

edited by
ROBERTA MINEO

EDUCATION IN MOTION

MOBILITY, TRANSFORMATION AND DIALOGUE ACROSS CONTEXTS

PERSPECTIVES FROM EUROPEAN-AFRICAN EDUCATIONAL COLLABORATION



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Introduction.

Educational Transformation Across Contexts: Mobility, Dialogue, and the ACHIEVE-IT Experience

Roberta Mineo

In a context marked by increasing global interdependence, educational systems are called to respond to forms of complexity that exceed national, disciplinary, and institutional boundaries. Questions of mobility, diversity, and intercultural dialogue are no longer peripheral to education, but central to how knowledge is produced, shared, and transformed. From a psychoanalytic perspective, such complexity can be understood as taking shape within a broader *pólis*: not simply a space of coexistence, but a relational and symbolic field that precedes and constitutes the subjects who inhabit it. In this sense, what is at stake is not only the encounter between individuals or cultures, but the conditions under which a shared field can sustain the work of thinking. The tension between *chorós* and *nómos* becomes particularly salient: it is a delicate balance between the transpersonal dimension that allows experience to be held, expressed and made thinkable, and the emergence of shared forms capable of transforming conflict into a space of judgment and dialogue. Education, in this perspective, can be understood as one of the sites in which this tension is continuously negotiated: a fragile process in which the capacity to sustain difference, tolerate ambiguity, and transform conflict cannot be taken for granted, but must be continually constructed. It is within such relational and symbolic configurations that learning takes place, not as an individual acquisition, but as a process emerging within a shared matrix of interactions, meanings, and practices. It is within this broader landscape that this volume is situated.

This volume emerges from a shared educational and research journey shaped by the ACHIEVE-IT project¹, a programme funded within the framework of the Italian National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR). Conceived as a collaborative initiative among Italian universities and their partner institutions across the African continent, ACHIEVE-IT has sought to foster academic mobility, strengthen institutional partnerships, and promote innovative approaches to teaching, learning, and research. Within this broader framework, the collaboration between the Department of Education at the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia and St. Paul's University in Kenya has constituted a particularly fertile ground for dialogue, exchange, and mutual transformation.

More than a collection of independent contributions, this volume reflects the intellectual and relational work generated through this collaboration. It brings together diverse perspectives on education, ranging from early childhood pedagogy to higher education, from participation and leadership to inclusion and sustainability, while remaining anchored in a shared concern: how education can respond to the complexities of contemporary societies marked by mobility, diversity, and global interdependence. In this sense, the book does not simply document a project; it embodies an ongoing process of co-construction of knowledge across contexts, cultures, and epistemological traditions.

¹ The ACHIEVE-IT project fosters academic collaboration between Italian and African universities with the aim of promoting international mobility, joint doctoral programmes, and advanced training initiatives. It brings together seven participating Italian institutions - the University of Parma, the University of Ferrara, the University of Bologna, the University of Salento, the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart (Piacenza), and the Mediterranea University of Reggio Calabria - alongside thirty-seven partner universities across sixteen African countries, including Algeria, Burundi, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Niger, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, South Africa, Senegal, Tanzania, and Tunisia.

At the time of publication of this volume, the project is still ongoing. Its expected outcomes include the strengthening of internationalization processes, the development of academic and professional competencies, and the consolidation of long-term strategic partnerships.

At its core, the volume is grounded in the recognition that educational transformation cannot be understood through isolated frameworks or disciplinary boundaries. Rather, it requires an approach capable of holding together multiple dimensions of experience: pedagogical practices, relational dynamics, institutional structures, and socio-cultural contexts. The chapters that follow reflect this multiplicity, offering situated analyses that, taken together, trace a broader trajectory of educational change.

The chapters are organized to reflect a progressive articulation of educational transformation across different dimensions and scales. They move from foundational pedagogical shifts to questions of participation, leadership, and inclusion, before expanding toward global and ecological concerns. This trajectory is then complemented by a focus on the lived experience of mobility and its role in shaping knowledge production, culminating in a conceptual reflection that seeks to bring these dimensions into dialogue. In this sense, the structure of the volume mirrors the very processes it seeks to explore: from situated practices to relational experience, and from experience to theoretical elaboration.

The volume opens with the contribution by Esther Marima, which provides a foundational perspective on the transformation of early childhood education in Kenya through the introduction of the Competency-Based Curriculum. By situating this shift within both historical developments and contemporary policy frameworks, the chapter highlights the move toward learner-centered pedagogy, holistic development, and the integration of knowledge, skills, and values. This pedagogical reorientation establishes a critical starting point for the volume, foregrounding education as a process that extends beyond the transmission of content to encompass the development of the whole person.

Building on this foundation, Rita Bertozzi's chapter shifts the focus toward the role of participation in educational contexts. Drawing on comparative perspectives and empirical work within the GOTALK project, the chapter examines participation as both a right and a pedagogical process, emphasizing its potential

to foster agency, inclusion, and democratic engagement. In doing so, it expands the discussion from pedagogical structures to relational dynamics, highlighting how educational environments can enable, or constrain, the active involvement of learners.

The theme of agency is further developed in Paul Gesimba's contribution, which explores leadership as a central dimension of educational transformation. Moving across different levels (from individual to institutional and societal) the chapter conceptualizes leadership not only as a set of competencies, but as a relational and ethical practice embedded within educational processes. By situating leadership within broader theoretical and socio-cultural frameworks, it underscores its role in shaping responsive and adaptive educational systems.

This trajectory is then critically deepened by the chapter by Wanjugu Wachira, which introduces the question of inclusion through a focus on disability in higher education. By examining the gap between policy commitments and lived realities, particularly within the Kenyan context, the chapter foregrounds the structural and cultural barriers that continue to limit equitable access and participation. In doing so, it invites a rethinking of education as a space that must actively address issues of exclusion, stigma, and inequality.

From this ethical perspective, the volume expands toward global and ecological concerns in the chapter by Milcah Ajuoga, which addresses biodiversity education and sustainability in higher learning institutions. By linking education to pressing environmental challenges, the chapter highlights the role of transformative pedagogies in cultivating critical awareness, responsibility, and action. It situates higher education as a key site for addressing global issues, while also emphasizing the need for interdisciplinary and practice-oriented approaches.

This experiential dimension of educational transformation is further explored in the chapter authored by doctoral researchers within the Reggio Childhood Studies programme, who offer a collective and reflexive account of their mobility experiences in

Kenya. Drawing on fieldwork, institutional engagement, and participation in international projects, Ndungu, Drure and Berni approach mobility not merely as geographical displacement, but as a situated process of knowledge production. Through practices of observation, dialogue, and documentation, the authors reflect on how their encounters across contexts have shaped their research trajectories, positionalities, and ways of knowing. In doing so, the chapter highlights mobility as a formative and relational experience, capable of fostering critical awareness, intercultural understanding, and the continuous redefinition of research perspectives, while also acknowledging the partial and situated nature of these processes.

Complementing these thematic contributions, the chapter by Pauline Kariuki provides a focus on academic writing as a foundational skill for participation in knowledge production. By examining essay structure, referencing practices, and the principles of scholarly communication, the chapter underscores the importance of equipping learners with the tools necessary to engage critically and effectively within academic discourse. In this sense, it offers a bridge between educational processes and their articulation within broader scholarly communities.

The volume concludes with a chapter by the editor, which seeks to bring these diverse strands into a conceptual dialogue. By exploring the interrelations between space, group processes, creativity, and mobility, the chapter proposes the notion of the educational matrix as a way of understanding education as a relational and dynamic field. Within this framework, academic mobility, such as that fostered through the ACHIEVE-IT project, is reinterpreted not merely as movement across contexts, but as a transformation of the relational and symbolic conditions under which learning takes place. The encounter between different educational cultures, including those shaped through the collaboration between Italian and Kenyan institutions, becomes a generative site for new forms of meaning-making, creativity, and collective understanding.

Taken together, the contributions in this volume offer not a single model of educational transformation, but a constellation of perspectives that illuminate its complexity. What emerges is an understanding of education as a process that is at once local and global, structured and emergent, individual and collective. Within this framework, mobility assumes a central role—not only as a mechanism of exchange, but as a condition that reshapes educational processes by generating encounters across contexts. The experiential accounts presented in the volume make visible how such encounters are lived, negotiated, and reflected upon by those directly involved, revealing mobility as a site of learning, tension, and possibility. Building on these insights, the concluding chapter proposes a conceptual lens through which these dynamics can be understood, framing education as a relational matrix in which space, group processes, creativity, and mobility intersect. It is within this movement - from mobility, to lived experience, to theoretical elaboration - that the significance of initiatives such as ACHIEVE-IT can be fully appreciated: not only as programmes of international collaboration, but as spaces in which new forms of knowledge, understanding, and educational practice can emerge.

In this sense, the volume invites readers to engage with education not as a fixed system, but as an evolving field of relations: one that requires ongoing reflection, dialogue, and collaboration across contexts. The hope is that the insights offered here will contribute to this broader conversation, and to the continued development of educational practices capable of responding to the challenges and opportunities of our time.

I. Transforming Early Childhood Education in Kenya: The Competency-Based Curriculum and Learner-Centered Pedagogy

Esther Marima

1. Introduction

Competency-Based Curriculum is a curriculum that emphasizes what the learners are expected to do rather than mainly focusing on what they are expected to learn about. In principle such a curriculum is learner - centered and adaptive to the changing needs of students, teachers and society. It implies that learning activities and environments are chosen so that learners can acquire and apply the knowledge, skills and attitudes to situations they encounter in everyday life.

Competency-Based Education allows learners to own the process of learning which makes them proactive and eager to learn. CBC emphasizes attainment of competencies among learners.

In Kenya the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) adopted a Competency-Based Curriculum in their reforms based on the findings of a need assessment study carried out in 2016. KICD conceptualized a competency as the ability to apply learning resources and outcomes in terms of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes adequately in the context of education, work, personal and professional development.

The curriculum reform in Kenya was guided by the vision “Nurturing every learner’s potential” so as to produce citizens equipped with relevant and quality knowledge with national values and social competencies (Kenya Constitution, 2010) and to equip them with the relevant and quality knowledge with

national values and social competences (vision 2020) which informed the need to undertake a major reform of the national curriculum.

The main objective was to help develop the ability to apply appropriate knowledge, skills and values to successfully perform a function. Learners are enabled to make connections between the knowledge they acquire and how they can use it meaningfully within a given context. CBC mirrors a pragmatic approach to learning by emphasizing learning through active learner participation and reflective experiences.

Early childhood education (ECE) is widely recognized as the foundation upon which lifelong learning and human development are built. During the early years of life, children experience rapid physical, cognitive, emotional and social development that significantly influences future learning outcomes. Because of this critical development period education systems around the world have increasingly prioritized early childhood education as a key component of national development strategies.

In Kenya, the introduction of the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) represents one of the most significant reforms in the country's education system in decades. The CBC was introduced to replace the 8-4-4 education system which had been in place since 1985. While the 8-4-4 system expanded access to education, it was widely criticized for its heavy emphasis on examinations, rote memorization and limited focus on the development of practical skills (KICD, 2017).

The literature on Kenya's curriculum reform highlights the limitations of the 8-4-4 system of education particularly its reliance on rote learning, examination-focused pedagogy and insufficient attention to critical thinking and practical competencies (KICD, 2017). This prompted the adoption of the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) designed to equip learners with skills, knowledge and values for the 21st century.

The CBC therefore aims to transform education by focusing on the development of competencies that enable learners to

apply knowledge, skills, values and attitudes in real-life situations, this shift is particularly important in early childhood education, where learning should be experiential, interactive and developmentally appropriate (Ministry of Education, 2019).

2. Global Perspectives on Early Childhood Curriculum

Internationally, early childhood education reform has shifted towards competency-based and holistic approaches. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2015) advocates for curricula that promote critical thinking, creativity and problem solving rather than rote memorization, similarly UNICEF emphasizes the importance of play, inquiry-based learning and continuous assessment.

Comparative studies indicate that these approaches not only improve academic outcomes but also enhance learners' social skills, adaptability, and lifelong learning capacity (OECD, 2018).

According to Fein (2015) competency-based teaching-learning approaches were implemented first in teacher education in the United States of America in the 1970s. Since then, competency-based learning approaches have been developed and implemented in a range of professional areas and learning institutions in various countries (Sanchez & Romero, 2015). Lessons from these global contexts informs Kenya's CBC framework.

3. Early Childhood Education in Kenya: Empirical Studies

Empirical research in Kenya indicates that pre- primary education significantly affects literacy, numeracy and social emotional development in primary school (KICD, 2017; World Bank, 2020). However, studies also highlight disparities in quality, particularly in rural and underserved communities, where infrastructure and resources are limited (MOE, 2019).

Research on CBC implementation reveals that teacher preparedness is a critical factor in successful curriculum adoption. Teachers trained in traditional pedagogical methods often face challenges in adopting learner-centered and play-based approaches (Mugambi & Waweru, 2021). Similarly, parental engagement is identified as a key determinant of early learning outcomes, underscoring the need for community participation in curriculum reforms (Njoroge, 2020).

4. Historical Development of Early Childhood Education in Kenya

African communities had a system of education called “Traditional System of Education”. The system of education prepared children to be useful in their families and communities. Children were educated and trained right from birth. Education prepares man to live in his society; thus there is no human society, which could not educate her children. We had a system of education through which our children were educated right from birth. This was the “Traditional system of education”. Europeans wrongly thought that our children were left in total ignorance and concluded that they were faced with empty minds in which they were to introduce education for the first time. Europeans therefore did not introduce education for the first time but brought literacy and schooling which were not part of the traditional system of education.

The system of education provided both informal and formal education. Informal education took place anywhere, curriculum was not planned and anybody could teach children. Formal education on the other hand was imparted in specific places, specific curriculum was used and not everyone could impart knowledge. Education system was meant to prepare children for life and make them useful in their families and communities. The education imparted was based on values, skills and actual life experiences.

The family and the whole community had collective responsibility of educating children unlike today where the responsibility is on a few people.

Education of a child started immediately the child was born. Parents were the first instructors of their children. As children started to speak, mothers and family members taught children how to speak.

Parents taught children by example and practically, for example the father could take his son to the farm or forest for practical training and through watching him perform activities gradually learnt how to handle different tools such as digging sticks and hunting tools. He also taught him names of various plants and their uses. Boys helped in herding animals, cutting wood, hunting and cultivating land.

Mothers taught their daughters all things concerning domestic duties of a wife in managing the affairs of a homestead. The young girls helped their mothers in housework, nursing babies, fetching firewood and water; Elder sisters also taught the younger ones.

Early childhood education in Kenya has developed gradually over several decades. Before independence in 1963, early childhood education was largely informal and community based. Families and communities were responsible for the upbringing and early learning of young children.

Traditional methods of teaching included story telling which conveyed different teachings and significance using both good and bad characters which they could emulate or avoid being like them. Singing songs, proverbs and riddles were also used to educate children.

Before independence, education for African children was not compulsory while that of European and Asian Children was compulsory and the African children who attended schools were mainly from urban areas.

After independence, the government began to recognize the importance of education in national development. Policies aimed

at expanding access to education were introduced and early childhood education began to grow through nursery schools and community centers (UNICEF, 2019). However many of these centers were privately run or community managed, leading to variations in quality and accessibility.

The introduction of 8-4-4 education system in 1985 expanded educational opportunities but also created an examination-oriented culture. Learning in many schools focused heavily on preparing learners for examinations rather than developing critical thinking and creativity (World Bank, 2020). Recognizing these challenges, Kenya undertook a major curriculum reform process that resulted in the development of the Competency-Based Curriculum in 2017 (KICD, 2017).

The curriculum reform in Kenya was guided by vision “Nurturing every learner’s potential” to produce citizens equipped with relevant and quality knowledge with national values and social competencies.

5. Theoretical Foundations of Competency-based Education

Competency-based education is rooted in educational theories that emphasize active learning and the application of knowledge. Jean Piaget’s theory of cognitive development highlights the importance of interaction between children and their environment in constructing knowledge (Piaget, 1952).

Similarly, Lev Vygotsky emphasized the role of social interaction in learning. His concept of the Zone of proximal development suggests that children learn best when supported by teachers or peers who provide appropriate guidance (Vygotsky, 1978).

Competency-based curriculum integrates constructivist learning theories, competency-based education principles and developmental psychology insights in a holistic development approach which addresses cognitive, emotional, social and physical development.

This approach is supported by international research including UNESCO (2015) and UNICEF (2019) which advocate for integrated learning experiences.

These theories and approaches influence the CBC framework by encouraging teachers to create learning environments that support exploration, collaboration and problem solving, play based learning, project activities, and experiential learning are therefore central approaches in early childhood education under CBC.

6. Structure of Early Years Education under CBC

In Kenya, Early Years Education (EYE) is the foundational phase of Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC). It covers the first five years of a child's formal schooling and designed for children between age four and age nine.

CBC organizes Kenya education system into three levels: Early Years Education, Middle School and Senior School. Early Years Education includes two years of pre-primary education (PP1 and PP2) followed by Grade 1 to 3.

Learning at this stage focuses on integrated learning areas rather than traditional subjects. These include literacy activities, mathematical activities, environmental activities, creative arts, and physical education (Ministry of Education, 2019) CBC therefore promotes core competencies such as communication and collaboration, creativity and imagination, critical thinking and problem solving, digital literacy, citizenship, learning to learn and self-efficacy (KICD, 2017).

This level should purely focus on activity books; no heavy content. Activities should be environmental, psychomotor & creative, religious and morals.

After those early years (EYE), learners move to Primary, upper primary, junior secondary and the senior secondary where they specialize in any of the three areas:

- STEM (science, technology, engineering & mathematics)
- Social sciences (language & literature/humanities/ business studies)
- Talents & arts (sports, performing arts, visual arts)

To align Education sector with vision 2030 and the Constitution of 2010, there was need for flexible education pathways (at senior school level) for identifying and nurturing individual learner's potential to produce intellectually, emotionally and physically balanced citizens to prepare for the 21st Century world of work which require individuals with 21st skills that is:

- Self directed
- An innovator
- Globally aware
- A communicator
- A problem solver
- A critical thinker
- Financially and economically literate
- A collaborator

The future of 21st Century Education is to help individuals; Live and work anywhere in the world, Travel as often as you like as long as you like, Change what you are working on to keep up with your interests and abilities, Enjoy earning potential that is not capped to salary figure, Choose your own hours and office work with peers across the globe.

CBE therefore ensures that learners are properly prepared for the world of work both locally and internationally.

7. Pedagogical Transformation in Early Childhood Classrooms

One of the most significant changes introduced by CBC is the shift from teacher-centered instruction to learner-centered pedagogy. Teachers are encouraged to guide learners through in-

teractive experiences rather than relying on lectures. A teacher therefore may explore environmental concepts by observing plants, drawing them, and discussing their observations. Such activities help develop curiosity, creativity and critical thinking.

Play-based learning also plays a major role in early childhood education. Through play, children develop communication skills, emotional resilience and problem –solving abilities (UNESCO, 2017).

Play is not only the most important aspect in a child's life; it is also a way of life and a right for every child. It is one of the factors that contributes to the overall development of a child and without which life would not make sense to a child. It is important to note that children will be children only once and should be facilitated to utilize this opportunity to the fullest.

All over the world, children learn and develop holistically through play both individually and collectively. As children play, they are able to observe and learn by talking among themselves and with care givers. With this kind of interaction, they are able to acquire new knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for social interaction and living with others.

Play is universal and although types of games may not be the same in quantity and quality, it remains a key aspect in learning and development.

8. Importance of play in early childhood

Play activities involve the child's total self and use all forms of energy. It provides relief and balances child's mental, physical social and emotional status. Play is therefore as necessary to a child as the food. It has been argues that play help develop imagination among other skills.

A child develops imagination, acquires skills of body and mind, is able to understand, sympathize and empathize, acquires competition skills and learns how to cope with failure and

success, is able to persevere and struggle towards a desired end, understands when it is necessary to assert oneself and when to forfeit self interest for the sake of others, acquires healing for hurts and sadness, releases pent-up urges towards self expression.

The effects of play deprivation in early childhood are poor imagination and creativity, nervousness, poor problem solving skills, lack or underdevelopment of empathy and lack of - self confidence, irritability and intolerance, idleness and laziness, craving for entertainment and imbalanced growth which the CBC curriculum has adequately addressed.

9. Parental involvement in the Competency-Based Curriculum

The shift toward the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) represents a remarkable transformation in the educational landscape, moving away from a teacher-centered approach toward a more collaborative, learner-centered model.

At the heart of this transition is the concept of parental empowerment and engagement. Unlike previous systems where the school was the sole custodian of knowledge, the CBC recognizes the home as a primary site of learning. Parental engagement, therefore, is not merely an optional support system but a core pillar designed to ensure that the competencies acquired in the classroom are reinforced and applied in real-world contexts.

Empowerment begins with a clear understanding of the curriculum's goals. For many parents, the transition from a grade-based system to one focused on skills and values can be daunting. Empowering parents involves equipping them with the literacy to navigate 7 Core Competencies, such as communication, collaboration, and self-efficacy so they can recognize these traits in their children's daily activities. When parents are empowered, they move from being passive providers of school fees to active co-educators who can facilitate «extended learning» at home. This might involve simple, integrated tasks like involving a child

in kitchen measurements to reinforce numeracy or discussing family history to build a sense of citizenship and belonging.

Engagement, on the other hand, is the active expression of this empowerment. It manifests through a consistent partnership between the school, the teacher, and the household. Effective engagement requires open channels of communication where the focus is not solely on academic performance, but on the holistic development of the learner's character and talents. By participating in school activities, attending workshops, and contributing to the assessment of a child's progress in non-academic areas, parents bridge the gap between theory and practice. This synergy ensures that the values of integrity, respect, and social responsibility are not just subjects to be studied, but lived experiences modeled by the adults in a child's life.

Ultimately, the success of the CBC hinges on this shared responsibility. While challenges such as time constraints and varying educational backgrounds exist, the curriculum encourages a flexible approach to involvement. When parents are truly engaged, the burden of education is shared, the learner feels supported across all environments, and the school becomes a community hub rather than an isolated institution. This collaborative spirit fosters a more resilient, capable, and values-driven generation, capable of navigating the complexities of the modern world.

A study carried out by Amunga, Were and Ashioya (2020) sought to establish the CBC activities that required parental involvement and the challenges they experienced in the implementation of the CBC. Results indicated that parents were not collaborating with schools in implementing the curriculum.

A study by Mwarari, Githui and Mwenje (2020) explored the perceived challenges of involving parents in implementation of CBC in early year's education. Findings showed that parents acknowledged the importance of participation in school activities and learning. However, they reported some of the factors which influenced their collaboration with schools which included: lack of time, lack of training for parents to understand what CBC is

all about, lack of adequate knowledge on how to assist children and lack of resources. This means that engaging parents in learning activities as required by CBC may not be successful if the parents are not sensitized on its importance and how they need to play their roles.

10. Assessment and Monitoring of Learning

Competency-Based Assessment can be described as determining the capability to apply a set of related knowledge, skills and abilities required for successfully perform critical work functions or tasks in a defined setting. The learner is given an opportunity to put into practice what they have learned.

It is a collection of evidence demonstrating how a learner can perform or behave according to a specific standard. It is based on the principle of assessing a learner as they use their knowledge and skills in a given situation. The focus is on the development of the learner.

Assessment in the CBC focuses on continuous evaluation of learners' progress rather than high-stakes examinations. Teachers use observation checklists, learner portfolios and performance tasks to monitor development (KICD, 2017). This approach allows teaches to identify individual strengths and learning needs while providing supportive feedback that enhances learning, parents are also encouraged to participate by supporting home-based learning activities.

11. Opportunities and Challenges

The CBC provides opportunities for holistic child development by integrating cognitive, emotional, social, and physical learning experiences. It also promotes creativity and innovation by encouraging learners to explore their interests. However, the transition which is

ongoing has presented challenges such as teachers' continuous professional development and adequate resources as well as parents struggle to understand the new assessment approaches (World Bank, 2020). This requires sustained investment in teacher training, infrastructure and stakeholder engagement.

A study conducted by Sifuna and Obonyo (2019) examined the challenges hindering effective implementation of CBD in Kenya. It was established that the curriculum was not systematically planned and implemented and that there was minimal training on the curriculum content and teaching methods. It was also noted that there was inadequate instructional materials as well as lack of participation by parents and other stakeholders in the curriculum reform process

Momanyi & Rope (2020) conducted a survey in Bomet East Sub-County which sought to establish challenges faced by teachers when implementing CBC. The results showed that teachers' lack of adequate knowledge and skills on how to implement the curriculum was the major factor hindering effective implementation of the CBC.

As highlighted by Wambua and Waweru (2019) who conducted a study to establish the challenges facing the implementation of CBC in all public primary schools in Machakos County. The study established that teachers were not fully prepared for the implementation of CBC and there were inadequate staff, inadequate infrastructure and lack of adequate teaching and learning resource.

A study conducted by Marion (2020) purposed to examine the challenges experienced by teachers in implementation of CBC in lower primary schools in Laikipia East Sub- County in Kenya.

Findings indicated that there were many challenges which were experienced by teachers as they were implementing the new curriculum. The teachers reported large class size as a serious challenge that impeded the implementation of CBC in public primary schools.

12. Conclusion

The Competency-Based Curriculum represents a transformative shift in Kenya's education system. By focusing on competencies rather than rote memorization, CBC seeks to prepare learners for real-life challenges and opportunities.

In early childhood education, the curriculum emphasizes play-based learning, learner centered pedagogy and continuous assessment. These changes have the potential to significantly improve the quality of education and support the holistic development of Kenyan children.

With continued investment and collaboration among educators, policymakers and communities, CBC strengthens the foundation of education and contribute to national development.

The Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) reimagines early childhood education by shifting the focus from passive memorization to the active mastery of essential life skills. At this foundational stage, the curriculum prioritizes holistic development, ensuring that a child's physical, emotional, and social growth are treated with the same importance as their academic progress. By moving away from high-pressure testing and toward formative assessment, the CBC creates a nurturing environment where children can explore concepts through play and practical interaction without the anxiety of terminal exams.

A central advantage of this approach is the early identification of talents. Because the curriculum encourages a wide variety of activities—ranging from creative arts to physical education—teachers and parents can spot a learner's unique inclinations and strengths from the very beginning. This personalized attention fosters self-efficacy, building the confidence a child needs to tackle new challenges. Instead of a one-size-fits-all model, the CBC recognizes that every learner possesses a distinct set of potential abilities that deserve to be cultivated.

Furthermore, the CBC integrates 21st-century core competencies, such as communication, collaboration, and critical thinking, into

the daily experiences of young learners. By engaging with their environment and using locally available materials, children develop a sense of citizenship and environmental literacy early on. This learner-centered methodology ensures that education is not merely a preparation for the next grade level, but a comprehensive process that equips children with the values and practical tools necessary to navigate a rapidly changing world.

The true success of this transition lies in the strength of the partnership between the school, the home, and the community. When parents are empowered as co-educators and teachers are supported as facilitators of discovery, the learner is no longer a passive recipient of information but an active architect of their own future. This model ensures that education is no longer a race toward a single terminal exam, but a continuous journey of mastery where every child's unique talents are identified, nurtured, and celebrated.

Ultimately, the parting shot for CBE is one of inclusivity and resilience. By prioritizing core values and essential competencies over rote memorization, we are preparing a generation that is not only academically capable but also ethically grounded and emotionally intelligent. As this system takes root, its greatest legacy will be a society of lifelong learners who possess the critical thinking and adaptability required to thrive in an ever-changing world. This calls for the alignment of values between home and school which is the bedrock of character development in a consistent manner, focus on the journey of learning and the acquisition of skills rather than the final grade and collaboration because the most successful learners are those supported by engaged ecosystem of parents, teachers and mentors.

Therefore, in conclusion, the transition to Competency-Based Education (CBE) represents more than just a change in curriculum; it is a fundamental shift in the educational philosophy of the 21st century. By moving the focus from what a learner knows to what a learner can do, CBE aligns the classroom with the realities of the modern workforce and the complexities of global citizenship.

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II. Children's and Adolescents' Participation in Educational Contexts: Rights, Practices, and Challenges

Rita Bertozzi

The paper focuses on a much-debated topic in Europe that inspired a European project, named GOTALK, that it will be mentioned during this contribution as a basis for reflection. Firstly, I will offer a brief overview of studies about children's participation and then I will introduce some insights taken from the action research conducted during the GOTALK project. Therefore, the focus will be on the project itself and on the processes of children's participation supported during the two years of implementation. Finally, some reflections are opening rooms for possible comparative perspectives and exchanges on this topic, in Italy and Kenya.

Key concepts are participation, inclusion, formal and non-formal learning, citizenship and agency, representation of childhood, as studied in sociological field. The main references for the GOTALK project are the deliverables of the pilot activities and *The Guidelines* produced by the team at the end of the experience, both available on the website of the Department of Education and Humanities (University of Modena and Reggio Emilia)¹.

The GOTALK project was launched within the European CERV program 'Citizenship, Education, Rights and Values' and was co-funded by the European Union. It addressed the facilitation of meaningful, safe and inclusive children's participation. The project aimed to develop and test consultative methods to foster

¹ <https://www.des.unimore.it/it/ricerca/progetti-di-ricerca/cerv-citizens-equality-rights-and-values-programme>.

impactful children and youth participation in decision making, in both formal and non-formal participatory processes. The partnership was made of two Belgian and three Italian partners: KdG University of Applied Sciences and Arts and the Municipal Office for Education of Antwerp in Belgium, and the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, Fondazione E35 and the International Institute of Humanitarian Law in Italy.

In order to develop and test inclusive participatory methods with children in school and out-of school-care contexts, eight pilot experiences were developed in 2023-2025 and proposed in parallel in two European cities, Antwerp in Belgium and Reggio Emilia in Italy, considering two age groups (6-12 and 13-18) and paying specific attention to diversity in terms of gender, cultural background and social class. One of the main focuses of the project was children's council as a potential tool for democratic culture, but it was explored in a wide sense, considering also other opportunities for participation in schools and non-formal contexts.

1. Why support young children's participation?

There are many good reasons why children's participation in decision-making should be encouraged and implemented. First of all, children's participation is a children's right stated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) and it is part of democratic principles: children are young citizens, not future citizens. Secondly, participation strengthens the sense of belonging to a community and it allows to manage conflictual situations in a peaceful way. Studies show a positive and bi-directional association between participation and sense of community, understood as "the perception of a sense of belonging to the community and of the existence of significant emotional ties, opportunities to satisfy one's own needs and to have an influence" (Zani et al., 2011, p. 92). Research with adolescents and

youths (Cicognani & Zani, 2009; Chiessi et al., 2010) shows that being able to have an impact on the local community strengthens one's sense of community and promotes more effective participation. Third, children's participation has the capacity to strengthen agency in general terms, that practically means capacity to make choices, to take initiative and to make plans for the future (Gotalk Guidelines, 2025). Finally, participation has the potential to develop, at certain conditions, some life competences (listening, expressing views, understanding conflicts and being able to transform them), so it contributes to citizenship education (European Parliament, 2022).

This issue is particularly important in Europe. The 'Life skills' framework (https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/lifecomp_en) is a reference point to the education system and it helps to identify the required competences in the new Century. It encompasses empathy, communication, collaboration, growth mindset, critical thinking, managing learning, well-being, flexibility, self-regulation. In this vein, participation encourages the practice of these competences and can be considered both as a goal and a tool.

2. Children's agency

Since the 1990s, partly because of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, there has been a growing focus in child policy on recognizing children as capable social actors, emphasizing their right to 'participation' and to be heard (Art. 12 CRC). This focus constructs specific 'images' of childhood regarding what it means to be a child and the view of children as citizens who are called upon to express their ideas and opinions in every sphere (family, community, school, society), from an early age.

Childhood studies have amply demonstrated that representations of childhood vary both historically and contextually (Qvortrup, 2004; Corsaro, 2003; James et al., 2019), and it is now well

established that there are multiple images of childhood (Hengst & Zeiher, 2004). The way in which childhood is conceived, represented and described influences both the way we interact with children and the children's own experience in daily life and in their relationship with the adult world.

Before looking to the European context, we can argue that also African scholars have examined the various ways in which childhood is constructed across different African societies, and the impact of these social constructions on the roles of children and the way they are treated (Twum-Danso Imoh, 2015). For example, research carried out in Ghana highlights a gap between general models, inspired by the CRC, and local values and norms, but also points to the existence of a middle ground where dialogue within local communities can be strengthened. Other studies on sub-Saharan African countries show the coexistence of traditional representations of childhood and new interpretations, which affect the nature of adult-child relationships and influence the effective recognition of children as rights-holders. In other studies, Rwezaura (1998) argues that the idea of children as integral resources in the family's economic activities contrasts with the idea of specific rights recognised for children. For this reason, it is essential to begin with an understanding of the social, cultural and economic contexts in which children live, in order to explore the notion of childhood as a socially and culturally constructed concept, and to consider the possible coexistence of different visions of childhood, different roles and activities of children, and their relationship with adults. A study conducted in Pemba (Mozambique) by Alderuccio (2016) highlights how the pupil-centred pedagogical approach, which applies the CRC's 'child-centred principle'² to the educational setting, is perceived by teachers as inappropriate to the Mozambican context

² Considered 'perhaps the most important principle' (UNICEF, 2009, p.12) which 'emphasises the importance of safeguarding the best interests of the child, making these interests central to all decision-making processes regarding education' (UNICEF, 2009, p.12).

because it redefines the relationship of authority and hierarchy between teachers and pupils in the classroom. In a society such as Mozambique's, which respects adult authority, pupils are expected to 'obey and listen' to their teachers in the classroom and, subsequently, to participate³. From these studies, there are evidence that we must consider the relationship between adults and children looking both to traditional models and recent perspectives.

In Europe the representation of the child as a social actor is well consolidated in literature and policies, but it needs to be verified in practice because the challenges are always there, especially during the implementation phases. Eurochild (2025) highlights a pressing need for progress in ensuring safe, meaningful, and inclusive participation of children in decision-making processes across various sectors. While child participation is supported by legal frameworks in certain countries—such as youth councils and participatory bodies—the actual impact often remains limited. This is frequently due to a lack of resources, awareness, and commitment to genuine involvement.

If we try to reflect on the possible links (if any) between the two continental contexts, we might start with these questions:

- How is childhood constructed in contemporary times?
- How do current social constructions of children/childhood differ from the past?
- What are the differences if any, in the constructions of boy children and girl children?
- How do contemporary socio-cultural representations of children and childhood contribute to the participation of children in education contexts?

³ It is interesting to note that in Emakhuwa the word 'obey' (wiwelela) is synonymous with 'listen to someone'. In this context, the community's view that children must "obey the rules of the elders" (Father) is translated in the classroom into the view that pupils "must first listen and then participate" (Alderuccio, 2016, p.103).

3. Participation in formal and non-formal education contexts

Many studies have analysed the different forms of participation, and many authors have discussed about the meaning of this term. Taking two references into account, Rogert Hart and Gerison Lansdown, we can fix some main characteristics.

In the 'Ladder of Participation', Hart distinguishes among non-participatory practices (manipulation, decoration, tokenism) and participatory practices, in which children and adults assumed different roles: in some cases children assume a role, but they are informed; in others they are consulted and informed, or adults initiate the process or activity but sharing decisions with children; we have also cases in which young people initiated and directed the process themselves or sharing decisions with adults (Hart, 1992). This scale has been adapted from an earlier 'citizen participation scale' developed by the scholar and activist Sherry Arnstein and has long been used in the development of socio-educational policies.

On the other hand, Lansdown (2001) clarified when we have consultative process, participatory process or children-led participatory process. Considering the similarities between these two contributions, research studies have summarized the different participatory processes (Tab. 1).

The Hart's model has been reworked leading to the proposal of a non-hierarchical order of the degrees of participation or focusing on the effect(s) of participation, rather than just on its modality, and on the role that surrounding adults and institutions play in shaping 'pathways' to participation (Shier, 2001). These analyses highlighted the fluid nature of participation, with its ongoing responses to context, circumstances and to the shifts in relational power dynamics that can evolve, ebb and flow within a given experience (Cahill and Davdand, 2018).

Tab. 1 - Different forms of participation and the role of children and adults.

Type (Lansdown)	Characteristics	Roles of Adults and Minors	Participation Levels (Hart)
Consultative Processes	Where adults initiate processes aimed at gathering useful information from young people to improve laws, policies, or services.	Initiated and managed by adults; Children have no control over results; Sometimes children may organize themselves, acquire skills, and influence results.	Children may only be informed about the action; Or they may also have a role in carrying out the consultation.
Participatory Processes	Aimed at strengthening democratic processes, helping children understand and apply democratic principles, or involving them in the development of services and policies that affect them.	Initiated by adults; Require children's collaboration; Need structures that allow children to criticize or influence results; Allow independent decision-making.	Children are invited to help realize ideas initiated by adults; Or co-design and implement those ideas with adults.
Children's Own Participation	Aimed at empowering young people to identify and pursue their own goals and projects.	Important issues are identified by children themselves; Adults assist but do not lead; Process is controlled by children.	Children independently express ideas and projects, and adults support their realization.

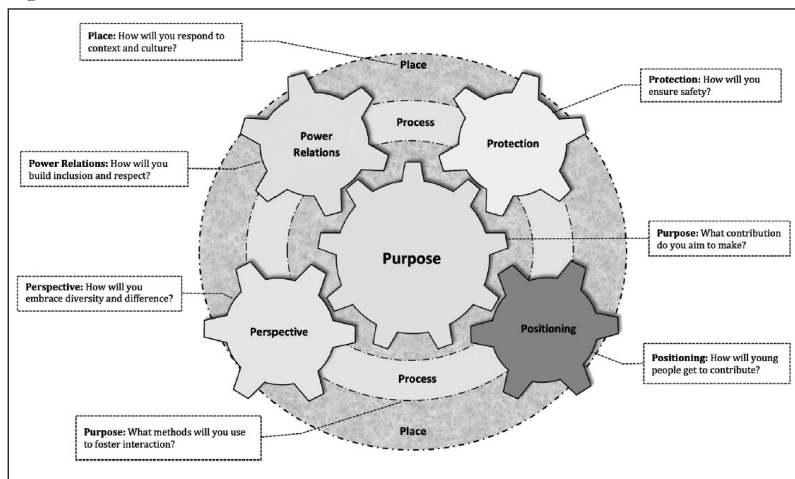
Source: Istituto degli Innocenti, 2020, “*Il diritto alla partecipazione dei minorenni attraverso la legge 285/97 ed oltre: esperienze e prospettive*”, in Quaderno 67, pag. 77-101.

The P7 model of Cahill and Davdand (2018) represents a thinking tool for youth participation, assembling seven interacting domains i) purpose, ii) positioning, iii) perspective, iv) power relations, v) protection, vi) place, and vii) process (Fig. 1). The purpose of the initiative is understood to orient all other domains, but activity in one domain influences what happens in other domains. For example, if power relations are managed well, diverse perspectives will be included and valued.

Despite the various theoretical approaches, research studies show some common problems around the implementation of children’s participation. First of all, the lack of representation and inclusivity: 70% of children surveyed in UNICEF studies would like to participate more in decision-making processes, and only 7% feel that they are truly listened to (UNICEF & EURO-CHILD, 2019). The problem is even more acute for children under 12, children from disadvantaged backgrounds, children with special needs and migrant children.

Secondly, the lack of sustainability and continuity. For children’s participation rights in decision-making processes to work, they have to guarantee a level of sustainability and continuity that is

Fig. 1. - The P7 Model.



Source: Cahill and Davdand (2018), p. 248.

obtained by a clear governance model. Although lacking in diversity, the EU mapping study names children's councils, children's parliaments and ombudspersons as strong mechanisms for creating such a governance model. However, these mechanisms seem to work more strongly on a European and a national level than on a regional and local level because of funding issues and facilitation by adults. Continuity is difficult to guarantee due to staff capacity and training.

Thirdly, the limited impact on the definition and implementation of policies. Children's impact is restricted to agenda-setting and their recommendations are often not binding (EC, 2021). Although children in Europe are included in consultative work on specific themes (e.g.; bullying, gender equity, health and wellbeing, technology, etc.), society sees children as incapable of executive responsibilities. According to the 'Our Europe, Our rights, Our future' report *"the relatively low levels of awareness and respect for [participation] rights may well derive from lack of child rights training for many professionals"*. The mapping study (EC, 2021) claims that many

adult facilitators of children's participation mechanisms lack in facilitation skills to help children participate.

Therefore, inclusiveness, sustainability and impact on decision making are real challenges for effective participatory experiences. The issue of inclusiveness refers to representation and whether all children may participate, as well as the ways in which participation is done. To foster inclusiveness in children's participation requires active efforts to engage a diverse range of children, particularly those who are often underrepresented or excluded due to factors such as disability, socio-economic background, language barriers or minority status. To avoid marginalization it is important to seek out voices from marginalized groups and create accessible, supportive environments that enable all children to participate meaningfully and to feel valued and empowered to express themselves. This involves using varied and age-appropriate methods of communication, including creative, visual and non-verbal tools to ensure that children with different abilities, languages, and levels of confidence can participate meaningfully. In line with these aims, the Malaguzzi approach (Rinaldi, 2021) seems to be very adequate, with his an 'Hundred languages' approach, recognizing that children do not only express themselves with words and adults should remain attentive to understand any 'other language' that children use.

Sustainability in children's participation means creating processes that last beyond individual projects, events or people and that are embedded within the culture, structures and everyday practices of the school and the community around it. Sustainability calls for a whole organization approach in which participation must be at the center of coordinated efforts from all actors involved, teachers, families, educators, and community actors.

For participation to be credible, it must ultimately have a tangible impact on the decisions taken, and children must be able to see the results of their efforts. This result requires that all children are informed about how to participate and about rules and limits of

their exercise, whereas adults should be prepared to open some space to implement recommendations or proposals.

Whilst it is true that children's participation is a challenge in all contexts, participation in school settings risks being taken for granted, whereas it needs to be analysed to understand whether it is truly inclusive and to what extent it is actually feasible. In many schools, there are representative bodies that encourage participation, such as children's councils or student councils. In this regard, it is worth considering just how inclusive they really are. Furthermore, participation cannot be limited to these forms alone; it must also challenge the everyday practices and school routines that affect all children, not just those appointed as representatives.

To make participation effective, it is necessary also to adapt the language to the specific age group and consider specific needs. Children participation must be linked to concrete, everyday facts as they reason through direct experience; adolescents are capable of handling theoretical and hypothetical concepts, however, to keep their motivation alive, it remains essential that even abstract reasoning stays connected to their lived experience. It is important to ensure stability in adult reference figures: the adult is the primary point of reference for children, often sought out even before consulting with peers, whereas for adolescents the peer group become the priority, and the adult's role must shift from a direct leader to a facilitator. Teachers must ask authentic questions and show curiosity for what pupils have to say. Equally important is to create an environment where children feel they truly have the power to influence reality: this is most easily achieved by adopting «whole school» or «whole organization» approach that involves all actors.

Finally, for participatory process being real, it is important to assume that participation cannot be compulsory and children's motivation to participate is not granted. Participation fails if young people lack interest, have limited knowledge of the topic, or are unaware of their own ability to create real change. Therefore, participation must be nurtured and continually supported.

4. The GOTALK project

The GOTALK project aimed to improve inclusivity and sustainability in decision-making processes within the education sectors. GOTALK was running in Belgium and Italy, but the GOTALK team wants to share ideas about child participation with other countries as well.

The GOTALK project conducted eight pilot studies to investigate how the inclusiveness, sustainability, and policy impact of children councils and children's participation can be strengthened. In Italy, the project was carried out in two secondary schools and two non-formal youth centres.

In the upper secondary school, pupils explored what it means to participate in school life and how this can be achieved: how, when and where to participate in school.

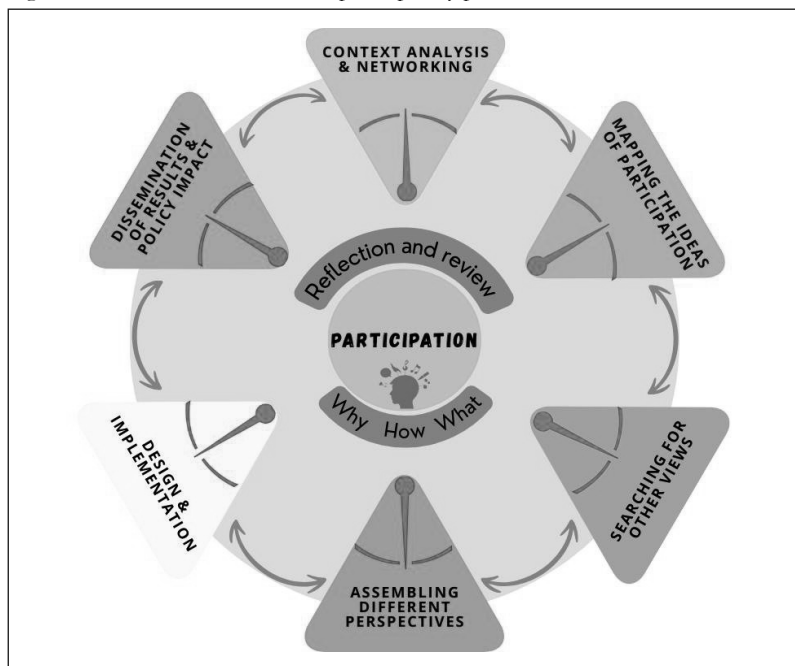
In the lower secondary school, the project involved three classes; each class put forward proposals for improving the school and then decided which one to focus on after inviting older pupils to vote for their favourite idea. A living wall at the school entrance served to keep everyone updated and involved in the project's development, linking the school experience with non-formal activities.

In non-formal education settings, GOTALK proposed working on the relationship between the young people and the neighbourhood, to identify the spaces and contexts most significant to them, both in terms of needs and opportunities.

From the beginning, the project took a multidisciplinary approach based on specific methodologies: observation and active listening, maieutic dialogue, and the valorisation of plural intelligences and hundred languages. The GOTALK method assumed a «three-dimensional» and core-based approach, integrating different levels of participation practice (Why? How? What?), in six steps: context analysis and networking stakeholders; mapping the ideas of participation in the group; searching for other views; assembling different perspectives; design of action and

products; dissemination of results and policy impact. This final model is part of the conclusive part of the mainstreaming guidelines developed by the GOTALK team project and a visual synthesis can be seen in the figure below (Fig. 2).

Fig. 2 - The GOTALK method for participatory processes in education contexts.



Source: GOTALK Guidelines (2025).

Participation is the core of the action, is the objective, the tool and the process itself. The six tasks located around the core generate, sustain and give concrete form to participation; they are also outcomes of participation and draw meaning from it. The participatory process can start from the core or from one of the other tasks; all tasks are interconnected and may intersect through the central common point. The six tasks are not sequential and some of them may emerge as more prominent than others, but all play a role in supporting and shaping participation.

Participation is a continuously moving process, that ask for reflective interventions: the process need to understand where to pause, when to move forward or return, and with which tools to do so. Moreover, reflections are guided by three questions: 'why' to foster participation, 'how' to support participation and 'what' tools are used. In every step of the participatory process, we are invited to pay attention to the different languages, that are the best allies in participation (dialogue, artistic, visual and bodily languages as alternative ways to express oneself), even with adults. During the project, different methodologies have been used: role playing, word café, tableaux vivant, photos elicitation, socratic dialogue, interviews with peers, meeting with student's representatives and counselor, audio materials, living wall, podcast, videos. The living wall has been an important common tool in Belgium and Italy, useful to collect and review perspectives, assembling different perspectives, keeping peers and school staff involved with the participatory process. It made explicit that participation is a collective process where everyone can add, contribute, inform and be informed. It strengthened a reflective practice and the documentation, which allow other children to participate in the future. The living wall itself was created using a variety of languages (drawings, text, photos, and alternative and augmentative communication) to ensure its inclusiveness.

Another important aspect highlight by the model are the different roles of adults and children. It is important to balance the contributions of children and adults, in accordance with the context and the needs, but assuring that children are protagonists supported by adults, as showed by the theoretical studies.

The process initiated with GOTALK reveals many similarities with Cahill and Davdand's reflections. Starting from the context and existing needs (place), the process and the methods used to strengthen interaction, with a specific focus on power relations, how differences are respected (perspectives), protection ensured, and children's contribution ensured (positioning), are essential elements for defining the purpose of the processes initiated, as well as the outcome.

awareness of the role of class or school representatives. Or improving participation in out-of-school-care contexts, affecting also the schooling experience.

These processes are possible not only by ensuring that children are genuinely involved, but also by reflecting on the role of adults. Working on participation requires a shift in attitudes and perspectives: teachers have to convey, observe and facilitate process. Teachers had to create opportunities to ensure there are spaces for participation, especially when the timing and the structure of the lesson could create constraints that hinder the participatory process. Adults must also be consistent and take ownership of the participatory processes they have initiated, supporting the children in achieving the desired outcomes.

5. Conclusion

The experience gained through the European GOTALK project offers food for thought that can also inspire other contexts, both in terms of participation in school settings and in terms of facilitating relationships between children and adults in participatory processes. Recognizing children as agents with agency is a contemporary perspective that may encounter resistance in the adult world and in more traditional representations of childhood.

Despite contextual and cultural differences, the exchange of ideas between researchers and students conducted during the capacity building exchange in Kenya has proven to generate potential avenues for future research. Children's councils also exist in Kenyan schools.

A possible research track could therefore begin by analyzing the Kenyan context and comparing it with the challenges addressed in the GOTALK project to identify similarities and differences in the challenges facing participatory processes in educational settings.

A second research perspective concerns teachers' and parents' representations of childhood, to capture the link between regulatory changes in school policies (which promote a learner-centered model), the views of different generations, and existing practices in schools.

Finally, an action-research process that seeks to apply the method used in GOTALK to support participatory processes in educational contexts in Kenya has garnered significant interest and could open avenues for dialogue between scholars and teachers who, despite operating in different cultural contexts, face increasingly global challenges that place the development of citizenship (and participation) competences and life skills at the core of educational systems.

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III. Leadership and Education: Developing Transformative and Ethical Practices in Learning Environments

Paul Gesimba

1. Introduction

Leadership and education are deeply intertwined forces that shape societies hence Leadership and education are two pillars that sustain the progress of societies. Effective leadership in education not only influences institutional success but also moulds future generations into responsible citizens and innovative thinkers. Education provides knowledge, skills, and values, while leadership ensures that these elements are directed toward meaningful goals. When leadership is strong within educational institutions, schools and universities become places of transformation, innovation, and empowerment. The interconnected dimensions of leadership in education includes: transformational leadership in schools, teacher leadership and professional development, student leadership and civic engagement, ethical leadership in education. Leadership remains a key component in education policy reforms and also shapes the educational landscape and future of communities.

2. Transformational Leadership in Schools

Transformational leadership is a style that emphasizes vision, inspiration, and the ability to drive change. In schools, principals and administrators who adopt this approach create environments where teachers feel motivated and students are encouraged to achieve their full potential. A transformational leader articulates a clear vision for the institution, aligning academic goals with the

holistic development of learners. By fostering innovation, such leaders help schools adapt to technological advancements and societal changes. For instance, schools that embrace transformational leadership often report higher student achievement, improved teacher morale, and stronger community involvement. This style of leadership is not about authority alone but about inspiring collective action toward shared goals.

3. Teacher Leadership and Professional Development

Teachers are central to the educational process, and their leadership extends beyond the classroom. Teacher leadership involves guiding peers, contributing to curriculum design, and influencing institutional growth. Professional development plays a crucial role in enabling teachers to fulfil these leadership responsibilities. Continuous training enhances teaching strategies, subject expertise, and adaptability to new educational technologies. Peer mentoring programs allow experienced teachers to support newer colleagues, creating a culture of collaboration and shared learning. When teachers take on leadership roles in committees, research projects, or school initiatives, they contribute to the overall success of the institution. Teacher leadership demonstrates that leadership in education is not confined to administrators but is distributed across all levels of the system. Instead of top-down management, teacher leadership focuses on working alongside peers, fostering a positive culture, and creating a shared, collaborative environment. Therefore they act as instructional coaches, data specialists, curriculum developers, union leaders, and mentors to new teachers.

4. Student Leadership and Civic Engagement

Education is not only about academic achievement but is also about preparing students to become responsible citizens. Student

leadership programs, such as student councils, provide opportunities for learners to practice governance, negotiation, and responsibility. Globally, many universities students have been allowed to participate in university elections and active leadership. This has contributed to civic engagement initiatives, including community service projects. Many young graduates have been shaped up with good morals with instilled empathy and social responsibility. These experiences help students develop skills in teamwork, communication, and problem-solving. The long-term impact of student leadership is significant, as individuals who engage in leadership roles during their education often carry these skills into adulthood. They become active citizens, professionals, and leaders in their communities. Student leadership thus bridges the gap between education and society, ensuring that learning translates into meaningful civic participation. Civic engagement allows students to take what they've learned in the classroom and apply it in their communities. These opportunities not only benefit a student's development and experience, but it allows area communities to benefit from students' unique insights, creativity and energy

5. Ethical Leadership in Education

Teachers and administrators serve as role models, shaping students' moral compass through their actions. This means that ethical leadership is the foundation of trust and sustainability in educational institutions. Leaders in education must ensure fairness, inclusivity, and integrity in their decision-making. Ethical leadership involves creating equal opportunities for students regardless of their background, handling conflicts with transparency, and promoting equity in diverse classrooms. When leaders demonstrate ethical behavior, they foster an environment of respect and trust, which is essential for effective learning. Ethical leadership also requires courage, as leaders must sometimes make difficult decisions that prioritize justice over convenience.

6. Leadership in Educational Policy and Reform

Educational leaders play a crucial role in shaping policies and reforms that determine the direction of national and institutional education systems. Curriculum design, for example, is influenced by leaders who balance tradition with innovation to meet the needs of contemporary learners. Policy advocacy is another dimension, where visionary leaders push for reforms that address issues of equity, access, and quality. Global examples show that countries prioritizing strong educational leadership often achieve significant improvements in literacy, innovation, and workforce readiness. Leadership in policy and reform is not only about administrative efficiency but also about envisioning the future of education and ensuring that institutions remain relevant in a rapidly changing world. Leadership in education drives policy and reform by setting strategic visions, cultivating a positive school culture, and fostering teacher development to improve student outcomes. Leaders act as catalysts by implementing, adapting, and advocating for policies, ensuring reforms like curriculum changes are effective in practice.

7. Contemporary Issues in Leadership and Education

Leadership in education is not confined to principals or policy-makers; it permeates every level, from teachers to students. Transformational leadership inspires change, teacher leadership strengthens institutions, student leadership builds future citizens, ethical leadership ensures fairness, and policy leadership drives systemic reform. Together, these dimensions highlight the indispensable role of leadership in shaping education and, by extension, society. Student leadership can be a powerful driver of self-motivation and academic success when it is intentionally cultivated within educational settings. Research shows that when students are given opportunities to lead, they develop a stronger

sense of ownership over their learning, which translates into higher engagement and achievement. Leadership roles such as student councils, peer mentoring, or organizing community projects encourage learners to set goals, manage responsibilities, and practice accountability. These experiences foster self-drive because students begin to see themselves not just as passive recipients of education but as active contributors to their school environment.

One key mechanism is the development of *leadership self-efficacy* the belief in one's ability to lead effectively. Studies indicate that students who build confidence in their leadership skills are more motivated to take initiative, persevere through challenges, and pursue excellence in academics. This self-efficacy is often reinforced by supportive environments where teachers and administrators encourage student voice and provide constructive feedback. Albert Bandura introduced the concept of self-efficacy in 1977 as part of his broader social cognitive theory. He identified four main influences: Mastery experiences (successfully completing tasks), Vicarious experiences (observing others succeed), Social persuasion (encouragement from others) and lastly Emotional states (managing stress and mood). Self-efficacy is a psychological concept introduced by Albert Bandura. It refers to a person's belief in their ability to successfully carry out the actions needed to achieve specific goals or outcomes. In simple terms, it's the confidence you have in your own capacity to manage tasks, challenges, and situations. Hence it strictly focuses on the belief in one's ability to influence events and control outcomes in life. In fact, Role in motivation: A strong sense of self-efficacy helps people stay motivated, persevere through difficulties, and bounce back from setbacks.

High self-efficacy is linked to better performance, resilience, and well-being, while low self-efficacy can lead to avoidance and reduced effort. To put it in everyday terms: *"if you believe you can learn a new skill, solve a problem, or lead a group effectively, you're more likely to put in the effort and succeed"*.

Additionally, student leadership nurtures intrinsic motivation. By engaging in leadership activities, students learn to align their personal goals with collective objectives, which strengthens their sense of purpose. Civic engagement projects, for example, help students connect their education to real-world issues, making learning more meaningful. This connection between leadership and purpose is a critical factor in sustaining self-drive, as students begin to see education not merely as a requirement but as a pathway to personal and societal success.

In practice, schools can harness student leadership by creating structured opportunities for learners to participate in decision-making, lead peer groups, and contribute to school improvement initiatives. When students are trusted with responsibility, they develop resilience, problem-solving skills, and a growth mindset—all of which are essential for long-term success in education. Finally, Student leadership is more than just holding titles; it is a pathway to cultivating self-drive and academic success. By empowering students with responsibility, encouraging goal-setting, fostering mentorship, linking leadership to real-world impact, and providing recognition, schools can create environments where learners are motivated to excel. Ultimately, student leadership transforms education into a process of personal growth, preparing young people not only for academic achievement but also for lifelong success.

8. Framework: Harnessing Student Leadership for Self-Drive and Success

Empowerment Through Responsibility

When students are entrusted with meaningful leadership roles, they develop ownership of their learning. Schools can assign responsibilities such as leading classroom discussions, open forums, organizing peer study groups, or managing school events. This sense of responsibility nurtures accountability, which in turn drives students to set personal goals and strive for success.

Goal-Setting and Reflection

Students who are focused end up being with courage to perform higher tasks than expected. Leaders should be encouraged to set both academic and personal goals. Schools can integrate leadership programs with structured reflection sessions where students evaluate their progress, identify challenges, and adjust strategies. This practice builds self-regulation and intrinsic motivation, key components of self-drive.

Peer Mentorship and Collaboration

There is power in peer mentorship where a senior leader in the society or any institution provide guidance. Leadership opportunities that involve mentoring peers or facilitating group projects help students develop empathy and communication skills. Acting as role models, student leaders inspire others while reinforcing their own commitment to excellence. Collaboration also teaches resilience and adaptability, which are essential for long-term success. There is great potential in future generations.

Linking Leadership to Real-World Impact

This act is beyond the classroom activities hence linking theory and practice develops the learner skills. Connecting leadership roles to community service or civic engagement projects allows students to see the relevance of their education beyond the classroom. When students realize that their actions can make a tangible difference, they develop a stronger sense of purpose. Purpose-driven learning is a powerful motivator that sustains self-drive.

Recognition and Feedback

Best practice approach can be initiated by acknowledging student leaders' contributions through awards, public appreciation, or constructive feedback reinforces their efforts. Recognition builds confidence, while feedback helps refine leadership skills. This cycle of encouragement and improvement strengthens students'

belief in their ability to succeed academically and personally. By giving positive vibes young individuals thrive faster with confidence.

Integration into Curriculum

Leadership development should not be an extracurricular add-on but integrated into the curriculum. Project-based learning, debate clubs, and collaborative assignments can embed leadership skills into everyday education. This ensures that leadership becomes part of the learning culture rather than a separate activity.

DEVELOPMENT EXPERIENCE FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

9. Human Capital Theory

Human capital theory provides one of the most enduring explanations for the relationship between education and leadership development. Becker (1993) argued that education enhances individuals' cognitive abilities, communication skills, and problem-solving capacity, which are essential for effective leadership. Leaders with higher levels of education are often better equipped to analyze complex problems, make informed decisions, and communicate effectively with diverse stakeholders. Recent studies reinforce this perspective, showing that investment in educational programs correlates with improved leadership performance in both corporate and educational settings (Harvard Business Impact, 2025). Education thus functions as a strategic investment in human capital, producing leaders who can adapt to dynamic organizational and societal challenges.

10. Transformational Leadership Theory

Transformational leadership theory emphasizes vision-building, motivation, and ethical responsibility, all of which align closely with educational objectives. Bass and Riggio (2006) describe transformational leaders as those who inspire followers to transcend self-interest for the sake of collective goals. Educational programs often integrate these principles by encouraging students to develop a sense of purpose, cultivate moral reasoning, and engage in collaborative problem-solving. For example, leadership development initiatives in higher education frequently include modules on ethical decision-making, social responsibility, and vision articulation (UNESCO, 2024). By embedding transformational leadership principles into curricula, education fosters leaders who are not only competent but also values-driven, capable of motivating others toward shared aspirations.

11. Experiential Learning Theory

Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory provides another critical lens for understanding how education contributes to leadership development. According to Kolb, learning occurs through a cyclical process of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Leadership education often incorporates experiential learning through case studies, simulations, internships, and service-learning projects. These experiences allow learners to practice leadership in real-world contexts, reflect on their actions, and refine their approaches. Recent research highlights that experiential learning fosters resilience, adaptability, and emotional intelligence—qualities increasingly recognized as vital for effective leadership (Jagnandan et al., 2024). By moving beyond theoretical instruction to applied practice, education ensures that leadership development is holistic and grounded in lived experience.

12. Integrative Perspective

Taken together, these frameworks suggest that education is not merely about knowledge acquisition but about cultivating dispositions and competencies that underpin leadership. Human capital theory emphasizes the cognitive and technical skills gained through education, transformational leadership theory highlights the ethical and motivational dimensions, and experiential learning theory underscores the importance of practice and reflection. Contemporary scholarship affirms that effective leadership education must integrate these perspectives, ensuring that leaders are intellectually capable, ethically grounded, and experientially prepared to navigate complex environments (UNESCO, 2025). This integrative approach positions education as a cornerstone of leadership development in both formal and informal contexts.

13. Higher Education as a Leadership Incubator

Universities play a pivotal role in leadership development. Formal leadership programs, such as workshops and mentoring initiatives, have been shown to improve self-awareness, strategic thinking, and interpersonal skills (Harvard Business Impact, 2025). Co-curricular activities, including student organizations and volunteer projects, provide informal leadership opportunities that foster teamwork, resilience, and decision-making. Moreover, higher education increasingly emphasizes global citizenship, preparing leaders to navigate diverse cultural contexts (Jagnandan et al., 2024). These findings suggest that higher education serves as both a structured and experiential incubator for leadership skills.

14. School Leadership Preparation

Educational leadership preparation programs, particularly for principals and administrators, demonstrate how education directly shapes leadership capacity. Structured training programs emphasize instructional leadership, community engagement, and resource management (Zahn, 2021). Recent global reports highlight that effective leadership is the second most important factor influencing learning outcomes, after teacher quality (UNESCO, 2024). However, challenges remain, including resource limitations and the contextual relevance of training programs, especially in developing countries. Evidence shows that well-prepared school leaders positively impact teacher motivation, student achievement, and institutional performance (UNESCO, 2025).

15. Lifelong and Professional Learning

Beyond formal institutions, education contributes to leadership development through lifelong learning. Professional development programs, executive education, and certifications enhance adaptability and strategic capacity in leaders (Harvard Business Impact, 2025). Informal education, such as community projects and civic engagement, nurtures grassroots leadership and social responsibility. Transformational leadership in education literature emphasizes that leaders benefit from continuous training in management skills, emotional intelligence, and ethical decision-making (IOSR-JRME, 2024). Thus, education extends leadership development beyond classrooms into lifelong and community-based contexts.

16. Critical Perspectives

Despite its recognized importance, critiques of leadership education highlight several limitations. First, there is an overemphasis

on formal credentials, which may not always correlate with leadership effectiveness (Zahn, 2021). Second, Western-centric leadership models often dominate curricula, limiting their applicability in diverse cultural contexts (Jagnandan et al., 2024). Third, scholars argue for greater integration of theory with practice, ethics, and emotional intelligence to ensure holistic leadership development (UNESCO, 2024). These critiques underscore the need for education systems to evolve and remain responsive to global leadership challenges. The contrary gaps is that there is overemphasis on formal credentials. Leadership effectiveness is not always proportional to academic qualifications. A disparity on cultural bias where western centric leadership models may not align with local contexts, limiting relevance. Therefore, leadership education must integrate theory with practice, ethics, and emotional intelligence to fit the local- home grown educated leader.

17. Higher Education and Leadership Development

Universities are key sites for leadership formation especially in formal Programs where Leadership development initiatives in higher education often include structured curricula, workshops, and mentoring. Studies show that such programs improve self-awareness, strategic thinking, and interpersonal skills. At the same time, Co-Curricular Activities: Student organizations, sports, and volunteer work provide informal leadership opportunities. These experiences foster teamwork, decision-making, and resilience. Yet in the Global Perspective, universities are increasingly emphasizing intercultural competence and global citizenship, preparing leaders for diverse and interconnected contexts. Higher education thus serves as both a formal and informal incubator for leadership skills.

School Leadership Preparation is critical and Educational leadership preparation programs, particularly for principals and administrators, demonstrate how education directly shapes

leadership capacity. Therefore, Structured Training for programs in Africa and other regions needs to emphasize instructional leadership, community engagement, and resource management. The contextual relevance, and sustainability of leadership training, especially in developing countries will be more relevant when well synchronized. Effective preparation correlates with improved school performance, teacher motivation, and student outcomes.

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN LEADERSHIP

We have nations around the world like in Finland where Sanna Marin was the youngest prime minister in Finnish history, taking office at age 34 on December 10, 2019, and serving until June 20, 2023. This has made Africa to rise with such cases where excellent young leaders in Africa emulating Finland. Andry Rajoelina first became president of Madagascar in March 2009, when he was just 34 years old. He assumed power as the head of the High Transitional Authority following a political crisis and a military-backed coup that ousted then-president Marc Ravalomanana. He remained in that transitional leadership role until 2014, making him one of Africa's youngest leaders in modern history. Assimi Goïta of Mali rose to power through a coup and has been leading since 2021. In 2024 Bassirou Diomaye Faye of Senegal made headlines in as one of Africa's youngest democratically elected presidents. Ibrahim Traoré of Burkina Faso is currently Africa's youngest serving leader and also one of the youngest in the world. This has is still current President (since 2022 coup).

18. The Gen- Z movement in African Countries

Africa has suffered a brain drain of intellectuals who end up leaving the continent in search of employment to sustain their living. A group of your youth and young adults have started a

revolution that is growing stronger every day. Young professionals comprising of lawyers, medical doctors, artisans and many others broke the silence of being unemployed with harsh living conditions. A higher percentage of educated populace in Africa exist with a higher percentage of low risk takers. Countries in the east and central Africa have experienced mass demonstrations against corrupt leadership yet the same leaders have undergone education systems attaining high qualification. We are yet to experience leaders who practice ethical leadership in many African countries. If a model of inculcating integrity would be exercised, then stability and development would guarantee many nations security leading to growth and development. The Gen Z movement in African countries is redefining governance by acting as a «policy laboratory» that demands accountability, transparency, and economic justice through, tech-savvy, leaderless, and non-partisan activism. Primarily driven by youth in nations like Kenya, Nigeria, and Morocco, this movement challenges established political elites, fosters a pan-African identity, and combats corruption. The young generation has use social media (TikTok, X, Instagram) for rapid, coordinated, and peaceful protests that are difficult for authorities to suppress. The young energetic youth has extensively used ethnic-based politics to focus on policy issues, such as the #RejectFinanceBill movement in Kenya, which forced governmental reconsideration of tax policies. The outcome of the leadership skills is outstanding. Street protests have directly influenced policy, with the potential to institutionalize reforms that outlast election cycles.

Below is a list of countries with the youngest leaders across the globe: Countries with Young Leaders.

Country	Leader	Age at Assumption of Office	Position
Finland	Sanna Marin	34	Prime Minister
New Zealand	Jacinda Ardern	37	Prime Minister
France	Emmanuel Macron	39	President
Chile	Gabriel Boric	35	President
Bhutan	Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck	26	King
El Salvador	Nayib Bukele	37	President
Costa Rica	Rodrigo Chaves Robles	38	President
North Korea	Kim Jong-un	27 (approx.)	Supreme Leader
Ireland	Leo Varadkar	38	Taoiseach (Prime Minister)
Ukraine	Volodymyr Zelenskyy	41	President

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IV. Disability and Inclusion in Higher Education: Barriers, Policies, and Practices in the Kenyan Context

Wanjugu Wachira

1. Introduction

According to the World Health Organisation it is observed that there are approximately 1 billion persons globally in this world who have a disability. In Malawi, more than 97% of children with disabilities have no access to education which is alarming.

Disabled student may be defined as ‘any student who has a sensory, cognitive, physical or psychological impairment’. The South African White Paper on Education defines a person with a disability as ‘a person limited or impaired in one or more functional activities which prevents full and equal academic, social and economic participation’. The impairment could be permanent, recurring or transitory and could be sensory, physical, cognitive or psychological.

Another definition of disability is a long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment that may hinder an individual’s full and effective participation in society on an equal opportunity with non-disabled people. During the past and at present times persons with disabilities have often been the focus of severe social stigma, discrimination and harassment which ultimately provokes persons with disability to live with the assumption and belief that their lives are shameful and they are not worthy of respect. This is a totally misguided belief as there are many persons with disability who have succeeded in many areas of their life for instance in achieving higher education, successful careers and leadership. However, it cannot be ignored that there is an uncontested connection between poverty and disability.

Based on the above belief if a disabled person feels discriminated there is a high likelihood they will shy off and not want to be associated with others. This means that the disabled person/s will not want to get involved in education to uplift themselves. Hence, a sense of hopelessness develops and consequently dependency and poverty may eventually result.

Disability is viewed to be complex, dynamic, multidimensional and contested. In recent times, the disabled people's movement in line with the world report on disability, a number of researchers from the social and health sciences have established the role of social and physical hindrances in disability. The change from an individual, medical perspective to a structural, social perspective has been explained as the shift from a "medical model" to a "social model" whereby people are viewed as being disabled by the community rather than by their bodies.

The medical model and the social model are in most cases presented together. Disability should be viewed as being purely medical or as purely social. In other words persons with disabilities can often encounter challenges developing from their health condition. It is essential to give a balanced approach, considering the appropriate weight to the numerous aspects of disability. Today there are different words used to refer to a person with a physical or other disability. Some include; handicapped person, person with special needs, person with disability and more recently differently abled persons.

Students with disability have increased in number in learning institutions over the years. Modern service provision for students with disabilities in higher learning institutions such as colleges and universities can be traced to programs that began as ad hoc supports for returning seasoned and experienced persons with disabilities in colleges and campuses. In particular, persons with special needs that are either physical or have sensory difficulties in nature.

This chapter expounds on the following topics:

- Services provided to special needs students in universities.
- Impact of disability services made available to university

- students with special needs
- Factors that influence the academic performance of special needs students in universities
- University policies on Special needs students
- An overview of disability, research and challenges a case study of Kenya.

2. Types of disabilities among university students

There are two common features stand out in majority definitions of disability, such as that of the World Health Organization (2001; 1980), the United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for People with Disabilities, the Disability Discrimination Act of the United Kingdom, and the Americans with Disabilities Act. The first feature is that disability is a physical or mental characteristic labeled or perceived as impairment while the second feature is some personal or social limitation associated with that impairment. The categories of a physical or mental variation as an impairment can be statistical, considering the average in some reference groups; biological, considering the theory of human functioning; or normative, considering the view of human flourishing. In addition, classified, impairments are generally seen as traits of the individual that an individual cannot readily change.

Furthermore, diseases are generally classified as impairments, even though they are rarely permanent or static conditions. On the other hand, diseases that are not long-lasting for instance flu and the measles are not considered as impairments. The notion of an individual/slimitation is broad and in cooperates restrictions on such “basic” actions such as lifting one’s arm. Additional limitationsan individual would experience of complex physical activities such as dressing and toileting; and on social activities for instance working, acquiring knowledge/skills or voting are also considered as limitations.

However, the characterization of both features is disputed. Several researchers have challenged the prevailing view of impairment as objective and biologically grounded. There is also disagreement about the conceptual and practical need for two categories of limitations, firstly, involving individual activity, secondly, social or political participation “disability” and “handicap” respectively.

3. Disability services made available to university students

A study by Hill (1992) on Accessibility: Students with Disabilities in Universities in Canada investigated disabilities at 27 Canadian universities. The study revealed that the number of students with disabling conditions in institutions of higher learning is increasing. This is an indication that more needs to be done to increase the facilities and support services for Persons with Disability.

Nel and colleagues (2015) conducted a study on ; The challenges experienced by students with a physical disability (SWPD) at a higher education institution in South Africa. The research was a qualitative investigation into the challenges experienced by Students with Physical Disabilities (SWPDs) at the University of Limpopo. Key findings indicated that disabled students generally find that there is inadequate physical infrastructure which compromises their physical access within the institution. Furthermore, results also revealed that participants also had to deal with discrimination from peers and staff. It was further reported that respondents being provided with proper amenities, such as laptops and wheelchairs, would assist students with disability find the environment less challenging. Creating awareness of Persons with Disability (PWD) to able-bodied staff and students was also seen as necessary in order to manage discrimination. Finally, results also indicated that poor infrastructure at the university provides many challenges and barriers to the

disabled being able to access different facilities at the university. This has ultimately led to PWD opting to staying in their rooms which has thus increased their isolation.

Students with disability in universities encounter numerous challenges, which may consist of a lack of suitable facilities, difficulty in accessing learning materials, a lack of understanding and respect from both other students and faculty members among others. In a study conducted in the United Kingdom, it was established that the challenges encountered by students with disabilities were worsened by the lack of a coordinated effort, across the institution, to address special needs issues.

Van Jaarsveldt & Ndeya-Ndereya (2015) established that in African universities technological barriers, a lack of awareness and poor liaison among the learning institution stakeholders and distancing of lecturers in providing learner support to students with special needs are challenges that students with disabilities encountered. Some studies conducted have revealed that students with special needs feel they have to work harder than other students without disability, due to the fact that they have to manage their disability and their studies at the same time.

The introduction of relevant technologies can provide support to students with special needs in their learning. It is perceived that technology can assist in reducing the barriers to equitable education for students with special needs and thus promote better integration of students with special needs into mainstream higher education.

According to a study conducted on students with special needs in a UK institution of higher learning by (Georgeson et al., 2015), results revealed that students with special needs lack the correct digital capital to enable them to succeed within higher education environments. Hence it is essential for students in higher institutions of learning ‘conceptualise’ and ‘organise’ technology-related support services for students with special needs, in order to support and promote access to equitable educational encounters and results.

The adoption of digital technologies for instance virtual learning environments and e-learning can assist in achieving increased levels of accessibility and inclusion amongst persons with disability. It should be noted that digital technology is accessible to all for it to impact positively on those who need it most.

From the above studies mentioned, it is evident that there are indeed some services and facilities available even though inadequate for PWD. However, more can be done in availing more support services and facilities. Some universities such as East Coast Polytechnic Institute, (ECPI) University in the USA and Open University of Japan (OUJ) aim to ensure that PWD are enrolled in their universities. ECPI University commits to providing qualified applicants with a disability an equal opportunity to access the benefits, rights and privileges of school services, programs and activities in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. ECPI disability facilities offered consist of restrooms and classrooms are designed to permit students with disability to enroll and benefit from the education. Furthermore, disability parking is provided which is convenient for accessing building entrances.

In addition, the Open University of Japan (OUJ) provides services and facilities for students with disabilities by allowing them to study from their residences. This involves adopting special arrangements for examinations and classroom-based activities as well as the extensive use of radio and TV for lecture transmission; providing transcripts and captions for all learning materials as well as ensuring texts are available in digital form for persons with visual impairment that need to use screen reader users.

4. Impact of disability services made available to university students with special needs

It has been observed that despite the increase in the use of e-learning facilities, students with disabilities apparently do continue

to display lower retention rates as compared to students attending lectures on a day to day basis.

This lower retention rate may be due to persons with disability feeling they should be in lecture rooms as opposed to their homes thus students with disability feel their needs are not catered for and thus feel excluded resulting to students with disability discontinuing with education.

It is evident from the above literature support services for persons with special needs in universities may be adequate or inadequate and may be made use of or may not be made use of by students with disability.

5. Factors that influence the academic performance of special needs students in universities

Based on a study on factors influencing academic performance of students with special needs in institutions of higher learning the case of middle level colleges in Machakos County, Kenya it was established that family background, adapted classrooms and extra notes and hand-outs influence the academic performance of students with special needs in middle level colleges in Machakos County, Kenya.

On the other hand, Sachs & Schreuer (2011) conducted a study on Inclusion of students with disabilities in Higher Education: Performance and participation in student's experiences. The study compared 170 such students in higher learning institutions in Israel with a total of 156 students without disabilities for formal achievements and overall participation in higher learning education. Findings revealed that academic achievements of students with disabilities were almost as high as those of students without disabilities, and overall students' experiences were similar. The disabled students and those without disability differed in areas of experiences. Findings also revealed that students with disabilities put in a lot of time to meet the demands

of their studies, and notably participated in fewer social and extra-curricular activities, and apparently used computers and information technology less. Higher instructions of learning do have a long way to go in order to minimize the gap in social inclusion of students with disabilities and to adjust the academic standards for the needs of persons with disability. This could imply that if students with disability are given all support services facilities and services they require the likelihood of them performing well in institutions of higher learning would increase.

6. University policies on Special needs students

Wanjau (2016) conducted a study on ‘policy and provision of learning supports and accommodations for students with disabilities in kenyan public universities.’ Three public universities out of 7 public universities consisted of the sample group of the study. Total population sampling was employed for students with disabilities (SWDs) who participated in this study. Findings of this study were that two of the Kenyan Public Universities had disability policies which had not been released to the public and their implementation was minimal. For the third university the disability policy was still in draft form due to delays by the administration in ratifying it. Results further revealed that the universities provided few types of accommodations to SWDs. It was further established that faculty (lecturers) in the Public Universities felt ill prepared and supported to lecture SWDs meaning no adequate training had been done. Furthermore, it was found out that although disability issues were mentioned in some public university policy documents, there existed wide gaps between policy and provision of accommodations to students with disability in these institutions of higher learning, due to the fact that these policies had hardly been implemented.

7. An overview of disability, research and challenges a case study of Kenya

Types of disability

The common types of disability are mobility which accounts for (42%), visual which amounts to (36.4%), cognition that amounts to (23.2%), hearing which accounts to (16.7%), self-care which is (15.3%) and communication at (12.1%).

We should not however forget diseases that are considered to fall under disability such as Diabetes and Epilepsy.

More than 80% of persons with disabilities live in rural areas in Kenya. Which is a relatively a high number.

Background of Disability in kenya

In 1980 the government declared the National Year for People with Disabilities to promote awareness.

In 1984 Educational Assessments and Resource Services were introduced by the ministry of Education to improve educational service for special education students.

However in 1989 Kenya's oldest Disabled Person's Organization (DPO), Kenya Union of the Blind merged with Kenya National Association of the Deaf, Kenya Society of the Physically Handicapped, and other organizations to form United Disabled Persons of Kenya (UDPK).

In 1993 The Attorney General appointed a task force to review laws related to persons with disabilities and to collect views from the public.

2003 National disability law was passed, Persons with Disabilities Act, establishing a National Council for Persons with Disabilities whose mandate is to implement the rest of the act on rights, privileges, and protection.

In the year 2007 The U.N. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) was signed.

Finally, in 2008 The U.N. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) was ratified.

2010 National Kenyan Constitution recognizes disability rights.

Facts about Disability in Kenya

With reference to the population, statistics indicate that

10% of the population is disabled in Kenya that is approximately 4.44 million people. This percentage is an indication that the percentage of persons with disability in Kenya constitutes a significant number of people and hence the necessity to ensure that persons with disability are considered when it comes to meeting their needs at the work place and in educational institutions.

In line with rural urban population statistics indicate that 66% of the disabled population lives in rural areas which approximately 2.93 million people.

78% of the overall population lives in rural areas (34.59 million people).

This is an indication that a large percentage of persons living with disabilities live in rural areas.

The age distribution of disabled population in Kenya are as follows:

- Age 0 – 14 years is 43.4% that is approximately 1.92 million people.
- Age 15 – 24 is 21% approximately 0.93 million people.
- Age 25 – 34 is 13.5% approximately 0.68 million people.
- Age 35 – 54 is 15.4% approximately 0.68 million people.
- Age 55 plus is 6.7% approximately 0.30 million people.

From the percentages provided it is evident that the age bracket that constitutes the highest percentage of persons with disability is the age bracket of 0 – 14 years at 43.4%. This could raise the question why is this? Is it due to change of lifestyle, foods consumed among other aspects.

Statistics indicate the disabled population consists of 50.4% female approximately 2.24 million people.

Whereas 49.6% are male at approximately 2.20 million people.

This suggests an almost equal distribution.

In line with education 19% of the disabled population is receiving a secondary education this is approximately 0.68 million people.

49.9% of the total population is not receiving a secondary education approximately 22.13 million people.

This suggests that more needs to be done to have more inclusive education so that more children living with disability can access education.

Persons with disability do get employment in Kenya.

33.3% of the disabled population is employed that is approximately 1.48 million people.

40.4% of the total population is unemployed (17.92 million people).

There is a good percentage of disabled persons who have secured employment. Some have acquired one their own while others have been assisted by the National Council of persons with Disability in Kenya.

Majority of disabled persons in Kenya are considered to be poor.

67% of the disabled population lives in poverty which is approximately 2.97 million people.

52% of the total population lives in poverty which is approximately 23.06 million people.

This suggests more needs to be done to reduce the levels of poverty among disabled persons in Kenya.

Disability Issues/Challenges in Kenya

There are numerous issues and challenges experienced by persons living with disabilities. These issues may be silent but have negatively impacted persons with disability in a huge way.

Discrimination while at work school or public places (lack of inclusion in many institutions/organisations).

Lack of adequate infrastructure for persons with disability for instance; lack of adequate ramps and lifts for accessibility for physically challenged and those with low vision and the blind:

- Working for excess hours to complete a task;
- Accusation that one is pretending especially if one has a disability which is not visible;

- Financial burden due to medical treatment/ medication;
- The notion that persons with special needs require special treatment;
- Expensive assistive devices; and
- Abandonment of persons living with disability.

Research

Research on disability issues contuses to be conducted in Kenya.

However, implantation of recommendations made from research conducted seems to be a challenge due to lack of prioritization of matters pertaining to disability and lack of adequate resources could also be another reason.

Examples of some research that has been conducted in Kenya are:

- Determinants of Disability Mainstreaming among Public Infrastructure Project Designs in Kisumu municipality-Kenya by Francis Makwata Musa
- Disparities that Affect People with Disabilities in Kenya
- Nelson H. W. Wawire, Department of Economics, Kenyatta University
- Factors Influencing Persons with Disability Readiness to Participate in Development projects in Kenya A Case of Makueni County by Bernardetta Nduku Kithuka

Research Gap/Further research

Some areas that research could be conducted on are:

- Coping mechanisms for persons with disability;
- Implementation, monitoring and evaluation of disability policies; and
- Disability conditions that bring about chronic conditions and other health challenges.

8. Conclusion

Governments of have tried to address disability issues but more can be done by the Government and the community and Organisations at large.

Access to affordable health care and equipment/assistive devises for persons with disability should be prioritized and addressed specifically for the vulnerable globally.

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V. Biodiversity Education and Sustainability in Higher Learning Institutions: Toward Transformative Pedagogies

Milcah Ajuoga

1. Introduction

The term biodiversity was first used in the United Nations Conference for Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. The convention on biodiversity recognizes the vast significance of biodiversity encompassing ecological, genetic, social, scientific, educational, cultural, recreational and aesthetic values. The ongoing decline in global biodiversity and the increasing urgency of conservation efforts highlights the crucial role of education in fostering environmental awareness and ecological responsibility (Oliveira et al., 2025). Biodiversity is fundamental to ecosystem stability and sustainability, yet its global decline under scores the urgent need for effective education to foster awareness and conservation efforts.

Franzolin et al. (2021) puts emphasis on the critical need for education and awareness programmes to promote conservation and the sustainable use of natural resources. Biodiversity education help learners understand the connections between biodiversity and key sectors such as agriculture, fisheries and forestry. In Portugal, the integration of environmental education and education for sustainable development into school curricular has evolved gradually, shifting from isolated environmental topics to a more holistic, cross disciplinary approach (Joan et al., 2022). However in Kenya, universities has adopted environmental sustainable development focused curriculum, offering specialized agenda by integrating sustainability principles into campus operations.

While looking at biodiversity of education in higher learning, we are essentially looking at the educational ecosystem. Education is vital because it helps in guiding educational efforts in raising awareness and promoting sustainable behaviour. University ecosystem thrives on a diversity of disciplines, trans formative pedagogy, ethics and leadership pack, teachers professional competences and research areas. The preservation of biodiversity has become a major concern in contemporary society.

In Kenya, biodiversity is a multifaceted approach aimed at raising awareness, building technical capacity, and fostering a sense of responsibility for the nation's diverse ecosystem. It is integrated into the national curriculum under Education for Sustainable Development SDG 4 which is quality education and Environmental Education starting from Early Years Education to Basic education up to higher education (Nation Media Group, 2024). Kanosvamhira (2025) posits that, schools play a vital role in instilling environmental responsibility with curricular emphasizing biodiversity protection and sustainable resource use.

2. Biodiversity Awareness in Institution of Higher Learning

Biodiversity is often relegated to a secondary topic within broader environmental science courses, rather than being treated as a core subject. Therefore students end up developing a general awareness of environmental issues, but their understanding of biodiversity such as its complexity, importance and interconnections tends to remain superficial (Franzoline et al., 2021). This lack of focus has resulted in knowledge gaps, with students often unable to grasp key biodiversity concepts or the real-world implications (Piranco et al., 2021). In order to bridge these gaps, a more holistic, cross disciplinary approach to education is essential, ensuring a deeper and more integrated comprehension of biodiversity (Vaverkova et al., 2024).

Creating awareness is not enough, education programmes are essential in enhancing knowledge, acquiring skills and attitudes. Effective environmental education must go beyond creating awareness and foster a deeper connection between students and the natural world. Attitudes towards biodiversity can shift through direct experience and practice, reinforcing the idea that people are more likely to protect what they understand and value. Acquiring knowledge alone does not always translate in action (Tiago et al., 2024). Hence the integration of experiential learning and hands-on conservation activities into educational programme is key for translating knowledge into meaningful environmental action. Higher institutions of learning as knowledge hubs, play a vital role in the process by integrating biodiversity themes into academic content.

Kenya like many nations, faces a myriad of environmental challenges, from deforestation and pollution to climate change which threatens the well-being of its citizens. The Ministry of Education has integrated the study of environmental education into various subjects exposing learners to teachings on biodiversity, sustainable practices and the consequences of degradation. Kenya has witnessed the emergence of Green School programmes, where schools are incorporating sustainable measures such as rain water harvesting, water recycling and tree planting initiatives.

3. Green Curriculum Promotion

A green curriculum is an educational framework that integrates sustainability, environmental protection, and climate action into all levels of learning, from pre-primary to higher education. Green curriculum is designed as a transformative, holistic and interdisciplinary approach that encompasses themes across the entire teaching and learning experience (Katsiampoura et al., 2025).

According to the European education area, Green Education, which includes initiatives and policies that integrate education

for sustainability and climate change into education and training, has emerged as a critical approach to empowering individuals with the necessary knowledge, skills and values to address the complex environmental challenges of the time. The world is at a critical scenario where climate change, resource depletion, biodiversity loss, and a myriad of other environmental challenges threaten the very nerve of our planet and the well being of future generations. In the presence of these, education has emerged as not only an accurate tool for individual advancement, but as well as a significant instrument for social transformation. Katsiampoura et al. (2025) observed that climate change is seen by Europeans as one of the most pressing issues. It is important to note that Africa is not left out. They further highlighted that countries in the European Union (EU) get assistance from the European commission in giving educators and students the information and abilities they need to be sustainable, assisting educational and training establishments in incorporating sustainability into their everyday operations, instruction and learning and establishing a common vision and knowledge of green transition education.

The environmental problems includes: environmental pollution, climate change, the ozone hole, deforestation, desertification, the extinction of biological species, acid rain among others. Climate change is outstanding among the lists. It is a byproduct of the greenhouse effect, which is a natural phenomenon necessary for the maintenance of life on the planet. Driga and Drigas (2019) established that human activities have contributed greatly to the increase of an unbalanced amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, causing the anthropogenic aspect of climate change.

In the learning institutions, green education can be propagated through inclusion in the curriculum where the educational programmes can be organized with an aim to raise awareness about sustainable mobility. Creating supportive learning environments that promote practical, interdisciplinary and locally relevant sus-

tainability education. Also by development of environmental problem solving capabilities and skills that enable learners to contribute to sustainable development and address environmental challenges. Green education is interdisciplinary, whereby various disciplines, including sciences, social studies, economics and ethics, to provide a holistic understanding of environmental issues, recognizing the multifaceted nature of environmental challenges.

In Kenya, it gears towards a sustainable future by promoting the greening initiative as part of its environmental strategy focusing on tree planting, forest conservation, waste management, regenerative agriculture, and urban belts. According to Raburu and Oriwo (2025), the programmes aims to combat climate change, boost biodiversity, and using modern technology, community engagement and education. The Kenyan green economy focuses on resource efficiency, sustainable natural resource management, social inclusion, resilience and sustainable infrastructure development.

Kenya's framework for sustainability related abilities is driven by the Education for Sustainable Development (SDG) policy and the Competency Based Education (CBE). These frameworks aim to transition education from rote learning to a holistic approach that equip learners with knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to address environmental, social, and economic challenges. Under the National Education for Sustainable Development Policy and CBE, learners are expected to develop several abilities such as; critical and systemic thinking where by the learners will develop abilities to understand the complex inter-dependencies between human actions and the environment, the learner would develop collaborative decision-making skills where they can engage with others to make informed choices for environmental integrity and social justice, learners can enhance values of citizenship and stewardship by developing a sense of responsibility to care for oneself, others and the local and global environment, problem solving and innovation is another key ability which can be applied to use creatively solutions to sustainability challenges such as climate change, waste management and resource scarcity and sus-

tainable consumption as an ability can help distinguish between wasteful and sustainable products and understanding the concept of finite resources (Sessional Paper n. 11 of 2014).

Kenya's key policies and programmes supportive of a green economy includes; investment in renewable energy, promotion of resource-efficient and cleaner production, enhanced resilience to economic and climate shocks, pollution control and waste management, environmental planning and governance and restoration of forest ecosystems (RoK, 2014).

Kenya has seen emergence of various technologies that promotes green economy. Examples are: solar powered water pumps, biogas systems which has reduced reliance on wood fuels, eco-friendly building materials such as recycled plastics and bamboo in construction, electric vehicles introduced in urban areas purposefully to reduce carbon emissions and improve air quality, smart Agriculture technologies, water purification systems using solar energy to provide clean drinking water and other sustainable methods and clean cooking stoves made out of clay which are environmentally friendly.

The Kenyan government has implemented several initiatives to align with future of work and sustainable development. Examples are: Ajira Digital Programme which empowers youth by providing digital skills training and access to online job opportunities, promoting inclusive participation in the digital economy, secondly is Green Economy Strategy and Implementation Plan (GESIP) 2016-2030, it outlines Kenya's road map for transitioning to green economy, detailing the necessary conditions, strategic framework, and implementation mechanisms and lastly, Kenya National AI Strategy 2025-2030 which aims to harness artificial intelligence for innovation and economic growth, with applications that support green economy goals such as climate resilience, smart agriculture and clean energy (Raburu & Oriwo, 2025).

Kenyan universities have increasingly transitioned from viewing sustainability as a government requirement to embedding it into their core operations, research and curricula. While progress

varies, institutions are leveraging the Kenya Green University Network (KGUN) to transform campuses into living labs for climate action.

Below are a few samples of efforts Kenyan universities have put to promote Green Education and sustainability. St. Paul's university (SPU) in Kenya has integrated sustainability into its core mission, focusing on environmental stewardship, ecotheology and innovative research. The Green Education and Sustainability initiatives range from Ecotheology short courses in partnership with the Green Anglican Movement Kenya, SPU offers groundbreaking course that trains religious leaders in creation care. Graduates implement practical community projects such as; tree-growing campaigns and climate education, installation of energy saving stoves and formation of parish green committees and waste management. SPU convened an Annual International Research Conference 2025 theme was "Re-Conceptualizing Sustainable Development Goals for Today's Challenges and Tomorrow's Possibilities", the focus areas included integral ecology, green finance and climate adaptation strategies. Another area of focus, SPU is a member of Sustainable Research and Global Partnerships, FOSTER Project a partnership aimed at embedding sustainable Open Science (OS) practices and infrastructure within the university's policy and curriculum. SPU Innovation Centre of Excellence (ICE) fosters green entrepreneurship mindset among students, helping them monetize business ideas that are reproducible and sustainable. SPU students has Environmental and Conservation Club which engages students in Campus recycling programmes, tree planting drives and advocacy and Sustainability in Academic Programmes in Master and PhD of Development Studies, which focuses on contributing to sustainable development. Finally, the university Strategic Plan 2025-2030 anchors its future on innovation, Digitalization and sustainability. One of its pillars is the ethical and sustainable management of financial, environmental and human resources to ensure long-term institutional resilience (SPU, Strategic Plan 2025-2030, 2025).

Kirigiah and Njoka (2024) observed that, Competency Based

Education and Training (CBET) represents a promising approach to aligning education with industry demands and fostering sustainable development in Kenyan universities. The study explored the intersection of CBET and sustainable development, focusing on the role of CBET in developing green skills, challenges in implementation and strategies for integration within higher education institutions. One of their findings was that, strategies for integrating green skills into CBET programmes include curriculum revision, strengthening academia- industry collaboration, and enhancing education on green technology and sustainable practices. Strathmore University under school of Humanities and Social Sciences hosted an Academic Staff Workshop entitled Competency and Sustainability in the University Classroom on March 2024. The theme of the workshop was aligned to the broader theme of the year, Sustainability: Caring for People and Planet. This reminded the community of its shared commitment to create a better world for current and future generations. The university made a call to action at the beginning of the year to integrate sustainability into the very fabric of the university community (<https://shss.strthmore.edu>). Further more Strathmore University hosts (0.6 MW) largest solar installations and Kenyatta University (100KW) and also notable sustainability initiative Green Education Hub, host for the LEAD-ESD regional capacity building programme. In the area of energy, Moi University notable sustainability initiative is in Renewable Energy Innovation Park focusing on phytochemicals and green hydrogen research, cafeterias initiatives include waste-to-energy biogas, solar-powered boreholes, and automated e-learning systems to reduce paper use. Curriculum re-orientation at the University of Nairobi, there is a shift toward interdisciplinary learning where sustainability is integrated into diverse fields. Meru University of Science and Technology, focuses on sustainable agricultural practices within the green economy. Karatina University leads in managing Botanical Gardens and 65 local school environmental clubs.

According to Nyatuka (2020) from Kisii University in Kenya,

Education for Sustainable Development is increasingly being recognized as a critical element of education systems and a facilitator of sustainable development. The researcher emphasized that, ESD is ideal to foster teaching, learning, policies, and practices needed to enhance social, economic, ecological realization of objectives of the CBET that Kenya rolled out.

Even though efforts are made to promote green education in Kenyan universities, there are persistent challenges that needs to be addressed, such as; resource constraints where limited funding for research and high cost of accrediting new green curricular remain major barriers. Another one is fragmented action where many sustainability projects exist as isolated islands rather than a unified national movement and finally, policy gaps, while national frameworks exist, many universities lag in adopting institutional level policies to guide climate action.

4. Biodiversity in Higher Education and Transformative Pedagogy

Transformative pedagogy is an activist educational approach that combines constructivist and critical pedagogy to foster deep, meaningful change in learner's perspective, values and worldview (Khedkar, 2016). Transformative pedagogy empowers learners to examines their own beliefs and societal norms to become active agents of change. In higher education, the integration of biodiversity through trans formative pedagogy represents a shift from merely teaching about nature for fostering deep, systemic change in how learners relate to the biosphere. Trans formative pedagogy empowers learners as active agents of change. Universities are increasingly adopting these innovative strategies to move from human -centered to nature -centered worldviews. HEI's therefore need to incorporate biodiversity into their curricula and community practices.

Core principles of transformative pedagogy includes; critical

reflection which encourages learners to question their assumptions, values and the societal power structures that shape their understanding, collaboration which replaces traditional lectures with interactive meaning - making where knowledge is co constructed through open and discussion between facilitators and learners. It promotes experiential learning and social justice orientation which aligned education with democratic ideals and equity. According to dictionaries and encyclopedias, transformative pedagogy, in its fundamental sense, is an educational philosophy focused on deep learning and societal transformation through critical reflection, experience and collaborative action. Learners are encouraged to apply their critical understanding and skills to address real-world problems, becoming agents of change in their communities and beyond.

Key pedagogical principle such as conscientisation can be applied in biodiversity training by developing an understanding of the root causes of biodiversity loss, such as industrial agriculture or habitat destruction. Solidarity as a principle can be applied in biodiversity training by building shared values that promote a seamless relationship between humans and non humans. Education should be made relevant to the life experiences of the learners and their specific local environment.

Transformative pedagogy leans on constructivism theoretical foundations which posits that learners learn by doing and generate meaning by reflection on how new information conflicts with their current understanding. Another relevant theoretical foundation is transformative learning theory, which focuses on the process of adult learners revising their frames of reference through a series of stages such as self examination and planning new courses of action. Therefore, the universities ultimate goal is to produce graduates who are adaptable and capable of tackling complex global challenges such as climate change among others.

Education that recognizes inequities and endeavour to create a more just society. It is based on the idea that educators can choose to either maintain or to resist and overcome coercive relations of

power and social economic inequities (Morrison, 2016).

The practical teaching strategies which can be used includes; flipped classrooms. Here the learners can use in-person time for interactive, collaborative activities where learners must apply new concepts to solve problems. Place-Based and experiential learning can be used, by exposing the learner to local ecosystems such as forests, wetlands or urban gardens and build emotional connections to nature. Inquiry -Based projects can be used where learners engage in Participatory research projects alongside local stakeholders such as farmers and scientists to promote sense of shared responsibility and ownership over conservation solutions. Interdisciplinary Case Methods using Health or sustainability frameworks, teachers learn to connect biodiversity loss to health, economics and ethics. For example, a cased study on wetland predators can teach systemic thinking rather than just biology.

Schools are ideally positioned to drive this transformation and nature based education often evaluates and targets individuals in isolation from their contexts.

5. Ethics and Leadership Pack to Promote Biodiversity in Universities Education

To promote biodiversity in university education, an effective ethics and leadership pack should move beyond simple species identification to foster deep ecological responsibility and institutional change. A study conducted by Balontia (2024), explored the impact of character education in developing ethical awareness for ecosystem sustainability, focusing on Binus University students through a project -based learning approach. The study emphasized the development of ethical behaviour, social responsibility and collective action to maintain a sustainable ecosystem. The results show that students recognize the importance of collaboration between individuals, governments and stakeholders in ensuring

environmental sustainability.

Three aspects of ethics and leadership pack includes, collective ethical awareness, shared values and sustainable benefits. Collective ethical awareness is a universal responsibility. Shared values, strengthen students beliefs that justice for nature is a collective obligation between individuals and institutions. Sustainable benefits refers to the long-term benefits to the environment and society that arise from maintaining a sustainable ecosystem. Character education is very important in shaping students moral perspectives and actions towards environmental conservation. Ethics education should be integrated into higher education for future environmentally conscious leaders.

Core ethics components may embrace a curriculum focused on biodiversity ethics and must cultivate collective ethical awareness, teaching learners that maintaining ecosystems is a shared moral responsibility. The conservation hierarchy, prioritize avoiding and reducing harm first, followed by restoring damage and creating new habitats. Encourage learners to debate the intrinsic value of nature against its value for human use to develop critical thinking. That is referred to as biocentric versus anthropocentric views. Justice and equity, addressing inter-generational equity and the fair sharing of benefits from genetic resources. Finally promoting ethical integrity by ensuring that research on biodiversity is conducted with transparency, stewardship and accountability.

Leadership frameworks for higher education in the context of curriculum leadership, the university administrators and faculty should integrate biodiversity into all disciplines, not just environmental science only. Wolff et al. (2024), observed that humanity faces big challenges with climate change that have become too obvious to be denied, a faster biodiversity loss than ever, growing inequality and poverty problems, and a zoonotic pandemic that has revealed that humans are parts of viral ecosystems. In such a world, the idea of the university and higher education in general is crucial in preparing for the future. To promote

leadership frameworks in the university, whole institution approach where universities should be treated as living labs where learners lead real-world conservation projects on their own campus. Empower students organizations to drive green policies, habitat restoration and eco-friendly events to build lifelong leadership skills. Establish links with external local communities to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical conservation action.

The “Pack” which is the practical education tools should be availed. The biodiversity toolkit, resources like Nature Positive Universities Toolkit provide actionable steps for campus based conservation. Multiple-Perspective case studies involving the use of local community issues as case studies to help learners understand the complex social, economic and cultural factors affecting biodiversity and lastly, UNESCO and other organizations offer Biodiversity Learning Kits to help students discover their surroundings and develop a sense of belonging to the biosphere.

Implementation strategies may include; interdisciplinary integration where biodiversity themes may be infused into non-traditional fields such as marketing, business, engineering, law among others in the process of professional development, train educators in conservation topics to ensure they can accurately guide students through complex ecological concepts. Finally, community radio and outreach can be utilized by use of multimedia to communicate conservation actions and raise awareness beyond the university walls.

6. Conclusions

Biodiversity education in universities is a crucial tool for transforming learners from passive observers into proactive environmental observers. While universities have successfully integrated foundational concepts, research indicates significant gaps between theoretical awareness and the practical skills needed

for conservation action. Throughout the book chapter writing, it is observed that.

There is knowledge gap, the learners actual knowledge of species conservation and ecosystem complexity often remains superficial. Therefore education must shift from merely increasing knowledge to fostering active sustainable behaviour. Curriculum limitations were observed where by current university curricula often treat biodiversity as a secondary topic within broader environmental science courses. There is need for a more interdisciplinary approach, integrating biodiversity themes into non-science fields such as economics, engineering among others. Experiential learning impact where hands - on activities such as fieldwork, citizen science and campus - based conservation projects are more effective at internalizing concepts rather than classroom lectures alone. Universities have strategic roles which are uniquely positioned to lead the whole institution transformations, aligning campus operations, research and community partnerships with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 15-Life on Land Lastly, there is a growing demand for a new breed of conservation professionals equipped with both scientific expertise and soft skills such as communication, problem-solving, critical thinking, proper attitude among others.

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VI. Learning Through Mobility: Reflexive Experiences from Reggio Childhood Studies

Frashia Ndungu, Eloise Drure, Laura Berni

1. Introduction

The internationalisation of higher education has increasingly positioned academic mobility at the centre of institutional strategies worldwide. Efforts by countries and universities to attract international students have become a key dimension of global competitiveness, with mobility programmes serving not only as educational opportunities but also as instruments for securing international accreditation, enhancing institutional visibility, and preparing graduates for participation in a globalised labour market (Woldegiorgis & Doevenspeck, 2015). While academic mobility is not a recent phenomenon (Knight & Woldegiorgis, 2017), its scale, direction, and strategic significance have intensified over the past two decades.

At a global level, these transformations are reflected in the increasing interconnectedness of higher education systems through partnerships, exchanges, and collaborative research. In the European context, academic mobility has been strongly institutionalised as part of a broader, managed process of convergence within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) (European Commission, 2022). Within this framework, student mobility has been a central policy instrument, notably through programmes such as Erasmus, established in 1987, which promotes short-term intra-European mobility with the dual aim of facilitating economic integration by normalizing cross-border movement and fostering a sense of European identity (Rivza, 2007). As a result, student mobility has become a key objective in the con-

struction of the EHEA, intended to enhance accessibility, inclusivity, and global competitiveness (European Commission, 2022). Within this broader policy architecture, mobility practices have expanded in both scale and form, giving rise to increasingly diverse mobility trajectories.

Within the African context, the importance of academic mobility has long been recognised as a driver of educational development and cooperation. The Declaration and Action Plan on Higher Education in Africa (UNESCO Dakar Office, 1997) highlighted the significance of mobility for students, faculty, and researchers. However, it did not explicitly define the scope or direction of such mobility. This was later more clearly articulated in the 2010 Joint Statement of the Association of African Universities (AAU) and the European University Association (EUA), which emphasised the role of inter-university partnerships in strengthening Africa–Europe cooperation (AAU & EUA, 2010). In this framework, universities are positioned as key actors in addressing shared global challenges through collaborative knowledge production and exchange. These developments illustrate how academic mobility has evolved from a historically embedded practice into a strategic, policy-driven, and globally interconnected phenomenon.

Student mobility may take different temporal forms, ranging from short-term exchanges, such as exchange programmes (Luo & Panibratov, 2023; Roy et al., 2018), to long-term engagement through full-degree study abroad programmes, each shaping distinct forms of educational and relational engagement. Although these forms of mobility have received comparatively less attention in the higher education literature, which has traditionally focused on longer-term experiences such as full-degree study abroad, short-term doctoral mobilities represent accessible and potentially high-impact opportunities for the development of early-career researchers (Henderson, 2022). Also known as temporary mobilities, short-term mobilities are driven not only by academic requirements but also by the expectation of experiencing difference

through exposure to alternative institutional and cultural contexts. Rather than being guided solely by perceptions of institutional hierarchy, mobility is often framed as a formative encounter with diversity across educational settings (Sin et al., 2017).

Despite their growing prominence, much of the literature on international student mobilities (ISMs) continues to privilege an instrumental framing of study abroad (Fakunle, 2021). Within this perspective, mobility is positioned as a strategic investment in human capital, primarily pursued to access better employment opportunities, higher salaries, or enhanced professional trajectories, often linked to movement towards the Global North or highly ranked institutions. Such narratives construct mobility as a linear pathway to economic and individual advancement, reinforcing hierarchies of knowledge production and privileging certain destinations as more legitimate or valuable sites of learning (Shen et al., 2022; Brooks & Waters, 2011). However, this dominant framing marginalises alternative forms of mobility that do not fit within these economically driven logics, particularly mobilities towards contexts in the Global South. These experiences remain under-theorised, often rendered invisible or perceived as lacking equivalent “value” within prevailing academic and policy discourses (Bauschke-Urban, 2025; Mendes, 2022).

In this chapter, student mobility is conceptualised as the movement of students across national borders to undertake short-term periods of study, training, or research within higher education institutions. Beyond physical relocation, it is understood as a situated and relational process through which learners engage with diverse institutional, social, and epistemic contexts (Woldegiorgis & Doevenspeck, 2015). This framing allows mobility to be read not only as a policy-driven mechanism but also as an experiential and knowledge-producing encounter shaped by context, relations, and situated learning.

Building on this perspective, the chapter draws on the co-authored and reflexive accounts of the authors, each of whom engaged in distinct but interconnected forms of mobility in

Kenya within the Reggio Childhood Studies doctoral programme. Guided by the epistemological orientation of the Reggio Emilia Approach (REA), the chapter reconceptualises mobility as a relational and situated learning environment: a space of encounter, co-construction, and reflexive engagement through which knowledge is produced, negotiated, and shared across contexts. At the same time, it acknowledges that such mobilities unfold within structural and temporal conditions that shape their possibilities, rhythms, and uneven accessibility (Fellsson & Mählck, 2017).

2. Reggio Childhood Studies Doctoral Program

In line with the broader trend of mobilities in higher education, the Reggio Childhood Studies (RCS) doctoral programme integrates international mobility into its structure, allowing its researchers to undertake research mobilities and missions abroad for up to 12 months over the three-year duration of the programme. Reggio Childhood Studies is an international industrial PhD developed within the “industrial” framework of the Reggio Children Foundation (FRC), to build a research base that draws on lived educational experiences while engaging with emerging challenges in education and bridging spaces of research where pedagogical inquiry can meet academic research (Goddard et al., *in press*).

The programme is grounded in the educational philosophy of the Reggio Emilia Approach (REA), which underpins its pedagogical orientation and informs its commitment to participatory, relational, and context-sensitive processes of learning. Through the doctoral program and its projects, FRC works to promote, sustain, and further develop this approach internationally, with a commitment to improving the lives of communities worldwide by promoting children’s rights, particularly the right to quality education (FRC, 2026). As such, the programme promotes processes and practices that foster active participation, relational

engagement among participants, and the exchange of skills across different fields of knowledge. It also encourages cross-cultural interactions that generate diverse perspectives, offering multiple stimuli for critically engaging with reality and supporting an ongoing, dynamic relationship with it. In this sense, the PhD is highly interdisciplinary, bringing together doctoral researchers with varied academic and professional backgrounds. This interdisciplinarity is also evident in the composition of the authors of this chapter, who come from diverse fields such as psychology and Education, human rights, sociology of organisations, political science, and architecture and interior design, yet are connected through their shared engagement with the PhD programme. Beyond disciplinary diversity, the programme also brings together researchers from international contexts, contributing to a broader environment of intellectual and cultural diversity (Colacino & Mineo, 2023). The authors of this chapter, for example, come from Kenya, France, and Italy, illustrating this transnational composition of the doctoral community.

3. The Reggio Emilia Approach (REA)

The Reggio Emilia Approach (REA), which originated in the city of Reggio Emilia in the aftermath of World War II, emerged from grassroots efforts led by women and local communities to reconstruct education as a site of social renewal and democratic participation (Edwards et al., 2012). Grounded in socio-constructivist principles, REA conceptualises the child as a competent, rights-bearing subject, positions the environment as a “third teacher,” and frames learning as a relational, co-constructed process shaped by social, cultural, and material conditions (Giudici et al., 2009). Over time, REA has evolved into a globally influential pedagogical philosophy, inspiring diverse “Reggio-inspired” practices across educational contexts. In this light, REA is understood as a broader cultural and political philosophy of learning that extends

across the life course, as reflected in the official PhD framing of *Reggio Childhood Studies—From Early Childhood to Lifelong Learning*. Emerging from the socio-cultural context of Reggio Emilia, this perspective repositions early childhood not as a bounded stage, but as a foundational lens through which learning is understood as continuous, relational, and embedded in lived experience across the life course.

Within this chapter, REA is particularly significant for how it frames education as a cultural and political project. It redefines schools not merely as instructional spaces, but as arenas of democratic practice where dominant narratives about childhood, knowledge, and social life are constantly negotiated, made visible, and reimagined (Dahlberg et al., 2013; Rinaldi, 2021). This perspective is strongly articulated by Carla Rinaldi, a pedagogist and key figure in the Reggio Approach, where she argues that “the school is not a preparation for democracy; it is democracy itself” (Rinaldi, 2021). This becomes particularly relevant when considered alongside mobility. Moving across countries, institutions, and contexts exposes researchers and learners to different environments, practices, and ways of knowing, which resonates with REA’s emphasis on learning as situated and relational. From this perspective, mobility can be understood not simply as physical movement but as engagement in processes of encounter and meaning-making. As Rinaldi emphasizes, “Learning is not the transmission of knowledge, but the construction of knowledge through relationships” (Rinaldi, 2021). Mobility, in this sense, is not just movement but part of the learning process itself. It can open space for reflection, for questioning taken-for-granted assumptions, and for engaging with different knowledge systems. At the same time, REA’s framing of education as a democratic and cultural project (McNally et al., 2016) aligns with the transformative potential of mobility programmes, which can foster intercultural exchange, critical reflection, and the questioning of dominant knowledge hierarchies. In this sense, mobility extends the “environment” of learning beyond the classroom, across institutions and borders.

Building on this perspective, this chapter explores how international mobilities influence knowledge production through the researchers' experiences, interpreted through the lens of the Reggio Emilia Approach. The next section explores the authors' individual and collective mobility experiences, undertaken between 2023 and 2025 in Kenya. During this period, they engaged in a wide range of academic and field-based activities, reflecting diverse lived experiences of mobility. By centering the researchers' perspectives, the chapter examines how each author navigated mobility, highlighting their activities, engagements, and reflections across varied contexts and the scope of their mobilities. In doing so, it contributes to a broader understanding of mobility as a relational trajectory of learning and research, rather than a linear process of knowledge transfer.

4. Situated Mobilities: Relational, Reflexive, and Spatial Trajectories of Learning

Being an industrial programme, all doctoral Students are actively involved in the Foundation's activities both locally and internationally (Goddard et al., in press). As such, due to our shared research interests in Kenya, we participated in the Play Explore Research (P.E.R.) project in Nairobi. P.E.R. was an international initiative implemented across various countries, and it promoted the integration of play and learning within early childhood education, grounded in the right to quality education for all children (Goddard et al., in Press). The conference-action in Nairobi was oriented towards NGOs, universities, policy makers, and educational professionals. The aim was to promote an open dialogue on early childhood education policies (0–8 years), bringing together educational communities, institutions, and civil society to strengthen educational quality and community resilience (Donnici & Manera, 2026). Each of us engaged in different roles as described in the following sub-sections.

Beyond the project, we also engaged in mobilities framed within different mobility plans, including the Erasmus study program funded by European Union (European Commission, 2026; European Union, 2022) and mobility supported by PNRR scholarships offered by the Ministry of University and Research (Ministero dell'Università e della Ricerca, Italy, 2023), through the university.

Mobility as Mediation across Educational and Community Contexts

The first trajectory, developed by Frashia, a doctoral researcher with a background in psychology and a growing engagement at the intersection of education and psychology, focuses on the young carers in sub-Saharan Africa (Ndungu et al., 2025). Within the RCS context, she extended this research by exploring their experiences within schools and the structural gaps affecting their inclusion in educational settings in Kenya. Positioned as an international student in Italy, her mobility to Kenya, her country of origin, was shaped by both familiarity and distance, rendering it simultaneously enriching and complex. While her prior knowledge of the context facilitated access and understanding, it also required her to critically examine and set aside assumptions influenced by her time abroad. Engaging with the field, therefore, involved a conscious effort to bracket perspectives shaped by exposure to different educational systems and social contexts and to attend more closely to the specificities of the local setting. This process highlighted how mobility entails the negotiation of multiple positionalities. Her experience underscores how mobility can reconfigure one's relationship to place, requiring the researcher to navigate critically between proximity and distance, familiarity and rediscovery. Within this broader trajectory, she engaged in two distinct yet interconnected mobilities: the first primarily research-driven under the PNRR scholarship, and the second situated within collaborative work as part of the P.E.R. research project.

During her first mobility at St. Paul's University, she experienced significant delays due to bureaucratic and administrative procedures while awaiting her residence documents in Italy. This challenge underscores the structural constraints faced by international students in foreign countries, where opportunities for mobility are closely tied to legal residence status. With no intervention by the university, this reveals how institutional processes can shape and, at times, limit access to international engagement. This mobility was formally hosted through a professor of theology, who had been introduced by a former colleague, and she was affiliated there for three months. Although the professor's academic background is in theology, this interdisciplinary encounter provided a supportive framework for mobility, enabling productive dialogue across disciplinary perspectives. The professor also supported her research by offering guidance and sharing insights related to the research process, introducing her to other researchers in the department, providing workspaces, and inviting her to seminars. However, the majority of her engagement took place beyond the university setting, as her data collection was conducted in a different location. This reflects a broader distinction between institutional affiliation and the lived geographies of mobility, where academic work often extends beyond formal academic spaces. Despite this distance, the university remained a critical anchor, providing access to key academic resources such as library facilities, opportunities to engage with researchers, and participation in scholarly events, including a conference on theology. These elements were instrumental in sustaining academic continuity across different contexts.

Her research focused on the experiences of young carers within educational settings in Kandara sub-county, her hometown. The research process was rigorous, involving several bureaucratic procedures to gain authorization and access to the field. These engagements with institutional authorities also became sites of dialogue, through which the issue of young carers, largely unrecognized within existing policy frameworks, was made visible.

This was followed by fieldwork involving the identification of research participants, including young carers and key informants. During this process, she engaged with ministries responsible for social welfare, public health, and local administration, all of which play a role in supporting community well-being. She also worked with village elders and community health volunteers, who acted as intermediaries between families and state structures. These interactions highlight a multi-layered ecology of care surrounding young carers, while also revealing gaps in coordination across institutional and community levels. Schools were often not aware of the situations of young carers. This points to a disconnection between educational institutions and broader community-based welfare systems, suggesting the need for more integrated and relational forms of support. Through this research, she was also able to draw attention to the resilience of young carers and their families, particularly in the absence of sustained welfare support compared to contexts such as Italy. Her transnational mobility thus enabled a comparative and reflexive perspective, informing context-sensitive recommendations for strengthening support systems across schools and communities.

Furthermore, her mobility contributed to the establishment of an institutional agreement between St. Paul's University and the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, creating pathways for subsequent student exchanges. Beyond student mobility, this also enabled reciprocal academic visits, with professors from St. Paul's University visiting the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia and the Fondazione Reggio Children, where they delivered lectures to doctoral students and contributed to the expansion of collaborative projects. These initiatives aimed to co-create sustainable learning frameworks drawing from both the Italian context and the P.E.R. project in Kenya, illustrating how individual mobility can function as a relational process of co-construction, generating connections that extend from the personal to the institutional and transnational levels. Importantly, such developments are particularly significant in contexts that are often underrepresented

in dominant mobility flows, highlighting the potential of mobility programs to both reproduce and challenge existing geographical inequalities in higher education.

During her second mobility, she was actively involved in the P.E.R. Project, where she occupied a dual role as both researcher and intermediary between local partners and the coordinating organisation. In this capacity, she facilitated connections between her institution and local partners, enabling access to services and contributing to cost efficiencies within project implementation. This positioning illustrates how mobility is not only spatial movement but also a relational practice of mediation, in which institutional, epistemic, and practical boundaries are continuously negotiated. Through this mobility, she joined colleagues in visits to schools within Nairobi's informal settlements. These visits offered opportunities to observe educational practices aimed at expanding access to early childhood education, particularly in pre-primary settings. She reflects on the efforts made to ensure the inclusion of children from diverse socio-economic backgrounds while also witnessing the pedagogical richness of these spaces. School-based activities such as drama and cultural music performances revealed the ways in which creativity and cultural expression are embedded in everyday educational life, fostering shared belonging among children across different backgrounds.

These encounters were further shaped by moments of interaction and play with the children, which created a sense of familiarity and relational proximity. In addition, during workshops conducted by colleagues in English, she frequently intervened in Swahili, facilitating communication and ensuring smoother engagement with children. These linguistic mediations highlight the embodied and situated nature of mobility, where knowledge exchange is not only verbal but also relational, cultural, and affective. Ultimately, her experiences prompted reflection on how mobility can enable intercultural dialogue and strengthen relational connections across diverse educational settings, a perspective that continues to inform her subsequent role within the

Reggio Children Foundation, where she works as a project officer responsible for international partner communication and coordination. Within this framing, mobility becomes a lived learning environment in line with the Reggio Emilia Approach, where meaning is co-constructed through encounter, interaction, and shared experience.

Mobility as Situated Discovery and Reflexive Practice

The second trajectory, developed by Éloïse, focuses on examining the role of civil society organisations, such as associations, NGOs, and foundations, in the realisation and development of a specific children's right: the right to Early Childhood Care and Education. Although the process of establishing it is ongoing, this right is relatively recent and does not yet have a binding legal framework within international human rights instruments. Her research explores the right to Early Childhood Care and Education within civil society organisations.

Her one-month mobility at St. Paul's University (Limuru Campus, October 2025) was framed within a collaboration with the head of the Master's programme in Early Childhood Education and centred on field-based engagement with local pedagogical practices. This positioning enabled observation of how the Master's degree is organised in terms of curriculum, teaching programme, and delivery modalities, including both in-person and distance-learning formats. As part of this mobility experience, over two mornings (22–23 October 2025), she observed a first-year teacher at Tigoni Nursery School. The observations were subsequently compiled into a concise analytical report. In this sense, observation forms an integral part of the mobility process, rather than a separate methodological activity.

During the mobility, she presented her research methodology, preliminary findings, and key limitations affecting the progress of her study on two occasions. The first presentation took place at St Paul's University's Annual International Research Conference,

held from 22 to 25 October 2024 at the Limuru Campus, titled “*Leveraging Research, Technology, and Innovation in the New Economy for Sustainable Development*.” The second occurred within a course setting, where she introduced her ongoing research to Master’s students in Early Childhood Education. In parallel, she attended courses offered at St. Paul’s University, including Research Methods and Leadership and Management for Educational Institutions, with a focus on special needs institutions.

Beyond these formal academic components, the mobility also created opportunities for encounter and exchange, both professionally and personally. She actively participated in informal activities organised by the university, including a prayer vigil, initiatives dedicated to international students, and a volunteering activity with children during which she facilitated a recreational game. This experience enabled encounters with other PhD students who were also on exchange programmes or visiting St Paul’s, including a Rwandan doctoral student in theological studies, with whom she discussed the PhD experience, respective methodologies, and the challenges of the doctoral journey. Such informal interactions nurtured reflexive engagement and informed the evolving direction of the research. The mobility thus extended beyond a strictly academic framework, contributing to the formation of relational networks and fostering connections among students.

Subsequently, she also participated in the P.E.R. conference-action in Nairobi, where she facilitated a workshop as part of her study (Drure, 2026a). The workshop, entitled *Making Children’s Rights Tangible: Awareness, Identification, Action*, was designed as a facilitative tool to foster connections between children’s rights and professional and/or voluntary practices. Two main constraints shaped the activity: a limited timeframe (one hour) and the need to adapt to the conference structure, particularly given the highly diverse audience, which included participants from civil society, the public sector, and academic institutions. Flexibility was therefore intentionally integrated into the design, with two main

objectives: to establish meaningful links between children's rights and participants' daily practices and knowledge, and to facilitate the sharing of experiences and best practices for advancing children's rights. To this end, a structured resource was developed, organised into four phases: an icebreaker activity (assisted by Mentimeter software), the presentation of five posters, a participatory phase in which participants contributed using adhesive notes, and a final restitution moment. The posters addressed: (1) the right to play, rest, and leisure; (2) the principle of interdependence in children's rights, particularly in relation to women's rights; (3) the 4As—Accessibility, Availability, Acceptability, and Adaptability; (4) the best interests of the child; and (5) advocacy practices aimed at making children's rights visible.

Her mobility experiences in Kenya generated several reflections. As a doctoral researcher whose primary fieldwork is not based in Kenya, but whose research questions focus on the realisation of the right to Early Childhood Care and Education within and through global civil society organisations, this mobility required particular attention to positionality. Her dual cultural (partly French, partly Swiss) and academic background informed both *a priori* and *a posteriori* reflection on the inherent biases in her approach: What assumptions does my perspective carry? How can I consciously deconstruct preconceptions rooted in a culturally constructed way of thinking? Rather than yielding definitive answers, this process unfolded through ongoing questioning and reflexive engagement, translating into an effort to de-centre herself and adopt a learner-oriented posture grounded in attentive listening, particularly during the workshop facilitation. It also entailed taking a clear stance against all forms of domination. This reflexive orientation resonates with the notion of deconstruction, as articulated in the work of Jacques Derrida (Ramond, 2008), understood not as a fixed method but as an ongoing critical orientation that constitutes a key lens within her theoretical framework. This perspective proved essential in interrogating these dynamics and rethinking her research posture.

More than a year after the Erasmus mobility and several months following the P.E.R. conference, the experience continues to resonate through notes, photographs, and reflections that inform academic and professional practice. The two-phase mobility, spanning observations of pedagogical practices from early childhood settings to university-level engagement, offered a comparative lens through which to examine diverse educational approaches shaped by the Kenyan context. The process of designing, facilitating, and analysing data from the workshop further provided a framework for critical reflection and iterative improvement. This included making visible a critical reading of the workshop, later presented and discussed at the P.E.R. project's closing conference in Reggio Emilia, Italy, in March 2026. These experiences contributed to a broadening of perspectives on teaching, the expansion of professional networks, and the development of workshop facilitation as both a methodological and pedagogical competence.

Mobility as Spatial Inquiry: Learning from Community-Based Educational Environments

The third trajectory, developed by Laura, is grounded in a background in architecture and interior design, with a particular interest in educational spaces understood as pedagogical and social devices. Within the international PhD programme Reggio Childhood Studies, her research focuses on the relationship between school architecture, learning, and community, with particular attention to Global South contexts and schools in Africa. From this perspective, her mobility experience in Kenya represented a fundamental part of her field research path.

Her mobility experience in Kenya, and particularly in the city of Nairobi, took the form of a qualitative field investigation based on participant observation and direct dialogue with the local territory and the educational communities that inhabit it daily. Her arrival in Nairobi coincided with participation in the

P.E.R. Conference-Action. At this stage, the experience also functioned as an opportunity for networking, facilitating the strengthening of connections between Twins International, with whom she had already been in contact, and the Reggio Children Foundation. Twins International, which has been developing the Alice for Children projects in Kenya since 2006, also took part, together with the other partners, in the P.E.R. project event, actively contributing to dialogue and exchange among the different realities involved. It also supported the activities of the Reggio Children Foundation project by facilitating and enabling school visits in slum areas.

During this experience, she had the opportunity to meet the participating institutions, establish connections with a professor from St. Paul's University, and actively take part in the conference activities alongside guests and local stakeholders. Following the conference, access to the field was made possible through collaboration with Alice for Children, an NGO that has been working in the area for over twenty years through educational and social projects aimed at the most vulnerable segments of the population. The presence of the organization and the support of local partners allowed her to enter highly complex urban contexts, where the spatial dimension is deeply intertwined with conditions of economic marginalization, infrastructural fragility, and social vulnerability.

The schools observed mainly belong to the category of Community Schools, one of the three main forms of education in Kenya, alongside public schools and private schools. These are educational institutions often established through the initiative of local communities, non-governmental organizations, or religious groups to ensure access to education in areas where the public system is unable to adequately respond to educational needs. From a methodological perspective, her research involved the collection of qualitative data through informal focus groups conducted within classrooms, interviews with teachers and educators, direct observation of daily activities, photographic

and video documentation, the collection of drawings produced by students, and field notes. Particular importance was given to dialogue with the educational community—teachers, coordinators, educators, and school staff—as carriers of situated and everyday knowledge of the school space and its transformations.

One of the most significant aspects that emerged is the very nature of the school buildings themselves. In most cases, the schools visited were not originally designed as educational facilities but resulted from the conversion of pre-existing buildings intended for other purposes: houses, commercial spaces, informal constructions, or residual spaces progressively adapted to educational functions. This creates strong heterogeneity in architectural configuration, environmental quality, and the possibility of building spatial relationships coherent with learning processes.

The urban context in which these schools are located is characterized by conditions of extreme precarity. Nairobi's slums are informal settlements not recognized by the state, lacking essential infrastructure such as sewage systems, running water, and stable electricity. In many cases, the main source of economic survival is connected to the landfill, which represents both a means of subsistence and a structural condition of social exclusion. The constant presence of waste, the widespread burning of garbage to contain its accumulation, and the sensory perception of these conditions—such as the persistent smell of burning coming from waterways and informal disposal areas—became an integral part of her field experience and of the educational environments she observed.

Access to these contexts also highlighted the need for strong relational mediation. Entering the slums cannot be considered a neutral act: the presence of a foreigner, and particularly of a white person, immediately generates visibility and requires constant negotiation of one's position as an observer. This made even more evident the need for an ethnographic approach based on listening, trust-building, and respect for local dynamics. Despite

the precariousness of the structures and the often-residual nature of school spaces, these schools develop a strong educational and symbolic identity. Teachers and educators take care of the space with attention and intentionality, recognizing it as an integral part of the pedagogical process. Even in the absence of an original architectural design, space is transformed into an educational environment through daily practices of appropriation, maintenance, and meaning-making.

What emerged most strongly from her mobility experience is that educational quality does not depend exclusively on building quality but on the relationship established between space, community, and pedagogical vision. Architectural typology changes the way the school is inhabited and, consequently, also changes the way learning and educational work are conceived. In this sense, space cannot be understood as a simple container of pedagogical action but as an active agent capable of influencing practices, relationships, and possibilities for social transformation. Her mobility, therefore, took shape not only as a geographical displacement but also as a process of learning and transformation of the research itself.

5. Mobility as a Complex, Relational Learning Process: Co-constructing Knowledge Through Situated Encounters

Beyond the shared elements and differences characterising our activities, objectives, experiences, and time spent in Kenya, what emerges is the inherently complex nature of mobility. The concept of complexity, as theorised by Edgar Morin (Dielbot, 2025; Morin, 1999, 2014), provides a useful lens through which to understand these experiences. It resists reductionist or linear interpretations, instead emphasising their multidimensional and evolving nature, shaped by interacting actors, dimensions, and temporalities. In this sense, mobility cannot be understood as a straightforward or predictable process, but rather as one

characterised by contingency, shifting positionalities, and movement across different social fields, producing emergent and often unexpected outcomes.

The experiences in Kenya show how mobility does not simply coincide with geographical displacement or a curricular opportunity but rather represents a true process of professional transformation. In a historical context in which travelling and crossing borders has become increasingly complex, marked by wars, geopolitical tensions, and growing global inequalities, having the opportunity to engage with a different cultural and social context takes on particularly significant value. As highlighted by Vakulenko and colleagues (2025), the pandemic, climate change, and global inequities have made the fragility of traditional models of international mobility increasingly evident. Mobilities come up as sites for reflexivity, situated spatial inquiries and mediation of cultures. A key dimension of these experiences lies in how being foreigners, being “guests,” being European researchers in African contexts, or returning to one’s country of origin, as in Frashia’s case, profoundly changes the way one observes and is observed. These experiences make one’s positioning visible and require continuous reflexivity, opening engagement with multiple perspectives.

From the three experiences, it emerges clearly that research is not built in isolation but through relationships with teachers, local communities, NGOs, partner universities, students, and colleagues. As Jerome Bruner states, “learning is a process of constructing meaning rather than receiving” (Bruner, 1996, p. 84), highlighting that understanding emerges through engagement and relational processes rather than passive reception. These trajectories become spaces for the co-construction of knowledge, fully consistent with the Reggio Emilia Approach, where learning is understood as dialogue with others and with context through participation and imagination (Edwards et al., 2012). It is also evident that mobilities are shaped by both formal academic structures and informal relational exchanges. Informal encounters,

spontaneous conversations, shared time, and personal relationships also become significant spaces of learning. These overlapping dimensions nurture reflexive engagement, enabling participants to navigate between institutional expectations and lived encounters in the field. This highlights how knowledge production does not occur exclusively within formal academic structures, but also develops within everyday spaces of exchange, trust, and lived experience. As John Dewey affirms, “all genuine education comes through experience” (Dewey, 1938, p. 25), reinforcing the centrality of situated and experiential learning. As a result, mobility extends beyond a strict academic framework, contributing to the formation of relational networks and fostering meaningful connections among students, educators, and institutions.

Mobilities also contribute to the formation of research communities and the expansion of academic networks, alongside the strengthening of interpersonal relationships. The students’ mobilities in Kenya provided opportunities for professional and social exchange, a dimension often associated with university exchange programmes as key sites of relational encounters (Finn, 2017). Beyond these immediate experiences, the reflections illustrate how mobilities extend into broader institutional networks. The relational networks established through North–South mobilities, such as those developed between Italy and Kenya in this context, do not operate as unidirectional flows of knowledge and talent towards the center. Rather, they enable reciprocal engagement, collaboration, and sustained institutional connections that challenge extractive dynamics of knowledge production. Within REA, this demonstrates how, through mobilities, the students can become an instrument of social engagement and pedagogical transformation (Goddard et al., in press).

What initially began as student-centered mobility gradually evolved into more sustained and reciprocal engagement, as professors later visited Reggio Emilia and engaged in discussions on potential collaborative projects with the Reggio Children Foundation. This shift highlights mobility as more than a temporary or indi-

vidualised academic experience. Rather, it functions as a generative space for long-term relationality, in which knowledge production becomes distributed across actors, institutions, and contexts. In this sense, these processes contribute to the co-construction of shared epistemic spaces that extend beyond the temporal boundaries of the exchange itself. They also challenge dominant perspectives that conceptualise international academic mobility primarily through center–periphery and dependency frameworks by foregrounding how mobility can generate sustained, bidirectional relational spaces of knowledge exchange between institutions in the Global North and Global South (Woldegiorgis & DoevenSpeck, 2015).

At the same time, our mobilities offer important insights into how engagement with diverse educational contexts can reshape understandings of locality, resourcefulness, and educational practice. As illustrated in Laura’s experience, exposure to different settings allows for a more nuanced appreciation of how communities adapt creatively to available resources. Her experience revealed that space is never neutral but must always be understood within the cultural, political, geographical, and historical context in which it is situated. Such encounters are particularly significant in challenging deficit-oriented (Aikman et al., 2016) or stereotypical narratives often associated with Global South contexts, highlighting that the “Global South” is not a fixed place, but a shifting position shaped by global power relations (Kloß, 2017). Instead, they reveal the complexity, agency, and innovation embedded within local educational practices. In this sense, mobility becomes a critical space of reflection, where preconceived assumptions are not only questioned but reconfigured through direct relational engagement. In alignment with the Reggio Emilia Approach, these experiences can be understood as relational learning processes in which knowledge emerges through encounter, dialogue, and mutual recognition.

The experiences of Laura and Frashia among vulnerable populations produce a shift in how learning is understood,

moving it beyond formal institutional frameworks toward more relational and community-embedded processes. These encounters make visible the diversity of educational organisation across contexts. In the Kenyan context, for instance, community schools and the collective efforts of volunteers play a crucial role in sustaining access to education and supporting vulnerable populations. These actors form an essential part of the educational landscape, demonstrating how learning environments are not confined to institutional boundaries but are co-constructed through community engagement and shared responsibility. Engaging with such differences enables international students to critically reflect on their own situated assumptions about educational provision and governance, opening more plural and contextualised understandings of learning.

Finally, a further dimension emerging from the mobility experiences highlights the structural conditions that underpin, and at times constrain, international academic mobility, particularly within broader Global North–Global South relations. Frashia's first mobility was marked by significant delays linked to bureaucratic and administrative procedures in obtaining residence documentation in Italy. Such requirements function as key regulatory mechanisms that govern entry, residence, and participation in academic contexts and are not evenly experienced across different geopolitical positions.

This experience highlights how mobility is never a purely open or fluid process but is instead embedded within legal, bureaucratic, and geopolitical regimes that produce asymmetrical conditions of access (Fellsson & Mählck, 2017). This reflects entrenched inequalities between Global North and Global South countries (Trechsel, 2021), where mobility is differentially enabled or constrained by unequal power relations, resources, and regulatory regimes. Reciprocal academic exchanges between institutions in the Global North and Global South are characterized by infrastructural asymmetries (Brooks, 2018): while north-to-south mobilities are supported through structured programmes,

funding schemes, and institutional agreements, south-to-north reciprocal engagements are often more constrained by visa regimes, administrative delays, and stricter documentation requirements. This underscores how mobility is materially and politically conditioned, with opportunities unevenly distributed across differently positioned subjects.

From this perspective, mobility can also be understood as embedded within hierarchical networks of unevenly positioned actors, shaping not only access to movement but also participation in knowledge production (Felleson & Mählck, 2017). Such constraints resonate with broader contemporary dynamics of internationalisation, where increased discourses of openness and collaboration coexist with intensified border governance, regulatory frameworks, and mobility hierarchies. As a result, the infrastructures intended to facilitate academic exchange may simultaneously produce friction, delay, and forms of exclusion that disproportionately affect students and researchers moving from the Global South to the Global North, reinforcing uneven mobility patterns (Ruiz et al., 2025). Within this context, mobilities highlight how such processes unfold within a complex interplay between openness and restriction, opportunity and constraint, where institutional, legal, and geopolitical frameworks shape who can move, under what conditions, and with what degree of reciprocity.

6. Conclusion

This chapter has conceptualised mobility as a relational and situated learning environment, showing how it extends beyond the boundaries of formal academic structures. Through the experiences of three doctoral researchers in Kenya, mobility emerges not as a linear or instrumental process, but as one shaped by encounters, reflexivity, and the ongoing negotiation of personal, academic, and institutional dimensions. The cases presented illustrate how learning unfolds through engagement

with communities, schools, local actors, and everyday practices of exchange. In this sense, mobility becomes a generative space where knowledge is co-constructed, assumptions are unsettled, and new professional and epistemological orientations take shape. These experiences support the chapter's central argument: that mobility functions as a relational ecology of learning rather than a simple transfer of knowledge across contexts.

Through the lens of the Reggio Emilia Approach, these trajectories can be understood as democratic, dialogic, and context-sensitive processes that produce knowledge through relation and encounter. At the same time, they make visible the non-neutrality of mobility, highlighting how inequalities, legal frameworks, and geopolitical conditions shape access, participation, and the possibilities for reciprocity. Rethinking academic mobility, therefore, requires moving beyond instrumental and hierarchical models toward forms of exchange grounded in dialogue, reciprocity, and shared responsibility.

Within this perspective, mobility is not only an academic experience but also a pedagogical practice and an ethical stance: one that calls for learning with others and for recognising space as an active site of learning, where knowledge is shaped through movement and relational encounters across contexts. In this sense, narrating mobility experiences becomes itself a relational practice, through which trajectories of learning and research are not only described, but continually reconfigured. In line with perspectives on pedagogical documentation inspired by Bruner's work (Massimelli et al., 2022), such narration can be understood as a meaning-making process that renders experience visible, shareable, and open to collective interpretation within a dialogic and reflective educational process.

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VII. Academic Writing and Referencing: Foundations for Scholarly Communication and Knowledge Production

Pauline Kariuki

1. Introduction

Academic essays remain a foundational medium of scholarly communication across disciplines. Whether in the humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, or professional fields, essays provide a structured framework for presenting arguments, synthesizing research, and demonstrating analytical competence. Two pillars underpin the effectiveness of academic writing: essay style and referencing.

“Effective academic writing integrates clear argumentation with careful documentation of sources “(Booth et al., 2016). Essay style encompasses the organization, clarity, coherence, tone, and argumentative structure through which ideas are conveyed. Referencing, by contrast, concerns the formal acknowledgment of intellectual sources that inform scholarly work. While often treated separately, these elements are deeply interconnected. Clear structure enhances argumentation, and accurate referencing situates arguments within broader intellectual traditions.

This chapter argues that essay style and referencing are inseparable components of rigorous academic writing. Together, they establish credibility, ethical responsibility, and participation in scholarly dialogue.

2. The Nature and Purpose of Academic Essays

Academic essays are formal compositions that present reasoned arguments supported by evidence. Unlike creative or expressive writing, academic essays prioritize logical organization, analytical depth, and evidentiary support.

Functions of Academic Essays

Academic essays have a major role which is Contribute knowledge and understanding within a specific academic field. Stella Boston (2020) identifies several key areas in academic writing: informing, persuading, advancing knowledge and fostering critical thinking.

Academic essays serve several essential functions:

1. Knowledge Dissemination – Essays communicate research findings, theoretical insights, and disciplinary developments to scholarly audiences. They also contribute to ongoing academic conversation, refining or challenging existence theories.
2. Demonstration of Understanding – They allow writers to exhibit comprehension of complex concepts and debates.
3. Critical Engagement – Essays require synthesis, evaluation, and interpretation rather than mere summary.
4. Intellectual Contribution – Through argumentation, writers contribute to ongoing scholarly conversations.
5. Professional Development – Structured writing cultivates analytical thinking and disciplinary literacy.

At their core, academic essays require writers to formulate a clear thesis, marshal evidence logically, and guide readers through a coherent progression of ideas.

3. Major Types of Academic Essays

The purpose of the essay dictates the techniques and style to adopt in order to accomplish the desired goal. The ability to use

appropriate essay style or even a combination of more than one earns credibility to an essay as it helps in engaging the readers and effectively communicate the ideas. Although academic essays share foundational principles, they vary in purpose and rhetorical strategy. Evidence in academic essays may take multiple forms: empirical data, textual quotations, theoretical frameworks, or statistical findings. However, evidence alone is insufficient. Its significance must be interpreted and connected explicitly to the thesis. Critical engagement requires writers to evaluate sources, identify assumptions, and synthesize competing perspectives. The most common forms include argumentative, expository, analytical, comparative, and reflective essays.

Argumentative Essays

Argumentative essays are structured around defending a clearly articulated position. They require extensive research and careful engagement with alternative viewpoints. The strength of an argumentative essay lies in its capacity to anticipate objections and address them through reasoned analysis.

In scholarly contexts, argumentative writing often serves as a vehicle for advancing new interpretations or challenging established assumptions.

Argumentative essays advance a clearly defined position supported by evidence and reasoning. They require:

- A focused thesis statement
- Engagement with scholarly literature
- Logical organization
- Consideration of counterarguments
- Evidence-based justification

Argumentative essays range from simple to complex topics, for beginners a simple topic can be form a basis for an essay. For example: “Should students be allowed to use AI tools for academic work?” On the other hand, the same topic can have a strong thesis state: “The use of AI tools by students in their aca-

demic work reduces their critical thinking and problem-solving skills hence it should be regulated.”

Unlike purely descriptive forms, argumentative writing demands sustained reasoning. It acknowledges competing viewpoints while defending a coherent position. Extensive research is often necessary to substantiate claims and demonstrate scholarly awareness.

Expository Essays

An expository essay uses factual evidence, illustrations and logical analysis rather than personal opinion to explain, or inform the reader about a specific topic. It takes an objective tone and focuses on facts statistics and examples. It may employ:

- Definition
- Cause-and-effect analysis
- Comparison
- Illustration through examples

Although expository essays may not always advocate a controversial position, they still require a precise thesis and organized presentation of evidence. Clarity and coherence are especially critical in this form.

Analytical Essay

Analytical essays examine how or why a subject function as it does. They move beyond summary to interpret underlying mechanisms, patterns, or meanings. Analytical writing is particularly central to literary studies, policy analysis, and theoretical inquiry. Analytical essays interpret and evaluate a subject—such as a text, theory, policy, or event—by examining its component elements. Rather than summarizing, analytical writing addresses “how” and “why” questions.

- Key features include:
- A debatable interpretive thesis
- Close examination of evidence

- Logical progression of analysis
- Integration of scholarly sources

Analytical essays demand intellectual rigor and depth, moving beyond surface-level description to critical insight.

Comparative Essays

Comparative essays explore relationships between two or more subjects to illuminate similarities, differences, or interpretive significance. The effectiveness of comparison depends on a clearly defined basis of analysis. Without a shared framework, comparison devolves into parallel description rather than insight.

- Effective comparative writing requires:
- A clearly defined basis for comparison
- Balanced treatment of subjects
- Sustained analysis rather than listing

A thesis articulating the significance of comparison

Two principal organizational strategies are common:

1. Point-by-Point Method – Each paragraph compares both subjects under a specific criterion.
2. Block Method – One subject is discussed fully before turning to the other.

The point-by-point method is often preferable for maintaining analytical balance.

Reflective Essays

Reflective essays incorporate personal experience but must retain analytical depth. In academic contexts, reflection is not merely introspection; it is a critical examination of experience in relation to theory, scholarship, or broader intellectual frameworks.

Reflective essays examine personal experiences or intellectual encounters through critical analysis. Though they incorporate personal perspective, they must maintain academic rigor and coherence.

- Reflective writing involves:
- Articulation of a central insight
- Integration of theory or literature (when applicable)
- Analytical interpretation of experience
- Structured organization

Even when subjective elements are present, reflective essays must uphold scholarly standards of clarity and logical development

4. Core Elements of Effective Essay Style

Regardless of type, effective academic essays share several stylistic characteristics.

Effective essay style is essential in academic writing because it helps communicate ideas clearly, logically, and persuasively. A well-written essay not only presents information but also organizes and expresses it in a way that is easy for readers to understand. Several core elements contribute to an effective essay style, including clarity, coherence, proper structure, appropriate tone, and correct use of language and referencing.

One of the most important elements of effective essay style is clarity. Clarity means expressing ideas in a simple and understandable manner so that readers can easily follow the writer's argument. Clear writing avoids unnecessary jargon, overly complex sentences, and vague expressions. According to Cottrell (2017), academic writing should present ideas precisely and directly to ensure that readers can interpret the intended meaning without confusion. When writers focus on clarity, their arguments become more accessible and convincing.

Another key element is coherence. Coherence refers to the logical connection of ideas within an essay. A coherent essay flows smoothly from one paragraph to another, with each section contributing to the overall argument. Writers achieve coherence by organizing ideas logically and using transition words or phrases

such as “however,” “therefore,” and “in addition.” These linking devices help guide readers through the argument and show how different points relate to each other (Oshima & Hogue, 2007).

Structure is also a fundamental component of effective essay style. A well-structured essay typically consists of three main parts: the introduction, the body, and the conclusion. The introduction introduces the topic and presents the thesis statement, which outlines the main argument. The body paragraphs develop the argument by presenting evidence, explanations, and examples. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the main points and reinforces the overall argument of the essay (Bailey, 2018). Proper structure helps readers understand the purpose and progression of the essay.

Appropriate tone and formality are equally important in academic essay writing. Academic essays require a formal tone that avoids slang, contractions, and overly casual language. Writers should maintain an objective and professional style while presenting their ideas. According to Neville (2010), maintaining an appropriate academic tone enhances the credibility of the writer and demonstrates seriousness in addressing the topic.

In addition, the correct use of language and grammar plays a crucial role in effective essay style. Accurate grammar, punctuation, and spelling ensure that the essay communicates ideas clearly and professionally. Errors in language can distract readers and weaken the impact of the argument. Therefore, careful proofreading and editing are necessary steps in the writing process.

Finally, proper referencing is an essential element of academic essay style. Referencing allows writers to acknowledge the sources of their information and ideas, thereby avoiding plagiarism and supporting their arguments with credible evidence. It also enables readers to verify sources and explore the topic further (Pears & Shields, 2019).

In conclusion, effective essay style is achieved through several key elements, including clarity, coherence, logical structure, appropriate tone, accurate language use, and proper referencing.

These elements work together to ensure that ideas are communicated effectively and arguments are presented persuasively. By mastering these core aspects of essay writing, students and researchers can produce academic work that is clear, credible, and engaging.

5. The Concept and Importance of Referencing

Referencing is a fundamental practice in academic writing and research that involves acknowledging the sources of information, ideas, data, or words used in a piece of work. It usually requires the writer to cite the original author within the text and provide full publication details in a reference list or bibliography at the end of the document (Neville, 2010). Referencing follows specific styles such as APA, MLA, Harvard, or Chicago, each with its own rules for formatting citations and references (American Psychological Association, 2020). Regardless of the style used, the main purpose of referencing is to give credit to the original creators of knowledge and to allow readers to trace the sources used in a piece of academic work.

The concept of referencing is closely related to the principles of academic honesty and intellectual integrity. When students or researchers use ideas or information from books, journals, websites, or other materials, they are expected to acknowledge the authors of those sources. This helps prevent plagiarism, which is the act of presenting someone else's work or ideas as one's own (Pears & Shields, 2019). By properly referencing sources, writers demonstrate respect for the intellectual property of others and uphold ethical standards in academic and professional environments.

Another important role of referencing is that it strengthens the credibility and reliability of a piece of writing. When a writer supports arguments with evidence from reputable sources, the work becomes more convincing and authoritative. Readers are more likely to trust information that is supported by recognized

scholars, studies, or publications (Cottrell, 2017). Referencing also shows that the writer has conducted sufficient research and engaged with existing knowledge on the subject.

Referencing also enables readers to verify information and explore the topic in greater depth. Through citations and reference lists, readers can locate the original sources used in the work and evaluate their accuracy and relevance (Neville, 2010). This transparency is essential in academic research because it allows other scholars to build upon previous studies, confirm findings, or challenge ideas where necessary.

In addition, referencing helps writers organize their research and clearly distinguish between their own ideas and those borrowed from other authors. This clarity improves the quality of academic writing by ensuring that arguments are well supported and logically structured (Pears & Shields, 2019). It also reduces confusion about the origin of particular ideas or information within the work.

In conclusion, referencing is an essential component of academic writing and research. It involves acknowledging the sources of information used and providing clear details that allow readers to locate those sources. Its significance lies in promoting academic honesty, preventing plagiarism, strengthening the credibility of research, and enabling readers to verify and further explore information. By practicing proper referencing, writers contribute to a culture of integrity, transparency, and respect within the academic community.

6. Major Referencing Styles

Referencing styles are standardized systems used in academic writing to acknowledge the sources of information and ideas used in research. Different academic disciplines prefer different referencing styles, but all styles serve the same purpose: to give credit to original authors, avoid plagiarism, and enable readers to

locate the sources used in a piece of work (Pears & Shields, 2019). Among the many referencing styles used in academic writing, some of the most widely recognized are APA, MLA, Harvard, Chicago, and Vancouver.

One of the most widely used referencing styles is the APA (American Psychological Association) style. APA style is commonly used in the social sciences, including psychology, education, and sociology. This style uses the author–date system for in-text citations, where the author’s surname and the year of publication are included in parentheses within the text. For example, a citation may appear as (Smith, 2020). A detailed reference list is then provided at the end of the document with full publication details. APA style emphasizes clarity and consistency in presenting research findings (American Psychological Association, 2020).

Another major referencing style is MLA (Modern Language Association) style, which is widely used in the humanities, particularly in literature, languages, and cultural studies. Unlike APA, MLA typically includes the author’s surname and page number in the in-text citation rather than the publication year. For example, a citation may appear as (Smith, 45). The full details of the source are then listed in a “Works Cited” section at the end of the document. MLA style focuses on giving clear credit to authors and allowing readers to easily trace textual sources (Modern Language Association, 2021).

The Harvard referencing style is another common system used in many universities around the world. It is also an author–date system similar to APA. In Harvard referencing, the author’s surname and year of publication appear in the text, such as (Brown, 2019). The full citation is included in the reference list at the end of the document. Harvard style is widely used in business, economics, and natural sciences because of its simplicity and flexibility (Cottrell, 2017).

The Chicago referencing style, sometimes called the Chicago Manual of Style, is commonly used in history and some social science disciplines. Chicago offers two main systems: the notes

and bibliography system and the author-date system. The notes and bibliography system uses numbered footnotes or endnotes within the text that correspond to detailed citations at the bottom of the page or at the end of the document. This style is particularly useful for historical research where detailed source information is required (The Chicago Manual of Style, 2017).

Another widely used referencing system in scientific and medical fields is the Vancouver style. This style uses numbers within the text to refer to sources in the order in which they appear. The numbers correspond to a numbered reference list at the end of the document. Vancouver style is commonly used in medical journals and health science publications because it provides a concise and efficient way of citing sources (Pears & Shields, 2019).

In conclusion, referencing styles are essential tools in academic writing that ensure proper acknowledgment of sources and promote academic integrity. Major referencing styles such as APA, MLA, Harvard, Chicago, and Vancouver are used across different academic disciplines depending on their conventions and requirements. Understanding these styles helps students and researchers present their work professionally while maintaining ethical standards in scholarship.

7. Common Errors in Essay Writing and Referencing

Essay writing is an essential academic skill that enables students to present arguments, analyze ideas, and communicate research findings effectively. However, many students face challenges in producing well-structured and properly referenced essays. Common errors often occur in areas such as developing strong thesis statements, maintaining coherence between paragraphs, balancing summary and analysis, addressing counterarguments, and applying accurate referencing practices. Understanding these errors can help writers improve the quality and credibility of their academic work.

One common mistake in essay writing is the use of weak or overly broad thesis statements. The thesis statement is the central argument of an essay and provides direction for the entire discussion. When a thesis is vague or too general, it becomes difficult for the writer to develop a focused argument. According to Bailey (2018), a strong thesis statement should clearly express the writer's position and guide the structure of the essay. Without a clear thesis, the essay may appear unfocused and lack a clear purpose.

Another frequent challenge is the lack of coherence between paragraphs. Coherence refers to the logical flow of ideas throughout an essay. Each paragraph should connect clearly to the main argument and to the paragraphs before and after it. When transitions between ideas are weak or missing, readers may struggle to follow the writer's reasoning. Cottrell (2017) explains that effective essays use linking words and clear topic sentences to maintain continuity and guide readers through the argument.

A third common error is the overreliance on summary rather than critical analysis. Some students focus mainly on describing what sources say instead of analyzing or evaluating the information. While summarizing sources can provide useful context, academic essays require writers to interpret evidence, compare perspectives, and develop their own arguments. According to Oshima and Hogue (2007), effective academic writing involves critical thinking and the ability to explain how evidence supports the writer's claims.

Another issue is insufficient engagement with counterarguments. A strong essay acknowledges alternative viewpoints and responds to them logically. Ignoring opposing perspectives can weaken an argument because it may appear biased or incomplete. Engaging with counterarguments demonstrates critical thinking and strengthens the overall persuasiveness of the essay (Graff & Birkenstein, 2018).

In addition to writing challenges, students also frequently encounter errors in referencing. One such error is inconsistent citation formatting, where the writer mixes different referencing styles or applies the chosen style incorrectly. Academic institutions

usually require the use of a specific referencing style such as APA, MLA, or Harvard, and consistency is essential to maintain professionalism and clarity (Pears & Shields, 2019).

Another common referencing problem is missing bibliographic details in the reference list. Incomplete citations may omit important information such as the author's name, publication year, title of the source, or publisher. Without these details, readers cannot easily locate the original source, which undermines the reliability of the research (Neville, 2010).

Finally, many students fail to cite paraphrased ideas. Some writers assume that changing a few words from the original text removes the need for citation. However, even when ideas are paraphrased, the original author must still be acknowledged. Failure to do so may lead to plagiarism, which is considered a serious academic offense (Neville, 2010).

In conclusion, common errors in essay writing and referencing include weak thesis statements, lack of coherence between paragraphs, excessive summarizing, limited engagement with counter-arguments, inconsistent citation formatting, missing bibliographic details, and failure to cite paraphrased ideas. Recognizing and addressing these challenges can help students improve their academic writing skills and produce essays that are clear, well-structured, and ethically researched.

8. Strategies for Strengthening Academic Writing

Academic writing is a critical skill for students, researchers, and professionals, as it allows the clear communication of ideas, arguments, and research findings. Strengthening essay style and referencing requires intentional strategies, as improvement does not occur automatically. By adopting systematic approaches such as planning, critical engagement with sources, proper use of referencing tools, and careful revision, writers can significantly enhance the quality, clarity, and credibility of their work.

One effective strategy for strengthening academic writing is to develop detailed outlines before drafting. Creating an outline helps writers organize their ideas logically and ensures that all relevant points are included. According to Bailey (2018), an outline provides a roadmap for the essay, allowing writers to structure arguments coherently and avoid digressions. Outlines also make it easier to identify where evidence and supporting sources are required, ensuring a more focused and purposeful essay.

A second key strategy is to engage critically with sources rather than simply summarizing them. While summarizing provides context, academic writing requires interpretation, analysis, and evaluation of information. Critical engagement involves questioning assumptions, comparing perspectives, and explaining how evidence supports the thesis (Cottrell, 2017). By analyzing sources, writers develop original arguments and demonstrate their understanding of the subject, making their work more persuasive and intellectually robust.

Using citation management tools is another strategy that improves referencing consistency and efficiency. Tools such as Zotero, EndNote, and Mendeley allow writers to store references, generate in-text citations, and automatically create reference lists in the required style. According to Pears and Shields (2019), these tools reduce errors in formatting and ensure uniformity throughout the essay, which is especially useful for longer research papers with numerous sources.

Careful attention to disciplinary style guides is equally important. Different academic fields prefer specific referencing styles, such as APA, MLA, Harvard, or Chicago. Reviewing and adhering to the relevant style guide ensures that citations, quotations, and reference lists meet disciplinary standards. Neville (2010) emphasizes that understanding style requirements is essential for academic integrity and helps avoid accidental plagiarism.

Another essential strategy is to revise for clarity, coherence, and precision. Revision allows writers to refine their arguments, restructure paragraphs, and improve the flow of ideas. According

to Oshima and Hogue (2007), effective revision also involves checking sentence structure, word choice, and grammar to ensure that ideas are communicated clearly and professionally. Well-revised essays are easier to read, more persuasive, and demonstrate higher academic rigor.

Finally, writers must verify that every in-text citation corresponds to a reference entry. Inaccurate or missing references can compromise the credibility of the essay and may constitute academic misconduct. Cottrell (2017) notes that double-checking citations ensures that all sources are acknowledged properly and that readers can trace the evidence used to support arguments.

In conclusion, strengthening academic writing requires deliberate and systematic strategies. Developing detailed outlines, engaging critically with sources, using citation management tools, following disciplinary style guides, revising for clarity and coherence, and verifying citations are all essential practices. By consistently applying these strategies, students and researchers can improve both the style and credibility of their academic work, producing essays that are clear, coherent, and ethically grounded.

9. Conclusion

Essay style and referencing are foundational to academic writing. Essay structure ensures clarity and logical coherence, while referencing situates arguments within established intellectual traditions. Together, they embody scholarly responsibility and ethical engagement.

Mastery of these elements enables writers not only to fulfill academic requirements but also to participate meaningfully in knowledge production. In an era marked by expanding access to information, disciplined writing and accurate attribution remain essential safeguards of academic integrity and intellectual advancement.

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VIII. Mobility as Matrix: Space, Group Processes, and Creativity in Transnational Education

Roberta Mineo

1. Introduction

Contemporary educational discourse continues to be largely shaped by implicit assumptions that position learning as an individual, cognitive, and largely decontextualized process. Within this paradigm, knowledge is often conceived as a transferable entity, moving linearly from teacher to student, and educational environments are treated as neutral backdrops rather than active participants in the learning process. Such perspectives, while deeply rooted in modern pedagogical traditions, risk obscuring the complex relational, spatial, and affective dimensions through which learning actually unfolds. They also tend to overlook the extent to which educational experiences are embedded within broader social, cultural, and symbolic systems that shape not only what is learned, but how meaning itself is constructed.

In contrast to this individualistic and static view, an emerging body of interdisciplinary scholarship invites a reconceptualization of education as a fundamentally relational and dynamic process. From this perspective, learning is not located within the individual alone, but arises within networks of interaction that involve people, environments, histories, and symbolic structures. Educational settings are thus understood as living systems: spaces in which subjects and contexts co-evolve through processes of encounter, negotiation, and transformation. This shift requires moving beyond a focus on isolated learners toward an understanding of education as a field of relations, in which space, group dynamics, and creative processes are deeply intertwined.

This chapter contributes to such a reconceptualization by proposing a theoretical synthesis grounded in three interconnected dimensions. The first concerns the role of space, drawing on the pedagogical philosophy of the Reggio Emilia Approach, where the environment is conceived as a “third educator.” Within this framework, space is not merely physical or architectural, but relational, symbolic, and political: it organizes interactions, supports or constrains forms of expression, and embodies cultural values and collective intentions. Educational space becomes a shared field of experience, where meanings are co-constructed and where the boundaries between individual and collective, internal and external, are continuously negotiated.

The second dimension focuses on the group as a central unit of analysis for understanding educational processes. Drawing on psychoanalytic and group-analytic traditions, the group is conceptualized not as a simple aggregation of individuals, but as a dynamic matrix, a field of relationships, communications, and unconscious processes that shapes and is shaped by its participants. Within this matrix, personal histories, cultural narratives, and social tensions intersect, giving rise to complex patterns of interaction that cannot be reduced to individual intentions. The group thus emerges as a space of becoming, where conflict, difference, and ambivalence are not obstacles to learning, but essential conditions for transformation.

The third dimension addresses creativity, not as an individual trait or isolated cognitive capacity, but as a process that emerges within social and relational contexts. While creativity is often associated with collaboration and collective exchange, empirical research also reveals its inherent tensions. Group dynamics can both enhance and inhibit creative processes, depending on how interaction unfolds, how differences are negotiated, and how the group contains or disperses its internal tensions. Creativity, in this sense, is not a guaranteed outcome of group work, but a fragile and situated process that depends on the quality of the relational and symbolic environment in which it is embedded.

While each of these dimensions - space, group, and creativity - has been explored extensively within distinct theoretical traditions, their interrelation remains insufficiently articulated, particularly in the context of contemporary educational transformations. This chapter argues that these dimensions can be meaningfully integrated through the concept of the group matrix, understood as a dynamic and multi-layered field in which spatial configurations, relational processes, and creative potentials converge. Such an integrative perspective allows for a more nuanced understanding of how learning environments function, and how they can be intentionally designed to support not only knowledge acquisition, but also relational and transformative processes.

Within this framework, educational mobility emerges as a critical, yet often under-theorized, dimension. Mobility is typically approached in institutional and policy terms, as the physical movement of students and faculty across geographical and institutional boundaries. However, from the perspective advanced in this chapter, mobility can be more profoundly understood as a transformation of the group matrix itself. When individuals move across contexts, they do not simply change location; they carry with them cultural assumptions, symbolic frameworks, and relational patterns that encounter, disrupt, and reconfigure those of the receiving environment. Mobility thus generates new configurations of the matrix, characterized by multiplicity, tension, and the coexistence of diverse epistemologies.

This encounter between different cultural and symbolic matrices can be experienced as disorienting or conflictual, but it also constitutes a powerful source of creative potential. The destabilization of familiar frameworks opens up spaces for reflection, reinterpretation, and innovation, enabling new forms of meaning-making to emerge. In this sense, mobility does not merely expand access or exposure; it actively reshapes the conditions under which learning and creativity occur. It fosters spaces of international understanding that are not based on the erasure of difference, but on the capacity to engage with it productively within a shared relational field.

This reflection is informed by the experience of the author as an Italian researcher engaged in educational contexts characterized by intercultural exchange and academic mobility, where the encounter between different pedagogical traditions has made visible both the potential and the challenges of working within plural matrices.

Against this backdrop, the aim of this chapter is to conceptualize educational mobility as a transformation of the group matrix that fosters creativity and intercultural meaning-making. By bringing into dialogue pedagogical, psychoanalytic, and empirical perspectives, the chapter seeks to offer a theoretically grounded framework for understanding education as a spatial, relational, and transpersonal process. In doing so, it contributes to a broader rethinking of educational practices and policies, highlighting the importance of designing learning environments that can hold complexity, sustain difference, and support the emergence of new forms of collective knowledge.

2. Theoretical Framework: Space as Relational and Transformative

Educational space has traditionally been conceived as a neutral container, a backdrop within which teaching and learning take place. Classrooms, lecture halls, and institutional settings are often designed and evaluated primarily in terms of functionality, efficiency, and organization, with little attention to their role in shaping relational and cognitive processes. Such a perspective implicitly assumes that learning occurs independently of the environment, as if knowledge could be transmitted regardless of the spatial conditions in which it is embedded.

This assumption has been critically challenged by philosophical and pedagogical traditions that emphasize the constitutive role of the environment in human experience. John Dewey, for instance, conceptualized the environment not as a passive setting, but as a set of conditions that actively promote or hinder action, shaping the ways in which individuals engage with the world.

From this perspective, learning is always situated: it emerges through interaction with a field of material, social, and symbolic elements that enable certain forms of experience while constraining others. Space, therefore, is not external to the learning process, it is one of its primary mediators.

The Reggio Emilia Approach further radicalizes this view by positioning the environment as a “third educator,” alongside teachers and peers. Within this pedagogical framework, space is intentionally designed to foster exploration, dialogue, and co-construction of knowledge (Rinaldi, 2006). Classrooms are conceived as open, flexible, and aesthetically meaningful environments that invite participation and engagement. Light, materials, textures, and spatial organization are not incidental features, but integral components of the educational process, shaping how children encounter the world and express their understanding of it. Space becomes an active pedagogical agent, capable of communicating values, supporting inquiry, and sustaining relationships (Vecchi, 2010). This becomes particularly visible in moments where children collectively reorganize materials and positions in space in order to pursue a shared inquiry. The shifting arrangement of bodies, objects, and attention not only reflects but actively shapes the emergence of meaning, as spatial configurations are continuously negotiated in relation to the task and to one another.

Crucially, the Reggio perspective extends beyond the physical dimension of space to encompass its experiential and relational qualities. The environment is not only what is seen and touched, but also what is lived and interpreted. It is a space of possibilities, where meanings are continuously negotiated and reconfigured through interaction. In this sense, educational space can be understood as a dynamic and evolving field, rather than a fixed structure, one that participates in the unfolding of learning processes and contributes to their depth and complexity.

At the same time, different educational contexts, such as the Kenyan, have developed alternative ways of conceptualizing the relationship between space, community, and learning, often em-

phasizing collective practices, relational knowledge, and the integration of learning within broader social life. These perspectives invite a decentering of any single pedagogical model, opening space for a plurality of educational epistemologies.

While pedagogical approaches such as Reggio Emilia foreground the material and relational dimensions of space, psychoanalytic and group-analytic perspectives invite a further conceptual shift: from space as environment to space as symbolic field. Within this framework, space is not only inhabited by individuals, but also by meanings, affects, and unconscious processes that shape how individuals relate to one another and to the collective.

S.H. Foulkes' concept of the group matrix provides a foundational lens for understanding this dimension. The matrix refers to the network of communications, relationships, and shared meanings that constitute the group as a whole. It is both the medium and the product of interaction: a dynamic field in which individual and collective processes are inseparably intertwined. From this perspective, space cannot be reduced to its physical characteristics; it is also the locus of a symbolic and relational order that organizes experience and gives it coherence.

Within group analysis, a useful distinction is made between *set* and *setting* (Lo Verso & Di Maria, 2002). The *set* refers to the observable, structural aspects of the group environment, its physical layout, boundaries, and rules. The *setting*, by contrast, denotes the underlying psychic and symbolic framework that holds the group together: the implicit norms, expectations, and emotional climates that shape participation and meaning-making. While the set provides the external conditions for interaction, the setting constitutes the internal architecture of the group experience.

Educational spaces can thus be understood as configurations of both set and setting, where material arrangements and symbolic processes are deeply interconnected. A classroom, for example, is not only defined by its desks, walls, and resources, but also by the relational patterns it supports, the forms of communication it enables, and the affective atmosphere it sustains. These elements

together create what may be described as a shared mental field: a space in which participants co-construct meanings, negotiate identities, and engage with both conscious and unconscious dimensions of experience.

In this sense, space becomes a site of transference and projection, where past experiences and internalized relationships are enacted and transformed within the group. It is through this complex interplay of personal, interpersonal, and transpersonal dimensions that educational spaces acquire their depth and significance. They are not merely locations where learning occurs, but fields in which subjectivity itself is shaped and reshaped through relational processes.

The conceptualization of space as relational and symbolic inevitably leads to its recognition as political. If space structures interactions, meanings, and possibilities of action, then it also embodies values, power relations, and visions of community. Educational environments are never neutral: they reflect and reproduce particular assumptions about knowledge, authority, participation, and belonging.

The historical origins of the Reggio Emilia Approach offer a compelling illustration of this political dimension. Emerging in the aftermath of the Second World War, the first Reggio schools were built collectively by local communities using the material remnants of destruction. This act was not only practical, but deeply symbolic: it represented a commitment to reconstructing society through education, grounded in democratic values and collective agency. The school was conceived as a space of participation, dialogue, and shared responsibility, a site where the future could be imagined and built together.

Within this context, space becomes an expression of the *polis*, understood in its original sense as a community engaged in the co-construction of social life. Educational environments are not isolated institutions, but integral parts of a broader social fabric, connected to families, cultures, and civic structures. They function as spaces of encounter, where different perspectives meet and

where collective meanings are negotiated. The design and organization of these spaces thus carry ethical and political implications, influencing who is included, whose voices are heard, and how differences are managed.

To conceive of space as political is also to recognize its transformative potential. Educational environments can either reproduce existing hierarchies and exclusions or create conditions for more equitable and participatory forms of engagement. They can foster openness, curiosity, and collaboration, or reinforce control, standardization, and passivity. The way space is structured (physically, relationally, and symbolically) shapes the possibilities of learning and the forms of subjectivity that emerge within it.

From this perspective, space is not merely a context for education, but a central component of its ethical and epistemological project. It is through the organization of space that educational practices materialize, and through its transformation that new forms of learning and relating can be imagined. When such spaces of encounter extend across cultural and geographical contexts, the relational and political dimensions of space become even more pronounced, as different educational traditions, values, and practices come into contact and require new forms of negotiation.

3. The Group as Matrix of Becoming

If space constitutes the relational and symbolic environment of educational experience, the group represents the dynamic process through which such an environment comes to life. Moving beyond individualistic conceptions of learning requires a re-orientation toward the group as a primary unit of analysis, one that is not reducible to the sum of its members, but emerges as a complex, living system. Within this system, interactions, affects, and meanings circulate in ways that exceed individual intentions, giving rise to a collective process of becoming.

A useful entry point into this understanding is to conceptualize the group as a transformative field structured by difference, tension, and shared engagement in a common task. Groups are not constituted through harmony or homogeneity, but through the coexistence of heterogeneous subjectivities, each shaped by distinct histories, identifications, and expectations (Foulkes, 1964). Transformation does not arise from the achievement of predefined goals, but from the group's capacity to engage with conflict, sustain ambivalence, and remain in relation under conditions of uncertainty. In this sense, the group is not a fixed entity, but an evolving process in which identities are continuously reconfigured through interaction, and meaning emerges through shared, often contested, experience.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, this process depends on the group's capacity for containment and working-through (Bion, 1961). Rather than eliminating tension, the group functions as a holding environment (Winnicott, 1965) in which differences can be symbolized, elaborated, and transformed over time. Conflict is not resolved in a linear manner, but metabolized through relational processes that allow previously unthinkable or unspoken elements to become thinkable. The organizing features of the group (its boundaries, norms, and leadership) serve not to impose order, but to sustain a frame within which psychic and relational processes can unfold. Within such a setting, fragmentation, projection, and dissonance are not indicators of dysfunction, but expressions of underlying dynamics that, if adequately contained, can become generative forces for reorganization, insight, and development (Anzieu, 1984; Hopper, 2003).

From this perspective, the group can be understood as a container: a holding environment that enables the expression and transformation of affective and relational dynamics. Such processes can be observed in seemingly minor moments: a pause following a conflicting contribution, a participant withdrawing from the interaction, or a sudden shift from engagement to silence. These micro-dynamics signal the presence of underlying tensions,

which, when contained rather than prematurely resolved, become the very material through which the group can elaborate experience. Containment does not imply control or suppression, but the capacity to sustain complexity without collapsing into chaos or rigidity. It is within such a container that learning, reflection, and creativity become possible, as participants are able to engage with difference and uncertainty in a way that supports growth rather than defensiveness.

The conceptualization of the group as a container is deeply rooted in psychoanalytic and group-analytic traditions, which foreground the centrality of conflict, unconscious processes, and relational dynamics in human experience. Within this framework, group life is not understood as a harmonious convergence of individuals, but as a site of tension, ambivalence, and negotiation.

Freud's reflections on sociality already suggest that conflict is constitutive of group formation. The emergence of collective life requires the regulation and transformation of instinctual drives, generating a persistent tension between individual desires and social demands. This tension is not an anomaly to be resolved, but a structural condition of human coexistence. Groups, therefore, are inherently ambivalent spaces, where forces of cohesion and fragmentation coexist and interact.

Wilfred Bion further develops this insight by distinguishing between the group as a *work group*, oriented toward a shared task, and the group as governed by *basic assumptions*, unconscious patterns of functioning such as dependency, fight/flight, and pairing. These basic assumptions represent collective defenses against anxiety, often leading the group away from its explicit purpose. Rather than viewing such dynamics as failures, Bion invites us to understand them as expressions of underlying emotional realities that require recognition and containment.

Didier Anzieu's concept of the *group skin* (1984) adds another layer to this understanding. Just as the skin functions as a boundary that both protects and connects the individual to the

external world, the group requires a psychic envelope that contains its internal processes and enables communication. When this *skin* is too rigid, the group becomes closed and impermeable; when it is too fragile, the group risks fragmentation and loss of coherence. The capacity of a group to function effectively depends on the integrity and flexibility of this containing envelope.

Earl Hopper's notion of the *social unconscious* (2003) further expands the scope of analysis by highlighting the role of historical, cultural, and collective dimensions that operate beyond individual awareness. Groups are not only shaped by the personal histories of their members, but also by the sedimented experiences of societies: traumas, ideologies, and power relations that are transmitted across generations. These elements influence group dynamics in subtle but profound ways, often manifesting in patterns of exclusion, projection, and silence.

Together, these psychoanalytic perspectives converge on a crucial insight: the group is a site where multiple layers of experience (individual, relational, and collective) intersect and interact. Understanding group processes thus requires attention not only to observable behaviors, but also to the underlying emotional and symbolic structures that shape them.

Building on these foundations, group analysis conceptualizes the group through the notion of the matrix, a multi-layered field that organizes communication, meaning, and experience. This matrix can be understood as comprising three interrelated dimensions: the personal, the dynamic, and the foundation (or transpersonal) matrix.

The personal matrix refers to the intrapsychic configurations that each individual brings into the group. These include internalized relationships, emotional patterns, beliefs, and expectations shaped by early experiences and socialization. Individuals do not enter the group as isolated entities, but as carriers of multiple internal groups: family, cultural, and symbolic structures that inform their ways of relating and perceiving.

The dynamic matrix corresponds to the here-and-now interactions within the group. It is the emergent field of relationships that develops through communication, exchange, and mutual influence. In this space, individual matrices encounter one another, generating patterns of attraction, resistance, alliance, and conflict. The dynamic matrix is not static; it evolves continuously as participants respond to and reshape one another's contributions.

The foundation or transpersonal matrix encompasses the broader sociocultural and historical context within which the group is embedded. It includes shared languages, norms, values, and collective memories that transcend individual experience. This dimension also incorporates what may be described as the transpersonal level: the layer of experience that connects individuals to larger symbolic and cultural systems, often operating outside conscious awareness. In contemporary educational contexts, this foundation matrix is increasingly shaped by transnational movements, historical entanglements, and global circulations of knowledge, which introduce additional layers of complexity into group processes and into the meanings that can be shared within them.

These three matrices are not separate domains, but interconnected layers of a single field. The personal is always already shaped by the transpersonal; the dynamic is the site where these layers become visible and negotiable. Group processes unfold at the intersection of these dimensions, revealing how individual subjectivities are embedded within broader relational and cultural structures.

From this perspective, the group can be understood as a dynamic *matrix of becoming*, a space in which identities, meanings, and relationships are continuously constructed and transformed. Learning, in this context, is not merely the acquisition of knowledge, but a process of participating in and contributing to this evolving field.

4. Creativity in Groups: Between Potential and Constraint

Creativity has long been conceptualized as an individual attribute: a capacity located within the mind of a subject, measurable through cognitive performance and often associated with exceptional talent or originality. Such perspectives have historically privileged the figure of the solitary creator, emphasizing internal processes such as divergent thinking, problem-solving, and ideation. While these approaches have generated important insights, they risk neglecting the fundamentally social and contextual nature of creative processes.

More recent theoretical developments have challenged this individualistic paradigm, proposing instead that creativity emerges through interaction between individuals, environments, and cultural frameworks (Plucker et al., 2004; Glăveanu et al., 2020). From this perspective, creativity is not a property of isolated minds, but a relational process that unfolds within specific social contexts and is recognized as such by a community. What counts as creative is not only what is produced, but how it is received, interpreted, and validated within a given cultural setting.

Groups, in this sense, are often considered fertile grounds for creativity. The convergence of diverse perspectives, experiences, and competencies can generate novel combinations of ideas and open up alternative ways of thinking. Collaborative environments are frequently associated with innovation, as they enable the negotiation of meaning, the comparison of viewpoints, and the co-construction of solutions. Creativity thus appears to be intrinsically linked to processes of social interaction and collective engagement.

However, this optimistic view requires qualification. The presence of others does not automatically enhance creativity; rather, it introduces a complex set of dynamics that can both facilitate and constrain the creative process. As research on group creativity has increasingly shown, the relationship between interaction and creativity is neither linear nor univocal, but

contingent upon the quality of group processes and the conditions under which they unfold.

Empirical investigation into the relationship between group dynamics and creativity offers a more nuanced picture of this complexity. A study conducted with young adults in a laboratory setting explored how group processes influence creative thinking and creative action during a collaborative task (Komarova et al., 2023): the research was developed within a collaborative framework involving scholars working across different educational contexts, allowing multiple perspectives to inform both the methodological approach and the interpretation of findings. Participants were invited to work in small groups to construct a representation of a *learning community*, allowing for the observation of both relational dynamics and creative behaviors. In several instances, participants were observed negotiating not only the content of the task, but their relative positions within the group: for example, through subtle struggles over access to materials or over the direction of the emerging product. These interactions reveal how creative processes are inseparable from the relational field in which they are embedded.

The findings reveal a paradoxical relationship between group dynamics and creativity. Contrary to the assumption that increased interaction necessarily enhances creative output, the study identified a negative correlation between the intensity of group dynamics and the level of creativity displayed. Specifically, when participants became more engaged in processes such as socialization, coordination, and group cohesion, their focus on the creative task diminished. In other words, the more the group invested in *becoming a group*, the less it appeared to produce in terms of creative outcomes.

At the same time, the study confirmed a positive relationship between creative thinking and creative action. Groups that demonstrated higher levels of reflective engagement with the task – through exploration, questioning, and ideation – were also more effective in translating these processes into concrete creative

production. This suggests that creativity is not merely a matter of interaction *per se*, but of the specific quality and orientation of that interaction.

Additional findings related to gender differences further complicate the picture, indicating variations in how participants oriented themselves toward the task and the group process. While such differences should be interpreted cautiously and within their socio-cultural context, they point to the broader influence of identity, expectations, and relational positioning in shaping creative engagement.

Taken together, these results challenge simplistic assumptions about the inherently positive role of group dynamics in fostering creativity. They suggest instead that group processes can generate competing demands: the need to establish relational cohesion may at times interfere with the capacity to sustain focus on creative exploration. Creativity, in this sense, emerges within a field of tension between relational investment and task-oriented engagement.

As researcher and observer within this setting, my position was itself part of the relational field under study, shaping both the interactions observed and their interpretation. This reflexive dimension underscores the extent to which research on group processes is always embedded within the very matrix it seeks to analyze.

The apparent contradiction between the potential and constraint of group processes in relation to creativity can be more deeply understood through a psychoanalytic and group-analytic lens. From this perspective, the dynamics observed in the empirical study are not anomalies, but expressions of fundamental tensions inherent in group life.

One key dimension concerns the role of anxiety and belonging. Entering a group situation often activates a need for acceptance, recognition, and affiliation. This can manifest in subtle forms, such as hesitation before voicing a divergent idea, alignment with dominant perspectives, or the gradual silencing of alternative

viewpoints. These moments, often fleeting, reveal the affective undercurrents that shape participation and influence the trajectory of creative processes. Participants may prioritize relational harmony and group cohesion in order to secure their place within the collective. This orientation, while essential for the formation of the group, can also lead to conformity, self-censorship, and a reduction in risk-taking, factors that are known to inhibit creative expression.

In psychoanalytic terms, such dynamics can be understood as manifestations of basic assumption functioning (Bion, 1961), where the group shifts away from its task in response to underlying anxieties. The effort to establish safety and cohesion may take precedence over engagement with the uncertainty and ambiguity inherent in creative processes. Creativity, however, requires precisely the capacity to tolerate not-knowing, to sustain ambiguity, and to engage with difference without prematurely resolving it.

Furthermore, processes of identification and projection within the group may influence how ideas are generated and received. Certain voices may become dominant, while others withdraw; ideas may be accepted or rejected not solely on their merit, but on their association with particular group members. The creative process is thus embedded within a relational field shaped by power, recognition, and emotional investment.

At the same time, it would be reductive to view group dynamics solely as constraints on creativity. Under conditions of adequate containment, groups can support the emergence of creativity by providing a space in which ideas can be shared, challenged, and developed collectively. The key factor is not the presence or absence of interaction, but the group's capacity to hold tension without collapsing into defensiveness or fragmentation.

Creativity in groups can therefore be understood as a fragile and situated process, dependent on a delicate balance between relational cohesion and openness to difference. Too much emphasis on cohesion may suppress divergence; too little may

lead to disorganization and loss of focus. As argued elsewhere (Komarova et al., 2023), creativity within group contexts lies precisely in its ability to navigate this tension, transforming it into a resource for collective thinking and innovation.

These dynamics become particularly intensified in intercultural group contexts, where participants are required to navigate not only interpersonal differences, but also divergent symbolic frameworks and expectations regarding communication, authority, and collaboration.

5. Bridging the Three Dimensions: Toward an *Educational Matrix*

The preceding sections have examined space, group processes, and creativity as distinct yet interrelated dimensions of educational experience. Each of these domains has been shown to play a constitutive role in shaping how learning unfolds: space as relational and symbolic environment, the group as a dynamic matrix of interaction and meaning, and creativity as an emergent process situated within social and affective contexts. However, when considered in isolation, these dimensions risk remaining analytically fragmented, obscuring the ways in which they co-constitute one another in lived educational settings.

This section proposes a conceptual integration of these dimensions through the notion of the educational matrix. Building on group-analytic theory, the matrix is understood not simply as a background or context, but as the very medium through which experience, communication, and meaning are generated. Extending this concept to education allows for a reconceptualization of learning environments as complex, multi-layered fields in which spatial configurations, relational dynamics, and creative processes are inseparably intertwined.

Within this framework, space, group, and creativity are not separate variables, but mutually constitutive elements of a single field. Space provides the conditions of possibility for interaction;

the group activates and transforms these conditions through relational processes; and creativity emerges as a potential outcome of this ongoing interplay. None of these dimensions can be fully understood without reference to the others: space without group remains inert, group without space lacks grounding, and creativity without both risks being reduced to an abstract or decontextualized construct.

The concept of the educational matrix thus shifts the focus from individual actors or isolated processes to the field of relations in which they are embedded. Learning is no longer conceived as something that happens *to* individuals within a predefined environment, but as something that emerges *within* a dynamic system of interactions. This system includes not only observable behaviors and material arrangements, but also symbolic meanings, affective exchanges, and unconscious processes that shape participation and understanding. This perspective resonates with cultural approaches to learning, which emphasize that knowledge is constructed through participation in shared systems of meaning (Bruner, 1996).

A key implication of this perspective is the recognition that educational processes unfold across multiple, interconnected levels. At the spatial level, the design and organization of the environment structure possibilities for movement, encounter, and expression. At the relational level, group dynamics mediate how individuals engage with one another, negotiate difference, and construct shared meanings. At the symbolic level, cultural narratives, internalized experiences, and unconscious processes influence how situations are perceived and interpreted. The educational matrix can thus be understood as a multi-dimensional field in which these levels intersect and interact continuously. This becomes particularly evident in contexts where educational practices emerge through encounters between different epistemological traditions. In such situations, the matrix is not simply a pre-existing structure into which participants enter, but a field that is co-constructed through the interaction of diverse ways of

knowing, teaching, and learning. The educational matrix thus takes shape as a site of epistemic negotiation, in which no single perspective remains unchanged.

Importantly, this framework also foregrounds the role of tension as a generative force within educational processes. As the previous sections have shown, both group dynamics and creative processes are characterized by inherent ambivalences: between cohesion and differentiation, structure and openness, familiarity and novelty. Rather than viewing these tensions as problems to be resolved, the concept of the educational matrix positions them as essential conditions for learning and transformation. It is through the capacity to hold and work within these tensions that new meanings and possibilities can emerge.

From a group-analytic perspective, this capacity is closely linked to the quality of containment within the matrix. The educational environment must be able to sustain uncertainty, difference, and affect without collapsing into rigidity or fragmentation. This involves not only the physical and organizational design of space, but also the relational and symbolic structures that support participation. Educators, in this context, are not merely transmitters of knowledge, but facilitators of the matrix: they contribute to the creation and maintenance of a field in which learning can take place as a collective and transformative process.

The notion of the educational matrix also allows for a rethinking of creativity beyond its conventional association with individual output. Creativity emerges not as a property of subjects, but as a quality of the field: a potential that arises when spatial, relational, and symbolic conditions align in ways that support exploration, risk-taking, and the reconfiguration of meaning. As the empirical findings discussed earlier suggest, this potential is fragile and contingent, dependent on the delicate balance between structure and openness, containment and freedom.

Finally, conceptualizing education as a matrix opens up new possibilities for understanding change and transformation. Educational processes are not linear or predictable; they involve con-

tinuous shifts in relationships, meanings, and configurations of the field. Small changes in one dimension, such as the introduction of new spatial arrangements or the arrival of new group members, can reverberate across the matrix, producing effects that are difficult to anticipate. This sensitivity to context and interaction highlights the importance of adopting flexible, responsive approaches to educational design and facilitation.

In bringing together space, group, and creativity within a unified framework, the concept of the educational matrix provides a foundation for rethinking education as a relational, dynamic, and inherently complex process. It invites a move away from static models of teaching and learning toward an understanding of education as an emergent phenomenon, grounded in the interplay of material, relational, and symbolic dimensions.

6. Mobility as Transformation of the Group Matrix: a Political and Ethical Stance

Educational mobility is most commonly framed in institutional and policy terms, referring to the physical movement of students and faculty across geographical, cultural, and academic contexts. Within this dominant perspective, mobility is often associated with access, exchange, and internationalization, emphasizing its role in expanding educational opportunities and fostering global competencies. While such dimensions are undoubtedly significant, they risk reducing mobility to a logistical or administrative phenomenon, overlooking its deeper implications for the relational and symbolic fabric of educational experience.

From the perspective advanced in this chapter, mobility can be more fundamentally understood as a transformation of the group matrix. When individuals move across contexts, they do not simply relocate; they carry with them internalized cultural frameworks, relational patterns, and symbolic meanings that become active within new environments. Mobility thus introduces

new elements into the matrix, altering its composition and generating shifts in the dynamics of interaction, communication, and meaning-making.

This transformation is not limited to the individual who moves; it affects the entire group. The arrival of new participants, or the displacement of existing ones, reconfigures the relational field, producing new alignments, tensions, and possibilities. In this sense, mobility operates as a matrix-disrupting and matrix-generating process, simultaneously destabilizing established patterns and opening up space for new configurations to emerge.

Experiences of collaboration between institutions situated in different socio-cultural contexts - for example, between European and African educational settings - make visible how mobility generates not only exchange, but mutual transformation. In these encounters, knowledge is not transferred from one context to another, but reconfigured through dialogue, tension, and shared practice.

A central feature of mobility is the encounter between different cultural, epistemological, and symbolic systems. These encounters do not occur in a neutral space, but within the already structured field of the group matrix, where meanings, norms, and expectations are continuously negotiated. The introduction of diverse perspectives can enrich this field, expanding its interpretive possibilities and enabling more complex forms of understanding.

At the same time, such encounters are inherently marked by asymmetry, misunderstanding, and tension. Differences in language, values, and communicative styles may generate friction, challenging the coherence of the group and exposing implicit assumptions that might otherwise remain unexamined. From a group-analytic perspective, these dynamics can be understood as expressions of the *foundation matrix*, where broader socio-cultural and historical factors shape the conditions of interaction (Foulkes, 1964; Hopper, 2003).

The concept of the multicultural matrix captures this layered complexity. It refers to a field in which multiple cultural narratives

and symbolic orders coexist and interact, often in ways that are not immediately transparent or easily reconciled. Within such a matrix, participants are required to navigate not only interpersonal differences, but also the deeper structures of meaning that inform them. This process can generate uncertainty and disorientation, but it also creates opportunities for reflection, dialogue, and the reconfiguration of knowledge.

Importantly, the multicultural matrix is not simply a space of diversity, but a space of relation. It is through the interaction between different perspectives that new meanings can emerge, and it is through the negotiation of difference that collective understanding is constructed. As intercultural theorists have argued, learning in such contexts involves not only acquiring knowledge about others, but transforming one's own frames of reference (Mezirow, 2000; Deardorff, 2006).

The reconfiguration of the group matrix through mobility has profound implications for creativity. As discussed in the previous section, creativity emerges within a field of tension between relational cohesion and openness to difference. Mobility intensifies this tension by introducing unfamiliar elements that disrupt established patterns of thought and interaction.

From this perspective, difference becomes a generative resource. The encounter with alternative ways of knowing and being can destabilize taken-for-granted assumptions, prompting participants to question their own perspectives and explore new possibilities. This process aligns with socio-cultural theories of creativity, which emphasize the role of interaction, diversity, and negotiation in the production of novel ideas (Glăveanu et al., 2020; Paulus & Nijstad, 2003).

At the same time, the creative potential of mobility is not automatic. As the empirical findings presented earlier suggest, increased complexity in group dynamics can also lead to fragmentation, withdrawal, or a retreat into familiar patterns. The presence of difference may heighten anxiety, leading individuals to seek safety in homogeneity or to avoid engagement with chal-

ling perspectives. In such cases, the matrix may become polarized or rigid, limiting the possibilities for creative transformation.

The key factor, therefore, lies in the capacity of the group to contain and work through the tensions introduced by mobility. When the matrix is able to sustain uncertainty and support dialogue across difference, mobility can foster a form of creativity that is not merely additive, but transformative. It enables the emergence of hybrid meanings, new forms of collaboration, and innovative approaches that would not arise within more homogeneous settings.

Understanding mobility as a transformation of the group matrix also highlights its ethical and political dimensions. Mobility is not equally accessible to all, nor are its effects uniformly distributed. It is shaped by global inequalities, institutional structures, and historical power relations that influence who moves, how they move, and under what conditions.

Within the group matrix, these broader dynamics are not external, but internalized and enacted through relational processes. Differences in status, language proficiency, or cultural capital may influence participation and recognition, creating asymmetries that affect how voices are heard and valued. The multicultural matrix thus becomes a site where issues of inclusion, exclusion, and representation are played out in concrete ways.

From this perspective, fostering meaningful educational mobility requires more than facilitating movement; it involves creating conditions for ethical engagement with difference. This includes recognizing asymmetries, supporting dialogue, and developing the capacity to remain in relation across tensions that cannot be easily resolved. As critical and intercultural scholars have emphasized, internationalization in education must move beyond superficial notions of exchange toward more reflexive and equitable forms of interaction (Andreotti, 2011; Marginson, 2014). In such contexts, practices of listening and documentation acquire particular significance, as they allow different perspectives

to be articulated and made visible within the evolving matrix (Massimelli et al., 2022).

Mobility, in this sense, can be understood as a practice of collective transformation, in which participants engage not only with new environments, but with the reconfiguration of their own positionalities within a shared field. It invites a shift from viewing education as the transmission of stable knowledge to understanding it as a process of co-creating meaning across difference.

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Conclusions.

Education as Relational Matrix: Toward an Ecology of Transformation

Roberta Mineo

This volume invites a reconsideration of education not as a set of discrete practices or domains, but as a relational field in continuous transformation. Across different contexts and perspectives, a shared concern emerges: how to sustain educational processes capable of engaging with complexity, difference, and change in a world increasingly shaped by mobility and interdependence.

Against this backdrop, the conceptualization of education as an interplay between space, group matrix, creativity, and mobility offers a framework through which the contributions gathered here can be brought into dialogue. Rather than functioning as an external application of theory, this perspective seeks to illuminate the conditions under which these processes take place, highlighting the relational, symbolic, and affective dimensions that underlie practices of teaching and learning.

If, as the contributions in this volume suggest, educational processes unfold within a dynamic and multi-layered matrix, then pedagogical practice cannot be limited to curriculum delivery or content transmission. Rather, it must engage with the conditions that shape interaction, meaning-making, and creativity. From this perspective, several implications emerge for educational design and facilitation, focusing on the configuration of space, the role of the educator, and the support of creative processes within increasingly mobile and intercultural contexts.

Space, understood as a constitutive dimension of the educational matrix, becomes a central pedagogical concern. In educational settings shaped by mobility, where diverse cultural, linguistic, and

epistemological perspectives intersect, the configuration of space plays a critical role in enabling or constraining meaningful interaction.

Educational environments oriented toward mobility must move beyond rigid, standardized layouts and instead foster flexible and relational spaces. Such environments allow for multiple forms of engagement (individual reflection, small-group interaction, collective dialogue) and can be reconfigured in response to emerging needs and dynamics. Flexibility is not merely a matter of physical arrangement, but of conceptual openness: spaces must be capable of accommodating different ways of inhabiting, interpreting, and using them.

In this sense, the design of educational space should support hybrid and intercultural settings, where diverse modes of expression and knowledge production can coexist. This includes attention to materials, aesthetics, and symbolic elements that reflect plurality rather than uniformity, as well as the creation of environments that encourage participation across differences. The aim is not to neutralize cultural distinctions, but to create a shared field in which they can be expressed, encountered, and negotiated.

Moreover, spaces for mobility must be conceived as transitional environments, capable of holding the disorientation and uncertainty that often accompany intercultural encounters. Just as transitional spaces in psychoanalytic theory enable the integration of internal and external realities, educational environments can support participants in navigating between familiar and unfamiliar frameworks. This requires a balance between stability and openness: spaces must provide enough continuity to sustain engagement, while remaining permeable to transformation.

If the group is understood as a dynamic matrix of becoming, then the role of the educator shifts fundamentally. Rather than acting primarily as a transmitter of knowledge, the educator becomes a facilitator of the matrix, responsible for sustaining the conditions under which relational and symbolic processes can unfold.

Central to this role is the capacity to hold the frame. The frame refers to the set of boundaries, norms, and structures that provide coherence and containment to the group. It is not a rigid imposition of order, but a flexible and responsive structure that supports the group's capacity to engage with complexity. Holding the frame involves maintaining continuity, clarifying expectations, and attending to the emotional and relational climate of the group.

In contexts of mobility and intercultural encounter, this function becomes particularly critical. The introduction of diverse perspectives can generate misunderstandings, tensions, and asymmetries that challenge the stability of the group. The educator's task is not to eliminate these tensions, but to manage and contain them, allowing them to become objects of reflection rather than sources of fragmentation.

This requires a shift from a problem-solving orientation to a process-oriented approach, in which conflict is recognized as a meaningful and potentially productive dimension of group life. Rather than seeking immediate resolution, the educator supports the group in remaining in dialogue, tolerating ambiguity, and exploring the underlying dynamics of interaction. In doing so, the group is enabled to move from enactment to reflection, from reaction to understanding. This involves attending not only to what is said, but to how it is said and to what remains unspoken: shifts in tone, moments of withdrawal, or the emergence of overlapping voices can all signal changes in the group's capacity to remain in relation. The educator's sensitivity to these signals is central to sustaining the matrix as a space of engagement rather than fragmentation.

Holding the frame also involves an ethical dimension. The educator must remain attentive to issues of power, inclusion, and recognition within the group, ensuring that differences do not translate into exclusion or silencing. This entails creating conditions in which multiple voices can be heard and where asymmetries can be acknowledged and addressed. The educator thus acts not only as a facilitator of learning, but as a guardian of the relational and ethical integrity of the group matrix.

Within this perspective, leadership can be understood as a function of the matrix rather than as an attribute of a single individual. It emerges through the capacity to regulate boundaries, sustain the group's orientation toward its task, and facilitate the circulation of meanings within the relational field. The educator, in this sense, exercises a form of distributed and processual leadership, which involves sensing shifts in the group's dynamics, intervening to support containment, and enabling participation without foreclosing difference. Leadership thus becomes inseparable from the ethical and relational work of maintaining the conditions under which the matrix can remain open, cohesive, and generative.

Supporting creativity within educational contexts requires engaging with the delicate balance between containment and openness. As the previous sections have shown, creativity does not emerge from unstructured freedom alone, nor from rigid control, but from the interplay between these two dimensions.

Containment provides the necessary conditions for creativity by offering stability, coherence, and a sense of safety. It enables participants to engage with uncertainty without becoming overwhelmed, and to take risks within a structured environment. Without sufficient containment, the group may become fragmented, and creative processes may dissipate or fail to consolidate.

At the same time, creativity depends on openness to difference, ambiguity, and the unknown. It requires the capacity to move beyond established patterns, to question assumptions, and to explore alternative possibilities. Excessive structure or overemphasis on cohesion can inhibit this process, leading to conformity and the suppression of divergent thinking.

The educational challenge, therefore, lies in maintaining a dynamic equilibrium between these poles. This involves designing tasks and environments that encourage exploration while providing enough structure to sustain engagement. It also requires facilitating group processes in ways that allow for the expression of multiple perspectives without collapsing into disorganization or conflictual breakdown.

In contexts of mobility, this balance becomes even more critical. The presence of diverse cultural and symbolic frameworks can amplify both the potential for creativity and the risk of misunderstanding. Supporting creativity in such settings involves creating conditions in which difference can be engaged productively, rather than avoided or neutralized.

Ultimately, fostering creativity within the educational matrix requires an orientation toward process rather than outcome. Creativity is not simply the production of novel artifacts, but a mode of engagement with the world: a way of thinking, relating, and making meaning that is open, reflective, and responsive. Educational practices that prioritize this orientation can support the development of learners who are not only knowledgeable, but capable of participating in complex, dynamic, and intercultural environments.

If the preceding sections have articulated the educational matrix as a dynamic interplay of space, group, creativity, and mobility, this concluding reflection seeks to extend this framework outward, toward the broader educational landscape in which these processes unfold. Rather than reiterating the arguments developed thus far, the aim here is to situate them in dialogue with the contributions of this volume, highlighting how the concept of the matrix offers a unifying lens through which diverse educational concerns (participation, leadership, pedagogy, and development) can be reinterpreted.

As curator of this volume, this reflection also emerges from an engagement with the diverse contributions that follow, each of which offers a situated perspective on educational transformation across different contexts.

Across the chapters of this book, education emerges not as a fixed system, but as a field of transformation shaped by multiple actors, contexts, and aspirations. Whether through the emphasis on learner-centered pedagogies, the recognition of children's and adolescents' participation, or the exploration of leadership as a relational and ethical practice, a common thread can be

identified: the movement away from hierarchical and transmissive models of education toward more distributed, dialogical, and participatory forms of engagement. The notion of the educational matrix provides a conceptual grounding for this shift, allowing these diverse perspectives to be understood not as separate innovations, but as expressions of a deeper transformation in how education itself is conceived.

From this perspective, the emphasis on participation, as explored in educational contexts that foreground children's and young people's voices, can be reinterpreted as a reconfiguration of the group matrix. Participation is not simply a matter of inclusion or consultation; it is a transformation of the relational field in which knowledge is produced and shared. When learners are recognized as active contributors, the matrix itself changes: authority becomes more distributed, meanings are co-constructed, and the boundaries between teaching and learning are redefined. Participation thus reflects a shift from education as transmission to education as a shared process of meaning-making within a relational space.

Similarly, the focus on learner-centered and holistic pedagogies, particularly in early education, can be understood as a reorientation of the spatial and symbolic dimensions of the matrix. Approaches that emphasize play, exploration, and experiential learning recognize that knowledge emerges through engagement with environments that are rich, responsive, and open to interpretation. In such contexts, space is not organized around control and standardization, but around the possibility of encounter: between the learner and the material world, between peers, and between different modes of expression. The holistic development of the child, in this sense, is inseparable from the quality of the matrix in which they are embedded.

The theme of leadership, as articulated in the context of educational transformation, further extends this relational perspective. Leadership, within the framework proposed here, cannot be reduced to individual authority or positional power. Rather, it

can be understood as a function of the matrix itself, a distributed and emergent process that shapes how the group holds its task, navigates tensions, and sustains direction over time. Educational leaders, whether teachers, administrators, or students themselves, participate in the ongoing construction of the matrix by influencing its boundaries, its capacity for containment, and its openness to change. Leadership thus becomes less about directing outcomes and more about enabling processes, holding the space in which learning, creativity, and participation can unfold.

Seen through the lens of the educational matrix, these different dimensions (participation, pedagogy, leadership) are not isolated domains, but interconnected aspects of a broader ecology of educational transformation. This ecology is characterized by the continuous interaction between individuals and collectives, between local contexts and global movements, between stability and change. It is within this ecology that educational mobility acquires its full significance.

Mobility, as discussed in this book, is not simply an addition to this ecology, but a force that intensifies and reconfigures it. By bringing different matrices into contact, mobility exposes the contingency of what might otherwise appear as natural or given. It creates conditions in which assumptions can be questioned, perspectives expanded, and new forms of understanding developed. At the same time, it reveals the challenges of engaging across difference, highlighting the need for structures that can support dialogue, negotiation, and mutual recognition.

In this sense, mobility calls for a rethinking of education not only as a national or institutional endeavor, but as a transcultural and transpersonal process. The encounters it generates are not merely exchanges of knowledge, but engagements between different ways of inhabiting the world. These encounters can give rise to new configurations of the matrix, in which hybrid forms of knowledge, identity, and practice emerge. However, such outcomes depend on the capacity of educational environments to hold complexity: to sustain spaces in which difference is

neither erased nor rigidified, but worked through as a source of learning and creativity.

What emerges from this perspective is an understanding of education as a practice of coexistence and co-creation. The educational matrix is not a neutral container, but a space in which ways of being together are enacted and transformed. It is here that learners develop not only cognitive competencies, but the capacity to engage with others, to navigate uncertainty, and to participate in the collective construction of meaning.

This has profound implications for how we think about the purpose of education in a contemporary world marked by mobility, diversity, and interdependence. If education is to respond to these conditions, it cannot be limited to the transmission of established knowledge or the reproduction of existing structures. It must instead cultivate the ability to inhabit complex relational fields, to engage with difference as a resource, and to contribute to the ongoing transformation of shared spaces.

In this regard, the educational matrix offers not only an analytical framework, but also an ethical orientation. It invites educators, institutions, and policymakers to attend to the conditions they create: the spaces they design, the groups they facilitate, and the forms of participation they enable. It calls for a commitment to fostering environments that are capable of holding tension, supporting creativity, and sustaining dialogue across difference. Programs of international cooperation and mobility, when grounded in such an orientation, can move beyond exchange toward genuine processes of mutual transformation.

Ultimately, the challenge is not simply to adapt education to a changing world, but to recognize that education itself is one of the primary sites in which that world is continuously made and remade. To think in terms of the matrix is to acknowledge that learning is always situated within a web of relations that extends beyond the classroom, connecting individuals to communities, histories, and possible futures.

In this sense, education becomes a practice of coexistence and co-creation: a way of engaging with others that requires the capacity to remain in relation across difference, to sustain tension without prematurely resolving it, and to participate in the ongoing construction of shared meanings. This does not eliminate conflict or uncertainty, but situates them as conditions through which learning, creativity, and transformation can emerge.

What is at stake, then, is not only what is learned, but how we inhabit the spaces of learning together. It is within these relational configurations, fragile, dynamic, and always in the making, that the possibility - and responsibility - of educational transformation resides.

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