



GENERIC SKILLS OF EDUCATORS TO PREVENT YOUTH DISCOMFORT. A TRAINING EXPERIENCE IN EUROPE

HABILIDADES GENÉRICAS DE LOS EDUCADORES PARA PREVENIR DIFICULTADES EN JÓVENES. UNA EXPERIENCIA FORMATIVA EN EUROPA

Valentina Guerrini ()*
Universidad de Sassari

Abstract

This paper offers a reflection on the necessity and importance of continuous training today for educators and teachers who work in close contact with young people on a daily basis, by a revision of generic skills that make it possible to prevent extremist behaviour and radicalisation among young people and instead promote critical thinking, resilience, a sense of belonging and social cohesion. At the same time, the contribution will report some significant results of the training experience carried out through the European Project DIVE IN "Preventing violent radicalisation among young individuals in Europe by innovative training approaches".

In this training experience, the intercultural competences, empathy skills, cognitive decentralisation, active listening and dialogue, digital competences were found to be key skills for educators to be able to guarantee quality education for all, to contribute to creating sustainable communities, and to promote peace, justice and strong institutions in line with the UN 2030 Development Goals.

Palabras clave: Educators; blended learning; youth discomfort; generic skills; prevention.

Resumen

Este artículo ofrece una reflexión respecto de la necesidad e importancia de la formación continua para los docentes y educadores que trabajan en contacto estrecho con jóvenes para reducir y prevenir el riesgo de problemas juveniles que puedan resultar en violencia, conductas extremas y radicalización.

La primera parte del trabajo se enfoca en las "habilidades genéricas" de los educadores que son necesarias para trabajar con jóvenes, para establecer una relación basada en la confianza y el sentido de pertenencia, con el fin de que ellos mismos puedan convertirse en constructores de comunidad.

La primera sección de este trabajo está dedicada a la reflexión y clarificación de la complejidad de ciertos términos usados en diferentes contextos y países, tales como habilidades blandas, habilidades genéricas y habilidades transversales. El Autor escogió usar el término "habilidades genéricas" debido a que es más apropiado para para indicar un enfoque que apunte a proveer una comprensión más amplia de la estructura y la composición de una competencia determinada, ya sea dura o blanda. Ya sea que las habilidades blandas se refieren a las características y habilidades necesarias para relacionarse con otros y trabajar en equipo (como comunicación, trabajo en equipo, gestión del tiempo, resolución de conflictos y liderazgo), el término habilidades genéricas, por otra parte, se refiere a las habilidades que van más allá de las competencias profesionales y que son necesarias para desarrollar tareas de manera exitosa.

La segunda parte del artículo, por otra parte, se refiere a un proyecto Europeo que ya ha sido implementado, DIVE IN "Prevenir la radicalización violenta entre jóvenes en Europa a través de estrategias formativas innovadoras." Específicamente, el enfoque es una experiencia formativa combinada, dirigida a docentes y educadores que trabajan con jóvenes.

El objetivo de esta formación fue entrenar a los docentes y educadores para interceptar señales de dificultades en los jóvenes que estuvieran relacionadas con la violencia, extremismo y radicalización.

(*) Autor para correspondencia:

Valentina Guerrini
Universidad de Sassari
Correo de contacto: vguerrini@uniss.it

©2010, Perspectiva Educacional
[Http://www.perspectivaeducacional.cl](http://www.perspectivaeducacional.cl)

RECIBIDO: 30.04.2024
ACEPTADO: 12.07.2024

DOI: 10.4151/07189729-Vol.63-Iss.2-Art.1578

Se identificaron contenidos clave sobre los cuales enfocar el curso (interculturalidad, grupos sociales, exclusión social, uso del internet como un canal hacia el extremismo, construcción de un curso de prevención dentro de la propia organización) y se implementó un curso piloto en países Europeos (España, Italia, Grecia, Austria) con el objetivo de lograr habilidades específicas y sobre todo genéricas.

A partir de los resultados de esta experiencia, emerge la importancia de invertir y mejorar la formación inicial y continua, con una perspectiva de aprendizaje continuo para profesionales de la educación que trabajan con jóvenes, especialmente para el desarrollo de habilidades genéricas en contextos colaborativos y estimulantes, en los cuales se utilicen metodologías activo-participativas.

Keywords: Educadores; aprendizaje combinado; malestar juvenil; competencias genéricas; prevención.

1. The generic skills for education professionals. A challenge to be faced

Generic skills are a major issue in different contexts, from school to informal places, from work contexts to the network. The theme of 'generic (or soft) skills' is transversal and very interesting if thought of, not in opposition to hard skills, but if imagined as part of an integral training of the person who must open his or her eyes as much as possible. Transversal skills, in fact, today more than ever, are indispensable in people's lives, necessary to counter various types of discrimination, a resource for opposing the impossibility of learning, experimenting, developing and allowing skills, talents and aspirations to flourish in a natural way.

In recent years, many researches (Istituto per lo sviluppo della formazione professionale dei lavoratori [ISFOL]¹, 2012; Levy & Cannon, 2016; Luzzatto et al., 2012) have focused on the issue of soft skills, mainly due to an instance, coming from the world of work, that has downsized the importance of technical competences in favour of a broader set of skills, shifting the focus from simple knowing or knowing how to do to the complexity of acting (Ciappei & Cinque, 2014).

At present, EU countries have different methodologies and approaches for teaching and assessing transversal skills. One obstacle is precisely the absence of a common language. There are different ways of naming generic skills (sometimes also called competences), different definitions, different ways of classifying and grouping them. Just to give a few examples: life skills (World Health Organization [WHO], 1993); transversal competences (ISFOL, 1998); key competences for a successful life and a well-functioning society (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2003); generic competences (González & Wagenaar, 2008); key competences for lifelong learning (Recommendation No. 962/2006); transferable competences (EC, 2011). These different designations correspond to as many models and classifications of transversal competences. Among the most recent contributions, the update of the Recommendation of the Council of the European Union on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning (Recommendation No. C189/2018) highlights the need to emphasise entrepreneurial, social and civic competences. Problem-solving, critical thinking, cooperation, creativity and self-regulation are indicated in the document as tools for applying what has been learned and being able to produce new knowledge. Emphasis is also placed on the need to invest in new ways of learning, through the creation of more flexible environments and an increasing merging of formal and non-formal learning.

¹ ISFOL in Italy is the Institute for the Development of Vocational Training of Worker. It is a public research body supervised by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.

ISFOL conducts scientific research on the topics of vocational training, labour and social policies; it provides technical and scientific support to the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies and operates in support of the State, Regions and Autonomous Provinces, local authorities, national public and private institutions.

According to Lamri and Lubart (2023), in this paper, I use the word “generic skills” to refer an approach aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the structure and composition of any skill, whether hard or soft. Whereas soft skills refer to characteristics and abilities that are necessary for dealing with other people and for working together in a team (as communication, teamwork, time management, problem-solving and leadership); the term generic skills, on the other hand, refers to skills that go beyond professional competencies and are necessary for the successful implementation of tasks. These include project management, presentation techniques, negotiation skills and intercultural competencies. The generic skill components approach builds upon recent findings, suggesting that all skills can be understood through a shared framework of five distinct components: knowledge, active cognition, conation, affection, and sensory-motor abilities. This integrated approach has the potential to reconcile the traditional distinction between hard and soft skills, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the complex nature of skills and their development (Lamri & Lubart, 2023).

Noncognitive skills are soft skills, such as the ability to handle stress, empathy, problem solving, motivation and proactivity, which are not related to language, logic-mathematics, science and technology skills. These are a set of social, human and psychological skills that help students develop a positive and functional attitude toward every aspect of daily life. The investment, according to the Council of the European Union, is precisely on being self-reliant, having self-confidence, possessing resistance to stress, organizing and planning, lifelong learning, being able to achieve goals, knowing how to manage information, being resourceful, having initiative, communicating, practicing problem solving, knowing how to work in a team, and possessing leadership skills. All within a framework within which soft skills can be declarative (knowing), procedural (knowing how to do) and pragmatic (knowing how to do) (Balzano, 2023).

Schools today must be able to take a holistic view of generic skills and hard skills in order to promote metacognitive learning that can be increasingly meaningful in the workplace (Ferrantino et al., 2024).

Today, more than ever, as societies are characterized by a high degree of complexity, rapid change and unpredictability, dramatic social events such as wars, epidemics, the coexistence of old and new economic and educational poverty, and the emergence of new forms of communication and learning especially related to the use of artificial intelligence, it seems particularly necessary, on the part of all citizens and, definitely indispensable for those involved in the management of educational processes, to possess skills to be able to read and act in changing social contexts, to know how to put oneself at stake and to know how to transform one's skills (upskilling and reskilling), to know how to manage stress, to know how to cope with

change, to be resilient, to know how to interact in increasingly heterogeneous contexts marked by differences (ethnic, cultural, linguistic, social, gender and sexual orientation...).

In recent decades, information and communication technologies have undergone impressive development, generating a radical transformation of our societies. Expressions such as “information society” (Robins & Webster, 1999), “knowledge society” or even “network society” effectively convey the epochal dimension of the changes taking place. The extent of these transformations has led to a rethinking of the very notion of literacy: traditionally associated with basic knowledge and skills (knowing how to read, write), it is today being broadened to include new literacies or, in keeping with the lexicon used by international bodies, new skills, in particular those needed to act with and in the new digital media that innervate the socio-relational fabric within which our contemporary lives unfold.

Another key concept underlying a renewal of the competences of education professionals is that of sustainability, which inevitably recalls complexity, a systemic, reticular, plural approach, at the centre of which are people (United Nations [UN], 2015). In this way, going well beyond the reductive interpretation of the term ‘sustainability’ (referring only to the dimension of the environment) to encompass everything that is particularly dear to the pedagogical community: sustainability “translated” into the fight against injustice and inequality, thus opposing those systems of ideas, values and practices that, unfortunately, still today divide and discriminate people, groups, cultures, societies (Shulla et al., 2020).

In particular, in the educational sector, the penetration of the neoliberal culture, the corporatist vision and privatization even in the field of personal and community services, cause counter-trends and resistance of cultural and organizational order, educational paths characterized by uncertainty, precarious balances, loss of principles values and frames of reference (Tramma, 2018). In this seemingly worrisome and negative picture, those generic competencies that can offer a positive and purposeful alternative vision in educational contexts and, above all, competencies that allow one to act and transform the criticalities of the present into opportunities for equitable and inclusive growth and development for a short- and long-term future are particularly necessary.

On the work front, on the ground of organizational science, the most important ones are autonomy, self-confidence, adaptability, stress resistance, ability to plan and organize, precision/attention to detail, continuous learning, ability to achieve goals, knowing how to manage information, being resourceful, communication skills, problem solving, teamwork and leadership (Boffo et al., 2023; Cera, 2023; Motsching & Ryback, 2016; Zouaoui et al., 2023).

In European Union, 2023 has been the "European Year of Skills": (European Commission, 2023) a choice that thus puts at the centre of the agenda training, more specifically, the need to empower companies to reduce the skills mismatch that exists in Europe through upskilling and reskilling activities.

In Italy, the debate on soft skills was introduced mainly by the Institute for the Development of Vocational Training of Workers (ISFOL), which, in this regard, made a distinction in terms of

- multidimensionality, meaning the possession of strategic skills, flexibility, problem solving;
- dynamism, an area that groups skills understood as a learning process involving cognitive, emotional and social aspects;
- subjectivity, in the sense that the path the individual constructs is also derived from his or her values and preferences (Cinque & Dessardo, 2020).

According to ISFOL, generic skills thus refer to fundamental operations proper to any person confronted with a task or work role (and not): diagnosing (the situation, the task, the organizational role, the problem, oneself), relating to others to respond to the demands of the work situation (made up of people, machines and tools, rules, procedures, etc.), dealing with the specific demands (of the situation, the task, the problem, the role), reflecting on one's actions and experiences in professional and work life. Possessing a good set of transversal skills means being able to profitably link thought to action, combining together the knowledge we possess, which is shared insofar as it derives from social recognition, our knowing how to do, which is manifest insofar as it is translated into action, and our knowing how to be, which is something subjective that makes us unique. All of this is particularly relevant for those working in education.

Today, in various fields, the educator is the specialist in the formation and full realization of the person, whose tasks include working out and bringing to fruition, in synergy with other professional figures, a complete educational project; starting from the conditions of the person (minor or person in difficulty) and the socio-cultural context in which he or she is inserted (also considering possible situations of strong discomfort), he or she is able to work effectively to foster the development of the person and his or her greater social integration (especially in cases of discomfort) (Cinque & Dessardo, 2020).

In today's complex society, the professional figure of the educator is now present in various contexts (residential facilities, boarding schools, youth centres, cultural mediation, territorial animation, schools, social cooperatives, etc.) with different operational specificities but with a single mission: that of promoting the well-being of the person or groups of people by fostering

the development of new skills or competencies. Cyrulnik (2001) calls the educator a "guardian of development and resilience" (p. 85), emphasizing his function as a promoter of the ability to cope with difficult and problematic situations. The educator bases his action in the educational relationship, the purpose of which is to help the other person achieve a higher level of self-esteem, autonomy and sense of responsibility, supporting a process of change in his way of perceiving reality and experiencing it on an emotional level.

Confirming the extent to which generic competences are central to declining the learning outcomes of the profile of educators and trainers (Romano, 2017), the socio-pedagogical professional educator has been defined as a "true profession of the human" (Mori et al., 2019, p. 400) that is located within the category of helping professionals, a hook to cling to in the unique and unpredictable contexts in which it operates, a possible engine of mediation between different formal, nonformal and informal educational agencies (Chiappetta Cajola & Traversetti, 2018).

2. The generic skills of education professionals to cope with the problem of youth distress and youth violence

In this post-pandemic historical phase, young people, and especially adolescents, are the age group most affected by the consequences of the health emergency. Adolescents between 14 and 19 years of age report more dissatisfaction with their lives with an increase in anxiety disorders, depression, self-injurious get and eating disorders, video game and smartphone addiction (National Institute of Statistics, [Istat²] 2022).

In particular, this contribution will focus on in-service training processes by educators to acquire generic skills necessary to prevent forms of neo-racism, social exclusion and peer violence among young people through a training course implemented during a European project aimed at countering violent extremism.

Especially for adolescents, who grow out of "discontinuity," out of experiences lived "in the here and now," such a time as they have experienced has indelibly affected their inner world (Mancaniello, 2020).

The role of the network is assuming a preponderant dimension in the lives of young people and online hate speech is mostly conveyed by social networks and numerous digital platforms, in addition, the virtuality of contexts and the masking of identities, contribute among young

² Istat refers to an Italian public research institution that carries out general censuses of population, services and industry, agriculture, household sample surveys and general economic surveys at national level.

haters, to spread a false perception of their acts, underestimating their dangerousness (Pasta, 2018).

The risk of the spread of hatred, racism and anti-social behavior is increased by the presence of the multiple media channels highly frequented by young people, and the widespread use of mobile devices that make their use easy and continuous (Guerrini & Proli, 2022).

There appears to be a clear need to educate from an early age in critical use "to the media and with the media" (Cambi, 2010), so that these media can be useful and innovative resources for young people and not dangerous channels of recruitment to extremist behaviour.

The role of the educator becomes central and strategic because he or she is a figure present in many different formal and nonformal educational settings, and it is at the intersection of formal, nonformal, and informal educational spaces that action must be taken to catch the first signs of youth distress (Freire, 2017; Iori, 2018).

One of the most important points of educational work in the face of the problem of youth deviance is that of prevention, that is, helping young people to live in conditions of adequate well-being and satisfaction, in a social environment rich in positive relationships and stimulation so that they do not need to seek alternative forms of satisfaction and self-fulfilment. As Tramma (2018) writes, "prevention means bringing together and interacting two cultures and points of view on a topic in the hope that the encounter will glimpse possibilities for different behaviours. Prevention is an uncertain peer dialogue (subject to the asymmetry of awareness and responsibility) in which there is a narrative exchange between two perceptions of the shared issue" (p. 117).

It seems clear that one of the indispensable skills for educators working with young people is communicative competence, that is, the ability to enter into dialogue with them by knowing how to intercept their needs and problems. First and foremost, an effort of cognitive decentralization and listening is needed (Fiorucci, 2017; Sclavi, 2003) so that those who work in the educational sector are called first to question their own paradigms of reference with the aim of mitigating the rate of ethnocentrism that often characterizes their value systems of reference. It is only from a correct approach to everyone's work that it is possible to spread an increasingly necessary "culture of coexistence" (Langer, 1995).

Today more than ever, it is essential to learn to take a perspective of "critical ethnocentrism" and be willing to deconstruct one's own prejudicial representations (De Martino, 1977). De Martino with the expression "critical ethnocentrism" referred to the impossibility and futility of leaving one's cultural tradition, since every human group tends to be ethnocentric, it is important, however, to never forget one's historical origin and above all to be aware of it.

Mindfulness and reflexivity alongside the juxtaposition of disciplinary and cross-disciplinary knowledge recall the work of Donald Schön (1983), on the importance of reflection during and after action. Reflection means, in fact, examining experience and personal beliefs that account for decisions made, seeking to reconstruct the process of thinking that determines consequences in practice. Such a process sees thought and practice placed in a circular recursive flow. Schön was one of the first authors to use the construct of community understood as a sharing of conventions, of actions that include distinctive means, languages and tools operating within particular types of institutional settings and sharing a common body of professional knowledge (Schön, 1983, p. 32). In the initial and in-service training of educators, it is important to create opportunities for communication and confrontation in a community of practice (Wenger, 2006) to create moments of confrontation and sharing, the "reflective educational professional," described in the literature, in fact constantly re-examines his or her goals, practices, skills, and knowledge, both individually and within the professional community (Fabbri, 2007), acquiring a permanent *habitus* that allows for self-regulation and professionalism learning.

Many research show that among the risk factors predisposing to violence and extremism may be the lack of a sense of belonging and social cohesion, and this is one of the main aspects on which to base the training of educators. As Crescenza and Leggieri (2024) point out, education today faces three major challenges: the first is the need to recover one of its main functions in terms of attention to cultural diversity, namely prevention. This implies a wide range of transversal skills on the part of educators linked above all to the ability to intercept and anticipate needs, to be able to empathize with the other, to be able to communicate, and to actively listen to the other.

The second challenge involves a commitment to rethink cultural diversity management measures to avoid segregation and stigmatization.

Finally, the third challenge completes the coexistence framework outlined in the first, proposing that spaces designated for education and instruction, schools first and foremost, can be constituted as spaces free of racism, xenophobia or any other form of intolerance. In addition to the main reference to the field of cultural diversity, it would be convenient and fair to extend them to any other kind of diversity, with a view to ensuring the conviviality of differences.

For these reasons, a diverse set of generic skills in educators is indispensable, to prevent various forms of discrimination and violence to educate respect for everyone and everything, including the environment, non-human living forms, with a view to environmental sustainability education.

To combat various forms of violence and extremist behaviour among young people, which are characterized by oversimplification of reality, educational intervention will have to provide tools and methods of critical analysis by bringing thinking back to a certain level of complexity (Tramma, 2019). The alternative is to educate to recognize the complexity of facts, to unveil the ideology that hides behind universalistic and absolute positions, then promote forms of complexity education and critical thinking that help to grasp the aspects in common between social groups and people who are only apparently different (Guerrini, 2022). Therefore, the educator must possess those generic skills related to the ability to develop critical thinking and problem solving; complexity education, having abandoned any claim to simplification and reductionism of reality, accepts the discontinuity and problematic nature of every educational process, aims to form open and critical minds, to know, choose and act (Mariani et al., 2017; Morin, 2017). Critical thinking is one of the resources that consists of the ability to think rationally, analysing issues and ideas and understand the logical connection between them, before accepting or formulating one's own opinion or concluding (Santerini, 2021). Underlying the idea of critical thinking is the need to teach young people how and not what to think. Critical thinking can be a shield against fake news and propaganda and help individuals work on their own identity and the formulation of independent opinions, a skill that is essential today in order to be able to decipher the countless messages coming from mass and social media.

Along with critical skills, it seems clear that the educator must possess digital skills and especially related to the critical use of media, enabling him or her to enter and understand the world of social media in which young people are immersed, to be able to recognize potentials and risks and to know how to educate young people to make equally critical use of them.

The European Commission has identified Digital Education, as one of the key factors in achieving a common European Education Area by 2025, through the Digital Education Action Plan (2021-27); however, digital skills are heterogeneously declined in Europe.

This plan includes two strategic priorities: the development of a high-performance digital educational ecosystem; and the shift to distance learning and the use of digital technologies that Covid-19 has accelerated, accompanying citizens to acquire basic digital skills from an early age so that digital contributes to overcoming gender employment inequalities. Digital has actually long been an area where European institutions have intervened, either by trying to theorize common elements or by funding projects in schools and/or school-to-school exchanges. It was in 2006 that Recommendation 962/EC of the Parliament and the Council of Europe was issued, the first in which digital competence is presented as one of eight key competencies, defined as follows: "to be able to use information society technologies (IST) for work, leisure and communication with familiarity and critical thinking." (p. 6). It is supported by

basic ICT skills: the use of computers to retrieve, evaluate, store, produce, present and exchange information as well as to communicate and participate in collaborative networks via the Internet (Ferrari & Pasta, 2023). Above all, the 2006 passage had the significance of recognizing digital competence its status as a "basic competence," thus essential and transversal. Since then, several documents have clarified the meaning of this competence, both from the perspective of students understood as future citizens and of teachers (Carretero Gomez et al., 2017).

Although European and international institutions over the past two decades have been able to update themselves following the explosion of big data and the prominence of algorithmic logics, a picture of strong heterogeneity emerges if we look at national systems (See, Livingstone et al., 2023). This is confirmed by the 2019 Eurydice Report (Cimò, 2019), with its systematic analysis of 43 educational systems characterized by fast legislative evolution on the topic: in curricula or ministerial documents, about half of the nation's refer to the European Key Competence; they have their own definition and use both their own national and EU definitions.

Digital competencies, represent extremely necessary transversal competencies in almost all workers, which are indispensable in the training of educators, the greatest difficulty lies in clearly and specifically declining these competencies and knowing how to translate them into expected competencies of the professional profile of educators, so that appropriate training interventions can be designed and self-assessment and evaluation tools can be built for educators themselves.

In accordance with the theses set forth by Panciroli and Rivoltella (2023), digital competencies related to the use of Artificial Intelligence in education today revolve around three aspects: educating on Artificial Intelligence (through promoting critical thinking, understanding "what's behind it," what messages and interests), educating with Artificial Intelligence (i.e., educating on the use of AI for decision making, promoting creativity, intelligent tutoring, evaluation, feedback management, and assistive systems), educating with AI (the possibilities of the computer designer when writing the code and implementing the algorithm and the process by which you train it, teaching it to interpret data correctly).

Awareness of the existence of such processes, with all the risks and potentials that are encompassed in education, and thus the ability to know how to properly use such tools, is undoubtedly a general competence of priority importance for educators.

3. The implementation of a European training course to develop generic skills in educators against youth violence

3.1. The European DIVE IN Project: general characteristics and objectives

The European Union is investing a lot of resources in training educational workers (teachers, educators, cultural mediators) to achieve the competencies set forth in Agenda 2030, with the intention of achieving societies with less inequality, more inclusive and sustainable.

The European DIVE IN Project, in which the writer participated as a research fellow at the University of Florence, is an example of a Europe-wide investment in the training of education professionals aimed at preventing extremism and radicalization among young people through the creation of a training course and a training platform designed to become a meeting space for trainers and trainees in Europe³.

This Project had as its overall objective the construction of a training platform and, during the course of the project itself, the testing of a Blended Learning Training Course in the various partner states aimed at all those who work with young people (educators, secondary school teachers, trainers, intercultural mediators, psychologists...).

The peculiarity of the project was to deal with the training of educators to prevent and counter violent, and extremist behaviour in young people by experimenting with a blended course and building a training platform full of insights and materials from the training needs of a sample of individuals working in contact with young people.

In fact, through the conduct of focus groups and administration of questionnaires to educators, teachers and psychologists, the need emerged to deepen concepts related to interculturality and communication strategies in multicultural contexts, to gain a deeper understanding of the mechanisms and risks related to the use of the Internet as a means of spreading extremist propaganda, to acquire tools and strategies for identifying early signs of radicalization, to learn

³ The European DIVE IN Project involved 5 partners from: Austria, Greece (2 partners), Spain and Italy. The European Project DIVE IN is part of the DG-Justice Call for proposals on preventing and countering violent radicalization 2019-2021 line and saw the participation of 5 partners from: Austria, Greece (2 partners), Spain and Italy. The coordinator was the NGO BEST (Austria- Vienna, an institute for professional and personnel training, specialized in European projects, courses for migrants, adults and youth at risk). The other partners were: University of Patras, Department of Computer Engineering, which supported the project for the management and organization of the online training course; IASIS, a Greek NGO that deals mainly with the social inclusion of migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, vulnerable people; SOLIDARIDAD SIN FRONTERAS, a Spanish NGO, specializing in the integration and welfare of vulnerable people by promoting training, social integration; University of Florence Department FORLILPSI, Head Prof.ssa Biagioli, whose main task was to provide the model for the evaluation and recognition of the skills acquired by the participants at the end of the course, as well as to develop the training module related to interculturality and to organize a training course for some training professionals. For more information see the project website: <http://www.divein-project.eu/> and that of the training platform: <https://trainingcenter.divein-project.eu/>

about strategies of social inclusion and exclusion in various groups, and to know how to develop strategies for managing diversity and inclusion in one's work context.

3.2. Methodology

Based on the data collected from the training needs analysis, five training modules were developed: Interculturality, Social Groups, Internet, Identifying Risk Behaviours, Prevention Measures-Developing a Plan for Inclusion in One's Work Context, in which each partner collected content, interviews, videos, reflection suggestions and activities following the principle that considers course participants to be active and transformative learners within a participatory context, where the learning individual acquires the ability to act by actually engaging in the relevant context (Mezirow, 2003).

In fact, the course offers simulations and case studies of real-life contexts, relying on a bottom-up approach.

One of the methodological principles of the course was to engage participants in meaningful learning experiences so that they could replicate them with the young people they work with. This allows young people to feel part of a community, to be in situations of confrontation with the other, being able to experience even their own frailties and weaknesses in order to try to accept them and overcome them without having to project them onto the other in order to defend themselves (Guerrini, 2022).

One of the principles in organizing the training course was precisely to develop generic skills that are transferable to various training contexts with young people (school, out-of-school, formal and non-formal settings) and to enable participants in the first phase of the training, to adapt and content learned to their own work context and to train other colleagues on the issues addressed. This implies, on the part of the participants themselves, generic abilities to learn and transform what has been learned to their own context. In addition, the mode of "cascading learning"⁴ in situated contexts, whereby trained trainees in turn trained other colleagues, also invoked the need to be able to communicate and know how to relate appropriately with colleagues-participants in the course.

⁴ Cascading training is a procedure whereby content learnt by a learner during a training initiative is disseminated to other colleagues. In this case, the educators and teachers who participated in the first phase of the training with the experienced professionals carried out training activities with their colleagues, re-proposing some contents with some modifications so that they could be adapted to the needs of the work context. The positive aspects of this training are precisely the flexibility and adaptability to the training needs of the context, the equal relationship between trained colleagues and information colleagues and the sharing of the same issues and training needs, the possibility to create a community of professional practices and to trigger transformational learning (Mezirow, 2003; Wenger, 2006).

In the first phase of testing the course, 16 participants were trained in addition to 90 hours of self-training in asynchronous mode on the above modules. In the second phase it was the trained teachers and educators themselves who, in turn, organized trainings targeted to the needs of their work context by involving colleagues and local actors. In this second phase, an additional 46 people were trained in the Italian context. In this phase, the course was further tailored to the needs of the local context.

From the trainings carried out in the first and second phases, it emerged that intercultural education is an indispensable need for all those who find themselves working in an educational context with young people, especially the need to acquire intercultural communication skills that enable one to act and communicate neutrally and free of prejudice in multicultural contexts was affirmed. Active listening and cognitive decentralization skills were found to be extremely useful and necessary for the purposes of educational work.

In the module on interculturality, several issues related to intercultural competence, empathy to active listening were explored through active and participatory methodologies and strategies that directly involved the participants themselves. Regarding these themes, special attention was paid to the concept of intercultural competence, understood as the ability to relate and interact positively in multicultural contexts marked by differences. Competence implies a series of transversal skills also related to the personal psychological dimension, which are difficult to quantify and "measure."

The "Social Groups" module focused on the topic of social inclusion and exclusion and the consequences of the latter, especially with reference to the risks of violent and extremist behaviour with a special focus on the influence of groups on individuals in the development of radical behaviour.

The module related to the use of the Internet, as a potential tool for approaching extremist movements, highlights the critical issues that inappropriate use of the Internet can entail for young people by becoming a channel of communication between extremist groups. Related to this part are the digital skills of practitioners, such as knowledge of sites and how young people use them.

Hate speech is now conveyed by social networks and countless digital platforms, and the virtuality of the contexts, as well as the masking of identities, distance such violent acts from the protagonists; young haters may therefore have a distorted perception of their acts, not fully grasping their dangerousness (Pasta, 2018). The risk of the spread of hatred, racism and anti-social behaviour is accentuated by the proliferation of media channels widely frequented by young people, and by the widespread diffusion of mobile devices that make their use easy and

continuous, so much so that some authors speak of the Age of Mobilism (Norris & Soloway, 2011; Ranieri & Pieri, 2014). For digital natives, real action is no longer marked by the opposition between the "offline" physical world and "online" virtuality but has now come to a continuum that Floridi (2017) calls "onlife". Barriers between being outside and inside the Net are cancelled (Rivoltella & Rossi, 2019). Educational agencies all are forced to compete with both the new divergent and creative thinking styles and the more emotionally engaging representations of virtual reality (Rivoltella & Ferrari, 2013). Education professionals play a key role in preventing violent extremism through an ongoing commitment to generating in young people a sense of belonging to a global humanity and building open societies capable of understanding and dealing with contemporary complexity (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2017). For this reason, it is essential to operate specific training directed at professionals who work closely with young people so that the correct interpretation of the phenomena allows the development of prevention strategies to be implemented in educational contexts (Proli, 2021).

In the training conducted, the module "Identifying Risk Behaviors" is aimed at getting young people to understand the signs of risk in behaviors and communication through verbal and nonverbal language, again, the basis on which the whole training course rests is communication skills (verbal and nonverbal).

Finally, the module "Prevention Measures" is practical-operational," offering practical suggestions on how to develop activities and strategies to prevent radicalization in one's own organization, and to build a prevention plan/strategy within it. In this case, multiple generic skills come into play: knowing how to understand a situation, knowing how to interact in a manner appropriate to the circumstances, digital skills, learning to learn skills, and citizenship skills.

3.3. Results

The satisfaction questionnaires administered at the end of the training showed that the blended mode facilitated both self-training on the platform and the creation of cooperative interactions and relationships during in-person meetings (Guerrini & Proli, 2022).

Discussions with colleagues were very important for the participants; the need for continuing education on the proposed topics was stressed by most of them (80%).

The administration of self-assessment questionnaires before and after the training made it possible to detect the effectiveness of the implemented training and its sustainability. In addition, the analysis of the 46 self-assessment questionnaires administered before and after

the training assessed a general increase in knowledge related to the proposed topics with an improvement from 25 percent to 50 percent depending on the topics of reference (Guerrini & Proli, 2022). One of the most interesting aspects that emerged from the final feedback from the participants was precisely the importance they gave to generic skills (such as knowing how to listen, knowing how to converse with young people, knowing how to decentralize from one's own frames of reference) indicated as key to success in the educational relationship, more than specific skills, and above all, the participants identified the difficulties related to the achievement and evaluation of these skills.

Finally, a key aspect according to the participants is the focus and commitment to improving the training of education professionals on issues related to youth distress, through meetings with specialists but also by working in groups with various professionals trying to find concrete answers to everyday problems they themselves face.

4. Conclusions

The topic of generic skills is at the centre of the debate in the initial and in-service training of educators. It is about recognising that there is a circularity and mutual influence in a person's skills, not a separation. Not only do hard skills interact positively with generic skills when they are cultivated, but generic skills can also be seen as the other side of technical competence, what falls to the individual in terms of personal training. The specialised culture inherent to hard skills should be supplemented by a general culture that the school should guarantee, qualifying itself, together with the family, as the most qualified training agency in the training of soft skills (Cegolon, 2023).

Educators graduates will need to be adequately prepared with the necessary generic skills to exploit new technology such as ChatGPT and other large language model artificial intelligence (AI) systems, and a detailed understanding of the risks of using it and related ethical aspects to maximize their employability (Wilkinson, 2024).

It has been demonstrated how the acquisition of generic skills makes it possible to create, develop and manage effective group relationships, increase individual motivation levels and acquire awareness, goal orientation, adaptability, lateral thinking as well as communication skills, skills considered essential in all contexts of action (CEDEFOP, 2023; Rani, 2010; Robles, 2012).

The implication of the generic skills issue is precisely the indirect recovery of humanism at the heart of the human resources economy, through an updating of the concept of general culture. In essence, it is a matter of recovering the core of the humanistic idea of education and training

advocated by Martha Nussbaum in her text significantly entitled *Cultivating Humanity. A Classical Defense of in Liberal Education* (1997). The concept of general culture is taken up in relation to liberal education as “a higher education that aims to cultivate the whole human being for the purposes of citizenship and life in general” (Nussbaum, 2006, p. 13).

As far as the training of educators is concerned, a crucial issue is to think about the educator's training and competences in tune with the needs of society. The educator is a promoter and facilitator of training processes; therefore he/she must be an interpreter of educational needs from childhood to elderly with particular attention to vulnerable persons with a higher risk of social exclusion. From this point of view, it is necessary to consider that, in addition to psychological skills (listening, communication, empathy, etc.) and specific skills to carry out one's role, intercultural competences are needed (Portera, 2022; Reggio & Santerini, 2017) to understand cultures, reduce prejudices, search for shared horizons and promote equal and inclusive relations between members of different cultures, in order to promote the training of young people willing to deal with diversity and question stereotypes and commonplaces.

5. References

- Balzano, G. (2023). Soft skills e povertà educative: l'importanza dell'educare alla scelta. *Il Nodo. Per una pedagogia della persona*, 53(27), 35-42.
- Boffo, V., Iavarone, M. L., Nosari, S., & Nuzzaci, A. (2023). The European LifeComp model between Embedded Learning and Adult Education. *Form@re*, 23(1), 1-4. <https://doi.org/10.36253/form-14245>
- Cambi, F. (Ed.). (2010). *Media education tra formazione e scuola*. Pisa: ETS.
- Carretero Gomez, S., Vuorikari, R., & Punie, Y. (2017). *DigComp 2.1: The Digital Competence Framework for Citizens with eight proficiency levels and examples of use*. Publications Office of the European Union.
- Cegolon, A. (2023). Soft skills e cultura generale. *Form@re*, 23(1), 112-122. <https://doi.org/10.36253/form-13757>
- Cera, R. (2023). Well-being in adult education: LifeComp, revisione e correlazioni tra competenze. *Epale Journal*, 13, 24-31.
- Chiappetta Cajola, L., & Traversetti, M. (2018). L'educatore professionale socio-pedagogico nei servizi educativi e scolastici tra sviluppo sostenibile e governance inclusiva: alcuni dati di ricerca. *ECPS Journal*, 17, 113-138. <http://dx.doi.org/10.7358/ecps-2018-017- chia>
- Ciappei, C., & Cinque, M. (2014). *Soft skills per il governo dell'agire*. Franco Angeli.
- Cimò, E. (Ed.). (2019). *I quaderni di Eurydice Italia. Strutture dei sistemi educativi europei: diagrammi 2019/2020*. Ediguida S.r.l. <https://eurydice.indire.it/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Eurydice-43 WEB.pdf>
- Cinque, M., & Dessardo, A. (2020). Soft skills and inter-disciplinarity as core contents for the education of educative professionals. *Form@re*, 20(2), 169-185. <http://dx.doi.org/10.13128/form-9056>
- Crescenza, G., & Leggieri, M. (2024). Revealing and countering violence and Hate Speech. Analysis and pedagogical perspectives from a university experience. *Q-Times. Journal of Education*, 26(1), 637-651.
- Cyrulnik, B. (2001). *Costruire la resilienza. La riorganizzazione positiva della vita e la creazione di legami significativi*. Erickson.

- De Martino, E. (1977). *La fine del mondo. Contributo all'analisi delle apocalissi culturali*. Einaudi.
- European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training. (2023). *Skills in transition: the way to 2035*. Luxembourg.
- European Commission (2011). *Supporting growth and jobs – an agenda for the modernisation of Europe's higher education systems*.
- European Council (2018). COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION on key competences for lifelong learning.
- European Union (2006). Recommendation No. 962 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning.
- European Commission (2023). https://year-of-skills.europa.eu/index_en?prefLang=it
- Fabbri, L. (2007). *Comunità di pratiche e apprendimento riflessivo. Per una formazione situata*. Carocci.
- Ferrantino, C., Tiso, M., & Iannotta, I. S. (2024). La promozione delle soft skill a scuola per il potenziamento delle attività cognitive. *Mizar. Costellazione di pensieri*, 20, (1), 72-84.
- Ferrari, S., & Pasta, S. (2023). Information Literacy: l'istanza educativa centrale per la declinazione delle competenze digitali. *Annali online della Didattica e della Formazione Docente*, 15(26), 170-192.
- Fiorucci, M. (2017). Educatori e mediatori culturali: elementi per la formazione interculturale degli educatori. *Pedagogia Oggi*, 15(2), 75-90.
- Floridi, L. (2017). *La quarta rivoluzione. Come l'infosfera sta trasformando il mondo*. Raffaello Cortina.
- Freire, P. (2017). *Le virtù dell'educatore*. EDB.
- González, J., & Wagenaar, R. (2008). *Universities' contribution to the Bologna Process*. European Commission.
- Guerrini, V. (2022). La prevenzione dei comportamenti estremisti nei giovani per una società più inclusiva e resiliente. Il ruolo della formazione continua degli educatori. *Pedagogia Oggi*, 20(2), 111-117.

- Guerrini, V., & Proli, M. G. (2022). La prevenzione dei comportamenti estremisti nei giovani attraverso approcci formativi artistici. L'esperienza europea del CineCommunity. *Formazione & Insegnamento*, 20(2), 411-424.
- lori, V. (2018). *Educatori e Pedagogisti*. Erickson.
- Istituto per lo sviluppo della formazione professionale dei lavoratori. (1998). *Unità capitalizzabili e crediti formativi. I repertori sperimentali*. FrancoAngeli.
- Istituto per lo sviluppo della formazione professionale dei lavoratori. (2012). *Rapporto ISFOL 2012. Le competenze per l'occupazione e la crescita*. ISFOL.
- ISTAT, National Institute of Statistics (2022). <https://www.istat.it/comunicato-stampa/le-condizioni-di-vita-dei-minori-anno-2022/>
- Lamri, J., & Lubart, T. (2023). Reconciling Hard Skills and Soft Skills in a Common Framework: The Generic Skills Component Approach. *Journal of Intelligence*, 11(6), 107. <https://doi.org/10.3390/jintelligence11060107>
- Langer, A. (1995). *La scelta della convivenza*. E/O.
- Levy, F., & Cannon, C. (2016). *The Bloomberg Job Skills Report 2016: What Recruiters Want*. <https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/2016-job-skills-report/>
- Livingstone, S., Mascheroni, G., & Stoilova, M. (2023). The outcomes of gaining digital skills for young people's lives and wellbeing: A systematic evidence review. *New Media & Society*, 25(5), 1176-1202. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448211043189>
- Luzzatto, G., Mangano, S., Moscati, R., & Pieri, M. (2012, 27 - 28 settembre). *Occupabilità e competenze dei laureati in Italia* [Conferenza]. Conferenza Internazionale sull'Occupabilità dei Laureati e Superiori Educazione Gestione Sistemi Lubiana Slovenia, Università di Ljubljana, Slovenia. https://centroriformastato.it/wp-content/uploads/Occupazione_e_competenze_dei_laureati-Lubiana_28-09-12.pdf
- Mancaniello, R. (2020). Adolescenti al tempo del Covid-19: una riflessione sul significato di vivere "attimi della catastrofe adolescenziale" in uno spazio-tempo negato, nella separazione corporea dal gruppo dei pari e in una relazione scolastica digitale. *Studi sulla Formazione*, 23(1), 21-51.
- Mariani, A., Cambi, F., Sarsini, D., & Giosi, M. (Eds.). (2017). *Pedagogia generale. Identità, percorsi, funzione*. Carocci.

- Mezirow, J. (2003). *Apprendimento e trasformazione*. Raffaello Cortina.
- Mori, S., Giunti, C., & Faggioli, C. (2019). Promuovere la partecipazione attiva e le soft skills nei corsi e-learning: dalla teoria alla pratica. *Studi sulla formazione*, 22(2), 397-408.
- Morin, E. (2017). *La sfida della complessità*. Le Lettere.
- Motsching, R., & Ryback, D. (2016). *Transforming Communication in Leadership and Teamwork*. Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-45486-3>
- Norris, C. A., & Soloway, E. (2011). Learning and Schooling in the Age of Mobilism. *Education Technology*, 51(6), 3-10.
- Nussbaum, M. (2006). *Coltivare l'umanità. I classici, il multiculturalismo, l'educazione contemporanea*. Carocci.
- Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2003). *Annual Report*. OECD. <https://doi.org/10.1787/annrep-2003-en>
- Panciroli, C., & Rivoltella P. C. (2023). *Pedagogia algoritmica. Per una riflessione educativa sull'Intelligenza Artificiale*. Scholé.
- Pasta, S. (2018). *Razzismi 2.0*. Scholé.
- Portera, A. (2022). *Educazione e Pedagogia interculturale*. Il Mulino.
- Prolì, M. G. (2021). Prevenire i comportamenti antisociali e la radicalizzazione dei giovani attraverso Internet. L'esperienza del progetto europeo DIVE IN. *Rivista Italiana di Educazione Familiare*, 19(2), 147-158. <https://doi.org/10.36253/rief-10653>
- Rani, S. (2010). Need for and Importance of Soft Skills in Students. *Journal of Literature, Culture and Media Studies*, 2(3), 1-6.
- Ranieri, M., & Pieri, M. (2014). *Mobile learning*. Unicopli.
- Reggio, P., & Santerini, M. (Eds.). (2017). *Le competenze interculturali nel lavoro educativo*. Carocci.
- Rivoltella, P. C., & Rossi, P. G. (Eds.). (2019). *Tecnologie per l'educazione*. Pearson.
- Rivoltella, P. C., & Ferrari, S. (2013). Educare ai new media in ambito familiare. Riflessioni pedagogiche. En E. Scabini, & G. Rossi (Eds.), *Famiglia e nuovi media* (pp. 22-26). Vita e Pensiero.

- Robles, M. (2012). Executive Perceptions of the Top 10 Soft Skills Needed in Today's Workplace. *Business Communication Quarterly*, 75, 453-465. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1080569912460400>
- Robins, K., & Webster, F. (1999). *Times of Technoculture. From the Information Society to the Virtual Life*. Routledge.
- Romano, A. (2017). Risvolti professionali nell'iter della Proposta di Legge Iori: riflessioni in chiave organizzativa. *Ricerche di Pedagogia e Didattica - Journal of Theories and Research in Education*, 12(2), 293-313.
- Santerini, M. (2021). *La mente ostile. Forme dell'odio contemporaneo*. Raffaello Cortina.
- Schön, D. A. (1983). *Il professionista riflessivo*. Dedalo.
- Sclavi, M. (2003). *Arte di ascoltare e mondi possibili*. Mondadori.
- Shulla, K., Filho, W. L., Lardjane, S., Sommer, J. H., & Borgemeister, C. (2020). Sustainable development education in the context of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development. *International Journal of Sustainable Development & World Ecology*, 27(5), 458-468. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504509.2020.1721378>
- Tramma, S. (2018). *L'educatore imperfetto. Senso e complessità del lavoro educativo*. Carocci.
- Tramma, S. (2019). Il tempo e la società dell'apprendimento permanente: opportunità, contraddizioni e nuove forme di emarginazione. *Pedagogia Oggi*, 2, 217-229.
- United Nations. (2015). *Sustainable Development Goals. Agenda 2030*, UN.
- United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. (2017). *A Guide for ensuring inclusion and equity in education*. UNESCO. <https://doi.org/10.54675/MHHZ2237>
- Wenger, E. (2006). *Comunità di pratica. Apprendimento, significato e identità*. Raffaello Cortina.
- World Health Organization. (1993). *Life Skills Education in Schools. Skills for Life*. WHO.
- Wilkinson, G. G. (2024). Enhancing Generic Skills Development in Higher Education in the Era of Large Language Model Artificial Intelligence. *Journal of Higher Education Theory and Practice*, 24(3), 64-76. <https://doi.org/10.33423/jhetp.v24i3.6832>
- Zouaoui, I., Drolet, M. J., & Briand, C. (2023). Defining generic skills to better support the development of future health professionals: results from a scoping review. *Higher*

Education Research & Development, 43(2), 503-520.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2023.2234312>