

Eighty Years After the Nobel Prize:
Gabriela Mistral and The Education of the Downtrodden of Latin America

Gabriela Mistral y México

Power to the People, Danilo Dolci: A Life Lived Intensely

After-school activism within the state school system and within the neighbourhood:
the “Scuoletta” case study in San Lorenzo (Rome)

Reckoning and reflecting with the multiple crises of our times:
translocal social movement learning

Critical Literacy and Social Justice; UNESCO Chair Annual Seminar; CALE 2025

Connecting Communities for Collective Action:
Report on the 2025 AONTAS Adult Education Summit

In Memoriam:
Francisco (Paco) Vio Grossi, Pierre Dominice, André Schläfli

Book Reviews

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Editorial

Volume 46 draws to a close with its second issue, this time celebrating the memory of two important educators, one from Latin America and one from Italy whose main stomping ground for his community education and action was Sicily. These are Gabriela Mistral and Danilo Dolci. There were anniversaries concerning each close to the date of publication of this issue.

2024 marked the birth centenary of critical community educator Danilo Dolci who features in an article written by one of his collaborators in his later years, school teacher Patrizia Morgante, author also of a book on Dolci which is reviewed by the undersigned also in this issue. Dolci's featuring in a journal such as this is long overdue. The article should be a boon for all those educating in the context of community development.

2025 marked the 80th year since Lucila Godoy Alcayaga , better and widely known by her pen name, Gabriela Mistral, became the first Latin American recipient of the Nobel Prize. This was the prize for literature where she was soon to be followed by another Chilean poet, her friend Pablo Neruda. As the two articles in this issue reveal, Mistral also made her mark in diplomacy and especially education. Her work in the context of rural and Indigenous education in her own Chile and in education more generally in Mexico renders her a leading figure in Latin American education. Both Dolci and Mistral were educators who “ rode the winged horse”, as W.B. Yeats would say of Patrick Pearce. Many of their ideas concerning education and community engagement were expressed not only in articles and speeches but also in verse. Quite memorable is Gabriela Mistral's ‘ La Maestra Rural’ which contains in verse stanzas elements for an entire educational philosophy. The two articles on her are fittingly penned by a fellow Chilean, Carola Gabriela Sepúlveda Vásquez and a Mexican researcher, Sylvia Schmelkes. Both represent Mistral’s main terrains of operation and Praxis.

The other paper in this issue, by Jonathan Langdon, Sheen Cameron, Loretta Baidoo and Ro Paradela, all based in Canada, deals with translocal learning within social movements, via a network rooted in Ghana, South Africa and Canada. This piece should add to the ever expanding literature on social movements and their constant promise of global democracy from below. These include the many Subaltern 'Southern' Social Movements about which Dip Kapoor wrote so extensively. Alas Dip is no more. He will be remembered in an In MEMORIAM piece in the next Spring issue. A former colleague and collaborator has already been lined up for this purpose. This issue however pays tribute to three erstwhile adult educators who passed away around this time, namely Francisco 'Paco' Vio Grossi, Pierre Dominicé and André Schläfli. Alas, IN MEMORIAM is becoming a constant feature of *Convergence. An International Adult Education Journal*. As some of those who keep penning them remark, this is becoming a regular occurrence.

On a happier note, the issue highlights three events, a symposium, a small seminar and a large bi-annual International Conference, the latter on Critical Adult Learning and Education (CALE 2025). It also comprises a report on a huge AONTAS Adult Education Summit held at the conference facilities at Dublin's Lansdowne Road's AVIVA Stadium. News of other such events from different parts of the world are most welcome for future issues of the Journal.

Eighty Years After the Nobel Prize: Gabriela Mistral and the Education of the Downtrodden of Latin America¹

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Gabriela Mistral: Some Biographical Notes

Gabriela Mistral was a teacher, writer, diplomat, and recipient of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1945. She was the first Latin American person to receive this recognition and remains, to this day, the only woman from the region to have done so. Gabriela Mistral is the pseudonym of Lucila de María del Perpetuo Socorro Godoy Alcayaga. She chose it after several attempts to “name herself” as a writer, and began using it after winning the literary contest Juegos Florales in Chile in 1914.

Lucila was born in Vicuña (northern Chile) on April 7, 1889. She grew up surrounded by women—her grandmother, mother, and sister—all of whom had a strong influence on her life and education. Her father was present only through imagination, as he abandoned the family when Lucila was three years old. Her relationship with nature was very important during her childhood. It allowed her to develop sensitivities and ways of knowing linked to ancestral and rural knowledge, which resisted traditional and Western forms of teaching, while at the same time significantly nourishing her self-education. The joy and appreciation she expressed in her narratives about her non-formal and informal education contrast with the narratives of exclusion that were common in Mistral’s reflections on her school experience, her professional training, and her relationship with Chile’s circles of power.

¹ This text was translated from Spanish to English by Matías Suárez Godoy, MA. E-mail: matias.suarezgodoy@gmail.com

This is highly significant because the “Nobel Prize Mistral” was formed mainly outside of school, particularly through non-formal and informal education experiences—something that, in many ways, challenges conventional conceptions of education. From a young age, Mistral began writing in regional newspapers about topics considered “unusual” for a woman—provincial and poor—especially in a society and an era marked by socioeconomic and gender exclusions, among others (Manzano, 2008; Pizarro, 2008). According to the author herself, those exclusions made it difficult for her to apply to the Escuela Normal (Teacher Training School) in Chile. Thus, through a distant and complex relationship with formal education, Mistral developed her own strategies to continue learning in alternative ways—for example, by studying alongside her sister, who was a teacher.

In 1922, invited by the Mexican government, Mistral left Chile and became what she called an “autoexile,” a term she used to emphasize the voluntary nature of her departure from her homeland. In Mexico, she lived transformative experiences and became a “citizen of the world.” After her time in Mexico, Mistral lived in various countries, circulating her writing widely—and she never again lived in Chile. Mistral received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1945, while serving as Chile’s consul in Brazil. From that moment on, her prestige as a writer grew and manifested, for example, in the efforts of intellectuals and artists to defend her right to the Chilean National Literature Prize, which she received six years after the Nobel. She died in 1957, in New York—as she said in one of her poems—in “una muerte callada y extranjera” (Mistral, 2010, p. 283).

Gabriela Mistral and the Education of the “Downtrodden” of Latin America

Gabriela Mistral coined the term “*abajados*” (the “downtrodden”) to represent the majority of people in Latin America who were, paradoxically, a political minority—those diminished by those in power. As Magda Sepúlveda notes, “la invención de la palabra es notable, solo “*abajada*” nos da esa idea de aquello que es reducido en un intento por hacerlos funcionar solo como “cosa” pequeña, como “nonada”, otra palabra mistraliana, relativa al ninguneo social chileno” (Sepúlveda, 2011, p. 90).

Mistral did not see this category as a generalization; she recognized within it women, children, Indigenous peoples, peasants, workers, and those living in conditions of confinement or deprivation of liberty,

among others. It is also significant that her concern for the “*abajados*” and their education was expressed through the visibility she gave this topic in her writings, through the circulation of her texts in Latin American newspapers containing information she deemed useful for the educational development of these groups, through the valuing of their knowledge, and through the construction of more democratic pedagogical practices. All of this was accompanied by an identity-based reflection that left autobiographical traces in her writing.

A distinctive aspect I recognize in Mistral is that she not only constructed discourses about the education of the “*abajados*,” but also developed practices that, in contemporary terms, we might consider inclusive. I see in her a critical and transgressive attitude toward gender, ethnic, and class models, which often led her to be considered “inappropriate,” as she included, made visible, and gave space to what was usually left unspoken — the stories of the excluded, of those “*abajados*,” as she called them. For Magda Sepúlveda, education — in Mistral’s poetry, and I would say, in her writing as a whole —

no es un traje, algo que se impone a “otro”, sino una experiencia que reside en prácticas a veces no consideradas por la hegemonía. Son visibles, en sus textos, conocimientos que se diluyen en la modernidad, los nombres populares de diversas plantas, la reparación de redes de las pescadoras o el tejido a telar de las andinas. (Sepúlveda, 2018, p. 33).

Women, Writing, Reading and Latin American Authors

Regarding women’s education, Mistral published in 1906 — when she was about to turn 17 — a text considered pioneering in this field. It was titled “*La instrucción de la mujer*” (“Women’s Education”). In it, she wrote:

Se ha dicho que la mujer no necesita sino una mediana instrucción, y es que aún hay quienes ven en ella al ser capaz sólo de gobernar el hogar.

La instrucción suya, es una obra magna que lleva en sí la reforma completa de todo un sexo.

(...) Instruir a la mujer es hacerla digna y levantarla. Abrirle un campo más vasto de porvenir, es arrancar a la degradación muchas de sus víctimas. (Mistral, 2017a, p. 142).

Throughout her career as a writer and teacher, Mistral was deeply concerned with women's education. She worked as a teacher and principal in girls' high schools (*liceos*) in Chile, published "*Lecturas para mujeres*" (*Readings for Women*) in Mexico in 1923 at the request of the country's Ministry of Public Education, and carried out several initiatives aimed at democratizing women's access to education, among other efforts. Speaking of her experience in Mexico and the *Lecturas para mujeres* project, Mistral said: "Ha sido para la pequeña maestra chilena una honra servir por algún tiempo a un gobierno extranjero que se ha hecho respetable en el Continente por una labor constructiva de educación tan enorme" (Mistral, 1979a, p. 111).

Following Carla Ulloa's *Expansión*, this book "se planeó como un libro temático al cual acudir en caso de necesitar reflexiones, miradas amplias o palabras sabias sobre aspectos centrales para las estudiantes" (Ulloa, 2022, p. 192). Comprising 227 texts (23 written by Mistral), it included expansion by 54 Latin Americans, 18 Mexicans, two U.S. authors, one Asian expansion, six ancient/*Expansión* texts, and 38 Europeans – a total of 101 authors (Ulloa, 2022, p. 192). I highlight Mistral's *Expansión* of Latin American authors because it made visible an expansion not always considered in such compilations at the time. Likewise, her expressed wish that this book accompany the teachers and girls of the school that would bear her name can be interpreted as an invitation to a *Expansion experience* – for example, through the expansion of the literary canon.

Another experience worth noting is that, during her tenure as principal of the *Liceo de Niñas de Punta Arenas* (1918–1920), in southern Chile, Mistral proposed the creation of a library with two sections: one for children and another for the general public. The first would serve the students of the school itself, and the second would serve working women who attended evening courses at the *Sociedad de Instrucción Popular* (Society for Popular Education), with the hope that, as the collection grew, it could also open its doors to students from public schools and to the wider community (Mistral cited in Scarpa, 1978, pp. 141–142).

Childhoods, Teachers and "Recovered Voices"

Childhood and education are deeply present in Mistral's work. She made visible the diversity of childhoods, their complexities, and their experiences. An example of this is the text "*El obrerito*" (1924), in which Mistral defines the lyrical speaker as a child.

Following Norma Ramos, we can highlight how, in her attention to childhoods, Mistral was concerned with the spaces where children should be educated, emphasizing in her prose writings the importance of raising them in harmony with nature (Ramos, 2014, p. 200). According to Ramos, this image created by Mistral contrasts greatly with utilitarian representations that linked children to agricultural labor or to the rationalization of the environment in the name of progress: “Esta relación fundamental, naturaleza-niñez, que plasmó la pluma de Mistral, sintetiza un perfil más del niño campesino equiparándolo con los dones de la naturaleza como la pureza y la vitalidad” (Ramos, 2014, p. 201).

Mistral’s concern for rural and peasant childhoods is evident in her text *“How an Agricultural School Was Created in Mexico,”* published in 1922, where she recounts her experiences visiting the Francisco I. Madero Agricultural School. Reflecting on this experience, Mistral asked: “¿Qué serán estos niños en diez años más? ¿Qué los diferenciará de los otros, formados en las escuelas primarias?” (Mistral, 2017b, p. 265).

She then answers:

Serán eso que es para mí lo más grande en medio de las actividades humanas: hombres de la tierra, sensatos, sobrios y serenos, por el contacto con aquella que es la perenne verdad. Harán una democracia menos convulsionada y menos discursadora que la que nos ha nacido en la América Latina, porque, hay que decir mil veces este lugar común: la pequeña propiedad (que ellos exigirán y que conseguirán en México) aplaca las rebeldías, la dignidad a la vida humana y hace el corazón del hombre propicio a las suavidades del espíritu. (Mistral, 2017b, p. 265).

According to Martha Leñero, in this text Mistral speaks of “*recovered voices*.” The scholar notes that Mistral,

además de contar cómo llega ahí, de preguntarse por qué la llevan a ver una de las escuelas más pobres y, luego, de ‘maravillarse’ por lo que ve cuando descubre a los alumnos sembrando parcelas, llama la atención la centralidad que otorga en su texto a la voz del maestro. (Leñero, 2023, p. 117).

Leñero adds that Mistral intersperses the narration of teacher Arturo Oropeza with brief “comments” of her own and, at other times,

cede por completo el lugar de enunciación al maestro, el enorme parecido que este modo de escritura guarda con lo que ahora conocemos como investigación etnográfica en educación, en la que leemos, literal y textualmente, a las y los protagonistas y actores de nuestros trabajos de investigación. Es así como Gabriela inserta un estilo que se convertirá en uno de los requisitos de nuestra forma de investigar en, desde y para la escuela. Pionera, entonces, en múltiples sentidos. (Leñero, 2023, p. 118).

‘ Make My Brick School a School of the Spirit’: Frontiers, Conversation and “Guests”

During her time as principal of the *Liceo de Niñas de Punta Arenas*, Mistral developed a series of initiatives that, in her words, sought the well-being of her students and of the local community in general. Her initiatives included, for example, the creation of libraries, the proposal to establish winter vacations, and the celebration of Christmas.

I highlight Mistral’s recognition of the “apostolic” role of the teachers who worked alongside her. On this, she wrote:

Mis compañeras iban a enseñar al más curiosos alumnado que yo recuerde. Menos defendida del hielo que el hiperbóreo europeo, aquella buena gente- mujeres y hasta niñas-llegaban sacudiéndose la nieve al umbral y entraba a la sala con el hálito hecho vaho, dándonos el rostro rojo y duro que hace el frío parecida al pellejo del pececillo rojo. (Mistral, 1978, p. 370)

In “that land of long night,” as Mistral called it, a solidarity among women began to take shape, leading them to unite in pursuit of greater educational opportunities. Mistral, for example, developed *tactics* (De Certeau, 1994) that made possible new pedagogical forms — one example being the inclusion of “conversation.” As she described:

Después de la hora del Silabario, yo daba otra de “conversación”. Incrédula como hoy de la “pedagogía pura”, receta de maestros entecos, yo me pondría a hablarles de su propia vida, de las contingencias que se trae el vivir entre elementos hostiles -hielo y puelche-, y de la obligación de ver la *unidad*, “contra viento y marea”, a pesar del tajo del mar

enfurruñado y el desparramo loco de islas. (Mistral, 1978, p. 370; emphasis mine)

These “conversation hours,” where Mistral recovered lived experience, its contingencies, and the duty to “see unity,” are both interesting and transgressive, as they represent efforts to build more intimate and human-centered pedagogical forms. I also highlight her recovery of the concept of *experience* and its transmission, which relates to the idea of narration in the *Benjaminian* sense (Benjamin, 1994).

In Mistralian narratives appeared the counsel, the warning, the congratulations—elements so present in the author’s “messenger” narratives. This choice of conversation reveals Mistral’s appreciation for orality, a characteristic element of her narratives, in which, by incorporating sensitivity, she established a distance from traditional pedagogy, from that “pure pedagogy” she distrusted. With this type of pedagogy, removed from absolute rationality, the author reclaimed her rural tradition and approached other audiences—those who had been historically “brought down.”

Gabriela Mistral’s critiques of traditional pedagogy also included a call to teachers to be active and to attentively and permanently safeguard pedagogical truths. As she herself said:

Las viejas verdades pedagógicas son como las del Evangelio: todos las conocemos, pero deben ser agitadas de cuando en cuando, para que exalten los ánimos como el flamear de las banderas y para renovar su generoso hervor dentro de nosotros. Verdades conocidas pero aletargadas, son verdades muertas, fardo inerte. Los maestros hemos de ser en los pueblos los renovadores del fervor, respecto de ellas.

No tenemos derecho, a pesar de las indiferencias que conocemos y de las incomprensiones que nos han herido, a dejar verdades que se enmohezcan en los demás. Somos los que hacemos su guardia a través de los tiempos. (Mistral, 2015, p. 43).

I consider it significant to highlight that the author referred to willpower as an important element in people. As she said, if one did not possess eloquence, one possessed will—“ese oro de los pobres, con el cual puede hacerse tanto en el mundo” (Mistral, 2015, p. 44). These conceptions are

what grounded and inspired the creation of “night courses” at the lyceum, oriented toward women who had interrupted their schooling, being, in the author’s own words, the first initiative of its kind in the provinces (Mistral, 2015, p. 44).

This idea of opening the doors of the lyceum to women and to the community in general is understood through the concept of school that the author develops, as she conceives it as a space of “negation of castes” Mistral said:

La asistencia común a una escuela como la asistencia común a un templo de gentes de distinta condición no degrada a nadie, porque la escuela es la negación de las castas si es cristiana de verdad y si educa mujeres de una república de verdad también. (Mistral, 2015, p. 46).

Recalling her work in Punta Arenas, Mistral narrated in detail the occasion when two political prisoners came to visit her in her night course. She said:

(...) una noche vi llegar gente extraña a la sala y sentarse hacia el fondo, familiarmente. Daba yo una charla de Geografía regional; me había volteado los sesos delante de aquella zona de tragedia terráquea, hecha de desplazamiento y de resistencias, infierno de golfos y cabos y sartal de archipiélagos.

Al salir, el grupo forastero se allegó a saludarme. Dos reos políticos del Presidio de Ushuaia habían sabido de ese curso nocturno y tan informal, quisieron ir a verme, y se les sumaron unos chilenos inéditos para mis ojos. (Mistral, 1978, p. 370).

Those contacts with the “brought down,” those people in situations of exclusion—women, political prisoners, and Chileans “unknown to her eyes”—both captivated and challenged Mistral to experiment with new forms of pedagogy closer to the contexts of those who attended her classes. She said:

La masa de un pueblo necesita capacitar, en breve tiempo, a sus hombres y a sus mujeres para la lucha por la vida. Hemos tenido la monstruosidad de enseñar durante 50 años los mismos programas con sólo variantes pequeñas. Durante este

período de tiempo, enorme en relación con los progresos febriles de la época, se han dictado leyes que han cambiado la faz espiritual de la nación; han nacido nuevas ciudades y se han transformado las antiguas, y la enseñanza, que debe iniciar las renovaciones, se ha quedado tras de todas ellas. No es que hayan faltado grandes maestros, ni que la instrucción haya sido insuficiente; nuestros educadores son gloria americana y la instrucción dada ha sido tal vez excesiva; fue el rumbo el erróneo; no ha mirado nuestra educación a las realidades de su tiempo, ha pecado de libresca. (Mistral, 2015, p. 48-49).

Mistral understood pedagogy as welcoming and accompaniment. Proof of this is that she referred to those who attended her “conversations” as guests. Of them, she said:

Mis huéspedes volverían solos después, y traerían a otros más, calculando siempre la salida de las alumnas nocturnas, para hablar a su gusto, mudos que soltaban la lengua perdiendo el miedo y que regresaban para no cortar el relato, por “contar muchísimo más”. (Mistral, 1978, p. 371. Sic).

The image: “ bringing culture to the last stronghold of a mountain range and even to prisons.”

I take up that phrase from Mistral in this title to recognize that one of her concerns regarding the education of excluded subjects was the creation of methodologies; thus, she used conversation and also reflected on the use of the image in education. She considered the image “as a kind of super-word, which avoids all error and convinces much more than the mere written or spoken word” (Mistral, 1979b, p. 204) and highlighted the possibilities its use would offer in rural, remote, or confined contexts, saying:

Es increíble la ignorancia en que viven los pueblos rurales respecto de nuestra época. Aunque llegue a ellos el cine, lo que de él alcanza a las aldeas y hasta a las ciudades pequeñas es un material calamitoso o tonto de amorfos o de crímenes, cuando no son unas necias historias seudocómicas que sólo hacen reír a los niños de las galerías. Ninguna época tuvo como la nuestra ocasión tan preciosa y ancha para educar a las masas haciendo llegar la cultura hasta el último reducto de

una cordillera y hasta las cárceles, donde no se da a centenares de presos la ocasión de aprender un oficio, ni de leer un libro sano, ni de ver una película que les muestre las maravillas que logra el trabajo de los hombres normales y las otras mayores que alcanzan los sabios de nuestra época. (Mistral, 1979b, p. 202).

To speak on this matter, she recalled her experience in Mexico with the “open-air schools” and narrated:

Había una mesita, una radio y un maestro rural de tipo apostólico, que renunciando a su descanso nocturno doblaba las clases diurnas con las nocturnas y esto con paga o sin ella. Yo llamaba esto la “escuela sin horas y sin techos”. Guardo el recuerdo de esas y de otras invenciones geniales del gran reformador José Vasconcelos, quien alfabetizó con la ayuda de los maestros misioneros, del cine y de la radio a millares de campesinos. (Mistral, 1979b, p. 199)

Eighty Years after the Nobel Prize: Some Reflections

I conclude my work with the photograph of the courtyard of an elementary school in Santiago, Chile, during the celebration of the first Gabriela Mistral Day, on April 7, 2025—an official commemoration instituted by Gabriel Boric, President of Chile.



Source: photography by Nancy Vásquez Pacheco.

This photograph allows me to recognize schools and their communities as creative and resistant spaces and subjects, who find in Gabriela Mistral a reference point in times when, as a country, we are deconstructing the dictatorial legacy of Augusto Pinochet.

Analyzing the processes of exclusion and inclusion in the history of education allows us to recover Mistral's experiences as an author who self-identified as "brought down" and who, in her writings, reclaimed the "brought down" subjects of Latin America, coherently including them in her narratives and pedagogical practices. Recovering Mistral's experiences and teachings allows us to reflect on the meanings of our own work.

Finally, I hope that the commemoration of the 80th anniversary of Gabriela Mistral's Nobel Prize will allow us to build spaces for reflection and study of the author. I also hope that we learn to listen to Mistral's *recados* (messages) in order to recognize who the "brought down" are today, and that, inspired by her and her work, we may defend education as a space for the negation of castes.

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Eighty years after the Nobel Prize. Gabriela Mistral and the Education of the downtrodden in Latin America

Carola Gabriela Sepúlveda Vásquez

Abstract. This text aims to analyze the writing of Gabriela Mistral in order to recognize the presence of those she considered the "downtrodden" of Latin America, and to examine how she made visible and problematized the education of these subjects, including them in her discourses and practices, and committing herself to them from an autobiographical perspective. In light of this revisionist moment, the commemoration of the 80th anniversary of her Nobel Prize becomes an important occasion to discuss the traditional readings of the author and her work—readings mainly constructed during the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet in Chile—which rendered invisible her work as a teacher and intellectual concerned with those excluded from Latin American modernities.

Keywords: Gabriela Mistral, education, “abajados”, excluded, Latin America

Quatre-vingts ans après le prix Nobel. Gabriela Mistral et l'éducation des opprimés

Carola Gabriela Sepúlveda Vásquez

Résumé. Ce texte vise à analyser l'œuvre de Gabriela Mistral afin de reconnaître la présence de ceux qu'elle considérait comme les « opprimés » de l'Amérique latine, et d'examiner comment elle a rendu visible et problématisé l'éducation de ces sujets, en les incluant dans ses discours et ses pratiques, et en s'engageant envers eux dans une perspective autobiographique. À la lumière de ce moment révisionniste, la commémoration du 80e anniversaire de son prix Nobel devient une occasion importante pour discuter des lectures traditionnelles de l'auteure et de son œuvre – lectures principalement construites pendant la dictature d'Augusto Pinochet au Chili – qui ont rendu invisible son travail en tant qu'enseignante et intellectuelle préoccupée par les exclus des modernités latino-américaines.

Mots clés: Gabriela Mistral, éducation, « abajados », exclus, Amérique latine.

Ochenta años despues del Premio Nobel. Gabriela Mistral y l'educación de los oprimidos en America Latina.

Carola Gabriela Sepúlveda Vásquez

Resumen. El presente texto tiene como objetivo analizar la escritura de Gabriela Mistral para reconocer la presencia de quienes ella consideraba “abajados” de América Latina y como fue visibilizando y problematizando la educación de estos sujetos, incluyéndolos en sus discursos y prácticas, y comprometiéndose con ellos a partir de una mirada autobiográfica. A la luz de este momento revisionista, la conmemoración de los 80 años de su Premio Nobel, cobra importancia

discutir las lecturas tradicionales sobre la autora y su obra, construidas principalmente por la dictadura de Augusto Pinochet en Chile, que invisibilizaron su trabajo como profesora e intelectual preocupada con los sujetos excluidos de las modernidades latinoamericanas.

Palabras clave: Gabriela Mistral, educación, “abajados”, excluidos, América Latina.

Gabriela Mistral y México¹

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Maestra Educación Primaria en retiro

Este artículo forma parte de la celebración del 80° aniversario del premio nobel de literatura otorgado a Gabriela Mistral, primera persona latinoamericana y la primera (y única a la fecha) mujer latinoamericana en recibirlo. Está enfocado a la relación de Gabriela Mistral con México. Su estancia en México la marcó a ella, y también dejó profunda huella en este país, patria de quien esto escribe.

Algunos antecedentes de ambos lados son necesarios

Gabriela Mistral es autodidácta. Terminó su escolaridad formal a los 13 años, y a los 15 ya era maestra en una escuela primaria. A los 25 años ganó el Premio de los Juegos Florales por sus “Sonetos de la Muerte”, y en parte a causa de ello fue nombrada directora de una secundaria para señoritas en Santiago de Chile. Ganar ese premio la dio a conocer, y gracias a ello José Vasconcelos la leyó y se convenció de que tenía que invitarla a México. Gabriela Mistral fue invitada por José Vasconcelos, primer Secretario de Educación Pública de México en 1922.

¹ Presentación realizada en el Gabriela Mistral (Lucila Godoy Alcayaga 1889-1957) 80th Nobel Prize Anniversary Webfest, convocada por la Cátedra Unesco Global Adult Education del Department of Arts, Open Communities and Adult Education, University of Malta, el 26 de mayo de 2025.

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Los antecedentes en México también son importantes. En 1921 termina oficialmente la Revolución Mexicana, la primera revolución social del siglo XX. Le antecede a esta culminación la redacción de la Constitución Política de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos en 1917, que en su Artículo 3° estipula que la educación es una garantía, y que es libre, pero que la oficial será laica y gratuita (Diario Oficial, 2017). José Vasconcelos, un intelectual de gran renombre, que había sido rector de la Universidad Nacional de México, asumió, como Secretario de Educación Pública, la enorme tarea de llevar la educación a las comunidades rurales en un país que en ese entonces era 80% rural y en un alto porcentaje (alrededor del 60%) indígena. Él sabía que debía hacerlo para educar a la infancia, a la juventud y a las y los adultos campesinos. Reconocía la gran deuda que 33 años de dictadura porfirista y después 10 años de guerra revolucionaria, habían dejado con el bienestar de campesinos e indígenas, y estaba convencido de que la educación era la mejor manera de resarcir los daños causados por el abandono y la pobreza y de integrar a los campesinos y a los indígenas a la vida nacional. Estaba convencido de que la cultura y las lenguas indígenas constituían un lastre para la integración de los indígenas a la vida nacional. Por esa razón, su proyecto educativo fue castellanizador, pues no se equivocó en considerar que eliminando las lenguas indígenas se perdería, junto con ellas, una parte esencial de sus culturas. Su ideal era que la población mexicana llegara a ser, toda ella, mestiza, por mestizaje biológico o por decisión cultural. Su visión de México la plasma, entre otras obras, en *La Raza Cósmica* (1925), en la que estipula que el mestizo es la fusión de lo mejor de los dos orígenes, español e indígena, y una raza superior. La escuela rural, la que estaba destinada también a las comunidades indígenas, era el vehículo idóneo para conseguir que los indígenas abandonaran su identidad, su lengua y su cultura y abrazaran la identidad mestiza⁴.

Dos instituciones son emblemáticas de sus esfuerzos: las Misiones Culturales, y la Escuela Rural Mexicana, fuertemente inspirada en John

⁴ El proyecto de Vasconcelos fue tristemente exitoso – yo considero que es el proyecto educativo más exitoso del siglo XX – pues en efecto murieron muchas lenguas, otras más perdieron hablantes, con ello desaparecieron muchas culturas que dejaron de poder nombrar sus significantes, y México se volvió más “homogéneo”. A pesar de ello, extendió la educación en el México Rural y elevó los niveles de alfabetización. Se redujo poco a poco la pobreza. Se incorporaron – en condiciones desiguales – al progreso nacional.

Dewey, que inició un poco después (1924) y que llegó a las zonas rurales para alfabetizar y castellanizar a la niñez rural.

Gabriela Mistral fue invitada a colaborar con las Misiones Culturales, que iniciaron muy pronto después de fundada la Secretaría de Educación (septiembre de 1921). Estaban destinadas a atender a todas las edades: a la niñez y a la población joven y adulta de las comunidades, así como a los improvisados docentes de las escuelas primarias recién construidas. Nos dice Gabriela que estaban constituidas por un responsable de Misión, una enfermera, tres maestros de primaria, carpinteros, albañiles, un agrónomo, una modista, una profesora de economía doméstica, un especialista en alguna pequeña industria... Salían las Misiones a las comunidades elegidas "en grandes camiones llenos de libros, herramientas agrícolas y semillas". En asambleas comunitarias se definía lo que se realizaría por parte de la misión y lo que le correspondía hacer a la comunidad. Así se construían caminos y escuelas, se alfabetizaba (siempre en lengua castellana), se enseñaban prácticas agrícolas y oficios, se ofrecían pláticas de salud. Las tardes de los sábados se realizaban lecturas comentadas de textos sencillos, que conformaron las primeras bibliotecas. Se constituían cooperativas agrícolas, las mujeres aprendían a utilizar máquinas de coser, se sembraban nuevas especies vegetales. Los pobladores ofrecían sus propios conocimientos a los visitantes de herbolaria, de medicina natural, de sus formas de trabajo. Emprendieron la tarea de alfabetizar a la población, y de asegurar que esa alfabetización fuera empleada para fines utilitarios, sí, pero también para el esparcimiento y el crecimiento espiritual. Para ello, Vasconcelos llevar buena literatura, incluyendo a los clásicos, a las zonas rurales. Y ahí Gabriela Mistral jugó un papel central. Todo esto nos dice Gabriela de las Misiones, pues visitó y acompañó a varias (Mistral y Neruda, 1995, p. 102).

Las Misiones permanecían en la comunidad elegida el tiempo que les llevaba cumplir sus propósitos, y de ahí, de forma itinerante, se trasladaban a otra. Había en ellas una gran mística. Los maestros fueron denominados "apóstoles", los miembros de la misión, "misioneros". Las Misiones Culturales son ejemplo de una educación de adultos que no fragmenta sino que atiende todos los aspectos de la vida comunitaria y de la persona: la productiva, la de salud, la social, la espiritual; que tiene como sus destinatarios tanto a hombres como a mujeres; que valora los conocimientos locales (salvo la lengua); que cree en la sabiduría de las

decisiones colectivas; que pone la educación al servicio de la transformación⁵.

Gabriela fue invitada por Vasconcelos en este contexto, para apoyar a las Misiones Culturales y a la construcción de la Educación Mexicana postrevolucionaria, específicamente para fundar y organizar las bibliotecas escolares y para participar en las Misiones Culturales. Gabriela Mistral tuvo un gran amor a los indígenas, a quienes admiraba por su humanidad, su sencillez, su creatividad. Es difícil entender cómo vivió la contradicción entre el proyecto de Vasconcelos y su respeto y valoración del mundo indígena. Pero lo que sí es un hecho es que compartía con Vasconcelos la importancia de la educación y de la lectura, sobre todo de la buena lectura.

Estuvo en México en esta primera ocasión en este periodo clave, entre 1922 y 1924. Colaboró en el periódico “El Niño Agricultor”, que los niños voceaban por las calles. Al respecto dice Gabriela que “los niños necesitaron poco de sus indicaciones sobre periodismo infantil”, fuera de sus errores ortográficos (Tittelboim, 1991, p. 147). “...ellos saben muy bien lo que deben publicar... Oí una vez a un orador de doce años explicar a sus compañeros algunas reformas que le parecían necesarias...” (Tittelboim, 1991, p. 148). Relata sobre un orador niño de una biblioteca en formación, en el contexto de un Congreso del Niño que ella presidió, “... es la verdad que se sacaba más provecho de aquel discurso que de muchos discursos pedagógicos” (Tittelboim, 1991, p. 148). Sabía valorar los aportes de los niños.

A una semana de haber llegado a México, se inauguró una escuela, llamada “industrial” porque formaba para el trabajo, a la que le pusieron su nombre: la Escuela Hogar Gabriela Mistral. Estaba dirigida a mujeres entre 15 y 30 años de edad. Ahí recibían preparación para encontrar trabajo o ganarse la vida. Muy pronto esta escuela llegó a contar con más de 1000 alumnas. A ellas Gabriela dedicó un libro que le encargó José Vasconcelos, “Lecturas para Mujeres”, una antología en la que incluye once de sus escritos entre otros de muchos autores latinoamericanos ilustres y de algunos clásicos de otras latitudes, como Rabindranath Tagore. Los temas en los que agrupa estas lecturas dicen mucho de sus

⁵ Quien esto escribe siempre he considerado que las Misiones Culturales, junto con los Folkeskole – escuelas del pueblo -- de Dinamarca y otros países escandinavos, son dos casos ejemplares de educación de adultos.

predilecciones: el hogar, los motivos espirituales, la naturaleza. Quería llevara las mujeres de su escuela buena literatura, para que recibieran una mínima aportación femenina como "...el amor de la gracia cultivado a través de la literatura" (Mistral, 2011, p. 15). En la introducción a esta obra Gabriela expresa su humildad al armar la antología siendo una extranjera que todavía no se ha compenetrado de la sensibilidad y el pensamiento mexicanos, para lo que se requieren, dice ella, varios años. Explica que valora el hogar, pues busca elevar lo doméstico a dominio, y a belleza. Esta primera sección, dice ella, la hizo con más cariño que ninguna. Está en contra de infantilizar a las mujeres, y también de entregarles lecturas "de sensiblería y de belleza inferior", y más bien de entregarles "una gran literatura con sentido humano". Porque, dice, "no educa nunca lo inferior" – que lección tan profunda e importante para nosotras y nosotros educadores --. Y con fuerte impronta feminista, lamenta que tenga que recurrir a tantos escritos de hombres al tiempo que hace un llamado a las mujeres a escribir, y a hacerlo en forma seria. (Mistral, 2011: 17). Serio, sin embargo, no significa complicado. También se muestra a favor de un lenguaje comprensible, llano, no erudito ni rebuscado. Su selección buscó tres cualidades: intención moral a veces social, belleza y amenidad. Y sobre ésta última me permito citarla textualmente:

"...creo que hay ya demasiado hastío en la pedagogía seca, fría y muerta, que es la nuestra. Tal vez esa falta de alegría que todos advierten en nuestra raza, venga en parte de la escuela-madrastra que hemos tenido en muchos años. El niño llega con gozo a nuestras manos, pero las lecciones sin espíritu y sin frescura que casi siempre recibe, van empañándole ese gozo y volviéndole el joven o la muchacha fatigados, llenos de un desamor hacia el estudio ..." (Mistral, 1991, p. 19)

Gabriela termina la introducción a sus *Lecturas para Mujeres*, publicadas por la UNAM como *Lecturas para Maestros*, agradeciendo el poder haber trabajado bajo el ministerio de un constructor de educación sólo comparable, dice ella, con Sarmiento.

Andrés Henestrosa, en el prólogo a este rescate que hace la UNAM (Mistral, 2001) de las *Lecturas para Mujeres*, dice que Gabriela Mistral recordó su recibimiento en nuestro país como "el único periodo de descanso que he tenido en mi vida". México, dice Henestrosa, ejerció una gran influencia en Gabriela, que la influencia que ella ejerció sobre la generación de americanistas le vino del contacto con nuestro pueblo.

Durante su estancia y trabajo en México, escribió artículos periodísticos que reflexionaban sobre la realidad mexicana, sobre sus paisajes y sus problemas. Fueron recopilados y publicados en 1957, de manera póstuma, bajo el título de *Croquis Mexicanos* (Mistral, 1957) En ellos se adentra con exquisitez en descripciones vívidas, profundas; su atención a los detalles permite que el lector se adentre en rincones inesperados, en la esencia del vegetal, del objeto, de una estalactita, de un paisaje. Pero ahí también se expone al lector a la cruda realidad de la pobreza y las condiciones de vida de los indígenas mexicanos, así como a la sensibilidad del artesano, de la madre, del trabajador. Plasma en blanco y negro su deleite ante la belleza y su sufrimiento ante la pobreza. Gabriela decía: “hay varios Méxicos dentro de México, y no se agota el país como los otros: da de comer al alma para mucho tiempo y queda, y dura.” (Mistral y Ocampo, 2007, p. 157).

Educadora como lo fue durante años, reconocida como “La Maestra de América”, experimentó en México el poder transformador de la educación y aportó al mismo su excepcionalidad humana. Esto, junto con su compenetración imperfecta – como ella lo reconoce – del México y del ser mexicano, se lo lleva consigo. Con ello como parte de su bagaje sigue produciendo sus extraordinarias obras, una de las cuales, *Tala*, le valió el Nobel. Con ese bagaje a cuestas, entre muchos otros, se enfrenta a su labor consular en Madrid, Barcelona, Lisboa, Oporto, Niza, Niteroi, Petrópolis, Los Ángeles, Santa Barbara, Veracruz – su regreso a México en 1949 –, Génova, Nápoles, Nueva York y a su trabajo diplomático ante la Liga de Naciones representando a Chile, su país. Con estas vivencias también enriquece “...su voluntad de definir la identidad americana más allá de las fronteras nacionales o sociales”, que veía como misión civilizadora (Mistral y Ocampo, 2007, p. 24), el sueño Bolivariano que Mistral refuerza y que nunca muere.

Gabriela le entregó a México su enorme sensibilidad, su valoración de las y los maestros, la promoción de la lectura y el fomento de las bibliotecas, la convicción de que educar es un acto social y emocional además de cognitivo, su exigencia de calidad, y el apoyo a la construcción de un sistema educativo postrevolucionario que comenzó sirviendo a los más pobres y apoyando a niños y niñas, jóvenes y adultos una educación integral, cercana a la vida, útil al bienestar y pero también al desarrollo espiritual. México le entregó a Gabriela el descubrimiento de que somos latinoamericanos, de que nos une una misma raíz, de que nos caracterizan

valores compartidos, y de que vale la pena luchar por la unidad de nuestros países como ella lo hizo a lo largo de su vida.

Gabriela fue grande, tan grande que la lectura de su obra deja un impacto fuerte a quien la lee y una influencia que permanece. Eso no se puede aprender, sólo se admira. Pero muchas cosas sí aprendemos de su vida: la sublimación de su propio sufrimiento, su sensibilidad de la naturaleza, a las pequeñas cosas, su sencillez, su com-pasión – sufrir con los que sufren --, su pasión por llevar la lectura al pueblo, su preocupación por comunicar, su firme compromiso con la libertad, su espíritu americanista y global.

Quiero cerrar con una cita que me parece central por lo actual; un llamado a despertar del letargo, a renovar la lucha por la justicia y la libertad, y un recordatorio de lo que significa educar. Dice así:

El trabajador intelectual no puede permanecer indiferente a la suerte de los pueblos, al derecho que tienen de expresar sus dudas y sus anhelos. América en su historia no representa sino la lucha pasada y presente de un mundo que busca en libertad el triunfo del espíritu. Nuestro siglo no puede rebajarse de la libertad a la servidumbre. Se sirve mejor al campesino, al obrero, a la mujer, al estudiante, enseñándoles a ser libres porque se les respeta su dignidad” (Teitelboim, 1991, p. 309-310).

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Gabriela Mistral and Mexico

Sylvia Schmelkes, Flor Sotelo

Abstract. This article highlights the period Gabriela Mistral spent in Mexico between 1922 and 1924, invited by the first Secretary of Public Education, José Vasconcelos, to collaborate on educational projects resulting from the first social revolution of the 20th century and the new Political Constitution of the United Mexican States (1917). It explores her love for Mexico, her admiration for the Mexican Rural School project, and her appreciation of the Indigenous population in contrast to José Vasconcelos's zeal to *castilianize* the population and eradicate Indigenous languages and cultures. The article emphasizes the mark Gabriela Mistral left on the country, as well as the impact Mexico had on her and her subsequent life.

Keywords: Gabriela Mistral, Mexico, Mexican Rural School, Indigenous.

Gabriela Mistral et Mexico

Sylvia Schmelkes, Flor Sotelo

Résumé. Cet article met en lumière la période que Gabriela Mistral a passée au Mexique entre 1922 et 1924, invitée par le premier secrétaire à l'Éducation publique, José Vasconcelos, à collaborer à des projets éducatifs issus de la première révolution sociale du XXe siècle et de la nouvelle Constitution politique des États-Unis mexicains (1917). Il explore son amour pour le Mexique, son admiration pour le projet de l'École rurale mexicaine et son appréciation de la population indigène, en contraste avec le zèle de José Vasconcelos pour castillaniser la population et éradiquer les langues et cultures indigènes. L'article souligne

l'empreinte laissée par Gabriela Mistral sur le pays, ainsi que l'impact que le Mexique a eu sur elle et sur sa vie ultérieure.

Mots clés: Gabriela Mistral, Mexique, École rurale mexicaine, Indigène.

Gabriela Mistral y Mexico

Sylvia Schmelkes, Flor Sotelo

Resumen. En este artículo se destaca el periodo que Gabriela Mistral pasó en México entre 1922 y 1924, invitada por el primer secretario de Educación Pública, José Vasconcelos, para colaborar en los proyectos educativos resultantes de la primera revolución social del siglo XX y de la nueva Constitución Política de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos (1917). Se problematiza su amor por México, su admiración del proyecto de la Escuela Rural Mexicana, y su valoración de la población indígena frente al afán de José Vasconcelos de castellanizar a la población y erradicar las lenguas y las culturas indígenas. Se resalta la huella que Gabriela Mistral dejó en el país, así como el impacto que México causó en ella y en su vida posterior.

Palabras clave: Gabriela Mistral, México, Escuela Rural Mexicana, Misiones.

MISCELLANEOUS ARTICLE

Power to the People *Danilo Dolci: A Life Lived Intensely*

Tiziana Rita Morgante
Translated from Italian by Sabina Langer

Danilo Dolci was an educator, poet, sociologist, anthropologist, and Nobel Peace Prize nominee. He went on hunger strike after the death of a child, invented the “reverse strike” – where participants work for free on projects for the public good – and was even imprisoned for defending the rights of the poor. He received the Lenin Peace Prize in Russia, but was slandered by the Church in Sicily. He founded the “Center for Full Employment” and the Mirto school. He was internationally known yet often ignored in Italy.

Born in Sesana (now Slovenia, then part of the Province of Trieste) in 1924, Dolci spent his childhood and youth in northern Italy. Just before he was about to graduate in architecture, he abandoned his studies to dedicate himself to those most in need: “*You cannot be happy if another human being suffers.*” As an architect, he thought, he could not help people who did not even have a home. The question that guided his entire life was: How can we give power back to each person?

After a short time in the Nomadelfia community (Grosseto, Tuscany), he moved to Trappeto, Sicily, where he would live until his death on December 30, 1997, the same year when and seven months after Freire passed away. Dolci had first visited Trappeto briefly in the early 1940s following his father, a railway worker. In this small fishing village, he chose to live poorly among the poor, sharing their hardships to understand them from the inside. There, he began one of the most powerful chapters of Southern Italy’s renewal.

In this small village of farmers and fishermen, he began his work of popular self-analysis: he asked questions, starting from his ignorance of the place, to understand the most urgent needs of the people and to be able to plan together a better life. On the bed of a child who had died from lack of food, he began his first hunger strike. Too many children were dying or risked dying from hunger and poor hygiene conditions; too many parents, without work, were forced to steal to feed their children and were accused of being bandits. *"Here we must act quickly and well because people are dying."* Italian society needed to know how people lived in that Sicilian land.

By asking people directly how to change their situation, Dolci brought back to light, from the Socratic tradition, maieutics: a method based on questions that help new ideas to be born. (Morgante, 2024) Among the first proposals that emerged was to have water for everyone, democratic water. This work of awareness, born from asking questions and from dialogue, transformed water into a lever for economic, social and cultural change.

The maieutic structure becomes the condition for anyone, at any time and place, to recognize and use their own power. Other actions followed: the reverse strike, a thousand-person fast on the beach against illegal fishing, the creation of a free radio, and precise denunciations against the Mafia. Then the educational experiment of the Mirto school, where, between the mountains and the sea, maieutics became a method to make each person grow through discussion and communication. Here everyone could dream of themselves and give life to new possible futures.

The "Borgo di Dio" is another fundamental place where, from the maieutic approach, concrete actions for the rebirth of the territory took shape. The Borgo is the place where Danilo laid the foundations of his life, hosted friends from all over the world and built the house where he lived until the end of his days. There a structure was built – first called the Center and Initiatives for Full Employment, today the Center for Creative Development – with a library, meeting room with a large round table, auditorium, and guesthouse. Here reflections turned into organic planning, the people of Trappeto met with world-renowned scholars and, together, they planned change: city-territory planning, non-violent struggle initiatives and marches after the earthquake in the Belice valley, the Mirto Educational Center. Today the Borgo has been revived thanks to the work and tenacity of one of his daughters, Daniela Dolci, who managed to recover those spaces to return them to all those who want to carry the torch forward.

Who was Danilo Dolci? A man who all his life transformed dreams into projects.

An exhibition shown in various places, including, most recently, Merano near Bolzano, “A Life Lived Intensely”, was reconstructed from the archive of the Sicilian anarchists of the province of Ragusa, purchased by the Danilo Dolci Committee of Trieste and, a few years ago, kindly donated to T.R. Morgante, the present author, to make the best possible use of it. What follows is a list of captions each accompanying a specific illustration.

The Panels of the Exhibition

‘POWER OR DOMINATION?’

In the late 1980s, after his experiences in nonviolent struggle, Danilo delved deeper into a theme that had, in fact, always permeated his reflections: What is the difference between power and domination? Domination spreads like a virus, like a tick — how can we free ourselves from it? How can each person unlock creativity and discover their own power?

He immediately suggests, in the verses of one of his poems that open the exhibition: “*Concentrate, we are rendered dull in endless ways!*” His is an invitation to work together seriously and deeply on ourselves and on others, so as not to collapse... an invitation to listen and engage in dialogue, beyond empty chatter.

‘THE ENCOUNTER’

Dolci was born in Sesana (now Slovenia, but previously Italy) in 1924, and at about 16 years old he encountered Sicily for the first time. His father, a railway worker, was often transferred for work, and one of these many assignments was to the small station of Trappeto. Danilo joined his father for a short summer holiday and discovered Sicily, with its beauty and its contradictions — a land that stayed in his heart, like its people. A land he would never leave again.

‘THE CHOICE’

Just before graduating, Danilo experienced a deep crisis and decided to abandon his studies. Where to go? Where to start? He began with a short

but intense time in Nomadelfia (near Grosseto, Tuscany), the community founded by Don Zeno Saltini, another leading Italian critical community educator, where everything was shared, where war orphans and abandoned children were welcomed into large families alongside biological children. It was a self-sufficient community with no money, where everyone learned to give and to give of themselves. Danilo saw it as a wonderful reality, but too isolated from society and the wider world. He chose to leave again.

In 1952, he decided to move permanently to Sicily. He saw a dramatic reality — devastating poverty that required both careful analysis and urgent action. Unfamiliar with this world and this territory, he learned to ask questions to understand the most urgent needs and how to meet them, helping people to act independently from the ground up. The work was immense; poverty and poor sanitation made life precarious for the weakest, especially children. He realized action had to be targeted, but years of resignation and immobility made even the smallest change difficult.

Trappeto was a valley with a road that was really an open sewer, where children played among flies and filth. Fathers were forced to become bandits, stealing fruit and vegetables to feed their children, risking prison every day. Yet nothing changed — the State did not intervene, and no one cared how these people lived, resigned to whatever fate brought them.

On 14 October 1952, there came a turning point. Danilo was urgently called to get milk for a child who was near death. He searched in the only pharmacy, in the nearby village of Balestrate, but did not arrive in time — the child died in his arms. Danilo felt he could not eat again unless this reality changed. It was an instinctive act, born from deep empathy: on the bed of little Benedetto Baretta, he began his first fast — there was no time to lose. People understood what he had chosen to do and were ready to take his place. The first letter of solidarity came from Aldo Capitini (critical educator, scholar and philosopher of active nonviolence, among the first Italians to interpret Gandhi's thought, who would soon become a friend and supporter).

'FROM BANDITS TO CITIZENS'

Four years passed after the first fast. Some things had changed — the open sewer in the valley was covered — but there was still much to build. These were years in which Danilo formed deep collaborations with friends,

colleagues, and supporters, some close by and many from other places, ready to help.

During this period, he married Vincenzina Mangano, a Sicilian widow with children, with whom he had five more: Libera, Cielo, Amico, Chiara, and Daniela. For Danilo, she was not only a wife and the mother of his children, but also a collaborator and ally, sharing with him years of struggle and commitment. With courage and generosity, she supported his choices and learned to emancipate herself.

In those years of work from the ground up, from within the community, some essential points became clear to guarantee the legitimate right to work: farmers had the right to cultivate their land, and for this they needed water; fishermen had the right to fish, while respecting the sea. But how could they make themselves heard by those who refused to listen?

On January 30, 1956, a fast of one thousand people took place on the beach of San Cataldo in Trappeto. A few days later came the first reverse strike, followed by a sensational arrest on the charge that a public fast was illegal. From conversations with the local people came the realization that the real problem was not an unproductive sea or barren land, but the injustice that denied the right to work and other basic rights. Fishermen knew the laws of the sea well: their fishing respected its life cycle, they paused for natural breeding seasons, and they did not use destructive fishing methods such as trawling or underwater explosives. But illegal fishermen, protected by the Port Authority that did not intervene, acted undisturbed, destroying the sea.

Likewise, the farmers knew the land was fertile and that water was not truly lacking. The problem was that most of the water, much of it wasted, was owned by a minority who sold it at high prices. A land without water dies.

So fishermen and farmers united, chose a creative and revolutionary way to demand their right to work. First came the fast on the beach of San Cataldo, where a thousand people, accompanied by the music of Bach and gazing at the sea, fasted peacefully. The protest had been announced to the authorities in advance, but they intervened anyway, ordering the participants to continue their fasts in their own homes, out of public view, claiming that fasting in public was a crime.

A few days later, the protest continued. This time, the unemployed worked together to repair an old, impassable country road. They worked peacefully, without carrying even the knives needed to cut bread. Again, the authorities arrived and, after three trumpet blasts, ordered the crowd to disperse. When they continued to work, Danilo and several collaborators – described as troublemakers with a marked tendency to crime – were forcibly apprehended, loaded into cars, and taken to prison. At Ucciardone, the notorious prison in Palermo, Danilo spent a month with the very bandits whose children he had once cared for. It was a month of work and study, during which he learned a great deal – the only month of his life lived at the expense of the State.

‘HOW TO GIVE VOICE TO THOSE WITHOUT A VOICE?’

Without ever abandoning the poetic language that was his most natural form of expression, Danilo Dolci constantly documented his work – a habit that allowed him to publish fundamental investigative books denouncing the inhuman living conditions of an entire population. Among them were *Fare presto e bene perché si muore* (Do things quickly and well as people are dying) (Dolci, 1954), *Banditi a Partinico* (Bandits in Partinico) (1955) (Dolci, 2009), and *Inchiesta a Palermo* (Inquiry at Palermo) (Dolci, 1956).

This precise documentation of the work carried out was part of his methodological approach: the process of popular self-analysis, over the years and with growing awareness, evolved into what Danilo called “reciprocal maieutics.” It became increasingly clear that a new way of relating to the community had been born: dialogues and reflections made it possible to plan concrete actions, which in turn generated new paths of reflection, in a continuous process that transformed individual voices into a collective one – the *I* became *We*. Each person became a midwife for the growth of another, while at the same time valuing and developing themselves. No meeting was worthwhile unless everyone left it being more than they had been before. As in Freire, it was a case of *ser mais* (becoming more).

Many scholars and intellectuals took an interest in his work, supported him, and contributed actively. He received numerous international recognitions, including the much-debated Lenin Prize, and above all, the press began to arrive. But how to bring about real, deep change?

‘WASTE’

In a land rich and beautiful, like its children, yet at risk of dying from suffocation because it is neither valued nor protected, but instead drained and abused — how can so much waste be avoided?

‘ANALYZE TO PLAN’

To organize grassroots change that can generate development in the territory, greater awareness and critical analysis of problems are essential. Beyond protests, beyond fasts and marches, it is necessary to analyze clearly so that an organic plan involving the entire population can be created — an alternative must be found. For this reason, meetings became more frequent, often with the participation of many experts: urban planners, architects, educators...

‘THE DREAM: DEMOCRATIC WATER’

After long discussions and growing awareness among the people — born from the process of popular self-analysis that evolved into the *maieutic* method — the “Study and Initiatives Center for Full Employment” in Partinico designed the first essential action for change: the construction of a dam on the Jato River. Water there would be the lever for transformation, bringing wealth back to those lands.

In 1962, with funding from the *Cassa del Mezzogiorno*, construction work on the dam began. The site operated day and night — the work was unstoppable.

‘THE ANTI-MAFIA ACTION’

The awareness process sparked by the *maieutic* approach gave life and courage to a community that was growing stronger and more attentive to the needs of the territory. After the dam was built, it was necessary to protect the achievements that had been won. It became increasingly clear that the mafia had to be isolated, as they represented only a small minority of the population — a minority that dominated by stripping others of their power. After filing precise, signed complaints, the decision was made to organize a march across Sicily.

‘THE LENIN PEACE PRIZE’

In 1967, Danilo Dolci received the Lenin Peace Prize — the communist world’s equivalent of the Nobel Prize (for which he was nominated eight times). On that occasion, he gave a speech that stood as a manifesto for nonviolent action and peaceful dialogue. The prize money was used in Trappeto, at the *Borgo di Dio* (see Schirripa, 2010), to build the “Centro di Formazione per la pianificazione organica” (Training Center for Organic Planning). The Center was inaugurated seven months after construction began and quickly became a key place where people could meet — often with experts — to find alternatives and plan the changes that were needed.

‘THE FREE RADIO’

January 15, 1968 — a tragic date: the earthquake in the Belice Valley. At the Borgo, in the “Centro di Formazione per la pianificazione organica” (Training Center for Organic Planning), all activities were suspended to go and provide assistance. But where was the State? Ministers arrived from the skies, yet the poor lived in shacks — freezing in winter, scorching in summer. How to give them a voice? After two years, still nothing! Meetings at the Borgo became more frequent to find a concrete solution and help the people of Belice.

Cries of despair, combined with verses from the poetry collection *Il Limone lunare* and the music of Bach, echoed through the first free radio station. In Partinico, on March 25, 1970, Franco Alasia and Pino Lombardo — two long-time collaborators of Danilo — began broadcasting news about the living conditions of the Belice Valley’s population, two years after the earthquake and after countless unfulfilled promises from the State. As their voices spread over the airwaves, together with Danilo’s poetry and Bach’s notes, the police burst into the broadcasting room and forced the program to stop. The radio was shut down after just twenty-four hours — this time the State found a way to act quickly. Pino Lombardo and Franco Alasia were sent home without being arrested.

From that radio came another important experience: “Radio Aut” by Peppino Impastato, who was also involved in the Center’s activities during those years.

‘SILENCE MEANS COMPLICITY’

Deeply honest people now had the courage to speak out, to denounce those who resisted change because they wanted to keep their privileges. The group gave strength and courage — for the first time, a population once divided, intimidated, and labeled as bound by *omertà* found the resolve to denounce the mafia clientelist system that had blocked the area’s development for years.

The testimonies were gathered by Danilo Dolci and his collaborators and presented to the police headquarters. The response was an accusation of slander and defamation against Danilo Dolci and his team. In *Processo all’art.4* (Dolci, 2011), the trial is documented with precise, detailed analysis — a trial brought for the accusations against ministers Volpe, Messeri, and Mattarella. It ended, after the historic defense speech by Piero Calamandrei, with an unbelievable sentence: two and a half years in prison, never served due to amnesty.

‘MIRTO: A NEST OF CREATURES’

Why should children be forced to go to school? Why isn’t there a school where listening and dialogue happen, as in our meetings? Can the reciprocal *maieutic* approach find space in a different kind of school — one where each person feels valued and respected, and where everyone can discover their own power?

These and other questions arose naturally in *Chissà se i pesci piangono* (Who knows whether fish weep) (Dolci, 2018), the record of the creation of the Mirto Educational Center — a new dream-project that emerged among the people of Trappeto and Partinico, who had increasingly become a renewed and united community.

‘INVENTING THE FUTURE’

Danilo Dolci’s vision grew ever wider, with increasing contacts abroad and with foreign committees. During those years, Danilo separated from Vincenzina and began a new relationship with Swedish photographer Elena Norman, with whom he had two children: Sereno and En.

His focus expanded more and more toward the school, which became a new educational center, designed and built with principles completely different from the traditional school — a type of school Dolci called “transmissive”. After long periods of reflection and rethinking — even

about where to build the center — with the participation of figures such as Freire, Galtung, Chomsky, Vonèche, Rodari... the Mirto School was inaugurated in January 1975.

Among olive and almond trees, near a natural amphitheater set into the rock, on a promontory from which you can glimpse the sea, along a small road that crossed a crumbling, cracked bridge (the only maintenance expense the Municipality of Partinico would have needed to secure the route), the educational center took shape — still an avant-garde example today, especially in its architecture.

Where else can the foundations of a new future be laid, if not at school?

‘THE GOD OF TICKS’

Domination is a parasite on every creature, sucking away its power and vital sap. Where does the tick hide? Danilo Dolci increasingly felt the desire to spread everywhere the awareness he had gained through his experience in Sicily (see, for instance, Dolci, 1966). In every place and in every time, the problem is the same, though dressed in different clothes: the tick drains vital energy, feeds on, and destroys its host.

How can a tick be recognized? How can its sly infiltration and parasitism be stopped? How can every creature be helped to defend itself?

‘THE PULSE OF CONNECTIONS’

In a flourishing of ever more fruitful connections, Danilo Dolci developed his core themes, along with the need to clarify, on a linguistic level, certain pairs of essential words: *Educate / Instruct*, *Transmit / Communicate*, *Power / Domination*. It became increasingly clear to him that the condition for each person to grow into a sense of shared responsibility is the widespread adoption of the reciprocal *maieutic* approach.

‘DRAFT MANIFESTO: COMMUNICATION AS THE LAW OF LIFE’

Mass communication does not exist — people reduced to a formless mass do not think, do not feel, do not live; they numb themselves in countless ways...

To foster change, we must not fear diagnosis. We need to spark and raise questions.

What is Peace? This was one of the themes explored at the Borgo, later transformed into the Center for Creative Development, which still works today to promote the creation of *maieutic* groups in Italy and beyond.

Danilo Dolci leaves behind a great legacy, and in his words echoes a question that is also an invitation to choose the direction we will take: “*Must we work so that this world perishes, or so that this world is reborn?*” Each person, everywhere, as a co-responsible being, will find their own answer and their own path.

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Power to the People. Danilo Dolci A life lived Intensely

Tiziana Morgante

Abstract. This article pays tribute to one of Italy's foremost critical educators, also among adults, and community activists who taught, organised and grabbed headlines with his radical actions. It does so just

one year after the centenary of his birth A poet and writer of works of strong sociological and anthropological significance, Danilo Dolci's reputation extended internationally to render him a household name in places such as Canada where translations of his works could be found. His maieutic Socratic approach brought him close to fellow critical pedagogue, Paulo Freire, with whom he worked and collaborated at Trappeto and Partinico in Sicily when Freire was still in exile and based in Geneva. This tribute to Dolci is written by one of his closest collaborators in his latter years.

Keywords: maieutics, community, reverse strike, peace, water

Le pouvoir au peuple. Danilo Dolci. Une vie vecue intensement

Tiziana Morgante

Résumé. Cet article rend hommage à l'un des plus grands éducateurs critiques d'Italie, également parmi les adultes, et à l'un des militants communautaires qui a enseigné, organisé et fait la une des journaux grâce à ses actions radicales. Il le fait juste un an après le centenaire de sa naissance. Poète et auteur d'ouvrages à forte connotation sociologique et anthropologique, Danilo Dolci s'est forgé une réputation internationale qui l'a rendu célèbre dans des pays comme le Canada, où ses œuvres ont été traduites. Son approche maïeutique socratique l'a rapproché de son collègue pédagogue critique, Paulo Freire, avec lequel il a travaillé et collaboré à Trappeto et Partinico en Sicile, alors que Freire était encore en exil et basé à Genève. Cet hommage à Dolci est rédigé par l'un de ses plus proches collaborateurs de ses dernières années.

Mots-clés: maïeutique, communauté, grève inversée, paix, eau

Poder para el pueblo. Danilo Dolci: una vida vivid intensamente

Tiziana Morgante

Resumen. Este artículo rinde homenaje a uno de los educadores críticos más destacados de Italia, también entre los adultos, y a los activistas comunitarios que enseñaron, organizaron y acapararon los titulares con sus acciones radicales. Lo hace justo un año después del centenario de su nacimiento. Poeta y escritor de obras de gran importancia sociológica y antropológica, la reputación de Danilo Dolci se extendió internacionalmente hasta convertirlo en un nombre muy conocido en lugares como Canadá, donde se podían encontrar traducciones de sus obras. Su enfoque socrático mayéutico lo acercó a su compañero pedagogo crítico, Paulo Freire, con quien trabajó y colaboró en Trappeto y Partinico, en Sicilia, cuando Freire aún estaba exiliado y residía en Ginebra. Este homenaje a Dolci está escrito por uno de sus colaboradores más cercanos en sus últimos años.

Palabras clave: mayéutica, comunidad, huelga inversa, paz, agua

MISCELLANEOUS ARTICLE

**Reckoning and reflecting with the multiple crises of our
times: translocal social movement learning**

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Introduction

Our collective post-COVID world is one of multiple and interlinked crises. While COVID itself continues to be a presence, the lockdowns most states responded with are in the past; and yet, the inequities this Pandemic and the state responses revealed continue as touchstones in analysing the ongoing and fresh crises our world faces; these include the climate crisis, the ongoing impact of capitalist dispossession, and the growing presence of war and violent repression and genocide, as well as the ever clearer failure of our international system for contending with these crises. Despite this ineffectual global governance response to these crises, social movements in countless locations continue to grapple with these crises, both through local actions, as well as pressure for government responses; many of these movements also connect with and coordinate their actions and activism with movements in other locations that face the same or related crises. It is just such an interconnection of

movements that is at the heart of the research partnership upon which this paper focuses

The overall goal of the Translocal Learning Network (TLN), the name of this research partnership, is to catalyze and animate local to local (translocal) learning as means to build capacity among localized movements in their struggles for a climate just and anti-capitalist future, and in so doing trace the contours of a theory of translocal learning – learning based on non-hierarchical local to local learning as opposed to top down learning that mimics the very problematic of global dominance the movements that make up this partnership contest. Key to this process is an insistence that movements and groups rooted in local social change efforts are crucial authors and actors of a climate just, anti-colonial, and anti-capitalist future. The members of this partnership consist of Abahlali baseMjondolo (AbM) shack-dwellers movement, as well as the Church Land Programme (CLP) from South Africa, Radio Ada community radio station, the Savannah Research and Advocacy Network (SRAN) and Venceremos Development from Ghana, as well as allied scholars from South Africa and Turtle Island/Canada.

The partnership has been working and learning together since 2016 both by distance and with in-person visits; the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic both exacerbated the pre-existing inequities and injustices each movement context faced and presented new challenges with increased state repression, unequal access to supports and healthcare, and increased risks for precarious labour and landless peoples (Langdon, 2022). In response to the isolation caused by the pandemic, and its associated lockdowns, and in an attempt to build solidarity and share learnings through these struggles, this group began meeting quarterly by Zoom, as well as organizing in-person retreats and delegations, and responding to requests of support through acts of solidarity that have brought group members closer despite the distance. This paper frames this work, the ongoing development of the partnership of this group, and the overall translocal learnings that have emerged thus far from this partnership.

Using the metaphorical image of a tree, this article provides the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of this partnership (the roots), a brief background to it, and the members and organization that make up its structure (the trunk), and then delves deeper into its actions and activities (the branches), and emergent learnings (the leaves and fruit). This image was arrived at collectively at an in-person gathering of the network in Durban, South Africa, in February 2023. In each section we draw on partner articulations to bring the metaphor to life.

Roots

“A people without the knowledge of their past history, origin and culture is like a tree without roots” (Seifert, 1938, p.5)

The roots of a tree act as its anchor in the soil, keeping it stable and grounded through storms. Root systems are the life-sustaining connection to the land, absorbing water and nutrients from the soil and converting them into what is needed for the tree’s growth, development, and repair. For trees to have long life spans, with trunks that grow wide and tall, branching out, bearing leaves and fruit, and nourishing whole ecosystems around them, their root systems must be massive, extending deep and wide below the surface to ensure their survival; without each movement being strongly rooted in their ancestral knowledge, people, and place, and without strong roots between movements, in shared values and principles, there would be no network. The multiple and overlapping oppressions and struggles are the roots of the movements that make up the TLN partnership; at the same time, the theoretical critiques of these oppressions, as well as the methodological thinking behind our partnership are also our roots.

Growing out of a critique of development, the work of the Translocal Learning Network (TLN) is rooted in the understanding that development is neo-colonial as a concept and practice; contrived and employed by Western influence and intervention for the ongoing power and profit of the Global North (Dimier and Stockwell, 2020). Thapelo Mohape, the General Secretary of the Abahlali baseMjondolo (AbM) movement in South Africa and a partner in the TLN, articulated this critique as central to AbM’s work. AbM is a movement of shack dwellers with more than 115,000 members that was formed in 2005 to fight for, promote and advance the interests of the poor and marginalized in South Africa. Mohape (2023) explains that people on the ground, the poor and marginalized most impacted by development policies and practices are not involved, engaged, or considered to be able to think or make decisions about development for themselves.

Usually “development is something that is done to poor people in the formerly colonized countries,” with the backing and financial support of Western governments, aid agencies, companies and local governments (Mohape, 2023, n.p.). “And therefore, these NGOs and Western companies that come and do development in Africa, they impose it on the people, and they do not discuss it with the people” (Mohape, 2023, n.p.). Furthermore, in addition to this model of development undermining,

criminalizing, and dehumanizing the poorest of the poor, it is also not a democratic process. “It is always assumed that when you are poor, when you are living in a shack, when you live in a rural area, when you are marginalized, that you cannot think for yourself, that you cannot be involved in development, because you are poor” (Mohape, 2023, n.p.). The embedded capitalistic and colonial nature of the machine of development de-links those most impacted, made to seem as if they are incapable of determining their own path and making their own decisions of what is best for themselves.

Echoing the thinking of the rest of the TLN, Mohape (2023) contends that the dignity of the poor can only be achieved if they are part of their own development, becoming stewards and active participants in development on their own terms and by their own design. Mohape (2023, n.p.) explains, “this must be a process undertaken from below, democratically. People must make decisions and must be consulted, and they must have a voice to speak about their own development. It must be initiated and completed with the people.” Development must be on one’s own terms.

“Nothing about us, without us”, the slogan used by many movements to demand that the full and direct participation of those most affected in decision-making, grounds the work of AbM and articulates not only the importance of democratic movements, but that movements themselves are capable of determining what’s best for their members without external imposition. This is another root of our network: that grassroots movements have their own analysis of their struggle. Grassroots movements contest contemporary models of development (Oliver-Smith, 2006), create innovative democratic models for sustainable development (Smith & Stirling, 2018), demonstrate a new world order for social change (Ekins, 2005), and focus on human rights, democracy and social justice for all on their own terms (Kaplan, 2016).

Additionally, social movements exhibit their dynamic ability to learn in struggle, produce knowledge, and evoke change locally (Langdon, 2020). Key to this understanding is the insistence that movements rooted in local social change efforts are not just critics of the oppressions they face, but crucial authors and actors for a climate just, anti-colonial and anti-capitalist future. Similar to a tree that grows away from what does not support it or that grows toward what does, grassroots movements and individuals know what is best for their own growth and development; conversely, with external intervention not aligned with their interests, they often perish.

To this end, in contrast to transnational movements, which frequently subordinate local contexts in their efforts to focus on the broader picture, localized movements are often far more effective in making change (Choudry, 2007; Langdon, 2010; Daphi, Anderl, & Deitelhoff, 2019). The particularities of these struggles can, however, lead to disconnection and even isolation from other struggles addressing these same and related crises. In an effort to encourage connection and mutual learning between local movements, the TLN emerged to attempt to build and maintain local to local (i.e. translocal) non-hierarchical connections between social movements in order for movements to learn from, share with, and draw strength from movements in other locations. The concept of translocal learning builds on Kapoor (2011), Wang and Soule (2012), and Carlson et al. (2018) who have documented translocal learning work being done in current contexts such as the anti-globalization and climate struggles, and on Gopal (2019) who articulates historical cases of this type of work in the anti-colonial period. Furthermore, it draws from social movement learning theory that centers movement articulations of their learning (c.f. English & Mayo, 2012).

The TLN operates in non-hierarchical ways, to build and maintain translocal learning, deepening analysis within and between movements and building solidarity relationships to create shared spaces for connection, support, and learning. Our framework of non-hierarchical translocal learning emphasizes that each movement involved in the TLN has something to learn, knowledge to share, and the mutual reciprocity of support, such as how trees intertwine their roots underground to provide mutual support. The flexible learning and sharing methodology of this network echoes McFarlane's (2007; 2009) use of translocal assemblage, to become more than learning from each other but layered relational solidarity through times of crisis.

This is similar to the concept of mutual flourishing in Robin Kimmerer's *Braiding Sweetgrass*, whereby she speaks about the mycorrhizae, fungal strands that inhabit tree roots, that connect trees in a forest and distribute carbohydrates amongst them, "They weave a web of reciprocity, of giving and taking. In this way, the trees all act as one because the fungi have connected them. Through unity, survival. All flourishing is mutual.... all are the beneficiaries of reciprocity" (2013, p.20). Just as it is the strength and depths of the roots and their ability to withstand stress and crisis with established systems of mutuality and reciprocity that ensures a tree flourishes, it is also true of this network.

Trunk

The trunk of the tree, emerging from and embedded in the roots, is the structure that allows the branches to spread wide, and the leaves and fruit to grow. The structure of this partnership, the relationships of its partners, and their overlapping struggles and solidarity, compose our trunk.

The Translocal Learning Network thrives on partnership. Despite our differing experiences, as paralleled to Kimmerer's (2013) description of fungi connecting the trees, partnership in this network serves as a critical function in ensuring the network continues to thrive in unity and for its members to survive. Shared Western-Capitalist informed vulnerabilities across the TLN feed the partnership and the work led by each partner. Albert Naa (2023, n.p.), Coordinator of the northern Ghana-based Savannah Research and Advocacy Network, a TLN member that is fighting large-scale mining and its impacts, spoke to these vulnerabilities with emphasis on Ghana, indicating that "we understand that the development of nations has also always been on how endowed they are. But the situation in Ghana seems to be contrasting, where the resource of our nation is rather developing other people, instead of developing us Ghanaians." These experiences are not exclusive to Ghana, as Thapelo Mohape (2023) makes reference to the West's assumption of the othered experiences of developing countries such as Ghana and South Africa and tend to propagate prescriptive development due to these vulnerabilities. Overcoming vulnerabilities — just as the fungi overcome disconnection — feed the partnership, legitimizing the work done by individual organizations, the creation of the network, and giving meaning to the partnership. This translates back to feeding their shared work to overcome vulnerabilities, in a manner that ensures survival and strength. In their shared experiences and vulnerabilities that give meaning to the partnership within the network, each organization pursues a specific goal: AbM advocates for dignified housing and ending impoverishment; CLP for Indigenous rights to land; SRAN, Venceremos and Radio Ada in different capacities and geographical positionings protest multi/national corporations and their inhumane activities in mining resources such as gold and salt, while also striving to protect the livelihoods of indigenes in these mining areas. These organizations, in their goal to advocate and protect the livelihoods of the people they represent, do not only work against multi/national corporations, but also state institutions and traditional authorities, and sometimes skepticism from the local populations. The agendas of each of these actors are often unclear and overwhelmingly against what our partners conceive as the best interest of the communities they emerge from/work with. Their work is very much

stifled by the capitalist market institutions and the state and traditional authorities working together. Albert Naa (2023, n.p.) articulates this explaining that, “Traditional authorities who are supposed to safeguard their communities’ values, protect their people, are looking the other way. Government agencies who are supposed to be doing their duty, due diligence, ensuring that mining companies are operating according to the laws of this country, are doing otherwise.”

The threat faced by these movements, their families and other community members is potentially debilitating. Just like the trunk of the tree is what sustains and gives life to branches and leaves, the work these movements do, separately and with the network, is what keeps them going during challenging times. Decrying the human rights violations, loss of livelihoods and lives, the lack of respect, and efforts to gag protestors, journalists and activists through bribes and threats, are the nutrients that fuel the struggle. SRAN typifies these experiences when Albert (2023, n.p.) explains that, “we look at the human rights violations that have arisen due to the presence of these Chinese mining companies such as Earl International and Cardinal Namdini, owned by Shandong Gold Limited. The loss of lives... the negligence is too high. Safety issues are not taken into consideration. And there is the incident of police arrests and detention where the rights of individuals, demonstrators, protesters are violated.” He goes further asking a very pertinent question, “who decides to rise against the misdeeds by these mining organizations?” (Naa, 2023, n.p.) When the state, traditional authority and market institutions are in cahoots to the detriment of the people, it becomes imperative for movements and organizations such as SRAN, AbM, Radio Ada, and CLP to take up the responsibility of protecting their people through the activist work they do. This is what drives their individual work and the partnership as well.

In their commonality and shared experiences are skills and perspectives that help them navigate the work done on the ground and also position each organization as an active and effective peer mentor. Some have more experience with direct action and mobilization, others with investigation and journalism, others with story-telling and communication, and some others with academic research. They work in different local languages and come from different cultural contexts, but they all share common goals that enable them to share their stories and engage in rich discussion of their learnings.

Drawing back to the tree metaphor, the desire to overcome challenges gives meaning to the fungal partnership and facilitates the outcomes these

movements pursue and vice versa. However, just as the trunk holds up and sustains the movement actions, it also forms a connection with other parts of the tree as its way of ensuring sustenance. Thus, in essence sustaining the network. In discussing this metaphor our partnership talked of the baobab tree, present in several African countries, where the trunk is likened to a connection that ensures unity and solidarity (Ritter, 2011).

Branches

In many ways, branches metaphorically best capture the dynamic of this partnership. All connected back to the trunk, directly or indirectly, branches also spread in all directions, much as movements try a myriad of strategies to overcome the vulnerabilities and oppression they face. Since July 2022, The TLN has met every quarter. The main aim of this network is to provide member-conceived stories that are subject to change over time as a result of each movement's circumstances as well as continuous engagement and re-storying. This article is drawn from the network's first eight meetings, one being a physical meeting in South Africa. The project has an online platform where the network shares their stories, www.translocallearning.net.

Stories that have branched out from the partnership have ranged from AbM's struggle to secure land and housing for shack dwellers amidst contention between state-led and political persecution and repression, including the arrest of AbM's representative to the network, Mqapheli Bonono; SRAN and Venceremos' engagement with community members facing mistreatment, unfair displacement, and resettlement, threats, and even violence and death through the actions of large scale mining companies, with the complicit support of traditional authorities' and government officials and institutions; Radio Ada's critique of Electrochem Ghana Ltd's monopoly lease to exploit salt from the community-owned Songor lagoon and the state-led persecution and ultimate death of Noah Dameh, the Deputy Coordinator of Radio Ada, under the claim of spreading false news; and finally, CLP's engagement with community members, particularly women and their role in the land justice movement in South Africa.

The interconnections in stories by the different movements and the commonality shared have gone far in co-inspiring and suggesting strategies to deal with their independent movement struggles, as well as strengthening their mutual solidarity. Amanor Dziagu (2023) of Radio Ada illustrates this point when he reflected on what solidarity and

partnership meant to Radio Ada as members of the TLN, as well as within their own Ghanaian context. He titled their contribution, “Partnership is the Best Thing to Offer” – a clear and simple message.

As the storytellers they are, Radio Ada members like to center their presentations around sayings and adages, and this was no different. Dziagu (2023, n.p.) began with the saying, “Hior duor ha muor, ne muor hu duor ha hior” that loosely translates from Dangme to English as “the right hand baths for the left hand, whilst the left hand also baths the right hand.” Dziagu explained that the adage “is telling us that one cannot do it alone and it is always successful when more hands and more ideas are brought on board.” He then added, “Knowledge, they say, is like a baobab tree and no one can embrace it all alone.”

Speaking of Radio Ada’s partnerships with the TLN, the Third World Network (TWN), and the Ada Songor Lagoon Association (ASLA) as different branches of partnership, Dziagu (2023, n.p.) reflected that “partnership with the Translocal Learning Network has not only put us at the center of the global world, but it is continuously impacting knowledge in our Ghanaian network membership.” Going further, Dziagu mentions the logistical support they have received from the network as well as the skills they have learned from our activities, such as critical thinking, creative writing, and a storytelling structure “that creates imagery that the deaf can hear and the blind can see.”

Turning to another branch, Dziagu (2023) then reflected about the importance of the TWN and their legal aid for Radio Ada: not only had they been providing legal advice and representation for late Deputy Coordinator Noah Dameh in his fight against accusations of publishing false news in the courts, but the TWN also provided Radio Ada with important legal documentation to bring to light the Electrochem Ltd. monopoly happening in Ada. On the one hand, the TWN had no direct access to the people to whom these documents concern and did not know the Dangme language in which they should be published locally; on the other hand, Radio Ada had no access to these documents, but the community radio station only broadcasts in Dangme and have deep roots in communities affected by this monopoly. For the TWN to give Radio Ada these documents meant they could stand in solidarity and cooperate to protect the livelihoods of the Dangme people - one hand washing the other.

Looking at another partnership branch, Dziagu (2023) spoke of their partnership with ASLA as perhaps the closest one of the three. They have

held demonstrations, provided company during trials, and facilitated bails for journalists and land defenders. They stood side-by-side with Noah in his struggle against prosecution. ASLA also played a crucial role in Noah's funeral.

Lastly, turning to another branch, Dziagu (2023) described Radio Ada's partnership with the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA). The MFWA has continuously stepped up to share Noah Dameh's story on an international platform. They have kept their eye on Radio Ada as far back as 2018 but have been especially vigilant since the attack on the station on January 13th, 2022, which they reported on and condemned (MFWA 2022). In 2023, MFWA published a piece in which they expressed that they were "deeply concerned about the remand for two weeks of Noah Dameh, who is accused of defaming Ghanaian businessman Daniel McKorley, and urges Ghana's Attorney General to intervene to end the persecution of the journalist" (MFWA 2023a, n.p.). They followed the piece with a petition three days later, in which they re-stated that they "appealed to Ghana's Attorney General and Minister of Justice to intervene to end the persecution of journalist Noah Dameh who has been remanded in custody" (MFWA 2023b, n.p). Surrounding these pieces, the MFWA has kept Noah and Radio Ada featured in their publications about press freedom and the safety of journalists, making sure that their stories are not forgotten or kept out of these conversations even after Noah's untimely death (see MFWA 2023a; 2023b; 2023c; 2023d; 2023e). As an organization dedicated to protecting press freedom and journalism, MFWA's partnership with Radio Ada has meant access to international attention on issues that may otherwise go unnoticed. In addition, MFWA's solidarity with Radio Ada's central mission – to report the truth and make information accessible to the locals of Ada – means that they can work together for the same goal, each in their own scale. This is another great example of one hand washing the other, or "Hior duor ha muor, ne muor hu duor ha hior."

Leaves & Fruit, a conclusion (for now)

"Our collaborative efforts and the stories we share are the fruit of our tree"
- Zodwa Nsibande, Church Land Programme, 2023, n.p.

At the end of the branch, attached to the trunk, tethered to the ground through the roots, are the leaves, and the fruit. The leaves feed the tree, even as they are fed by the tree by its lifegiving sap; the fruit grow from the tree to house, protect and eventually share and spread its seeds, its gifts, elsewhere. Together, the leaves and fruit represent the

replenishment and future of the tree, and the culmination of the tree's purpose. In our network, the leaves are our members, and the fruit, the product of our collective struggles - the knowledge we have gained, the knowledge we have grown. Amanor Dziagu (2023, n.p.), from Radio Ada, captured this idea above when he stated, "Knowledge, they say, is like a big baobab tree and no one can embrace it alone." The knowledge we have grown has been cultivated together.

The metaphor of the tree emerges from our collective discussions of what we see this network as, and what we hope it will be. Briefly, we will recapitulate the stories from our partners with reference to this metaphor. These stories are some of the fruit we see taking shape in our partnership through the way they overlap, support, and yet are unique contributions to this paper:

- Abahlali baseMjondolo shares a critique of development that starts from the standpoint that the poor and marginalized are the authors of their own theory and analysis
- Savannah Research and Advocacy Network narrate the key challenges communities have faced in dealing with large scale mining emergence
- Radio Ada shares with us the importance of partnerships and collaboration in activism and community journalism in the face of corporate and state oppression and persecution

These stories overlap through the ways in which one provides a conceptual frame, another provides concrete examples of partner actions, and the third speaks to how our partnership can build support and solidarity. Across all of these, we are beginning to see four types of fruit growing from this partnership:

1. Translocal Learning: Partners are sharing stories and learning from each other's struggles; this process both validates and deepens these stories and learnings;
2. Knowledge democracy: Sharing/learning helps sharpen stories to speak to the world, and thereby centre the voices and more broadly share the knowledge of those at the heart of struggle;
3. Solidarity: Mutual solidarity is continuously emerging/deepening, as we hold each other's stories and struggles;
4. Collective Action: Through ongoing gatherings, collective campaigns are starting to take shape, percolating in the various movements, but also inspiring each other to interweave each other's causes in our own.

The story shared by Radio Ada about the importance and impact of partnerships speaks deeply to what is being learned about mutual solidarity in the network. The critical analysis of development processes by AbM - and their emphatic insistence on the power of their own analysis - speaks to the knowledge democracy being grown by this network; it also speaks, for instance, to the translocal learning fruit being AbM's analysis and their strategies influencing organizing in Ada as well as the organizing in Ghana's Upper East Region (see Langdon, 2022). By the same token, the example of collective action taken to support AbM during the incarceration of Mqapheli Bonono, as well as the coming together to support Radio Ada during the harassment, arrest, and death of Noah Dameh, shows the power of collective action emerging from the network. These fruits are constantly emerging because they are rooted in the collective gatherings, and ongoing sharing of struggle, the network members all engage in. We look forward to sharing what spouts from the seeds of these fruits in the time to come. For now, however, this is a picture of the tree that has grown through our efforts.

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Reckoning and Reflecting with the multiple crises of our Times. Translocal social movement learning

Langdon, J., Cameron S, Baidoo, L and Paradela, R

Abstract. In our post-COVID global community, we continue to grapple with multiple interconnected crises, including climate change, capitalist dispossession, war, violent repression, and genocide, as well as the inability of our international governance systems to address them. Amid this bleakness, social movements, both locally and transnationally, are taking action in response to these ongoing crises. In this article, we introduce the Translocal Learning Network (TLN), a research collective of social movements rooted in Ghana, South Africa, and Canada, and its work responding to the multiple global challenges of today for an anti-capitalist and climate-just future. The TLN's operation is guided by the objective and philosophical approach of catalyzing and fostering non-hierarchical, local-to-local (translocal) learning through mutual support. Therefore, it positions itself as a critique of neocolonial and top-down development, asserting that affected communities must be the *authors and crucial actors* of their own future. To illustrate the network's philosophy and vision, we employ the metaphor of a tree, describing its theoretical and methodological "roots," its structure and formation as the "trunk," and its "branches" representing the strategies employed by network members. In this way, we showcase emerging learning as collective "leaves" and "fruit" that highlight shared respect, epistemic solidarity, and the TLN's strategic actions.

Keywords: Social movement learning; translocal; participatory research; Ghana; South Africa.

**Reflexion et analyse des crises multiples de notre époque. Apprentissage
du mouvement social translocal**

Langdon, J., Cameron S, Baidoo, L and Paradela, R

Résumé. Dans notre monde post-COVID, nous continuons de faire face à de multiples crises interdépendantes liées au climat, à l'expropriation capitaliste, à la guerre, à la répression violente et au génocide, ainsi qu'à l'incapacité de nos systèmes de gouvernance internationale à y faire face. Malgré ce contexte sombre, des mouvements sociaux poursuivent leurs actions aux niveaux local et transnational en réponse à ces crises. Cet article présente le Réseau d'apprentissage translocal (TLN), un partenariat de recherche réunissant des mouvements citoyens du Ghana, d'Afrique du Sud et du Canada, et leurs travaux visant à relever les multiples défis mondiaux qui menacent un avenir climatiquement juste et anticapitaliste. Le TLN s'appuie sur une approche philosophique visant à catalyser et à animer un apprentissage et un soutien mutuel non hiérarchiques, de niveau local à local (translocaux). Elle s'inscrit donc dans une critique du développement néocolonial et vertical, affirmant que les communautés impactées doivent être les principales *actrices et créatrices* de leur propre avenir. Pour illustrer la philosophie et la vision du réseau, nous utilisons la métaphore de l'arbre, en soulignant ses « racines » théoriques et méthodologiques, sa structure et sa formation (le « tronc »), et ses « branches » qui représentent les stratégies mises en œuvre par ses membres. Ce faisant, nous mettons en évidence les apprentissages émergents, tels des « feuilles et des fruits » collectifs, qui témoignent du respect mutuel, de la solidarité épistémique et des actions stratégiques du TLN.

Mots clés: Apprentissage par les mouvements sociaux ; translocal ; recherche participative ; Ghana ; Afrique du Sud

Reflexionado sobre las multiples crisis de nuestro tiempo. Aprendizaje translocal de movimientos sociales

Langdon, J., Cameron S, Baidoo, L and Paradela, R

Resumen. En nuestra colectividad mundial post-COVID, continuamos lidiando con múltiples crisis interrelacionadas, como la climática, el despojo capitalista, la guerra, la represión violenta y el genocidio, así como la incapacidad de nuestros sistemas de gobernanza internacional para afrontar estas crisis. En medio de esta desolación, los movimientos sociales, tanto a nivel local como transnacional, están llevando a cabo

acciones en respuesta a las crisis actuales. En este artículo, presentamos la Red de Aprendizaje Translocal (TLN, por sus iniciales en inglés) una colectividad de investigación de movimientos sociales enraizados en Ghana, Sudáfrica y Canadá, y su labor responde a los múltiples desafíos globales actuales para un futuro anticapitalista y con justicia climática. La operación de la TLN es guiada por el objetivo y enfoque filosófico de catalizar y fomentar un aprendizaje no-jerárquico y local-a-local (translocal) desde el apoyo mutuo. Por lo tanto, se sitúa en una crítica al desarrollo neocolonial y vertical, afirmando que las comunidades afectadas deben ser los autores y actores cruciales de su propio futuro. Para ilustrar la filosofía y la visión de la red, empleamos la metáfora de un árbol, describiendo sus "raíces" teóricas y metodológicas, su estructura y formación como "tronco", y sus "ramas" que representan las estrategias empleadas por los miembros de la red. De este modo, mostramos los aprendizajes emergentes como "hojas" y "frutos" colectivos que resaltan el respeto compartido, la solidaridad epistémica y las acciones estratégicas de la TLN.

Palabras clave: Aprendizaje de movimientos sociales; translocal; investigación participativa; Ghana; Sudáfrica

CONFERENCES AND SEMINARS

Critical Literacy and Social Justice: Report on the Engaged Minds Symposium

The ARLE Special Interest Group on *Literacies: Reading, Writing & Oracies*, in collaboration with the Department of Arts, Open Communities and Adult Education at the University of Malta, held a three-day, international research symposium titled Engaged Minds: Exploring the Intersection of Critical Literacy and Social Change, from 22 to 24 October 2025, at the Valletta Campus. Convened by Prof Carmel Borg, the symposium brought together educators, researchers, activists, and community practitioners to examine the role of critical literacy in analysing social inequalities, challenging dominant ideologies, and contributing to broader social justice movements. Participants explored how both traditional and digital literacies shape power relations and considered examples of critical literacy in action across local and global contexts.

Across presentations, workshops, and network sessions, the symposium emphasised practical strategies for integrating critical literacy into educational and community settings. Discussions focused on fostering critical engagement with media, supporting the development of critical digital literacies, and encouraging collaboration between sectors to drive social change. The event highlighted participants' shared commitment to using literacy as a tool for empowerment and concluded with reflections on personal and collective responsibilities in advancing more just and equitable societies.

Third International UNESCO Chair Malta Seminar on Global Adult Education

On 4 and 5 November, the 3rd Global Adult Education Seminar, organised by the UNESCO Chair in Global Adult Education, took place. As in the previous two editions, this 'intimate' Seminar was held over two days in the UM [Faculty of Education](#) Boardroom. As in the previous years, a small group of 6 guests was invited to address the chosen theme. This year, the theme was Community Education.

The invited speakers, the bulk of whom were lodged at the Urban Valley Resort and Spa at Kappara, just behind the UM's Msida campus, were the following: Professor Maria Slowey, Emerita, Dublin City University, Ireland; Professor Edith Gnanadass, University of Memphis, USA, Professor Jesus Jaime Diaz, Colorado State University Pueblo, USA, [Dr Maria Brown](#), University of Malta, Malta, Dr Sandra Vatrella, University of Naples Federico II, Italy, Dr Sehnaz Nigar Celik, Yuzuncu Yil University, Turkey.

The seminar, convened by [Prof. Peter Mayo](#), UNESCO Chair in Global Adult Education, was officially opened by [Prof. Colin Calleja](#), Faculty of Education Dean, who outlined the Faculty's work to date in adult education.

Second International UNESCO Global Adult Education Chair Malta Conference on Critical Adult Learning and Education - CALE 2025

The University of Malta Valletta Campus was once again, after 2023, venue for a massive international conference organised and convened by the *UNESCO Chair in Global Adult Education* on Thursday 6 and Friday 7 November 2025.

Over 70 participants were registered for this conference, hailing from South and North America, Africa, Eastern and Western Europe and Asia. This conference followed on the one held in May 2023 in which Adult Learning and Education was combined with Critical Education in general. This conference focused exclusively on *Critical Adult Learning and Education* (CALE).

The conference programme was planned by the present UNESCO Chair incumbent, [Prof. Peter Mayo](#) and the onsite running of the two days was coordinated by Prof. Mayo and prospective UNESCO co-Chair, [Dr Maria Brown](#), with logistical support before and during the conference forthcoming from the University's Conference Unit, particularly [Lucienne May Bugeja](#) and [Maria Evelyn Vella](#).

The conference was officially opened by the Dean of Education, [Prof. Colin Calleja](#) and the two keynote speakers, one keynote address at the start of each day, were Prof. Roberta Piazza, Università di Catania and [Prof. Kenneth Wain](#), University of Malta.

The programme was jam packed and involved three rooms on the Valletta campus' second floor, including the Aula Prima.

The general enthusiasm for and satisfaction with this event, expressed by many participants are leading the convenors to mull changing this from a bi-annual to an annual event. Work is now about to be carried out on the publication of the conference proceedings.

Both the preceding 'intimate' two day seminar and the CALE conference are considered important events on the international adult continuing education calendar. They constitute two important activities in the work package of the UNESCO Chair in Global Adult Education.

CONFERENCES AND SEMINARS

Connecting Communities for Collective Action: Report on the 2025 AONTAS Adult Education Summit

Thomas Murray

AONTAS, Ireland's National Adult Learning Organisation

At a time when democracy and social cohesion are challenged across Europe, the AONTAS Adult Education Summit highlighted how adult education connects communities and empowers people to stand up for collective action.

The Summit brought together adult education learners, practitioners, policy makers and academics in Dublin, Ireland, on 19th-20th November to reflect on adult education, and to ask critical questions about who our education systems serve, and who they leave behind. The event attracted some 200 participants from across the island of Ireland, the United Kingdom, and Europe and was officially opened by Ireland's Minister of State at the Department of Further and Higher Education, Marian Harkin.

'We must resist': The Critical Role of Adult Learning in Fractured Times
Dr Sharon Clancy (University of Nottingham) delivered a powerful keynote address entitled 'Reclaiming Resistance and Resilience'. Sharon drew on her own research and activism on class, community, and culture to name the systems and inequalities creating division within our communities in the current political climate. Her address highlighted the importance of ensuring, as Raymond Williams once put it, that adult learning becomes part of a process of social change: 'Our education system is so often skewed toward a particular elite perception of social mobility. We must resist that. We need, at grassroots level, to think about

equitable participation and how we could affect democratic societal change. That comes from us all working together’.

In his keynote address, ‘Popular Education in Historical and Contemporary Practice’, Professor Peter Mayo (University of Malta) reminded participants that education grows from people, place, and struggle. Peter traced the roots of popular education - from the popular, anarchist movements in Spain to the radical, non-formal traditions of Latin America - to explore mutually intertwined ideas of learning and organising learning. Citing Antonio Gramsci, Gabriela Mistral, Ivan Illich, and Paulo Freire, he offered a tour de force survey of critical contributors to an ongoing international and intergenerational praxis centred on community-led learning, resistance to colonialism, and ‘learning webs’ grounded in local knowledge and lived experience. The struggle continues!

Learner Voice and Democratic Learning

Adult learners’ voices featured prominently throughout the Summit. In a vital contribution that received a standing ovation, Cathy Clear shared how she had hidden her literacy issues her entire life until she took the step to take classes with her local Education and Training Board. Cathy is now writing a book of short stories that she hopes will be helpful to adult learners in similar situations. Returning to education as an adult, Cathy said, transformed her life and her sense of self-worth: ‘I’m not ashamed anymore. I want to make a difference for other people and show them what’s possible’. This positive message found a joyful echo in a live music performance from the Forever Young Community Choir. On Day One of the Summit, AONTAS launched the 2025 Learner Voices Across Ireland report. Within Ireland’s adult learning system, the National Further Education and Training (FET) Learner Forum represents a formally recognised space for FET learners to discuss their learning experience together and to inform its future development. The corresponding report draws attention to the voices of learners living with disabilities, learners in the International Protection system, as well as apprentices struggling at the intersection of work and learning. It further highlights the need to improve financial and mental health supports for all learners. Representatives from AONTAS, Galway and Roscommon Education and Training Board, and Learning and Work, UK, discussed the report’s findings while the importance of Learner

Voice to future policy was highlighted in subsequent contributions by civil servants from both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Adult Education Beyond Borders

Themes of increasing social polarisation and declining trust in institutions in Ireland, the UK, and Europe cohesion featured prominently throughout the Summit as did the role of adult education in supporting social cohesion and inclusion. On Day Two, AONTAS launched the 2025 Adult Learner journal which explicitly addressed this theme. This year's special edition focuses on Challenging Racism and Creating a More Inclusive Society, bringing forward the ideas of educators, practitioners, and learners pushing for meaningful transformation in policy and practice.

Panel discussions brought together colleagues from across Europe to share perspectives on adult education in their national contexts, and insights into trends and challenges across the continent. Panellists included Lubica Gálová (Lifelong Learning State Vocational Education Institute, Slovakia), Raffaella Kihrer (European Association for the Education of Adults), Dr John Evers (Association of Austrian Adult Education Centres), and Nessa White (SOLAS, Ireland).

Strengthening Care, Connection, and Community

Summit attendees could choose from a range of interactive panels and workshops exploring adult and community education from diverse perspectives. Topics explored included learner voice, transformative education in times of polarisation, and partnerships between community education providers and higher education institutions. Workshops enabled discussion around equality in apprenticeships, practical anti-racism, and storytelling as a means of connecting communities. The agenda reflected and enabled a diverse mix of insights, lived experience, and learning in action.

The final panel, Strengthening Communities through Community Education, brought together leaders from across the sector - Dearbháil Lawless (AONTAS), Ciarán Mac Giolla Bhéin (Conradh na Gaeilge and Glór na Móna), Philomena Abulu Obasi (Diversity and Inclusion), and Vivienne Glanville (Women's Collective Ireland). They explored how community education drives social change, strengthens language and

cultural identity, challenges racism, supports women's leadership, and builds collective power in communities.

Adult learner and AONTAS Board Member, Chidiogo Blessing Ebeledike, summed up the Summit's impact when she highlighted the importance of learning alongside people of all ages and backgrounds, brought together as a community. 'Community education is more than education', Blessing emphasised, 'It's where you find connection, support, and friendships'.

The AONTAS Adult Education Summit was co-funded under the New European Agenda for Adult Learning (NEAAL) and funded by the European Union.

You can find out more about AONTAS at <https://www.aontas.com/>

IN MEMORIAM

Francisco Vio Grossi (1943-2025)

Trayectoria, legado y inspiración

Jorge Osorio Vargas

Universidad de Valparaíso

Octubre de este año ha fallecido en Santiago de Chile Francisco Vío Grossi (Pancho se le llamaba en la comunidad global de educadores y de investigadores). Su deceso es ocasión para recordar y agradecer las contribuciones de Pancho al trabajo educativo y a la Investigación Acción Participativa (IAP) en América Latina y El Caribe no sin reconocer su participación y liderazgo en las redes de los movimientos sociales y de la cooperación internacional a nivel mundial. Nacido en 1943 estudió Derecho en la Universidad Católica de Valparaíso (Chile) siendo parte del movimiento de la reforma universitaria y política que el país vivió en los años 60 y 70 del siglo pasado. Ya titulado de abogado se incorporó como profesional en la institucionalidad gubernamental de la Reforma Agraria donde combinó sus saberes técnicos y sociales con el enfoque pedagógico participativo que Paulo Freire había sembrado en su paso por Chile como asesor de los procesos de capacitación impulsados por la Reforma Agraria. El golpe de Estado de 1973 sorprendió a Pancho y su familia en la ciudad de Talca, fue apresado y reprimido por las fuerzas militares golpistas y debió exiliarse en Inglaterra.

Cursando un doctorado en Sociología en la Universidad de Sussex se vinculó a redes y grupos de trabajo que investigaban problemáticas rurales en África y América Latina a través de la IAP y proyectos de educación de adultos de inspiración freireana. Desde entonces su vida como educador e investigador se vinculó al Consejo Internacional de Educación de Adultos (ICAE) y a sus redes. Junto a Budd Hall, Paulo Freire y Orlando Fals Borda impulsó la red latinoamericana de IAP que

luego dio lugar a la creación del Consejo de Educación de Adultos de América Latina (CEAAL) del cual fue su Secretario General hasta 1990. Desde Inglaterra Pancho emigró a Venezuela desempeñándose como profesor e investigador en la Universidad Nacional Simón Rodríguez consolidando su rol de liderazgo en la IAP y en la educación popular de América Latina. Organizó simposios internacionales de IAP que dieron lugar a publicaciones que se convirtieron en marcos de inspiración política y epistemológica para investigadores que trabajaban en universidades, organizaciones no gubernamentales de desarrollo, centros de educación popular y movimientos sociales. De regreso a su país en 1982 implementó proyectos de IAP junto a comunidades campesinas, estudió la situación del mundo rural y de la agricultura familiar durante la dictadura y organizó programas de capacitación para dirigentes que reorganizaban el tejido social campesino destruido por la contrarreforma agraria de la dictadura. Asentó la sede del CEAAL en Santiago y junto un grupo de profesionales, educadores, investigadores y líderes sociales creó el centro EL Canelo de Nos, que bajo la forma de una organización no gubernamental se constituyó como un centro de referencia para Chile y América Latina en la formación de educadores populares, en la promoción del desarrollo local, la educación de los derechos humanos y la creación de grupos de estudio en políticas sociales, género, derecho comunitario energías renovables, desarrollo sustentable y ecología política que al tiempo de la recuperación democrática en Chile proveerían de experiencia profesional a los programas gubernamentales post dictadura.

En los años 90 del siglo pasado Pancho fue Presidente del ICAE y luego Rector de la Universidad Bolivariana, Director de la Agencia Gubernamental de Cooperación Internacional y Embajador en la República de Guatemala. De regreso a su país en la primera década del presente siglo reasumió su rol de liderazgo en El Canelo de Nos que conservó hasta su fallecimiento.

En su trayectoria como investigador, educador y gestor de importantes proyectos de cooperación internacional Pancho deja lecciones importantes y que conservan toda su relevancia y actualidad en nuestros días. Su marco de apreciación de los procesos sociales y políticos de América Latina estuvo basado en tres principios: la vitalidad de los procesos de educación popular como dimensión estratégica de los movimientos sociales; la dimensión democrática y altermundista de los procesos de generación de conocimientos y

aprendizajes desde el “mundo de la vida” de los sectores subordinados y vulnerados de la sociedad, y ; la generación de redes y alianzas globales para construir alternativas políticas que superaran el orden neoliberal y sus derivaciones más recientes a regímenes autoritarios en el mundo.

Pancho formó a varias generaciones de líderes democráticos de base , promovió pedagogías comunitarias y dialógicas como condición y sello del trabajo educativo y social de las organizaciones no gubernamentales y centros de estudios, valoró la interculturalidad como vía de reencuentro humano y epistémico en el campo académico , creó espacios de expresión para el arte y la cultura popular, los conocimientos ancestrales de los pueblos originarios o primeras naciones y confió siempre en la capacidad de las comunidades de base y los movimientos sociales para crear conocimientos a través de la IAP y la educación popular en un diálogo crítico con los saberes dominantes formalizados en una cultura académica no renovada . Avant la lettre Pancho fue un intelectual-educador decolonial que nos deja la tarea, aún inconclusa, de fortalecer estrategias educativas que distribuyan socialmente el poder y los conocimientos, democratizando el acceso y el disfrute sin límites de los bienes comunes de las ciencias, de las tecnologías , de las humanidades y del arte.

IN MEMORIAM

Francisco 'Pancho' Vio Grossi (1943-2025) Grassroots Activism and Participatory Action Research

Budd L. Hall

University of Victoria, B.C., Canada

Born in the coastal Chilean city of Valparaíso, Chile in 1943, Francisco Vio Grossi's life can be understood best within the tumultuous road to democracy and beyond that Chile has experienced over the past 80 years. I met Pancho at the University of Sussex in 1974 in England during his years of exile having escaped from imprisonment in the national stadium by the Pinochet government. When we first met, he told me that his Father had been the lawyer who brought a legal suit against Coca Cola to reveal its recipe before it could be imported into Chile. Coca Cola won that legal challenge, but Pancho learned the importance to working for justice.

His first degree was in law. He was an activist during the Allende years working in agrarian reform with peasants to take control and manage the farms where they had previously been workers. He gained insights that would eventually lead to his contribution to the field of participatory research. He ran for political office under the MAPU political party of the day. When the Pinochet coup of 1973 happened, Pancho and thousands of others were arrested and taken to the national stadium for processing.

He travelled through the mountains to Argentina and was in Buenos Aires for some time exploring what he and his wife might do in exile. He was fortunate to get a scholarship to come to the Institute of Development Studies in Sussex, UK under the mentorship of Prof. Emmanuel de Kadt, a Chilean sociologist aligned with the resistance to Pinochet. His PhD was written about the Mexican agrarian reform movement. My friendship with Pancho began in Sussex. I shared the

ideas that we had developed in Tanzania called participatory research. He related that that was the way that many of them had been working during Salvador Allende's days. Pancho wrote an article about his work in Chile in the first journal written about participatory research which came out in 1975.

I moved to Toronto, Canada in 1975 to work with Prof J. Roby Kidd on the creation of the International Council for Adult Education. We organized the first World Conference on Adult Education in Tanzania in 1976. Pancho participated in that along with Paulo Freire and many others of that generation. Pancho was key in the decision to create the International Participatory Research Network. After his years in England, he took a job as a Professor in Simon Rodriguez University in Caracas, Venezuela. It was from Caracas that Pancho created both the Latin American Network in Participatory Research and later the Latin American Council for Adult Education (CEAAL). Pancho led the Latin American group to the first international meeting of the participatory research network in Ljubljana, Yugoslavia in 1980.

Once the security situation was more favourable, Pancho was able to return to Chile and began working with the remarkable network of grass roots activists and intellectuals who were all working for the return to democracy in Chile. Pancho and his colleagues eventually were able to build the legendary popular education centre, El Canelo de Nos. Pancho was the architect of the Third World Assembly of Adult Education that took place in Buenos Aires in 1985. With Alfonsín giving the keynote address, the Buenos Aires conference brought the Latin American popular education movement together with the global adult education movement. In 1990 he was elected to the position of President of the International Council for Adult Education. He was also appointed as President of the Universidad Bolivariana. Once democracy was regained in Chile, Pancho also served as the Director of the Chilean Agency for International Cooperation in the government of President Eduardo Frei Ruiz Tagle. He was subsequently appointed as Ambassador from Chile to Guatemala. Upon return to Chile for health reasons he resumed his role as Director of El Canelo and later as President. He welcomed all the progressive Presidents of Chile, the legendary Brazilian, Paulo Freire, Mwalimu Julius K Nyerere of Tanzania and thousands of Chilean activists.

Pancho's passing is a deep loss for me. We supported each other in our various projects over the years. He was full of joy. He could dance both the Cueca and the Tango. He had a vision of what true democracy could be and the skills to bring democracy to life. He is survived by his talented wife Cecilia and his adult children Panchito and Daniela. He would certainly join us in saying, 'Hasta la Victoria.....Siempre'.

IN MEMORIAM

Pierre Dominicé (1938-2024)

Pierre Dominicé's Biographical Gifts

Linden West

Canterbury Christ Church University, UK

Pierre Dominicé's life was redolent with inspiration, energy, dedication, alongside struggle, anxiety and quest. It offers us - students, colleagues in Geneva and a wider world, me included - an abundance of gifts. Gifts matter as French feminist philosopher Helene Cixous has written for a vibrant ecology of learning. Cixous says of the good writer that "she involves her story in history (...) using poetry, fiction, and the theoretical idea of the gift in a feminine economy" (compared with the masculine economy of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's 'capital'). Gifts bring superior possibilities, she insists, including in adult learning; "the genuine gift is admissible...because of the ability of women to accept and accommodate the other, libidinally and reproductively, without violence" (cited in Chapman Hoult, 2012).

The above, I suggest, is also true of men like Pierre Dominicé: symbolically the feminine and masculine can be integrated in processes of eclectically inspired lifelong learning and of what Jung called individuation. Learning eclectically about feeling as well as mind, body as well as spirit; accepting a kind of negative capability - a capacity to live in doubt as well as uncertainty without grabbing at facts and resisting the fundamentalisms of some contemporary religion. But also finding symbolic truth in aspects of the Christian eucharist, the bible and images of the cross.

History is also central to biography: we are inevitably creatures of our times. Times, in large part for Pierre and others, when conventional forms of religion struggled to be heard, or are arrogant in their fundamentalism. Times when the liberal spirit in adult or higher

education gets marginalised under the mantras of economic deities and the business university. And times where biographical work became an existential necessity as inherited templates fracture, and we are forced, like it or not, to compose lives on more of our own terms. Times too of deepening anxiety about climate crisis, wealth inequality, conspicuous consumption and febrile worship of Mammon. And of war, and crises of democratic life and mental health. Here is the context in which Pierre Dominicé lived his life and struggled for wisdom. In his struggle, we can find profound gifts.

It might seem strange evoking Cixous when I think of Pierre, a year or more after his death. But the idea of his life as gift is strong: the gift of his teaching, of his spiritual and religious quest, and of his biographical approach to adult education, codified in his book *Learning from our lives* (Dominicé, 2000). The book was an inspiration in my own work, and an inspiration for students across Europe, and a wider world, thanks to his important role in the francophone 'L 'Association Internationale des histoires de vie en formation et de recherche biographique en education' (ASIHVIF) and the 'European Society for Research on the Education of Adults (ESREA) Life History and Biography Network', over many years. As I write in this moment, I also recall the gift of talking to him just before he died: in a Maison de Retraite, near Geneva, in the company of his former student, who became a dear colleague to us both, Michel Alhadeff-Jones. Michel had been anxious that I visit Pierre knowing of my admiration for him and also recognising just how ill he was. It was a final time to be together before his death (I'd done a Workshop for Michel in life history and professional experience, immediately before, at the University of Freiburg, in Switzerland).

Pierre invited us into his lovely room in the Maison de Retraite, with a stunning view of a river and mountains. We sat and mused, and I noticed an open edition of the Psalms on the table near his bed. I read them too, I think I said, admiring their vibrancy, joy and suffering as 'wisdom literature'. He nodded. 'The spiritual life is crucial', he said. 'Yes', I agreed, but why then, I asked, in our work together in the ESREA Network over so many years, did we give so little attention to it? Pierre shrugged and said that 'it was not the done thing in the academy'. I realised how we both sought to reconcile a good and liberal spiritual life with the religious inspiration of our youth and the largely secular, technicist and scientific naturalism of the academy. Getting older gave some of this greater urgency, for both of us.

Pierre demonstrated in *Learning from our lives* how to nurture oral testimony – around, for instance, significant experience and or problems in a student’s professional life – over time, and in dialogue, and then to weave it creatively and analytically into forms of imaginative, reflexive writing. Students worked in supportive groups, shaped by groundrules emphasising the importance of time and space for self and the other, for non-judgementalism, the narrative imagination, generosity of spirit as well as dialogue. Pierre and colleagues offered rich theoretical resources, drawing on the work of Michel Foucault, Paul Ricoeur, Gaston Pineau and Christine Delory-Momberger, among others. Gradually, students learned to deepen their story as the world of ideas encountered lived experience in a dialogical community. An iterative process connected inner life and meaning with professional concerns and a wider literature. A quest to move beyond fragments of experience, and to find more of a whole, a gestalt, to guide professional and personal life. And to find more self-recognition and acceptance in the process too, in a community of learners. These hermeneutics have shaped my own work among generations of Masters and Doctoral students, and in the Middle East, when working with Jewish Israeli and Palestinian educators.

Giving time to the personal and historical – even when time is scarce – and for storytelling. In Geneva, and Canterbury, among other places, narrative risks were encouraged and shared reflexivity cultivated. And learning to write imaginally in the potential poetics of history and self was deemed essential, encompassing messy, mysterious, obscure, and ethically challenging as well as beautiful, even sacred moments. That sums up one aspect of Pierre’s gift to us all.

Pierre, I should mention, was raised in a Protestant Genevan family and studied theology at University before working in university adult education. I realise now how we shared a common quest, through reading his last book *Au risque de se dire* (Dominicé, 2015). The book was written on his retirement and is an expression of frustration about what is difficult, sometimes impossible to say in the academy: about the importance of inner meaning, stillness, the symbolic and learning from the other in a turbulent culture, where people have become more frightened of one another. And how the academy can make this difficult in its deification of disembodied theory.

Pierre sought an ecumenical, dialogical, cosmopolitan solution to faith in a globalised world: in the company of diverse friends from the Taizé

community, where simple, meditative chants support prayer and silence and the search for reconciliation across diverse traditions. Among spiritual friends too in Buddhism, and in experiencing the Catholic eucharist at the 'Foyer Cistercian de soeurs'. Pierre's was a never complete quest for truth, dialogue and meaning. It was an unfinished attempt to reconcile some earlier religious grounding with diverse spiritual perspectives, within a secularised academy culturally 'allergic' to Christianity. Peter Alheit, the distinguished sociologist, who also played a leadership role in the ESREA Network, reminded me, on Pierre's death, that both he and Pierre had been Protestant Pastors. What emerges now, as I read Pierre's writing, is a kind of challenge to the conventional antagonism between 'academic knowledge' and 'religion', or at least spirituality in the struggle to build the good society in a globalised world. Both/and, not either/or.

We need, as Pierre saw it, to ground ourselves biographically, in a cosmopolitan openness to 'alterity', to better understand the depths, exhilaration and occasional failure of our own and others' learning lives. And, in fact, doing biography and generating meaning is itself, at times, profoundly spiritual. But the academy is often dazzled by the spell of quantification, scientific naturalism or theoretical performance, relegating inner life and the search for meaning to its margins. Work of this kind struggles for legitimacy and space.

And to return to the Psalms and symbolism. Pierre writes of these, in *Au risque de se dire*, and his beliefs, as embodying a form of 'dissidence'. Of personal rapport with God, through which a dialogical spirit lived in relation to the Psalms. Here is writing embodying a mix of gratitude, recognition, acknowledgement, revolt, joy and suffering, he wrote, where he feels in dialogue with the Psalmists as well as God. But this requires silence and stillness too, which takes time and effort if the text is to become alive and intelligible. Pierre however does not seek certitude or crave membership of groups. Rather he celebrates difference, and the importance of engaging with others' diverse interpretations on matters that are both clear and obscure. He finds arrogance in the certainties of ecclesiastical hierarchies that get in the way of such a living, learning faith. He finds powerful illumination in the symbolism of the cross: in terrible abandonment alongside resurrection; as well as in the eucharist's bread and wine, and the feeling of being fed and sustained. This is enough, he writes, to sustain him in his dissident pilgrimage.

He/we might also hear a call from the Cosmos to work to make things more conscious, in beautiful ways. Bach's *St Mathew's passion* is a case in point, as is the making of the good learning life. It is something sacred. Pierre's life was spent experiencing and illuminating the interplay of auto/biography, mythos and logos, youth and age, health and illness, science and religion, the material and spiritual, learning and resistance in a dissident but also loving way. Pierre's spirituality lies in holding on to some religious roots – eucharistic and biblical – while accepting the difficulty of explaining or justifying them in the academy, and a globalised world. But via ritual, symbolism, and the crucial work of dialogue, across difference, we can progress. Pierre is deeply perplexed at where the world is heading, as many of us are – pedagogically, epistemologically, culturally, ecologically and spiritually – but in facing this and dialoguing, spiritually, with diverse seekers, in the Psalms and here and now – passionately, eloquently, always respectfully – Pierre offers perhaps his last and greatest gift.

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IN MEMORIAM
André Schläfli (1950 – 2025)

Alan Tuckett and Sturla Bjerkaker

Former director of the Swiss Lifelong Learning Association (SVEB) from 1991 – 2016, André Schläfli passed away unexpectedly in Cyprus 22 November, and we are many friends and adult educators in Europe and globally who mourn the loss of a good friend and colleague.

André was first and foremost a Swiss, but to get inspired for his work “at home”, and to inspire colleagues abroad, he became for many years an active member of the executive board of the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) and later, from 2011 – 2016, the European Vice-President of ICAE, the International Council for Adult Education. In 2012, he was inducted into the International Adult and Continuing Hall of Fame (HoF), where he also later became the Chair of the Board. He also initiated the European Branch of the Hall of Fame – HoFE, which under his leadership grew to be an important part of the Hall’s activities.

I (Alan) first met André in 1991, just after he was appointed to transform SVEB into a lifelong as well as life-wide community learning association. He had an unusual background for our work, having previously been a banker, but it gave him skills in budget management we learned to appreciate! He brought energy, organisational skills, an enquiring mind and enduring passion to adult learning and education. As well as work as colleagues in EAEA, I worked closely with him and Ruth Jermann over the launch of the nationwide LernFestival. It was creative, innovative and full of fun.

I (Sturla) met André around the turn of the millennium. He had been working for some years to create an Adult Education Law in Switzerland, and I was invited to present the Norwegian legislation. We

became close friends, and we worked together both for ICAE and for the Hall of Fame, and we had numberless discussions where we sometimes could disagree but always ended up friendly.

Over the 25 years he led SVEB, he persuaded legislators to adopt the law enshrining financial support for Adult learning and education as well as a secure financial footing for SVEB's work, which was realized in 2017. He pioneered work on professionalisation and certification of the teaching workforce.

André played a key role in securing Swiss Co-operation funding for the work of ICAE, which lasted for several years. Andre was a bright, hardworking and stimulating colleague and friend, never shy to challenge adult educators' orthodoxies, but always a loyal and committed partner in the work. He will be hugely missed.

BOOK REVIEW

Paolo Vittoria

L'Asino Mancino. Archaeologia di un educazione
(*The Left handed Dunc. An Archaeology of an education*),
Bibliotheka Edizioni, Rome, Italy,
2024, 92 pp. 9788869349058 (open access)

Peter Mayo

University of Malta

The school's programming for failure is a staple of Sociology of Education as developed in the late 60s and throughout the 70s and 80s in the 'Western' capitalist-driven world. More precisely it is the staple of critical versions of educational and cultural sociology spearheaded by such prominent works as the School of Barbiana's *Lettera a una Professoressa*, Don Lorenzo Milani's *Esperienze Pastorali* (Milani was the Barbiana school's director), and, among others, the writings of Pierre Bourdieu who shared with Milani knowledge of the French critiques of bourgeois institutions. Bourdieu was of course a major source of this French critique, together with Christian Baudelot and Roger Establet, Louis Althusser, the France-based Greek, Nicos Poulantzas and Raymond Boudon. Others from the British-American context, such as Raymond Williams (see his book *Culture*), Bowles and Gintis, Jean Anyon, Paul Willis, Paul and Phil Corrigan and the whole stream of contributors to critical pedagogy, foremost Henry Giroux, underline this point. Some venture beyond simple reproduction analysis to highlighting forms of cultural production emerging as a result of student disenchantment, alienation and resistance.

Paolo Vittoria has been an exponent of this type of critique both in the Italian language and in English; two books co-authored with the undersigned attest to this. In this small but compelling book, however, he sheds light on the processes involved in this "programming for [potential] failure" and eventual defiance of the odds through in depth, contextually

grounded personal narratives as student, educator, professor and *meridionale* ('Southern') intellectual straddling the unmistakably 'geographical 'Southern' contexts of Naples and Brazil. The narrative approach, constituting a personal odyssey and memoir, helps Paolo take in all the intricate contextual factors that contribute to a person's formation. These include tribulations and cutting loose. The latter entails a sense of adventure. As the memoir shows, this involved moving outside Italy to the impoverished but, like Naples, culturally throbbing Brazilian *Nord-Este*. He did so without at first speaking a word of Portuguese or rather Brazilian variants of Portuguese which, through living with *camponesa* families and in a new milieu, he eventually mastered. Brazil was to become an integral part of his life from then onward culminating in his marrying a *paulistana* of Neapolitan extraction, settling down as post doc fellow and professor in the country's *carioca* side and having children born there.

Interesting parallels abound with his city of origin, "*Napule mille culure*" (*Napoli, mille colori* - Naples a thousand colours), as the great Pino Daniele would sing. Naples, the city which draws closer than any other, that I know of, to the Latin American context, is the place where the "*carta sporca*" (dirty scrap of paper) and the "*inte' viche*" (interior of the narrow alley, *vicolo*) combine with examples of past and present creativity. This brings to mind the "*Spaccanapoli*" street said to divide the city, or it's "*centro storico*" (historical centre) in two with the street's rundown facades providing much of the setting for landmarks in European philosophy from Saint Thomas of Aquino (at San Domenico Maggiore in the Piazza San Domenico) to Gianbattista Vico to Benedetto Croce (his Istituto di Studi Storici palace is smack in the centre of Spaccaapoli with that section of the street named after him). Then there is creativity in works of art there or in the vicinity with non Neapolitans such as Caravaggio, Jusepe de Ribera (lo *spagnoletto* from Xativa in the Spanish Valencia region), Mattia Preti (Calabrian from Taverna who worked in and for Naples, even from his Malta workshop) and the Roman born Artemisia Gentilleschi (darling of feminists) besides a possee of Neapolitans as Luca 'fa presto' Giordano, Battistello Carracciolo (not to be confused with his later politician's namesake after whom a prominent street is named), Francesco Solimena (l'Abbate Ciccio), Massimo Stanzione and many others including Giuseppe Sanmartino of the veiled Christ. Then there is the theatre with the city's plethora of auditoriums, one dedicated to the '*principe della risata*' (the prince of laughter), Antonio De Curtis, better known as Totò. Another is the Teatro San Ferdinando (it testifies to the city's Spanish

heritage) with its surrounding square and streets dedicated to the greatest Neapolitan theatrical family, the de Filippo family. None of these are mentioned in the memoir, neither Enrico Caruso, Massimo Troisi, nor Pino Daniele, except of course the one great Argentinian and adopted Neapolitan 'saint' who rivals San Gennaro: the iconic Diego Armando Maradona. It is obvious that Paolo basks in the glory brought to the partenopean city by the Argentinian, whose legacy can be felt also well after his death as he turned Napoli from a provincial club to one of Europe's powerhouses, having just won the football championship (Serie A).

Paolo took solace from the fact that Maradona was a *mancino* (left footed), not ambidextrous, unlike the other Latin American idol, Pele. In this regard, *el pibe d'oro* was a role model for Paolo who, as a child at school, was made to feel not normal because of his natural tendency to write with his left hand, something the system sought to 'school out' of him and other children, one of the several forms of documented physical (not simply symbolic) school violence. This is one of the features which, together with others, contribute to discrimination in the school system. Superstition and religious misconception or misrepresentation play their part not accounted for in generalised discussions around school inequality. The exception is when cases are dealt with contextually and holistically as with ethnographic social research, with their 'thick' descriptions, and memoirs or narratives such as this one.

The choice of Brazil as Paolo's adopted other context was not accidental. As with Maradona choosing 'unfashionable', 'subaltern' Naples when the world was his oyster, Paolo's choice of Brazil might perhaps have been, with the advantage of hindsight, spot on. Affinities abound between the two contexts. Precarious living and resilience in colonial contexts, Naples colonised by the Italian 'North' through the Risorgimento, combine with creativity and manifestations of what Antonio Gramsci calls the "popular creative spirit". Popular education is one such example in this book, associated as it is with work in the favelas and barrios of Latin America. Its most heralded practitioner, Paulo Freire, is a great source of reference in the various short essays in this precious little volume. Paolo, however, traces this to similar manifestations of popular education in Naples especially his work at the *casa dei scugnizzi*, street urchins, once romanticised in Neapolitan art. This throws into sharp relief the figures of Mario Borelli, dubbed 'Don Vesuvio' because of his larger than life personality, and Don Ciccio (Ciccio being an abbreviation for Francesco).

Paolo also sees affinities with his later work with the *maestri di strada*, street teachers, that abound throughout Italy and Naples in particular.

For my money, this is the best chapter in the memoir, a great narrative contribution to the international literature on popular education. It underscores the kind of nonformal education to which Italy's contribution has been great, as shown in this book with references to, for instance, the post war work of Aldo Capitini. All this stands in contrast to the hegemonic discourse of the narrow competence based education and the OECD and EU driven, Lifelong Learning, of which this book provides trenchant criticisms. The popular, as Paolo shows, provides examples of creative, contextually-based, approaches to education and cultural production as opposed to the staid, 'one size fits all' life-sapping hegemonic ones emerging from the major European institutions and, worse, philistine US Trumpian oligarchies of power.

BOOK REVIEW

Carmel Borg and Peter Mayo (Eds.)

*Stretching Boundaries of Critical Education:
Past, Present, and Future Possibilities,*
Faculty of Education, University of Malta, Malta,
2024, 333 pp., 9789918203345 (pbk)

JosAnn Cutajar

University of Malta

When you are teaching, sometimes you need to stop and truly reflect on what you are doing. When I was invited to review this book, it prompted me to pause and re-examine my role as an educator, and to reflect more deeply on the current state of education in Malta. I became a teacher in 1989 because I firmly believed that education could be a tool for social change - one that encourages people to think critically, to empower themselves, and to support marginalised communities. Reading this volume reaffirmed my conviction about the transformative power of education and reminded me of the importance of resisting the reproduction of social exclusion and injustice within educational systems.

The structure of the book itself invites reflection. It uses the past to interrogate the present, opening up possibilities for a more emancipatory future in education. Critical education challenges traditional norms and practices, pushing beyond established boundaries to address issues of power, inequality, and social justice. The book powerfully demonstrates how learning can be transformative, helping individuals and communities to question dominant narratives and engage in practices of emancipation. It provides much-needed spaces for marginalised voices to be heard, recognised, and empowered—to envision and fight for alternatives to injustice.

I particularly appreciated how the book draws from a rich diversity of experiences and knowledge from different parts of the world - especially from countries often labelled as “less developed” in both the Global North and Global South. Contributions from scholars in the Global South show that researchers from these regions are not merely describing phenomena but are also generating critical theories with global relevance. Authors such as Njoki Wane, who explores Mwalimu Julius Nyerere’s educational philosophy of Ubuntu and self-reliance, illustrate how indigenous philosophies can offer powerful alternatives to colonial and Eurocentric models of education.

Importantly, the book seamlessly weaves together theoretical discussions and practical analyses, addressing various fields such as public education, STEM, compulsory education, adult and popular education, theatre, oral history, and literacy. The chapters reveal, for example, how colonial education undermined indigenous pedagogies (Wane), how the militarisation of education threatens democracy (Bordin), and how technocratic approaches dehumanise medical education (Grant).

Several chapters resonated with me on a personal level. I was particularly drawn to contributions that focused on grassroots initiatives and emancipatory knowledge production, such as Aidan Jolly’s work on somatic knowledge and embodied learning; Angela Daly’s “spaces of hope”; Gianna Katsiampoura’s recounting of women educators in the Greek Resistance; and Jesus Jaime-Diaz’s exploration of Critical Race Theory in Oregon’s community colleges. Eva D. Babovec’s feminist critique of critical education also stood out, reminding me how feminist and critical pedagogical frameworks share a commitment to challenging systemic inequalities and amplifying marginalised voices.

Both critical pedagogy and feminist education challenge power dynamics, reject the idea of “neutral” knowledge, and prioritise lived experiences, intersectionality, and transformative learning. Aidan Jolly’s emphasis on co-produced knowledge echoes these principles, suggesting that learners and educators must work collaboratively rather than hierarchically. Knowledge, as the book repeatedly underscores, is situated, contextual, and shaped by histories of struggle and survival.

This insistence on diverse, contextualised knowledge is urgent. As Peter Mayo and Paolo Vittoria argue, education cannot remain tethered solely to Eurocentric or North American models; it must be globally relevant

and locally responsive. In Malta, as elsewhere, we see how a single pedagogical model often marginalises vulnerable groups. Different individuals and communities require different forms of education at different stages of life - whether for healing from trauma, empowering minority groups, or fostering economic self-sufficiency.

Moreover, several chapters offer timely critiques of the commodification of education. Maria Chalari, Eleftheria Atta, and Hasan H. Aksoy warn against how market-driven priorities deepen educational inequalities - a phenomenon increasingly evident in Malta. Aksoy's critique of the growing gap between private and public education mirrors the troubling PISA results in Malta, where children from independent schools outperform their peers in state schools by nearly two years. Education risks becoming a privilege rather than a right, reinforcing existing social divides.

The book also highlights the role of non-formal education in promoting democratic and emancipatory ideals. Aidan Jolly's work with theatre, for example, illustrates how embodied practices can be used to foster public health awareness, address trauma, and build resilience through collective knowledge production - an approach deeply aligned with feminist critical pedagogy.

Another powerful contribution comes from Sung Sang Yoo, Gabyung Kim, and Yu-Na Kim, who explore literacy among the elderly. In a rapidly changing world, illiteracy - whether traditional or digital - isolates individuals and erodes their agency. Literacy remains fundamental for social participation, dignity, and self-esteem.

In conclusion, *Stretching Boundaries of Critical Education* is a rich and timely volume. It reminds us that the periphery and semi-periphery possess the capacity to generate theory, knowledge, and praxis that challenge dominant paradigms. I am deeply grateful to Professors Carmel Borg and Peter Mayo for facilitating this edition, and to all the authors who have shared their critical and hopeful visions for education. This book is not only an academic contribution; it is an invitation to rethink, to resist, and to reimagine education as a truly emancipatory force in our lives and societies.

BOOK REVIEW

Catherine M. Hands

*Pathways to community engagement in education.
Collaboration in diverse, urban neighborhood,
Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, Switzerland,
2023, 267 pp., ISBN 978-3-031-33001-8 (eBook)*

Antonella Naudi Costa

University of Malta

This book is based on a research project in the city of Stirling in Ontario, Canada, focusing on four schools in underprivileged neighborhoods characterized by diverse cultures. As indicated in the title of this book, the author solidifies the meaning of collaboration within a community and provides an in-depth look at how collaboration between the schools and the community can serve as a catalyst for improving schools, enhancing educational attainment, and addressing the different learning needs of the students.

The author, who is a teacher by profession, is an educational researcher in Ontario. Her contribution is integrated into a wider study of collaboration, a concept that rose to prominence in the 1980s and has since experienced ongoing development. Hence, this research significance expands upon previous studies. Indeed, this book highlights the broader connection between communities and schools on a macro level, analyses the influences of processes and social environments on a micro level, and challenges the belief that schools can function autonomously from the community.

I was intrigued by the way that the author presents each chapter by using familiar comparisons to introduce new concepts. From the author's description of the mutually beneficial relationship among zebras, rhinos and woodpecker birds who exchange food and insect relief, she transitions into the interconnectedness of social systems, as exemplified by the transportation of the Sahara Desert Dust across ecosystems. In the

beginning of each chapter, those narratives provide the readers with a framework to comprehend the intricate field of community engagement in education. The author adeptly sets the stage for the upcoming chapter by introducing its primary theme, facilitating a smooth transition while maintaining a consistent focus on the significance of school community engagement.

This book is enhanced by rich literary sources to substantiate the researcher's findings. The author does not only rely on her own expertise in the field, but she also skillfully draws on renowned international experts. For readers who are still unfamiliar with the subject matter, some theoretical discussions might seem complex, however the author's writing style makes the book accessible to a broad audience. The author navigates through the theoretical underpinnings, policy implications and practical implementations within this educational sphere, captivating and involving the reader all the way. She takes a holistic approach to this study, drawing up both the sociological and ecological concepts as frameworks to understand the contextual elements that affect the collaboration process.

Case study methodology was adopted, which adds depth and credibility to the conclusions drawn, and enhances the understanding of community engagement across different urban contexts. In each chapter the author strategically incorporates first-hand accounts from interviews conducted with participants involved in this study; mainly professionals working in schools and community members from public and non-profit sectors, which serve to reinforce the significance of the results that emerged from this study. Out of the 95 interview subjects, there was only a representation of one community resident, also a parent of one of the students. A bigger representation of parents would have enriched the study even more, given that the parents or primary care givers can bring broader perspectives and insights about the students, thus their role in decision making processes is crucial. Indeed, this would prevent shifting the entire responsibility of the children's education solely on teachers.

The theme of connection and collaboration between various social environments resonates throughout this book. The author makes special reference to the partnership process between the school leaders and administrators, community members and students, highlighting the necessity to engage in and sustain collaboration and networking for fruitful results. The study also sheds light on how crucial it is for educators to go beyond their traditional role of academic instructors to cater for the unique strengths, challenges and backgrounds of each

student. In addition to this, when there is lack of motivation and interest to create opportunities for collaboration, community partnerships will encounter obstacles to commence new activities and to sustain them.

The author also considers the different diversities in the schools and through this research she gives evidence of how community collaboration had the capacity to address disparities in the provision of support to students who experience adverse life circumstances and who cannot reach their full potential academically. This study also makes a reference to mental health issues in students. The author shows that community engagement is needed to tackle the serious consequences of mental health illnesses in young students.

At the conclusion of each chapter, the readers are provided with a comprehensive summary of key points followed by recommendations and concluding reflections offering a deeper understanding of the chapter's content and encouraging further engagement on the subject matter. This book is intended for an audience who are actively engaged in the field of education, community development workers, youth workers, social workers based in community and educational settings, policymakers and all those professionals and members in the communities including parents who see the potential in the communities and schools as agents of change.

This research is about the schools and communities working together in contribution towards the overall educational success of students and youths. It also sheds light on the reality that obstacles and challenges to collaboration exist. Thus, professionals can use this book as a guide for further reference on the subject matter, and researchers can be inspired to explore the school-community and family collaborations even further.

BOOK REVIEW

Tiziana Rita Morgante

*Educare e disobbedire: in dialogo con Danilo Dolci,
Mesogea, Messina, Italy,
2024, 192 pp., 978-88-469-3033-0 (pbk)*

Peter Mayo

University of Malta

This book, authored by one of Danilo Dolci's collaborators at Trappeto and Partinico, and published on the birth centenary year of the educator it celebrates, consists of interviews, reflective pieces and seminar proceedings. These are all focused on the tasks and experiences of generating popular consciousness and collective resource creation in a community constantly facing, for this purpose, severe types of what Paulo Freire calls 'limit situations'. The context is characterised by what, many contend, has been a 'State within a state' with its own rules, concerns and *modus operandi*. Many nowadays go as far as to contend that this state within a state has now extended its reach into the more national centers of power.

Danilo Dolci, originally from Italy's 'North', chose Sicily as his terrain of operation, after he abandoned studies in Architecture to take up social engagement on behalf of and with the downtrodden, 'I poveri cristi', as he calls them. The alternative state to the mainstream one is of course the Mafia. The terrain is also part of that 'Southern' region once constituting the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, also, when under Bourbon rule, arguably the richest province in that then geographical expression called 'Italy'. It was eventually to be reduced to a subordinate province or colony following the Rothschild-induced overthrow of this monarchy, then perceived as a threat to British naval dominance in the Mediterranean. This of course occurred in the course of the Piedmontese-led *Risorgimento*. What we have here is a context marked by an intricate web of colonialism, 'internal' colonialism. The situation foregrounds the 'Southern Question' (la Questione Meridionale), dealt with by Dolci in one of his videos and

elsewhere. It forms the backdrop to the situations discussed in the interviews and other writings in this book.

As with all decolonising discourses, Dolci's approach at the heart of this volume conveys a sense of community and community empowerment at that. This occurs through, among other things, advocacy, including media advocacy via *digiuni* (hunger strikes), activism and communal action. Communal action includes showing the potential and room for actual employment, as with the *sciopero alla rovescia* (reverse strike). This would involve unemployed persons engaging collectively in urgent infrastructural projects which require human power and which, either for lack of imagination or more likely *will*, the mainstream authorities were reluctant to engage. So is the *diga* (dam), involving a mass collective effort which many regard as Dolci's and his followers' crowning success story.

The discussions in this book gravitate around educational approaches intended to generate confidence among the community and in its own resources, including manifestations of what Gramsci would call the 'popular creative spirit'. As with Don Milani and Paulo Freire, the approaches were intended to develop that critical consciousness and 'hermeneutics of suspicion' (Ricoeur) necessary to enable people not to accept things unquestionably in pure 'banking education' fashion.

In this regard, the pedagogical approach favoured by Dolci, to help render community members *cittadini sovrani* (sovereign citizens), as Don Milani would argue, is a *maieutic* one, as derived from Socrates. This *maieutica* is adopted by Dolci as his main pedagogical weapon against social and intellectual passivity. It is the anti-transmission pedagogical, communications model (a community radio was developed by Dolci and his collaborators) and entails constant questioning. One relies on problem-posing questions rather than on receiving answers, prescriptions. This is what Paulo Freire calls "A Pedagogy of the question", the mark of *problematisation*.

The affinity between Dolci, Milani and Freire, as well as other writers, are brought out well with the provision, in the book, of even excerpts of transcripts from a seminar at Trappeto and Partinico, the centre of gravity for coordination, documentation, monitoring and preparation for the many Dolci-led projects, including the Mirto school. Many of the cited figures still alive in Dolci's time even collaborated with him and his fellow activists, especially in the 70s. The book rightly provides ample space for a symposium held at Trappeto in 1975, featuring, among others: Paulo Freire, who travelled from Geneva then as he was in exile from his

Brazilian homeland, Johan Galtung, chief proponent of peace studies and education, Bogdan Suchodolski, great Marxist Humanist philosopher of education from Poland, widely respected internationally, even by Poles well after 1990, and Ettore Gelpi, one of Italy's Radical Party founding members and Head of UNESCO's Lifelong Education Unit. The others included a then young Maltese socialist activist who would eventually, several years later, become a Minister of Education in his country.

This must have been a momentous seminar to discuss an important project in education carried forward by Dolci and his collaborators. It is great that Tiziana Morgante's volume sheds ample light on it, reproducing the actual participants' choice of phrases, albeit, in the case of some, in Italian translation. My only quibble is that I am sure Paulo Freire used *praxis* in his intervention, not the reported *prassi*, as it has been translated, which means *abitudine*, everyday habitual ways. Praxis is more than this. It entails reflection on action, involving recourse to theory as codified reflection, for transformed action that can in turn transform lives. The actual word therefore should have remained the Ancient, Greek, Aristotelian, *Praxis*.

At the end of this excellent book, which reveals how some of Dolci's basic ideas are taken up by Morgante in her own practice as a teacher in a Rome public school (she had joined Dolci's team of volunteers during and after her student days), I have been left with still one intriguing question. How did the entrenched traditionally ruthless forces in Sicily allow Dolci and his followers to survive with his projects? One would think, they would have been perceived as threatening their interests. As Roger I. Simon once asked in the title of a contribution to *The Critical Pedagogy Networker*, "but who will let you do it?".

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and

- d) What would be the specific research interests of readers / adult education specialists / practitioners that the text can support? (e.g., 3-4 examples of specific research interests and/or specific nomenclatures / levels of scholars / specialists / practitioners that the text can support).

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