

Artigo

The vertical curriculum in the lifelong learning perspective

O currículo vertical na perspectiva da aprendizagem ao longo da vida

El currículo vertical en la perspectiva del aprendizaje a lo largo de toda la vida

Paolo Di Rienzo¹

University of Roma Tre (UniRoma3) Rome, Italia

Abstract

The paper considers the concept of the vertical curriculum in the lifelong learning conception. The concept of vertical curriculum introduces an issue that marks a discontinuity with transformative values in pedagogical debate and teaching practice. The perspective of lifelong learning modifies and integrates the educational project precisely on the basis of a different temporal conception, not only on the adjustment of organizational structures but on the ecology of development and learning understood as a vital process. In this sense, schools must confront the scientifically proven thesis that people continue to learn and transform throughout their lives and must at the same time make this idea pedagogically sustainable. From this point of view, the reference map comes to be supplemented with the concepts of mental plasticity and pervasiveness of knowledge, from which some key criteria for learning-to-learn-oriented design, among others, can be derived. The vertical curriculum represents a cultural artifact, progressive and recursive, capable of promoting training in complexity, understood in this part as a process that is related to the dimension of reflexivity and strategic competencies: a process that lasts throughout the life cycle and allows for the construction of meanings from experience, in a perspective of critical consciousness, global citizenship and planetary responsibility.

Resumo

O artigo leva em consideração o conceito de currículo vertical na concepção de aprendizagem ao longo da vida. O conceito de currículo vertical introduz uma questão que marca uma descontinuidade com valores transformadores no debate pedagógico e na prática docente. A perspectiva da aprendizagem ao longo da vida modifica e integra o projeto educativo justamente a partir de uma concepção diferente de tempo, não apenas no ajuste das estruturas organizacionais, mas na ecologia do desenvolvimento e na aprendizagem entendida como um processo vital. Nesse sentido, a escola deve confrontar a tese cientificamente comprovada de que as pessoas continuam aprendendo e se transformando ao longo de suas vidas e deve, ao mesmo tempo, tornar essa ideia pedagogicamente sustentável. Desse ponto de vista, o mapa de referência integra-se aos conceitos de plasticidade mental e pervasividade do conhecimento, dos

¹Full Professor, Department of Education, University of Roma Tre. PhD in Education. ORCID id: 0000-0001-6774-9516 E-mail: paolo.dirienzo@uniroma3.it.



quais podem ser extraídos alguns critérios-chave para aprender a aprender, entre outros. O currículo vertical representa um artefato cultural, progressivo e recursivo, destinado a promover a formação da complexidade, entendida nesta parte como um processo que se relaciona com a dimensão da reflexividade e das habilidades estratégicas: um processo que perdura por todo o ciclo vital e que permite construir significados a partir da experiência, numa perspectiva de consciência crítica, cidadania global e responsabilidade planetária.

Resumen

El artículo toma en consideración el concepto de currículo vertical en la concepción del aprendizaje a lo largo de toda la vida. El concepto de currículo vertical introduce una pregunta que marca una discontinuidad con los valores transformadores en el debate pedagógico y en la práctica docente. La perspectiva del aprendizaje a lo largo de la vida modifica e integra el proyecto educativo precisamente a partir de una concepción diferente del tiempo, no sólo sobre el ajuste de las estructuras organizativas sino sobre la ecología del desarrollo y sobre el aprendizaje entendido como un proceso vital. En este sentido, la escuela debe confrontar la tesis científicamente comprobada de que las personas continúan aprendiendo y transformándose a lo largo de su vida y debe al mismo tiempo hacer que esta idea sea pedagógicamente sostenible. Desde este punto de vista, el mapa de referencia se integra con los conceptos de plasticidad mental y omnipresencia del conocimiento, de los que se pueden derivar, entre otros, algunos criterios clave para aprender a aprender. El currículo vertical representa un artefacto cultural, progresivo y recursivo, diseñado para promover la formación de la complejidad, entendida en esta parte como un proceso que se relaciona con la dimensión de la reflexividad y las habilidades estratégicas: un proceso que perdura a lo largo de todo el ciclo vital y que permite construir significados a partir de la experiencia, en una perspectiva de conciencia crítica, ciudadanía global y responsabilidad planetaria.

Keywords: Lifelong learning, Reflective teachers, Learning to learn, Strategic competences

Palavras-chave: Aprendizagem ao Longo da Vida, Professores Reflexivos, Aprender a Aprender, Competências Estratégicas

Palabras clave: Aprendizaje a lo largo de toda la vida, docentes reflexivos, aprender a aprender, habilidades estratégicas

1. Fundamentals of the vertical curriculum in a lifelong learning perspective

The concept of vertical curriculum introduces a question that marks a discontinuity with transformative values in the pedagogical debate and in teaching practice. In this sense, the school should pursue a double educational line: vertical and horizontal. The vertical line expresses the need to set up a training that can then continue throughout life.

If the notion of curriculum is not new to the scientific and professional community, it is nevertheless necessary to think about the organization of a school form in the name of complexity and to deal with issues that do not fully coincide with those of the classical curriculum.

The category of complexity is the engine of a profound transformation of cultures, mentalities and identities, but also of the logics and processes of education. It - understood as pluralism, as reciprocity of unity and multiplicity, as

the cohabitation of local and planetary spaces together, as a disposition to hybridization; but also as a reflection on complexity itself, as a reading of its cognitive style, of its organizational function (of experience and/or knowledge) of its multiple heuristic models – it defines a formative paradigm, a model of construction of the ego, of intelligence, of communication, in a school that is less and less a separate body of society and more and more a functional agency - but critically functional, also – to its development (Callari Galli, Cambi, Ceruti, 2003, p.11).

In this case, the vertical curriculum represents a progressive and recursive cultural artifact, designed to promote education in complexity, understood in this part as a process that concerns the holistic dimension of the person, constitutive of lifelong learning and focused on the category of strategic competence, in which learning to learn takes on importance.

Let's try to understand, in the perspective adopted, what can be the content paths that are intertwined with the notion of vertical curriculum.

Complexity education is related to the dimension of reflexivity in learning processes. Learning is a process that lasts throughout the life cycle and allows us to construct meanings from experience, in a perspective of critical consciousness, global citizenship and planetary responsibility. In this sense, strategic competences play a key role, including the ability to learn. Learning to learn is related to educational, didactic and learning situations, which allow subjects to understand their relationship with knowledge and with the process of knowing, starting from the initial school experiences in which children are involved. The vertical curriculum is therefore oriented towards the focus of awareness and change of perspectives, pursued through the promotion of metacognitive and epistemological competences, with a view to lifelong learning.

The theme of lifelong learning has been present since the second half of the twentieth century and has gone through the ups and downs of the international political and cultural debate in many ways.

In the early years of the second half of the twentieth century, UNESCO supported the intrinsically progressive value of the concept of lifelong education, understood – in contrast to the elitist conception of education, of the mere reproduction of social inequalities – as a principle closely linked to issues of social justice and access to education guaranteed to all throughout life. This approach, on the other hand, is criticized and questioned by other international organizations, as it is utopian, generic and scarcely practicable. Since the same period, in fact, a functionalist orientation has been affirmed, with increasingly accentuated forms up to the present day, which understands, in an almost exclusive way, education as a tool for economic growth.

In view of this, the central thesis, which we want to develop in this paper, consists in conceiving lifelong learning as a horizon of meaning and cultural perspective for the educational system, when it is understood within the formative perspective of human learning development and the capabilities approach (Sen, 2001).

Reference is made here to the humanistic interpretation of the concept of lifelong learning. Understood in this way, this concept is conceived as a condition of social and individual development for the expansion of the substantial freedoms enjoyed by human beings. It is a perspective that – going beyond the traditional conceptions of economic development, even those centered on the theme of human capital – places at the center of growth strategies the ability of

individuals to live those lives that they have reason to appreciate and to expand the real choices they have available through the possession and development of those capabilities that are a strategic condition for the substantial freedom of human beings and in this sense of their ability to play an active role also in economic and productive development (Sen, 2001).

In fact, in the current scenario, increasingly characterized by social complexity, on the one hand, the principle of the lifelong learning potential of human beings has undoubtedly been acquired and, on the other, the primacy of economic rationality is strongly discussed, even in the face of the now cyclical global economic/financial crises. Both of these aspects bring into play the need for renewed attention to the development of a reflective rationality that gives value to the resources of individuals. Thus, the need for a more advanced cultural orientation is reaffirmed, based on the guidelines of meaning and the generative value of action, in which the ability to attribute meaning to oneself and others is important.

It is in this perspective that a formative interpretation of the concept of lifelong learning is emphasized, which emphasizes the reflective character of human action, on the ability of subjects to structure cultural behaviors in a global dimension of life characterized by the potential for learning throughout the course of life. This perspective can contribute to defining a new theoretical framework of reference for the education and training system, which, from a perspective of lifelong learning and lifelong education, cannot shirk its responsibility towards multiple transformations that are redefining our life systems.

2. A critical approach to lifelong learning

In the framework of the European Union, lifelong learning is defined in the 2000 Memorandum on Lifelong Learning and the Communication on Making a European Lifelong Learning Area a reality, “any learning activity undertaken at any time in life aimed at improving knowledge, skills and competences from a personal, civic, social and/or employment” (Commissione delle comunità europee, 2001, p. 10). Among other things, the Memorandum recognizes that lifelong learning is not only characterized by the lifelong dimension, i.e., for the entire life span, but requires the enhancement of the lifewide dimension, understood as the significance of learning processes in all contexts (formal, non-formal, informal), and of the lifedep dimension understood as a profound transformative change that is not simply mechanistic of the individual who learns. Such two dimensions are usually implicit in the most common term lifelong learning.

It is therefore substantiated in the learning that affects the entire course of a subject's life and is presented both as a process of formation of citizens, personal enrichment and professional qualification; and as a process, so that they may be able to contribute to the development of democracy.

If we want to search for the origin of the concept of lifelong learning, it should be pointed out that, although in the literature since the times of ancient Greece it had been highlighted that man feels the need to learn throughout his life, the concept in question has found its first and systematic elaboration only since the seventies of the last century. In this period, in fact, UNESCO (Faure et al, 1972) introduced lifelong learning as an inspiring criterion for renewing the education sector and for promoting, through the latter, social equality.

On this basis, in order to mitigate economic, social and cultural inequalities, policies relating to education and instruction would necessarily have to be based on new paradigms. From this point of view, lifelong learning was attributed the function of a channel of access to a better society and a better quality of life and that of a tool to predict and adapt to change without suffering its consequences, leveraging the personal development of individuals.

This humanistic interpretation of lifelong learning, however, did not find complete support from the policies that followed over the years and, even less, from the broader socio-productive context, because it stood at the antipodes of the neoliberal wave that invaded the Western world.

In fact, it was not until the mid-1980s that we fully observed the predominantly utilitarian approach of lifelong learning at the centre of the debate. This direction is part of and is due to a significant change in the way of conceiving reality, which at that historical moment, was interpreted in an economic key.

In this new institutional, social and productive order, educational policies are being revised. In an economy increasingly characterized by changeability and uncertainty, in fact, education has seen its intrinsic function as a source of improvement in itself questioned and has been conceived mainly as a tool for economic productivity. This was closely linked to the positions of some economists that starting with technological change and moving on to the promotion of the demand for education, technological change itself would accelerate and there would be an increase in productivity.

There has therefore been a shift from the humanistic vision of lifelong learning, as a tool to stem social inequalities, to an economic vision, according to which education and instruction are used as slogans to promote technological change, in favor of greater productivity.

In the first half of the 1990s, lifelong learning was the subject of attention, both by UNESCO (which in 1994 identified lifelong learning for all as a medium-term strategy for the period from 1996 to 2001), by the Ministers of Education of the European Union, and at the 1996 conference. urged Member States to make lifelong learning a reality for all and to make it a priority for the next five years.

Also in 1996, the European Union, on the occasion of the publication of the Cresson White Paper, relaunched lifelong learning as a concept to promote individual development and to achieve greater employability, recognising it as a fundamental element of knowledge (Commissione europea, 1996).

During this period, the European institutions have come to realise that along with the promise of increased productivity and improved living standards, the new economy also introduces new challenges for society, industry and individuals.

In the face of this new awareness, it was considered that, if the challenges related to the evolution of society were not faced by citizens with the appropriate tools, there would be a risk of marginalization and exclusion, exacerbating social inequalities. With this in mind, the new economy required flexibility and a spirit of adaptation to change, all skills that could be addressed thanks to continuous and recurring training, a passport to mobility.

The new focus on lifelong learning also emerged from the publication, in 2000, of the aforementioned Memorandum on Lifelong Learning, which was the result of the reflections that the European institutions have developed on lifelong learning.

In accordance with the Lisbon European Council in 2000, the Memorandum, reaffirming the interconnectedness of social and economic changes, established that lifelong learning should have two main objectives: to promote active citizenship and to promote employability. In fact, the document states that lifelong learning is an essential policy for the development of citizenship, for social cohesion and for employment.

More specifically, the European Union has attributed to lifelong learning as a strategy to face the challenges related to competition and the use of new technologies, but also, and not least, as a tool for improving citizens' cohesion, equal opportunities and, more generally, the quality of life.

Lifelong learning is therefore about critically exercising one's own thinking and applying knowledge not only in solving problems, but also in understanding and dealing with change. That is why, more and more often in recent years, lifelong learning has been placed at the center of the political agenda of many countries and international organizations. This growing attention shown by institutions towards the process of learning knowledge and competences through experience would be found precisely in the fact that it represents one of the strategic sectors for the economic and social development of countries and at the same time represents the fulcrum of the educational system.

In this sense, lifelong learning becomes a tool to face the challenges related to globalization, as through constant learning work the subject is able to orient himself and make his own choices, applying the appropriate competences to be used in the different stages of life.

Learning should no longer be conceived, therefore, as a process that takes place exclusively in the first phase of a subject's life and does not necessarily have to be linked to the formal channels of education with which he comes into contact in this phase but must take place and must continue in other areas as well, going beyond the places traditionally assigned to it. In this sense, the competence of the subject is no longer conceived as the result of the acquisition of knowledge acquired in youth but as the ability to mobilize at any time the resources (knowledge, skills) acquired during life in different contexts. Learning no longer takes place only within the training and education paths carried out by the subject but expands to decline as a potential that can be realized throughout life and in a plurality of situations and times (Di Rienzo, 2021).

On the other hand, the rhythms at which society is evolving quickly make the knowledge acquired obsolete and necessarily imply that the individual learns continuously throughout the course of his life, so that he can be the protagonist of his own choices and, more generally, of his own existence. Consequently, the ability of individuals to process and use knowledge effectively (competence) is the decisive factor of lifelong learning and it is therefore the task of institutions to create all those conditions for each individual to fully develop his or her potential and contribute to the progress of society. Learning thus becomes the key to addressing social exclusion and marginalization and a means of promoting civic well-being.

In the light of the above, it follows that education becomes a permanent process that is not limited to the activities carried out in educational institutions but goes beyond these narrow boundaries to involve subjects throughout the course of their existence, embracing the different areas of life, from the professional to the family, from the private to the social. In this perspective, lifelong learning becomes at the same time a policy, a theory, and a method,

through which the potential of each individual to learn and train in the course of life and realize one's life project is enhanced. Lifelong learning therefore represents a cultural and social change, to the extent that it allows the individual to expand his or her potential and allows him or her to participate effectively in the development of society, through the exercise of competences considered crucial, on a civic, social, and productive level (Di Rienzo, 2021).

3. Strategic competencies for the vertical curriculum

The definition of competence has involved many scholars from different disciplines and is still a debated topic, so much so that we should talk about definitions of competence in the plural. We can trace the beginning of the debate in the 1970s, in two specific areas, that of work and education. Within these two spaces, this word has been used to indicate individual qualities, rather than parameters for assessing knowledge. While the debate was enriched with new positions and even clashes, the transformations taking place in the world of work and education required a continuous rethinking of theories and practices that still occupy the pages of manuals and scientific journals today.

Certainly, the issue of competences has brought into a clearer relationship between the theoretical and practical dimensions, education and work, so much so that it has become the subject of national and supranational policies. This focus on competences and the places where they are learned and developed has initiated evaluation processes on the functioning and results of school and training systems and has stimulated new ways of classifying roles and tasks in the world of work.

The first necessary distinction concerns the definition of the term competence in the singular, which refers to a cultural approach, which marks the transition from the primacy of knowledge and transmissive teaching and tasks to the enhancement of applied practical knowledge and the social learning process (Benadusi, Molina, 2018). The term of competences in the plural, on the other hand, refers to a set of resources that should enable the citizen to cope with the continuous changes in society.

From a pedagogical point of view, there has long been a debate on how competences can be built, transmitted, and updated. If competence is only the result of experience, of practice, what role can education play? Competences are multidimensional constructions, consisting of information, concepts, motivations, values, and volitions that must be acquired in the contexts of education and training, at work; information is processed in processes, procedures that are articulated by the subject, individually; The processes adapt to social, cultural and organizational contexts, in a practical learning situation. Competences, therefore, can be built in all experiences, starting from educational and training, to work and daily life. Everything contributes to supporting development and renewing competences, where practice does not have a privileged place in which to realize itself but has places and contexts that expand the possibility of acting and gaining experience.

Many disciplines have dealt with competences: from sociology to educational sciences, from psychology to business sciences. Each of them amplified different, albeit complementary, aspects to which the different areas concerned with this theme referred: the management of human resources in companies, active labour policies, training, European policies.

Reflecting on competences for the vertical curriculum involves reflecting on so-called strategic competences.

In the perspective of the capabilities approach to promote opportunities for educational and social inclusion in a lifelong perspective, a commitment is required in the direction of strengthening individual competences (Sen, 2001).

The reference here is in particular to those key competences, defined by different studies as transversal (UNESCO, 2013), socio-emotional, non-cognitive, soft skills, character (European Union, 2019; OECD, 2015), life skills (UNICEF, 2020), skills for 2030 (OECD, 2019), personal, social and learning to learn competence (Council of the European Union, 2018; European Commission, 2020). These are competences that, although not included among the technical-professional ones, condition the ability of individuals to express professional behaviors and to place themselves in the work environment with adequacy, expressing, among other things, resilience and the ability to adapt to changes. They enable full participation in society and successful management of labour market transitions (Council of the European Union, 2018). According to the OECD's DeSeCo project, these competences are considered key as "competences of prime importance for a successful life and effective participation in different field of life – including economic, political, social and family domains; public and private interpersonal relations; and individual personal development" (Rychen, 2004, p. 321). The role of learning and competences as a lever for social and labour inclusion is also reaffirmed by the European Pillar of Social Rights, which in its first article states that: "Everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning, in order to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society and to successfully manage transitions in the labour market" (art. 19). This affirmation is based on the effectiveness of the exercise of social rights in the European

In this sense, strategic competences, variously named, are a set of relational, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral competences that influence the effectiveness of our daily actions. They fall under other types of competences, also by virtue of the fact that they are able to improve cognitive skills and, in general, a wide range of life outcomes, from educational success to the labor market, health and civil coexistence. These competences are primarily related to the emotional dimension and psychosocial competences. They are, in fact, attributable to behavioral skills, personality traits (such as openness to experience, conscientiousness, extroversion, friendliness, emotional stability), psychological characteristics (optimism, resilience, hope), motivational systems, forms of self-discipline, thought patterns, and metacognitive strategies. Although the notion of strategic competences is commonly accepted and there is a wealth of empirical data available on their effectiveness, there are many open topics, from their definition - "what and what are strategic competences?" - their conceptualization - "Do they correspond to personality profiles?" - their evolutionary dimension - "Do they develop or change over time?" - interventions for their learning and development - "Is it possible to teach them?" (Pisanu, Fraccaroli, 2022).

Strategic competences are also part of a broader construct that has been developed by the European Union in recent years, under the name of key competences for lifelong learning, and which represents a crucial aspect for the vertical curriculum.

Two important European Recommendations have initiated a process of defining regulations, practices and curricula in the various Member States: the 2006 Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning and the 2008 Recommendation on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). These institutional documents, and those that followed in the following years, were precisely concerned with ensuring that European citizens had opportunities to develop key competences for citizenship and lifelong learning.

The European guidelines on key competences allow us to introduce a further starting point on this broad and polysemic issue: the distinction between hard and soft competences, the result of various classification works that have attempted to divide competences into cognitive/hard, those relating to codified disciplinary knowledge and non-cognitive/soft competences, those attributed to personality, emotional and motivational sphere, social skills.

The focus on the emotional-relational aspects of competences has expanded and enriched with numerous international studies and surveys that have dealt with strategic competences and include, together with socio-emotional competences, processual and interdisciplinary competences. It is important to remember the extensive work of the OECD on this issue, starting with the De.Se.Co Project (Definition and Selection of Skills) (Rychen, 2003), launched in 1997, which based the reflection on what the key competences for the knowledge society should be. The De.Se.Co Project was carried out with the aim of providing a further conceptual framework that is the subject of international surveys to assess learning and key competences, such as the Pisa (Programme for International Student Assessment) (OECD, 2014) which aims to ascertain the knowledge and skills of fifteen-year-olds in school in the main industrialized countries on a three-year basis and to allow monitoring of the education system. The aim of this constant monitoring is to verify the extent to which young people leaving compulsory education have acquired certain competences considered essential to play a conscious and active role in society and to continue learning throughout their lives. In addition to these, there are surveys aimed at a wider segment of the population, the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) which has detected the ability to produce written information, providing a picture of the possession of functional literacy competences of the adult population (16-65 years) (OECD, 2016a) and the Adult Literacy and Lifeskills (ALL) which extended the scope of observation to competences related to the use of formalised languages, reasoning and problem-solving skills and the ability to interact effectively in work environments and social groups (OECD 2011). Both IALS and ALL delve into the theme of competences as a key to ensuring that all ages have the tools to be active in work, in sociality and as citizens. Finally, the PIAAC (Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies) survey, which has developed in an innovative way some aspects, such as the direct observation of ICT skills, through the use of the computer for the development of the items, the in-depth study of work-related competence profiles through the job requirements approach methodology and the analysis of the elements that characterize the fundamental components of the reading comprehension, for subjects who reveal poor literacy competences (OECD 2016b).

A further contribution from the OECD focuses on social-emotional competences, which can have a dual social and personal connotation, and play an important role in driving the success of individuals, both at school and at work,

and in social environments (including technology) (OECD, 2015). In particular, non-cognitive competences further interact, nurture, and encourage individuals so that they can achieve positive outcomes.

Certainly, this wide-ranging debate, which has lasted for decades and has not yet ended, has brought out the complexity of the issue of competences and their characteristic of multidimensionality and multifactoriality. The relationships between dimensions and factors can be read with different approaches: on the one hand, the atomistic one, which sees skills as a set of different and heterogeneous elements, in an additive logic; on the other hand, the holistic one, which takes on a cognitivist perspective. This is the view that competence consists in mobilizing and coordinating resources, cognitive and non-cognitive, with one or more operating schemes. Competence consists not only of content and resources but of the ability to select and orchestrate them, starting from understanding the context of application that will determine their mobilization. Competence is therefore a metacognitive process, where a practice built on experience and observation is implemented, which needs reflexivity (on practices, resources, situation, mobilization) to be maintained and implemented (Le Boterf, 2008).

On the basis of the above, therefore, in this paper we prefer to consider the term competence, instead of skill, taking into account the definitions provided by the Council of the European Union. In the Recommendation on European Qualification Framework (2017), competence is defined as 'the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work, or study situations and in professional and personal development'; while in the Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning (Consiglio dell'Unione Europea, 2018), competence is depicted as a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes. In the cited definitions, skill is considered as the ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems or the ability to carry out processes and use the existing knowledge to achieve results' (Consiglio dell'Unione Europea, 2018). In both cases, skills can be considered as a type – among others – of personal resources, while competence is the ability to mobilise and combine those internal resources (knowledge, skills, behaviours...) and external once to produce satisfactory results (Le Boterf, 2008).

In what follows, therefore, we will use the broader and more dynamic term competence, instead of skill.

Considering competence as the ability to mobilize and combine personal and contextual resources to accomplish tasks (and not as something one has in a static way) makes it evident that the simple acquisition of disciplinary knowledge or practical skills is not enough to adapt to changes.

In this sense, OECD (2015) has highlighted that in order to ensure the well-being and development of people, multidimensional competences are needed that include both the area of cognitive processes and socio-emotional elements. The socioemotional competences predict a range of important life outcomes and have a strong influence on schooling decisions, employment, work experiences, occupational choice, and wages, while simultaneously minimizing risk behaviours (such as smoking, participation in illegal activities, and unplanned pregnancy).

In the 2018 revision of the Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning, the Council of EU introduced a new competence, called Personal, Social and Learning to learn competence (PSL), that integrates the

Learning to learn key competence of the previous framework with a wider scope on personal and social development. The PSL competence has been described: the ability to reflect upon oneself, effectively manage time and information, work with others in a constructive way, remain resilient and manage one's own learning and career. It includes the ability to cope with uncertainty and complexity, learn to learn, support one's physical and emotional wellbeing, to maintain physical and mental health, and to be able to lead a health-conscious, future-oriented life, empathize and manage conflict in an inclusive and supportive context. (Consiglio dell'Unione Europea, 2018)

As defined, PSL competence includes metacognitive and socio-emotional dimensions and is considered essential to take care of one's well-being and personal development, being able to face transformations and manage uncertainty, in complex and changing contexts of interaction.

European Union (2019) identifies three core, intertwined elements that underpin PSL competence: Self-regulation, Empathy and Growth Mindset. The first element refers to the ability to manage oneself in a complex context, being able to adapt to the context and take care of one's own well-being. Being able to recognise and govern one's own emotions, thoughts and behaviour enables people to adopt flexible strategies, not letting themselves be overwhelmed by changes and accepting them as opportunities.

The second element, Empathy, refers to the ability to recognise and tune in to the thoughts and emotions of others, being open to understanding points of view other than one's own. This facilitates communication and a willingness to cooperate.

The growth mindset, which is intertwined with the motivation to act, is nurtured by the drive to meet three fundamental human needs (Ryan, Deci, 2000): the need for autonomy, the need for mastery and the need for meaningful relationships. It supports a sense of self-efficacy (Bandura, 2008) and provides people with the energy they need to face the challenges of learning and personal development. Growth mindset also nurtures critical thinking (metacognitive competence), which is expressed in divergent thinking and creativity as well as in analytical and convergent thinking (European Union, 2019).

PSL competence is, therefore, an extremely valuable resource for dealing with uncertainty, both in terms of emotional and social management, and in terms of activating cognitive processes geared towards managing complexity and cognitive flexibility.

In 2020, the Joint Research Centre (JRC) of the European Commission published the report 'LifeComp. The European Framework for Personal, Social and Learning to Learn Key Competence' (European Commission, 2020), with the aim of establishing a shared understanding and a common language on the PSL competence, useful for the development of actions to foster the maturation of this key competence in education and lifelong learning.

The LifeComp model articulates PSL competence in three areas, as defined by the EU Council: personal area, social area, learning to learn area. Each area is expressed through three competences.

Competences included in the Personal area are:

- Self-regulation: awareness and management of emotions, thoughts and behaviour;

- Flexibility: ability to manage transitions and uncertainty, and to face challenges;
- Well-being: pursuit of life satisfaction; care of physical, mental and social health; and adoption of a sustainable lifestyle.

Competences included in the social area are:

- Empathy: the understanding of another person's emotions, experiences and values, and the provision of appropriate responses;
- Communication: use of relevant communication strategies, domain-specific codes and tools, depending on the context and content;
- Cooperation: engagement in group activities and teamwork, acknowledging and respecting others.

Competences included in the Learning to learn area are:

- Growth mindset: belief in one's and others' potential to continuously learn and progress;
- Critical thinking: assessment of information and arguments to support reasoned conclusions and develop innovative solutions;
- Managing learning: the planning, organising, monitoring and reviewing of one's own learning.

Each competence in turn is illustrated by three descriptors, outlining the dimensions of awareness, understanding and action (European Union, 2020). The proposed model, however, is not intended to emphasise the autonomy of the competences considered, but rather their interrelation and interaction. The document, moreover, emphasises how the development of each person and his or her competences is influenced by relationships with others, both at the micro-system level and at the socio-cultural context level.

4. Conclusion

On this basis, therefore, it is essential to question the need for the vertical curriculum in a lifelong learning perspective, for the continuous development of people and for the individual to become a lifelong learner. He must have the strategic competences, such as the key ones, and, in particular, he must learn to learn how to learn. In other words, it is necessary for him to acquire a strategic competence, understood in the sense of the power to learn that is the result of the ability to mobilize a complex of dimensions/directions of knowledge, and of action, integrated in a significant way. In essence, the subject can also learn his own learning process, through the acquisition, throughout the course of his life, of those competences that allow him to face his work and to live his existence in a participatory way. Consequently, lifelong educational methodologies must give the subject a leading role, focusing on his or her experience (Di Rienzo, 2014).

In a society characterised by discontinuity and rapid change, the gap between those who possess knowledge and those who do not has it is increasing, so that lifelong learning must pursue a genuine political aim, which is substantiated in the cultural transformation of society and in the spread of awareness that knowledge is the primary source of freedom and social development. Education must therefore be focused on the life situations and learning strategies of the subject, creating a spiral relationship between theory and practice, between knowledge and action, which constitutes the meaning of education to the extent that it touches individuals, their actions, their relationships

with the different contexts of life and work, that is, organizations, collectivities, society in general. This leads to the recognition of the importance of reflexivity as a method, which recalls the need for reflective teachers.

Reflexivity has emerged as an increasingly significant means of giving meaning to experience and ways of learning. Reflective thinking is the best way to think. It is the kind of thinking which consists in mentally withdrawing into a subject and giving it serious and continuous consideration. Reflective thinking can be taught and learned by the person through discipline: only a disciplined person is both trained to reflect on his actions and to undertake them deliberately (Dewey, 1961). Taking into account the reflexivity of reflective thinking and reflective education means valuing and recognizing the importance of subjectivity. It means trusting the subject who is a thinking agent. Through reflective education, transformative learning is generated: a fruitful perspective because it allows the interaction between an adaptive dimension and a transformative dimension, such as to relate previous knowledge with new knowledge, thus generating new knowledge and, above all, new mental habits for the interpretation and use of the knowledge itself. Education in reflexivity produces the quality of our knowledge, because it is a way of thinking capable of observing itself, of looking at itself, as if to move as a subject acting in a social community. Education in reflexivity presupposes an apprenticeship in complex thinking, capable of distinguishing, contextualizing, accepting the uncertainty and challenges of the complexity that reality proposes, without simplifying and trivializing it.

In other words, education is required to transform the experiences of individuals into conscious learning and to accompany people along the path of their existence, by overcoming the gap that in the past marked the dividing line between vocational training (aimed at the retraining and specialization of the worker) and general education, which is not linked to the work environment, but is oriented towards the formation of the person and the citizen (Loiodice, 2004).

However, it should be pointed out that the 2000 Memorandum on Lifelong Learning reaffirmed that lifelong learning is not a specific aspect of general training, but rather the guiding criterion in the many contexts in which the learning process takes place. Furthermore, as the analysis of the Memorandum shows, educational measures must aim to ensure, in all Member States, equal access to information, as well as guidance and training throughout the life course. They must also increase citizens' participation in social progress, both through the acquisition and updating of skills and knowledge.

In summary, the concept of lifelong learning, in its versatility, refers to:

- strengthening the level of participation of citizens in social life;
- a key reference for education and training policies;
- a strategy to create the conditions that allow the development and growth of individuals.

The aim is to promote people's personal development and sense of initiative, their integration into working life and society, their participation in democratic decision-making and their ability to adapt to economic, technological, and social changes. Lifelong learning is, therefore, a key policy lever to strengthen the capacity of individuals to face the challenges posed by a constantly changing and increasingly interconnected world, as well as a strategy for the competitiveness of the European system. The increasingly accelerated processes of transformation in the economic, social, cultural, technological, and

environmental fields mean that the knowledge, skills, and competences learned by children or adolescents, in the context of the family, school, training, higher education or university will not be valid for life, and this entails a series of demands. These include promoting the recognition of the meaning and value of lifelong learning, investing in the quality of education and training provision at all levels, and promoting effective universal and lifelong access to training opportunities.

The question of universal access to lifelong learning is supported by Schwartz (1987), according to whom lifelong learning is based on three guiding principles: the principle of participation, the principle of globality, and the principle of equality of opportunity. In particular, the last refers to the need to guarantee all citizens, regardless of gender, socio-economic status, and culture to which they belong, the same opportunities to participate in education and training courses aimed at the realization of the self in its entirety, i.e. in the work, personal and social spheres.

The purpose of the vertical curriculum is based on the right to integral development and the full inclusion of all citizens in social and democratic life, of which education is an instrument and content. The learning potential, in fact, represents a distinctive characteristic of human beings and requires the adoption of new visions of human development, based on the so-called capabilities approach (Sen, 2001), which refers to those external and internal conditions of individuals that allow true freedom of choice. It is precisely access to lifelong learning and education that is determined, in what is defined as the learning society, one of the great challenges of human development and social inclusion, in the awareness that the forms of exclusion of our times and those possible in the near future [...] mainly take the form of lack of inclusion (in work and in civil society). In this sense, they always pass through educational exclusion.

Bibliography

BENADUSI Luciano; MOLINA Stefano. **Le competenze. Una mappa per orientarsi.** Bologna: Il Mulino, 2018, 211.

CALLARI GALLI Matilde; CAMBI Franco; CERUTI Mauro. **Formare alla complessità,** Roma: Carocci, 2003, 184.

COMMISSIONE DELLE COMUNITÀ EUROPEE. **Memorandum sull'istruzione e la formazione permanente.** Brussels: Commissione delle comunità europee, 2001, 46.

COMMISSIONE EUROPEA. **Insegnare e apprendere verso la società conoscitiva.** Lussemburgo: Ufficio delle pubblicazioni ufficiali delle Comunità europee, 1996, 116.

CONSIGLIO DELL'UNIONE EUROPEA (2018). **Raccomandazione del Consiglio del 22 maggio 2018 relativa alle competenze chiave per l'apprendimento permanente.** Gazzetta Ufficiale, 2018, 13.

DEWEY John. **Come pensiamo.** Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1951, 256.



EUROPEAN UNION. **Developing a European Framework for the Personal, Social & Learning to Learn Key Competence (LifEComp)**. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2019, 59.

DI RIENZO, Paolo. Recognition and validation of non formal and informal learning: Lifelong learning and university in the Italian context. **Journal of Adult and Continuing Education**, v. 20, n. 1, p. 39-52, 2014.

DI RIENZO, Paolo. Apprendere ad apprendere e qualità dei processi formativi. L'ecologia delle idee di Gregory Bateson in una prospettiva pedagogica. **QTimes Journal of Education, Technology and Social Study**, v. XIII, n. 3, p. 130-138, 2021.

EUROPEAN COMMISSION. **LifeComp. The European Framework for personal, social and learning to learn key competence**. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2020, 84.

FAURE, Edgar et al. **Learning to be: the world of education today and tomorrow**. Paris: UNESCO, 1972, 348.

LE BOTERF, Guy. **Repenser la compétence pour dépasser les idées reçues : quinze propositions**. Paris: Eyrolles-Ed. d'organisation, 2008, 139.

LOIODICE, I. **Non perdere la bussola. Orientamento e formazione in età adulta**. Milano: FrancoAngeli, 2004, 160.

OECD, Statistics Canada. **Literacy for Life: Further Results from the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey**. Paris: OECD Publishing, 2011, 388.

OECD. **PISA 2012 Results: What Students Know and Can Do (Volume I, Revised edition, February 2014): Student Performance in Mathematics, Reading and Science, PISA**. Paris: OECD Publishing, 2014, 564.

OECD. **Skills for Social Progress: The Power of Social and Emotional Skills**. Paris: OECD, 2015, 142.

OECD. **The Survey of Adult Skills: Reader's Companion, Second Edition**. Paris: OECD Publishing, 2016a, 130.

OECD. **Why Skills Matter - Further Results from the Survey of Adult Skills**. Paris: OECD Publishing, 2016b, 59.

OECD. **OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030. Conceptual Learning Framework. Concept Note: OECD Learning Compass 2030**. Paris: OECD, 2019, 12.

PISANU Francesco, FRACCAROLI Franco. Risorse psicosociali nella scuola: una riflessione su costrutti, modelli e pratiche formative. **Giornale italiano di psicologia**. 2, 279-296, giugno 2022.



RYAN, Richard, DECI, Edward. Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. **American Psychologist**, 55, January 2000, 68-78.

RYCHEN, Dominique Simone. **Key competencies for a successful life and a well-functioning Society**. Cambridge: Hogrefe & Huber, 2003, 206.

RYCHEN, Dominique Simone. An overarching conceptual framework for assessing key competences. Lessons from an interdisciplinary and policy-oriented approach. In DESCY Pascaline, TESSARING Manfred (eds), **The foundations of evaluation and impact research. Third report on vocational training research in Europe: background report**. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2004, 313-330.

SEN, Amartya. **Lo sviluppo è libertà. Perché non c'è sviluppo senza democrazia**. Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2001, 368.

SCHWARTZ, B. **Educazione degli adulti ed educazione permanente. 11 lezioni all'Università degli studi di Padova**. Padova: Liviana, 1987, 167.

UNESCO. **Transversal Competencies in Education Policy and Practice (Phase I). Asia-Pacific Education Research Institutes Network (ERI-NET)**. Paris and Bangkok: UNESCO, 2013, 71.

UNICEF. **Comprehensive life skills framework rights based and life cycle approach to building skills for empowerment**. New Delhi: India Country Office, 2020, 42.