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Education and Learning

The Book of Abstracts

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University of Malta, Valletta Campus

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Foreword

The University of Malta Valletta Campus hosted, once again following 2023, an international conference organised by the UNESCO Chair in Global Adult Education on 6–7 November 2025. The conference brought together over 70 participants from South and North America, Africa, Europe, and Asia, reflecting the global reach and relevance of Critical Adult Learning and Education (CALE).

Building on the earlier conference held in May 2023 in the context of the International Critical Education Conference (ICCE), CALE 2025 focused exclusively on critical adult education and learning. The conference took place at a historical moment marked by rampant populism, the erosion of distinctions between fact and fiction, intensifying militarisation, corporate encroachment into public spaces, and the growing reduction of education to a narrow technical activity.

Against this backdrop, CALE 2025 sought to reaffirm the urgency of critical adult education research and practice. In the spirit of its predecessor, the conference aimed to move beyond critique as denunciation, embracing critique as a generative practice—one that combines critical analysis with the exploration of emancipatory possibilities. The guiding imperative was clear: liberating praxis or sheer barbarism.

The strong engagement and enthusiasm of participants reaffirmed CALE as a significant space for international dialogue in adult and continuing education.

Peter Mayo

Table of Contents

Adult Education and the Formation of Collective Subjectivity in Gramsci	1
Advancing Understanding of Professional Activism Education and Engagement: Discussing Research Findings with Activists	2
Breaking Barriers, Building Futures: Examining Educational Challenges and Empowerment Pathways for Illiterate Women in Van Province-Türkiye	3
Care, Hope and Change: Lecturer Perspectives on Critical Adult Learning in the Age of Disinformation	4
Challenging Neoliberal Hegemony: Radical Educational Methods, Forms, and Practices in Grassroots Urban Communities	5
Collective Learning Through Public Sociology and Social Movement Dialogue	6
Co - creating African Women Leadership Discourses Using Feminist and African Indigenous Perspectives.....	7
Confronting Nativist Discourse: Drawing Upon a Critical Theory of Adult Education for Humanizing Antagonisms Along the Mexico-U.S. Borderlands	8
Critical Adult Pedagogy in ' Southern' Europe. Possibilities for Transformative Action	8
Critical Adult Education in the Context of Social Transformation	9
Critical Approaches to Adult Education: The Metacognitive Training Through the Glass to Promote Psychological Well-Being Among Students	10
Educational Third Places as Spaces of Democratic Inquiry: A Deweyan and Freirean Analysis of Cascina Oremo and Rondó dei Talenti.....	10
Examining the Possibilities of Embodied Learning and Situated Solidarity Building to Foster a Critical Relational Understanding of Place in Canada.....	11
Flexible Learning, Critical Practice: HumanEness in Human–Nonhuman Assemblages.....	13
From Collective Emancipation to Individual Integration: A Critical Reading of Adult Learning and Education in Italy	14
Gendered (In)Visibilities and the Public-Private Divide: Critical Insights from Early Career Researchers in European Higher Education.....	15
Mapping Conscientization: A Participatory Model for Popular Education Praxis	16
Mitigating Bias as Repairs in Artificial Conversations: A Critical Approach in AI Literacy for Teachers.....	17

Political Clarity and Activism in Dystopian Times: North American Educators Embracing Freirean Theory and Praxis	19
Popular Education in Historical and International Perspective.....	20
Popular Education Toward Action, The Italian Branch of ATTAC And the Commons.....	21
Professionalisation of Adult Educators as a Right: A Critical Pedagogical Approach	21
Quiet Courage, Radical Visibility: Canadian Rural 2SLGBTQ+ Pride Events as Sites of Critical Adult Education	22
Rethinking Learning Support Educator Training through the Concept of Adult Education.....	23
Rethinking Education in the Age of 'Late Capitalism': A Critical-Transformative Theory of Education for Social Innovation	24
Revealing Pre-School Teachers' Needs for Being Competent and Informed for Sustainability....	26
Study Stress and Educational Transition as a Component of Developmental Crisis in Young Adults Across 8 Countries.....	27
Transformative Education in Marginalized Contexts: A Focus on Women's Imprisonment.....	29
Transformation of Values by Flipped Learning Through Character and Value Education: Turkish Case	30
Towards a Caring Society: Potentials of Adult Education and Learning in a "Careless World" ...	32
Utopian Thinking as a Method of Civic Adult Education to Counter Nationalism and Racism? .	33
Volunteering as a Democratic and Emancipatory Space for Adult Learning. A Research on Competences Development and Civic Engagement in Italy	34
Whose Voice in Adult Education?: A Freirean Inquiry into Migrant Learning in Turkey	35

Note: Abstracts are ordered alphabetically.

Disclaimer: This book includes abstracts submitted by authors who responded to two post-conference calls for publication circulated via email to all participants. The authors are solely responsible for the grammatical and factual accuracy of their abstracts, including references. The Book of Abstracts has not undergone professional English language proofreading.

Adult Education and the Formation of Collective Subjectivity in Gramsci

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This paper investigates Antonio Gramsci's conception of adult education within the broader framework of the philosophy of praxis as developed in the Prison Notebooks. Rather than treating education as a separate pedagogical field, Gramsci situates it within a general theory of history and political action. The philosophy of praxis is interpreted not as a doctrine of revolution but as a theoretical–practical reflection on the relationship between knowledge and historical agency, linking forms of knowing to the making of history. Starting from Gramsci's rereading of Marx's Theses on Feuerbach and the Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, the paper shows how ideology acquires both gnoseological and political value: it becomes the terrain on which human beings become conscious of historical contradictions and act upon them. Within this framework, education appears as a decisive moment in the formation of collective subjectivity, since the emergence of a historical agent depends on processes of intellectual and cultural transformation. Through an analysis of Gramsci's pre-prison writings and their reworking in the Prison Notebooks, the paper reconstructs the shift from the expectation of imminent revolution to the strategic concept of hegemony. Adult education is thus no longer primarily linked to institutional schooling but to the broader processes of intellectual and moral reform operating across civil society. Gramsci's claim that every relationship of hegemony is necessarily a pedagogical relationship reveals education as a pervasive social process involving the transformation of common sense and the development of practical self-consciousness among subaltern classes. Finally, the paper analyses the role of the political party, understood as the "modern Prince," as the collective subject capable of organizing experiences, producing organic intellectuals, and unifying theory and practice. Adult education emerges as a continuous historical formation through which individuals become aware of their social position and capable of universalizing their political will. In this sense, the formation of collective subjectivity represents not only the core of Gramsci's pedagogical and political project, but also the very meaning of adult education within the framework of the philosophy of praxis.

Keywords: Gramsci; Adult Education; Hegemony; Philosophy of Praxis; Collective Subjectivity

Advancing Understanding of Professional Activism Education and Engagement: Discussing Research Findings with Activists

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This paper reports the processes and findings of a qualitative study aimed at confronting, deepening and advancing knowledge about professional activism (PA) by discussing previous research findings with a group of experienced professional activists – individuals engaged in defending the rights and causes of the people in situations of vulnerability (PSV) with whom they work. This topic gained theoretical substance through its intersection with critical understandings of educational, social, and community intervention with PSV, particularly in adult education and community psychology. Approaches emphasising this field's ethical, political, critical, and pedagogical aspects (Freire, 1979; hooks, 1994; Martín-Baró, 1986; Montero, 2004; Prilleltensky & Fox, 1997), as well as the richness of the learning and politicisation implied in PA (Choudry, 2015; Foley, 2001; Ollis, 2010).

Previous research revealed that opportunities to foster this political consciousness and positioning, and to reflect on activism as a relevant professional role, are triggered mainly by personal and professional relationships throughout life and by concrete work experiences (Costa et al., 2021). Among other findings, it identifies personal and psychological factors (e.g., emotional and attitudinal), as well as social and contextual elements, which contribute to explaining involvement in various forms of PA (Costa et al., 2025). Building on these findings, we conducted a qualitative study using focus groups to explore diverse interpretations and develop a rich, participatory and comprehensive representation of our previous results on PA education and engagement.

Thirteen professional activists in Portugal participated, divided into three online focus groups. The data were analysed through reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013, 2019), using a deductive-inductive approach. The participants' sharing and reflections, while corroborating most of the presented findings, provided valuable insights, enriching them by problematising certain aspects and offering detailed input on PA education and learning, as well as other factors influencing PA (dis)engagement.

Regarding PA learning and education, a vision of the education system as non-disruptive, encouraging neutrality, and individualised rather than structural interventions, stands out. At the same time, participants argue that higher education should foster critique, political awareness, and training for practice, while acknowledging that professional activism learning is inevitably shaped by experience. Regarding the predictors of PA engagement, we highlight participants' reflections on the effectiveness and management of emotions, the intersection of emotional expression with gender and sexual orientation, political experiences across different generations, the central role of organisational culture and support, the impact of financial dependence, insecurity in the sector,

gender inequality and norms, and the separation-fusion-continuum between personal and professional life, as well as its impact on mental health.

This study advanced and deepened our understanding of these phenomena, highlighting implications for future research, and provided an opportunity to view the research process as a catalyst for professional reflection on the practices they implement. Moreover, this study has underscored the importance of further exploring these aspects, leading to two new in-depth studies on the topic, thereby ensuring the continuity of this research.

Keywords: Professional Activism; Adult Education; Qualitative Research; Focus Groups; People in Situations of Vulnerability; Social Justice.

Breaking Barriers, Building Futures: Examining Educational Challenges and Empowerment Pathways for Illiterate Women in Van Province-Türkiye

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The belief that women's literacy is critical for development has shaped public policies and the programs of international organizations worldwide. Research has demonstrated positive correlations between female literacy rates and key health indicators, such as lower child mortality and fertility rates (Robinson-Pant, 2008). According to data from the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK, 2022), the illiteracy rate among women aged 25 and over is 6.1%, compared to 1% among men. Furthermore, the employment rate for individuals aged 15 and above is 28% for women and 62.8% for men. Van Province, which is socioeconomically disadvantaged, ranks among Türkiye's provinces with the lowest female literacy rates and the lowest average years of schooling. This study examines the structural and socio-cultural barriers faced by illiterate adult women in Van Province, as well as the dimensions of empowerment in the literacy process. Conducted using a qualitative research design, the study involved semi-structured interviews with 22 participants: 12 female learners, 5 teachers, and 5 administrators. Content analysis generated 748 codes. The findings were organized under six main themes: (1) Institutional Challenges, (2) Family and Societal Barriers, (3) Psychosocial Impact of Literacy, (4) Functional Literacy in Daily Life, (5) Supportive Factors, and (6) Skills Gained Through Education.

The findings indicate that women's access to education is constrained not only by individual factors but also by multilayered structural conditions, including institutional inadequacies, patriarchal norms, and economic limitations. At the same time, participation in literacy education significantly enhances women's self-confidence, self-efficacy, and social participation, thereby supporting both individual and social empowerment processes. The study suggests that adult literacy programs



should be redesigned within a gender-sensitive, context-specific, and social/ecological justice framework to contribute effectively to women's social, economic, and individual empowerment.

Keywords: Adult Education; Literacy; Adult Literacy; Women's Literacy Programs

Care, Hope and Change: Lecturer Perspectives on Critical Adult Learning in the Age of Disinformation

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In an era marked by the spread of misinformation, the rise of populism, and the commercialization of knowledge, integrating critical adult education into social work training has become essential. This paper examines the perspectives of social work lecturers on incorporating critical adult education into curricula.

Using a qualitative research design, the study conducts structured interviews with social work educators from diverse international contexts to explore how critical education enhances social workers' ability to navigate complex social and political landscapes.

The findings show that critical adult education equips social workers with the knowledge and skills needed to challenge harmful narratives, advocate for social justice, and promote democratic participation. It supports more informed and compassionate engagement with diverse communities and their needs. By emphasizing human rights, ethical reflection, and social justice, critical adult education aligns with the core values of social work, reinforcing emancipatory practices that challenge oppression and promote equity—enabling students to cultivate self-advocacy and resilience within the communities they serve. The study also highlights the role of social work lecturers in integrating critical education into training. By strengthening lecturers' capacity to engage students in discussions on harmful narratives, social justice, and civic participation, programs can better prepare future social workers for contemporary challenges.

The insights presented offer recommendations for improving social work education. Integrating critical adult education into training can help future social workers develop the skills necessary to address contemporary social and political challenges and remain effective agents of care, hope, and change.

Keywords: Critical Adult Education; Social Work Education; Disinformation; Critical Pedagogy; Social Justice; Human Rights

Challenging Neoliberal Hegemony: Radical Educational Methods, Forms, and Practices in Grassroots Urban Communities

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This paper examines how radical educational methods, forms, and practices in grassroots urban communities serve as a means of challenging neoliberal hegemony. In an era marked by neoliberal urban policies, grassroots communities emerge as counter-hegemonic spaces resisting gentrification, social exclusion, and the commodification of urban life.

Education within these spaces unfolds through non-formal and informal learning processes, fostering critical awareness and empowering individuals to challenge dominant socio-political structures. While previous research has extensively examined grassroots communities from sociological and anthropological perspectives, the radical educational dimensions—particularly the methods, forms, and practices emerging within these communities—remain underexplored.

This paper addresses this gap by analyzing how grassroots initiatives develop and implement unique, alternative approaches to radical adult education that shape community organization, self-governance, and counter-hegemonic practices. Drawing on distinct radical educational approaches identified in this study, it highlights the transformative potential of education as a tool for resistance and social change. This focus is particularly relevant in contemporary urban settings, where growing inequalities and precarization necessitate innovative, emancipatory models of learning and collective action.

Grounded in both classical and contemporary radical educational theories, this paper bridges Freirean pedagogy with self-organized learning frameworks while incorporating progressive approaches to adult learning in urban spaces. By examining radical educational approaches in grassroots urban communities, it seeks to define and conceptualize radical educational methods, forms, and practices as they emerge in urban autonomous spaces. These approaches challenge dominant knowledge production systems, foster collective agency among marginalized populations, and provide a framework for understanding how education in grassroots settings serves as a counter-hegemonic tool for social transformation.

Using a qualitative research approach, this study focuses on a grassroots community in Ljubljana. Data collection includes semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and analysis of secondary sources such as social media posts and photographs. As the research is ongoing, the paper will present preliminary findings at the conference. Early interviews indicate that the community's radical educational methods, forms, and practices are central to fostering both individual and collective resistance to the pervasive neoliberal hegemony that shapes mainstream education systems.

Radical educational methods, forms, and practices in grassroots communities hold significant potential for challenging neoliberal agendas. By emphasizing non-hierarchical learning, critical consciousness, and dialogue, these approaches offer viable alternatives to oppressive mainstream education systems. Their implications extend beyond individual communities, contributing to the transformation of non-formal adult education into more inclusive, democratic, and emancipatory practices that empower marginalized populations and offer sustainable alternatives for learning and social change.

Keywords: Radical education; non-formal and informal learning; Grassroots urban communities; Counter hegemonic spaces

Collective Learning Through Public Sociology and Social Movement Dialogue

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Collective learning is essential for social change for justice. This is the process described in social movement studies as cognitive praxis (Eyerman and Jamison, 1991) or social movement process (Cox and Nilsen, 2014) in which “within any specific social context, the ways in which we articulate our understanding of our needs and organise our attempts to meet them are determined – not fixed, but in a faster- or slower-moving process of (often internally unequal and contested) collective learning and praxis” (Cox & Nilsen, 2014 p. 36). This process of collective learning can be driven by deliberative practice (which might include popular education or action research) and also through changes in shared culture from the intervention of emergent social movements from below. The process of dialogue, between subaltern groups in their struggle for justice, and those who would offer the resources of education in solidarity, also constitutes the praxis of public sociology: understanding the (social) world in order to change it.

This paper draws on a trajectory of public sociology praxis, from the intervention of educators in community struggles and social movements, through the activities of social movements in redefining what is meaningful in everyday lives. This has been articulated through two (Bristol University Press) publications deploying ‘extended case’ (Burawoy, 2009) methodology: ‘Public Sociology as Educational Practice: Challenges, Dialogues and Counterpublics’ (Scandrett, 2020) and ‘Life and Labour: Contested Occupation and Meaningful Alienation’ (Giatsi Clausen & Scandrett, 2026). The paper will explore how social movement praxis provides a rupture of ‘good sense’ into the ‘common sense’ in which people find meaningful those activities and occupations that are also the cause of their alienation.

Keywords: Collective Learning; Social Movements; Public Sociology; Hegemony; Occupation

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Co - creating African Women Leadership Discourses Using Feminist and African Indigenous Perspectives

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This paper examines the historical and cultural narratives of leadership among Zambian women, framed within a decolonizing methodology that challenges colonial and patriarchal legacies. The study draws upon Afro-feminism and Ubuntu philosophies, grounding the discourse in the critical perspectives of Linda Tuhiwai Smith's *Decolonizing Methodologies* (1999) and Oyewumi's *The Invention of Women* (1997). These perspectives are crucial to understanding how Western-imposed gender categories have influenced the construction of leadership in Zambia. By employing phenomenology and narrative inquiry, this study examines and critiques the ongoing impact of colonial histories on the roles and recognition of women leaders, particularly those who defy traditional norms through community-based and Indigenous leadership models.

The paper employs a qualitative design, utilizing semi-structured interviews with women leaders across various sectors, including politics, education, and community development. Through this approach, the study seeks to recover Indigenous knowledge systems and highlight how women leaders reclaim and redefine leadership by drawing from cultural philosophies, such as Ubuntu, which emphasize interconnectedness and collective responsibility. This methodology is responsive to the intellectual call for decolonizing leadership narratives and reimagining leadership in a manner that is both inclusive and rooted in the socio-cultural realities of Zambia, as well as other postcolonial African contexts.

This paper is situated in the ongoing struggle against hegemonic ideologies that continue to dominate postcolonial spaces. It highlights the need for critical adult education discourses that challenge imperialist logic and reassert African leadership practices, rejecting Westernized notions of power and authority. By focusing on Indigenous leadership practices, the study contributes to broader debates around the decolonization of knowledge, offering more equitable alternatives to Western colonial leadership models and providing a platform for the voices of African women in leadership. The research highlights the urgent need for a “world in common,” a collective redefinition of leadership based on shared histories and postcolonial realities.

Keywords: Zambian women's leadership; Decolonizing methodology; Afro-feminism; Ubuntu philosophy; Indigenous knowledge systems; Narrative inquiry

Confronting Nativist Discourse: Drawing Upon a Critical Theory of Adult Education for Humanizing Antagonisms Along the Mexico-U.S. Borderlands

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This paper examines the intensification of nativist anti-immigrant sentiments during the second Trump oligarchy in the United States, particularly focusing on the deportation of undocumented immigrants from Latina/o America and the symbolic confrontation of perceived threats from the Mexico-US La Frontera/Borderlands. It highlights the cyclical nature of immigrant perception, where economic fluctuations influence public sentiment towards undocumented immigrants, fluctuating between acceptance for labor needs and scapegoating during economic downturns. The paper emphasizes the critical importance of the Mexico-U.S. borderlands' history in resisting marginalization and addressing the harmful effects of internalizing anti-immigrant rhetoric. Furthermore, it advocates for a transformative approach within adult education that fosters democracy and critical awareness among educators and learners alike. By critiquing societal structures governed by corporate interests and technocratic rationality, the paper argues for a critical theory of adult education that encourages resistance to ideological and hegemonic social control that promotes a constructive form of patriotism grounded in moral and humanistic values. This perspective seeks to empower marginalized groups and challenge the prevailing narratives within capitalist societies, ultimately advocating for a radical hope in the spirit of social justice for the common good.

Keywords: Nativism; Borderlands; Immigration; Critical History; Solidarity; Internationalism; Adult Education

Critical Adult Pedagogy in 'Southern' Europe. Possibilities for Transformative Action

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This presentation is based on a book due to be published on 19th February 2026. The book title is 'Southern' Europe and Beyond in the Mediterranean. Critical Essays on Adult Learning and Education published by Brill. The presentation focuses, specifically in this conference, on the European side of the region. It reveals major landmarks in ALE in the. 'North' and 'East' Mediterranean, both terms placed in parenthesis to highlight their being relative and politically constructed. So are 'Southern' and 'Middle East' etc. The latter being, as Nawal El Saadawi declares, a British colonial construct, positioning once imperial London as the centre. This is a basic premise for any discussion regarding ALE in this and other regions. A key theme is ALE with regard to the 'Rhythms of Life' it reflects following Annales historian, Fernand Braudel. There is a clash between popular, often open air, manifestations, involving learning and also organised nonformal education in synch with 'Southern' climes and life rhythms, and 'Northern' and 'Northist' or 'Central European' conditioned projects notably from such agencies as the EU. These projects

often reflect and project a rhythm of life at odds with that of 'Southern' European contexts. It is often underlined by neoliberal and individualising, 'employability'-oriented tenets in contrast to the more popular, collective traditions of open learning of 'Southern' European contexts. This discourse has been given scant attention in discussions around not only ALE but education in general. It constitutes an all pervasive and recurring theme in the book, among others such as mass migration and the quest for a genuine democratic multiethnic society for which ALE can play an important part in concert with other variables. Education does not change things on its own but remains an indispensable ingredient of a genuine democracy.

Keywords: Rhythms of life; Popular Education; Mediterranean; Colonialism; Mass Migration

Critical Adult Education in the Context of Social Transformation

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Adult education is defined as “planned educational activities organized and conducted to provide knowledge and improve the understanding of adults in various fields” (Demirel, 2008). According to Miser (2002), the purpose of adult education is to focus on meeting the individual’s needs and productivity, helping them realize their full potential and become more productive. Based on this, adult education can be viewed not only as a means of individual development but also as a tool for social transformation. Considering adult education as a means of social transformation highlights the concept of critical adult education. According to Brookfield (1995), critical adult education focuses on the individual’s autonomy, internalized assumptions, actions, and the reflection on these actions, with these elements holistically integrated into the educational process. In this context, adult education is understood not merely as the transmission of necessary knowledge to adults, but as an influential force that affects all areas of life and transforms society.

In line with the aim of this study, the approaches of thinkers who centre the transformative potential and social function of education will be examined. In this regard, leading figures of critical pedagogy, such as Antonio Gramsci, Paulo Freire, Peter Mayo, Henry A. Giroux, and bell hooks, who view education as a tool of resistance and transformation through concepts such as hegemony, cultural reproduction, and critical consciousness, will be included. In addition, despite their distinct theoretical foundations, the views of classical educational theorists such as Jean Piaget (theories of cognitive and moral development), Lev Vygotsky (sociocultural learning theory), and John Dewey (experience-based, democratic education) will also be evaluated for their contributions to the social dimension of education. The perspectives of these thinkers will be addressed holistically within the study's theoretical framework, and a synthesis will be developed regarding the social and transformative functions of education across critical pedagogical approaches and developmental and experience-based theories. This study is expected to offer a perspective to the literature on

critical adult education within the context of social transformation and to present a comprehensive picture of the field.

Keywords: Adult Education; Social Transformation; Critical Adult Education

Critical Approaches to Adult Education: The Metacognitive Training Through the Glass to Promote Psychological Well-Being Among Students

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The training project “Futura Through the Glass: Performing Arts and Transformative Skills for Gender Equality 2024”, funded by the “Futura. La Puglia per la Parità – II Ed.” grant, aimed to support psychological well-being and metacognitive awareness among university students through a performing arts-based approach. The intervention consisted of a 6-hour theatrical workshop led by a professional actor and structured around the Metacognitive Training “Through the Glass” (MTTG), grounded in Transformative Learning Theory and selected Cognitive Behavioural Therapy principles. Twenty-one undergraduate psychology students participated (MAge = 20.7, SD = 1.68; 71.4% women). Outcomes were assessed using pre–post self-report questionnaires inspired by the CBA-VE (Michielin et al., 2008). Group-level effects were small and non-significant (well-being: $d \approx 0.31$; perceived change: $d \approx 0.47$). Individual-level analyses revealed substantial interindividual variability, with larger improvements observed among participants with lower baseline scores. Findings highlight heterogeneous change trajectories and the relevance of individual-focused analytic approaches in arts-based metacognitive interventions.

Keywords: Performing arts; Metacognitive training; Psychological well-being; Gender equality; University students

Educational Third Places as Spaces of Democratic Inquiry: A Deweyan and Freirean Analysis of Cascina Oremo and Rondó dei Talenti

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The sustainability of educational third places as democratic environments depends not only on their pedagogical design but also on their institutional resilience. If these spaces are to function as laboratories of inquiry in the Deweyan sense, they must cultivate continuity of experience. Democracy, for Dewey, is not episodic participation but a long-term process of shared growth. This implies that third places cannot rely solely on short-term projects or temporary funding cycles; they require stable structures capable of supporting reflective practice over time.

At the same time, stability must not become rigidity. One of the distinctive strengths of third places lies precisely in their flexibility. Their hybrid positioning between formal education, civil society,

and local governance allows them to experiment with new methodologies, interdisciplinary approaches, and participatory models. Yet this flexibility can also expose them to fragmentation. Without a coherent pedagogical vision, innovation risks becoming a succession of disconnected initiatives rather than a sustained democratic trajectory.

From a Freirean perspective, the long-term democratic value of third places depends on their capacity to nurture critical agency rather than adaptive competence. While employability, creativity, and talent development are important dimensions, they should not overshadow the deeper educational task of fostering critical consciousness. Learners must be encouraged not only to navigate existing systems, but to question and transform them. This requires dialogical spaces in which diverse voices are genuinely heard and where power relations can be examined rather than silently reproduced.

Moreover, the governance of third places must reflect the democratic ideals they promote pedagogically. Participatory decision-making, transparency in resource allocation, and collective evaluation processes are not administrative details but integral components of democratic education. When governance structures mirror hierarchical or technocratic models, a dissonance emerges between discourse and practice. Conversely, when institutional frameworks embody shared responsibility, the educational experience acquires coherence and credibility.

Educational third places thus occupy a delicate position within contemporary societies. They respond to the limitations of traditional schooling while remaining embedded in broader socio-economic systems. Their transformative potential does not reside in their separation from these systems, but in their capacity to create micro-publics where alternative forms of cooperation and learning can be rehearsed. In this sense, they function as experimental democracies—spaces where the meaning of participation, responsibility, and collective inquiry is continuously negotiated.

Their future will depend on whether they can maintain this reflexive orientation. If they become primarily instruments of policy branding or market alignment, their democratic promise will weaken. If, instead, they preserve a commitment to inquiry, dialogue, and social justice, they may contribute significantly to renewing democratic culture. Educational third places are therefore not merely complementary institutions; they are indicators of how societies imagine the relationship between education and democracy in an era of uncertainty

Keywords: Educational third places; Democratic education; Critical pedagogy; John Dewey; Paulo Freire; Inquiry-based learning; Social inclusion.

Examining the Possibilities of Embodied Learning and Situated Solidarity Building to Foster a Critical Relational Understanding of Place in Canada

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A critical analysis of the Canadian migration-education system reveals numerous shortcomings produced by border imperialisms, unjust immigration policies, and colonial deficit-logics within

certain lifelong learning ideologies that treat immigrants as ‘disposable’ and little more than labouring bodies. Thus, there is a need for more critical approaches to adult immigrant education through relational understandings of place, which consider immigrants’ responsibilities to learn about the histories of Indigenous Peoples beyond accepting what is provided by the state. This paper will share findings from a Canadian study that explored the potential of an embodied learning adult education approach for decolonizing immigrants’ lifelong learning to support developing a relational understanding of place.

This paper poses the question: What are the possibilities of an embodied learning approach in adult education to support new immigrants in building community and developing a more critical relational understanding of place?

This qualitative research project employed embodied learning theories (Ng, 2018), situated solidarity building (Nagar & Geiger, 2017) and diaspora space theory (Brah, 1996), which helped create a more critical learning space that recognized and supported women from different countries, cultures and backgrounds coming together to challenge the current systems and practices of adult immigrant education.

The principal investigator facilitated twelve educational sessions following a feminist and decolonial research methodology (Mohanty, 2003; Tuhiwai Smith, 2021). Each session featured a movement practice, self-reflexive collective discussions, and journaling time. Discussions focused on topics such as the challenges of life in Canada as immigrants and the responsibilities of settlers to learn about Indigenous Peoples and the lands on which they live. Nine women who were new to Canada participated in the research. Data came from three sources: one-on-one semi-structured interviews, the researcher’s field notes and reflective researcher journal, and participants’ journals. These three sources of data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

It was found that in this project, creation of a collective space, viewed as a diaspora space, promoted self-determination and offered an opportunity to challenge the power, hegemony, and separations imposed by the nation state. Through situated solidarities, feelings of togetherness generated in the learning space encouraged bravery to share and have difficult but critical conversations. Learning about Indigenous Peoples encouraged more respectful connections with land and participants’ own cultural and ancestral knowledges, contributing to more critical ways of thinking and being.

This interdisciplinary research makes significant contributions to adult education, critical migration studies, and feminist scholarship by challenging imperialist logics and deconstructing hegemonic power structures within mainstream adult immigrant education. A key contribution is as an example of the possibilities of embodied learning and situated solidarity building for reimagining adult immigrant education. Given the social and political turmoil surrounding migration globally, this research has important implications because it provides a comprehensive and critical perspective on how honoring migrants’ self-determination can lead to transformative change.

Keywords: Migration, Gender, Embodied learning

Flexible Learning, Critical Practice: HumanEness in Human–Nonhuman Assemblages

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Relational pedagogies underpinned by critical education theory for online flexible learning development such as networked learning and open educational practices offer transformative potential. These critical digital pedagogies potentially deepen learning engagement, encourage the development of metacognitive competence, and enable co-creation of learning in ways that empower learners to gain a voice, navigate complex border crossings beyond those of space, place and time traversing social, culture and philosophical terrains that shape and possibly expand their worldview and how they act in and with the world.

This presentation shares a practice-based case of a postgraduate flexible learning course that adopts a relational pedagogy stance. The course models open and networked higher education teaching and learning through a preach-through-practice approach. An activity-centred design and analysis framework is used to explore the learning experience. Student evaluation comments suggest that students hold a positive view of the course learning experience and recognise the value of relationality for learning. But there is exposed in this evaluation resistance to engage in intellectual independence and mutual critique. Evidently, relational dialogic engagement remains challenging—particularly for those who perceive themselves as holding a deficit position within academic hierarchies.

In a world marked by uncertainty and deepening entwinement of humans with highly sophisticated digital technologies that mimic human intelligence in computation and communication capacities, such efforts for emancipation are not only desirable but urgently becoming necessary. Dialogic sense-making, characterised by polylogic, embracing divergent thinking and ethically responsive actions and interactions, offers a pathway to preserve and affirm emancipatory humanness as in humanisation of humans, within the evolving assemblages of human and non-human agentic actors. It is not an easy feat, and a sustained effort is needed beyond the planning of democratic processes and the invitation to liberatory action as a one-time event.

The demand by adult learners for online and distance education has been growing steadily, with a marked acceleration following the widespread shift to digital platforms during the Covid19 pandemic. This trend of human and nonhuman assemblages for learning and development is especially pronounced in postgraduate education, where working professionals seek flexible learning opportunities to improve and develop their knowledge and skills. Online flexible learning affords adults autonomy to regulate their study schedules, conveniently access course materials anytime and from anywhere, and sustain connections with teachers, peers and the broader network of human and nonhuman resources.

Keywords: Flexible learning, higher education, critical pedagogy, online learning, learning design, teaching and learning

From Collective Emancipation to Individual Integration: A Critical Reading of Adult Learning and Education in Italy

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In the Italian context, Adult Learning and Education (ALE) has historically addressed the margins of society: individuals needing basic literacy, workers requiring professional training, school dropouts, housewives, and the unemployed. Since its early configurations, ALE has played a key role in managing those liminal social spaces left untouched by the normalizing mechanisms of the school system. Despite its importance, institutional and formal ALE has long suffered from fragmented implementation and limited political recognition. With the end of large-scale literacy campaigns in the 1980s, and the weakening of mass political and trade union movements, ALE gradually lost much of its emancipatory potential.

The current CPIAs (Provincial Centres for Adult Education) represent the latest institutional outcome of this trajectory. Commonly referred to as “schools for immigrants”, CPIAs reflect both the demographic shift in adult learners and the changing nature of marginality. Their primary function is now to facilitate the “integration” of so-called “new citizens”—mostly migrants from countries labelled as peripheral — through language acquisition and civic education.

This integration model is shaped by an enduring European ideology that equates nationhood with linguistic and cultural homogeneity: one nation, one language, one people. Such a framework continues to inform both national and EU-level policies, where social inclusion is contingent on the acquisition of national languages and cultural adaptation. In this way, language education is not merely a tool for communication but a key tool in the governance of migration and the making of acquiescent citizens.

CPIAs are thus located at the intersection of two policy logics: restrictive migration control and neoliberal educational reform. Their operations reflect and reproduce the priorities of both the Ministry of the Interior and the labour market. These priorities shape curricula, funding structures, and the internal dynamics of school communities, often at the expense of pedagogical innovation and democratic participation.

This research offers a diachronic and critical analysis of ALE, contrasting the current reality of CPIAs with the transformative legacy of the 150-hour courses of the 1970s. These courses, promoted by labour unions and supported by political movements, fostered collective empowerment through education and sought to redefine the role of working-class adults within the school system.

This research asks: What remains of the transformative spirit of the 150-hour courses? How has the figure of the adult learner changed in response to neoliberal globalization and European border regimes? And crucially, do spaces still exist within public education to reclaim adult learning as a political and collective practice?

Sources include scholarly literature in Italian, French, and English, as well as archival material from political parties, trade unions, and grassroots educational movements.

Keywords: Adult Education; school; 150-hours courses; CPIA; migrations; migration policies

Gendered (In)Visibilities and the Public-Private Divide: Critical Insights from Early Career Researchers in European Higher Education

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This paper presents findings of a study that profiled ‘Early Career Researchers (ECRs)’ to demystify ‘public-private divide’ conventions, while critically questioning the ECR category’s definition. The study also queried disparities and resistances at play with respect to (de)colonising higher education, research, and innovation (HERI) contexts. The findings include narrative insights from 36 participants of the COST Action CA20137 *Making Young Researchers’ Voices Heard for Gender Equality (VOICES)* network, which includes 480 members, based across Europe. Findings resulting from the thematic analysis of semi-structured interview data critically and qualitatively chronicle salient intersections such as age range, gender, nationality, country of residence, race, ethnic background, religion, sexual orientation, and socio-economic group. The discussion critically complements existing monitoring and evaluative knowledge-bases (particularly quantitative), with a nuanced discernment of personal experiences.

It thus provides valuable insights into the precarious (in)visibility(/-ies) of ECRs that connect the personal, public, and political realms.

The discussion concludes with recommendations for monitoring and evaluation policies and practices to foster the mitigation of disparities, invisibilities, and under- and misrepresentations of ECRs.

Keywords: Cross-country comparative research; Decolonisation; Feminist narrative research; Gender representation; Early career researchers (ECRs); Researchers; Higher education

Mapping Conscientization: A Participatory Model for Popular Education Praxis

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In a time when adult education risks being hollowed out by technocratic agendas, militarized worldviews, and corporate overreach, this presentation introduces the Conscientization Wheel—a participatory model for liberatory learning, grounded in popular education and designed to support critical adult education in practice. Developed through collaborative research between Pueblo Crítico, a grassroots pedagogical collective, and the Jobos Bay Eco-Development Initiative (IDEBAJO) in Puerto Rico, the Wheel emerges from the systematization of activist knowledge. It offers a framework to make visible, and act upon, the dynamic interplay between awareness, critical thought, solidarity, and commitment to a just world.

This model reimagines Paulo Freire's concept of conscientization not as a linear path, but as a cyclical and relational process. It weaves together four interconnected dimensions: raising awareness (anchored in context, methodology, and strategy), thinking critically (focused on power, positioning, and reflection), empathizing and building solidarity (grounded in diversity, participation, and collaboration), and loving the world (guided by pedagogy, organization, and impact). Rather than reducing learning to individual cognitive shifts, the Wheel supports collective processes of inquiry, planning, and action.

In practical terms, the Wheel is accompanied by a five-part handbook collection that enables adult educators and organizers to map current practices, visualize ideological tensions, and generate strategies for transition. Color-coded rankings allow for assessing the degree to which practices are limited, emergent, participatory, transformative, or emancipatory, without turning them into static measurements. Instead, each level becomes a point of departure for deeper dialogue and critical planning. Open-ended questions and prompts invite reflection on what remains unspoken, who is served or harmed by existing practices, and how to align pedagogical choices with liberatory goals.

The model responds to a persistent gap in adult education theory and practice: the need for tools that are simultaneously grounded in political struggle and adaptable to diverse contexts. It draws from Freirean pedagogy, disability justice frameworks (including its visual affinity with the autism spectrum wheel), and the lived experience of grassroots organizing across the Global South. Through its adaptable design, the Wheel foregrounds criticality, collectivity, and creativity, values often diluted in mainstream discussions of impact and outcomes.

Ultimately, the Conscientization Wheel serves as a navigational tool for those committed to critical adult education as an insurgent practice. It dares to ask: What does it mean to track our pedagogy not only for improvement, but for emancipation? How can we make space for radical tenderness,

political clarity, and collective strategy within our learning environments? And how might models like this equip us to respond, not with despair or cynicism, but with insurgent imagination, to the rising threats of techno-feudalism, epistemic erasure, and social abandonment?

This project invites dialogue across movements and geographies and proposes the Conscientization Wheel as one possible contribution to the urgent task of keeping adult education rooted in liberation, not accommodation.

Keywords: Conscientization; Popular Education; Participatory Research; Critical Adult Education; Praxis

Mitigating Bias as Repairs in Artificial Conversations: A Critical Approach in AI Literacy for Teachers

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Narratives of Artificial Intelligence often portray it as a silver bullet (Suchman, 2023) for overcoming key educational challenges in the 21st century, such as time management, access to content and multilingual translation, and the demand for personalisation and flexibility in education (Chiu et al., 2023), particularly in relation to the reskilling and upskilling of adult learners (Milana et al., 2024). Yet, such narratives promote the idea of AI as an opaque ‘black box’, an oracular power (Roncaglia, 2023) capable of dominating and determining educational situations, trajectories, and participants’ capabilities (Markauskaite et al., 2022). This framing obscures the fact that AI systems are cultural objects, assemblages (Lindgren, 2023) that may reproduce and amplify biases and stereotypes when generating content, also in educational contexts and materials (Shieh et al., 2024). Tensions between stereotyped AI-generated content and the complex educational settings, characterised by superdiverse and postdigital features (Pasta & Zoletto, 2023), become evident when GenAI tools enter the education and learning of adults with migratory backgrounds. In these contexts, the ability to identify and mitigate bias in AI-generated content is an essential competence for AI-literate teachers, and professional development in AI literacy can be considered a foundational step toward a human-centered use of AI in education (Sperling et al., 2024).

Drawing from sociomaterial approaches to adult education (Fenwick & Edwards, 2013), this contribution presents initial findings from the thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) of qualitative data collected through an online questionnaire administered to in-service teachers working in Adult Education Centres (CPIAs) in Italy, as part of an ongoing research project on their professional practices with GenAI.

Initial findings suggest that teachers’ reasons for using GenAI tools are in line with broader expectations and perceptions regarding AI in education, as suggested by the literature (Giannakos

et al., 2024; Yim & Wegerif, 2024). While their prompting strategies also tend to follow established recommendations (Cain, 2023; Moorhouse et al., 2025), teachers notably highlight the constant need to pay attention to the AI-generated output, which they often have to modify or correct, in particular when they detect biased content. On the one hand, such acts of repairing AI-generated output when it is pedagogically unsatisfactory (also noticed by Selwyn et al., 2025) can be seen as the locus at which their professional competence becomes critical, especially when mitigating algorithmic bias. On the other, some references to dialogic prompting support the conceptualisation of teachers' interaction with GenAI as a form of artificial communication (Esposito, 2022). Therefore, further investigation should focus on teachers' artificial conversations as lived experiences (Medrado & Verdegem, 2024) of careful revision of AI-generated content, in order to prevent GenAI tools from negatively affecting their professional practices and educational environments. Participatory approaches, such as action research, could contribute to the discussion on AI literacy in superdiverse adult education, not in abstract terms but rather by providing teachers with space for critical reflection and innovative experimentation.

Keywords: Adult Learning and Education; AI Literacy; Teachers' Practice; Artificial Communication; Repairs

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Political Clarity and Activism in Dystopian Times: North American Educators Embracing Freirean Theory and Praxis

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This paper analyzes the exploration of critical theory in a graduate seminar on critical pedagogy at the University of Arizona. The seminar focused on the works of Paulo Freire and his scholarly antecedents and contemporaries, including Karl Marx, Antonio Gramsci, Amílcar Cabral, and Gustavo Gutiérrez. The course was designed to collectively make sense of Freire's important theoretical contributions to critical pedagogy (e.g., banking education, conscientização, praxis, false and true generosity, dialogics, political clarity, radical love, etc.) as well as some of the pedagogical practices that he used in international literacy campaigns in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s (generative themes, culture circles, problem-posing education, etc.). Most of the students enrolled in this course were public school educators in K-12 settings.

During the seminar, the political climate in the United States was tense and deeply worrying. The Trump campaign echoed far-right isolationist and imperialist ideologies, promising to crack down on “left-wing lunatics” on day one of a new Trump Administration. Not uncoincidentally, students/educators in this cohort responded with an intellectual fervor and sharpness I had not seen in earlier graduate cohorts. They tackled discussions and assignments as a “synthesis of opposites.” They regularly connected Freirean and Gramscian theories about ideology and political strategy to

events on campus, such as pro-Palestine student encampments, protests for migrant solidarity, and the global effects of toxic capitalism and patriarchy on the American working class. In short, students/educators displayed a collective political clarity about how they wanted to respond to repression, and particularly how they would engage with their own students going forward.

This paper discusses several “provocations” about the role of context when dialoguing with educators about revolutionary theory and critical pedagogy: (1) How do contemporary United States socio-political contexts facilitate a deeper understanding of critical theory? (2) During times of relative economic comfort and harmony, do theories of revolution remain abstract, even tepid? In contrast, are these theories sharpened intellectually during widescale repression? (3) What kinds of political clarity do educators manifest under repressive conditions? Similarly, what forms does a new commitment for activism take? (4) Finally, while no one wishes to experience repression, how do its associated emotions of rage and fear contribute to more resolute and politically risky stances for justice?

Keywords: Paulo Freire, Critical Pedagogy, Political Clarity

Popular Education in Historical and International Perspective

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This presentation provides an overview of the international panorama of popular education, focusing briefly on different interpretations of the term and discussing its grassroots nonformal nature in Spain during the Republican period and the education and cultural missions, Portugal immediately after the 'Revolution of the Carnations', and specifically Latin America. In Latin America its flexibility serves various purposes such as changing location in times of civil war and serving as an alternative to schooling given the huge walking distances involved to reach the school building and the need for families to have extra 'hands' in the field in campesinos/as/camponesos/as contexts. In revolutionary periods, such as in Nicaragua and Grenada in the early 1980s, it served to enable the new popular government to honour its pre-revolution promise of providing education and health services to all. Health education features prominently in Latin American 'educación popular'. As in Portugal in 1974, popular education in Nicaragua and Grenada, and Cuba well before, including mass literacy education (avoided in post-1974 Portugal at first to celebrate what people had and therefore not start with a 'deficit' approach), served to also keep the revolutionary momentum going. Popular education is often intergenerational with adults being joined by their young offspring for reasons of flexibility, remote school locations and family agrarian work requirements.

Keywords: Revolution, Adult Literacy, Grassroots, Flexibility, Intergenerationality

Popular Education Toward Action, The Italian Branch of ATTAC And the Commons

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The "Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions and Action for Citizens" (following ATTAC) is an international network of twin organizations that developed its approach to education and, therefore, to action. On the one hand, the international network of ATTAC is composed of several national groups, while on the other hand, each has specific characteristics, and they do share a common basis in popular education oriented towards action. To do so, the ability to mutually learn the national and international political scenarios, and the ability to learn from each other and to share the acquired knowledge are all parts of the picture. In this context, common goods and participation are two milestones for civil society organization, and several campaigns worldwide were conducted on this basis.

The already mentioned mutual learning process is not seen here as for adults only, although adults represent the main part of the attacies worldwide. Although they are a part of the net, young people still make up a small portion of it. At this point, I focused attention on the Italian branch of Attac only, and on the way the militants practice “popular education”, the tools they employ, and the grid they are connected to, aiming at providing popular education, growing awareness campaigns, and consequent actions. Praxis, power dynamics, participation, and mutual learning are all concern the Italian civil society organization in the current globalized world. They also concern the ways the militants critically re-think the knowledge they produce. Knowledge produced that way was meant as a toolkit that enables new forms of participation by also including the claim for the commons as the basis for democratic civil coexistence.

The Gramscian notion of hegemony has informed this work. Data were collected and qualitatively analysed to depict several critical educational practices the Italian attacies put in action. The ways they have helped inform everyone, including public educational institutions and political organizations, are part of the picture. ATTAC European groups continue to work on European issues and on post-Brexit European politics. They will also go into additional depth about the popular education they offer, and further details will be provided as follows.

Keywords: Popular Education; Collective Action; Commons; Care Society

Professionalisation of Adult Educators as a Right: A Critical Pedagogical Approach

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This paper draws on a case study of the University of Malta’s part-time, evening, hybrid BA (Hons) in Adult Education, Training, and Development (BA AETD) to interrogate the professionalisation of adult educators through the lens of critical pedagogy and educational rights. Using secondary

data - student feedback, institutional records, and the Annual Programme Review - the study explores how course structures, practices, and institutional commitments shape sustainable participation and professional identity formation among (prospective) adult educators in a (post)-COVID-19 context.

Guided by Freirean and Schweisfurth-inspired frameworks, the research critiques how readiness for learner-centred, emancipatory education is both enabled and constrained by systemic, socio-economic, and institutional conditions. Findings reveal that alignment between course design and students' professional/personal aspirations, together with flexible modalities and decision-making opportunities, supports transformative professional growth. However, health issues, family pressures, and employment demands persist as barriers to educational continuity.

The paper argues for recognising the professionalisation of adult educators as a fundamental right, contingent upon higher education's capacity to provide equitable structures, warranting mechanisms, and supportive working conditions. This right-based, critical pedagogical stance calls for collective responsibility to reimagine adult education as an emancipatory and socially transformative practice.

Keywords: Critical Pedagogy; Adult Education; Professionalisation; Educational Rights; Hybrid Learning; Work-Life Balance

Quiet Courage, Radical Visibility: Canadian Rural 2SLGBTQ+ Pride Events as Sites of Critical Adult Education

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In an era where populist rhetoric seeks to erase marginalized voices, where public spaces are increasingly privatized and regulated, and where the pursuit of adult education is reduced to mechanized skills training, rural Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, and other non-normative sexualities and genders (2SLGBTQ+) pride events in Canada stand as acts of critical resistance. These events are more than celebratory gatherings; they are vital sites of adult learning, political education, and quiet but radical courage in the face of fear and vulnerability. While urban 2SLGBTQ+ prides have long been understood as explicitly political, rural prides exist in a distinct and precarious space and are emerging at a time when legislative gains for 2SLGBTQ+ rights are being met with renewed attacks on queer existence.

This paper presents findings from a 2024 national study on critical adult education at rural pride events across Canada. The data is based on interviews with 25 pride organizers from nine diverse rural communities and researcher-driven photography of pride events as visual ethnography. By examining these events through a critical adult education lens, I explore how they function as grassroots interventions against the erasure of 2SLGBTQ+ people in small-town life. These prides reclaim public spaces, provide counter-narratives to dominant heteronormative and conservative discourses, and create informal learning environments where intergenerational and intersectional knowledge is exchanged.

A central theme in this research is how many rural 2SLGBTQ+ individuals navigate a landscape where visibility can invite violence, yet fear itself becomes a teacher. Fear drives the need for safe spaces, the building of solidarity, and the fostering of collective resilience. These events embody my view of “quiet courage,” which is a form of resistance that is not always loud or confrontational but is nonetheless relational, transformative, and life-affirming. From teach-ins about 2SLGBTQ+ struggles to drag pedagogy at community centres, these educational acts challenge dominant ideologies while forging alternative community spaces.

In linking this research to critical adult education, I argue that rural pride events exemplify liberating praxis. They combine critiques of systemic oppression and isolation with tangible action. They resist the corporate encroachment on identity as experienced in urban prides, where inclusion is often contingent on economic gain, and instead centre learning through/as human experience. These events educate not just 2SLGBTQ+ individuals but also straight, cisgender allies, local leaders, and broader communities, offering alternative pedagogies of resistance in educational and social spaces that fail to address rural queer realities.

This study contributes to critical adult education by demonstrating that learning is not confined to institutions but is embodied in acts of queer visibility, queer storytelling, and queer organizing that take place in homes, on the land (farms, forests, and coasts), and in community centres. We are at a crossroads between liberating praxis and sheer barbarism. In this climate of rising far-right populism and the weaponization of misinformation, rural pride events offer an antidote: a model for inclusive, community-driven learning that reclaims public space, resists erasure and homogenization, and affirms that no one is disposable.

Keywords: LGBTQ+ rights; rural education; pride; inclusion; Canada

Rethinking Learning Support Educator Training through the Concept of Adult Education

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The professionalisation of Learning Support Educators (LSEs) in Malta has led to the establishment of structured qualification pathways, beginning with a compulsory 10-week Award in Inclusive Education. While this introductory course represents an important policy commitment to inclusive schooling in line with frameworks such as the UNESCO Salamanca Statement (1994), limited research has examined how it aligns with adult education principles. This article rethinks compulsory LSE training through the conceptual lens of adult education, questioning whether the programme reflects its principles or functions as a procedural requirement for entry into the profession.

Adopting a qualitative single-case study design, the research draws on semi-structured interviews with nine LSEs employed at an independent school in Malta. Participants represented diverse national and educational backgrounds, including Maltese and non-Maltese LSEs with qualifications ranging from secondary level to master's degrees. Data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis, generating three overarching themes: course organisation; course structure and

content; and other influencing factors, including prior educational experience and attitudes toward self-directed learning.

Findings indicate overall moderate satisfaction with the course. Participants valued peer-to-peer learning, practical activities, tutor personality, and the flexibility of online delivery. However, concerns were raised regarding excessive theoretical content, organisational challenges, limited practical application, and insufficient linguistic inclusion for non-Maltese participants. Contrary to initial expectations, no significant differences were found in attitudes toward learning based on nationality or educational level; instead, most participants demonstrated strong self-directed learning habits and brought substantial prior learning experience, both formal and informal.

The study highlights a tension between standardised, lecture-based provision and the expectations of a diverse adult learner cohort. It argues that introductory LSE training would benefit from a stronger integration of adult education principles, including greater recognition of prior learning, enhanced course practicality, flexible design and delivery, and improved linguistic inclusivity. These findings contribute to ongoing discussions on professional development of LSE training within inclusive education frameworks.

Keywords: Learning support education; LSE training; Adult education; Inclusive education

Rethinking Education in the Age of 'Late Capitalism': A Critical-Transformative Theory of Education for Social Innovation

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Why and how should the capacity for transformative action—both individual and collective—be understood as a central goal of adult education? To address this question, this article develops a critical argument that situates adult education within the structural contradictions of late capitalism.

The belief that capitalism is inevitable and natural manifests as an atmosphere that shapes both thought and action (Fisher, 2009). Its ability to absorb even anti-capitalist ideas without truly challenging the system makes it increasingly difficult to imagine viable alternatives (Fisher, 2009). Despite the growing economic and power inequalities (Piketty, 2020), the worsening ecological crisis (Saitō, 2024), and increasing mistrust in the future, pessimism among workers, and political extremism (Collier, 2018), the current configuration of capitalism manages to incorporate its own contradictions into a narrative that ensures its self-replication. The dominance of individualistic narratives, the commodification of public spaces, and social fragmentation reinforce the logic of capital accumulation. These dynamics should be subject to careful critique to open spaces for political reflection and stimulate actions for social change (Fisher, 2009; Galeotti, 2020).

Even the fiercest critics of the late-capitalist model identify possible alternative paths grounded in collectivity, mutualism, and the valorisation of common goods (Saitō, 2024; Piketty, 2020). These pathways are not merely symbolic forms of resistance but represent genuine alternatives—models of social and cultural organisation capable of generating innovation from the ground up. They

emerge from the capacity of citizens to exploit the “discrepancies” within existing social structures, exploring alternative routes to address societal challenges as a counter-logic to late capitalism.

In the literature, these experiences are referred to as social innovation, a concept that can be understood both as a kind of panacea for managing the side effects of late capitalism and as an opportunity to reimagine and rebuild the structures of social organisation connected to it (Busacca, 2013). The concept of social innovation is analytically difficult to delimit, as its core features are mainly expressed through practices. Its debate has been repeatedly revitalised in times of crisis and social tension, where it has assumed shifting meanings—from socialism to social reform—while increasingly being framed as an innovative response to collective needs (Godin, 2012).

From a pedagogical and educational perspective, these practices—which creatively combine resources to promote alternative ways of living—also embed learning processes. Viewing education as a driver of social innovation thus opens new perspectives for both pedagogical reflection and educational practices capable of generating tangible changes in society, potentially influencing the very model of society itself.

In this scenario, education can assume a strategic role by overcoming its adaptive and reproductive function, traditionally oriented toward the acquisition of skills aimed at adjusting to technological change or perpetuating the status quo. Instead, it should adopt a renewed innovative and evolutionary function, aligned with a critical-transformative theoretical perspective, and oriented toward liberating individuals from the conditions and factors that hinder human development through conscious and collective forms of social action (Freire, 1970; Federighi, 2018; Galeotti, 2020). This vision takes shape when education creates the conditions to imagine new realities and to experiment with alternative ways of thinking and acting, drawing on the power of collective imagination (Mulgan, 2020) and on the development of social relationships rooted in solidarity. In this way, education becomes fertile ground for social innovation, capable of generating profound and lasting transformations in society (Galeotti, 2020).

Keywords: Transformative adult education; Societal capacity for action; Critical pedagogy; Collective embedded learning processes

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Revealing Pre-School Teachers' Needs for Being Competent and Informed for Sustainability

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Becoming sustainable is the issue of our century. It is found to be the key to a longer life for all the living creatures as much as human beings. It is significant to understand what sustainability is and how it can be supported through educational initiatives as well. It is mostly the case in schools that everyone focused on environmental precautions or consumption behaviors. However, being sustainable asks for much more than this. Teachers as the vital role models at schools should understand all the steps for a sustainable life. As offered by UN, there are 17 goals to be achieved till 2030 and these goals could help any individual of the society to find a way to contribute. If teachers are educated for these goals and feel competent in teaching and taking action through them, the schools can be an important centre of sustainability as well.

As in all cases, educating children should be the priority as many behaviors and habits made through the early years of our lives. Early childhood is seen as the most important part of personality development. This should motivate us to educate the people enough who would serve as models for these children. Thus, in providing schools with teachers competent and informed about sustainability, it is rational to start with pre-school teachers. This study aimed to put forward their understanding and prior knowledge regarding sustainability and sustainable development goals (SDGs).

The research questions in this context were:

- What is the awareness level of teachers for sustainable development?
- What do the teachers know about SDGs?
- What do they need to know about sustainability and SDGs?
- How much competent do the teachers feel themselves for teaching sustainability?

The study was needs analysis research and it was conducted with descriptive design. The participants were reached using snowball sampling. The data collection tools were a scale by Atmaca, Kiray and Pehlivan (2019) and a semi-structured interview form with 9 open-ended questions developed by the researcher for understanding the knowledge and competencies of teachers regarding sustainable development. The form and scale were also undergone reliability and validity studies such as expert opinions, interconsistency coefficients etc. Besides, member-check, thick description, inter-coder reliability are the other precautions that are considered. The participants were 113 pre-school teachers from 21 different schools for the survey and 9 of these teachers were assigned according to criterion sampling for interviews. The criteria were working at schools with different socioeconomic status, volunteering and having at least 5 years of experience. For data analysis, descriptive statistics, Mann Whitney-U and Kruskal- Wallis tests were used for quantitative data and content analysis was performed with interview data.

The findings of survey showed that there is no significant difference regarding any variable of the study such as years of seniority, age, socioeconomic status among the total scores obtained by the scale and sub-scales. The mean values are very high reflecting that the awareness of teachers is high for sustainability. The averages were 4.60 for total scale while the sub-scale mean points were

4.49 (economy), 4.76 (society) and 4.59 (environment). Within interviews, it is obvious that teachers define sustainability mostly as recycling or reuse of any material for saving waste. They also associate recycling ideas and activities with sustainability. Although concerning results of the survey, their awareness through SDGs seem high, within interviews all of the participants indicated either not knowing SDGs or having very little information about them. This might be due to their lack of knowledge regarding the content of the SDGs even though they engage in some activities related to these goals. Through interviews, it is seen that teachers mentioned too many activities regarding ecological or environmental dimension of sustainability, while the participants of the survey got the highest scores from social sustainability. This could be also because of teachers' not knowing about the content again, or the ecological awareness is more emphasized through in-service trainings or meetings. (even some recycling, waste projects at schools)

While teachers put forward some problems within practices for sustainability, they mentioned their perception regarding their competency in activities for sustainability/SDGs. They mostly stated that they are open to development and explain the need for some support such as seminars/trainings, training in different fields, more financial resources, working with other teachers, activists, experts, etc... Teachers made many suggestions regarding classroom practices, the methods to be used and for community as well.

This study implies that there are many requirements to enhance teachers' understanding through sustainability and competency for classroom practices within this field. It is obvious that qualitative methods are giving more detailed information about real awareness levels (due to social desirability tendency or less careful answering), more qualitative ways of data collection could be used such as diaries, student portfolios, observation. The further studies may include families and students in order to associate different dimensions of sustainability regarding each group. This study is considered unique in involving all of SDGs and raising awareness and knowledge of teachers in terms of teaching them to children.

Keywords: sustainability, sustainable development goals, pre-school teachers, awareness for sustainability, competency

Study Stress and Educational Transition as a Component of Developmental Crisis in Young Adults Across 8 Countries

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Developmental crises are defined as transitional periods during which individuals question their social environment and sense of self while struggling to cope with changing circumstances (Robinson & Wright, 2013). The early adulthood crisis is a developmental crisis experienced in the transition to adulthood, often manifesting in areas such as career, romantic relationships, and family (Petrov et al., 2022; Robinson, 2008). Such crises can contribute to a learning process in which adults reflect on and potentially transform their behaviors and perspectives (Alhadeff-Jones, 2021). Transitions in education and work during young adulthood are known to be related to both adjustment problems and well-being (Lanctot and Poulin, 2024). Understanding the role of study-based stress and difficulty in educational transitions in crisis experiences has potential for supporting this age group in terms of adult learning and education and the development of educational interventions that address the developmental needs of early adults.

Data from an international project on developmental crises in young adulthood were used in this study. The total sample consisted of 2,247 young adults (aged 18–29) from eight countries: Brazil, Czechia, Greece, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Turkey, and the United Kingdom. Participants were first presented with a brief definition of a crisis episode and asked whether they were currently experiencing one. Those who answered “yes” were invited to describe (a) the main events and external situations contributing to their crisis and (b) the emotions and thoughts they experienced during it, each in 1–3 sentences. For the purpose of this paper, we focused specifically on participants’ descriptions of life events and external conditions that contributed to the crisis. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to code these responses within each country. This paper highlights two prominent cross-national themes: study-based stress and struggle and educational transitions. Frequencies were calculated to demonstrate their prevalence, and illustrative quotes were selected to reflect shared experiences across cultural contexts.

Across the eight countries represented in the study, the themes of studying-based stress and struggle and educational transition appeared in participants’ descriptions of crisis-related life events. These themes were reported to varying degrees across all national samples, highlighting their relevance to the developmental challenges faced by young adults. Studying-based stress and struggle referred to difficulties such as academic overload, anxiety about performance, and doubts about one’s degree choice. It was among the most frequently reported external life events in Czechia (32.6%), the United Kingdom (22.9%), and Greece (22.7%). and also showed high rates in Pakistan (20.0%) and Brazil (20.4%). Educational transition included challenges related to entering, leaving, or

changing educational institutions. It ranked second in the United Kingdom (23.9%) and third in Czechia (17.9%), and was also reported, though less frequently, in Brazil (12.4%) and Turkey (5.1%).

The findings suggest that study-based stress and educational transitions are common developmental crises in young adulthood, although their prevalence varies across cultures. Differences among countries are highlighted based on cultures.

Keywords: study stress, educational transition, developmental crisis, young adults.

Transformative Education in Marginalized Contexts: A Focus on Women's Imprisonment

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This paper aims to deconstruct dominant paradigms and interpretive categories applied to carceral settings—especially women's prisons—which remain comparatively underexamined within educational research. From an adult education perspective, we conceptualize women's prisons as contested learning environments in which educational work can either reproduce stigma or foster critical consciousness and self-determination. Building on this premise, the paper argues that prisons can become sites for innovative educational practice if notions such as vulnerability and marginality are rethought through critical reflection and targeted professional development for social workers and educators. In the current conjuncture—shaped by intertwined political, cultural, economic, and social crises—the condition of women in prison constitutes a privileged vantage point from which to observe broader social processes and tensions. Addressing these contexts requires a multidimensional approach attentive to the intersections of gender, class, race, and migration trajectories.

Detention and prison life are closely linked to widening inequality and poverty (Antigone, 2023), raising urgent questions of social justice, gendered stereotyping, and the often stigmatizing character of the educational pathways available in custody. Drawing on recent scholarship, we adopt a gendered, intersectional (Ronconi & Zuffa, 2023), and ecological perspective to advance a more critical orientation toward educational work in contexts of exclusion and to support meaningful processes of self-determination and emancipation from social marginalization.

Women in prison—both in Italy and internationally—constitute a small minority of the incarcerated population (APT, 2024). This numerical marginality contributes to their invisibility and voicelessness, while exposing them to a patriarchal carceral order that judges them not only as offenders but also as women and, frequently, as mothers (Rutter & Baar, 2021). Finally, the relative scarcity of women's imprisonment - together with the prevalence of minor, often repeated offences - shapes both the research agenda and the quality of interventions, which are frequently ad hoc and insufficiently responsive to women's specific needs (Murray & Farrington, 2008; Zizioli, 2021; Vianello, 2023). We contend that pedagogical inquiry can function as a lever for transformation in

these settings, provided it is grounded in critical pedagogy capable of challenging entrenched power relations and fostering women's agency.

Keywords: Women's imprisonment; Critical pedagogy; Intersectionality; Social justice.

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Transformation of Values by Flipped Learning Through Character and Value Education: Turkish Case

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Transformation of thoughts is a long and challenging pathway. In adult learning process, transformative learning provides students with a process of inhabiting new ideas or transforming their own. The classical way of teaching can fall short with this changing and shifting ideas. Therefore, various innovative or creative methods or technics could help to ensure the transformation instead of just deductive teaching or asking questions. With respect to this, the purpose of the study was to put forward how the pre-service teachers' transformational learning is processed through Character and Value Education Course (an elective course in faculty of education) and the change in their perceptions of values.

The duration of teaching process of Character and Value Education Course was the second semester of 2024-2025 Education year in a state university in the southern of Turkey. The total of 11 weeks included many transformative activities and the course was carried out using flipped learning. The study is a case study dealing with transformation of pre-service teachers (16 pre-service teachers, 3 males and 13 females, freshmen) in terms of values and understanding of values. One of the data collection tools was the Defining Issues Test (DIT) by Rest (1975) and adapted to Turkish by Akkoyun (1987). This test was used both in the beginning of the teaching process and at the end. Also a form developed by the researcher to reveal the change in the pre-service teachers' awareness for the values and value priorities, their knowledge regarding the factors affecting values and teaching for values. This form consisted of 13 open-ended questions. Some examples are "What is the meaning of value according to you? What kind of a relationship is there between values and the society?", "How do you classify the values?", "What are the most effective ways in values education?". This form was also applied at the end of teaching process again (This was addressed

as pre and post-implementation of the form). The researcher diary kept for each lesson and the pre-service teachers' products through activities were also sources of data in the study.

Through the analysis of the data the test scores were counted according to the original version, taking care of the moral development levels of the answers given by the participants. Also, Wilcoxon Signed Ranks test was used to see if there are any significant differences between the scores before and after the instruction. The Cronbach Alpha value was also measured. For the other form, content analysis was conducted.

The results of the study put forward that the transformational instruction brought various dimensions. At first, looking at the test results, there were no significant differences for the scores obtained by the answers related to stories through DIT and there were some changing scores upward or downward for different students. This may reflect that students got through a confusion which is common through learning values or social adaptation processes. However, it is not a precise result and the findings could be interpreted as the change is not significant statistically. The findings through the form, on the other hand, show that students developed their ideas of values and their structures/schemas about values. Even though, most of the students could define the values in a sense in previous form, they associate it with society in a detailed way within post-implementation. Their classification of values seems more professional after the instructional process compared to beforehand. The students put forward the chaotic results or problems in the absence of values through pre-implementation but they emphasize their significance for assigning the common rights and wrongs and enabling living together in the post-implementation. As for the factors constituting and changing values, students added education, religion, family, technology factors compared to former implementation of the form. It is crucial to see that they mentioned empathy and tolerance more in the post-implementation regarding multicultural societies. Through universal values, it is seen that they emphasized justice, freedom more and also mentioned peace, tolerance and equality. These are important values expected to be developed by the students through the instructional process. In addition, they brought about many methods and techniques that can be used through values education and mentioned the important factors such as empathy, starting at an early age, educating in family within post implementation. Their evaluation of the course consisted of positive (such as doing activities all the time) and negative matters (e.g. midterm exam) and what they learned (to avoid prejudice or associating values with life).

This study was important to offer a new perspective of teaching values and contributing to understanding of values education in a transformational way. It is crucial to find new and effective ways of teaching values and enhancing the transformation of thinking and behaving in the same way. Similar studies could be planned for longer durations through transformational learning activities or alternative teaching methods. Besides, qualitative or quantitative research might be conducted to understand the ways through which pre-service teachers can develop their understanding of values, to offer new methodologies for the field of values education.

Keywords: Transformative Education; Flipped Classroom; Pre-Service Teachers; Values Education

Towards a Caring Society: Potentials of Adult Education and Learning in a “Careless World”

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The contemporary landscape is fraught with multifaceted disruptions, encompassing escalating social inequalities, the adverse impacts of an “imperial mode of living” (Brand & Wissen, 2021), the climate catastrophe, the resurgence of anti-democratic and right-wing extremist movements, global conflicts, and other phenomena – also coined as a “careless world” (The Care Collective, 2020). These challenges prompt critical reflections on new political and economic frameworks and alternative ways of living together.

Many scholarly perspectives and social movements around *care* have a focus on the so-called care crisis (Dowling, 202) and the unjust distribution of care work, but they also inspire a broader conceptualization of care in various societal spheres. The advocacy for a “care revolution” (Winker, 2015), grounded in feminist discourse and care ethics, seeks to elevate care and reciprocal human relationships as fundamental tenets in envisioning democratic, inclusive, and dignified lives for all.

The suggested presentation sheds light on the (structural) carelessness ingrained in capitalism (ibid.), particularly evident in its interactions with vulnerable societal groups. Amidst these developments, concepts such as a “care-democratic” (Tronto, 2013) or “convivial” (Adloff, 2022) society emerge as counterpoints, emphasizing relationality, reciprocity, solidarity, social participation, and citizenship.

The pursuit of a caring society intersects with redefining social and ecological relationships, redirecting the economy towards the common good, and reorganizing care, housing, and labor within society. Emphasizing mutual learning, life experiences, and fostering agency, care movements aspire to enable participatory processes and cultivate solidarity.

This presentation aims to explore the potential of adult education and learning in the development of caring societies. This encompasses awareness raising and strategies for empowering individuals and communities, as well as ways to co-create public structures rooted in care. Our analysis will be underpinned by a theoretical framework of active citizenship and learning for democracy (English & Mayo, 2012). Additionally, we will explore the conceptualization of *caring as a practice of learning* and *learning as a practice of care*. The presentation will supplement the broader theoretical discussions with tangible examples from recent studies conducted by the authors in the fields of migration, ageing, care, and active citizenship.

Keywords: Caring society, Learning, Ageing, Active citizenship, Conviviality

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Utopian Thinking as a Method of Civic Adult Education to Counter Nationalism and Racism?

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Contemporary migration studies have drawn widespread criticism towards international border regimes due to human rights violations and global injustices ingrained in border management worldwide (e.g. Cuttitta & Last, 2020; Mau, 2021). This has encouraged researchers from various disciplines to explore the idea of global freedom of movement (GFM). While some authors oppose the idea of GFM, based on the self-determination of nation-states, strong arguments from political philosophy and ethics are in favour of GFM, primarily driven by the principles of global justice. In comparison to that, the idea of closed borders is often associated with nationalist and racist ideologies. Both, dealing with topical issues such as 'global justice', and the discussion of utopian ideas, can be seen as very valuable for learning processes, particularly in the field of civic learning. So far, the connection between utopias and (adult) education has been discussed mostly as theoretical or philosophical considerations (e.g. Benz-Gydat et al., 2021), or as didactic instructions, such as methods of future workshops (Jungk & Müllert, 1981), or the speculative method of philosophizing (Martens, 2015). Empirically, the connection between utopias and political educational processes – especially in adult education – and the effects of utopian thinking have barely been researched.

In this presentation, I will discuss what we know so far about the relation of utopian thinking and civic learning processes, particularly concerning migration related issues. On this basis, an analysis of the current practice of adult educators will give insight into the use of utopian thinking in their educational work. The research questions are: (1) Is utopia included into the pedagogical concept of civic adult educators? (2) If this is the case, in what way do educators include utopian thinking? (3) What are the experiences, particularly with regards to the aim of counteracting racism and nationalism?

The empirical basis will be qualitative, guideline-based, interviews with experts in the field of civic learning, conducted in Austria. Research participants are adult educators in the field of global learning, anti-racism and critical racism education and migration-related civic education. The interviews will be analysed using content analysis (Kuckartz, 2018).

Keywords: Utopia, Civic education, Global freedom of movement, Nationalism, Racism

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Volunteering as a Democratic and Emancipatory Space for Adult Learning. A Research on Competences Development and Civic Engagement in Italy

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Within the field of adult education, the opportunity to learn through non-formal contexts, such as volunteering, is playing an increasingly significant role. In fact, voluntary activities can become emancipatory practices for critical learning and, thus fostering the development and the nurturing of those citizenship competences paramount for individuals to exercise their role and power as responsible and aware citizens in a society undergoing constant transformation. A kind of an inclusive, equitable and quality education for all, aimed at fostering solidarity and peace (Unesco, 2024).

In the Italian context, volunteering constitutes a socially significant phenomenon, involving millions of people engaged in unpaid and community service activities that significantly contribute to social cohesion and collective well-being. Volunteering, however, not only provides essential services, but also represents a meaningful opportunity for personal development and experiential learning. The recognition of such learning within volunteer activities emphasises their centrality for individuals who seek to consciously and systematically mobilise his/her various resources to effect meaningful change in the environments in which he/she lives and acts (Di Rienzo, Serra, & De Blasis, 2024).

Between April and July 2023, nearly 9,000 volunteers responded to a structured questionnaire designed to explore the strategic competences exercised during their voluntary activities, as well as their motivations and perceptions regarding their roles and the impact of their actions. This

survey is part of a broader research initiative aimed at enhancing the value of volunteering and promoting policies that support the validation of learnings and the recognition of competences acquired in non-formal settings.

The respondents' answers indicate that the competences most frequently mobilised are social competences (92.5%), followed by the competence of learning to learn (86.9%) and personal competences (85%). Citizenship competence also emerged strongly, exceeding 80%. When asked about their primary motivation for engaging in volunteering, more than 63% of participants cited the desire to make a contribution to the community. These findings confirm that volunteering is perceived by the protagonists themselves as a meaningful experience of personal growth, education, critical learning and civic engagement.

In an era marked by increasing complexity impossible to simplify and characterised by negative traits such as uncertainty, the decline of deterministic knowledge, and the inadequacy of linear logic (Morin, 2018), there is a pressing need for a critical approach to adult education. Such an approach must empower them to enact their roles as active, responsible citizens, while continually enhancing the positive contributions they can make to the communities they inhabit. From this perspective, volunteering may be understood as a vital training ground for the critical education of adults who are capable of fully realising their potential in order to contribute to the betterment of society in a conscious, incisive and inclusive manner.

Keywords: volunteering, strategic competences, critical education, active citizenship

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Whose Voice in Adult Education?: A Freirean Inquiry into Migrant Learning in Turkey

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This study critically examines the access of migrants under temporary protection, especially adult Syrians, to adult education in Turkey. Inspired by Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy, it questions the extent to which current practices are grounded in andragogical principles and how much space they allow for the subjective experiences of migrant adults.

Over the past decade, Turkey has hosted a large number of migrants and has developed various policies and programs in the field of adult education. Many of these programs consist of short-term courses focused on language acquisition and vocational skills, or activities designed to promote social cohesion. However, these initiatives often position migrant individuals not as active participants in the learning process, but as passive recipients of predetermined content. Rather than

being shaped by migrants' lived experiences, needs, and prior knowledge, these educational structures tend to rely heavily on one-way knowledge transmission.

This paper evaluates adult education policies and practices for migrants in Turkey through Freire's concepts of dialogue, participation, and critical consciousness. It explores to what extent these programs, particularly those oriented toward integration, are participatory, culturally responsive, and transformative. The paper argues that the boundary between adult education and integration-oriented activities has become increasingly blurred. Migrants are more often treated as subjects expected to adjust to dominant norms, rather than as agents capable of shaping their own learning. Furthermore, the lack of meaningful inclusion of migrants' voices in these programs may undermine their motivation and engagement.

In contrast, a dialogic educational model aligned with Freire's approach would encourage migrants to engage in learning through their lived realities, aspirations, and knowledge. A Freirean paradigm in adult education could offer a space for collective reflection, critical dialogue, and social action. This would contribute not only to individual empowerment but also to mutual understanding and inclusive coexistence at the societal level.

Ultimately, this study offers a critical perspective on the structural and pedagogical dimensions of adult education for migrants in Turkey and proposes pathways toward more inclusive, participatory, and equitable learning environments.

Keywords: Paulo Freire; Critical pedagogy; Adult migrants learning; Adult education