

## INTRODUCTION

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The topic of *embedded literacy*, closely connected to *embedded learning* on one hand, and *training in the workplace* on the other, is a central theme for reflection on adult education in Europe and around the world. The exponential increase in migration among a large part of the population, the need to raise the schooling levels of the weakest social classes and the requirement/need for adults to return to training to span the technological gap separating many workers from the skills required by the global labour market, are just some of the manifest social transformations that have made it urgent to respond to the demand for basic and initial training.

The category of *literacy* is very complex and it can be given multiple definitions, as the essays in the volume demonstrate. Nevertheless, there seems to be a general agreement between the various areas of study, concerning the notion of *competence*, as shown in the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union documents from the mid-2000s<sup>1</sup>. Some parts of the adult population of working age are lacking the basic skills for dealing with the globalised world, technological advancement, or indeed their own personal everyday life as well as life in the workplace. These competences are by no means the ones that should have been learnt during primary school, that is, reading, writing and counting. These competences have not evolved into know-how skills through an initial level of literacy, and do not serve in the evolvment of the personal skills to continue learning in the lifeworld.

The problem is particularly important for democratically developed countries. Here a large number of workers cannot access the labour market due to the radical changes and transformations it has undergone as a result of globalisation in the last ten years in particular. In addition, the economic

<sup>1</sup> Recommendation of the European Parliament and Council, 18 December 2006, (2006/962/CE). The recommendation concerns the key competences for life-long learning.

crisis that has affected all the most industrialised nations has made the need for migrants to learn a language, for people with low levels of schooling to understand new technologies, and for every employed or unemployed adult to know how to transform learning resources into transferable knowledge in the most diverse professional spheres all the more urgent.

What training, for which contexts, with whom and how? This is a quick summary of the questions that the volume we are presenting here attempts to provide with some lines of thought.

The European Commission<sup>2</sup> indicates *knowledge* as a pivotal element for the economic and social development of the EU countries; knowledge meant as the possibility of training, the need for education, an innovative trend for individual lives and the collective life of its states. The ability to go on creating knowledge is one of the points justifying the diffusion of a type of knowledge that does not remain knowledge alone, but becomes the driving force behind social transformation and the empowerment of every single person.

Knowledge, know-how and learning are part of the first age of human development, but appear as mainstays of adult life whatever condition it evolves into. Besides, ever since Classical Greece man's human formation has developed along and by means of education/schooling on one hand, and, on the other hand, formation of the person, of the self throughout the whole of life. Even then man was seen in his entirety and young people were educated to achieve fullness *through* and *with* knowledge and know-how. Today, every man's active life hinges upon learning. However, not just learning in the contexts set aside for that end, such as schools or evening classes or professional training. Learning *while* at work and *within* the workplace is the way to uphold a tough, high-level fight against primary and secondary illiteracy.

The pledge to achieve higher levels of economic and social development can only come to pass by raising levels of schooling and decreasing relapses into illiteracy among adults both in and out of work. The central problem for the European states that have put the Lisbon indications into practice revolves around both increasing the number of people entering training and diffusing knowledge of new technologies as a way of entering the new labour market in the twenty-first century. Nevertheless, the problem with developing economic and social policies has been how to combine the diffusion of know-how/knowledge/learning with the methods used for this end.

<sup>2</sup> European Commission, Communication from the Commission, *Adult Learning: It is never too late to learn*, COM(2006) 614 final, 23.10.2006. Cf. European Commission, Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, *Action Plan on Adult learning. It is always a good time to learn*, COM(2007) 558 final, 27.7.2007.

And this is where *embedded literacy* comes in, a topic which the volume tries to deal with from a twofold viewpoint: through theoretical reflection outlining the theme against the development of the European labour market, and reflection on hands-on experiences, resulting from a project financed by the European Community called CELiNE, *Content Embedded Literacy Education for the New Economy*<sup>3</sup> which all the authors of the essays actively took part in putting together. Work on the project lasted approximately two years, from the last months of 2007 to October 2009. The project was based upon a methodological structure concerning the construction of a training course *within and in the workplace*. The outcome of the project was a six-module course for the development of *embedded literacy* through an *embedded learning* method. This planning-teaching work has been put into practice and tested in two European countries, Greece and Romania.

So, the central theme of the relationship between work, subject, learning and knowledge has taken shape in terms of teaching and training, in theory and in practice. Hence, what is being offered is not just reflective material, but also reflective practice.

The introduction to the volume suggests keys for looking at the topic in question and puts the problem into context following a pedagogic and andragogical view that is present in the literature but absent from the educational debate in some partner countries. In this sense, the contribution given by Federighi's opening essay focuses on the nexus between implicit education and *embedded learning* as the central key for giving both companies and workers the opportunity for growth. The essay tends to analyse the trends that this nexus prompts within economic production contexts and defines its management mechanisms. The piece is rounded off by proposing an example of a model of *embedded learning* in a company taken from the analysis of a series of experiences carried out in some European firms. Torlone's essay gives a detailed account of the state of the art through the presentation of a series of examples of good practice of *embedded learning* in the workplace. This collection highlights how the process is already underway at least in the companies that are most attentive to their workers' educational conditions and also shows possible ways of proceeding in this direction.

The pedagogic contribution to the debate on the education/work nexus deals with a further viewpoint that needs to be considered so that *embedded literacy* does not become merely a new didactic-methodological form of teaching. The workplace is also a place for formation of the self; the work tools and work context are aspects of the educational activities

<sup>3</sup> CELiNE project, *Content Embedded Literacy Education for the New Economy*, (2007 LLP-LdV-TOI-2007-RO-012) in <<http://www.celine-project.eu>> (09/09).

actioned by the subjects. Company organisation educates too. Boffo's essay deals with this additional formative aspect of the problem. The subject who learns is given central importance not only by the care used by the trainers to build the educational activities, but also by the way that the subject is then enabled to take care of himself. In this sense, the motivation to learn, the hinge of life-long learning, will come from personal motivation, which creates wellbeing in the surroundings, in turn also created by the same wellbeing/care that every subject gives and receives in the workplace, as Dârjan also demonstrates.

The didactic/methodological contribution is illustrated in the essays in the second part of the volume which present the teaching that a VET teacher and a VET trainer have to draw up to build *embedded learning* courses. This is the direction taken by Dârjan and Predescu in their essays. Teaching activities are illustrated by Letrud and Sørli, who provide an example of the work carried out in Norway on *embedded literacy*.

Other particular aspects of a VET teacher's methodological/teaching work are presented by Lazăr and Predescu as regards Romania, and by Halatsis as regards Greece.

The volume is rounded off by essays by Radtke and Loble, adding to the understanding of how other European countries are implementing *embedded literacy* courses and illustrating some examples from workplaces in Germany and the United Kingdom.

Those European countries that have been the destination for a large number of immigrants, such as Sweden, Norway, Germany, France and Britain, have been considering the problem of learning the host country's language or raising low-skilled workers' levels of schooling for quite some time, not only with the aim of improving social integration, but also in the awareness that a country cannot achieve a democratic balance without the citizens' wellbeing in their surroundings.

However, *embedded literacy* is not a problem pertaining to the European Union, or not the EU alone anyway. With the fall of communication barriers, the boundaries of knowledge have expanded, but in addition to this so have the problems that a lack of know-how/knowledge involves. So the challenge is not ours alone, in Europe, it is a planetary challenge that concerns the survival of the very democratic states themselves.

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