

ESREA - European Society for Research on the Education of Adults
Interrogating Transformative Processes in Learning and Education Network
&
The Italian Transformative Learning Network

Contemporary Dilemmas and Learning for Transformation

The 3rd Biennial Conference of the Network will be held in Milan (Italy)
at the University of Milano-Bicocca
from Thursday June 28th to Sunday July 1st, 2018

First Call for Papers

The ITPL Network

Since the first Transformative Learning Conference was organized in Europe in 2011, there have been lively exchanges within the European Society for Research on the Education of Adults (ESREA) around the meaning and the functions of transformative processes in the field of adult education and lifelong learning. Created in 2014, this Research Network of ESREA opens a space for enhancing and sustaining international dialogue and research. It aims at exploring, in depth, the meanings, theories and practices that are involved in the facilitation of transformative processes (including but not limited to transformative learning) across the lifespan.

In our Network, we bring together diverse researchers/scholars from different countries to dialogue and explore transformative processes/TL, in theory and practice: philosophically, psychosocially, pedagogically, ethically and through the lens of heterogeneous forms of research and disciplinary/interdisciplinary framings. We seek to cultivate a genuinely international dialogue involving new and experienced colleagues from all over Europe, and around the globe, to further our understanding of transformative learning, and of transformation itself, and to contribute to wider debate about the nature, purpose and possibilities of adult education in a changing and deeply troubled world.

The Network holds a **biennial conference** – hosted by one of our European member countries – and selects a theme that builds on the discussions during previous conferences.

Our third conference explores questions raised by the experience of many and perplexing contemporary dilemmas and the way they may relate to learning and transformation. The choice of the theme appears appropriate as a way of triggering dialogue and reflections around contemporary socio-political and ecological, as well as ethical and educational, crises that characterize European countries, and the wider world. And of the dilemmas posed by what can be antagonistic, sometimes complementary and often contradictory positions that are experienced in the field of the theory and practice of transformative education.

The Italian Transformative Learning Network

The Italian partner, jointly organizing this conference - along with 4 Universities (Milano Bicocca, Siena and Arezzo, Padova, Napoli “Federico II”) - is composed by a range of scholars, researchers and practitioners who are interested in the study and practice of transformative learning in life contexts and in workplaces. Its purpose is to sustain and develop research trajectories and multidisciplinary inquiry on the topic of adult learning, active developmental methodologies and informal learning processes. The Italian Transformative Learning Network promotes high-impact research, useful to be applied for organizational, group and individual development.

About ESREA

The European Society for Research on the Education of Adults (www.esrea.org) promotes and disseminates theoretical and empirical research on the education of adults and adult learning in Europe through research networks, conferences and publications. It was established in 1991 as a scientific society which provides a Europe-wide forum for all researchers engaged in adult education and learning. It has individual and institutional members from all over Europe, and beyond. It comprises 12 Research Networks that hold regular seminars for the exchange and scientifically open debate on research; it also organizes a Triennial Conference of all networks, and promotes a Scientific Journal (RELA – Journal of Research on the Education and Learning of Adults), and a book series with Sense.

The 2018 Conference theme:

Contemporary Dilemmas and Learning for Transformation

Originally used in rhetoric, the term “dilemma” referred to an argument that sets out an alternative between two contrary arguments, both potentially unfavourable to the person who must choose. More commonly, the expression is used to signify a difficult choice between two possibilities that triggers doubt or perplexity (Oxford English Dictionary, 2017; Rey, 2000). In his contribution to transformative learning theory, Mezirow (1991) introduced the notion of dilemma to evoke disorienting moments in our lives, and the transformative potential these may bring. Accordingly, the experience of dilemmas is associated with the possibility of critical self-reflection and an assessment of one’s fundamental assumptions, alongside the potential to break through into new ways of seeing and being. Thus, experiencing a dilemma can reveal lived antagonisms, tensions or conflicts, some resolution of which can trigger profounder forms of learning. Recursively, the experience of transformation can also raise new dilemmas in our relationships and ways of being in the world. However, there are many ways to conceive the relationship between the experience of dilemmas, and of learning, transformation, and of personal and collective development.

Nowadays, the experience of dilemmas seems to be particularly acute, as people can face overwhelming feelings of pervasive change, precariousness, and critical choices that inevitably impact on what they do, how they think and feel, and of who they are and where they live. Dilemmas may find expression in the pace of how they should live, or the values to live by, and of what they may learn, and how they can change themselves and influence the world around them.

Being aware of the complexity inherent in our contemporary situation arguably makes every dilemma even more difficult to address. Thus, forced migration, uncertain economic development, political violence, ecological crisis, or the domination of consumerism in mass culture, and even in education, can represent many sources of alienation that perpetuate and exacerbate dilemmas for many. Alienation might also contribute to the current epidemic of mental distress as identified by the World Health Organisation. Everyday experience of discrimination, unemployment, powerlessness, of populism, racism and xenophobia, or of the pervasiveness of consumption and the meaningless and emptiness this can evoke, raises countless challenges and questions. And as much as these may be experienced as alienating, the conflict provoked can also be a means to profounder forms of learning. From an educational perspective, the multiple antagonisms that shape the activities of learners, teachers, trainers, activists, researchers and policy makers, reveal a dynamic field of tensions, within which every decision carries its own dilemmas.

From the psychological, including psychoanalytic and developmental psychology, dilemmas may be interpreted through the tensions experienced – consciously and unconsciously – whenever conflicting desires or impulses are felt. Like wanting immediate solutions or quick answers, rather than engaging with the struggle to know, at a deeper level.

Dilemmas can also find psychic expression in disorientation as the mask or persona we present to the world no longer functions or feels false, and we search for more authentic modes of life and relationship. From a psycho-social perspective, the experience of dilemmas can relate to tension between the cognitive aspects of characterizing a problem, and how cultures define the people involved (in classed, gendered, raced, status, or educational terms, etc.), and the conflicting and confusing emotions generated. From a systemic perspective, contradictions may appear between different levels of communication (e.g., what is said and what is expressed non-verbally), while understanding may have to be framed within awareness of people in context, in relationship in families and communities and within wider ecologies. From a sociological point of view, dilemmas can reveal conflicts of interest and power dynamics, whether at individual or collective levels, whenever a situation involves people, in interaction, with heterogeneous backgrounds (e.g., of class, gender, age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc.).

Whether dilemmas are conceived as the expression of unconscious dynamics, or of socio-cognitive conflict, or double-binds, or power struggles, we can assume that they bring a potential for learning and transformation; or of course change may be resisted, because dilemmas feel too overwhelming, and people turn to fundamentalist solutions, in which complexity is abolished, however illusory this might be.

The aim of our conference is therefore to question the nature and the processes through which dilemmas are experienced by people, including those active in the field of adult education and lifelong learning, and the relationship between such dilemmas and learning as well as transformation, or resistance and closure.

Contributions can relate to a variety of possible dilemmas and ways of making sense of them, as for example:

The functions and characteristics of dilemmas, from a theoretical perspective:

- Dilemmas, their nature and dynamics, as a central feature of the theory of transformative learning

- The role of dialogue and the nature of critical self-reflection to address the experience of dilemmas

Dilemmas in facilitating transformative processes:

- Dilemmas experienced when interacting with learners (e.g., in the classroom, at work)
- Dilemmas experienced as an educator (e.g., negotiating the institutional, organisational, interpersonal and pedagogical dimensions involved)
- Specific dilemmas encountered in different settings (e.g., higher education, vocational education, literacy, intercultural learning, etc.)
- Dilemmas in interpreting and evaluating transformative processes
- Dilemmas inherent to the anticipation of transformative processes
- Dilemmas that relate to the temporalities of transformative processes (e.g., lack of time to critically reflect, to dialogue)

Social and cultural perspectives on dilemmas:

- Dilemmas associated with oppression
- Dilemmas inherent to the experience of migration
- Dilemmas in social action
- Dilemmas and self-identity (e.g., gender, age, sexual orientation)
- Dilemmas in political activity and progressivism
- Dilemmas of the Enlightenment project
- Dilemmas inherent to emancipatory learning
- Dilemmas inherent to conflicting temporalities (e.g., work-life balance, acceleration and urgency versus slowness)
- Dilemmas related to the 'Big Questions' of Life, i.e. love, death, suffering, and the meaning of our existence on Earth, etc.

Psychological perspectives on dilemmas:

- Intra-individual and inter-personal dilemmas
- Dilemmas and the experience of life transitions
- Resistance and openness in learning and experience
- Dilemmas and ways of knowing
- Dilemmas of religious belief, faith, in spiritual conviction and of doubt
- Dilemmas in health and how to live a better, less stressful life
- Dilemmas of cynicism and crises of faith, of whatever kind

Dilemmas inherent in the scientific activity in the field of transformative education:

- Dilemmas inherent in the use of scientific theories, or in the adoption of epistemological or philosophical positions, in the study of transformative processes
- Dilemmas inherent in the methodologies used to study transformative processes
- Dilemmas inherent in the relationships between researchers and the people involved in the research process
- Dilemmas inherent in the funding of research in the field of transformative education
- Dilemmas inherent in scientific dialogue, academic writing, or other forms of expression and dissemination of scientific ideas

And not least, self-reflexively, the dilemmas of the Network itself:

- Dilemmas involved in the organization of the Network biennial conferences (location, frequency, language, etc.)
- Dilemmas involved in the ways we refer to practices and theories
- Dilemmas inherent to the scheduling of the conference (type of sessions, time allocated, etc.)

This call includes papers, experiential sessions, symposia and posters:

Papers will be given 45 minutes: 25 for presentation and 20 for debate.

Experiential sessions will have 90 minutes and will take the form of workshops where activities based on participants' experience are the basis for reflection on the conference topics.

Symposia (90 minutes) can include up to three presentations around a theme (max. 60 minutes) and 30 minutes for dialogue and debate.

Posters are aimed at cultivating dialogue around the conference topic; hence we suggest to refer to situated dilemmas, e.g. connected to issues and questions emerging within a specific community of practice, cultural dimension, or territorial area, and aiming to highlight how these dilemmas can be understood and reframed according to a transformative framework. There will be a dedicated time frame for posters during the conference; presenters are expected to be around during this time frame for questions and explanations. Handouts should be provided.

Submission:

Abstracts should be submitted by **December 23, 2017** to the Conference organizing committee at itlp2018@unimib.it.

Format:

Proposals should not exceed **600 words** and include only essential references as these form part of the word limit.

Style: Anonymised, in Times New Roman, 12 points type, single spaced.

Include a **separate contact page**, listing: author(s) name(s), institutional affiliation, phone, email and type of presentation (paper, symposium, workshop, or poster). In case of multiple authors, please signal one author who will take on the responsibility of communication with the Conference organizers.

Both abstract and contact page should be provided as doc, docx or rtf files, titled respectively:

ITLP2018_Type_of_presentation_Abstract_Short_title

ITLP2018_Contact_Short_title_Surname_First_name

Review process:

Proposals will be blind reviewed by the Scientific Committee, and acceptance announced by **February 15th, 2018**.

Guidelines for submission of papers:

Final papers (3000–5000 words) should be submitted by **April, 30, 2018** and sent to itlp2018@unimib.it.

Detailed guidelines for submission of papers will be made available on the conference website (<https://sites.google.com/view/itlp2018conference>) at a later date.

Language policy

ESREA's language policy seeks to be sensitive and inclusive. English will normally be used during the Conference, in plenaries and workshops, but some presentations can be held in another language, as long as the participants are able to help with the translation. More specifically:

- Abstracts for the peer-review process must be in English.
- Papers can be submitted in another language, but in this case short summaries (1000 words) in English should be provided.
- Authors who prefer to present in their language should contact the organizers in order to determine whether it is possible to find a registered participant who is able to help with the translation.
- For presentations made in another language, accompanying slides must be provided, in English or bilingual.
- English speakers are asked, too, where possible, to provide bilingual versions of their slides and be aware of the effort required by not-Anglophone others to follow.

At the conference, there will be no professional translation, but several colleagues are willing and able to help and facilitate dialogue. Tolerance, respect, mutual support and curiosity will do the rest. Speakers requiring some translation or explanation should be aware that they can say less in the allotted time, hence plan for this – perhaps by providing essential information in the form of a hand-out, for example.

About the location:

The Conference will be held at Villa Forno, an historical building situated in Cinisello Balsamo, via Martinelli 15, in the northern outskirts of Milano. Built in the XVIII century and recently restored, the building is part of the campus of Milano Bicocca University and is used at present for graduate courses and teachers' education, meetings and concerts. Cinisello Balsamo offers many possibilities for accommodation at different prices.

More information about the venue, travel and accommodation will be in the website.

Conference Fees and registration / Conference Dinner:

EARLY BIRD REGISTRATION (before March 28, 2018)

ESREA¹ members: 180 Euros

HAEA members: 180 Euros

Non-members: 250 Euros

PhD Students: 120 Euros (3 bursaries for PhD students will be available)*

FULL FEE

ESREA members: 250 Euros

HAEA members: 250 Euros

Non-members: 320 Euros

¹ To become a member of ESREA, visit <http://www.esrea.org> and click on “Membership”

PhD Students: 170 Euros

Bursaries:

ESREA offers 3 bursaries, in order to support participation of graduate and doctoral students. In order to be eligible for a bursary, the applicant needs to

- be a graduate student – doing a Doctoral or Master's Degree,
- an individual member of ESREA or a student from a member institution; and
- having a proposal accepted, and presented during the Conference.

The bursary of maximum 300 Euros can only be used to cover travel expenditures and/or accommodation. Details about bursaries will be provided on the Conference website.

Individuals who hold a position at a university, including PhD or other doctoral students who are employed full-time by their university, are expected to pay the regular fee. Those who register as a Doctoral student need to be able to show proof of their status.

Steering Committee:

Prof. Michel Alhadeff-Jones, Teachers College, Columbia University, USA; Sunkhronos Institute, Switzerland

Prof. Loretta Fabbri, University of Siena, Italy

Prof. Monica Fedeli, University of Padova, Italy

Prof. Laura Formenti, University of Milano-Bicocca, Italy

Prof. Alexis Kokkos, Hellenic Open University, Greece

Dr. Anna Laros, University for Applied Sciences and Arts, Northwestern Switzerland

Prof. Claudio Melacarne, University of Siena, Italy

Prof. Maura Striano, University of Napoli-Federico II, Italy

Prof. Linden West, Canterbury Christ Church University, UK

Scientific Committee:

Prof. Eric Bertrand, Université Paris Est Créteil, France

Prof. John Dirkx, Michigan State University, USA

Prof. Jérôme Eneau, Université Rennes 2, France

Saskia Eschenbacher, Universität Augsburg, Germany

Prof. Roberto Espejo, Universidad Católica del Norte Chile, Chile

Dr. Fergal Finnegan, Maynooth University, Ireland

Prof. Ted Fleming, Maynooth University, Ireland

Prof. Thomas Fuhr, Pädagogische Hochschule Freiburg, Germany

Prof. Pascal Galvani, Université du Québec à Rimouski, Canada

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Prof. Chad Hoggan, North Carolina State University, USA
Dr. Ian Jasper, Canterbury Christ Church University, UK
Prof. Ewa Kurantowikz, Dolnośląska Szkoła Wyższa, Poland
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Prof. Alexis Kokkos, Hellenic Open University, Greece; Convener of the Network
Dr. Anna Laros, University for Applied Sciences and Arts, Northwestern Switzerland; Convener of the Network
Prof. Linden West, Canterbury Christ Church University, UK; Convener of the Network

Early Scholars Committee

Dr. Francesca Bracci, Gaia Del Negro, Dr. Daniela Frison, Dr. Andrea Galimberti, Dr. Mario Giampaolo, Dr. Silvia Luraschi, Dr. Alessandra Romano, Dr. Concetta Tino.

The Italian Transformative Learning Network's Founding Associates

Loretta Fabbri, Monica Fedeli, Paolo Federighi, Claudio Melacarne, Maura Striano.

For further information, please contact the secretary of the conference, Dr. Gaia Del Negro, at itlp2018@unimib.it.

Best wishes,

The Network Conveners:

Michel Alhadeff-Jones

Alexis Kokkos

Anna Laros

Linden West