

Preface

All grown-ups were children first wrote Antoine de Saint-Exupéry in *The Little Prince*.

When we think about school, this lesson reminds us that every adult has a great possibility and a duty: to grow and to help young people growing.

It's discomfoting to see that, on the whole, adults' answer to this call is not adequate, both because we are not always acting conscientiously and because of the complexity of relationships in today's social environment, which we find hard to deal with.

In school more than in any other context, this human capacity should be enacted for the education of new generations, of today's children who will be tomorrow's grown-ups. However, there, the situation is even more difficult and the effects of our inadequacy are amplified.

For example, there are at least twenty students for one teacher in every class, and each student comes from a specific environment. Much as teachers strive to do their duty, they cannot communicate effectively with all their students. Information and intentions are likely to get sometimes misinterpreted by students, for many reasons. These facts should stop us from dismissing students' disappointing answers as due to incompetence or slackness.

Whatever the reasons for failures, bad school results affect the whole institution. Mainly through the mass media, all school system's shortcomings are heavily underlined and public opinion's prejudices are amplified. This highlighting of failings creates a spiraling negative reinforcement that undermines teacher's function and authority, and diverts the attention from the heart of the matter. In fact, educational failures have deeper roots. They stem from the present educational inexperience of our society, which after all has had Montessori, Piaget, Dewey, Morin and many others, but apparently never paid attention to their educational suggestions.

An open and advanced educating community, aware of and able to enact pedagogical theories that have been proved efficient, would not just watch helplessly the failure of young people who are unable to develop their potential: a situation sadly evidenced by reports on dropping out data. (the UNESCO Data Center at <http://stats.uis.unesco.org/> can be used to get detailed reports on this point)

This would not be the only positive effect.

Were the educational duty understood by all, every local public entity would strive to find the needed ways, places and availability to get positively involved, and education could not be conceived anymore as something confined within school walls.

The importance of educational aspects would be recognized, even in all instances where formative goals come foremost, as in high school, university and beyond, in lifelong learning and in teachers' training. We would realize the crucial important of being able to listen to the people in front of us, thus enriching these relationships with motivations and opening new spaces

All these potentialities are evidenced in several experiences gathered in the present volume.

Moving out of the present situation must start from inside. We think that school operators' aim must be to further learners' continuous desire for knowledge, a desire which is inborn in all humans. Teachers should listen to, and strive to use more ways to communicate the pleasure of learning.

Fortunately, signals from public school, university and other training institutions show that many teachers want to listen to young people and are ready to support their potentialities, as well as to make teaching stimulating by improving methods and tools.

Professors, teachers, trainers, and education scientists who share these principles regularly meet online to show how classical pedagogical principles can be used to address the complexity of today's world, with or without the support of digital technologies, and to discuss new strategies or to confirm the validity of known didactic practices and pedagogic theories (e.g., a listing of social networks used in educational environments or for educational purposes can be found at http://www.educationalnetworking.com/List+of+Networks_ by Tangient LLC).

Unfortunately, even though these experiences are public and often very effective, they remain unknown beyond the restricted group of direct participants and they are often short-lived, because of their promoters' limited resources.

They are drops in the ocean, which apparently cannot modify the entire educational system. But this can be changed, if we are able to understand their spirit and their promoters' value. Then every drop will leave a sign, in whatever ocean it will fall.

This book aims at providing a space to document these efforts, which are admirable and crucial for our society's future.

It's important to spread information about this movement, because other teachers can be inspired and encouraged by it, and because these experiences can give a clear signal of emergency to social bodies and local public institutions, whose response is so far insufficient, but which are essential in building a motivating and fertile environment.

The possibility to spread this innovating movement has been caught by one of us, Paolo Pumilia, whom our publisher IGI Global had asked for a project for a research handbook or an encyclopedia.

He proposed the project to the Italian network www.lascuolachefunziona.it (LSCF), created and capably lead by Gianni Marconato, together with about ten collaborators, where teachers and pedagogy researchers had been developing a project about didactic improvement in public school for two years.

LSCF is inspired by an open cooperation between university research and educational practice. We think that a constant and mutual exchange is essential for building an educating society, an educational environment which is adequate to our society.

In Summer 2010, the LSCF community was attracted by the simple and exciting idea to collectively broadcast many didactic intuitions and educational success stories born of public school operators' dedication and passion, via an international publication.

This surprising summer enthusiasm probably arose from the need to react against governance and mass media pressure, which impoverishes and brings discredit on the public school, even though teachers have been making new didactic experiments in the field.

In a few weeks, more than 50 participants' contributions were collected and translated in English, with effective abstracts. Thanks to that material, we designed the first project idea and presented it to the publishing house.

In a few weeks, the proposal was accepted, but IGI Global asked us to extend the project to the rest of the world.

In the following months, objectives were defined according to our goals, both in LSCF network discussions and thanks to Luigi Guerra, Dean of the Faculty of Education Sciences in Bologna, and Elena Pacetti, Education Sciences researcher.

We thus managed to explicate the more wide-ranging implications that were already present in the starting idea. Our ambition was both to collect examples of didactic practices, but also to review them critically and rationally. Besides, the long range diffusion was refocused pedagogy research, which imposed a certain rigorousness and homogeneity to the structure of these reports of didactic experiences.

In that phase, we conceived a long term idea, in which the IGI-Global publication was to be a first step: we named it '*Gocce nel Mare*' or '*Drops in the Ocean*'. Further information at http://dropsintheocean.net/_or mailing to dropsintheocean.info.edu@gmail.com. Meanwhile we decided to give the royalties for the book to LSCF social network, in the hope that they would enable us to make more projects and didactic experiments.

Finally, Luigi Guerra e Elena Pacetti joined us in the Editorial Board, where they are in charge of the comparative analysis of selected experiences.

This is how our project started.

After a year and a half, it has reached the result you can see in this book. That is not a mere gathering of educational experiences, but a structured collection of narratives, with the addition of five descriptive chapters prepared by the editorial board, thanks to the collaboration of Manuela Fabbri and Federica Zanetti, from the Bologna University, as a guide for the reader through the two volumes.

The purpose of this book is to present civil society with a sample as varied as possible – though inevitably incomplete – of the liveliness that characterizes the world of education and training, by organizing the experiences in a form that facilitates comparison and evaluation and thus makes the content usable by the academic community.

Before closing, we want to describe the most difficult and meaningful moments in our publishing work.

The call for contributions, in which we explained our goals and asked for interesting experiences, was our first deadline. It was prepared in two languages, Italian and English, later also in French and Lithuanian, and diffused through Italian and international mailing lists and social networks. When we happened to participate in a congress, we used to speak about our project.

During the following period, in which we collected and evaluated contributions, we realized that for many teachers, English was an insurmountable obstacle.

In order to overcome it, a volunteer translator's team was set up. We thus managed to satisfy all the requests (over thirty) and all the collected experiences were ready to be reviewed by international experts.

Every manuscript was sent to two or more reviewers, in a double blind review process, in Winter 2011/2012. We involved about hundred experts, in every field of educational sciences research.

In the end, the style of every draft, revised by authors according to experts' suggestions, was edited by Jonathan Bishop (fifth co-editor, recruited for this job), an expert in technology and didactics, and an English native speaker.

Parallel to writing and editing, we helped authors to structure their draft according to our template. We aimed to a final result which could be used by pedagogy researchers. In order to achieve this goal, we worked hard for a few months, in a direct personal exchange with each author.

This support was crucial for our target; the collected material could be comparable, even if a product is of very different conditions, it has homogeneous descriptions and analysis.

Finally, one further feature worth to be noted. Our template had been designed to explore a communication channel allowing teachers to turn scholars's attention to specific research directions. That effort engaged us in a very demanding, special role as mediators between the educational contexts and the academic world. Results of such endeavor have not yet been analysed; that will keep us busy in the course of the Drops in the Ocean project.

Elena Favaron
Paolo M Pumilia
17th August 2012

REFERENCES

Sant-Exupery, A. (1943). *The little prince*.