

**ESREA – European Society for Research on the Education of Adults  
Life History and Biography Network**

**‘Togetherness’ and its discontents**

**Connectivity (as well as belonging, cooperation, conflict and separation) in  
biographical narratives of adult education and learning**

**The Annual Conference in 2018 will be held in Torino, Italy,  
at COREP – SAA  
from Thursday 1st to Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> March 2018**

**First Call for Papers**

**The Network**

For 25 years since its first meeting in Geneva, the Life History and Biography Network (LHBN) of ESREA has been a forum for a wide range of researchers, including doctoral students, drawing on different disciplinary backgrounds, and coming from every corner of Europe, and beyond. Our conferences are based on the recognition and celebration of the diversity of methods, approaches and epistemologies in biographical research. And our aim is to create spaces for dialogue, reflexivity and discovery, in order to sustain trustful collaboration, publications and collaborative research projects. Our recent conferences have explored the political role of life history and arts based research, the role of wisdom and the spiritual, the emotions, the embodied nature of learning and narratives, and the action of discourses in human lives; and where resources of hope lie, collectively and in individual lives, as well as in the research process.

**The Conference theme**

During the last conference in Copenhagen, 2017, on “Discourses we live by”, there were many moments when we reflected on the role of relationships and groups, both as resources and occasions for learning, e.g. when they offer recognition, challenges, and opportunities for reflection, and as contexts of power, oppression, and mystification, when frames of meaning and structures are imposed on us. And when our proximal system, the family and cultural groups in which we are embedded, seem unable to evolve with us. We also reflected on the role of conflict as a triggers for transformative and intercultural learning, and or a deadlock and the driving force behind dramatic escalations of violence.

We are social and communicating beings: in fact, we are born in a human group, a family, whatever this term might mean, across different cultures, and we become part of many groups, communities, teams, organizations, associations. Every time we engage with the new and different we have to learn how to position ourselves in connection to others, and to the whole. We also learn how to separate, to individuate, to take a distance, to be able to transform ourselves, and our relationships, in a healthier, safer, more respectful and rewarding ways. Separation as well as togetherness lie at the

root of human flourishing. Our narratives can sustain, celebrate, or challenge the I, and the Us, in building individual and collective identities.

By researching learning biographies, we can discover many references to experiences of belonging, and to their role in shaping experience and meaning, and how they are part of the construction of knowledge, identity, awareness, and coordinated action. Togetherness can be a filter to read human lives, at an intermediate (meso) level in relation (and maybe connecting) the subjective (micro) level with the larger context (macro). But separation from families, from the known and familiar, is important too in building new, even liberated identities and for understanding ourselves in the world

So, we have decided to focus the next conference (1-4 March 2018) on the place and nature of togetherness in learning lives, and how it becomes part of our research. And of the discontents – echoing Freud – that can surround such experience. We want to consider the learning potential of dialogue as well as of breakdown and conflict, at a time characterized by many experiences of disconnection and reciprocal mistrust, of violence, and refusal to engage with the other except in negative ways. When groups become ‘immune’ from the other, offering protection and belonging but at the expense of any capability to engage with diversity and otherness, and to learn from them.

We want to consider different kinds of human groups, their origins, their processes of construction and destruction, and of potential evolution and transformation: is there a form of group learning, when we consider a group as a ‘Mind’, i.e. a system of ever changing interconnections that develops information of its own? (Bateson, 1972)

Various themes can intersect: of class, religion, ethnicity, nationality, age, gender, sexual orientation etc. and how individuals can make a difference within the groups they compose, or can feel that development is only possible through separation. Homogeneity and heterogeneity are always present, and the way they are managed can favour learning or hinder and block it, e.g. when one’s characteristics become reasons for marginalization, symbolic violence, bullish behaviour, etc.

Perhaps we need new ways of conceiving connectedness, to help in building more open communities and to revitalize educational processes, and or research, as social and communicative human endeavours, and to enhance our humanity, across difference, and against overly narrow and constraining ideas of belonging. And for strengthening democratic processes in contexts of life, work, and learning. Biographical research emphasizes subjectivity, and the possibility of telling one’s story, as a way to illuminate individual life experience and trajectories; this continues to be an important focus for us as researchers, but we also need to consider how we can together build better contexts to sustain transformation as well as continuity, at all levels.

As frequently discussed in previous conferences in Milan, Canterbury and Copenhagen, new conversations, models and methods are needed to highlight the auto/ biographical origins of what is essential for a good life, and for a just society; this goes back to our experiences during childhood, adolescence, youth and adulthood, encompassing formal education, as well informal and workplace learning, and experiences of political engagement. A class, a party, an association, a group of friends, our family of origin as well as the family we created, like a working team, can play an important role: the conference will be a space for us to think about such experiences together, hence realizing this same process in our conversations, to seek to illuminate where resources for learning can lie and how we make sense of them, in the lives of those with whom we research, as well as our own.

### **Some questions**

What kind of learning emerges from the experiences of connectedness? Do groups, families, teams,

and organizations 'learn'? How did it have an influence in our lives, and the lives we search?

What of separation processes and their place in learning?

Can life-based or narrative research itself enhance togetherness, and if so how, in which conditions and with what effects?

What are the conditions that enable people to learn within relational systems, and to transform them?

Can adult education and learning profit from a better knowledge of these issues? If so, how?

Is togetherness a motivator towards adult learning, and does education enhance togetherness?

What are, on the contrary, are the potential manifestations of dis-connection, and with what implications?

Can togetherness become a delusion, a mystification, a prison of the mind, or an obstacle in a world that celebrates individualism?

### **Our Scientific Committee**

Alan Bainbridge, Laura Formenti, Linden West (conveners of the Network)

Michel Alhadef-Jones, Rob Evans, Agnieszka Bron, Barbara Bruschi, Lorenza Garrino, Patrizia Lemma, Barbara Merrill, Emanuela Guarcello, José Gonzalez Monteagudo, Hazel Reid, Marianne Høyen and Hazel Wright.

Members of the Scientific Committee come from Italy, Germany, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom; all of us are committed to facilitate communication across the different languages, to create a learning inclusive community and to offer good critical space for early as well as expert researchers.

### **The location of the Conference**

The conference will be held in Turin in COREP at SAA.

COREP is a non-profit consortium founded in 1987. One of the few consortia who provided a link with the Piedmont's higher education system (University of Turin, University of Eastern Piedmont, Polytechnic of Turin), COREP implements initiatives of collaboration between those Institutions, the world of manufacturing and services, and Local Authorities in three main fields: specialist and high-level advanced training (in all fields, from medicine to journalism, to engineering), innovation support and services for Consortium Members.

SAA (Scuola di Amministrazione Aziendale-Business School) was founded in 1957. The School of Management was one of the first and leading examples of strategic interaction between the academic world and the business world in the training and education of the managers of tomorrow. SAA has always been characterized by its capacity for innovation, where new educational methods have been tested and developed both for teaching and management training. SAA, which is a part of the University of Turin, has organized interdisciplinary projects on all the different aspects of management: it was and is today the link between the world of research, higher education and the economic world. .

SAA is structured as a campus located in the south-east of Turin, easily reachable from the center of the city by car, by public transport: underground and bus.

SAA Via Ventimiglia, 115, 10126 Torino  
Subway Station LINGOTTO

**Deadline for submission** of abstracts for papers and proposals for symposia/workshops:

**9<sup>th</sup> October 2017**

Please send your proposals to: [esrea2018@corep.it](mailto:esrea2018@corep.it)

Abstracts (WORD format) should have no more than 500 words, Times New Roman, 12 points. The title of the abstract should be clear. Your name, institutional affiliation, phone and email should NOT be included in the abstract, but be on a separate page.

Proposals for papers, symposia, workshops, or posters will be blind reviewed; acceptance will be announced by **mid November 2017**.

Final papers (3000 – 5000 words) should be submitted by **31st January 2018**.

Detailed information will be made available later on the conference website.

### **Conference languages are English and French**

ESREA's language policy is inclusive. Abstracts for the peer-review process may be in English or French. Papers and presentations will be welcome in French as well as English. Where possible, a short (1000-1500 word) summary in English should be provided.

For French, German, Italian speakers (and for all others): slides in English or bilingual are recommended. Professional translation is not provided during the conference, instead we will use the linguistic skills of colleagues to facilitate dialogue. Tolerance, respect, mutual support and curiosity will do the rest. It is important to notice that speakers requiring some element of translation or explanation must accept that they can say less in the allotted time: they should plan for this, perhaps by providing essential information in the form of a hand-out, for example.

### **For further information, please write to:**

Dr Alan Bainbridge: ; [alan.bainbridge@canterbury.ac.uk](mailto:alan.bainbridge@canterbury.ac.uk); Professor Laura Formenti: [laura.formenti@unimib.it](mailto:laura.formenti@unimib.it); Professor Linden West: [linden.west@canterbury.ac.uk](mailto:linden.west@canterbury.ac.uk); Professor Lorenza Garrino: [lorenza.garrino@unito.it](mailto:lorenza.garrino@unito.it)

Conference website link: [www.uep.corep.it/esrea2018](http://www.uep.corep.it/esrea2018)