

Pedagogy of communion as promising educational approach for the achievement of global competencies.

ABSTRACT

This paper highlights the results of a theoretical analysis aiming to prove that the key dimensions of *Global Competence* framework as proposed by OECD in 2016 (knowledge, skills, attitudes and values) are integrated in the so-called *Pedagogy of Communion*: the educational approach sprouted from the experience of Chiara Lubich and the Focolare Movement (Lubich, 2001).

The *socio-ontological intelligence* theoretical model may represent a valid support to all parties interested in developing the emerging *OECD Education 2030 Framework* aimed at establishing a common grammar and language, to support the design of curricula fostering the development of global competence. This theoretical reference framework used for the analysis proposed in this paper is an updated version of the Model of Social Intelligence (Gulotta & Boi, 1997; Boi, 2009;), integrated with an ontological perspective (Argiolas, 2014; 2017).

KEYWORDS: *education framework; global competence; pedagogy of communion; socio-ontological intelligence.*

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INTRODUCTION

Today, we live in an extremely complex and dynamic society, whose main characteristic is a strong interdependence among persons, cultures, and peoples.

In all fields, we feel a pressing need to act in the perspective of the person as a unified entity.

Facing unprecedented challenges and opportunities, the members of this generation require new capacities, the ability to solve complex problems and to cooperate with others from different disciplines and cultures.

If our youths are to succeed, they need to recognise that their understanding of the world is inevitably partial. Therefore, awareness of traits and biases, characterising their cultural identity is essential.

For some years, educators have been discussing if there is a way to support young people so that they can learn how to make use of knowledge, cognitive and creative skills, values and attitudes, to act creatively, collaboratively and ethically.

Such a goal can be achieved by activating an educational process able to promote the development of a Global Competence.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has recently proposed a new and challenging definition of Global Competence:

Global competence is the capacity to analyse global and intercultural issues critically and from multiple perspectives, to understand how differences affect perceptions, judgments, and ideas of self and others, and to engage in open, appropriate and effective interactions with others from different backgrounds on the basis of a shared respect for human dignity. (OECD, 2016)

This definition includes the acquisition of in-depth *knowledge and understanding* of global and intercultural issues; the *ability* to learn from, and live with, people from diverse backgrounds; and

the *attitudes* and *values* able to unite all of us around our common humanity, and necessary to interact respectfully with others.

Studies carried out by the World Economic Forum (WEF, 2016) underline that, among skills workers should be acquiring as the Fourth Industrial Revolution gathers pace, those that are normally developed in pre-school will be valued highly.

Modern educational processes, therefore, should pay specific attention to the need of ensuring adequate soft skills to the future workforce, such as: empathy and cooperation, sharing and negotiating.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2016) together with interested countries, organisations and experts, is developing *a new framework* aimed at establishing a common grammar and language, to support the design of curricula fostering the development of competences necessary for the future throughout all relevant stages in the learning cycle, including early years, tertiary education and lifelong learning.

Four propositions constitute part of the *Education 2030 Framework*:

1. The evolution of the traditional disciplinary curriculum should be rapidly accelerated to create knowledge and understanding for cross-cultural and transdisciplinary understanding.
2. The skills, attitudes and values that shape human behaviour should be rethought, to counter the discriminatory behaviours picked up at school and in the family.
3. An essential element of modern learning is the ability to reflect on the way one learns best.
4. Each learner should strive to achieve a small set of key competences, such as the competence to act autonomously; the ability to mobilise knowledge, skills, attitudes and values, alongside a reflective approach to the processes of learning, to engage with and act in the world in the perspective of continuous improvement.

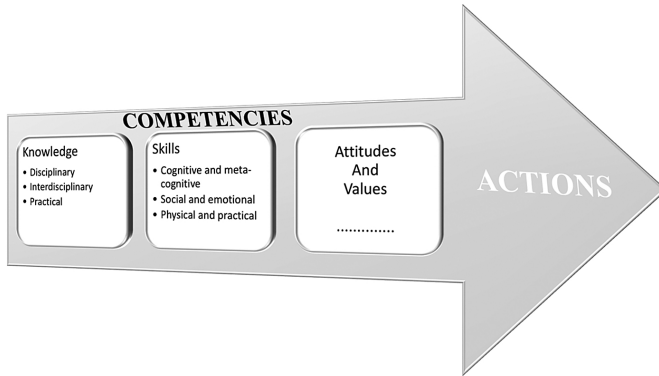


Figure 1 – The emerging OECD Education 2030 Framework

The emerging OECD Education 2030 Framework recalls the main dimensions investigated within the “*social intelligence model*” (Gulotta & Boi, 1997; Boi, 2009), highlighting the strategic importance of leveraging on the specific *educability potential* of each individual, for the activities of design and implementation of educational processes able to focus on human values and dignity.

Starting from an updated overview of the main pillars of that theoretical model, this paper tries to answer to the following key question: *can the educability model emerging from a pedagogy of communion be considered a typical example of an educational process able to better equip the young people to build more just, peaceful, inclusive and sustainable societies? That is to say: is the pedagogy of communion a promising educational approach for the achievement of global competencies?*

1. SOCIO-ONTOLOGICAL INTELLIGENCE THEORETICAL MODEL

Acquiring Global Competence is a life-long process. Those who develop Global Competence are better equipped to build more just, peaceful, inclusive and sustainable societies (OECD, 2016).

The challenge is to develop the strategic *skills* and *competences* based on resources that find possibilities of germination and development within a *relationship culture*.

Human behaviour is not idle. Personal actions are tacitly influenced by specific *values* and some *other aspects* concerning personality in depth (Folador, 2006).

In each personality, there is an aptitude to transcend, to go beyond oneself. For this reason, communication, propensity to dialogue and relationality can be considered as structural characteristics of every human being (Sparaco, 2006); thus revealing a peculiar aspect of human nature: *the potential of educability*, an inexhaustible inner energy to educate oneself and others, which is revealed through a set of specific *dimensions*.

What we think and do passes through our inner selves or, as some scholars say, through our *map of identity* (Feuerstein, 1980); (Sternberg R., 1981); (Gulotta & Boi, 1997); (Casse & Claudel, 2000); (Petagine, 2007); (Doise, 2010).

Our mind can be considered a process that emerges from the distributed nervous system extending throughout the entire body and, also, from the communication patterns that occur within relationships (Siegel, 2012).

To orient ourselves in this map we need an *intelligent glance*.

The word intelligence, deriving from the Latin verb *intelligere*, indicates the ability to read between the lines (*inter-legere*), to summarize, as well as the ability of understanding in depth (*intus-legere*) what happens and, therefore, making the most appropriate behavioural choices among different options (Folador, 2006).

According to Howard Gardner (1983), every person has a set of multiple intelligences; he/she is intelligent in different ways. Nowadays at least nine different kinds of intelligence have been identified. Every human being can develop different kinds of intelligence if adequate conditions of encouragement, empowerment and education are provided.

Since intelligences are strictly interdependent and interact in a very complex way, it is extremely important to be aware that every individual can reveal higher levels for some kind of intelligences and lower levels for the others, and that he/she can use stronger ones to develop or compensate the others.

Almost twenty years ago, social intelligence had been defined as the *syntax of living* (Gulotta & Boi, 1997), to highlight that, it is an articulated, interdependent complex of *information* available to a specific *person*, in a particular *context*, to reach *vital goals*.

Social intelligence has been defined by Daniel Goleman (Goleman, 2006) as *the new science of human relationships*.

The *model of social intelligence* can be used to outline the development of an intelligent glance (Gulotta & Boi, 1997); (Gulotta, 2008); (Boi, 2009), (Boi, 2013) as it embraces a communitarian perspective and considers interpersonal relations, communication and cooperation as a fundamental basis for success in personal and social development.

At the foundations of that model there is the concept of *variability*: no behaviour can be assessed as intrinsically intelligent or otherwise, without taking into consideration the place, purpose, time, and the sequence in which the action is expressed.

Learning is not simply acquiring pieces of information, but it is made of relationships that give meaning to what has been learned.

The typical role of education is the promotion of individual integrality through the synergistic harmonization of each person's *multiple dimensions* (Milan, 2012).

Relations and interpersonal experiences influence the intelligence and the ways in which we reconstruct reality in our mind (Siegel, 2012).

Knowledge is not static or additive, but the result of constant interaction with its actual realisation.

Knowledge is a starting point, but if taken on its own it is not sufficient (Celli, 2006), because in the person's mind a combination of meanings occurs (Savoldelli, Borga, & Lettieri, 2004).

Each person can be viewed as a *dynamic microcosm* engaged in a continuous relational exchange (Sorgi, 1991), which continuously designs -and transforms –himself or herself during life, encapsulated, we could say, within the culture in which his or her life is conducted.

Furthermore, *Culture* can be defined as a set of different kinds of education. It is an *imprinting* that influences the way in which we learn (Novara, 2011). This requires a concrete training and education in *vigilance* (Laeger, 1989) and *reflexivity*: competencies that make us live as if in a *house with transparent walls*. They determine the ability to relate (De Cataldo Neuberger & Gulotta, 1991), to perceive the needs, requirements and expectations of the self but also of the others; the responsibility of mutual understanding, while respecting the genuine uniqueness and unrepeatability of the other (Sass, 1994), (Goleman, 2006).

When two or more persons or cultures come together, a *conflict* necessarily arises, because the reference points turn out to be subjective, arbitrary, just details. Deep acceptance of the conflict may generate an *openness* that makes it possible to reconsider one's position from different perspectives (Novara, 2011).

Habit (*ethos*), as defined by Aristotle in the second book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, «*guides men, gives shape to their visions, to thought and their behaviour*», and it is learnt by doing (Dewey, 1916).

Education allows the acquisition of that *habit*. By virtue of that *habit* we actively adapt to the environment.

Who we are depends on what we continuously do or think. That habit becomes the lens (intelligence) through which we look at things (Covey, 1989); (Chiappei & Cinque, 2014).

We can consider habit as the *attitude* that enables the extension of the *cultural capsule*, thus making it more *transparent* and *permeable*.

Which personal dimensions can help to educate *habit*?

Within the Model of Social Intelligence (Gulotta & Boi, 1997); (Boi, 2009), the following seven *dimensions* have been identified:

potential, good sense, tacit knowledge, creativity, rationality, wisdom, and sapience.

Potential converts what is possible into reality. This dimension results from the combination of dispositions, beliefs, values and expectations, which grow -and express themselves- in real situations, as far as we learn how to learn by experience (Capraro & Cardinali, 2008). Potential is not independent and isolated, but interconnected and co-generated by a multi-personal matrix (Stern, 2005).

What enables us to enter into relationship is *good sense*, the person's dimension defined as a set of measures to observe different situations and to assess what can be done according to personal values (Gulotta & Boi, 1997); (Ioverno, 2008). Good sense is the dimension which develops our *ability to listen and to understand*, when looking for a point of convergence, a synchronicity with each other or with specific situations (Wolvin & Coakley, 1993).

Good sense leads us to an informal, *tacit knowledge* (Wagner & Sternberg, 1986) that, leveraging self-motivational and self-organisational aspects, allows a person to orient himself or herself (Polany, 1990), making use of the traces from previous experiences, whether in expressing judgments, or when achieving specific short and long-term goals.

Intelligence acquires dynamism. Along this pathway, *creativity* allows to grasp in a new way, relationships between ideas and things, the inherent positive potential in every person and situation, to sense greatness even in small things (Thatchenkery & Metzker, 2007). Creativity is the personal dimension that allows us *to feel*, as was the case with Michelangelo and the majestic figure of David already existing inside a block of marble, long before being sculpted (Cooperrider, 2007).

When intelligence becomes *reflection in action*, ability to reason critically and in a functional way for the achievement of personal well-being and fulfilment, *rationality* comes into play (Gulotta & Boi, 1997), qualifying the emergence of beliefs and the decision-

making processes (Baron, 1985); (Baron, 1988); (Sen, 1993); (Sacco & Zamagni, 2006).

When rationality reveals a *cognitive and behavioural style*, which seamlessly extends its social radius through the acquisition of shared interests, values and methods (Gulotta & Boi, 1997), *wisdom* emerges as a science that accumulates while selecting and integrates while connecting (Gabrielli, 2006). It is the dimension that reveals a personality which is flexible and detached from one's knowledge (Sternberg, 1990), able to learn how to overcome difficulties, how to fill personal gaps and how to enhance personal strengths, up to exploiting the whole in order to achieve significant goals for oneself and for the other (Sternberg, 2003).

When creativity, rationality and wisdom come together in a harmonious synthesis, *sapience* exhibits itself, as a peculiar personal *dimension* which fully reveals the *potential of educability*: the attitude to a proactive behaviour (Chinchilla & Moragas, 2010), the capability to recognise and consider otherness as a source of mutual enrichment, as well as a sense of solidarity and fraternity which allows, beyond sensible appearances, to grasp what is not immediately accessible in daily life.

Sapience can be considered like a *light* that enables to grasp, just as if through the use of X-rays that which innervates and binds different realities (Lubich, 1998).

It is the dimension that enables the person to get to the roots of his or her being, thus discovering the *standpoint* from which reality is viewed, interpreted and lived (Coda, 2012); a perspective from which, with others and among others, one can find inspiration and energy to define one's personal worldview, as well as motivations, purposes and passions useful to fulfil one's role meeting all its requirements (Folador, 2006).

Sapience makes us aware of the *flavour* of life, of what makes it tasty, and transforms the complexity of being in this world by giving meaning to human existence (Chiappei & Cinque, 2014).

«Through the gift of sapience -the theologian Raimondo Spiazzi says (Spiazzi, 1964)- the soul is put in touch with the eternal realities. (...) It sees what it cannot retell, (comprehend) and drinks from an inexhaustible source, without ever being satisfied (fully quenched) with an increasingly strong desire. (...) Everything is seen in its relationship of dependency and convergence to a divine plan (...) with the same mental synthesis of God(...)» (Lubich, 2002, pp. 131-132).

It is precisely sapience that activates *the intelligence of intelligences*: that which has been recently defined as *ontological intelligence* (Argiolas, 2014; 2017).

It can be considered as the *pupil* of a watchful, unobtrusive, but deep eye.

Ontological intelligence represents the intrinsic *value* of each person's development. It is the first real goal to be achieved, in order to develop in a harmonious way, from within and from below, the potential of educability, its various dimensions and intelligences (Gardner, 1983), (Gardner, 1993), (Gardner, 1999); (Sternberg R. J., 1985); (Salovey & Sluyter, 1997); (Roche Olivar, 2002); (Goleman, 1996), (Goleman, 2006), (Goleman, 2009), to give them sense and meaning.

The activation of ontological intelligence requires its proper examination: the person must question his or her intentions, values, prejudices and stereotypes.

Ontological intelligence generates a *creative relatedness*, it develops an open, flexible mentality, a sympathetic practice that fosters interpersonal relationship, dialogue, trust and reciprocity.

It seeks the good of the other, beyond one's own, building one with the other, in relationship with the other (Argiolas, 2014; 2017).

Global competence can be achieved through a harmonised development of all socio-ontological dimensions of human intelligence.

2. THE ACHIEVEMENT OF GLOBAL COMPETENCIES WITHIN PEDAGOGY OF COMMUNION

Focusing our analysis on the educational approach which appears to be at the basis of the so-called *Pedagogy of Communion*, sprouted from the experience of Chiara Lubich and the Focolare Movement (Lubich, 2001) we'll try to identify the main elements providing support for a positive answer to the key question of this paper.

According to Adam Biela (Biela, 1996), this pedagogical perspective could represent a methodological foundation upon which "new" theoretical models and empirical research strategies can be built.

The *pedagogy of communion* builds primarily on sought and lived reciprocity in the relationship between teachers and learners, among educators, among groups and educational institutions, in the interdependence between thought and action, in the everyday interchange between word and life. Hence Education can find its highest sense in promoting communion among persons, peoples, cultures and religions (De Beni, Šimović, & Gasparini, 2012) (Boi, 2013).

The term *communion* is already present in social sciences. Especially in the organisational culture, it was introduced for the first time in 1938, by Chester Barnard (1888-1961), a senior American executive, interested in understanding what motivates different people, with different projects of life and different subjective systems of preferences, to collaborate for the achievement of common objectives. He defined the *conditions of communion* as «that feeling which makes you at ease in relating to others which is sometimes called *solidarity, integration, sociability, or social security*» (Barnard, 1938, p. 148).

In interpersonal relationships, communion is generated by the personal *initiative* of either one or the other, therefore it is *free* and cannot be imposed; it is *plural* because it is open to the other's ex-

pressive diversity, and it is *universal* because it can affect, directly or indirectly, every human being.

Communion, as an essential dimension of human existence, encourages the improvement of a culture of reciprocal trust, allows to create spaces for dialogue and a full, mutual participation and exchange of gifts (Argiolas, 2014; 2017)

In this sense, Education to communion, implies a *welcoming intentionality*, a meeting place, leaving enough space for the other while finding space within the other, each person in his or her integral wholeness thus sharing values, talents and intentions, motivations and actions, common projects, up to the point of experiencing a free, mutual belonging.

Education to communion cannot but lean towards the dimension of “us”, to the principle of *sociality*. It is the goal to be achieved as well as the method to be implemented for a complete exploitation of personal talents, of new relationships, and human values, in the perspective of solidarity, participation and cooperation.

Education to communion promotes *bonds of responsibility*, ontological spaces of *reciprocity*, where each person can act as query and reply, listening and speech, so that those who are in a different functional, cultural and social status, may become actors, creative protagonists, progressively more autonomous and independent to develop active citizenship (Milan, 2012).

But what is the specific educational goal of a *pedagogy of communion*?

«The goal that has always been assigned to education (to form the human person, to render him or her independent) is implemented, almost paradoxically, by forming the person-in-relationship, which for us means the human person in the image of the Trinity, one who is capable of continually transcending self in the context of the presence of Jesus in our midst. (Lubich, 2001, p. 223)

What kind of relationship can show continuous self-transcendence as an image of the Holy Trinity?

It is well known that interpersonal relationships are at the heart of human life.

They have been studied by different disciplines and from different points of view (Gulotta, 1995); (Gulotta, 2008).

From the Palo Alto School perspective (Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1971), the relationship is the *meta* aspect of every communication, transmitting the way through which information must be treated.

The symmetrical or complementary nature of communicational exchanges depends on whether they are based on a relationship of equality or difference.

In a *symmetrical relationship*, participants tend to mirror each another, to find their motivations in one another; everyone behaves as if conveying to have the same value as the other, under conditions of reciprocity.

A *complementary relationship*, instead, is based on mutual difference, one stands above the other, in the position of the one who gives, directs, advises, criticises, while the other, who stands below, asks, obeys, accepting the definition of their relationship imposed by the first one.

This kind of relationship, like the previous one, is not inherently positive or negative, rather it is essential to know how to communicate, in a symmetrical or a complementary way in different situations. This can be dangerous when the complementarity becomes rigid, that is, when the one who is above suffocates the other's personality, constantly keeping the latter in a state of emotional or intellectual dependence, or when the symmetrical relationship tends to extreme competitiveness, to a real symmetrical escalation in which each person tries to be more similar to the other (Gulotta, 2008).

Each kind of communication, either symmetrical or complementary, reveals the need of any person for self-affirmation.

The kind of interpersonal relationship proposed by Chiara Lubich, shows some peculiarities that substantially undermine

the *meta* aspect of communication and the idea that a relationship is generated by the individual need of self-affirmation.

«*I felt – Chiara Lubich says- that I was created as a gift for the person next to me and that the person next to me was created by God as a gift for me. As the Father in the Trinity is everything for the Son and the Son is everything for the Father*» (Lubich, 2005, p. 128).

Love binds everything on Earth together: therefore, we need to be Love if we want to find the golden thread connecting human beings. Hence, communication is always a mutual gift and every relationship, as a meta aspect of communication, is Love (Lubich, 2005).

For the German philosopher Eric Fromm, Love is an active power, that solicits effort and wisdom. It is a real art which breaks down the walls that separate a person from his or her peers, while allowing him or her to preserve their identity and integrity (Fromm, 1995).

The true *art of loving* comes to light from the Gospel. Based on Jesus's example to be the first to love, this art of loving moves us to consider the others like ourselves, to become one with the others in all their needs, to understand them and to provide effective help.

This relational dynamic can be envisaged as *the golden rule of educational relationships*. Therefore educators who want to achieve communion can claim just one right: to serve everyone, because in everyone is God they are serving. Hence, they will have just one obligation: to love everyone so that Christ can be generated, grown and developed in them (within themselves). They will not be able to find peace until, thanks to their continuous service, the same spiritual physiognomy of Jesus can be recognised in any brother and sister (Lubich, 1984).

According to Chiara Lubich, Jesus is within each person, therefore representing the authentic personality of every human being.

We could even say that *Jesus within us* is our *ontological intelligence*, the highest expression of our potential of educability.

A peculiarity of the educational model proposed by the *pedagogy of communion* is that global competences and soft skills development cannot disregard a specific focus on transcendence as an inherent dimension of each human being's educability potential.

We learn from Chiara Lubich that «*we need to be Love*» (Lubich, 2005, p. 82)

Indeed, the innovation of Christianity is not merely believing in God's existence, but believing that God is Love (1 Gv 4,8.16).

If we acknowledge that God is one in three Persons, according to a logic of Love, we should believe that God's inner life includes diversity, plurality, equality, otherness, gift, acceptance, reciprocity.

God is not a lonely being, shut in oneself, but a sympathetic being, He is community, shared life (Cambon, 2009).

«*Love is a Light -Chiara argues- and with the right light we can see if the way we approach others conforms to God's expectations, and is in line with how the other would dream Jesus by his side*» (Lubich, 2005, p. 82).

Love requires an intersubjective relational dynamic.

The human being is one in his or her self and at the same time, he or she is body, spirit and relationship with others. If we don't take this in consideration, some dysfunctions could arise, such as narcissism, selfishness, extreme hedonism, but also spiritualism and fundamentalism.

A community without spiritual roots is reduced to a psychological group and it can end up in a vacuous activism without generating the expected outcomes (Cambon, 2009).

Learning to be Love opens our educability potential to a dimension of sapience which enables us to grasp the depth of what is happening within us, outside of us and between us.

The *sapiential* dimension must be lived as inherent to the rational, cognitive, creative and relational sphere. The oneness that makes each person able to go beyond oneself into the setting

of “us”. This represents the foundation of the social dimension development towards the universal fraternity.

If we are guided by ontological intelligence, heading towards global competence should be easier.

3. CONCLUSIONS

In a world torn by divisions and conflicts, by unthinkable violence against children, by forms of fundamentalism ascribed to religious issues, proposing the art of loving, as well as communion, as goals to be achieved in the frame of a renewed educational project and as the best ways to develop the potential of educability of each person, may appear absurd and utopian.

Nonetheless *Goal 4* of the United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda for development stresses that obtaining a quality education is the foundation to improving people’s lives and sustainable development:

Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning (UN)

Every day UNESCO tries to accomplish its fundamental humanist mission to support people in understanding each other and working together to build lasting peace.

Through learning and life experience individuals become inter-culturally competent up to appreciating diversity as well as managing conflicts in accordance with the values of pluralism and mutual understanding (UNESCO, 2015).

In front of the pressing need to act in the perspective of the person as a unified entity, modern educational processes must pay great attention to the need of ensuring the acquisition of in-depth *knowledge and understanding* of global and intercultural issues; the *ability* to learn from and live with people from diverse backgrounds; and the *attitudes and values* able to unite all of us around our common humanity, and necessary to interact respectfully with others.

We need learning resources and curricula able to approach global competence as a multifaceted cognitive, socio-emotional and civic learning goal (Boix Mansilla, 2016).

The word education derives from the Latin verb *educere* that means *extracting from*.

Education to communion, envisaged as an application of Socratic method, helps to extract and empower human attitude to love, deeply rooted in every person since the origins.

Love pushes human beings to a continuous inner investigation to find their best traits in the depths of their nature.

Love can be developed if human relations are not limited to mere emotions and feelings, but all personal faculties are put into play together with multiple intelligences up to ontological intelligence.

For Paulo Freire (Freire, 2002), one of the typical virtues of educators is deep love: for humanity, for the world, for knowledge and for their professional activity. Learning experience respects its authentic, humanising nature when people educate each other to communion, with the mediation of the world they live in.

In this paper, we've carried out a review of the "*social intelligence model*" (Gulotta & Boi, 1997; Boi, 2009;), integrated with the recent findings on *ontological intelligence*, in order to show that: the educability model emerging from the world-wide experience called *pedagogy of communion* integrates the key dimensions of Global competence as defined by OECD in 2016.

From the overview of the main educational experiences based on pedagogy of communion from different areas of the world (Boi, 2017) we can argue that practicing the art of loving within communion fosters a generative relationality, at individual as well as social level, and enhances educability potential, intelligences and personal dimensions.

Educating to love is the real mission of schools inspired by Pedagogy of Communion.

We can educate ourselves to love, and at the same time, we can be educated to love.

Through love we can learn how to love.

Pedagogy of Communion can be considered not only a promising educational approach, but a typical example of an educational process able to implement the key dimensions of global competence (knowledge, skills, attitude and values), in line with the OECD Educational 2030 Framework.

Communion is the key driver for personal and community-led empowerment, trust, responsibility and reciprocity, through which everyone becomes a creative key player in building active citizenship.

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