

edited by
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EDUCATION IN MOTION

MOBILITY, TRANSFORMATION AND DIALOGUE ACROSS CONTEXTS

PERSPECTIVES FROM EUROPEAN-AFRICAN EDUCATIONAL COLLABORATION



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Introduction.

Educational Transformation Across Contexts: Mobility, Dialogue, and the ACHIEVE-IT Experience

Roberta Mineo

In a context marked by increasing global interdependence, educational systems are called to respond to forms of complexity that exceed national, disciplinary, and institutional boundaries. Questions of mobility, diversity, and intercultural dialogue are no longer peripheral to education, but central to how knowledge is produced, shared, and transformed. From a psychoanalytic perspective, such complexity can be understood as taking shape within a broader *pólis*: not simply a space of coexistence, but a relational and symbolic field that precedes and constitutes the subjects who inhabit it. In this sense, what is at stake is not only the encounter between individuals or cultures, but the conditions under which a shared field can sustain the work of thinking. The tension between *chorós* and *nómos* becomes particularly salient: it is a delicate balance between the transpersonal dimension that allows experience to be held, expressed and made thinkable, and the emergence of shared forms capable of transforming conflict into a space of judgment and dialogue. Education, in this perspective, can be understood as one of the sites in which this tension is continuously negotiated: a fragile process in which the capacity to sustain difference, tolerate ambiguity, and transform conflict cannot be taken for granted, but must be continually constructed. It is within such relational and symbolic configurations that learning takes place, not as an individual acquisition, but as a process emerging within a shared matrix of interactions, meanings, and practices. It is within this broader landscape that this volume is situated.

This volume emerges from a shared educational and research journey shaped by the ACHIEVE-IT project¹, a programme funded within the framework of the Italian National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR). Conceived as a collaborative initiative among Italian universities and their partner institutions across the African continent, ACHIEVE-IT has sought to foster academic mobility, strengthen institutional partnerships, and promote innovative approaches to teaching, learning, and research. Within this broader framework, the collaboration between the Department of Education at the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia and St. Paul's University in Kenya has constituted a particularly fertile ground for dialogue, exchange, and mutual transformation.

More than a collection of independent contributions, this volume reflects the intellectual and relational work generated through this collaboration. It brings together diverse perspectives on education, ranging from early childhood pedagogy to higher education, from participation and leadership to inclusion and sustainability, while remaining anchored in a shared concern: how education can respond to the complexities of contemporary societies marked by mobility, diversity, and global interdependence. In this sense, the book does not simply document a project; it embodies an ongoing process of co-construction of knowledge across contexts, cultures, and epistemological traditions.

¹ The ACHIEVE-IT project fosters academic collaboration between Italian and African universities with the aim of promoting international mobility, joint doctoral programmes, and advanced training initiatives. It brings together seven participating Italian institutions - the University of Parma, the University of Ferrara, the University of Bologna, the University of Salento, the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart (Piacenza), and the Mediterranea University of Reggio Calabria - alongside thirty-seven partner universities across sixteen African countries, including Algeria, Burundi, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Niger, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, South Africa, Senegal, Tanzania, and Tunisia.

At the time of publication of this volume, the project is still ongoing. Its expected outcomes include the strengthening of internationalization processes, the development of academic and professional competencies, and the consolidation of long-term strategic partnerships.

At its core, the volume is grounded in the recognition that educational transformation cannot be understood through isolated frameworks or disciplinary boundaries. Rather, it requires an approach capable of holding together multiple dimensions of experience: pedagogical practices, relational dynamics, institutional structures, and socio-cultural contexts. The chapters that follow reflect this multiplicity, offering situated analyses that, taken together, trace a broader trajectory of educational change.

The chapters are organized to reflect a progressive articulation of educational transformation across different dimensions and scales. They move from foundational pedagogical shifts to questions of participation, leadership, and inclusion, before expanding toward global and ecological concerns. This trajectory is then complemented by a focus on the lived experience of mobility and its role in shaping knowledge production, culminating in a conceptual reflection that seeks to bring these dimensions into dialogue. In this sense, the structure of the volume mirrors the very processes it seeks to explore: from situated practices to relational experience, and from experience to theoretical elaboration.

The volume opens with the contribution by Esther Marima, which provides a foundational perspective on the transformation of early childhood education in Kenya through the introduction of the Competency-Based Curriculum. By situating this shift within both historical developments and contemporary policy frameworks, the chapter highlights the move toward learner-centered pedagogy, holistic development, and the integration of knowledge, skills, and values. This pedagogical reorientation establishes a critical starting point for the volume, foregrounding education as a process that extends beyond the transmission of content to encompass the development of the whole person.

Building on this foundation, Rita Bertozzi's chapter shifts the focus toward the role of participation in educational contexts. Drawing on comparative perspectives and empirical work within the GOTALK project, the chapter examines participation as both a right and a pedagogical process, emphasizing its potential

to foster agency, inclusion, and democratic engagement. In doing so, it expands the discussion from pedagogical structures to relational dynamics, highlighting how educational environments can enable, or constrain, the active involvement of learners.

The theme of agency is further developed in Paul Gesimba's contribution, which explores leadership as a central dimension of educational transformation. Moving across different levels (from individual to institutional and societal) the chapter conceptualizes leadership not only as a set of competencies, but as a relational and ethical practice embedded within educational processes. By situating leadership within broader theoretical and socio-cultural frameworks, it underscores its role in shaping responsive and adaptive educational systems.

This trajectory is then critically deepened by the chapter by Wanjugu Wachira, which introduces the question of inclusion through a focus on disability in higher education. By examining the gap between policy commitments and lived realities, particularly within the Kenyan context, the chapter foregrounds the structural and cultural barriers that continue to limit equitable access and participation. In doing so, it invites a rethinking of education as a space that must actively address issues of exclusion, stigma, and inequality.

From this ethical perspective, the volume expands toward global and ecological concerns in the chapter by Milcah Ajuoga, which addresses biodiversity education and sustainability in higher learning institutions. By linking education to pressing environmental challenges, the chapter highlights the role of transformative pedagogies in cultivating critical awareness, responsibility, and action. It situates higher education as a key site for addressing global issues, while also emphasizing the need for interdisciplinary and practice-oriented approaches.

This experiential dimension of educational transformation is further explored in the chapter authored by doctoral researchers within the Reggio Childhood Studies programme, who offer a collective and reflexive account of their mobility experiences in

Kenya. Drawing on fieldwork, institutional engagement, and participation in international projects, Ndungu, Drure and Berni approach mobility not merely as geographical displacement, but as a situated process of knowledge production. Through practices of observation, dialogue, and documentation, the authors reflect on how their encounters across contexts have shaped their research trajectories, positionalities, and ways of knowing. In doing so, the chapter highlights mobility as a formative and relational experience, capable of fostering critical awareness, intercultural understanding, and the continuous redefinition of research perspectives, while also acknowledging the partial and situated nature of these processes.

Complementing these thematic contributions, the chapter by Pauline Kariuki provides a focus on academic writing as a foundational skill for participation in knowledge production. By examining essay structure, referencing practices, and the principles of scholarly communication, the chapter underscores the importance of equipping learners with the tools necessary to engage critically and effectively within academic discourse. In this sense, it offers a bridge between educational processes and their articulation within broader scholarly communities.

The volume concludes with a chapter by the editor, which seeks to bring these diverse strands into a conceptual dialogue. By exploring the interrelations between space, group processes, creativity, and mobility, the chapter proposes the notion of the educational matrix as a way of understanding education as a relational and dynamic field. Within this framework, academic mobility, such as that fostered through the ACHIEVE-IT project, is reinterpreted not merely as movement across contexts, but as a transformation of the relational and symbolic conditions under which learning takes place. The encounter between different educational cultures, including those shaped through the collaboration between Italian and Kenyan institutions, becomes a generative site for new forms of meaning-making, creativity, and collective understanding.

Taken together, the contributions in this volume offer not a single model of educational transformation, but a constellation of perspectives that illuminate its complexity. What emerges is an understanding of education as a process that is at once local and global, structured and emergent, individual and collective. Within this framework, mobility assumes a central role—not only as a mechanism of exchange, but as a condition that reshapes educational processes by generating encounters across contexts. The experiential accounts presented in the volume make visible how such encounters are lived, negotiated, and reflected upon by those directly involved, revealing mobility as a site of learning, tension, and possibility. Building on these insights, the concluding chapter proposes a conceptual lens through which these dynamics can be understood, framing education as a relational matrix in which space, group processes, creativity, and mobility intersect. It is within this movement - from mobility, to lived experience, to theoretical elaboration - that the significance of initiatives such as ACHIEVE-IT can be fully appreciated: not only as programmes of international collaboration, but as spaces in which new forms of knowledge, understanding, and educational practice can emerge.

In this sense, the volume invites readers to engage with education not as a fixed system, but as an evolving field of relations: one that requires ongoing reflection, dialogue, and collaboration across contexts. The hope is that the insights offered here will contribute to this broader conversation, and to the continued development of educational practices capable of responding to the challenges and opportunities of our time.