

English Corner

Traduzioni a cura di
Ilaria Da Col e Anna Battistella

My Skills *Capacità al centro*

edited by
Laura Cortellazzo
Assistant Professor at the
Department of Management and
Ca' Foscari Competency Centre
Member

Sara Bonesso
Associate Professor at the
Department of Management and
Ca' Foscari Competency Centre
Vice Director

Fabrizio Gerli
Associate Professor at the
Department of Management and
Ca' Foscari Competency Centre
Director

Developing Soft Skills: The Role of Experience

The current organizational environment, characterized by growing flexibility and rapid change, increasingly requires mastering a wide set of soft skills, such as teamwork, communication, empathy, emotional management and flexibility. According to research, developing these skills requires a learning approach that differs from traditional methods normally adopted in the academic and corporate education landscape. This approach focuses on active learning and cooperation, with experience playing a fundamental role. Ideally, each experience can become an opportunity to use, and perhaps improve and develop, personal and interpersonal skills.

The experiential approach conceives learning as a holistic process in which a person is called to think, feel, hear, perceive and behave in agreement with the environment. As specified by David Kolb's theory, experiences represent the starting point for reflection and observation. Based on reflection and observation, individuals can attribute meanings to their experiences, creating knowledge structures and transforming their action patterns.

Experiences Transform Us
Experiences are a fundamental mechanism through which individuals learn, adapt, and ultimately modify their behaviour in response to the dynamic environment. This can be applied either to personal or professional experiences. For example, parenthood or caregiving can positively influence our ability to listen, provide emotional support, manage emotions in stressful situations, showing patience and understanding, and time-management skills by prioritizing tasks and allocating one's time efficiently.

Living abroad and exploring other countries allow people to immerse themselves in different cultures, customs, and traditions. Interacting with people coming from different contexts promotes cultural awareness and sensitivity, helping individuals develop empathy, respect, and appreciation for cultural differences. Travelling often involves navigating unfamiliar environments, facing unexpected challenges, and adapting to changing circumstances, testing one's flexibility.

Especially if repeated over time, these experiences allow to re-examine, test, and integrate their beliefs and behaviours, creating lasting change in their behaviour.

In most cases, there is a tendency to separate personal and professional experiences because they belong to different spheres of life. However, integrating them could unlock potential and allow individuals to leverage skills developed in personal contexts within the workplace as well.

A University-Level Study
Based on experiential learning theory, a recent study conducted by the Ca' Foscari Competency Centre on a sample of 324 master students examined the impact of different types of experiences (cultural, sports, international, etc.) on their soft skills levels.

Through the active participation in extracurricular experiences,

students have the opportunity to observe and reflect on their beliefs and behaviours, identifying, modeling, or mirroring from others the most appropriate behaviours.

Previous studies showed a positive relationship between the participation in extracurricular activities and communication skills, initiative, decision-making, interpersonal skills such as working in teams, and self-confidence. However, these studies tend to group different experiences as if they were a single factor. A step forward was distinguishing how different experiences can influence different types of soft skills. Specifically, the study shows a significant relationship between cultural activities – such as the participation in cultural, theatre, and art groups – and cognitive and interpersonal skills. Experiences related to studying and working abroad have a positive effect on social awareness skills (e.g., empathy), relationship management skills (e.g., teamwork) and cognitive skills (e.g., systems thinking). Moreover, practising sports activities positively influences self-management skills such as goal-orientation and self-control.

The results of this study provide interesting implications on how to capitalize on personal experiences in the learning process of soft skills. First, given that some experiences allow for the training of certain skills more than others, a person can more easily orient their learning process. Additionally, the person must pay attention to how their mastery of skills is improving progressively during the experience. Lastly, personal experiences such as participation in volunteer, cultural, sports activities, etc., can, especially for young people entering the job market with limited work experience, be evaluated in recruitment and selection processes. To this end, it is essential to acquire awareness of the experiences that more strongly encourage specific behaviours.



LEI & The World *Lei & Mondo*

Camilla Spaliviero
Research Fellow in Educational
Linguistics and Collaborator of
the Archivio Scritture Scrittrici
Migranti, Ca' Foscari University
of Venice

in conversation with
Espérance Hakuzwimana
Writer and Activist

How do you position yourself within the contemporary landscape of Italian literature? Is it still useful to use definitions like 'Italian migration literature'?

I want to write everything, without limiting myself. There is a void, and I am aware that I have this great opportunity, and I want to seize it with honesty and in alignment with the times we are living in. I am a bit hesitant about labels because today they can be confusing, whereas perhaps a few years ago they were useful for clarification. Sometimes, on Instagram, I receive photos where people show me that my books are in the 'foreign literature' section of bookshops and libraries. What can I do about it? In any case, the fact that people take photos and send them means that a message has been conveyed. I can simply be an Italian writer. I also believe it is useful to move beyond the momentary interest in literature written by black individuals. I wish for an Italian literature with all possible nuances, but not categorized based on trends or the latest dramatic event that has occupied the news, like the death of George Floyd.

In addition to being a writer, you are an activist. How has this commitment influenced your writing?

Writing and activism have always put me in crisis. Until a few years ago, I struggled to keep them separate because I thought it was the only way to develop these

paths. However, in the complexity of being alive and trying to find beauty in this existence, I understood that I could not continue like that. Besides being a lying child, I was also a coward, and I never made my thoughts count. I just wanted to read. Then there was a moment when my staying on the sidelines was no longer valid as a way of imagining life. On 3 February 2018, in Macerata, Luca Traini left his house and shot people just because they were black. It was a real attack that individuals with a migratory background, Afro-descendants, in this country observed with deep terror. My reaction was to take to the streets. There I met those who embraced my desire to transform fear into something good. Thus began my cultural activism: I read the world through books, and by writing them, I try to explain what my idea of battle is. The words of others have been redemptive because they allowed me to grow. At 19, I was studying International Studies at the University of Trento and felt unprepared for life but ready for literature. I had read the major works of English and French literature, and was up to date on all publications in Italian literature. Yet, in class, international guests cited authors from other countries that I did not know. I realized how limited my perspective was! From that moment, I felt the anxiety of having to catch up on all the voices I had not heard. When we talk about education, we also talk about the books we must read, and indeed, reading educates me about the convictions I hold, as someone with a connection to the history of Rwanda and who also grew up with a Western education. At a certain point, it became consistent to incorporate my activism into the things I write.

As a writer and activist, you use social networks a lot. What role do these tools play in spreading certain topics?

Being born in the 1990s, I grew up with forums like Myspace and MSN, which helped create beautiful human networks of peers with similar passions. I cannot imagine how much the Internet has changed since then, but I use Instagram with the same purpose. Sometimes I open a question box to give people the opportunity to take some time and share their stories. My intention is to build a 'human' communication channel to witness the growth of those who

follow me and connect those who want to interact. I opened Instagram also because I wanted to talk about books, and this led publishing houses to start sending them to me. I am aware that I can influence people's reading choices, but this does not change my intentions; it has actually helped me approach social media with better detachment, especially after the pandemic.

How can literature foster the encounter between different languages and cultures in today's Italy, on the one hand multilingual and multicultural, and on the other hand dealing with a complex political situation?

Literature can support the exchange among people of different languages and cultures through processes of identification. In our country, the road ahead is still long, but we need the ability and patience to listen to change, which sometimes is imperceptible. Last year, while presenting my first novel, *Tutta intera*, a student, with red eyes, thanked me, saying: "It is the first time I find Moroccan Arabic written well in a book". For me, it was a circle that closed. In the initial phase of writing the novel, I told myself: "In this book, I want there to be truth", and asked myself: "How do I tell the stories of these second-generation girls and boys? How can I be as faithful as possible to their truth?". I wanted to include sentences in their language within situations where the characters feel comfortable enough to use their other mother tongue. I asked friends of Moroccan, Tunisian, and Romanian origin to help me translate these sentences. I had them meet with the publishing house and those who read the audiobook for correct pronunciation. Then a boy exactly like them read the novel, identified with it, and came to tell me. My goal is to fill the bookshelves by telling these lives that they exist. I learned this from Igiaba Scego, who, with the *Future* project, opened the doors to eleven Afro-descendant writers for a collection of stories that meant much more than all the politicians who promised us *ius soli*.

In your first novel, *Tutta intera*, are there autobiographical elements?

When I was little, I could not say I was a black person because I was surrounded by white people, and my blackness was so visible that

it became invisible. This situation deprived me of a word that for many could be small and short; instead, it took me twenty-two years to reclaim it. I had to put in such a quantity of feelings, excerpts, and fragments that I felt the need to write my first book, *E poi basta. Manifesto di una donna nera italiana*. It is a book that cannot be classified because what we are made of is so heterogeneous that it cannot be put under a label. I wanted my soul and life experience to be enclosed in a 'manifesto'. Each of us must have one, evolving over time. That is mine, and I am glad it is composed of pieces of articles, poems, quotes, and lists of names that allowed me to reclaim the word 'black' and redefine myself in the space I occupied. The next step was to explain what goes beyond being black, and I needed an entire story. Many think *Tutta intera* is an autobiographical text. In reality, my autobiography is all in the first chapter, while the rest is a product of imagination. The only thing I wanted to do in life was invent stories to soothe the little girl I used to be, who searched for herself in books and could not find herself. In Italy, today, we have to convince ourselves that skin colour does not define us, even though when we step outside, we realize it is not that simple. Creativity and imagination allowed me to find other words and put them in order. My autobiographical intent is to respond with joy and light to the loneliness, pain, and violence I experienced and transform them into a tool for other lives.

What role does teaching play in *Tutta intera*?

In *Tutta intera* I wanted teaching to be a point of contact to open up cracks. School is an island where many lives come together and take shape. One becomes aware of what otherness, marginality, and diversity mean. The school has the task of telling these stories, but this does not always happen. The protagonist experiences a 'different' school because she starts teaching an afternoon extra-curricular course for students who need to learn Italian. It seemed like a way to narrate a growth not only connected to grades but also to who one becomes. I would not be the person I am if I had not attended the schools I did, not so much for the studies but for the desks I occupied, the teacher-mentors, the books bought and used... There will

always be a bit of school in what I write because I am grateful for the work of teachers, whom I also meet in training courses. I observe their passion for staying up-to-date to understand with which tools they can adequately respond to the younger generations.

Your latest book, *La banda del pianerottolo*, is aimed at girls and boys aged 8 and up. Why this publication?

Writing for children has always been a dream that I could not afford. Then I met my editor, who reminds me of my primary school teacher, and a shameless love was born. *La banda del pianerottolo* was a challenge, and I had fun. I had to stop writing because I was laughing by myself in front of the computer! I had forgotten that writing could also be tenderness and lightness. I realized that my writing comes across as simple and direct even though it is not easy. That is why adults who have read this book tell me that they liked *La banda del pianerottolo*, too. On the other hand, it is wrong to underestimate children and think that they cannot tackle 'grown-up' topics. When I presented *La banda del pianerottolo*, I said: "From 8 to 99 years old" because I believe it is a story from which everyone can learn something. I am happy to have written it because it gives me the opportunity to talk about racism, discrimination, and identity in a different way. Here, we laugh, joke around, and there are beautiful colours, pure and shameless joy.

Biography

Espérance Hakuzwimana was born in Rwanda in 1991. Having survived the genocide, she was adopted by an Italian family and grew up in the province of Brescia. Since 2015 she has been living in Turin, where she attended the Scuola Holden. There she engages in activism by collaborating with associations, schools, libraries, and companies to dismantle the stereotypes underlying discrimination. She shared her story in *E poi basta. Manifesto di una donna nera italiana* (People 2019). She is one of the authors of the anthology *Future. Il domani narrato dalle voci di oggi* (Effequ 2019), edited by Igiaba Scego. Her first novel, *Tutta intera*, was published by Einaudi in 2022. Her latest book, *La banda del pianerottolo* (Mondadori 2023), is recommended for children aged eight and up.



LEI & The World **Lei & Mondo**

Leila Karami

Translator, Professor of Cultural Narratives and Dynamics (Persian), Ca' Foscari University of Venice

in conversation with **Sudābe Sālem**

Musician, composer, and orchestra conductor

Could you share with us your journey into music and the instruments you currently play?

I was born into a large family that was quite sensitive to the arts, and this allowed me to attend the Tehran Conservatory of Music where I began playing the *santur*¹, my main instrument. I've also played the piano and the *robāb*. At the Academy of Fine Arts, I took a course in Music Education. Today, I mainly use the piano and various percussion instruments to teach music to children.

I know that you incorporate elements like play, singing and nature in teaching music to children and teenagers, and I also know that you draw inspiration from the heritage of Iranian folklore.

Since I was a college student, I have been aware of the benefits these elements bring to kindergartens. Discovering the Orff-Schulwerk method² was decisive in influencing my choice of university courses and later in my work at the Center for the Intellectual Development of Children and Adolescents. Unfortunately, following the Iranian Revolution of 1979, public musical activities were

prohibited, and I solely gave private lessons until the early 1990s. After the conclusion of the eight-year Iran-Iraq War (1980-88), and amidst the ensuing political crisis, the limitations, and increasingly restrictive bans, which heightened the sense of loss and depression within society, the government eventually began to relax certain regulations. This provided me with the opportunity to resume teaching music to children who had lived the hardships of war or suffered from the political turmoil. We were all immersed in an atmosphere of fear, tension, and gloom, which seemed to infiltrate every corner of our lives, including schools. To alleviate anxiety among the children, I introduced rhythmic games, movement, and singing along with musical instruments – in doing so, I also felt more motivated to try new approaches. I began to incorporate different activities into my teaching approach, such as exploring the sounds of nature through music education and introducing folk songs from the diverse dialects of Iran. I embarked on a journey with the children, into the rich rhythms of our country's northern forests, southern sea, mountains, and deserts.

Do you believe that musical education stimulates children's creativity and cultivates skills that are useful for life?

Group activities in class provide children with opportunities to express their emotions while also fostering cooperation and inspiring them to generate new ideas. Indirectly, I teach them to embrace diversity. Through collaborative activities like movement and group singing, children also learn to interact with others regardless of age. Sadly, musical activities have been banned in our compulsory school system for decades.

What factors are important in children's musical education?

Teaching music to children requires both artistic flair and a solid understanding of developmental science and education. It is about creatively unlocking a child's potential, organizing diverse musical information in their minds, which can also enhance their abilities in another area. A music teacher should be adept at connecting with children while considering their cultural and individual differences. Creating a serene, joyful, stress-free environment is essential. Collaborating with educators from diverse cultural and social backgrounds holds significant importance. For me, music

instruction extends beyond merely training a child's ear or teaching rhythm and sound. Music is intertwined with cultural identity, and it is key especially during the crisis phase Iran is going through. Iranian children can benefit from melodies and dances originated from diverse geographical regions: introducing them to the distinct sounds, languages, dances, movements, and cultures of their country is essential to my teaching approach.

What do you expect from the parents of your young students?

Luckily, even in small cities, many parents today appreciate their children's interest in music, which encourages them to engage in musical activities. We must recognize that digitalization is a significant aspect of children's lives, connecting them with the world and making around them and accelerating their development compared to previous generations. When the children come to class, they often have some exposure to music already. Some parents are solely focused on the end result and hope their children will become prodigies like Mozart, which can influence their choice of instrument. Such an attitude does not contribute to a peaceful learning environment, because they stop having fun and think of music as a school task. I wish parents would be patient, refrain from dictating their children's choice of musical instrument.

Now tell us about your research on Iran's oral culture and the use of classical literature in music.

After years of teaching and research in the field of music, I have discovered the rich heritage of Iran's oral culture, especially for children. This heritage includes songs, nursery rhymes, fairy tales, rhythmic body movements, and playful games, all designed to educate and encourage speech development in young children. These games can be also played with fingers even while sitting, and many of them are rooted in figures from Persian classical literature. Originating from our grandmothers, they have been passed down through generations, with variants suitable for all ages. I have drawn inspiration from this oral culture to compose melodies suitable for various musical instruments, catering to toddlers and elementary school children. Both students and teachers enjoy the experience, and the latter are committed to integrating and preserving this cultural heritage as well.

What about concerts?

The end-of-trimester show with the choir is one of our main activities. In the 1990s, the Municipality of Tehran authorized the teaching of music and visual arts in cultural centres. I was invited to work in one such centre in southern Tehran, where I established the 'Iranian Children and Adolescents Orchestra'. Since 1995, the Municipality has granted me the opportunity to perform in various venues, including Va dat Hall, Tehrān City Theater, Āzādi Tower Cultural Complex, and āfe Hall in Shirāz. Initially, I single-handedly designed every aspect of the performances, from the script to the songs and music. However, over time, I have developed collaborations with masters whom I have known for years. In the concerts, children aged six to sixteen take part. We draw inspiration from Ferdowsi's *Shāhnāme*,³ Rumi's *Mathnavi*,⁴ as well as popular songs and dances. Sometimes, mothers also join their children in the performances. On certain occasions, the Orchestra involves over 200 people. This includes costume designers, stagehands, set designers, sound, and light technicians. In essence, the expenses are considerable, obtaining permits from the authorities is not easy at all, and I frequently need to adjust the project due to budget constraints. In the last year, from 2022 to 2023, there were no permitted shows except for the choir performance. However, some of these performances are accessible on my YouTube channel, *Soudabeh Saleem*.

Tell us about your activity in music therapy.

Four years after the Iran-Iraq War, in 1992, I participated in music therapy workshops for children at the Orff Institute in Austria. It was there I discovered the profound benefits of music therapy in alleviating anxiety in traumatized children. The concept of 'music therapy' provided me with a more accessible framework to pursue my work, circumventing the government restrictions on music education. This enabled me to develop projects in youth detention centres, receiving support from various associations and governmental entities. In collaboration with UNICEF, I organized courses for children affected by the Bam earthquake, as

1 An ancestor of the cymbal or the piano, it is an Iranian string instrument widespread throughout the Middle East.

2 The Orff-Schulwerk method involves getting children to experience music actively, with the body, through the creative use of the voice, and through active listening that enables them to derive useful information for understanding music from the experience.

3 The most famous epic poet in Persian medieval literature.

4 Famous thirteen-century Persian poet.

well as for those in female orphanages, children in need of specialized medical care, and those with Down Syndrome and autism.

Based on what you have said so far, I believe you have many beautiful and sad memories.

Yes, I have both. I like watching the children during performances; it is beautiful to see them having fun. Additionally, practising silence and breathing also bring me joy. A beautiful memory comes to mind when a girl generously lent her costume to a six-year-old during rehearsals. The younger girl was in tears because her costume was not ready. The older girl took off her skirt and gave it to her, insisting she could do the rehearsals without a costume. Among the sombre memories, one stands out: a music therapy session at a juvenile detention centre where everyone was in shock following the suicide of a friend.

You have written books and recorded albums, right?

I have produced four albums of play-songs, featuring mother-child songs inspired by oral culture. I have organized performances, shows, and orchestras. In addition, I like to mention the performance *The Merchant and the Parrot* by Rumi, as well as the shows *Zir-e Gonbad-e Kabood*, which aimed to support children affected by the 2012 East Azerbaijan earthquake. The books primarily focus on teaching musical instruments to children. Among other things, in 2002, my husband, my two sons, and I founded the *Vedā* private music institute. Furthermore, in 2015, we established the publishing house *Mo'asese-ye farhangi-ye Āvā-ye sāz-e khorshid*.

Biography

Sudābe Sälem, born in Tehran in 1952, is a musician, composer, and orchestra conductor specializing in children and teenagers. A graduate of the Fine Arts faculty at the University of Tehran, she is committed to the study of music education for young learners. She has established children's music schools and led music therapy courses for youths affected by various adversities such as the Iran-Iraq War, the 2003 Bam earthquake, and the 2012 East Azerbaijan earthquake. Her outreach extends to those in juvenile detention centres, orphanages, and individuals requiring special medical care.

A place for her Un post(o) per LEI

by **Fabiana Andreani**
Career Mentor & Content Creator
@fabianamanager

Will Training Save Us All (?) New Career Paths for Companies and Students

The job market is evolving, and yet we still view it through the lens of the past, when your career path stayed the same for your whole life, or close to it. However, due to technological and cultural changes, as well as a much longer working life, nowadays our professional lives are destined to change or adapt to our needs. The key to this process is training, which becomes fluid and ongoing, less invasive than before but more integrated into our skills.

In this article, we will explore how training is key for companies, offering both attractiveness to the new generations and how to overcome talent scarcity, especially for specific profiles like STEM or Data roles. We will provide useful resources for our student readers and examples of virtuous companies that have found in training a distinctive feature in the job market.

We are faced with a world of opportunities. I fear the future because it is uncertain. Which side are you on? These questions have been common in recent months, since the new discoveries regarding AI have shown the world what artificial intelligence can do; and perhaps they were even before, since the sudden and unpredictable changes showed the fragility of the global scenario. After decades, we have realized that we now see a technological future not as a positive source for progress and well-being, but as a controversial presage.

When it comes to work, there is another question to ask ourselves: how has the meaning of professional career changed?

For new generations, work makes sense if it is impactful and aligns with their values. Hence, it is normal to change it if they find a position that suits them better. So, in the future, the uncertainties of socio-historical events, fears of eco-anxiety and bleak technological futures are combined with a new meaning of employment. What can make the difference? Training, for sure. If 65% of students currently enrolled in primary education cycles will do a job that does not exist now by 2050 (OECD data), continuous professional updating, also known as Life Long Learning,

will give us the necessary help.

This won't make the uncertainty of the future disappear, but it will surely make us more suited to withstand changes. Training is related to another critical issue for our country, namely the skill mismatch, i.e., the difference between the skills required by the market and the workers'. This can be either horizontal, related to the field of study, or vertical, when it impacts the level of training. Korn Ferry's *Future of Work* research indicates that by 2030, more than 85 million jobs will be hard to fill due to the lack of required skills.

According to current ANPAL data, already 40% of positions are hard to fill in Italy, so the mismatch here is severe and leads to reduced productivity and GDP.

Solving the skill mismatch begins with guidance during the training journey, then with the awareness that one can and must add skills to their profile to make it suitable for the demands of the work environment. Technology lends us a hand here: recently, we have witnessed a progressive democratization and fluidity of training, with teaching models becoming less invasive and closer to the learner's needs – such as with blended, live streaming, on-demand courses.

An example of this is MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses), which are often initiated by individual universities. In this regard, Ca' Foscari University of Venice is at the forefront, promoting its MOOCs with free and open participation. Other notable Italian MOOCs include:

- Federica Web Learning by the University of Naples Federico II
- BOOK by Alma Mater Studiorum University of Bologna
- POK by Politecnico di Milano.

Aggregators like EDUOPEN are also useful to consult. This project is funded by the Ministry of Education (MIUR) and includes over 17 Italian universities, offering free courses with specific start dates. At the end of each course, a participation certificate is issued, certifying the level of the course attended. EMMA, on the other hand, brings together MOOCs from major European universities. Moreover, unemployed people as well as students can access funded programs like *forma.temp*, which offers the chance to attend full training courses for skill updating or advancement either in-person or remotely. Last but not least, MIUR recognized regional-based training courses such as IFTS and ITS contribute to building solid and innovative professionals.

On the hiring side, training can help

companies overcome the talent shortage resulting from the lack of specific profiles. In recent years, academies within companies or organized by third parties have been established, with a view to offering training for subsequent hiring. An example of this are the academies promoted by Adecco, targeting different figures, from commercial to technical.

The beauty of this corporate training is that it aims at overcoming traditional background-related barriers, offering real reskilling opportunities. Among the most successful, we recall:

- Deloitte Lumina Academy, a pathway aimed at humanities graduates to introduce them to the world of strategic consulting;
- Accenture Pink Academy, aimed at women with humanities degrees for an introduction to the cloud world;
- ATON Academy by ATON, a Treviso-based IT company offering an open SQL technician free course regardless of study background or age, and hiring the most brilliant profiles.

Focusing on training is also great for talent retention, as confirmed by Universum's 'Talent Outlook 2024' research. It is strategic both to explain the available skills and tools during the selection phase, and to offer certified training courses to early future candidates, thus creating a loyal community towards the company. Recent examples of companies that have stood out in Italy include:

- Generali Italia, with its digital ecosystem Go Generali
- Fastweb, with the courses from Fastweb Digital Academy and internationally;
- L'Oréal, with its L'Oréal for Youth program, which integrates a training opportunity (Boost Program) with the Brandstorm Challenge to implement what has been studied and be evaluated for the idea;
- LVMH with the Inside LVMH platform, where one can find content about the company, open positions, and courses related to the luxury and retail world.

In this complex and changing scenario, training appears for companies as the crucial where CSR issues, reputation, productivity, and talent attraction converge.

On the side of research and evaluation of candidates, we are moving more and more towards a model where our progressive skills framework will make the difference, not just formal titles. This is confirmed by research from LinkedIn, BCG, and McKinsey.