

## **ENHANCING ARTISTIC EXTRA CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES TO STRUGGLE AGAINST EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING (ESL)- THE EXAMPLE OF AN EDUCATION TO OPERA (EducOpera project)**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The EducOpera project ([www.educopera.eu](http://www.educopera.eu)) is a European project, Erasmus + programme, gathering partners with different profiles (Universities, Research Centers, VET organization and an Opera house in France) in five countries- France (leader), Denmark, Italy, Slovenia and Spain. The aim of this two year project is to struggle against Early School Leaving (ESL) through the acquisition of skills & competences by the means of an education to Opera. Three main pedagogical actions are suggested through an education to Opera: listening, acting/playing and singing, plus all the other skills in order to manage an Opera (or similar) show. In complement to a formal education (an education to Opera delivered at school), it may take the form of an extra-curricular activity offered outside school (non-formal and informal learning). Different kinds of competences may be acquired: artistic ones (singing, acting, and playing an instrument), pedagogical ones (history, literature, or sciences...), technical ones (in electricity, make up, dressing, building a stage...), or managerial ones (fund raising, managing of human resources ...). Therefore, it plays a specific role in transversal pedagogical strategies and multidisciplinary learning. The main audience of the EducOpera project includes different profiles of educators- teachers at school (in different matters: language, music, sport...), educators outside school (in associations, music house, conservatories, opera house...), heads of secondary school willing to enhance creative extra-curricular activities together with organizations in their neighborhood as a non-formal and informal learning is more and more taken into account in an inclusive approach of education.*

## **A RESEARCH & PRACTICE-BASED RESEARCH FOCUSED ON AN EDUCATION TO OPERA**

At school, education to music is part of a compulsory education. Musical education tackles some main objectives: listening; playing and/or composing; building a musical and artistic education. In complement to a formal education, many extra-curricular activities are offered such as choirs (inside or outside schools) with an annual concert to show the work done among an audience. An education to music combines different kinds of knowledge - history, literature, or sciences. It plays a specific role in transversal pedagogical strategies and multidisciplinary learning (such as history of arts). Many opportunities are offered to youngsters outside school to play the music: in association or conservatories.

An education to opera allows an opening of youngsters to artistic culture. This pedagogical approach is a main asset for enhancing creativity and a harmonious personal development. Opera involves various disciplines such as music, drawing, sports, and dance. An education to Opera may reveal hidden talents, enhances a collective and team spirit, and improves culture and knowledge. It allows acquiring various competences- mastering one's body, concentrating and breathing. It stimulates memory, combines written and oral expression in mother tongue or a foreign language, enriches a personality, and is a main asset for empowerment.

In a praxis based approach, David J. Elliot, rhetorician in education and musician, suggests that an education to music would be more pragmatic than aesthetic. Antti Juvonen states that *« in the heart of pedagogy is the musical experience. Pupils are asked to play the instruments and to sing in order to better understand the music not as an abstraction, but through practice and sensations it reveals. Acting for feeling and understanding before learning a theoretical knowledge, this is the methodological principle»*. Learning music enhances a cognitive, emotional, physical and social development of youngsters; it is a main source of creativity. Musical education and more generally artistic education are most necessary for children to become adults open on the world, with relevant knowledge and critical thinking for sharing values with the future generations (Kubik, 2016).

We intent to explain in our article the pedagogical strategy suggested by the EducOpera for students to acquire competences outside school to be taken into account by their educators in their evaluation. This European project implemented in five countries has designed a tool, a mentoring and a guidance for educators to

struggle against Early School Leaving by bridging the gap between formal, non-formal and informal learning thanks to an education to Opera.

## **A TOOL & MENTORING FOR EDUCATORS TO IDENTIFY AND VALUE THE COMPETENCES ACQUIRED BY STUDENTS THANKS TO AN EDUCATION TO OPERA**

The EducOpera is an Erasmus+ project with the defined goal of combatting Early School Leaving (ESL) through the acquisition of skills and competences that come through Education to Opera. Opera is defined as an art that combines “a musical play in which most of the words are sung, or plays and music of this type” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2018). In the EducOpera project, if two of the three elements characterizing an opera (singing/dancing/acting) are present, the activity was suitable - music being compulsory in all cases. The EducOpera perspective not only promotes artistic competences but has a broader approach, including other competences such as managerial, pedagogical, and technical skills.

A first concept of Education to Opera is based on it being part of a compulsory discipline learnt at school – musical education – but one that also promotes Key competences - “literacy competence” , “multilingual competence” , “personal, social, and learning-to-learn competence”, and/or “cultural awareness and expression” . In addition, many of the tasks in the program require technical skills that are linked to “mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology” as well as the managerial competences needed to raise financing and enhance the sustainability of an opera house.

A second concept of the EducOpera strategy is that it is offered outside school as an extracurricular activity. The importance of such activities available to pupils during their free time (and in which they voluntarily engage) is a main characteristic of the project. The involvement in an activity outside of school encourages pupils who might be resistant to traditional learning to become open to other pedagogical approaches and, through them, to acquire knowledge and know-how and learn how to behave in an informal context. The idea is to combine as simply as possible formal learning delivered at school by teachers with non-formal and informal learning delivered outside of school by educators.

The EducOpera portfolio was designed to equip all educators - teachers at schools and professionals outside of school (in associations or local authorities) with the tools to build a bridge between learning “at school” and learning “outside of school”. The portfolio should help them identify and assess the skills and competences already acquired and/or to be developed by young people through an Education to Opera and to support their work with young people facing difficulties at school, including those who have already left school. It combines components of

formal, informal, and non-formal learning. First educators are asked to list the relevant skills and competences acquired by their pupils during an Education to Opera, and particularly to make connections with the eight key competences (EC, 2006). Educators are then invited to combine formal learning (required at school) with non-formal and informal learning (acquired outside school) with reference to the European guidelines (CEDEFOP, 2009).

The suggested mentoring is meant to support any educator (teacher at school and any professional working with youngsters outside school). Extra-curricular activities have a positive impact on the youngsters' behaviour, learning performance, conclusion of schooling and self-esteem and they encourage confidence that youngsters will become successful adults and will be able to take on important social roles (Massoni, 2011). One of the key elements for a positive effect of extra-curricular activities on youngsters is a voluntary choice. Thus, the choice itself and the consequent involvement in the activity bring the first responsibility of the youngster to attend the chosen activity. This is later upgraded with the responsibility of performing the tasks in the framework of the activity and the responsibility towards the mentor, teacher and other participants. The involvement of a youngster in an activity in which he or she feels comfortable and is successful in it also influences the youngster's self-image, self-respect and pride and, consequently, his or her behaviour as well. Being successful in extra-curricular activities thus especially contributes to behavioural changes in problematic youngsters.

A third concept of the EducOpera project is an emphasis on competences required at school which have been included in the European Key Competences Framework (as agreed to by all the Ministers of Education from EU member countries). The competence approach has been at the forefront of the European Commission's incentives and numerous projects include it in order to empower vulnerable groups, such as the elderly, early school leavers, youngsters in diversity contexts. The evaluation of competences thus obtained is "a key element in national lifelong learning strategies". The emphasis is also on the competences being systematically and correctly recorded, evaluated and then considered in the school system or later in the access to the labour market. Many competences acquired by youngsters outside of the school environment are today still left unrecorded, without self-reflection or evaluation. Nowadays, this can be changed because there are many tools that provide assistance in evaluation either in the form of a portfolio or other, also digital ways of recording competences (i.e. Youthpass).

At last, the ideal to build a bridge for formal, non-formal and informal education in most European countries is not yet functional and although many educational institutions and European policies support such approaches, many of us are discovering that new ideas are extremely difficult to implement in the existing formal education systems.

### *Learning outcomes (LO)*

At the end of the pedagogical sessions the learners (students) have been involved in an extracurricular activity meant to bridge the gap between formal learning and non-formal/informal learning (LO1). The struggle against Early School Leaving is one of the main research areas of the Lab of Experimental Pedagogy of the University of Perugia (Department of Philosophy, Social Sciences and Education). For several years, the group has been using empirical experimental approaches, including the active teaching of competences, in an effort to prevent school dispersion. The group has also engaged in studies focused on how this kind of teaching could affect the learning outcomes of pupils and have an impact on psychological and cognitive dimensions (Batini, Bartolucci and De Carlo 2017, 2018).

Our starting point was that the aim of the EducOpera Project was to support schools in combatting the phenomenon of Early School Leaving as well as to promote social inclusion and pupils' acquisition of new skills and competences through educational activities related to music and opera offered outside of school. The University of Perugia, using a model implemented by the Lab of the Experimental Pedagogy, organized an experimental program related to the project in the framework of Alternative Educational and Training Systems. They have been formalized in Italy under Law 107 promulgated July 13, 2015 for the school year 2015/2016. The intention of the law was to provide a structure for programs implemented in the final three-years of high school that would have a duration of at least 200 hours with the purpose to "increase job opportunities and guidance skills".

Such a program for secondary school pupils was proposed in the form of the EducOpera project through a dedicated national internet portal that defined artistic and musical activities and the acquisition of new skills and competences as its main objective. Since there is no opera company in Perugia, we involved several associations working in the fields of music, theatre, and performing arts education. Activities provided by the participating associations were proposed to third and fourth-year pupils in the framework of Alternative Educational and Training Systems with the support of four teachers from the three schools. The main added point was to promote awareness among pupils about how art and music could boost learning outcomes. The first outcome was to build awareness among pupils about competencies, and how they could apply them in order to fulfill their needs in order to point out the gaining of competencies outside schools and how to value them in the curricular activities. We then implemented a path in order to fill the gap from awareness of pupils and the need to certificate competencies in a national formal level. The second outcome (LO2) was meant to elaborate, and then describe, in a formal way, all the work carried out inside the art and music associations in which they carried out the experience. Students were now made able to reflect on the

experience, and think about how to relate them in the school system. The third outcome (LO3) was reached by the exchange between students and teachers, followed by the university research team, of what the students wrote and documented within the project. Although it could seem a reflective practice on what was implemented so far, we provided also a way of thinking about how to build future plans on how to improve other actions that would lead to an improvement of other levels of competencies, and not only in the immediate level, but in a Lifelong Learning path. The last point was focused on the effective overall outcome they will benefit from (LO5): « all the activities we carried out...were useful in order to re-evaluate our life at school...but more on what we will be achieving in our professional life”.

## **TESTING & PILOTING THE EDUCOPERA- FEEDBACK IN FRANCE & ITALY**

The EducOpera approach was tested in the five countries. We have detailed the one conducted in France and Italy.

### *Testing in France*

The implementation of the EducOpera project took place from 2017 to 2019. The work with the pupils was organized in a close partnership between the Opéra de Massy in charge of gathering professionals with all types of profiles-artists, technicians, pedagogues; the College Blaise Pascal – its head of school and a teacher in French language; and the Institute for Research and Information on Volunteering (IRIV) in charge of supporting the pedagogical tasks among youngsters and the educators involved.

The first year, a demanding planning with weekly sessions was suggested but it didn't work. So the second year was organized differently. The first meeting with the pupils took place in September to define shared rules (attendance, signatures and active participation...), including topics to be covered, profiles of professionals to be involved, and the schedule of the monthly sessions. The pupils had to attend the sessions regularly, at least three to five sessions for the year. Another requirement was to show an interest in the topic of opera. The reward was an evaluation, signed both by the teacher, and the head of the school.

The profiles of the professionals involved were various. A first professional was in charge of pedagogy among a wide audience (thanks to a network of schools, social centres, and the Massy City Hall). A second professional, a make-up artist, combined both technical and artistic skills. A third professional, a theatre director presented a special show she had created. A fourth professional, a comedian played a trust game to prepare the pupils both physically and mentally. A fifth professional, a musician and percussionist gave a lecture to the pupils about his role in the orchestra and the different music instruments played. A sixth professional, an electrician at the theatre, explained how to use different kinds of

lights in a play or an opera. A seventh professional, a conductor combined music (piano) and song (a chorus in two groups, one with boys, the second with girls). An eighth professional, a dancer and choreographer, created choreography for the pupils combining a song by Michael Jackson referring to elements of opera. A ninth session was dedicated to a visit at the Paris Opera Garnier after the youngsters asked for it. A final session, associating the College Blaise Pascal and iriv was dedicated to the evaluation of the pupils.

In complement, a series of pedagogical sessions were conducted among professionals interested in the EducOpera approach or directly involved in the project. These sessions were first meant to gather the feedback from the educators, asking them to identify the weak and strong points of the programme. A second goal was to emphasize the potential benefits of an Education to Opera as an extracurricular activity that might reduce Early School Leaving (ESL) using the competence approach. A couple of sessions were focused on the explanation of the four-step approach suggested by the portfolio with a focus on the eight key competences defined in the European framework. Another main point of the sessions among the professionals was to remind of the importance to combine informal and non-formal learning methods in extracurricular activities in complement to the formal learning proposed at school. A focus was also made on the mentoring / tutoring and a presentation of the evaluation process generated by the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ). The last sessions tackled the sustainability of the process. A clear connection was made between the experience acquired by pupils during the project and competences required at school: on the one hand, hard skills such as literacy competence (KC1), cultural expression, and awareness competence (KC8), and, on the other hand, soft skills such as regular attendance to the monthly sessions, pupils learning to introduce themselves to adults they didn't know, asking relevant questions about their professions, and actively and positively participating in the programme.

On the basis of the SWOT (Strengths Weakness Opportunities Threats) Analysis conducted after the end of the testing, the key aspects of the EducOpera project were the following. Firstly the holistic approach was a main asset with a pedagogical process including the acquisition of competences that are linked to professionals working at the opera house, and the informal/non-formal learning approach of an extracurricular after-school activity that necessitates the voluntary involvement of pupils in the learning process. A second important benefit was the close mutual relationship built between the French partners - Opéra de Massy , College Blaise Pascal and iriv. In order to implement a sustainable future for the EducOpera, the same kind of partnership has to be built. A third point is the successful programme implemented the second year with monthly sessions. The group was composed of pupils with diverse backgrounds, different levels at school (good, average, or critical), and a balance between boys and girls. The participants had varying knowledge of opera. The shared rules with the pupils have had an

impact on their involvement. As a result, the second year, the rate of dropping was very low and the students suggested a visit to the Opera House Garnier in Paris.

The EducOpera project combined a theoretical and practical approach. On the one hand, the “detour strategy” has been a successful and innovative pedagogical approach implemented in the past years and promoted by educators who work with Early School Leavers. The idea is to find alternative ways for pupils, especially those who resist the methods of the traditional educational system, to acquire competences in diverse learning environments. On the other hand, the practical implementation of the two-year project emphasized the necessity to carefully select youngsters, to offer a regular but not too demanding schedule as this is an extracurricular activity, and to actively involve them in all activities. An active support has to be provided to teachers and professionals working in the field of opera. They must be convinced by the competence approach, with a relevant pedagogy & tool such as the EducOpera portfolio & tutoring for educators together with an evaluation focused on competences rather than grades

### *Testing in Italy*

The University of Perugia, using a model implemented by the Lab of the Experimental Pedagogy, organized an experimental program related to the project in the framework of Alternative Educational and Training Systems. Alternative Education and Training Systems were formalized in Italy under Law 107 promulgated July 13, 2015 for the school year 2015/2016. The intention of the law was to provide a structure for programs implemented in the final three-years of high school that would have a duration of at least 200 hours the purpose of which was to “increase job opportunities and guidance skills”.

Such a program for secondary school pupils was proposed in the form of the EducOpera project through a dedicated national internet portal that defined artistic and musical activities and the acquisition of new skills and competences as its main objective. Since there is no opera company in Perugia, we involved several associations working in the fields of music, theatre, and performing arts education, and selected four of them to participate in the project. Activities provided by the participating associations were proposed to third and fourth-year pupils in the framework of Alternative Educational and Training Systems with the support of four teachers from the three schools. Once the associations were chosen, the pupils entered a preliminary phase of training at the University of Perugia and undertook a twenty-hour introductory training course at the individual associations. Both pupils and teachers were informed about the EducOpera project, its goals and purposes, as well as the role and the activities of the associations involved with the aim of prepared them for the activities in which they would later be participating. The meetings focused on competencies both at the European level (key competencies) and at a national level (sixteen basic competencies). They also tackled opportunities for work programs with the associations that would make use

of the acquired competences and on the certification of the acquired competencies at school.

At the end of the initial activities within the associations (totaling some sixty hours), the final phase (another twenty hours) was used for evaluation and the enhancement of what was achieved. The pupils, along with the Italian team and the educators/teachers of the school, also worked on balancing the skills achieved during the experience by using the VAEB (Valuing a voluntary experience, iriv & alii, 2006) tool. In parallel, we implemented various sessions with teachers outside and inside schools. Feedback was collected from the participants. Teachers and other stakeholders expressed interest in better understanding the eight key competencies. They also focused on the four transversal skills, considering “learning-to-learn” and “social and civic competences” to be the most significant and the “closest” to the activities carried out by the associations. Several participants found it useful to “fix” in a certain way the eight competencies by making a precise diagram which could be used in order to spread the knowledge among operators and teachers thus preventing the risk that they would not recognize and value them as much as they actually deserve because of a lack of familiarity.

During the second year of the project, mentoring for educators – both school teachers and professionals outside school – was provided during a series of seminars. The aim was to help these actors to implement the EducOpera project using the output of the research and activities that took place during the first year. The seminars had both theoretical and practical content as well as an introductory discussion on school dispersion and Early School Leaving. Those who attended also learned about official strategies to prevent and combat these phenomena and their potential effects and were presented with an analysis of different types of learning (formal, non-formal, and informal).

The seminars included a debate on the Intellectual Outputs of EducOpera in order to gather feedback from the participants. Meanwhile pupils were engaged in the activities of the Alternate Training and Education system, following the same programme that was provided for during the first year of the project. At the end of the experience, an open debate ensued to gather feedback from pupils and other stakeholders such as teachers, volunteers, educators, and professionals. Opinions on the programme were collected during the training sessions intended for both pupils and teachers and through an online questionnaire. This information was used to improve tools created at the European level for the EducOpera project. The main opinion expressed by participants was that an experience such as EducOpera, especially because it is framed in an Alternative Training and Education system, can help pupils to acquire transversal skills and competences that may be valuable in life and at school. Participants were also positive about the tools and methods used in the project by educators, professors, and professionals from the

associations. All of our debates, discussions, questionnaires, and meetings have shown the remarkable potential of the EducOpera project for pupils and the positive impact such experiences can have on their development. Professors, educators, and professionals all believe in the importance of supporting schools in combatting the phenomenon of Early School Leaving, promoting social inclusion, and the pupils' acquisition of new skills and competences through educational activities outside school related to music and opera.

We decided to frame EducOpera activities within the context of the alternative education and training law in Italy, thus creating a replicable model and implementing a path that will continue beyond the scope of the project. We offered students an unusual and different option for an alternative education and training experience that was much appreciated and produced excellent results in terms of satisfaction and personal growth, educational success, and the acquisition of new competences and skills. We also co-administered a test to all participants in order to evaluate changes in psychological dimensions such as perceived self-efficacy. To summarize: the participants improved their scores in dimensions such as "finalization of actions" (i.e. the ability to plan and finalize any kind of working action), "relational fluidity", and "context analysis". The activities are interchangeable and may be revised and adapted according to specific needs and the area of implementation.

## **LESSONS LEARNT IN TERMS OF LEARNING STRATEGY TO STRUGGLE AGAINST EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING (ESL)**

On the basis of the implemented testing thanks to the EducOpera project many lessons can be learnt.

*Lessons for the pedagogy to be implemented to struggle against Early School Leaving (ESL)*

The first lesson learnt is that an education to Opera is an example of extracurricular activity addressing a wide audience ; firstly educators who would like to include the EducOpera process in their pedagogical approach ; secondly heads of schools (with pupils aged from 13 to 15 years); thirdly representatives of NGOs offering extracurricular activities to youngsters ; fourthly members of local governments offering a support to families whose children might face difficulties at school with the goal of preventing Early School Leaving (ESL).

The second lesson learnt is that the combination of these different types of professionals should enhance a better guidance to identify, evaluate, and also

support educators involved in extracurricular activities with the aim to build a bridge between formal learning (acquired at school) and non-formal and informal learning (acquired outside of school). The more various the profiles and responsibilities the better the impact on the public policy meant to struggle ESL.

The third lesson learnt is the innovative part of the EducOpera project as the tool and method designed includes not only an artistic focus, namely, the learning of singing, acting, and playing music (the three compulsory elements that describe opera), but also many other skills linked to the activities of an opera house such as technical skills (electricity, makeup, costume design, construction of scenery), managerial skills (fundraising, human resources, project management), and pedagogical skills (historical/cultural background). This was certainly one of the most convincing part among participants as the youngsters could discover other professional profiles and therefore opportunities for a professional future.

The fourth lesson learnt is the necessary evaluation of the cognitive impact of an Education to Opera on pupils (the assessment of competences acquired and those required at school, etc.). The tool and method portfolio suggests a four-step approach in how to use Education to Opera to acquire experience relevant to the development of competences required at school and to combat Early School Leaving (ESL). This is most important in order to build a very tangible link between formal learning (competences acquired at school) and informal/non formal learning (competences outside school).

A fifth lesson learnt is the meaningfulness of providing a detailed description of the testing conducted in different countries (opera in France, secondary schools in Italy, local schools in Denmark, association for opera in Slovenia, a variety of schools in Spain) as it has been conducted in different educative systems, with various roles played by extracurricular activities and a discrepancy in the importance or understanding of the competence approach. The profiles of the participants, in particular the professionals working in Opera houses (different background and experiences) or even the teachers (specialising in diverse topics) are useful to implement the EducOpera process.

A sixth lesson learnt is the different understanding and application of the Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) which includes social and emotional dimensions as well as hyperactivity and attention. It has to be carefully explained as some educators may be reluctant to use it, this has been the case in France. The practical exercises along with a survey for both educators and youngsters (in order to evaluate the level of competences acquired) are much more convincing. The most meaningful example has been given by the Slovenian team which succeeded to create and present an Opera show.

A seventh lesson learnt is the change in the perception of the Opera, in the first place perceived as elitist, especially by people living in sensitive urban areas. This has been a main positive impact of the EducOpera project. At the end of the two year testing with regular pedagogical sessions, youngsters didn't see themselves as spectators but as potentially actors of the different tasks and activities required by a Opera house. Some of the participants decided to start an artistic activity at the end of the testing, music or dance.

### *Lessons for the cognitive approach*

The potential power of Education to Opera combines musical and verbal narrative elements and encourages the development of a range of emotional and cognitive components through the merging of its various constituent elements. Numerous neural circuits are involved in its narrative decoding (Batini et al. 2016, 2018). The cortical areas involved in the perception of movement are also activated when subjects read or listen to transitory verbs within a narrative itself (Wallentin et al., 2011). This activation is stronger when reading a narrative text than when disjointed sentences are read together (Kurby & Zacks, 2013).

Through the combination of narration and music, the understanding of intentions and emotions, and empathizing with characters, stories contribute to the development of skills for correctly decoding beliefs and intentions in the real world (Kidd & Castano, 2013). Empathizing with a character not only implies understanding the emotional state of another person but also the ability to experience emotions along with the character (Brink et al., 2011). To summarize, Education to Opera, because it combines music and narrative, can act as an amplifier in the following areas: first of all language: there is a strong correlation between language and music. In fact listening to songs and melodies facilitates language learning. Moreover the development of sound coding is enhanced and this helps in the understanding of foreign languages but also memories: music can be used to remember things that have been learned and is therefore a good tool to develop mnemonic skills.

Another really important dimension is creativity because children with musical skills have a greater degree of creativity than children who demonstrate less musical ability. Creativity and music reinforce each other. But we could think about another cognitive level and functions: Spatial intelligence which is the perception of distances and forms in the surrounding environment. Studies have shown that the sense of orientation is closely related to active listening of music. More even important, emotional intelligence which means that music and melodies have always been able to arouse emotions and feelings of the most varied kinds. Depending on the type of music and the particular moment, listeners may be able to refine the perception of their emotional states and decode their feelings.

And we can say more. In most cases, children with the musical skills that come with the study of an instrument have a predisposition to learn and succeed in logic and mathematics. Analytical capacity is developed as the brain interprets the notes as symbols that create the whole that is the melody. And finally, music helps children develop general life skills, the basic emotional, cognitive and relational skills that all people learn over the course of a lifetime. Concentration, perseverance, commitment, dedication, self-control, and assertiveness are all skills that are developed with the study of music, especially the mastery of an instrument. Educational systems should participate not only in the traditional education but should also provide experiences that can mobilize the transversal competences of pupils. In this sense, schools are often not effective, and non-formal or informal learning activities can become essential in the lives of pupils in order to mobilize a series of resources and skills that will serve them not only in the school environment but over the course of their lifetimes. As we have seen, education combined with the effects of learning with music, including its narrative component, has the potential to become a real “gym” for cognitive, emotional, and linguistic skills and in general for what we call “360-degree” cognitive empowerment. Extracurricular, and in particular musical, activities can encourage the maturation of these transversal competences and thus is an approach that brings these competences into the curriculum of pupils to improve both formal learning and the achievement of life skills

## **CONCLUSION**

We believe that the maximum expression of the project has been to provide students with a new way of conceptualizing and using their interests (cultivated outside of school) as important educational elements at school level. Very often these are not recognized, valued and used within the school curriculum. The real innovation brought by the EducOpera project has become a starting point to review what is the relationship between school learning ...and all that is non-formal teaching that takes place continuously and in a very productive way outside of school. Life is not made of rules and formalities. It's made up of learning. Sometimes unconscious, that we have to take seriously in a world that is changing frantically. In this sense EducOpera has tried, and will try, to accompany this change in order to accompany new directions of learning, development and student empowerment.

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