

Laudatio for Anna Arfelli At the Occasion of Her 80th Birthday



As usual, when you try to recall the path taken by a person who was important in your own training, you think back also to your own history and you introduce your own points of view. In the same way to retrace the professional profile of Anna Arfelli we needed accurate documentation, certain biographical data, but we also chose to bring attention to the things that we considered most significant, aware that we had introduced our reading of her history.

Biographical Notes

Anna Arfelli was born in Ravenna in 1933. In 1957 she graduated in Medicine and Surgery from the University of Bologna with a thesis in Developmental Psychology entitled “The reaction of the infant’s smile”, supervised by Prof. Renzo Canestrari, under whose guidance she continued her training in a psychological clinic.

In 1960 she specialized in Nervous and Mental Diseases. She attended training in Psychology of the Group with Alice von Platten, Augusto Ricciardi and Giampaolo Lai.

In 1970 she obtained a lecturing post in the Psychology of the Developmental Age (now Developmental Psychology).

Since 1971 she has taught Developmental Psychology at the University of Macerata in the laurea degree course in Philosophy, where she served as professor from 1991 to 2003.

In 1980 she received European Community funding for a comparative study of teaching in the humanities universities, a study carried out at the

University of Bielefeld Fakultät für Pädagogik and Fakultät für Linguistik und Literaturwissenschaft, and at the University of Nijmegen Subfakulteit der pedagogische en endragogische Wetenschappen.

In the last decade of the 1900s she participated in the Inter-University EURINS project, supported by the Ministry of Scientific and Technological Research, for the study of teacher training in some European countries; in particular, she led the research on initial training in Germany.

She retired in November 2003. She was Director of the Centre for Research in developmental psychology and education from its establishment in 2004 to 2012 and she served in the faculty of the PhD in Science Education and territory analysis.

Cultural and Organizational Activities

Anna's activity has always been constant and intense within the university institution, leaving important signs of her passage such as the Inter-University Centre for Research on Education and Training in the Educational Professions (C.I.R.DI.FOR.), which she directed for several years after having collaborated in setting it up in 1988.

Likewise, in 2004 she conceived of and proposed the Centre for Research in developmental psychology and education, still active at the University of Macerata.

She was an active part in the organization of the Inter-University School of Specialization for Secondary School Teachers (SSIS) – organised by the Universities of Ancona, Macerata and Camerino in a joint effort – chairing the Committee proposal and directing the School in its first and most difficult year (academic year 1998/99).

She also helped to organize the Course in Philosophy and Human Sciences, which she led in the academic years between 1995 and 1998, in an effort to create dialogue between disciplines, so similar in their common roots and so different in their research methodologies, such as psychology and philosophy.

The Attention to the Territory

The first part of her professional path is not related to the university, but to her commitment to the territory in Emilia Romagna and Marche. Her work is characterized from the beginning by her innovative and experimental components in the field of childcare, also including situations of disability: from institutes to homes / families, employing novel approaches. Her approach calls into question not only the context in which to organize interventions, emphasizing the ability to weave networks of relations with the territory, but also the professionals;

she introduced the training of social-educational workers in a period in which awareness about training was not as clearly established as it is now.

The Group, the LAC and Training in the Socio-Educational Field

In the academic year 1976-77 Anna Arfelli established the Training Communication Laboratory, an organized set of teaching-learning modules designed as a place to experiment with and analyze actual or almost real events, educationally chosen, through structured routes with different perspectives: a starting point for further specialized studies and a return point for considering the complexity of human behavior.

Anna Arfelli already identified at that time in the hetero-centered group work and in intergroup situations the events to be preferred for the construction of knowledge. The Training Communication Laboratory from the very beginning has, in fact, been an instrument created in response to the need to reconsider the more traditional teaching methods such as lectures, in an attempt to harmonize the disciplinary learning with discussion and social and communicative interaction of a group. The assumption was to consider teaching action as a communication in an organized complex context and learning as a situation involving players on the side of the theoretical content rather than on the interpersonal relationships that are essential for the co-construction of meanings.

The privileged place for the social construction of knowledge was identified by Anna Arfelli in 1980. Group, if properly organized and conducted, is a mode in which you can develop and use, in a relationship of interdependence, individual, inter-subjective and cooperative learning. The ability to discuss, to listen and also to allow the ideas of the Other to interact with ours in a dialectical and not dichotomous relationship, accepting therefore the hypothesis of change, has undoubted values in the learning process.

Interaction, especially when it can turn into integration, shapes critical knowledge, that is aimed at relativizing and not absolutizing one's point of view, which also allows us to negotiate others' points of view and to build together a new knowledge in a dynamic way.

The flexibility of the structure of the LAC has proved useful both for the purposes of training students from different degree programs and for the most current applications of distance teaching and learning, to extend the training of adults in service in general. In addition, from that experience among her pupils other proposals for participatory and interactive teaching have developed, that have their roots there but that then have developed and expanded according to the fields of implementation.

Learning in School Age

The Gestaltic roots of Anna Arfelli's work and study approach are retraceable also in the parts of her work dedicated to school learning, especially in those concerning primary school. In the hot years when a lot of attention was dedicated to teaching contents, to leading class as a group, to interactive communication as a performing tool in the learning process, part of her research focused on the collaboration with schools, in accordance with the methodology of action research. That is to say analysing in particular the aspects of reading and writing acquisition and learning of scientific concepts, always using an interactive and global approach which puts together the acquired knowledge with the achievement of new and more complex knowledge.

An Ecological Approach to Disability

During her early work experiences Anna Arfelli was also concerned with disabled children, with whom she developed a complex expertise which has always examined the child, according to the Lewinian approach, within the family or school context.

In her latest research, in which she goes back to her early interests, the focus is on the problems that arise when starting to approach disabled primary school children for the first time, trying to interpret a child's life space, i.e. the original way in which he lives and organizes his experience.

The Appreciation of the Gestaltic Approach in Childhood Studies

The constant and careful reminder of the Gestaltic approach has led in recent years to a systematic re-reading of the most important Gestalt psychologists' contributions about childhood.

That is why she wrote a book in which she synthesizes and reinterprets some of the most significant results and topics such as: the observation of child and childhood development as the progressive organization of structures according to Koffka's thought; the development of perception and methodological problems especially referring to the research of Helen Frank and Joseph Becker; the theory of evolution and the life space in the developmental psychology of Kurt Lewin; the first years of life and the perception of the human face in the newborn in Eino Kaila's research; the research on character development by Richard Meili and his collaborators; the psycho-diagnostic contribution of Kurt Gottschaldt; the systemic vision of development according to Wolfgang Metzger; the Münster school and the first stages of human being development.

Barbara Pojaghi & Paola Nicolini

Publications by Anna Arfelli (selected bibliography)

- (1964): "L'influenza dei fattori figurali su alcune prestazioni psicomotorie nell'età prescolare", in coll. con Galli G., *Rivista di Psicologia*, 4, pp. 357-65.
- (1966): "Sui criteri fondamentali per la organizzazione di un Istituto M.P.P.", in coll. con Canestrari R., Casadio G., Palmonari A., *Infanzia Anormale*, 70, pp. 655-62.
- (1968): "L'apprendimento precoce della lettura e lo sviluppo dell'articolazione percettiva", *Aggiornamenti di Psicologia*, Istituto di Psicologia dell'Università di Bologna, pp. 1-15.
- (1968): "Sui fattori di adattamento scolastico in prima elementare", *Aggiornamenti di Psicologia*, Istituto di Psicologia dell'Università di Bologna, pp. 1-27.
- (1971): "L'educazione come incontro interdisciplinare", *Psicoterapia e Scienze umane*, 1, pp. 28-30.
- (1973): "Montelparo. Riflessioni critiche su un'esperienza", in coll. con Folicaldi R., *Parametro*, 15, pp. 30-33.
- (1978): "Il giudizio dell'insegnante e la carriera scolastica nel ciclo elementare", *Pedagogia e Vita*, 4, pp. 411-26.
- (1980): "La realizzazione del contratto di lavoro fra insegnanti e allievi all'ingresso della scuola dell'obbligo", in coll. con Al., *Pedagogia e Vita*, 5, pp. 539-52.
- (1992): "Ricerche sullo sviluppo del giudizio morale. Questioni di metodo", *Quaderni del Dipartimento di Filosofia e Scienze umane*, Università degli Studi di Macerata.
- (1995): La scoperta della promessa in età evolutiva. Come una mamma ha interpretato il figlio, apprendista parlante, in Galli G. (a cura di), *Interpretazione e Promessa*, Giardini Editori e Stampatori in Pisa, pp. 81-87.
- (1995): L'evoluzione del sé. Problemi e metodi, in AA.VV., *L'evoluzione del sé. Teoria psicologica e prassi educativa*, Cittadella Editrice.
- (1995): "L'istituzione scolastica come laboratorio sociale", *Pedagogia e Vita*, 1, pp. 49-60.
- (1997): *Didattica interattiva e formazione degli insegnanti*, (a cura di), CLUEB.
- (1999): La sincerità dei genitori di fronte alle curiosità sessuali dei figli. Carl Gustav Jung e Melanie Klein nel ruolo di genitori, in Galli G., *Psicologia delle virtù sociali*, CLUEB, pp. 179-212.
- (1999): Die Aufrichtigkeit der Eltern angesichts der sexuellen Neugierde ihrer eigenen Kinder. Carl Gustav Jung und Melanie Klein in der Rolle als Eltern, in Galli G., *Psychologie der sozialen Tugenden*, Böhlau, pp.170-198; 207-212.
- (2001): Il sistema educativo in Germania, in CO.N.C.U.R.E.D. (a cura di), *Insegnanti in Europa. Materiali di confronto sulla formazione iniziale in Germania, Spagna, Francia, Olanda, Svezia*, Franco Angeli.
- (2001). *Conoscersi per decidere. Uno studio sull'orientamento nella scuola di base*, in coll. con D'Emilio A., Morlacchi Editore.
- (2002): "Laboratorio didattico con simulazione in piccolo gruppo", in coll. con Centioni R., *Università e Scuola*, 1/R, pp. 21-32.
- (2002): L'individualità dell'altro nelle prime relazioni di cura, in Galli G. (a cura di), *Interpretazione e Individualità*, Istituti Editoriali e Poligrafici Internazionali, pp. 59-70.
- (2003): *Interpretazioni junghiane. Il contributo di Elisabeth Rüf*, (a cura di) in coll. con Galli G., Istituti Editoriali e Poligrafici Internazionali.
- (2004): *Interpretazione e Nascita*, (a cura di) in coll. con Galli G., Istituti Editoriali e Poligrafici Internazionali, pp. 145-160.
- (2005): Prima di dire Io, in AA.VV., *L'io allo specchio*, Quaderni del Dipartimento di scienze dell'educazione e della formazione, Università di Macerata, pp. 5-18.
- (2006): Field-Theory and Analysis of Child Behavior in Metzger's School. Development of Self Consciousness and Motivation for Achievement. In: *Gestalt Theory*. Vol. 28(4), pp. 389-402.
- (2008): *La rilevanza della Gestalttheorie per la ricerca psicologica*. Edizione Simple, Macerata.
- (2008): *Interpretare lo spazio di vita del bambino disabile*, (a cura di) in coll. Muzi M., eum, Macerata.
- (2008): The relevance of Metzger's thought on early childhood development. In: *Gestalt Theory*. Vol. 30(4), pp. 403-408.
- (2010): Die Entstehung der Person. In: Giuseppe Galli (Hrsg.): *Gestaltpsychologie und Person: Entwicklungen der Gestaltpsychologie*. Wien: Krammer, pp. 77-108.
- (2011): Richard Meili als Entwicklungspsychologe. In: *Gestalt Theory* Vol. 33(1), pp. 41-56.
- (2011): Das Werden der Person - Gestalttheoretische Beiträge. In: *Phänomenal*. Vol. 3(1), 2011, pp. 8-13.
- (2012): Eino Kaila und die Wahrnehmung des menschlichen Gesichts beim Säugling. In: *Gestalt Theory*. Vol. 34(1), pp. 15-30.
- (2013): *Gestaltpsychologie und Kinderforschung*. Wien: Krammer, Wien

Barbara Pojaghi, b. 1949, is Full Professor of Social Psychology at Macerata University. She teaches Training Psychology, Political Psychology and Group and Organization Psychology in the Faculty of Communication Science. Pojaghi's research is focused on group dynamics, political psychology and the development of gender identity.

Address: Department of Sciences of Education, University of Macerata
Piazzale Bertelli, 1
62100 Macerata, Italy
E-mail: barbara.pojaghi@unimc.

Paola Nicolini, b. 1956, is Associate Professor of Developmental and Educational Psychology at the university of Macerata. Her main themes of investigation are the training of teachers and educators; the investigation of identity building in a lifelong perspective; e-learning and e-training. She is appointed by the Rector of the University of Macerata as his Delegate for Orientation, Tutoring and Job Placement. She has written several books, chapters of books and articles, both at national and international level.

Address: Dipartimento di Studi umanistici
University of Macerata, Italy
E-mail: paola.nicolini@unimc.it