HARRY POTTER
AND THE QUEST FOR KNOWLEDGE

A Commonplace for Reflecting on Learning and Teaching

FRANCESCO CAVIGLIA* & MANUELA DELFINO**

Institute for Language, Literature and Culture - Aarhus University (Denmark)
*** Institute for Educational Technology - National Research Council, Genova (Italy)*

Abstract. The *Harry Potter* saga treats the theme of magical education with a remarkable depth and complexity, to the point that it might become a shared narrative about learning and teaching, to the benefit of a large readership of educators and students. Goal of this paper is to highlight the main ingredients of the educational process which turns Harry and his close friends not just into world-saving heroes, but rather into young people who have acquired the set of knowledge, skills and dispositions that make them ready to engage in adult life and give their contribution. The narrative power of the series can be harnessed by teachers as a basis for reflecting on their own views and practices of schooling, and in the literacy classroom as a point of departure for guiding the students to reflect, from a distance, on their own schooling and learning experience.

Key words: Harry Potter; Literature; Teacher education; Models of schooling; Teaching methods

Chinese
[Translation Shek Kam Tse]
哈利波特对知识的探求：反思学与教的备忘录

摘要：.

哈利波特英雄故事以非凡的深度和复杂性处理魔法教育的主题，以致可以成为有关教学的共享故事，有利于大部分教育者和学生组成的读者群。本文旨在突显出把哈利和他的好朋友们变成不仅仅是拯救世界的英雄，而是成为学会整套知识、技能，养成准备进入成人阶段的性格，并付出贡献的年轻人的教育过程中的主要成分。教师们可以利用该系列丛书故事的力量作为对自己观点和教育实践反思的基础；在语文课上，作为引导学生从远距离反思自己学校教育和学习经验的出发点。

关键词: 哈利波特; 文学; 教师教育; 学校教育模式; 教学方法

Dutch
[Translation Tanja Janssen]
TITEL. Harry Potter en de zucht naar kennis; Een plaats om te reflecteren op leren en onderwijzen.
SAMENVATTING. De Harry Potter sage behandelt het thema van toverlessen met een opmerkelijke diepgang en complexiteit, waardoor het een gedeeld verhaal kan worden over leren en onderwijzen voor een groot publiek van docenten en leerlingen. Het doel van deze bijdrage is om de hoofdingrediënten van het leerproces te belichten waardoor Harry en zijn beste vrienden niet alleen superhelden en wereldredders worden, maar vooral ook jonge mensen die kennis, vaardigheden en disposities hebben verworven die hen klaarmaken voor het volwassen leven. De verhalende kracht van de reeks kan door docenten gebruikt worden als basis om te reflecteren op hun eigen ideeën over onderwijs en hun eigen praktijk. In het taalonderwijs kan de serie gebruikt worden om leerlingen te laten reflecteren op hun eigen onderwijs- en leerervaringen.
TREFWOORDEN: Harry Potter; literatuur; docentenopleiding; onderwijsmodellen; didactiek

Finnish
[Translation Katri Sarmavuori]
TITTELI. HARRY POTTERIN TIETOA ETSIMÄSSÄ; Oppimisen ja opetuksen reflektion sukkeluus
ABSTRAKTI. Harry Potterin tarina käsittelee maagisen kasvatuksen teemaa huomattavan syvällisesti ja monimutkaisesti, niin että sitä voidaan pitää oppimisen ja opetuksen narratiivina suurelle kasvattajien ja opiskelijoiden lukijakunnalle. Tämän tutkimuksen tavoitteena on valottaa kasvatusprosessin pääaineksia Harryn ja hänen lähiystäviensä osalta, ei maailmaa säilyttävinä sankareina vaan nuorina ihmisinä, jotka ovat saaneet tietoa, taitoja ja valmistautumista aikuisten elämään. Sarjan narratiivinen voima tarjoaa opettajille perustan reflektoida omia näkemysiään ja käytäntöään ja kirjallisuusluokassa ohjata oppilaita reflektoimaan etäisyyttä ottaen omia koulunkäyntiin ja oppimiseen liittyviä kokemuksiaan.
AVAINSANAT: Harry Potter; kirjallisuus; opettajankoulutus; koulutusmallit; opetusmetodit

French
[Translation Laurence Pasa]
TITRE : Harry Potter et la quete de la connaissance
RÉSUMÉ. La saga de Harry Potter aborde le thème de l'enseignement de la magie avec une profondeur et une complexité remarquables, au point que ce pourrait devenir un texte de référence sur l'enseignement et l'apprentissage destiné à un vaste lectorat d'enseignants et d'étudiants. Le but de cet article est de souligner les principaux ingrédients du processus éducatif qui transforme Harry et ses amis proches, non seulement en héros sauveur du monde, mais surtout en jeunes gens ayant acquis l'ensemble des connaissances, des compétences et des dispositions leur permettant de s'engager dans la vie adulte et d'y apporter leur contribution. La puissance narrative de la série peut être exploitée par des enseignants comme base de réflexion sur leurs propres représentations et pratiques éducatives et, en cours de littérature, comme point de départ pour amener les élèves à réfléchir, avec un certain recul, sur leur propre scolarité et leur expérience d'apprenant.

MOTS-CLÉS : Harry Potter; littérature; formation d'enseignant; modèles de scolarité; méthodes d'enseignement

Greek

[Translation by Panatoya Papoulia Tzelepi]

Τίτλος. Η αναζήτηση της γνώσης από το Χάρι Πόττερ ένας κοινός τόπος αναστοχασμού στη μάθηση και διδασκαλία

Περίληψη. Ο μύθος του Χάρι Πόττερ διαχειρίζεται το θέμα της εκπαίδευσης στη μαγεία με αξιοσημείωτο βάθος και περιπλοκότητα, σε σημείο που μπορεί να αποβεί κοινή αφήγηση για τη μάθηση και τη διδασκαλία, και να βοηθήσει ένα μεγάλο αριθμό εκπαιδευτικών και μαθητών. Ο στόχος αυτού του άρθρου είναι να υπογραμμίσει τα κύρια στοιχεία της εκπαιδευτικής διαδικασίας η οποία καθιστά τον Χάρι και τους φίλους του όχι μόνο κοσμοσωτήριους ήρωες αλλά νέους ανθρώπους που απέκτησαν το σύνολο των γνώσεων, των δεξιοτήτων και των στάσεων που τους καθιστά έτοιμους να μπουν στην ενήλικη ζωή και να συνεισφέρουν. Η αφηγηματική δύναμη της σειράς μπορεί να χρησιμοποιηθεί από τους δασκάλους ως βάση αναστοχασμού για τη δική τους θεωρία και πρακτική της εκπαίδευσης και για την τάξη του γραμματισμού ως αφετηρία καθοδήγησης των μαθητών στον αναστοχασμό, από απόσταση, για τη δική τους εκπαίδευση και τις δικές τους εμπειρίες μάθησης.

Λέξεις κλειδιά: Χάρι Πόττερ, λογοτεχνία, εκπαίδευση εκπαιδευτικών, μοντέλα εκπαίδευσης, διδακτική μέθοδος

Italian

[Translation Manuela Delfino, Francesco Caviglia]

TITOLO. Harry Potter e la ricerca della conoscenza. Una base comune per riflettere su insegnamento e apprendimento

SOMMARIO. La saga di Harry Potter affronta il tema della didattica della magia con una profondità e una complessità degne di attenzione, al punto tale da poter diventare un testo condiviso sull'insegnamento e sull'apprendimento, a beneficio di una vasta comunità di lettori, composta da docenti e studenti. Obiettivo di questo contributo è evidenziare i principali ingredienti del processo didattico che trasformano Harry e i suoi amici non solo in eroi che salvano il mondo, ma in giovani che hanno acquisito un insieme di abilità, competenze e inclinazioni che li rendono pronti ad affrontare la vita adulta e di portare il loro contributo. Il potere narrativo della serie può essere sfruttato sia dai docenti come una base per riflettere sui propri punti di vista e sulle proprie pratiche didattiche, sia nelle classi di lettere come punto di partenza per guidare gli studenti nella riflessione – da una certa distanza - sulla loro esperienza scolastica e di apprendimento.

PAROLE CHAIVE: Harry Potter; letteratura; formazione dei docenti; modelli didattici; metodi di insegnamento

Polish

[Translation Elżbieta Awramiuk]

TITUŁ. HARRY'EGO POTTERA POSZUKIWANIE WIEDZY. BESTSELLER INSPIRACJĄ DO REFLEKSJI O UCZENIU SIĘ I NAUCZANIU

STRESZCZENIE. Saga *Harry Potter* traktuje temat edukacji magicznej z niezwykłą głębią i złożonością, do tego stopnia, że może się stać opowieścią o uczeniu się i nauczaniu, niosącą korzyści zarówno dla nauczycieli, jak i uczniów. Celem niniejszego artykułu jest wskazanie głównych składników procesu edukacyjnego, który przeobraża Harry'ego i jego bliskich przyjaciół nie tylko w herosów broniących świata, ale także w młodych ludzi, którzy posiedli pewną wiedzę, umiejętności i postawy, pozwalające im angażować się w świat ludzi dorosłych i współtworzyć go. Narracyjna siła tej serii może być wykorzystana przez nauczycieli jako podstawa refleksji na temat ich poglądów i zwyczajów stosowanych w nauczaniu, a na lekcjach literatury jako punkt wyjścia do kierowania uczniów ku zastanowieniu się nad ich własną nauką i doświadczeniami w uczeniu się.

SLOWA-KLUCZE: Harry Potter; literatura; kształcenie nauczycieli; modele kształcenia; metody nauczania

Spanish

[Translation Ingrid Marquez]

TÍTULO. HARRY POTTER Y LA BÚSQUEDA DEL CONOCIMIENTO

RESUMEN. La saga de *Harry Potter* trata el tema de la educación mágica de una forma sorprendentemente profunda y compleja, al punto de que podría convertirse en una narrativa compartida acerca de la enseñanza y el aprendizaje, beneficiando a gran número de educadores y estudiantes. La meta de este ensayo es enfatizar los ingredientes principales del proceso educativo que convierten a Harry y sus amigos cercanos no sólo en héroes que salvan al mundo sino en jóvenes que han adquirido un conjunto de conocimientos, habilidades y disposiciones que los preparan para involucrarse en una vida adulta en la cual contribuyan. El poder narrativo de la serie puede ser usado en el salón de clases como base para reflexionar sobre perspectivas y prácticas didácticas; y en una clase de lectoescritura, puede ser el punto de partida que lleve a los estudiantes a considerar, desde la distancia, su propia experiencia escolar.
PALABRAS CLAVE: Harry Potter; literatura; educación de docentes; modelos de enseñanza; métodos didácticos

1. INTRODUCTION

Near the end of the last book of the *Harry Potter* saga (HP), the young protagonist challenges the evil and much older Lord Voldemort by claiming to possess superior knowledge: "I know things you don't know [...]. I know lots of important things that you don't" (HP7: 591; the seven Harry Potter books – Rowling 1997 to 2007 – are henceforth referred to by a progressive number).

Indeed, in the seven years of the saga Harry may have not undergone major changes in his moral outfit (Sawyer, 2007), but his education has been a success. At the beginning, Harry is 11 and does not even know he is a wizard. The reader will then follow him along his years of education and life experiences in the wizarding community which will turn Harry and his close friends, Hermione and Ron, not only into brave young wizards who manage to save the world, but also into young people who have acquired the set of knowledge, skills and dispositions that make them ready to engage in adult life and give their contribution.

The saga thus follows both its main characters and its model reader (Eco, 1979) on a path from childhood to adolescence and addresses itself to a worldwide audience, as boldly prophesized in the first pages of *The philosopher's stone*: "He'll be famous – a legend – [...] there will be books written about Harry – every child in our world will know his name!" (HP1:15).

This paper suggests that the narrative power of the *Harry Potter* series could be harnessed in teacher education as a basis for promoting reflection on different views and practices of learning, teaching and schooling, as well as in the literacy classroom as a point of departure for guiding the students to explore their identities and to reflect, from a distance, on their own experience of growing-up and learning.

In particular, we propose that the HP saga could be harnessed as a "commonplace for interpretation" (Sumara, 2002a), that is as a catalyst for interpretive pedagogical practice, a strategy for gaining a deep insight with literary texts, based on individual reflection and shared discussion. Literary texts typically attract emotional involvement and identification from readers (Iser, 1993) and offer at the same time rich opportunities for engaging readers in interpretive inquiry triggered by "indeterminacy" in text (Iser, 1971). While the saga's potential for triggering identification among learners and teachers is clearly recognizable from the numerous manifestations of 'Pottermania' (e.g., Black, 2003; Kooy, 2003), we suggest that in the case of HP, *indeterminacies* arise from the mixture of realism and magic on which the narrative is based. The saga's fictional school-setting is closely modeled after the roles and rituals of real-world schools, but no real-life student or teacher will ever enjoy the opportunity of being or becoming a wizard, thereby prompting some negotiation for mapping fictional characters, roles and situations onto real-world correspondents.

Text discussion based on immediate personal response and identification may indeed fall short of enriching the reading experience (Lewis, 2000); in organizing shared reflection on the educational theme in the HP saga educators will need therefore to provide the readers with additional resources (e.g., in form of hints or addi-

tional reading) with the purpose of enabling the readers to go beyond their own stereotypes and ingrained biases on what schooling is and how it ought to be.

The theme of the magical education in the saga has been object of study by several scholars since the first books were published (Applebaum, 2003; Elster, 2003; Hopkins, 2003; Gladstein, 2004; Dickinson, 2006). However, the last three books lend to this 'educational' thread a remarkable depth and complexity, which is the focus of this paper.

J. K. Rowlings was probably guided by the narrative logic of the saga and by her background as a student and teacher rather than by the thought of renown educationalists. However, readers with a background in education are well entitled to read HP through the lens of educational theories, as long as this view is consistent with the work's *intention* (*intentio operis* in Eco, 1990).

Keywords like "experiential learning" (Dewey, 1997), "situated cognition" (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; Kirshner & Whitson , 1997), "community of practice" (Wenger, 1998), "inquiry-based learning" (Edelson, Gordin, & Pea, 1999; Kuhn, Black, Keselman, & Kaplan, 2000), "dialogic principle" (Bakhtin, 1986; Todorov, 1984), "critical literacy" (Fairclough, 1992), resonate to the ear of the educationalist that reads HP. Indeed, while classes at Hogwarts reflect different but well-established pedagogical approaches (Dickinson, 2006), and situations and characters are not always free from stereotypes and caricatures, the global learning experiences of Harry, Hermione and Ron seem to foreshadow some welcome innovation that we ought to witness in our schools in the near future, not forgiving the lessons of the past.

Admittedly, fictional education enjoys a freedom that real-life school officials can only dream of, and its results depends on the will and fantasy of the author and her readers. But precisely for this reason, the Harry Potter saga offers the opportunity to reflect on schooling from a fresh angle, maintaining a degree of separation with the real learning experience and its formal organization.

2.   READING THE HARRY POTTER SAGA

Rowling's narrative technique, based - with the exception of the very first chapter – on an internal focalization, increases not only the degree of empathy and involvement by readers, but also gives them the chance to learn gradually together with the characters. The HP books thus offer a *simulated* (Oatley, 2001) experience that teachers and teacher educators can harness as a basis for reflection and discussion on education and learning.

This paper presents a literary reading of the HP saga in the light of a few education-related themes, followed by a description of how the saga has been proposed in the literacy classroom, or could be proposed in a pre-service teacher education setting.

2.1 Schooling at Hogwarts

Young witches and wizards aged 11 to 18, who are chosen on the only prerequisite that they have shown a disposition to perform magic at an earlier age, are all called to attend the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, the only institution in Britain devoted since centuries to magic education. Being educated as a British witch or a wizard means learning how to control and use ethically the technology of magic, and being socialized into the habits and values of the wizarding community.

Studying at Hogwarts is crucial for a young witch or wizard. Being expelled, as it happened to Hagrid and as Harry seriously risks during his school career, means having one's wand snapped in two, a degradation ceremonial which means becoming an outcast. At the same time, what students learn in Hogwarts is a privilege and a great opportunity for social rise: the students from muggle (i.e., non magic) families have to learn the culture and craft of wizardry entirely through the school. Those students, as Hermione and Harry demonstrate, can end up being as good witches and wizards as the others.

2.1.1 Formal vs. informal schooling

Many aspects of Hogwarts' organisation mimic British boarding schools and traditional schooling. Classes, examinations, homework, the system of competing houses or the student hierarchy, all reflect existing praxis. However, the learning goal – magic – transforms the schooling experience in a complete educational process, shaping each situation and event in an opportunity to learn. For example, spaces at Hogwarts are enchanted and most of them can be used by teachers and students as a learning resource.

To the goal of enculturation in the world of magic, informal learning through school habits and rituals is as important as classes and subject matters. For example, house-points are gained by students who show outstanding performance in classes, but also for showing intelligence, courage or 'moral fiber' in real-life circumstances (e.g., HP1: 221). Even school-lawbreaking may deserves recognition: when professor Flitwick removes the swamp that Fred and George Weasley have planted in a school corridor, he leaves a tiny patch as a monument to their magic skills (HP5: 747).

2.1.2 Disciplines taught

As for the disciplines taught at Hogwarts (e.g., Transfiguration, Potions, Charms), most of them are oriented to the practice. In these classes, which take place in a laboratory setting, the students appropriate the knowledge and technology which are necessary for performing growingly complex magic. Proficiency in these matters requires a mixture of studying (learning what is doable, recognizing the enchantment from its effects, observing performances of magic done by teachers), writing essays and practicing (formulae, wand movements, inner disposition). Interestingly, what students learn in classes never remains inert knowledge. The flow of events in the saga are designed to provide a wealth of opportunities to situate the learning both in

everyday practice and in less usual circumstances. For example, as soon as Harry and his companions have learned their first levitation charm, they find a use to it when they need to disarm a mountain troll (HP1: ch. 10). This kind of narrative pattern is repeated throughout the books, and the reader can appreciate how pieces of magic, which the first time had required long hard work, gradually become assimilated into routine tools. For example, a whole chapter is devoted in HP2 to the Polyjuice Potion, which permits to transfigure into someone else, but henceforth this potion returns until HP7 as an established technology used by our heroes as well as by their enemies (HP2: ch. 9-12, HP4: 592, HP6: ch. 21, HP7: ch. 4).

As in muggle schools, not all subject matters and teachers are equally appreciated. *History of Magic*, emblematically taught by a ghost-teacher (HP2: 112), is boring and apparently pointless (although Harry and his friends do learn about some key events in the history of the wizarding community). *Divination* is "a very imprecise branch of magic" (HP1: 190), as another teacher puts it, and the teacher is an old fraud. While being himself a quite proficient wizard, Severus Snape makes arbitrarily evaluations and frightens his students to paralysis (on the different teaching styles, see Dickinson, 2006).

In the whole, however, the combination of hands-on approach to learning in classes plus the opportunities generated by the environment, via the author's imagination, make Hogwarts into "an atmosphere in which [students] are given basic tools and then are encouraged to discover on their own and apply and practice their learning" (Dickinson, 2006).

2.1.3   The Headmaster

Albus Dumbledore is the most accomplished wizard of his time. Instead of seeking political power, he chose to devote himself to educating the young generations. As we will explore in the following sections, Dumbledore impersonates the idea of education that emerges from the saga and is at the same time the link between the school and the outside world. For example, he organizes the Triwizard Tournament (HP4) for young witches and wizards from different European countries with the goal of promoting international cooperation. Two years later, he initiates Harry to a mission to destroy Voldemort.

Dumbledore has the highest consideration for young age and is fiercely protective of his students, but he would not withheld information which is vital to them as member of the wizarding community at large. In the speech he gives after the death of a student, Cedric Diggory, deceased during the Triwizard Tournament, Dumbledore reveals that Cedric had been murdered by Lord Voldemort. Face to the horror and disbelief of his students, he adds:

> "The Ministry of Magic [...] does not wish me to tell you this. It is possible that some of your parents will be horrified that I have done so […]. It is my belief, however, that the truth is generally preferable to lies, and that any attempt to pretend that Cedric died as the result of an accident, or some sort of blunder of his own, is an insult to his memory."
> (HP4: 626)

In other words, Dumbledore is the kind of headmaster that is thoroughly committed to educating his students and trusts them to the point of revealing them troublesome *truths, despite the wishes of their parents and of political authority.*

2.1.4   *Formal schooling and the real world*

In the sole circumstance in which a profound conflict arises between formal schooling and real world, the ethos of the school is clearly oriented towards the real world. In HP5, the Ministry of Magic seeks to take control of Hogwarts through his emissary Dolores Umbridge, who is appointed to teach *Defence Against the Dark Arts*. Umbridge reduces the subject to pure theory, proposing "a carefully structured, *theory-centred*, Ministry-approved course of defensive magic" (HP5: 216, our emphasis). When the students complain because they are not learning how to defend themselves, Umbridge's answer is "You will be learning about defensive spells in a secure, risk-free way" and "it is the view of the Ministry that a theoretical knowledge will be more than sufficient to get you through your examination, which, after all, is what school is all about." When Harry further complains "what good's theory going to be in the real world?", Umbridge's answer reveals that any dialogue is meaningless: "This is school, Mr. Potter, not the real world" (HP5: 220). At this point, as will be further discussed, the students take the matter in their own hands and organize an unsanctioned course. This study group, however, is organized against the law but in accordance to the *spirit* of Hogwarts, and chooses to call itself, after the name of Hogwarts' Headmaster, *Dumbledore's Army*.

2.2   *"Together we will build and teach!": Learning with people*

After discovering that he is a wizard, Harry Potter's life changes dramatically. He will enter in many groups and communities, that will contribute to his education: many adults that will take care of him (e.g., some of his teachers; his godfather and Headmaster; the members of Order of the Phoenix), as well as his peers (e.g., Ron and Hermione, the Quidditch team, the house of Gryffindor, his girlfriends).

    Harry's relationship with the closest of these people is utterly *dialogic* (Bakhtin, 1986; Todorov, 1984). In particular in the last two books, the reader who observes Harry interacting with Dumbledore or with his companions Hermione and Ron can experience an idea of learning as under construction and evolving rather than reified and static, that is one of the principles identified as hallmarks of a dialogic classroom (Fecho & Botzakis, 2007) and as a basis for knowledge building (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1996; Scardamalia & Bereiter, 2006).

2.2.1   *"There was so much he had never asked him, so much he should have said…": the dialogues with Dumbledore*

Harry's interaction with Dumbledore is the emblem of an ideal student-teacher relationship. Dumbledore represents, according to the characters' categories depicted by Vladimir Propp (1968), the helper and donor of the young hero Harry. The pieces of

information which become most crucial to Harry's understanding of his identity and of his mission, are channelled by means of dialogues with Dumbledore. Dialogue, in fact, is a mean to provide the right amount of information at the right moment. In the incipit of the saga, Dumbledore explains how one-year-old orphaned Harry, who just survived Voldemort's attempt to kill him, will have to grow in a muggle family, away from his identity in the magical world "until he's ready to take it" (HP1: 16). And when Harry, at the end of his first year at Hogwarts, asks Dumbledore why Voldemort had tried to kill him in the first place, the answer is "I cannot tell you. Not today. Not now. You will know, one day" (HP1: 216). With these words, Dumbledore expresses a pedagogical principle which goes hand in hand with the need to create expectations for the reader: Harry will have to wait until book 5 to have an answer to his question, and will discover new crucial information about himself and his mission only at the end of HP7.

Harry's dialogues with Dumbledore are the moments in which threads are pulled, the sense of events is explained and future developments are announced. These dialogues are utterly constructivist: Dumbledore constantly provides scaffolding to help Harry understand things by himself. For example, even if urgently asked, Dumbledore does not directly explain the magic connection between the Harry and Lord Voldemort, but guides Harry to find himself an answer to his deepest doubt about his true inclination (HP2: 244-245). Later in the saga, Dumbledore organizes a set of encounters to let Harry take part in his attempt to discover clues in Voldemort's past which may be used to destroy him. During these meetings, Dumbledore provides some background information, lets Harry watch some exhibits and then leads him to activate his previous knowledge and use clue-based reasoning (Ginzburg, 1983) to make sense of what they have witnessed (HP6: 200-204).

Knowledge which is really valuable is not cheap: it requires both life-experience and a deep involvement in dialogue, both by the characters and by the readers. After Dumbledore's death, one long encounter occurs between Harry and his headmaster in a sort of limbo, at the most crucial moment of the entire saga (HP7: ch. 35). In this exchange, while Dumbledore expresses regrets for not having trusted Harry to the point of telling him about the secret of the *deathly hallows* (HP7: 571), Harry seems to have earned, through sufferings and endeavours in accomplishing his mission, a status which is (almost) equal to Dumbledore. It comes at first as a surprise, yet consistent with Harry's development, that we finally discover that this dialogue – which is intellectually quite engaging for the reader too, since not everything is told explicitly – has indeed taken place inside Harry's head.

Renée Dickinson (2006: 240) insightfully wrote, before the last Harry Potter book was published, that

> "Hogwarts' learning culture [...] favors the annihilation of direct instruction in preference for practical life experience. The pedagogies of the [Hogwarts'] teachers, rather than educating the students in their subjects, often force the students to teach themselves".

Dumbledore takes this principle to an extreme: he dies, but not without providing Harry with some form of scaffolding to continue with his fight against Voldemort.

2.2.2   *"You need your friends, Harry": Harry, Ron and Hermione*

A very special role in Harry's life is represented by his peers Ron and Hermione. Their friendship benefits from their complementarities. Hermione takes great care of the school subjects, is very studious and shows an amazing power of recalling things. Ron often exploits the knowledge deriving from his being born in a pure-blood wizarding family and, growing up, develops problem-solving skills. Harry is courageous and keen to prove his valour.

By chapter 10 in the first book the three of them can call themselves friends. From that moment on, with realistic ups and downs, they will never be apart, and will share their knowledge, competences, skills and affects. Harry, Ron and Hermione are stronger together than apart. They live the development of their friendship and the process of growth from childhood to adolescence and mature age together, becoming more and more aware of the importance of sharing their own strengths to the point of blindly trusting each other under extreme danger.

As it happens in real life, this process is not a trivial one, since it involves both positive aspects (e.g., affects, fellowship, fun, comprehension, etc.) and problematic ones (e.g., jealousy, competition, embarrassment, misunderstanding) in the frame of disclosure to others, self-acceptance, creation and discovery of their identity.

Although they, and especially Harry and Hermione, are reasonably self-assured, still they cherish formal recognition by Prof. Dumbledore, who encourages their friendship and entrusts them with the mission of destroying the objects that secure Voldemort's immortality (HP6: 78-79).

It is worth noticing an opposition here. Voldemort's strategy was, in fact, to split his soul and conceal the parts in objects called horcruxes, thus avoiding to die, to spread discord and enmity among his opponents and to use other people to do his bidding. Harry's strength, on the contrary, relies on his friends' voluntary help. This opposition can be summarized in Dumbledore's words: "we are only as strong as we are united, as weak as we are divided" (HP4: 627).

2.2.3   *"We need a teacher, a proper one, who can show us how to use the spells and correct us if we're going wrong": Dumbledore's Army*

Defence Against the Dark Arts is the only school subject in which Harry comes to outshine Hermione and all the other students, in part because he has received one-to-one tuition from outstanding teacher Remus Lupin (HP3), in part because he goes through some dreadful real-life experiences with dark magic (end of books 1, 2 and 4, beginning of HP5).

In book 5, when the new-appointed teacher in *Defence Against the Dark Arts*, the above-mentioned Dolores Umbridge, reveals herself as someone whose hidden agenda is to *prevent* the students from learning how to defend themselves, Hermione asks Harry to become the leader of a learning group for those students who really want to learn the subject. Harry declares himself ready to share his knowledge with her and Ron, but Hermione insists that *all* the students who wish, have the right to be taught in such a crucial subject (HP5: 296). The whole experience of organizing a full-blown clandestine course is very complex and the members of the study group

which calls itself *Dumbledore's Army* do learn a lot, while Harry builds for himself a leader's status among his peers.

It is not surprising that, right after the group is caught and apparently dismantled, a few members soon become involved in the real-life struggle against the Dark Forces, and that many former soldiers of Dumbledore's Army will volunteer to fight, two years later, in the final "battle of Hogwarts" against Lord Voldemort.

Interestingly, the organization of Dumbledore' Army is one of the very few endeavours in which Harry, Hermione and Ron act entirely on their own, without help from teachers and adult wizards. By the end of book 5, Harry and his friends have become young adult representatives of the best of the wizarding culture of their time. Their education at Hogwarts has paid off.

2.3 Learning with information resources

Books and newspapers are important tools for understanding even the wizarding world. Many pages in the saga are devoted to the quest for and analysis of information. Harry, Hermione and (mostly in the last books) Ron seem unabashedly driven by the idea that the world is knowledgeable and use all their intellectual and magical power to make sense of the many unsettling events they face (Elster, 2003; Hopkins, 2003). Indeed, they eventually become excellent wizards and witches also because they learn how to understand a variety of information sources, from muggle-like books and newspapers, to wizards-only media, as in the case of retrievable memories. Inquiry-based literacy across the curriculum (e.g., Bruce & Davidson Wasser, 1996) seems Hogwarts' approach to understanding media in the wizarding world, as exemplified in the following sections.

2.3.1   "Tens of thousands of books; thousands of shelves; hundreds of narrow rows": Hogwarts library

Hogwarts library contains all known information about the wizarding world. Books are the first resource whenever Harry and his companions want to understand or to do something that goes beyond their current knowledge, be it for doing their homework or for finding ways to fight Voldemort. Indeed, books provide answers in many circumstances, from finding the recipe of an advanced (and illegal) potion (HP2: 121-125) to finding a way to destroy *horcruxes* (HP7: 88-90).

The library stands always open to the students, although some books are confined to a restricted section which require special permission from the teachers. The library provides also a complete collection of newspapers, which Hermione manually scans in the sixth book until she eventually discovers the identity of the Half-Blood Prince (HP6: 502, 593-594). Typically for the low-tech magical world of HP (Oakes, 2003), the reader is left with the impression that a digitalized version of the archives would be a worth piece of magic.

Hermione, Harry and Ron make intensive use of the library throughout the first six books. In the seventh, which takes place outside Hogwarts, Hermione takes with

herself on a most difficult and long journey as many books as possible by means of a miniaturizing purse, a magical correspondent of an USB pen-drive.

Interestingly, while Hogwarts' library contains all published information on magic, the forces which Harry and Voldemort encounter in this last book are beyond the current state-of-the-art. Voldemort cannot figure out the reason why it is so difficult for him to kill Harry, while Harry still has to understand the deepest meaning of a prophecy connecting him to Voldemort. Knowledge is not a fixed entity, not even in the magical world.

2.3.2 *"It becomes easier to spot patterns and links, you understand, when they are in this form": the Pensieve*

Memories and thoughts have the power to cram people's mind, becoming a burden too heavy to take around or too precious to let them sink into oblivion. In these cases, in the wizarding world, it is useful to have a *Pensieve*, a basin in which is possible to pour, store, and eventually examine silvery swirling and shimmering contents, neither liquid nor gas: memories (HP4: ch. 30).

Memories can be added to other memories, thus preserving them, but also lightening their owners from an overwhelming past: through the immersion in the Pensieve, it is possible to remember and to visit again selected events from one's life.

Through the Pensieve, Harry enters in both Dumbledore's and Snape's memories, he leaves his present, to fall through darkness and land in the past, attending as an observer to the memories of someone else's, analyzing and interpreting them as if they were objective facts.

While Harry's first immersion in the Headmaster's memories occurred without permission and can be compared with the vision of a movie (HP4: ch. 30), later on – in the sixth book – the travels in the Dumbledore's past life are ways to let Harry share Dumbledore's knowledge of Voldemort past life and to collect clues on the Dark Lord. Each memory deserves to be discussed, analyzed and interpreted together by the old and sage wizard with the adolescent Harry, showing that the encounter with the past is part of a learning process. This is evident in the final book, when Severus Snape's memories are lived by Harry on his own, as the last truth on his loathed teacher, until then held as the responsible for Dumbledore's death. Harry's final interpretation will revise both Snape's conduct towards Dumbledore and the prophecy involving him and Voldemort.

2.4 *A case study of experiential learning about lies and truth*

A set of experiences led Harry, Hermione and Ron from a rather naïf attitude to information towards a mature understanding of what it means to seek the truth. We believe that this 'critical literacy' thread in the saga is one with the greatest potential for classroom intervention (an example with details from the first four books in Caviglia, 2002).

*2.4.1   "See if she can't break the habit of writing horrible lies about people":
gossip, lies and propaganda*

While Harry and his companions never lose faith in the possibility of finding reli-
able information, they become gradually aware that books, newspapers, public
speeches and personal communication can also be designed to mislead.

The first encounter with lies regards the teacher of *Defence Against the Dark
Arts* in HP2, Gilderoy Lockhart. This especially good-looking wizard has published
several books on his deeds against the dark arts and has a share of faithful admirers
in the wizarding community. When Harry, Ron and Hermione set out to fight a
monster at the end of the book, they would expect to get some help from their fa-
mous teacher. But Lockhart reveals himself – 'Books can be misleading', he tells
Harry - as someone who has built his fame by stealing and repackaging as his own
the memories of other less charming wizards and witches (HP2: 220).

Hermione is the leader figure in confronting public discourse. At 13 she sub-
scribes to the wizarding newspaper *The Daily Prophet* (HP3: 14). She believes that
the newspaper is basically trustworthy and seems to expect that the newspaper
would be ready to defend the weak (HP4: 137), until she and Harry become the vic-
tims of annoying gossip by sensation-seeking journalist Rita Skeeter, who misrepre-
sents Harry's words in an interview and then fabricates a romance between Harry
and Hermione.

One year later, after bitter disillusionment, Hermione will blackmail reluctant Ri-
ta Skeeter into interviewing Harry about Voldemort's return, thereby convincing
part of the unaware wizarding community. The reader can appreciate, through a live-
ly exchange between Hermione and Rita Skeeter, the socio-political and economical
constraints that influence the media's editorial choices:

> [Rita Skeeter speaks]: 'They won't print a story that shows Harry in a good light. No-
> body wants to read it. It's against the public mood.' [...] People just don't want to be-
> lieve You-Know-Who's back.'
>
> 'So the Daily Prophet exists to tell people what they want to hear, does it?' said
> Hermione scathingly. [...]
>
> 'The Prophet exists to sell itself, you silly girl'. (HP5: 501)

From HP5, in fact, disinformation escalates. After Harry and Dumbledore denounce
the return of Lord Voldemort, they are repeatedly targeted by *The Daily Prophet*,
under influence of the Ministry of Magic, as being – respectively – mentally unsta-
ble and senile. In the last book, when the Ministry becomes controlled by Volde-
mort, the *Daily Prophet* aligns itself to the new totalitarian regime: exemplary of the
new policy is an article that closely reminds racial propaganda in Germany and Italy
in the '30s, with discrimination against muggle-born wizards underpinned by 'recent
research' (HP7: 172).

Lies are ubiquitous and often vicious in the Harry Potter books. A lie lures Harry
into a trap which kills his godfather Sirius Black (HP5: 731), and Voldemort lies
until the very end, when he tries to lower the morale of his surviving enemies in
Hogwarts by announcing that Harry had fled face to him (HP7: 583). Even the Pen-

sieve memories can be tampered with, for example because someone is ashamed of what he did. However, an expert wizard may recognize the presence of a lie (HP6: 347-348).

All in all, lies and disinformation are treated as an aspect of life people must learn to defend themselves from, as much as they learn how to defend themselves from the Dark Arts. By the end of the saga, our three heroes have learned that not all the words should be taken at face value, but also that lies and propaganda, when recognized, become a precious source of information.

2.4.2   *"The truth. […] It is a beautiful and terrible thing, and should therefore be treated with great caution": multiple perspectives*

Until book 6, Harry sees truth as basically immanent to facts. For example, Harry is simply shocked to see, in the Pensieve, how his 15-years old father bullied fellow-student Snape, and has little understanding for those who minimize this kind of mis-behaviour (HP5: 590).

At the beginning of his last mission, to which he has been sent by Dumbledore just before his death, clouds gather on his former headmaster's reputation. In opposition to the reverential attitude towards Hogwarts' Headmaster, exemplified by an hagiographic article on him written by a youth friend on the *Daily Prophet*, Rita Skeeter announces an instant-book, allegedly based on a source close to the Dumbledore family, which promises disturbing revelations about his youth. Although he knows well Rita Skeeter's habit of distorting her sources' words, Harry is intrigued by the story and tries to know more about his Headmaster in a quest that resembles Dumbledore's (and Harry's) inquiry in Voldemort's past in HP6.

Harry finds a copy of Rita Skeeter's book, in which the young Dumbledore is accused of neglect and possibly murder of his own sister Ariana and of having once supported the ideology of wizards supremacy over muggles. The confirmation that, beyond any doubt, Dumbledore indeed once sustained the right of wizards to rule over all the other creatures, will be found by Harry in a letter. His world risks to break apart and, as in the case of his father misbehaviour, he will not listen to those who reminds him, as Hermione does, that Dumbledore was quite young at the time (HP7: 294). And he remains torn by doubts that Dumbledore may also have been guilty of cruelty towards his sister. As in Akira Kurosawa's *Rashômon* (1950), the story of the Dumbledore family and the tragic fate of Ariana is then told once again by Dumbledore's brother, who casts a different and yet more tragic light on the chain of events that lead to Ariana's death (HP7: 454-457). The fourth version of the story is told by Dumbledore himself in his last dialogue with Harry. But, as we have already mentioned above, the reader eventually discovers that this dialogue occurs *inside* Harry's head (HP7: 579). Interestingly, no new *facts* emerge from this ex-change, but *understanding* dawns on Harry. He understands now Dumbledore as a human being who suffered and made mistakes which must have haunted him for a lifetime. This mature Harry rediscovers both the greatness and the humanity of his Headmaster and mentor. It does not matter, now, whether it was Dumbledore who cast the curse which killed his sister; it was a dreadful accident and this bit of infor-

mation does not need to be revealed, after a new and more nuanced *truth* has emerged on the whole life of Dumbledore.

3.   A COMMONPLACE FOR NEGOTIATING LEARNERS' AND TEACHERS' IDENTITIES

While fiction in general is arguably a form of experience (Rosenblatt, 1938; Oatley, 1999), the success reached by HP can be interpreted as a sign that *these* books are *already* being lived as an intense and easily shared experience. Their popularity among young readers can be capitalized as the premise for further re-readings or *close reading* with the aim to develop interpretation skills and deep insights (Sumara, 2002b).

In our experience, reading the first HP book in a lower secondary school class was very useful in order to analyze, from a literary point of view, how the author introduced the different characters and to discuss, from a personal perspective, how they coped with their identities exploration. On one side, characters like Harry Potter and Hermione have to face the fact that they are different from what they have been told till the moment they received the letters from Hogwarts with an offer to attend a school for wizards; on the other, characters like Ron, Neville and Draco Malfoy know virtually from birth to be wizards and must endure considerable pressure to live up to their families' expectations. In any case, all the characters can not defer facing the identity theme nor can they ignore existential questions such as "Who am I?", "Who are my parents?", "In which way am I different from them?", etc.

Even though our students will never find themselves witches or wizards, they were able to read the HP saga as a book of identity-quest, in which the characters bustle about to find their own way of living, according to their aptitudes. What we actually did was to quote and to call to mind the episodes read together during every day school-life.

Having to choose some HP excerpts to read during our school lessons, we opted for the characters' introductions and some episodes in which they had to face their hopes, fears and uncertainties. For example, we examined teacher Remus Lupin's hands-on lessons about 'boggarts' (HP3: ch. 7), i.e., shape-shifting creatures which take the form of something the observer deeply fears; 'dementors' (HP3: ch. 5), i.e., even more dreadful and powerful beings that feed on people's despair and force them to recall their worst memories; and 'patronuses' (HP3: ch. 12), i.e., anti-dementor helpers that can be conjured by recalling happy memories.

Enhancing a reflection on the characters' reactions to their discoveries of the self and on their fears is a way to reflect - in an indirect way - on the sense of the self during adolescence (Kroger, 1996; 2006). Thanks to the feelings of empathy and involvement raised by the story we could pose questions like "Who are you?", "What are your fears?" in forms like "Harry suddenly discovers to be a wizard. What do you think you are? Don't you ever think you are different from your beliefs?", "What are your family's expectations about your future?", or "What form your patronus would take?", etc.

Significantly, our students did not limit themselves to reflecting on their own fears and bad or good memories, but showed to recognize how growing up should mean learning to mobilize resources to be able to cope with fears and bad memories, and to capitalize on good ones. After some oral and written reflection a few of our students also observed that while it was indeed possible to learn how to grow stronger against one's weak points, fighting real-life equivalents of boggarts and dementors remains indeed difficult for adults too. Moreover, students appreciated how teacher Remus Lupin managed to enable *all* his students to face a boggart by playing both on their individual strength and on the collective force of the group ("It's always best to have company when you're dealing with a boggart", HP3: 101).

While teen-agers strive to discover themselves as individuals, their teachers have to cope with the different perspectives and the multiple roles they have to cover with their students (Cooper and Olson, 1996; Britzman, 1994). Making use of the HP saga in pre-service teacher education can be interesting in order to enhance the discussion on the process of becoming, or (un)becoming (Sumara and Luice-Kapler, 1996), a teacher. The HP saga may provide the general frame to start thinking on the teachers' roles, on the ways of teaching and on the different perspectives from which it is possible to observe the students and listen to their needs. The variety of role models and school situations created by J.K. Rowlings may give trainee teachers the chance to talk about teaching and teachers on a neutral field, in which their own experiences and views can be filtered and discussed on the basis of a shared narrative, thereby allowing some distance and even some possibility for experimenting with multiple views and identifications. Reading circles for novice teachers, as described e.g. by Kooy (2006) and possibly enriched with an online component, might ideally flourish around the HP saga.

4.   CONCLUSIONS: A DESIGNED EXPERIENCE OF GROWING UP, LEARNING AND TEACHING

One day on a bus, one of the authors overheard two about 14 years old students, a girl and a boy, coming back from school and talking about their teachers and their school comrades. One of the teacher was referred to as *McGonagall* and was obviously appreciated by the two as competent, strict and fair; another one was rather derisively framed as "one who would like to be Snape", another one was *Sybill Trelawney*, the lunatic *divination* teacher. The classroom seemed also to have among the students a *Draco Malfoy* (just not as wealthy), with accompanying cronies, a would-be Hermione and a (still hopeless) Neville Longbottom. If they had read the whole saga – from the characters they were mentioning, they only knew first three books – we imagine the boy would probably identify with Ron and the girl would take Ginny Weasley as a model. It was clear that the two students had invented the game by their own initiative and were enjoying it. A creative teacher would find this an ideal situation for further exploring a variety of school-related topics. Within groups of learners and teachers, HP might have the potential for becoming what *The Jungle Book* (Kipling, 1894) represents for Cub Scouts both as a motivational book

and as a universe for framing the experience of growing-up, learning and teaching (Baden Powell, 1916).

Educationalist and videogames expert Kurt Squire has recently pointed out how diverse groups, from the U.S. Military to nonprofit organizations, are investing in videogames as a means for fostering "designed experience" which can represent their ideological views, and suggested that educators too ought to find a way to mobilize and make available their own ideological views (Squire, 2006). Our claim with this paper is that the HP saga can become the shared narrative about learning and teaching that educators were sorely missing.

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