



# Bridging experiences among adults

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## **Introduction: Chains of influence**

The Bridging project is not only about enriching children's experiences directly, but also about building strong connections among professionals to support critical reflection and open learning. It has been long emphasised that the quality of children's experience is not limited to what happens inside the classroom, but also of the broader professional environment (Connors, 2019; Knapp, 2003). Factors related to professionals may play an indirect but critical role in improving children's experiences. As such, in Bridging, professionals, including teachers, staff from cultural institutions, and researchers from the universities, were seen as learners, and protagonists of their own learning (Peleman et al., 2018), with a series of learning experiences organized through visits and meetings.

The learning opportunities among professionals were designed following Knapp's (2003) model of the chain of influences. Accordingly, professionals learn in much the same way that children do – through interactions among contents, facilitators, and

learners and by respecting and fostering the sense of agency. Based on chains of parallel learning processes, in Bridging, the activities for professionals were designed to facilitate collaboration and the coconstruction of new knowledge crossing various fields of knowledge (Education, Psychology, Architecture, Arts, Design). All partners were seen as 'actors of change' (Peeters & Sharmahd, 2014), addressing not only their expertise and knowledge, but also on their professional attitudes and understandings. A variety of activities were planned and experienced together, including seminars, but also walks through the city, and joint moments of vivid discussions.

Bridging is based on interdisciplinary collaboration, aiming at enriching the knowledge and perspectives of educators, staff from the cultural institutions, and researchers through the cross-fertilization of such different discourses. A series of texts were prepared for this book, in an attempt to illustrate the variety of perspectives, concepts, and theoretical frameworks that were part of Bridging. In "Identity and Diversity in

*Early Childhood Education and Care*", Geert De Raedemaeker and Kaat Verhaeghe discuss issues around diversity, highlighting the importance of identity development. In BRIDGING, personal and interpersonal development is as much important as professional development, which demands a holistic approach to professional development, where relationships and processes are acknowledged and highlighted. The second text, *"Relationships matter: The power of relationships in early childhood development"*, Joana Cadima and Catarina Grande provide the theoretical grounds for the need of relationship-building practices, emphasizing the importance of respect, active listening and responsiveness in all spheres of our lives. In the text it follows, *"Inclusiveness, partnership and holistic perspective"*, Joanna Pękala and Kamila Wichrowska focus on inclusion, one of the core concepts of the project, and include several illustrations about how the activities within the project addressed this issue. At last, Raija Raittila in the text *"Children towards a sustainable lifestyle - activities and exploration in nature and in the city"* discusses how Environmental Education includes vivid and meaningful experiences of children, not only with the nature, but also with the city, reinforcing the underlying principle of BRIDGING about the importance of strong, emotional, and experienced connections between humans and their environment.

## References

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