

## THE FLOOR TO THE STUDENTS

### A project to develop students' participation and learning interactions

The Istituto Comprensivo of Chiuduno is composed by 4 schools: two primary schools and two lower secondary schools. The principal's name is Virginia Ginesi. The Institute counts 870 students, 97 teachers, 17 caretakers and 8 secretaries.

Chiuduno (5350 citizens) is situated at the feet of the hills near the town of Bergamo. The most developed manufacturing fields are the plastic industry and the wine industry. The most famous local wine is known as Valcalepio.

Bolgare (4790 citizens) is a lowland village near the town of Bergamo. The manufacturing field is less developed in favour of the public services industry.

Both the villages experience a high immigration level which is becoming a constant concern. The immigrants represent the 15%-20% of our students.

The **core idea** in our project is that co-operation, participation and learning interactions experienced by pupils in school are meaningful to the growth of their sense of citizenship in a cultural, social and political perspective. For this reason, since 2003 we have been promoting activities that are meant to produce "real actors" as to say that teenagers must play an active role in their educational process.

Therefore, teachers from our school, town officers, parents and co-ops educators joined together in order

- to increase students' participation and active citizenship in school and within their home town
- to improve collaboration between adults and young
- to develop young's assumption of responsibility
- to encourage our students to become real actor in their educational process.

The **Seeds** project gave occasion to investigate the strengths, the future opportunities, but also the weakness of the project. We based our search on the cues given by the Seeds committee and we corrected the plan of the project. Moreover, the *Stresa* network helped us to develop our self-evaluation analysis.

So, we investigated the projects and the activities planned in our school in order to live citizenship experiences. In our self-evaluation search, we used interviews, observations, questionnaire. The interviews, particularly, left to the interviewee the possibility to discuss our scholastic style.

The core idea of the project is that citizenship is related:

- to live together, as a real community,
- to cultivate good relationships between adults and among adults and young,
- to assume responsibilities

and we must be aware of the fact that civic education should not be restricted to the school environment.

Moreover, to compare our ideas with European partners permitted us to extend the matter to integration among different culture.

Thanks to the project, students learnt to act as adults and to assume responsibilities. We live with them, for example, some interesting moments:

1. The first step of our project was to vote in 2 students as representatives of each class. In a 1<sup>st</sup> grade, the teacher explained the students how adults plan and prepare local elections. She cleared how to call an election, how to stand as a candidate and how to prepare a poll station. Then the teacher called an electioneering meeting. 4 girls ran for the class delegation and they made a speech. After that, the teacher assigned different roles to the students: two of them were in charge of preparing the ballot-box, three students works as board of scrutineers, two boys were chosen as police officers, the others prepared two poll booths and all the ballots. All the students voted and their vote was secret. The ballots were later counted and the president proclaimed the 2 winners in a bursting of cheers! The students had acted as adults.
2. In 2005 a borderline boy was elected as representative. Being in charge of this role represented an important experience since the boy could build self-confidence, use his energy in positive actions, and gain more and more reliability. He was a very efficient and practical delegate!
3. The “Preadolescents Committee” gave a party on the last day of school. The day before, teachers, students, parents and caretakers had met in order to prepare all the necessary. They collaborated with enthusiasm, responsibility and care and the result was a extremely successful party!

#### Some difficulties...

1. Teachers and co-op educators joined the project, but the co-operation often proved to be difficult. Their aims, styles, priorities and evaluation of the facts were quite different. The educator, for example, usually tolerates students’ impudence and muddle, she works to improve relationships and she acts as a students’ friend. On the other hand, the teacher has to direct the student’s attention on aims, on remembering rules, and she has to act as the students’ guide, she feels responsible for the achievement of the work.
2. Last year the committee did not set a calendar for the meetings and some resulting problems arose between students and teachers. For this reason, we set a calendar from October to June and we hung it on the wall of each classroom.

3. Sometimes students were not able to coordinate their classmates during the meetings. Once, some classmates rudeness caused the two delegates cry. The teacher had to intervene to stop the quarrel. He helped students understand their role and the reasons why this had happened. It is important that the teenagers be given free speech, but this also means that the teachers may face difficulties, risks and hard work.

### Expectations

Thanks to the project, our school has become more active in social life and it cultivated efficient and productive relationships among territorial, educational and political agencies. Teachers, parents and town officers have met on a monthly basis, they have talked and compared ideas and, above all, they have given students more proposal power.

We all hope to spread seeds of comparison and co-operation between the adults and the young. We would like to know if our project will bring about a change: will the town officers pay more attention to the young's needs? Will the relationship between teachers and students change? Will the students become more responsible during their educational process? Will teenagers take part to social and school life as citizens?

### The project needs to be developed, therefore:

- In September, all the teachers participated to 2 refresher courses: the 1<sup>st</sup> dealt with how teachers can involve students during the lessons and the school life; the 2<sup>nd</sup> dealt with relationships among adults.
- The case study report was shown to the management staff, to the self-analysis committee and to the interviewers.
- The staff analyzed the report and organised a refresher course for teachers. The course will closely examine the report and citizenship with regard to participation, responsibility, relationship.
- After that, the staff will make a synthesis and set up a new conference where different tools like reading, role plays, blobs, etc. will be used.

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