

## Chapter 25

# From Broadcasting to Transforming: The Social Construction of Knowledge for Understanding Lawfulness

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter discusses the construction of knowledge as an innovative approach to traditional teaching. This topic is treated via the presentation of a project about lawfulness that was realized in the Calabria region during the 2010/2011 school year. The study aims to identify within the project central elements that enable students to progress from the mere acquisition of information to a transformation of knowledge, where through applying the teaching, in a constructivist approach to learning, they are able to articulate it in their own language and not that of the teacher as in broadcasted learning environments typical of past generations. The main project-related aspects are investigated, and the role of situated learning and experiential learning is discussed. The changing role of the teacher and the increasing need to understand artifacts, such as tools and signs, are explored.*

### INTRODUCTION

There is an increasing appetite among younger generations for more relevant educational opportunities reflecting their values and need to not adhere to the monotonous status quo often found

in their parent's education (Tapscott, 1998, 2008). The question therefore is, how can curricula be made more exciting for them? Can, for instance, Risorgimento uprisings or parliamentary deliberations about a proposed law become regular discussion topics for a group of students?

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Teachers often ponder such questions as they plan the design of a lesson (Lyons, 2002). However, the realization of their ideas is often hampered by technical, logistical reasons and by the structure of traditional school teaching. Nevertheless, in some situations and contexts, some themes must be dealt with in innovative ways, in order to deeply impact students' training: it is so with the topic of lawfulness in Calabria, where the project we shall examine here took place.

In fact, this Italian region is often at the core of criminal affairs connected to the 'ndrangheta', as a highly competitive organization geared towards criminal activities both in Italy and abroad (Cayli, 2010). Calabria's criminal organizations historically developed around single family nodes that were rigidly self-referential and a highly competitive organization geared towards criminal activities both in Italy and abroad. Calabria's criminal organizations historically developed around single family nodes that were rigidly self-referential and wary of external interference. Active citizenship is vital for a community's structure and for building a future of lawfulness, where state and justice are acknowledged as fundamental goods: Citizens think that criminality impacts their daily life, hampering the development of economic activities in Calabria (Siebert, 2005). For these reasons, the school undertook the concrete promotion of the concept of lawfulness, thus fostering a process of assimilation and elaboration of meanings, towards making each single student perceive him/herself as an active protagonist of society.

The themes of Italy's Unity and of lawfulness were the two main topics investigated in the "Istituto di Istruzione di Bianchi/Pedivigliano", which is in the province of Cosenza in the country. In a 2010-2011 project, financed by the European Social Fund (<http://www.fondosocialeuropeo.it>), both themes, even though they were developed separately, converge into the activation of students' civic awareness. The impact of these projects is strongly connected to the local territory, which is a region deeply marked by the phenomenon

of underworld gangs. The Province of Cosenza, organized crime is mainly active in the fields of extortion, usury and drug traffic (Paoli, 2003).

More particularly, the school is located in an isolated area with few connections with the outside world, where the social fabric lacks other significant educational supports. Many students are involved in work in family-run businesses, mainly agricultural, and there are situations of problematic behavior, mostly connected to bullying. An attitude of indifference, despair and resignation towards situations that border on the illegal reveals a social unease that the school, together with other local institutions, intends to remedy via project activities concerning active citizenship and lawfulness.

The project this contribution focuses on is called *Dallo scettro alle urne: da sudditi a cittadini*<sup>1</sup>, a title that contains two significant images: the scepter as symbol of royal power, through which the sovereign arbitrarily ruled the lives of his subjects; the ballot box as the tool by which citizens can freely determine the life of their country. The general goal of the project is to promote lawful behavior, as a preventive means against subtle forms of violence like 'omertà', nepotism, corruption, indifference towards local social issues.

The students, who were strongly involved in all stages of the project, benefitted from this intervention, designed to reinforce active citizenship and an increased knowledge of democratic tools. The study presents these as live experiences with a lasting history and a present relevance that must be defended by everyone's single actions.

The transversal capacity this curricular information about lawfulness and national unification aims to empower students not to be passive receivers, but to shape meanings by challenging a passive approach of learning and by putting themselves at the core of their training path.

The project was evaluated globally, via a continuous monitoring and attention paid to the satisfaction of all subjects involved. More particularly,

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