

Chapter 32

How to Bring Together Two Generations so Distant in Age, yet so Close by Heart: A Case Study of the LAGR Project

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this chapter is on the annual project “Adottiamo i nonni dell’ospizio,” translated “Let’s adopt grandparents in retirement home” (LAGR), winner of the Special Prize of Giornata delle Marche (2008). The main aim of the project is to promote the education of young people to active citizenship. It was developed by the teacher L. Del Papa, with the collaboration of 19 pupils of the 5th class, section C, including a girl suffering from Down’s syndrome and the elderly guests of the Opera Pia Ceci nursing home in Camerano (Italy). The project is part of an educational trend called “the thread that links the senior and youth generations,” sponsored by the USR (Ufficio Scolastico Regionale delle Marche).

INTRODUCTION

The recent Italian National Guidelines for Curriculum (INC) in 2007 assert that the school’s aim is to educate and state that education is only meaningful if it manages to overcome the fragmentation of knowledge, rather than by simply

reducing “the path of simple acquisition of the knowledge skills” (p. 5). However, the difficult living conditions of the younger generation seem to lead to a loss in the meaning of knowledge, and therefore of life (*Ibidem*). Aside from the social problems of the younger generations, it is also important to emphasize issues concerning

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elderly abuse, victims of psychological, physical, economic, sexual abuse and neglect, due to the isolated conditions within which they often live (Krug *et al.* 2002, p. 127). According to the findings of the study previously mentioned the school aims to combat the concept of ‘nihilism’ and of a feeling of an empty existence, in order to confront the depreciation of values and to restore hope in change, in the empty palpability in the deep tragedies that afflict our society. It aims also to identify routes and cross-teaching strategies, which aim to solve such problems. This is based on the premise that “education is not just about the teaching of new information but also the transformation of attitudes and behavior, which is a critical prevention strategy” (*Ivi*, p. 140). The objective of this chapter therefore is a present a case study of a project that ran for one school year in the Comprehensive Institute of “Sperandei” (ICS) in Camerano, a Marche Special Prize winner (“Premio Speciale alla scuola Elementare Sperandei di Camerano,” 2008). The “active” participation of the elderly hospice in education and the teaching of pupils aged 10 years, through the establishment of real laboratories, seems to respond entirely to the educational needs expressed in the literature cited above. Although this project was implemented in Italy, this chapter will show how such an educational perspective responds to significant and essential needs internationally.

The project was carried out during the academic year of 2008-2009 and involved 19 children from 10 ICS school years, consisting of 15 primary school classes, 350 pupils and 29 teachers. The village lies on the outskirts of the city of Ancona (Italy), lies in an industrial region holding a high socio-economic status. Workshops acted as the main tools for working and a means of monitoring the learning process (see the section Special Aspects of the experiment). The main evaluation tool used is the strong, ongoing connection between the children and the elderly. Even today, they can find their grandparents and their older friends in the hospices. The grandparents have

been in contact with families and when they call each other to catch up and chat. In the case of the elderly, it is vital that the children call them and take an interest in them, as they are likely to become less active within society as they get older.

The students’ learning process in the specific subjects were evaluated according to the standard curriculum of the school, achieved whilst taking into account the INC.

The main aims of the project included tying past, present and future, by recognizing the value of older people in society. This involved promoting intergenerational exchange, in order to responding positively to issues related to the long-term care of the elderly, leading to a rediscovery of national cultural traditions. The root experience of young people in discovering the values of life, solidarity, peace and family union, are also explored. In INC, a pedagogical model is emerging, that is consolidated in the statement that we must “educate educating” (*Ivi*, p. 6) and that the school’s task is to pass on cultural heritage and to prepare young people for the future by introducing them to adult life; contributing to the personal journey within which the student partakes by supporting their search for meaning (*Ibidem*). Aligning with ministerial guidelines, each year the USR involve school children in projects that put the educational principles that are expressed in the relevant legislation into practice. In 2008, school children were invited to design educational programs focusing on the issue of longevity. The project is part of the educational trend called “the thread that links the senior and youth generations,” sponsored by the USR. Schools were invited to reflect and to deepen human values, cultural identities and ethics to rediscover their potential and their historical values in a perspective of openness to the future, in particular to the elderly people.

The project was designed by the teacher L. Del Papa, according to the “the thread that links the senior and youth generations,” sponsored by USR. The participants in this experience include 19 children from ICS’s V C and 30 elderly people

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