

Italy (Tuscany)

Senzazaino. Without a backpack for School Communities

Senzazaino is a network of 35 Italian schools, most of which are located in small towns and country areas in Tuscany, which are engaged in a project aimed to innovate the organisation of primary and early secondary schooling. In a symbolic act, the schools have substituted the traditional backpacks in which students carry their learning materials with a light folder that is to contain only selected homework materials, while classrooms were equipped with functional furniture to store learning materials in the children's workplaces. Practice is inspired by Montessori pedagogy and current research and educational visions, emphasizing children's autonomy and co-responsibility in the planning of learning, problem solving during activities aiming at knowledge construction, holistic education that takes into account children's emotional, social, motivational as well as cognitive development, parent participation, and teacher cooperation in a professional community where best practices are shared by means of a global curriculum handbook that contains tools and working sheets for teachers. These can be used to plan, monitor and evaluate classroom management, day planning, teaching activities and the use of facilities, methodologies, and space. Well-organised learning spaces with different areas dedicated to subject areas allow students from one class to engage in different activities at the same time.

General Information

Name of the ILE: Senzazaino. Without a backpack for School Communities

Location/Address: Via Volpi n.139, 55100 Ponte a Moriano (LUCCA)

Website (if available):

http://www.senzazaino.it/index.php?option=com_content&view=frontpage&Itemid=172&lang=en

ILE submitted by: Valentina Giovannini, researcher.

Rationale

Why do you suggest that it should be included in the project? How does it respond to 21st century learning challenges?

Students have a backpack because they have to carry to and back from the school all their materials: books, exercise-books, pens, pencils, erasers, scissors, rulers, colors... Why can any other worker find his tools in the workplace and pupils cannot? The backpack communicates a sense of shakiness, unfriendliness: it was invented to cater for soldiers and mountain climbers in very inhospitable situations. The Senzazaino project substitutes the backpack with a light folder or a bag to carry just a homework, all the classrooms are provided by functional furniture and effective materials. It's a symbolic act: meanings

and school practices change in relationship with three central values: responsibility, community, hospitality. (From the presentation of the project itself <http://www.senzazaino.it>)

Senzazaino is a network of schools in Tuscany (pre-primary, primary and first grade secondary level often organized in comprehensive schools). These schools are engaged in a project aimed to overcome the traditional organization of primary and secondary school (symbolized by heavy backpacks), fostering a global curriculum approach.

The school organization is profoundly different from the other Italian schools, even several aspects are inspired by experiences practiced in the past (the Montessori method, examples of schools engaged in active methodologies as Scuola Città Pestalozzi, teachers as Mario Lodi, Bruno Ciari) and linked with current research and educational visions (learning environments, learning as an emotional and physical fact, sustainable teaching and learning, collaborative work for both teachers and pupils, cross-curricular competencies, multiple intelligences, learning styles and personalization, formative and authentic assessment).

The LE has:

Threes values:

- hospitality of the school environment
- Sense of belonging to a community of practice and research
- Responsibility

Four features:

- Global approach to persons
- Global approach to knowledge
- Global approach to relationships
- Global approach to the environment

Ten statements:

1. children's autonomy and responsibility affect proficiency learning
2. problem – solving helps the student in the construction of knowledge
3. focus on body and senses develops the whole child
4. a differentiated instruction considers the multiple intelligences and the differences in every child
5. both students and teachers are involved in the school planning
6. teachers work in a professional community where they share best practices
7. several didactic tools develop several ways of teaching
8. well – organised spaces nourish the autonomy and responsibility
9. parents' participation supports the school engagement
10. authentic assessment fosters students' improvement

Based on these aspects the school staffs elaborate the “global curriculum handbook” as a collaborative product: it is a set of tools aimed to CLASS MANAGEMENT (G), DAY PLANNING (G), ACTIVITIES PLANNING (A), RESOURCES (objectives, contents, methodologies, facilities, space, tools) MANAGEMENT (R) (see Orsi M. (2006). *A Scuola senza zaino. Il metodo del curricolo globale per una Scuola Comunità*. Trento. Erickson).

Evidence

Is there any evidence or indications showing that this initiative achieves the outcomes that it is aiming at?

Learning Aims / Intended Learning Outcomes of the ILE

What are the core learning aims and which knowledge, skills or attitudes are to be acquired? (These may include outcomes related to learners' social, interpersonal, or meta-cognitive development)

Learners

Which group(s) of learners is it aiming at? Who is eligible to take part? How many learners are there? What are their ages?

The schools are open to any student from the local district including those with disabilities. There are around 25 students in every class; special needs students are included in integrated classes.

Facilitators

Who are the teachers/facilitators? Who are the leaders? What are their professional backgrounds? What are their roles?

There is a project staff formed by the promoters (the co-ordinator Dr. Marco Orsi and other headmasters), some facilitators operating on the area level and the school staffs (headmaster and teachers) of each school involved.

The headmasters and the teachers are qualified personnel of public schools. When the headmaster and the teachers of a school decide to join the project, they are involved in meetings with facilitators and the responsible staff, with parents, with the local government, and they are engaged in an annual commitment to start the plan.

Organization of the ILE

How is learning organised? How do learners and facilitators interact? What kind of pedagogy do they follow? What curriculum is used?

The schools have a school time range from 30 to 40 hours a week for primary school children and 30 to 36 hours a week for secondary students. Lunch is provided by the city administration and paid for by families. The project focuses on time and space organization, autonomy and personalization, the main goals being to improve the motivation of learners and their learning success. The model (timing, space setting, grouping and learning activities), is characterized by a balance between individual and collaborative, cognitive and social, operational and digital, motion and reflection activities.

The class level is the heart of the project.

The rethinking of the classroom environment allows us to build a set of different work areas, where learners can perform multiple tasks simultaneously. A complex and multi-purpose room where pupils are free to move in and to touch, handle, feel, share, listen to, build, learn... make.

The central educational reference (not new, but often forgotten in our schools) is the concept of experience, which is global in nature because it involves the all senses and the whole body.

It is not just to improve and beautify the classrooms to make them more functional, but to create a "learning environment" in which everything is connected. This environment "ties" the threads between architectural forms, furniture and educational activities with a view oriented to fill the gap between body and mind. It is an environment where organizational and pedagogical actions intertwine in a dimension of professional collaboration.

The "global curriculum handbook" is organized in working sheets to plan, indicate and summarize, monitor and evaluate the activities: a set of tools for CLASS MANAGEMENT (G), DAY PLANNING (G), ACTIVITIES PLANNING (A), RESOURCES (objectives, contents, methodologies, facilities, space, tools) MANAGEMENT (R). The day planning is a crucial point, it is linked with the analytical planning of the different activities scheduled and, on the other side, with a the planning of the week or longer.

All the working papers are presented in Orsi M. (2006). *A scuola senza zaino. Il metodo del curriculum globale per una Scuola comunità*. Trento. Erickson (p. 97-144), here are few samples:

Day planning

Time	Activity	Time long	Space	Notes
8,30	entrance		Agorà	
First time				
8.35	Warming up (AR*)	15'	Classroom	
	(AA**)	20'		
10.30/10.45	Break time		Playground	
Second time				
10.45	(AA*)		Art and crafts room	

* Routine activity

** Progress activity

Working plan/routine activity

Step	Phases	Time	Notes
1	The teacher waits for pupils entrance in the Agorà space	2'	
2	Pupils sit silently down onto the Agorà	2'	
3	Pupils recite a rhyme	4'	
4		5'	
5	The teacher presents the morning plan of activities and the working groups; pupils can ask details	5'	
6	Each group of pupils reach the area in which the activity take place		

Learning Context

In which context does learning take place? What does the physical learning environment look like? Are community resources used to facilitate learning and how?

The Senzazaino schools are located in several different context. Many of them are in Tuscany, but there are some in other Italian regions. The schools are mainly in small towns and country areas, characterized by an intense and effective relationship between schools, local communities and local authorities. There are lots of opportunities for learners out of the school: sport, language and music courses, public libraries, museums. The school has an important relationship with the city council and the local associations and the curriculum includes many activities in collaboration with them.

The idea of school conceived within the Senzazaino project needs to be shared with parents and the community all around the school environment. So, many actions have been planned to explain the project and to involve the families.

Parents are considered an important resource for the teaching/learning process: the handbook for the global curriculum approach indicates some practical suggestions to activate their continuous involvement, as:

- a magazine created by teachers, pupils and parents
- meetings in which pupils explain their activities to parents
- special meetings and “Day of...”
- laboratories with parents as workers, learners and teachers

An example is the “Curious parent’s corner”. *There is a chair in the corner by the wall and the class door, there’s a folder, some sheets and a pencil and there is a clear instruction: to get in, sit down and observe silently. It is possible to take notes and to ask the teacher questions after the lesson.*

Resources:

The most important resources are personal motivation, communicative and collaboration capacities. The physical learning environment is characterized by the presence of laboratories dedicated to specific activities (theatre, music room, woodwork room, library, art and crafts room) and by carefully organized classrooms.



See also <http://www.flickr.com/photos/senzazaino/3858966736/>

The space setting aims to provide:

- autonomy of learners in managing the experiences
- different activities at the same time
- involvement of the whole dimensions of the person (emotions, motion, thought, relationship)
- inclusion
- use of communicative strategies and solution
- the opportunity to document and archive materials
- the opportunity to manage meetings and foster different needs of organization

Special care is given to the painting of the walls, curtains and furniture, light, noise control, plants and cultivation and the presence of pets.

ICT (PC, interactive whiteboards) are located both in the classrooms and in special areas; their use is strongly integrated into the daily activities.

History of ILE

Who initiated it? For what reasons was it started and with what purpose? Have these changed since?

The Senzazaino project was established after a significant experience, the “Day of responsibility”, in 1998, the final happening of a project called “Becoming responsible for growing up”. Pupils were requested to organize all the school working and functioning for a day, supported by teachers and the headmaster as tutors.

The headmaster and the teacher promoters of the experience developed a comprehensive project addressing all the aspect of school life: learning environment, school community, methods and activities.

Currently the project involves 35 schools (351 classes), with a predominance of primary level schools.

From the beginning, one of the most important aspects considered was the setting of spaces and furniture, to foster group and collaborative activities, but the pedagogical model, characterized by collaborative planning and evaluation practices, innovative didactical methodologies, promotion of autonomy and responsibility of pupils, is constantly improving, as a continuous formative path for teachers and school communities.

The schools adopt a curriculum defined by the adaptation of the national guidelines.

Funding of the ILE

How is it funded?

Schools are funded with the annual quota of ministerial funds and family funds for students Others funds are raised participating to tenders of local and national institutions and with activities organized by committees of parents.

Learning Outcomes

What are the learning outcomes achieved by the ILE, including academic, social, interpersonal and meta-cognitive outcomes? How is learning assessed?

The school is involved in the national program of evaluation of learning. Pupils are also assessed by their teachers twice a year on learning achievement in school subjects and at the term of fifth and eighth level on cross-curricular competencies.

In 2009 a research project was conducting from the Faculty of psychology of Florence in ten schools Senzazaino on collaborative, pro-social and empathic behaviour.

(www.iscomar.it/file/empatiapro-socialitapprendimento-1.doc)

Documentation describing or evaluating the ILE

Is there documentation on this learning environment? Is there a website? Films? Research reports or evaluations? Other forms of documentation? (please supply references or links)

<http://www.senzazaino.it/index.php?lang=en> (English)

<http://www.senzazaino.it/index.php?lang=it> (Italian)

<http://www.lucca5.it/dettagli.php?id=59> (school site of the co-ordinator headmaster)

References to recent published materials:

Orsi M. (2006). *A scuola senza zaino. Il metodo del curricolo globale per una scuola comunità*. Trento. Erickson

http://www.indire.it/aesse/content/index.php?action=read_school&id_m=3472

<http://www.educationduepuntozero.it/organizzazione-della-scuola/senza-zaino-modello-scuola-che-vogliamo-3067192704.shtml>

<http://www.iscomar.it/Senza-Zaino-Una-scelta-pedagogica-innovativa.htm>

<http://gold.indire.it/datafiles/BDP-GOLD00000000021B1BA/Scheda%20descrittiva%20-%20Verso%20Senza%20Zaino.pdf>

Seminar on innovation in the school organized by Regione Toscana:

http://www.regione.toscana.it/regione/multimedia/RT/documents/2011/02/23/ed9e37dc035254af82f084c53bb0ff84_02programmaa4lucca.pdf

Seminar on the project:

http://www.firenzefiera.it/cvn/show_file_dett.php?id=196612