

Preserving Human Rights: A Year-Long Human Rights Education Course

Name of organization:
Istituto Comprensivo “Socrate”

“The protection of human rights: foundation for freedom, justice, and world peace”

Presentation of the Education Plan on Human Rights

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The Comprehensive State Institute, “Socrates” of Marano of Naples, introduced into the curriculum, beginning in 2000, the practice of Education on Human Rights, using the Regulations of Scholastic Autonomy — Decree of the President of the Republic 8 March 1999/275 — as “normal teaching material.” It was an innovation of great importance for the Italian school; from 2001, the teaching curriculum has included activities during the afternoon schedule to open classes. And those that participated from 2003 as well as the former pupils of the Institute who ask to continue the formative route, develop the role of mini-educators within the Institute. Together with the younger ones, they are leaders in a process of sensitization and information on the topic of human rights.

After an initial and strong poor reaction, inside and outside of the school, due to the official nature of the “newness” of the topic and of the methods used as well as the young age of the students participating, the practice EDU¹ of the Socrates school has been known for its consistency and for the innovative elements that characterize it.

The terms of the Education on Human Rights were thus created. In 2002, the Socrates school initiated the collaboration with the Department of Constitutional Italian and Compared Rights of the University “Federico II” of Naples, and with the National Research Council — Human Rights Department. From the first year of implementation of the practice, Amnesty International (Italian Section), Doctors Without Borders Italy, ManiTese, Ecole Instrument De Paix-Italy, Soka Gakkai, have all collaborated with the students.

Forms of temporary collaboration are born from the requests of the students during the formative routes, in subjects such as the rights of the Romani children, the privatization of water, and the moratorium on capital punishment.

Every annual route ends with a meeting of two to three days that involves the organizing pupils side by side with witnesses of human rights violations, represented by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and institutions. In a more concrete view of participation, the boys and

¹ EDU (Educazione dei diritti umani): Education on Human Rights

girls sell their works to the public to collect the funds to support initiatives that they themselves choose among those that follow in the course of the year. Their choice supports countries promoting the protection of the rights of girls, women, and minors.

In 2004, the Socrates school decided to transfer the acquired funds in favor of the people of southeast Asia hit by the tsunami; every Christmas they organize the “Fair of solidarity,” on this occasion the proceeds are transferred to the distance adoption of children of Guinea Bissau, with whom they exchange pictures and letters.

Of different typology are the manufactured articles by the students for the collection, from ceramic objects to toy dolls, from paintings, to the CD Roms.

Between the educational visits there is always the Shop of the World of Manitese in Naples because the young “experts” also involve themselves in the support and spread of fair trade and critical consumption.

The practice, at first, was started with small funds by the school, voluntary contributions from parents and teachers who were involved, and by ethically correct private sponsors. Since 2002, the Commune of Marano in Naples has supported the activity with modest financing.

In view of the entire participation by students, even the job of bookkeeping is held by a pupil who manages the funds, indicates the possibilities of expenditure and ensures that all the funding will be equal to the available entries. The group may then be informed of eventual problems.

Thanks to the activity of information and sensitization that the boys and girls have created, the Commune of Marano of Naples has come in contact with different NGOs, has furthered collaborations with the NGO ManiTese and Ethical Bank, and has promoted on the territory the exhibition of the Italian Buddhist Institute Soka Gakkai “Teachers of Peace.”

The Commune of Marano of Naples has promoted more times in the local community with the students of the Socrates school “Human Rights Week” and the Global March Against Child Labor.

The practice of EDU also involves the participation of the students in seminars, shows, and meetings that are developed in Naples or in other towns. On these occasions, students have the opportunity to know and confront defenders and victims of violations representing the national and international NGOs, jurists, and politicians.

With time, the practice has been replicated not only in the province of Naples. From 2004 the activity was adapted to other contexts after some meetings of training of teachers — secondary school San Lucido (Cosenza), secondary school of Foglianise (Benevento).

In the neighboring territory with the Commune of Marano, the activity was adapted to classes of the secondary school “Evangelista Torricelli” of Casandrino (Naples) and to classes of the secondary school “The Siani” of Villaricca (Naples).

The teachers of these schools participate in this period in the course in training on national aspects of Amnesty International: “First steps: how to do activities of education on human rights in the school.”

The work and activities of the boys and girls in these schools has also favored their active involvement in events of large relief.

Representing a component of the different groups are students elected in plenary seat from all of the participants. Teachers invited students to encourage their choice.

“Rome for Women” held in 2005 was a meeting for training teachers and students of Secondary Educational Institutes of grade II of the city of Rome. Spokespersons at the press conference of the opening of the Rome for Women project of training on the rights of girls and women of the Commune of Rome and of Amnesty International, turned to the Educational Institutions grade II Rome 2005; and held trainings of volunteers and teachers for ManiTese in Naples in 2005 and in 2006.

A number of students were invited to guide the public — students, teachers, citizens, authorities — to the use of the show “Human Rights and Immigration,” initiative promoted from the Province of Naples, from the National Research Council, from the Harbor Authority of Naples in 2003.

The boys and girls have also participated in large relief events — World Day Against Organized Torture from Amnesty International (Italian Section), Rome 2004; the Children’s World Congress on Child Labour, coordinated by ManiTese (Florence 2004). In addition, the students and their families accommodated Mexican girls subjected to exploitation. They also presented to the Congress, favored the interiorization of structures, the knowledge of being able to operate “from the of inside” and gave their own contribution to social change by participating with concrete actions. This constituted a further justification to continue the experience.

In 2005 a group of students asked to establish the Young Group of Amnesty International and to arrange for branches in the local schools.

Also, with the participation of the parents, at first due to the increased motivation by the children, this work continuously becomes a more important element of the students’ lives. Parents appreciate the commitment of their children to working together and creating further occasions for meeting and collaboration in a familiar context.

From 2006, parents and, in some case, grandparents, after some meetings of training of EDU, support the students in the ways and in the concordant formal procedure with the teachers and that vary in relation to the needs emerged.

The practice of Education on Human Rights was conceived after an attentive analysis of needs. The Socrates school is located in the north of Naples, in southern Italy where the violation of the rights of minors, girls, and women is widespread. Discrimination and racism demonstrate themselves by ethnicity (migrants, Romani) and type (direct, indirect).

Also in southern Italy, the exploitation of juveniles and other illegal work and organized crime organized are present. The sense of distrust in the local institutions and in the State is widespread. Education is not considered neither a right nor a “tool” of development and participation.

Beyond the school, only the parish offers a meeting place for children and young adults, where they can participate in the activities organized by volunteers. The children’s library is a recent creation.

- The specific learning objectives are:

1. Main historical events and reasons that lead to the recognition of human rights. Main international, European and national tools. The distinction between political, civil, social, and economic rights. Rights of children. Rights of women.
2. Active listening and communication. Critical thought. Ability to participate actively in work groups. Ability to make a shared decision. Respect for oneself and others. To recognize and to accept diversity. To recognize violence, prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination. To assume responsibility. To work to promote and to defend human rights including the value of individual contribution for social change.
3. Sense of responsibility for one’s actions. Capacity to appreciate diversity. Empathy and solidarity with others, even from afar. Sense of human dignity, of one’s value, and that of others. Sense of justice.

- Main subjects are:

Needs and rights

History of human rights

Main international, European, and national tools for the protection of the human right

The rights during childhood and adolescence in Italy, Europe, and the world

The exploitation of child labor in our community, in Italy, Europe and the world

The migrant minorities at the arrival of the maritime border in Italy

Invisible minors

The trade of human beings in Europe

The sexual exploitation of minors

The violence of young girls and of adolescents in the school, in our community, in Italy, in Europe, and in the world

The use of videophones, YouTube, Internet, cyberbullying

SchoolTube: an educational example for students and teachers for the loading, viewing, and sharing of videos

The violence of girls and women: an Italian, European, and world problem

The right to education in our community, in Italy
The right to education in our country for the Romani and migrant children
The participation of young adults in the life of the community
The right to education for the young girls and for the young girls in countries of war
The condition of children and of women in the conflicts
The soldier children
The arms trade
Diamonds

Economic, social, and cultural rights; the net of rights
The right to health: illnesses conquered in our community — which ones and how?
The right to health, poverty, and education
Access to cures and to the essential medicines

The human right to water: The water and I; drought and use of water in our community
The wars for water

- Indications of success

Voluntary participation. Behaviors marked with greater respect. Greater autonomy and responsibility, autonomy and consciousness of each person's capacity and attitudes. Ability to work in a group. Acquisition of knowledge.

- Methodology

Participative methodologies: brainstorming, discussion, cooperative learning, working in small groups, role playing, simulation games.

The initial approach to the knowledge of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is realized by means of animated and interactive CD Roms, created by Amnesty International Italian Section.

The Education on Human Rights was conceived to be prolonged and holistic process that aims to change attitudes and behaviors, and also to inform, so the chosen methodologies (not formal training) have a global and inclusive approach. The EDU is centered on those who learn, on the needs, preferences, ability of each young person. The students build their learning in groups, are subjects of research, organization, and accomplishment of the activity.

The teacher is a component of the work groups, learns, and is the facilitator of learning. In this type of symmetrical educational student-teacher relationship, the teacher facilitates the learning, is competent and active in the game, supports the culture effectiveness in front of incapability, exploits and promotes the activation of the positive resources, and helps to surpass personal obstacles.

Through non-formal learning, the factors of emotional intelligence also are recognized to take a central role in the emotions in the support and the motivation to work towards a purpose.

Conflict inside the group is neither denied nor suppressed, like it often happens in the Italian school, but considered an important individual moment of growth in which everyone examines their behaviors and values, negotiates, and makes shared decisions.

The activities of EDU, in fact, are based on the understanding that the conflicts of opinions can be constructively used for learning, the purpose is that the participants can learn from that process, to listen to oneself or another, to express oneself, to respect the differences of opinion; done in manner so that on the inside of the groups emerge the individual skills, ability, attitudes that make the work of each individual indispensable. Every participant learns, discovers, cooperates, communicates, confronts oneself, learns from another, projects, realizes, tests the solidarity in class, and then uses this in the greater community.

This context of learning, to discover different abilities, means that the “normal activities of class” do not emerge. The proposed activities in the non-formal context of education are discussed from first basic manual steps for EDU of Amnesty International and from Compass — Manual for EDU with the boys and girls — Council of Europe; they are timely chosen, adapted to the formative needs of the boys and girls and to the territorial context in which the school operates.

Values and attitudes cannot be taught but are learned through experience, or the “things” best remembered doing. For this reason the activities are involved and fun. Students in class play games but the purpose is always serious: it’s about an important local or global topic, an explanation of a human right.

A culture of human rights is not a culture where everyone knows their own right, the knowledge is not necessarily respect of another, is it a togetherness of attitudes, behaviors, norms, and rules.

The EDU involves the education for personal and social change, the development of skills of the boys and girls to be active citizens that participate in their community to promote and protect human rights.

The curriculum in the formal context is often limited to a shared knowledge that the children should acquire and give proof of knowledge. The personal and social development, even if recognized as important, is not always the main objective, as it is to acquire knowledge.

The methodologies used by the Socrates school supply a structure for the development of ability and attitudes of the boys and girls in areas such as communication, critical thought, cooperative work, capacity to work and to manage the conflicts, autonomy, creativity, responsibility, empathy, and solidarity.

The typologies of activities developed therefore involve:

a) the active participation of the boys and girls that involves the decision of the content, and through the involvement in activities they learn to be responsible for their decisions and actions;

b) the students work together to realize shared objectives and seek results that will be positive, whether on an individual or group level.

Using teamwork the students collaborate on an autonomously formal procedure “putting together their different talents and activities,” relying on one another to complete a job.

Teamwork encourages the participating boys and girls to assume responsibility, develop cooperation, the skill of communication, and the ability to make a shared decision.

To be involved encourages the participation of the members of the group without dominating or self confidence, and improves the safety of everyone testing the solidarity with the others.

Initially, the students of every age individualize the themes on that work. In every class /group they create groups inside of which are presented complementary abilities necessary because the practice of EDU produces effective results.

This way, conflicts are developed that the teamwork at first produces but the experience that the young adults go through and the role of the teaching facilitator contributes to develop and to make recognizable their personal, emotional and motivational skills inside of the group and to recognize the same group of belonging like a resource; the groups are not rigidly closed, the abilities and the necessary knowledge in the various moments are requested by the components of the other groups.

Two important objectives of EDU are firstly to give the boys and girls the skills to appreciate the different points of view on a given situation or argument, and not to be necessarily in agreement. And secondly, to help them develop the capacity to find consensual solutions to the problems.

The proposed activities are based on the understanding that the conflicts of opinion can be constructively used for learning.

Like in many non-formal educational activities, the purpose is not to have everyone in agreement but rather that the children can learn from the process, to listen to each other, to express themselves, to respect differences of opinion, to learn about the other; the teacher does in manner that in the groups emerge the individual skills, ability, and attitudes that make the work of each person absolutely indispensable.

The texts on which to work are chosen inside of the groups and are acquired with the professors. The completion of the final products makes idealists of the girls and boys that choose the typologies and the formal procedure for completing the works.

Their choices are mainly shown with the accomplishment of CD ROM, theme publications that include also stories and poetries of those whom are authors, videos, panels to subject, photographs, paintings. The songs and the music for the final event are chosen by the work groups. All of the works are exhibited in a show during the days of the final annual meeting.

Education on Human Rights can create effective results, provoke a valuable behavioral change, create sensitization to others, and ongoing development.

