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How can a Teacher change the world?

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Let's make the Sea Plastic-free: Social Justice for Pupils.

A Service-Learning Experience.

1. Introduction

Have a healthy planet is a right for everyone, especially for future generations. Social justice must be also for children: if we do not care about the environment, we are stealing children's future. This chapter shows a Service-Learning project developed into an Italian kinder-garden classroom. Aimed at children from three to six years of age, the project had two purposes: first, it would test Service - Learning approach with pre-school children; second, giving back what are their rights, it will raise pupils' awareness about climate change and the necessity of respecting environment. Living in a seaside town, is a child right to be helped to ask for a prepared community to afford the plastic pollution and its connected social problem. Service-Learning approach motivates students to be active heroes of their learning path, in their social rights, and help the community to solve a real problem. In this way, they could develop civic engagement and social justice. Results demonstrate a large involvement by young students: they made waste sorting during the school year and went to the beach to collect plastic garbage, growing their awareness about pollution and sustainability. A reflection about the importance of teaching civic education at school and the related issues concerning human rights, social justice ad sustainability is also a contribute produced in this chapter.

2. Civic education in the Italian School system and Agenda 2030 goals

Italian Law 92/2019¹ introduces in the school system civic education as transversal subject, from kinder-garden to high school level.

The Law is made up of three pillars: constitution and citizenship, sustainable development and digital citizenship. These pillars are considered as macro-areas in which it is possible to investigate specific topics.

2.1 Constitution, national and international Law, Legality and Solidarity

¹ Law 20 agosto 2019, n.92: *Introduzione dell'insegnamento scolastico dell'educazione civica.*
<https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2019/08/21/19G00105/sq>

In the first pillar, we can find the knowledge of the constitution as subject, that is considered a fundamental issue for the growth of the citizen of tomorrow, but it is also possible to find the study of national, regional and local systems as the study of international organizations such as the European Union and the United Nations. In addition to knowledge of organization and order, the first pillar concerns issues of legality, the respect of law and solidarity.

2.2 Sustainable Development, environmental Education, Knowledge and Protection of Heritage and Territory

The second pillar, regarding sustainable development, offers various possibilities of study. It looks like to be the most urgent pillar, considering climate change and the possibility of geopolitical framework transformations. The reference is the *UN 2030 Agenda*² and its 17 goals. Sustainable development refers both to natural and human environments and, also, refers to personal wellbeing, under the profile of health, nutrition and personal safety. These goals seem, in some part of the world, far to happen. In this pillar is included also volunteering and active citizenship education.

2.2 Digital Citizenship

The third pillar, concerns digital identity and digital citizenship; it starts from a reflection about the necessity of creating net-users more critical and aware. The *Guidelines for teaching civic education* declare: «The capability of someone to be able to apply conscientiously and responsibly of virtual communication».³

In Law 92/2019 it is possible to grasp its interdisciplinary aspect. In it is possible to find out the idea of relating disciplinary areas, traditionally separated in the Italian School-system. Morin affirms the necessity of a new way of thinking the disciplines:

«Children are obliged to learn inside isolated categories[...]. We teach children to know objects by isolating, but they must be positioned in their own habitat to be properly known, when for a living being can be known only in the relationship with its habitat, where it can draw energy and organization».⁴

The pedagogical proposal of Service-Learning offers the opportunity to develop goals proposed by Law 92/2019, in a more active involving and motivating way.

² <https://unric.org/it/agenda-2030/>

³ Italian translation: «La capacità di un individuo di avvalersi consapevolmente e responsabilmente dei mezzi di comunicazione virtuali» in *Linee guida per l'insegnamento dell'educazione civica*, 2020, Allegato A, p. 2. (Trans. *Guidelines for civic education teaching*, 2020, appendix A, p.2) https://www.miur.gov.it/documents/20182/0/ALL.+Linee_guida_educazione_civica_dopoCSPI.pdf/8ed02589-e25e-1aed-1afb-291ce7cd119e?t=1592916355306

⁴ Morin, 2016, Italian version, p.73.

3. The Italian way to Service-Learning

Service-Learning, in Italian called *Apprendimento-Servizio*, is a pedagogical approach that has its roots in South America, referring to Paulo Freire and its *Pedagogy of oppressed*,⁵ and in North America, considering John Dewey and the pedagogical activism an inescapable reference.⁶ Service-Learning is now practiced and studied in a lot of part of the world. Ines Tapia is now considered one of the most important Scholar about Service-Learning for South America⁷. She was the first author publishing a book about Service-Learning in Italian (2006).⁸

In Italy, Service-Learning implementation started ten years ago circa, from the first experimentation in LUMSA, Rome University.⁹ Professor Italo Fiorin practiced Service-Learning approach with their student, future support teachers in primary school. In its book titled: «Beyond the Classroom, the pedagogical Proposal of Service-Learning»,¹⁰ Fiorin describes the theoretical framework and also reports methodological suggestions and many practical experiences. This book can be considered a reference for the Italian way to Service-Learning.

In 2016, Service-Learning was implemented in the Ministerial project called: «3Regions». Following it, in 2018 was published the Ministerial document titled: «An Italian way to Service-Learning»¹¹. In the introduction of the document, Rosa De Pasquale, head of the Public Department that followed the project, declares: «Service-Learning is a proposal that can spread the seeds of change. [...]: it is a pedagogical approach that invites to rethink contents and methods, under the logic of improved transformation of reality, joining learning with a constructive engagement for the community».¹²

In Italy, Service-Learning is spreading mainly in formal educational contexts, such as the school, where the approach is used to support the community in a prosocial optic.

The main characteristics of Service-Learning are:

- protagonism of the students, as main heroes of their learning path;
- strong motivation, generated by choice of their personal learning path;
- the service offered to answer to a real need deeply felt as a problem or a challenge by the Community;
- school and student maintain a relation based on reciprocity.

For all these aspects, it is possible to affirm that Service-Learning contributes to improve the social wellbeing of their actors, especially students, but also teachers and all the civic partners involved in a Service-Learning projects.

⁵ Freire, Paulo. "Pedagogy of the oppressed." *Toward a Sociology of Education*. Routledge, 2020. 374-386.

⁶ Dewey, John. "Experience and education." *The educational forum*. Vol. 50. No. 3. Taylor & Francis Group, 1986.

⁷ The Service-Learning network for South America is one of the most active in the world. www.clayss.org, consulted on 4th of October, 2022.

⁸ Tapia, M. Nieves. *Educazione e solidarietà. La pedagogia dell'apprendimento-servizio*. Vol. 13. Città Nuova, 2006.

⁹ www.lumsa.it, consulted on 15th of November, 2022.

¹⁰ Fiorin, Italo. "Oltre l'aula. La proposta pedagogica del Service Learning." *Milano: Mondadori Education* (2016).

¹¹ MIUR 8/10/2018 *Una via italiana per il Service Learning*, Roma

¹² Ibidem, p.5. Italian translation «Il *Service-Learning* è una proposta di fare scuola che può spargere i semi del cambiamento. [...]: si tratta di un approccio pedagogico che porta a ripensare i contenuti ed i metodi secondo la logica della trasformazione migliorativa della realtà, unendo il *Learning*, l'apprendimento, al *Service*, l'impegno costruttivo per la comunità».

4. Service-Learning, Sustainability and Social Justice

Referring to *Agenda 2030*, the 13th goal asks action for the climate change. Particularly, the target 13.3 aims to: «Improve education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning».¹³ Considering childhood as one the most fragile phase in human life, it is very important educate the next generation to afford the climate change issues and to help them to reduce their impact on the earth. *Agenda 2030* Goal 14 titled: «Life below water. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development», target 14.1 declare the intention to: «prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution».¹⁴

Italian school system, thanks to the Law 92/2019, reached the importance of teaching civic education already from pre-primary school. Considering the *Convention on the rights of the child and adolescent* (1989), children have in right to be educated to assume “*their civic responsibility into a free society and to develop the respect for natural environment*”.¹⁵ The 20th of November 2022, Italian President, Mattarella, on the occasion of the *International Day of Rights of Childhood and adolescence*, declared:

«The *International Convention on the Rights of Children and Adolescents* put children on the center of a net of fundamental rights: the right to be not discriminated, the respect of the superior interest for the child, the right to life, to a right growth, the right to be listened. Global conflicts, widespread poverty, climate change are threats to the full enjoyment of children rights, children hard hit by the pandemic years».¹⁶

In other school systems, civic education is not organized as a discipline, but considerations about the topic are activating a debate around climate change education.¹⁷ In Jimenez and Moorhead (2021) is underlined how, worldwide, sustainability is now beginning to be a main topic in pedagogical area through the implementation of environmental education in school curriculum, for increase the awareness of climate change.¹⁸

¹³ <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/cities/>, consulted on 09th of September, 2022.

¹⁴ <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal14>, consulted on 23th of November, 2022.

¹⁵ Unicef. "Convenzione sui diritti dell'infanzia e dell'adolescenza." *UN. Retrieved November 27* (1989): 2017, Art. 29. <https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention>, consulted on 21th of November 2011.

¹⁶ La Convenzione internazionale dei diritti dell'infanzia e dell'adolescenza ha posto bambini e ragazzi al centro di una rete di diritti fondamentali: il diritto alla non discriminazione, il rispetto del superiore interesse del bambino, il diritto alla vita, a un corretto sviluppo, il diritto all'ascolto. Conflitti globali, povertà diffusa, cambiamenti climatici sono minacce al pieno godimento dei diritti dei bambini, duramente provati anche dagli anni della pandemia. <https://www.quirinale.it/elementi/74082> il 21 11 2022.

¹⁷ Howard-Jones, Paul, David Sands, Justin Dillon, and Finnian Fenton-Jones. 2021. "The views of teachers in England on an action-oriented climate change curriculum." *Environmental Education Research* 27 (11):1660-1680. doi: 10.1080/13504622.2021.1937576, p.1660.

¹⁸ Jimenez, Jeremy, and Laura Moorhead. 2021. "'Don't Say It's Going to Be Okay': How International Educators Embrace Transformative Education to Support Their Students Navigating Our Global Climate Emergency." *Education Sciences* 11 (10). doi: 10.3390/educsci11100593, p.1

Moreover, European Framework requests an attention about rights and democratic education. The *Charter on Education for democratic Citizenship and human Rights Education*¹⁹, now under review,²⁰ affirms that: «democratic citizenship and human rights are strictly connected and supporting each other».²¹

Service-Learning approach offers the possibility to implement civic education curriculum, integrating sustainability and social justice, issues considered part of the human rights.

5. The project: following Service-Learning path

The project titled: «Let's make the Sea Plastic free» has contributed to develop an experimentation of Service-Learning into an Italian kinder-garden classroom, attended by 20 pupils. The project took place in Italy, in Santa Marinella, a seaside-town, 60 km Norther from the capital city, Rome. Teachers aimed to aware children and their community about the risk of plastic pollution, in order to enhance good civic actions. Meanwhile, teachers wanted to test an active method, such as Service-Learning, in their classroom. Children, from 3 to 6 years old, took part to every step of the project, as main heroes, following Service-Learning path. The project was initially planned as a two-year project: due to the Covid-19 Pandemic, it was not possible to obtain the final product but, anyway, results were founded out.

5.1 Motivation

Following the five steps of Service-learning pathway,²² the project started with the motivation which took longer than the others. The main issue for the teaching team was about to how to bring children in to a social problem. Story telling was the answer. After the story telling was proposed a discussion in circle time. In this way it was possible to enhance empathy and awareness about pollution. Later, children painted two long billboards: one was only with sea elements, like fishes, coral, shellfishes and sea stars, and the second one was very similar but adding plastic bottles, bags, garbage in general. In this way pupils realized how the sea should be and how the sea really appears.

5.2 Diagnosis

Analyzing how is the sea due to the plastic pollution, children started the diagnosis of the issue, felt as real challenge, leaving an individual dimension to enter in a class-group and civic dimension. Pupils started to ask where do they had to put their plastic bottles and other materials. For children of this age, it is not possible to use the classic instruments suggested for the diagnosis step, such as the one called the problem three.²³ Teachers choose to show images about plastic pollution and its effects

¹⁹Recommendation CM/REC (2010)7 <https://www.coe.int/en/web/edc/charter-on-education-for-democratic-citizenship-and-human-rights-education>

²⁰ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/human-rights-education-youth/edc-hre-charter-review>

²¹ https://www.indire.it/lucabas/lkmw_file/Cittadinanza_e_Costituzione/CoE_edu2010.pdf, p.4. Italian translation: *L'educazione per una cittadinanza democratica e l'educazione ai diritti umani sono strettamente interrelate e si supportano reciprocamente.*

²² Fiorin, Italo. "Oltre l'aula. La proposta pedagogica del Service Learning." *Milano: Mondadori Education* (2016), p. 74.

²³ Ibidem, p.85

to the pupils, for example beaches full of plastic, plastic floating on the sea, etc. After that experience, started a discussion on how to afford the challenge of making the sea plastic free.

5.3 Conception and Planning

During the third step, teachers used some games to sensitize children about the necessity of waste sorting and the fact that the environment care is a right for future generation. Teachers used body-games to activate children. Games were centered on rights and active citizenship, like waste sorting game, where, through motor paths and exercises, pupils had to collect garbage around the classroom. Another game, for example, was a coding game about a fish, Nemo, who had to survive at the pollution.

5.4 Execution

During the execution step, children continued to practice waste sorting in their school routine, learning, day by day, the difference between materials. During the spring, the classroom went to the nearest beach to collect plastic bottles and other garbage, to give their contribute in keeping beaches, and sea, cleaned, like responsible citizen. During that occasion, a member of the local council and two coast guards, explained pupils how important was the job they were doing to help the environment.

5.5 Closure of the project

In conclusion, children should obtain a product given back from the plastic collection, but the Covid-19 Pandemic stopped the project before reaching the target. Anyway, during the summer, children went to the beach and continued to collect plastic that was floating on the sea or laying on the beach, explaining and involving their relatives about the harmful consequences of the presence of plastic for marine fauna.

5.6 Transversal Processes: Reflection, Documentation, Assessment

Reflection process was used during the all steps of the project, during circle times, proposed before and after concrete experiences. Reflection helped pupils to get learnings deeper, in a meaningful way.²⁴

Documentation was produced during the project with the aim to support reflection and to show the community the actions developed by the classmates. For those purposes, teachers planned accurately when and what register, leaving nothing to chance.

The evaluation of the project has the intention of understanding how service-learning can support meaningful learnings and of testing if service-learning can be useful for kinder-garden school as an active methodology. In kinder-garden school the assessment is always formative;²⁵ the results of the

²⁴ Ausubel, David P., and Donald Fitzgerald. "The role of discriminability in meaningful learning and retention." *Journal of educational psychology* 52.5 (1961): 266.

²⁵ MIUR, (2006), *Annali della Pubblica Istruzione. Indicazioni nazionali per il curricolo della scuola dell'Infanzia e del primo ciclo di istruzione*, Ed Le Monnier. Translation: Minister of Instruction and University and Research, (2006) *Public Instruction Annals. National Indication for pre-primary school and for the first cycle of instruction*, ed. Le Monnier, p.24.

project, in terms of self-efficacy and motivation from the students, confirm the value of service learnings projects also for pre-primary school grade.

6. Conclusion

In Service-Learning methodology there are both learning and service goals. *Learning* goals were connected with the school civic education curriculum, in fact, one of the four kinder-garden purpose is the citizenship.²⁶ *Service* goals were two: first, make a garbage sorting to the beach, in order have a plastic free space; secondly, children wanted to aware their families and their community about pollution of plastic in the sea.

Considering the topic of the chapter, honestly, teachers don't know if they can change the world, but, for sure, they can open pupils' minds in a positive way, especially about citizenship. As children are our future, in some way, teachers can change the future of this world. Paulo Freire, in *Pedagogy of Hope*, affirms that its necessary recognize that the present is now intolerable and, for this reason, we need to plan a new future.²⁷

Removing plastic from the sea whenever they went to the beach, children demonstrated a wide attention for the community where they live. After the project, Children continued to improve their ecological skills. It is possible to consider the results as a validation about using Service-Learning with kinder-garden students. This project can be considered a real proof that, still so young, pupils can exercise their rights.

In general Service-Learning projects might represent a model to obtain *a robust and justice-orientated educational response*²⁸ to afford social issues in educational contexts. The study of Waldron, Ruane, Oberman, and Morris (2019), suggests the necessity to have a *holistic approach to climate change education*.²⁹

Service-Learning, with its steps and transversal processes, confirms to be an innovative methodology useful for the implementation of civic education curriculum.

²⁶ MIUR, (2006), *Annali della Pubblica Istruzione. Indicazioni nazionali per il curricolo della scuola dell'Infanzia e del primo ciclo di istruzione*, Ed Le Monnier. Translation: Minister of Instruction and University and Research, (2006) *Public Instruction Annals. National Indication for pre-primary school and for the first cycle of instruction*, ed. Le Monnier, p.

²⁷ Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of hope: Reliving pedagogy of the oppressed*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021. Italian version, pp. 96, 97

²⁸ Waldron, F., B. Ruane, R. Oberman, and S. Morris. 2019. "Geographical process or global injustice? Contrasting educational perspectives on climate change." *Environmental Education Research* 25 (6):895-911. doi: 10.1080/13504622.2016.1255876,p.1

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p.1

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Sitography

www.lumsa.it

www.clayss.org

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<https://unric.org/it/agenda-2030/>

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/edc/charter-on-education-for-democratic-citizenship-and-human-rights-education>

Images



Image 1. Billboard: How the see should be.



Image 2. Plastic sorting on the Beach