



Social Skills for Good Mood and Better Learning

Pietrina De Giorgi

Istituto d'Istruzione Superiore 'R. Canudo' Liceo Classico e Liceo Scientifico (Italy)

bais00200g@istruzione.it

1. Introduction and background

Students are often defined as “digital natives” [1], their approach to knowledge is based on research and discovery and centred on problem-solving and knowledge-sharing. Students are interpersonal, logical, spatial, intrapersonal, musical, linguistic [2], they can become really creative and ready to act very effectively either when working in a positive environment where their efforts and works are appreciated and when they experience international cooperation. As nowadays the knowledge is net-structured, experiential, cooperative, active and self-organised [3], the traditional roles of the teacher and students have changed and, as a consequence, the focus of the methodology becomes students centred rather than teacher centred. Teachers become resources and serve as facilitators and evaluators of accomplishments, they have to promote group work after having composed heterogeneous, balanced groups where members with high and low abilities can cooperate with the purpose to strengthen the cooperative identity, knowledge, awareness and sense of belonging.

All these considerations have led the group of the Comenius project ‘Social skills for good mood and better learning’ to try to find possible answers to the following challenges:

- Why don't we create an engaging environment for our students and for the school community in order to teach more effectively?
- Why don't we create a positive atmosphere in order to make the students learn more effectively?
- Why don't we use the technology our students love to make them experience the strength of the personal contribution to the growth of school community and also to the knowledge of the European reality?

1.1 Let's start with social skills

The partnership has started with a general reflection about what are the social competences everyday school community and family practice in relation to a wide variety of situations such as the regard, acceptance, ability to work together, tolerance, the inter-cultural competence in the contacts with others; the feeling of self-worth, self-confidence, self-monitoring and individual responsibility felt by everyone inside the school community; the capacity to teamwork, cooperation, ability in handling conflicts, ability to communicate in teamwork, the disposition to be flexible, generous responsible, committed towards people and school life.

The main objective of the project at the beginning has been that parents, teachers and students become aware of the situation in relation to strengths and weaknesses in social climate at each school in order to become engaged in active citizenship and responsibility for good mood as a basis for a good learning atmosphere.

In order to reach the planned objectives the partners have acquainted with each other creating PP-presentations to introduce each school and its environment to all partners, each presentation has encouraged the students to remember, understand, apply, analyze, evaluate and create [4] and better their skills. Since this first step students and teachers have had the opportunity to deal with their own situation and learn a lot about the situation of their partners in Europe. This kind of activity has allowed many students to reflect deeply about their environment from a geographical, historical, social point of view in order to show the main typical aspects of their land. The results of that kind of virtual tour have been placed on every partner's website and also sent to the coordinating school, where it has been attached to the project website, which has been developed during the whole project period and has been seen by all partners.

After this first phase students, parents, teachers have been asked to fill in an anonymous questionnaire about the development or lack of social skills at school, they have been invited not only to give possible reasons of their absence but also to analyse how the school tries to overcome these deficits, and what can be improved. The result of the questionnaire has showed the analysis of the strength and weakness points in each school in relation to the presence, the use, the lack of student-student, student-teacher, teacher-teacher, teacher-parents, teacher-headmaster relationships. The general ideas received by the analysis of the questionnaires has been that school gets under control the respect of the general rules even if many students seem to be little tolerant, students would like to have a stronger relationship with teachers based mainly on sympathy and a greater cooperation, at the same time they propose a wider use of group work to have the opportunity to work together, while an intergenerational truth has been stated: teachers and students can develop their social skills by socializing and handling conflict.

The schools have organized presentations about the use of social skills and have compared the results, the local community has been always involved in the sharing of analysis through the report in the local newspapers as well as in conferences about social and school life. Results of the survey have had an impact on further work, as a consequence by collecting and comparing the strengths and weaknesses and successful projects in the partner schools such as mediators, learning partnerships, tutor-systems, cultural, sportive, artistic or musical activities, the Comenius teams have received ideas and inputs for developing and bettering projects in each school as well as for improving social skills at each partner school. The partners have shared the idea that establishing a series of guiding principles such as respect, responsibility, compassion, initiative, adaptability, perseverance, honesty,



optimism, trustworthiness, courage, loyalty for all the relationships to be built around it is possible to improve the learning opportunities for students[5]. The partner schools agreed that through rigor, relevance and relationship [6] it is possible to achieve an interesting success in teaching and learning style all these considerations lead to build a network for mutual help and a market of ideas which have contributed to better some communicative techniques and above all have laid the basis for an integration of new pedagogical approaches in schools.

1.2 Let's use social skills for better learning

In the second project year the partners have tried to adopt or adapt projects of other partners to its own school environment and have realised activities to reinforce the use of social skills.

The main aim has been:

- promoting opportunities of communication;
- sharing documents and contents produced by students;
- promoting opportunities of learning by doing;
- promoting a continuous interaction among students and teachers;
- enabling students to use languages and ICT creatively;
- enabling students to interact and share content in an international context;
- promoting the involvement of students in team work;
- supporting the development of innovative ICT-based content, services, pedagogies and practice in lifelong learning;
- enhancing the quality and European dimension of teacher training and also to support improvements in pedagogical approaches and school management.

At the beginning a photo competition has been organized in each school 'The world in my eyes', it was based on 5 sections:

- your town and its citizens;
- fantasy has no limits;
- human and nature;
- school matters;
- just beautiful.

Students have been involved in the personal 'reading' of the world around them, the competition has highlighted the students' interest in photography, the winning photos have been shown in the European photo exhibition in Czech Republic during a Comenius meeting. Afterwards the partners have concentrated on a specific new project for improving social skills: they have written a 'Cousine book' where each school has contributed with regional receipts and photos made by students during their preparation of local dishes and with an introduction about the typical regional diet and information about particular eating habits. A wide range of teaching methodologies have been used from cooperative learning [7] for increasing the student achievement, mutual concern, self-esteem in making them work together on a common task, to problem solving method especially when students have been busy in seeking information, generating new knowledge, making decision in those situations where students have taken on responsibility for their own learning and have decided what to do, how to do it, the time of realization, the general duties.

The most unusual, engaging and involving activity has been the writing of a novel book whose six stories have been started by the different schools according to the initials of the country name; each country has contributed with a chapter, the seventh country has provided instead the illustrations. The work has been particularly involving as the students for each story had to read the part written by the previous partners and follow it in a suitable way using coherence and consistency, an appropriate tone and register. Creative writing has developed the practice of group work, students have been involved in proposing, creating, sharing.

The partners have continued the activity of sending e-mails and have continuous Skype contacts in order to plan activities and analyse the ongoing products. With the aim to share the experience of an unusual school time a 'Comenius night' has been organised where students and teacher of the seven schools have been linked thanks to Skype-contacts, karaoke, quizzes about the countries of the partnership meanwhile they spent time dancing, eating, playing games: a sort of great party with European youth united in distance.

The Comenius info-corner in every school has always reported on work in progress. The coordinator at every school has been responsible for updating this place and the school website. The school community and local community has always been informed about travels in foreign countries with articles written by the responsible and the students, parents have participated in the hospitality of foreign students and have followed the phases of activities organised by the school in occasion of the Comenius meeting in Gioia del Colle.

2. Conclusion

The Life Long Learning programme through the Comenius projects wants to improve the quality and to increase the volume of mobility involving pupils and educational staff in different Member States, to improve the quality and to increase the volume of partnerships between schools in different Member States, so as to involve the higher number of pupils in joint educational activities, moreover LLP encourages the learning of modern foreign languages [8]. These goals are great and particularly useful first of all to understand better the meaning and



sense of Europe, after to get students to know other languages and cultures and elaborate personally information and models, in the end to get the students watch with new eyes their reality and culture in order to promote not only the richness of their land but also the richness of the differences [9] in a balm of fraternity [10].

The two years' work with the constant sharing of information and experiences among the partners, the students, the school community, the local community has allowed a new approach to school life in learning, teaching and in the general way of working and timing, the partnership has strengthened relationships so far it has created a vision of Europe not as a geographical reality but as a reality made up of human beings and friends with many things in common: traditions, will to work, creativity, desire to communicate, faith in Europe, faith in youth.

References

- [1] Palfrey J. & Gasser U. *Born digital: Understanding the first generation of Digital Natives*, New York: Basic Books.
- [2] Gardner. H. (1983). *Frames of mind*, Basic Books
- [3] Ferri, P. (2008). *La scuola digitale. Come le nuove tecnologie cambiano la formazione*, Milano: Bruno Mondadori
- [4] Anderson, L.W. & Krathwohl. D (Eds) (2001). *A taxonomy for learning, teaching and assessing: A revision of Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives*, New York: Longman
- [5] Lawrence W. Lezotte, Robert D. Skaike and Michael D. Holstead, *Effective Schools. Only you can make the difference*, <http://www.leadered.com/pdf/Successful%20Schools%206-05.pdf>
- [6] Daggett. W. (2005) *Successful Schools: from Research to Action Plans*, <http://www.leadered.com/pdf/Successful%20Schools%206-05.pdf>
- [7] Robert E. Slavin (1980), *Cooperative Learning*, John Hopkins University University <http://rer.sagepub.com/content/50/2/315.abstract>
- [8] http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/doc84_en.htm
- [9] Giuseppe Goffredo. *i dolori della pace*, Alberobello: Poiesis
- [10] Hedi Bouraoui. *Puglia with open arms*, Bari:WIP