***Italian Best Practices***

**“Making Economy”: A PEER EDUCATION PROGRAM ABOUT FINANCIAL AND ECONOMIC THEMES**

From the idea of a teacher, “Making Economy” project was set in different schools of Vigevano, a small town close to Pavia (Italy). The great innovation of this initiative is the teaching method: in fact, a peer education program was set for pupils of 7th and 8th grade (Italian *middle school*). In this case, 12th grade students, from the technical high school “ITS L. Casale”, were the teachers. The latter had the opportunity to deepen some topics they have already studied, since their school curriculum forecasts economics and finance as main subjects. The project collected enthusiasm and involvement from all the participants, from students to teachers. It records the first edition in school year 2018/19, but many others are yet to come…

To better understand the adopted methodologies and how (real) teachers set the program, we interviewed Professor Stefania Rotundo, who teaches at ITS L. Casale in Vigevano and she is one of the main coordinator and responsible of the project. She will tell us how it is born the project and its future directions.

**Dear Professor, may you tell us where the idea of experiencing a “peer education” about finance and economics was born?**

Many factors competing for the creation and realization of “Making Economy” project. On one side, some middle schools of the city felt the necessity to deepen economic and financial themes, also solicited by the indications of Italian Ministry of Education. In fact, it is now clear the necessity of teaching financial topics from young age. On the other side, our school registered the need to diversify the range of instruments for projects alternative to normal school curricula. In fact, our school track already focuses on economic and financial subjects. Lastly, the peer education instrument allows students to put in place important skills, being educators for their peers, allowing the exchange of experiences without any “fears”.

**How was prepared the work before teaching? Did you propose specific topics? or did students decide them?**

Firstly, with other high school teachers, we listened to the needs of the addresses, so the *middle schools* of the city of Vigevano. From this starting point, a heterogeneous framework emerged: each school had different necessities about contents and organization. However, the common ground was represented by the need of proposing financial education at the crossroad of pupils’ daily life, allowing the emergence of wrong and risky behaviours. Hence, the pocket money tool represented the beginning: in this way, students have defined the economy, with the currency as instrument to know.

Once defined the activities’ concept, professors stimulated the research of specific financial topics though our high school students, such as the currency evolution or the behavioural traps. Along with the deepening of themes, students also thought about activities to propose to their younger counterparts: they prepared cards game, interactive sheets, presentations and other various means to teach financial topics.

In this project, the didactic materials proposed by the Bank of Italy and by Consob were particularly useful. Together with them, the Regional Education Office (“USR Lombardia”) helped me through the realization of a precise didactic framework.

**How long did the preparation of financial lectures in class last?**

The two classes of high school participating to the project, worked on this initiative from October 2018, the first edition of the Italian Financial Education month, with the participation of the path organized by the Regional Education Office (USR Lombardia) with Consob, 10 hours in total.

Then, students created raw didactic materials, that teachers tested in December 2018 with pupils of high school ITS Casale. While January was dedicated to the finishing of details of the created materials, identifying roles and skills in each class of students-teachers. Other 10 hours were dedicated to this activity.

Lastly, in February 2019 the financial education lectures took place in middle schools, covering a 10-days period, with a total of 60 hours where senior students taught to junior ones. In particular, for each of the 24 middle school classes, 2 lectures of 2 hours each were realized.

**Which is the general level of high school classes about financial education?**

All of my classes have a level of financial and economic knowledge pretty high compared to their contemporaries, since their school curricula forecast related subjects, such as law, political and business economics and financial mathematics. These subjects cover half of their school curriculum.

**Which is the general level of *middle* school classes about financial education?**

Students from middle schools generally have some notions about economic and financial themes: they are aware of some concepts, but do not know the motivations behind them, even if they are very simple to catch: for instance the nexus between goods and needs. In fact, there is the possibility that students underestimate the risk connected to some daily choices, such as the unrestrained consumption, hazardous betting, or they do not understand parents’ decisions.

**Which are the advice you can give to a teacher approaching a peer education project about financial and economic themes?**

Doing peer education means betting on our students: believing in their capabilities and doing a step back as teachers, posing them at the centre of the scene. Teachers must not be afraid of this roles’ exchange. Our worrying as professors is to give students solid knowledge foundation, where they can build up their lectures, together with materials. In doing this, is essential to provide them rigorous methodologies, without blocking their creative and critic vein.

Hence, through a peer-to-peer approach we could recover our “educators” dimension helping students in putting in place precious resources to share and spread.

**Have you already set a new edition of “Making Economy” project? Have you some new ideas?**

Yes, the next edition will be called “Making Economy 2.020”. It aims at providing an overview of the subjects of the economy: families, enterprises, State and “the rest of the world”. Each of these subjects is doing economy by consuming, investing, working, saving, producing, exchanging or providing services to citizens. We are working on a big game, where junior students will learn (or deepen if they have already followed the previous edition) the mechanisms through which the economy works and the connected risks.

*Talking with teachers so enthusiastic for their students and the activities they put in place is a joy for all practitioners and researchers who are approaching to the world of financial education. They road to cover is long, but the success of this kind of initiatives is very good news thought the walking…*