

AN UNIVERSITY ORIENTATION EDUCATIONAL PROJECT IN HIGH SCHOOL

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SUMMARY

During the 2024-2025 school year, the “P. Secco Suardo” Institute in Bergamo organized an educational orientation project for all those students who, having reached the end of their studies, were either afraid of choosing their future path or had no idea what they wanted at all and lived in mental confusion. Orientation is an essential new concept introduced within the educational themes of Europe, which we can no longer do without in our schools.

Key words: *orientation – choice – students - NEET*

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INTRODUCTION

Since the end of the 20th century, educational and schooling issues have begun to take place within the new framework of the global, technological and telematic society in which peoples and cultures are characterized by interdependence and in which issues have become increasingly vast and complex.

In this landscape, supranational organizations, such as the European Union and the O.N.U., have found it indispensable to take on a significant role in influencing the education policies of all member states, becoming centers of educational thinking.

In particular, we refer to UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) and the documents issued by the European Community. Their strong interest in schools and education is part of a general political reflection on the need for the West and Europe to be adequately equipped to react to the great challenges and changes of the present time.

In a 1995 document, the White Paper on Education, also known as the Cresson Report, the new cultural model of the contemporary world is outlined, namely the “knowledge society”, a society based not only on economic and productive wealth, but also on the strategic value of knowledge. The main elements capable of giving life and permanence to the new knowledge society are: possessing a high and effective preparation and understanding learning as a life-long path; this will be made possible by knowing how to effectively constitute one's own personal identity and by knowing how to “self-orientate”, i.e. being able to “take stock” of oneself, one's professional future and the construction of a personal life project, to aim straight towards a well-defined goal, acquiring the ability to choose and awareness of one's interests and resources.

Until a few years ago, “orientation” only meant the activity of advising and guiding a person to choose a school or profession that corresponded as closely as possible to his or her aptitudes. The current concept,

however, was redefined and expanded according to the new vision by the Council of the European Union in 2004.

It is ‘the set of activities that enable citizens of all ages, at any point in their lives, to identify their skills, competences and interests, to make educational, training and employment decisions as well as to manage their personal life paths in training activities, in the professional world and in any other environment in which they acquire and/or make use of these skills and competences.’ (Council Resolution on lifelong guidance, 2004.)

THE ITALIAN SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEXT

In today's society, it is common, in young people who are about to choose for their future after finishing their studies, to find it very difficult to decide which path to take and, above all, the fear of making mistakes and setting out on a life path that is not right for them. Anxiety about finding oneself in a job that one does not like and, very often, the fear of disappointing one's parents and loved ones, are constant elements present in all the high school students met within the orientation project implemented but, according to field studies in this area, frequent characteristics in all Italian students.

Identifying the reasons for this current phenomenon isn't easy; certainly several factors, both educational and cultural and social, have contributed to its development. For example the difficulty of searching for personal identity in an increasingly dynamic and complex society, lacking stable moral values and reference points; or even a dominant culture that emphasizes performance and demonizes defeats and failures; or, finally, a widespread overprotective upbringing that tends, especially in Italy, to make young people dependent and not very autonomous, incapable of moving on to adulthood with determination and confidence.

The human being, as such, is faced with possibilities and choices in his existence. As the philosopher Søren Kierkegaard said, a choice is never easy or without consequences; on the contrary, it is an act that gives rise to anguish, since it implies individual responsibility and the impossibility of turning back once the decision has been made. Anguish arises from the knowledge that one may make the wrong choice and lose the alternative possibilities not chosen.

THE PROJECT

In 1999, in the United Kingdom, in a government study by the Social Exclusion Unit created with the aim of analyzing all those situations that are “at risk” and in such a state of exclusion that they encourage the start of criminal careers, the acronym NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) appeared for the first time. In 2002, again in the United Kingdom, sociologists J. Bynner and S. Parsons, in an article entitled “Social exclusion and the transition from school to work: the case of young people not in education, employment of training”, take up the term and interpret the generational phenomenon of those who seek neither education nor employment as one of the consequences of an unwillingness to take responsibility due to difficulties in the transition to adult life.

Over the years, the acronym NEET became very popular throughout Europe and is also widely used in Italy. It refers to young people aged between 15 and 29 who are not in education, training or employment and who remain, in fact, on the margins of life.

In 2024, the number of NEET young people in Italy will be around 2 million, a huge figure. In fact, Italy ranks second in Europe after Romania.

On 22 December 2022, the Italian Ministry of Education issued a Decree to reform the orientation system through the EU-funded National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR), also with the aim of combating the NEET phenomenon.

The guidance reform has created a structured and coordinated system of interventions that, starting from the recognition of students' talents, aptitudes, inclinations and merit, accompanies them in an increasingly personalized manner to critically and proactively elaborate their life project, including a professional one.

This reform has been implemented in all high schools in Italy through initiatives and projects involving external experts and institutions, but also teachers themselves.

During the school year 2024-2025, the high school “Paolina Secco Suardo” in Bergamo has designed an orientation project with the aim of:

- strengthening lifelong learning and training;
- helping to make one's choice.

40 hours have been earmarked for fifth grade students from December 2024 until May 2025, with the aim of helping them get to know themselves and their aptitudes and accompanying them in making the best decision for their future. Meetings were held once a week and lasted two hours after lessons with the support of two expert teachers, specialised in clinical pedagogy and psychology.

The students were unclear about their future and eagerly accepted the opportunity to participate in the course. Membership was by free choice and attendance was not compulsory, so some students attended all meetings, while some only a few times. A total of 36 young people enrolled. The students were divided into various sub-groups over several days and some meetings were held individually

METHODS

Various techniques and also many tests were used so that the students could reflect on themselves and their choice of life:

- One-to-one meetings and clinical interviews based on the search for deep meaning and the meaning attributed to one's existence and choices;
- structured questionnaires (by Italian psychologists Cornoldi, De Beni, Moè) providing a complete picture of the student with respect to his or her study skills, the strategies usually used, cognitive styles and his or her motivations;
- written learning and study tests to assess the student's learning and memorisation skills and his ability to understand texts;
- Holland's test, that provides six personality types, each of which corresponds to a certain professional field. Thus, the choice to pursue a certain profession should not only consist of performing certain predefined tasks, but should represent a kind of continuation of an individual's life;
- Global QE Test - Emotional Intelligence (EI) or Emotional Quotient (EQ) tests measure a subject's ability to recognise their own and others' emotions and take them into account to modulate their behaviour in relation to others. Recent studies on emotional intelligence have found a significant correlation with prosocial behaviour, coping skills, positive mood, the ability to make decisions efficiently and leadership skills. The test used was based on research by psychology professor K. Petrides.

RESULTS OBTAINED

At the end of the course all the students were satisfied because:

- they had a chance to reflect on themselves;

- they felt within themselves that they had made a decision;
- they had had the opportunity to learn more about themselves;
- they were able to understand what they wanted in life;
- they had overcome the fear of having to choose;
- and, finally, they had a very true and realistic idea of themselves.

This was verified through interviews and the administration of satisfaction questionnaires.

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