

GOLDEN5 PROGRAMME

GOLDEN AREAS:

Social climate

19090- 2004-1-COM-1-2.1.

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3. GOLDEN5 AREAS: Social Climate

Buccoliero, E. (2007). Golden areas: Social Climate. In www.golden5.org/programme.

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1. The class is a group (or maybe not)

In the first year of high school, on the first school day, groups of boys and girls begin to share a place and a time that is going to be theirs for several years. In that moment – rare cases excepted – this combination of place and time is the bond among them. They are not a group yet, they can become it.

According to social psychology, the formation of a group goes through phases. Let's try to see them, following the scheme suggested by Tuckerman.

Tuckerman Model of Group Development

Steps	What happens
Exploring	Newcomers take a look around themselves, gather information about each other, and introduce themselves. Harmonies and alliances begin to be built. They feel the need to suspend uncertainty.
Forming	Relationship issues revolve around resolving dependency issues and testing, making leadership roles clear and getting the group acquainted. The leader with his behaviour is the one who more than others affects the development of a group culture.
Conflict	Balance within the group is challenged because: - the group does not agree on the leader; - there are different way of interpreting the roles; - there are people who wish to modify their role.
Norming	The group plans a new roles structure and sets norms and shared values.
Performing	At this stage, the group is functioning efficiently to achieve group goals. The group focuses on the aim for which it was created.
Adjourning	Closure can imply the division of the group (e. g. after the final exam) or affect individual members (failure, dropout, moving,...). It can be wished for or forced.

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The process through the different stages is neither linear nor simultaneous, which means:

- the process cannot be extinguished or played again. For example a group might never deal with the task, or go through a new conflict phase after the structure definition;
- the duration and modality of passing from one phase to another can be different for the different group members: for example, while some students have already agreed on a set of procedures for the group, others might still be in a stage of conflict or exploration.

Being a forcedly composed group, and being inside an institution, a class deals immediately with a formal task. Nevertheless, its real assumption can be graduated according to the schools and the levels. Besides this progressive acquisition of the task, there is always an initial phase of exploration, in fact the curricular plans for the first year take into account an initial slowness, due to the students' needs to adapt to the new context. This stage is helped through welcoming projects, a way to sum up, structure and give aims to the process of knowing each other, a stage that in "natural" conditions would be much slower and could possibly never go deeper.

The relational development of the class is never definitely set. Moving from exploration to task can be difficult, it involves stops and recursiveness, which can cause problems especially when there is no agreement on the *task* to perform, if the context is ambiguous from a *normative* point of view, or if there is no agreement on the choice of the *leader*:

1.1. What is the aim for the class?

The formal *task* of school is certainly to develop learning processes of subjects knowledge or, better, the person itself. Teachers often note that at school "students come to join together, not to learn". The adventure that actually involves them is about good and bad relationships among them, enjoying or suffering.

Actually even teachers can have personal aims other than or added to teaching. For example supplementing the partner's or their own salary when they work mainly outside school, keeping social relationships going in a difficult time of their lives, and so on. And even for them a little investment in work can be motivated by past frustration or the need to protect themselves from further bad experiences.

It is absolutely normal that in an institution, explicit and implicit aims don't match perfectly as long as, obviously, the parts don't come to total incompatibility. If, in order to have more fun, the kids need to skip classes, not to listen to their teachers, or even make fun out of them, it is evident that learning has no chance.

When studying is devalued by most of the students or when the experience of the group is based on prevarication, power relationships prevail over learning, which is obstructed because it is less interesting and, anyway, to affirm the kids' supremacy over teachers and school as an institution.

1.2. Do agreed rules exist?

The ambiguity of the normative context occur in many high schools where formal rules, starting from school rules, are a weak point. In addition, norms should be functional to reaching the aims; if the task is not shared, neither can the norms be, especially because in most cases:

- people in charge do not make the rules respected;
- possible sanctions in front of those who break the rules do not deter students;

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- lacking of a process of interiorizing and sharing the principles that inspired the rules for living together in the school.

Goffman had already talked about the *underground life* of total institutions. As a matter of fact, in an organization ambiguity is solved through implicit rules created for the group. In schools, we are talking about students, but also about teachers who, at the same time, set rules themselves (sometimes including the rule of not having rules in common) and share codes of education and behaviour with the kids.

Working out substitute norms is not negative itself, since it moves from the need of points of reference, an extremely important feature in adolescence and preadolescence, even more among kids who have difficulties within the families or at school.

It is a problem when these norms are created around mechanisms of illegality or prevarication.

1.3. Who has to lead?

In a more or less evident way, the group feels the need to identify itself around a leader who can be formal or informal, chosen by election, acclaimed or imposed from outside.

Teachers have an authoritative role in the performance of learning tasks, therefore their possibility to perform their leadership depends first of all on how involved students are in the school. If studying is appreciated, all skilled teachers can be a reference point, despite personal favour, but when it is not like this, the teacher's success is left to his/her own charisma or the use of authority, that is, the ability to subdue the kids with the power of fascination or imposition.

The class, moreover, has its own internal life, a net of relationships that is suspended if it can't gather around a point, especially in the first phases of getting to know each other. Numerous kids will try to impose their influence. The identification of a leader comes from a negotiation where every member or group of members will evaluate advantages and disadvantages of the different choices.

It is important to remember that *the choice of a leader concerns the whole group*. The criteria used varies from class to class and even, in time, in the same class. In general, we assume that the leader is functional to the group in the phase it is carrying out in that specific moment from a relational perspective and focused to the reaching of aims (either about studying or socializing)

2. Formal, informal, bully leaders

In a class, we distinguish different levels of leadership that can refer to the same or to different people: a formal level given to the kids who receive a specific duty from the teachers, and an informal level carried out by the students, recognised for their influencing skills, regardless of election. In some classes there are even kids, perpetrators of some kinds of prevarication, who can be candidates to become group leaders.

Leadership levels in a class

Class leaders	Tasks and role definition
"formal" representatives	They are chosen by their mates or the teachers to represent the class. They have an interface role towards the teachers and the school from an

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	institutional point of view. They are the “task experts”.
Informal leaders	They are charismatic kids who become a point of reference for the group and more than others influence its dynamics. They are the “relationship experts”. They are characterized by identification in the class and spirit of enterprise.
<i>Bullying perpetrators: in search of confirmation, not always accepted as leaders</i>	<i>They assert their presence through bullying over one or some kids in particular. Their place in the class depends on the accordance between bullying and the culture shared by the group.</i>

The overlapping of the different levels varies according to how worthwhile is studying considered by the general culture, and how this views bullying. Let’s make hypotheses based on observation of two structural dimensions of the group:

- orientation of the class of a *collectivist versus individualist* kind, according to how worthwhile is cohesion considered by the group, which requires universality of values, attitudes and behaviours, or according to the importance given to the development of individuality regardless of the rules of the group.
- *focus on the task versus focus on relationships*: depending on the members giving importance to the aims suggested by the school institution (studying, learning, theoretically the global growth of the person) or to socialization among peers, seen as independent and, moreover, obstructed by the duties connected to studying.

Intersecting these two aspects, we obtain four extreme possibilities, none of which actually is to be found as it is. Every class finds its own balance between attention to the person and cohesion of the group, between studying and socializing.

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Types of groups according to the group/individual and task/socialization axis:

Class orientation	The task for the group matches the school task (complete personal growth)	The group rejects the aims set by the school and adopts focus on peer relationships
<i>Collectivist</i>	It is important for everybody to learn and develop his/her personality. Learning processes are cooperative. Bullying is rejected by the group because it obstructs the growth of all its members.	Unity is important for the group, and is attainable through the recognition of a leader. Those who propose a different model from the one prevailing are legitimately excluded (scapegoat mechanism). Nobody helps the victim because he/she is not recognized as part of the group.
<i>Individualist</i>	It is important that the individual emerges with his/her own abilities. Learning is competitive. Bullying can be legitimized as extreme competition. The victim finds little support because he/she is considered inadequate to the situation. Other kinds of bullying are rejected, and even those who perpetrate them, if they don't seem willing to change their behaviour.	It is important for everyone to establish his/her influence over each other. There can be more than one candidate to leadership and division of the class in subgroups (various, indifferent factions). Bullying can be admitted in order to assert oneself as a leader. Nobody helps the victim because "each one has to defend him/herself"

3. Different orientations of the class group

The scheme presented in the previous chart shows four possibilities. The relational discomfort, or namely bullying, crosses three of them with different expressions and meanings:

- *in an individualist culture where the class is oriented to studying*, bullying, when it occurs, is hardly recognized by adults; on the contrary, it can be functional to organization and it is hardly fought;
- *in a collectivist culture where the class is oriented to relationships*, bullying, when it occurs, is supported by the majority of mates who recognize the bully as their leader.
- *in an individualist culture where the class is oriented to relationships*, bullying, when it occurs, comes from disruption. No one can give it cohesion, even though some kids may possibly try the escalation to power and one of the ways to do this is showing their own power through bullying. Even in this case, the bully victims are many, kids who in some relationships are made victims and in others are able to prevaricate. Unlike the previous case, they don't have the relief of an "ideological justification" or a sense of emulating and belonging to support their suffering and prevarication. In this case the bully victims are a symptom of a deep weakness in the system, to which the class could not react, even opposing it, with an integrated and efficient system of rules. Almost nothing is normed or sanctioned anymore, neither by the school nor by the group. The situation has run out of control and the impression is that everyone is against everyone.

4. The charismatic leader

He/she who can stand as a leader, that is, he/she is accepted for his values and behaviours, bases his power on the admiration of some and the fear of others, taking advantage of the charisma he/she owns and can use on others. The kids around him talk about him as a “nice, intelligent, fun, strong leader, able to defend himself, ...”. He sounds like an uncommon person who “rightfully” can stand out. And according to the shared values on which the leader establishes his power – that is through ways that do not depend only on the most charismatic kid, but are supported by the whole group – the class will set its own inner relationships on cooperation or on competition, or clearly on prevarication.

According to some experts, leadership is not a mix of personality features, but an identity strategy, that is one of the possible modalities to reinforce one’s own identity through other people’s admiration. There are many other ways of doing so. During adolescence, the group is the main point of reference – in some cases more than family itself – in experiencing the self and building up one’s own identity, and the charismatic leader is a person who nourishes his/her self esteem through other people’s consideration. If in addition he is not very good at studying, his position risks to be rather marginal, unless he can redeem it working out different resources, trying to find a way to forget his sense of inadequacy or difficulty and building himself a positive social identity.

The charismatic leader has a functional role to the group because he solves ambiguities, provides clear rules, with his way of being offers a model to be followed. His relationship to the group is an ongoing exchange. He gives something to others and receives something from them.

What he gives includes the power of his personality and the ability to perform, better than the others, what the group considers important, regardless if it is, depending on the contexts, biology or stealing snacks. With his authority, the charismatic leader fills the normative emptiness and the uncertainty moments – which can be serious especially during the first phase of group building – providing a reference model of values and behaviours.

From his supporters, the leader gets the confidence of acting in a friendly and united system, where everybody feels a strong sense of belonging. His followers address him with trust, obedience, identification, sometimes even devotion. They will try to imitate him, even though nobody should reach his level in order not to oust him.

If needed, he may raise the ante in order to show the audience who is the strongest. The inner hierarchy has different layers and develops in complex way.

The leader’s helpers can not express neither disagreement nor show that they are stronger than him, as not to compromise order within the class. But they can serve as examples for others in the class who live in a more marginal context compared to them. In a bullying situation, this is the role of some bully victims who suffer prevarication from the bully-leader and then, with his guide or following his example, train on weaker ones.

Being well aware of the attitude reserved to those who are different, the kids who do not identify with the charismatic leader, very often refrain from showing disagreement in order not to be excluded by the group.

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In these class groups, scholastic engagement is strongly influenced by an implicit inner norm which sets how much students are supposed to study, and not by chance some teachers can tell the difference between a “nice good class” and an “awful class”.

Judgment can be general, at least on the whole, because the kids tend to decide together what the standard scholastic duty should be, even implicitly. The theorists of organizations know how much a tireless worker can be opposed by his work mates until he is persuaded to reduce levels of production. His efficiency indeed represents a threat to the whole group since the risk is to cause general higher expectations in his superiors. Even in a class with strong corporative cohesion, the level of attention towards school will be generally uniform and the group will sanction those who stray from the average.

3. The scapegoat

The mirror of a charismatic leader is the scapegoat. His role recurs in groups in general, and in teenage groups in particular, especially inside school where the combination of kids in the same class is accidental and does not follow a natural process of identification chosen by the kids.

The scapegoat summons all the negativity, tensions, troubles, disapproval, accusations, derision of the group. His mates should bestow deep gratitude upon him for acting as a lightning rod. Those who have this function swallow bitter pills every day while the others are delighted by their own harmony. If by chance the scapegoat drops out of the group, even temporarily, it is easy to see conflicts arise, hidden until that time, between those who earlier promised each other eternal friendship.

The choice of a scapegoat is not accidental. In the phase when the group tries to reach the maximum unity around a common image and behaviours, values and aims, the scapegoat is the one who more than anyone strays from average.

Not willing to compromise his uniformity at all in front of the evidence of *diversity* – for any reason – the group disqualifies inner deviance and invest it with every negative charge, until they cut off the one who is the bearer. This exit can be symbolic in the case of student who is continuously ridiculed, alone at his desk, isolated in socializing moments such as during the break or at the gym, but this can also occur in those cases where such kids, devastated by continuous hostilities, decide to get out of the game changing school or class (or to the extreme act of those who attempt suicide).

Actually the scapegoat summons all the fears of his mates. They see in him what they never would like to be or what they terribly fear of becoming, perhaps what they are already and they try hard to hide in front of others. It is known how much homophobia, for example, is rooted in a hidden, feared, homosexuality. This example is particularly suitable when talking about adolescence, the time when the construction of sexual identity engages and frightens, and the kids (especially male) are afraid of finding themselves different. The same happens with the exclusion of the boy/girl who “smells bad”, the persistence on body messages or details. “Strange” kids, for their height, weight, body image, lightly disabled people, are often passive victims in high schools. Their diversity is considered a good reason to disqualify or cut them off the group. Exclusion is functional to the “perfumed”, “well dressed” and “healthy” ones, to make clear their own integrity.

5.1. When the scapegoat offers him/herself

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There are groups where there is no need to look for a scapegoat: he/she offers him/herself. In studies about bullying, they are named “provoking victims”. They are kids who invest a lot in school and its dynamics, although in a counterproductive way, at least apparently. Continuous teasing, catching attention, playing with other people’s things, telling lies easy to be detected, and much more, requires a whole lot of energy.

When questioned about these kids, their mates say that some kids “deserve” being bullied, they “pursue it”. Those who observe the dynamics from inside the group reasoning, tend to share this idea. Teachers often strongly dislike these kids.

When preparing a class intervention, there are two basic questions. The first point to clear out is whether respect is to be gained or got as a gift. We are talking about respect, not about liking or friendship, which imply a personal choice in the relationship with the other. And this introduces the concept of proportion between the affront that a member can do to the group, and what the group is allowed to do to him.

The second issue is what drives some kids to tease their mates when they know well that they are losers and, moreover, why their schoolmates keep responding them, when they know exactly, having experienced over and over that their mate will never learn and keep behaving in the same way.

The repetition of such behaviours is part of the mechanism of the scapegoat and plays the same releasing function, with an added value: the scapegoat himself seems to ask to be punished.

Only meeting closely and carefully these kids’ way of living can their weakness emerge. Some of them have suffered prevarications in other contexts and now feel the need to perpetuate their role of losers, the only one they’ve strongly experienced, by actively provoking it. Others live the extra scholastic time in a situation of serious isolation from their peers or with very obsessive or close-minded parents, extremely protective or entangling, and at school they feel the need to catch attention in order to gain a central role inside the group and, maybe, to signal somehow their discomfort.

6. Golden 5 project: key steps

For all the reasons mentioned above, working to encourage relationships inside the class implicitly means increasing the value of all the relational aspects of school life, enhancing motivation to study and improving everyone’s experience.

There are some simple things that every teacher can do, and which become effective when shared by different teachers in the class council, or, even better, when they are agreed on by all the teaching team.

One therefore has to be aware of the processes of group building and accompany them carefully: making the rules clear, providing chances for knowing each other, proposing diversity as a value, giving space to the richness that everyone can bring into the group.

We indicate some key-steps one can use as a test in time. They are divided according to the topic:

- a – structures, rules and routines;
- b – relationships;
- c – values.

a. Structures, rules and routines

a1. *Sharing aims*

There are aims that cannot be achieved alone. A teacher, for example, even a very good one, can not teach his subject to students who don't want to learn it. And a sure way to favour cooperation is to involve our "partners" in the definition of a common aim. In particular, the teacher can tell the kids the aims on which his work is based and, within the limits imposed by his role, he can negotiate them partially keeping into consideration the class' point of view.

Aims of learning can then be articulated at an individual level, according to the potentialities and needs of every student (see the section about individualized learning).

Key steps

Setting shared aims for the class and for individuals talking about them with the kids, explaining well what is expected from them, agreeing on "differences" in requests or evaluation that a teacher gives to different students, according to their needs or possibilities.

a2 – *The certitude of rules*

As explained before, building a group goes through a phase of uncertainty about rules and roles that have to be applied. A class tests every teacher's determination and strength of in order to understand how far they can go. Even in the relationships between mates there can be different opinions about the right way to behave with others.

For this reason, it is very important, especially at a starting phase of knowing each other, to set clear and shared rules in which the group can identify itself and the teacher can refer to when needed, showing that he is the first to respect them and believe in them and inviting the group to behave coherently with their own choices.

And rules have to be positive, it is important that they indicate "what to do" instead of "what to avoid", both for the encouraging feeling and attention to the person who starts this, and for a higher degree of definition and precision that a positive rule can have.

Key steps

Building 3-5 positive rules with the class and referring to them. Rules can be established from the beginning of the school year in a process of negotiation which can be proposed to the kids in many ways. Here are some hypotheses:

- *using anonymous cards on which every kid writes the rules he/she would like to see applied in class, then collecting, grouping, discussing, selecting all the suggestions to set some final shared rules*
- *asking every student to write on a card 3-5 positive rules in which he/she identifies and then asking the kids to negotiate them first in couples, (asking each couple to reach a group list), then in groups of 4, 8, etc..., moving to bigger levels of agreement.*

Teachers should take note that class rules are efficient if reinforced and kept alive in time. This means not only sanctioning, but also taking one's time to verify if and how the rules are applied, if they are realistic, etc. Otherwise they will be another example of unapplied rules of which our schools (and not only schools) are full.

a3 – *Favouring knowledge of each other*

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Group cohesion is higher when all its members can identify in a specific aim, verifiable and hopefully “special”. This means planning real occasions for the kids to experience that the others are actual resources: because they have ideas, skills, attentions, different and complementary abilities, sometimes better than their own, and because getting together, as a group, they can empower, allow each member of the class to be recognized and accepted.

Key steps

Giving the chance of doing things together: *group work, workshops, performances, etc... can be real occasions to get to know each other and to learn how to cooperate respecting others.*

b. Relationships

b1 – *In the group each member finds his/her place*

From a relational point of view, it is very important for every member to feel that there is a place for him/her in the group, not necessarily to the detriment of other members. Making everyone feel involved in the class means giving the chance to listen to others and being listened to, to pay attention to the world of mates, knowing that in turn, each one will have the chance to be accepted and receive the same space.

Key steps:

In some occasions give chance to the kids world; *for example interviews in turns, or bringing something from home and showing the others something personal, retelling personal or family stories related to specific events or ages or places (being careful when there are kids with difficult past events in class), etc.*

b2 – *Knowledge against judgment or fear*

Above all we fear what (and who) we don't know. And often, in the life of a group's judgment, prejudice, exclusion are a way to dissimulate the fear of what is different, to keep oneself far from it, to feel stronger (as individuals and as a group) through the identification of an enemy.

But when kids have the chance of knowing each other more deeply, this occurs more rarely. Because it is inevitable that they will find out similarities, in their personality and in their or other people's history, there will be reasons for interest and curiosity – and it will be harder to decide that the group can or wish to do without someone, in order to live better.

Key steps:

Increasing reciprocal knowledge among the kids: *it can be achieved in many ways, and some have already been clarified. Even a careful - not too quick - change in the desks assignment, or the possibility to cooperate on specific aims and for a definite time, is a way to know oneself and the others better.*

b3 – *Seeing the group as a resource*

The group dimension is typical of school, where the kids are always together with peers, and it has specific features that can not be replaced. In studying or playing, in duty as well as in celebrating, everyone contributes to the group, with energy and imagination, sense of humour, ability to focus on the aim or to listen to and encourage one's mates.

In fact, we know that in a good group there is not only one leader, but a spread leadership function which is evident in different ways according to the task the group is asked to carry out.

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Group working for a teacher implies passing from the idea of the kid's individual learning of the subject, as if being part of a class were accidental or an organizational need, to the hypothesis that group dynamics can favour (or obstruct) learning and, therefore, the teacher's work is also, and mainly, to lead groups.

At least in Italy, group works are actually perceived by some teachers as a "danger" because they are more difficult to check than with the whole class. This way, at least at the beginning, for a teacher who doesn't like group work, it could be advisable to prepare and lead a lesson with a colleague, so that to become more confident especially in front of a difficult class.

Key steps:

Developing group activities to improve trust and peer relationship

b4 – From competition to cooperation

We learn better what we need to teach. It is a certain assumption in social psychology and pedagogy, although still not used much in schools.

Teaching proceeds from those who know more to those who don't know yet, and not always this has to occur between an adult teacher and a young student. Moreover, at school many things are taught, and probably taking advantage of the relationship among peers to improve learning means giving little teaching responsibility to different kids, giving value to everyone's skills and attitudes. What we are aiming at is the creation of a climate where one's success is due to the abilities of working in group, not to being able to stand out to the detriment of others.

Key steps:

Make kids support each other in studying

C - Values

c1 – Autonomy

Success in teaching and, in general, in education, is due to the ability of making learners independent. So, for instance, a great achievement for a teacher is conveying the students a study method, curiosity, passion for his/her subject.

Autonomy of thought, judgement, choice, etc. occurs during childhood and adolescence through gradual steps which should be commensurate with age and kids characteristics, as well as adequate to the contexts where they live.

At school, stimulating processes of greater autonomy even in learning implies making the kids perceive that we trust them, that we believe they will make it, that we see their good qualities and give them a chance to show it. It is obviously not just an attempt, but a process to be verified in time, which implies adjustments and keeps the teacher constantly involved in the educational relationship with the student and the class, to release or strengthen his function according to what is going on.

Key steps:

Promoting autonomy

c2 – Indicating positive models at an individual level...

It is easier for a boy or a girl to learn how to behave properly when they have models to imitate or when it is clear what adults expect from them. In this sense, promoting and giving value to positive behaviours and the kids acting them means providing suitable models of identification and, at the

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same time, recognising everyone's skills and potentiality, because all kids - even the most disruptive - have abilities which can be noticed and appreciated.

This is very important also to avoid that the class eventually labels some mates in a negative way, because they are *too much*, or *never* appreciated by their teachers. We know to what extent a "too perfect kid" or his contrary can catalyse the rejection and dislike of their classmates. Attention to positive ones should not result in the opposite effect of "excessive zeal" by the teacher.

Key steps:

- ***Promoting social relationships and recurrently appreciating positive behaviours***
- ***Pointing the "best" students as models for the others***

c3 – Indicating positive models at a group level

The addressee of every lesson is the class. Not only and not so much the individual students but taken as a whole. Appreciating the positive aspects of the group and the things they do together, talking about what has gone well today or what we have been able to do is a way for suggesting a positive way of seeing the growth of the group and its ability of cooperating in the learning process. It is also a resource in order to give a positive feedback to all kids and not only to some, because the students themselves can build group identity, i. e. they perceive themselves as "we", as part of a unity, which has potentialities and can improve with the help of everybody.

Key steps:

At the end of each lesson or day, underline the positive aspects

7. The Chance project in Naples: an intervention on school cultural and structural patterns

We have seen how a teacher can favour positive relationships among kids in his/her class. This kind of work is not limited to direct relationship, since relations among people are largely determined by rules of living together they have to know and observe, by sanctions applied when the rule is broken, by shared places and times...

Meetings inside the European Golden 5 project have given the chance to see the differences among different school approaches, starting from structural issues such as class composition, organization of the weekly timetable, role rules for teachers and students, and so on.

Now we would like to introduce the experience which took place in an "uncommon" Italian school.

It is called "Chance" and it is a school "for second chances" founded in Naples in 1998 in the Spanish Quarters, an area known for school drop out already in middle school years. The project, now extended to other city areas, is aimed at bringing back to school girls and boys who hadn't completed middle school.

The Chance school has a very different approach compared to "ordinary" schools. In the following chart we highlight some of the main differences, distinguishing between structural and cultural features. The former concern "concrete" aspects, that is how things are done: places, time, programs, teamwork, teachers' training, structural moments of listening to the kids... The cultural

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aspects are, on the contrary, about how the school is perceived and seen by its protagonists and the relationships among them.

A partial conclusion is that school (at least the Italian and “ordinary” one) as it is now, as we know it, is probably inadequate and thinking about preventing relational discomfort makes sense especially if it means rethinking school completely, experimenting new ways for all those kids – or adults – who know and learn prevarication as life rules because there is a lack of different ones, given or produced by themselves, which have the same value, appeal and applicability.

Comparison between Italian “ordinary” school and the Chance project

ITALIAN “ORDINARY” SCHOOL	THE CHANCE PROJECT
Structural differences	
Theoretical lessons take most of the time	Workshops take most of the time
School places are usually anonymous.	School places are planned and decorated by those who live in them
Programs are decided by the Ministry.	Programs are flexible according to kids’ competences and interests.
Teachers are assigned.	Teachers choose to work with these kids and following these specific methodologies.
Teachers have varied psycho-pedagogical training depending on their sensitivity.	As for the psycho-pedagogical aspect, teachers share a training course during the year, which consists of workshops, meetings with experts...
The teacher is alone in class	Lessons are always taught by two teachers at least.
Teachers only teach their own subject.	Teachers can teach more than one subject, as long as they have a basic knowledge of it.
Passing from one moment to the next is left to routine and habit.	Passing from one moment to the next is marked by rituals planned according to educational aims.
Kids speak about the class during class meetings reserved to them.	Kids talk about the class, among themselves and with adults, one hour per week, as part of the regular school timetable.
Teachers discuss during class councils, a few times a year.	Teachers discuss every week, during a specific time within their work hours.
A teacher willing to work with difficult kids can feel alone and overwhelmed by responsibilities.	Teachers receive constant counselling by a psychologist who helps them in case of difficulty.
Teachers are the only adults with an acknowledged education role.	The education task is assigned to teachers, janitors, “social parents” (very often “mothers” who assist the process of kids’ growth).
Contact with social and health services seldom occurs and only in case of serious need.	Contact with social and health services is constant and cooperative. The team includes a social worker and the above mentioned psychologist.
Knowledge comes first, then its application.	Living skills come first, then the necessary knowledge is taught.
Teachers have a varied approach to the educational aspects of their work.	Teachers work for the general education of their students.
Students apply and go to school because they have to, and don’t know exactly what to expect.	Kids apply and attend the school on the basis of a pact that they know, share and sign.
The relationship with “difficult” families involves distance, mistrust and reciprocal accusation.	The relationship with “difficult” families, is mainly based on educational alliance.

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In case of bullying, the teacher may fail to notice what's going on or say something.	In case of bullying, all the teachers intervene at once.
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