

Tackling early school leaving in an intercultural environment

The QPA Method

- Questionnaire on Learning

The QPA Method

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Introduction

The presence of foreign pupils in schools represents a dynamic phenomenon which sets in a situation characterized by considerable changes at social, cultural and educational level such as:

- Globalization
- Europeanization and enlargement of the European Union
- Changes in local authority competence (decentralization, autonomy, etc.)
- Transformation of communication languages and media
- Transformation of knowledge and the links between the various forms of knowledge
- School reform processes

School attendance by pupils having different social, cultural, ethnic backgrounds and differing learning skills and experiences is, in our plural and globalized society, a structural datum in such a continuous growth as to have an impact on the whole educational system and, though not in a uniform manner, not only on the schools in major urban areas, but also those in medium and small towns.

As shown by international (UNESCO), European and national studies, we are facing a generalized and complex phenomenon involving problems and challenges which are not easy to manage and solve, and which affect the efficacy of school services and educational results.

The high concentration of pupils with strongly differentiated culture, conditions, family and school history, literacy and learning experiences calls for a change in the traditional educational and training models and techniques and the adoption of up-to-date methods, tools and professional performances to meet current different needs.

Notwithstanding all constructive and commendable efforts by the school personnel and, in particular, by the teaching staff, this situation is one of the most critical, leading to school failure, dropping-out, study delays.

The QPA Method allows the development of an educational path which, starting from the identification of students' resources and difficulties in learning, involves the participation of the students so that, at the end, they become aware of how their own learning processes work.

Learning implies a development process which has to be supported so that knowledge and experiences can become abilities and subsequently competence. Enhancing the development of learning means "promoting one person's growth and fulfilment".

Focusing on learning involves, above all, the identification of the difficulties pupils have when faced with the acquisition of new knowledge. Knowledge, skills and competence give the possibility to young and adult students to better know themselves, to positively relate to others, to actively participate in the educational, social and working community and "to fully enjoy social recognition and integration in their own environment". Immigrants and Roma people who go to a foreign country inevitably suffer the "loss" of the social recognition and integration they enjoyed in their country of origin, that is, they lose the psychological and social supports which were fundamental in their daily life. They have to reconstruct social recognition and integration in their

reception country. Through learning, they start a journey of acquisition of knowledge and experiences that must be transformed into the necessary skills and competence for their social and working integration in the new community.

In this context, schools and training institutes play a fundamental role.

However, immigrants and Roma people already have a set of knowledge, aptitudes, competence and interests developed in their original cultural environment, which we must “understand with them”, so that we can help them to become aware of their resources, to understand their new environment and to progressively accomplish their social integration.

QPA is an innovative tool that was developed in Italy. It allows the understanding of how learning processes work and the efficient and autonomous management of one’s own learning (key competence: “learning to learn”). QPA is a valid support for preventing dropping-out and early school leaving.

QPA is based on the studies and experiences of Professor K. Polacek’s working group (FORTUNE Consortium). Professor Polacek developed an innovative theory on the fundamental bases of learning processes and created a psychoeducational tool just as innovative (QPA) which allows worldwide sharing of criteria to assess how learning processes work in relation to students of all nationalities, identifying their resources and difficulties in acquiring knowledge. By investigating learning processes, strategies and motivation to study, QPA’s detection of knowledge-acquisition mechanisms and interpretation of results are rooted in the theoretical framework of cognitive psychology. Cognitive psychology underlines that learning is much more efficient when various resources are utilized – at personal (physical, emotional and intellectual resources) and social level (school environment), joined with a valid educational activity by teachers and the contribution of the family. Learning in this way will have a positive impact on the educational path, preventing students’ discomfort and difficulties arising from the new social and learning environment in which they live, and a positive influence on the students’ future life - through better social interaction - as well as on the quality of the professional career they will take up.

In summary, the QPA method aims at:

- Identifying and developing ways to support and motivate IVET¹ students at risk, especially those having a migrant or Roma background, to achieve their learning potential.
- Identifying and transferring learning strategies and methods to help IVET students at risk to maintain their motivation and to complete education and training.

¹ See page 5.

I. QPA: Theoretical Framework

What is important in teaching is not so much the cultural environment, destined to change in time due to cultural and scientific evolution, but the creation of situations which enable students to develop the ability to do research work, to collect information, to be autonomous in learning, that is “to learn to learn”.

Efficient teachers convey learning techniques and strategies through teaching and encourage the development of motivation in their pupils. The knowledge-acquisition process requires the subject’s active participation, which will be adequate only if they learn to learn, starting a path leading to the awareness of their own learning processes to be able to consciously manage them. The acquisition of the key competence “learning to learn” implies the awareness that students can no longer be considered as the passive subjects of teaching; instead, they must be necessarily active, playing a leading role in their own education and training.

A broader vision of learning allows students to become autonomously aware that differing methods and techniques are used worldwide to stimulate learning, that their own way of learning is influenced by the cultural environment and that learning is a psycho-social function at the basis of knowledge, social interrelations and the community of origin itself.

Within the framework of intercultural education, QPA is a tool that not only allows a **diagnosis** of the development of learning processes in native and foreign students, but also reveals their resources and identifies the most effective way to enhance them. In other words, starting from the various approaches to learning that are universally shared, QPA leads students to understand their own learning processes and how they work as well as to autonomously manage them, under the expert guide of the teacher. QPA is a guide to teachers for the organizational planning with the aim to assist students towards a more autonomous management of learning.

QPA defines the four basic dimensions supporting learning processes (intrinsic motivation, metacognition and self-regulated learning, learning strategies and the consolidation of learning) and identifies the scale of superficial learning as an indicator to detect many students’ hidden difficulties in learning. The method was initially developed in four formats (A-B-C-D) to identify, address and enhance the development of learning processes during the whole educational path, from primary school to the completion of university studies.

II. The Intercultural Coexistence Model

The QPA method in an intercultural schooling reality is based on the intercultural coexistence model which supports the scientific approach with the aim of:

- 1.- Addressing the various issues from a global perspective.
- 2.- Implementing training courses with the active participation of the various actors involved.
- 3.- Developing *key competences* through education and learning in order to allow “every citizen to adapt in a flexible way to a world which is rapidly changing and characterized by strong interconnection”.
- 4.- Promoting the autonomy of the actors involved in training, providing them with all necessary instruments for an adequate educational planning.

III. QPA: Implementation Framework

The QPA path aims at tackling dropping-out during the initial phases of vocational education and training (IVET). Since 50% of students in secondary school attend IVET courses, drop-outs within IVET are part of the wider problem of early school leaving. A considerable number of students attending IVET courses do not complete their training programme.

In this background, the intercultural key of QPA is focused on the relation between native and immigrant students, preventing “those who want to integrate from feeling different”, but at the same time respecting each culture’s peculiarities and identifying learning as the meeting point.

III.1 Beneficiaries

Dropping-out is registered mainly during the first and second years of upper secondary school, peaking at 30% in the first years’ classes of vocational technical schools.

Beneficiaries are IVET students in the first two school years.

The project aims at promoting cooperation between students and teachers through an interactive educational path in which teachers and pupils will share their learning experiences and will learn how to manage their reciprocal diversity in an intercultural environment.

Students and teachers will investigate thoroughly knowledge acquisition and transfer techniques from an international perspective in order to develop a broader vision of learning, projecting it towards working in a global dimension.

In the project's perspective, learning is a common goal which unites the various actors involved (native, foreign and Roma students together with teachers and parents), thus providing a tool to meet the need of learning to manage the risk of dropping-out and early school leaving, each actor taking their own responsibility.

III.2 Goals

1. To provide native, immigrant and Roma students with tools enabling them:
 - a. To know how learning processes work and to develop tailored learning techniques and strategies in order to manage the acquisition of knowledge more autonomously based on self-efficacy and self-esteem (key competence “learning to learn”)
 - b. To lead their own personal orientation project with an international and flexible perspective in view of their future work placement (competence “spirit of initiative and entrepreneurial spirit”);
 - c. To interact in an intercultural environment learning to manage their own and the others' diversity (competence “cultural awareness and expression”)
 - d. To make project proposals within the framework of active citizenship as a vehicle of integration in the social and educational environment (“social and civic competence”)
2. To offer school operators (teachers, cultural mediators, managers) the possibility to interact and exchange experiences with foreign and Roma students, by thoroughly investigating learning processes to effectively identify students' cognitive resources/potentials, thus facilitating integration in the new reception community and in an intercultural environment.

By acquiring the QPA method, teachers will play a major role in their students' learning within the theoretical framework of metacognitive education. With the students' active cooperation, teachers will be able to stimulate/guide learning processes under two perspectives:

 - Learning of educational contents in an international environment, and
 - Learning of intercultural attitudes and behaviours following a path of interdisciplinary approaches and a holistic concept of learning.
3. To promote networking in order to be more effective in preventing dropping-out and promoting social integration (schools, youth centres, associations, etc.)

III.3 Method

The QPA method envisages four implementation phases.

Phase 1. Target identification: school network, school courses, classes.

Phase 2. Training of the school staff: teachers, cultural mediators, other personnel.

Phase 3. Implementation of the teaching-educational path in class with the students, including the first administration of QPA.

Phase 4. Evaluation and interpretation of results:

- Second administration of QPA
- Evaluation of results and comparison with the first administration
- Return of results and new planning.

The FORTUNE Consortium team will support schools and the staff concerned during all phases of the implementation, in relation to both contents, including educational material, and methodology, with particular attention to monitoring and evaluation.

Assistance will be provided through:

- A website concerning training and its content (portal)
- A system to exchange opinions on line in real time (chat)
- The exchange of e-mails involving the whole group (mailing list)
- A system of distance learning (e-learning).

Based on an interdisciplinary and inclusive approach for both teaching and learning, the QPA path is implemented in the classes within the curricular subjects agreed upon with the head of the school. In Italy, in relation to secondary education and training, the selected subjects involved the various cultural axes (language, mathematics, science, technology, history and social issues) connected with the activities and teachings of “Citizenship and Constitution”, so as to facilitate an organic coordination among the areas and to develop the key competences for lifelong learning as recommended by the European Union.

III.4 Delivery

Each module can last from 2 to 3 hours based on the class involved.

MODULE 1

Objective:

- To acquire a broader vision of learning as a universal psycho-social function which is at the basis of knowledge and of educational, social and intercultural attitudes.
- To become aware that one’s own way of learning is influenced by the cultural environment and individual differences.
- To know the role of QPA in learning.

Methodology: interdisciplinarity and group work.

Participants: native, foreign and Roma students, school staff and intercultural mediators.

Contents: **Learning in a universal environment**

- 1 .- Universal approaches to learning
- 2 .- National and international educational systems
- 3 .- Intercultural learning and attitudes

4.- The gender characteristics which influence the way in which males and females acquire knowledge

5.- Presentation of QPA

Training: My learning style.

MODULE 2

Objective: To understand the importance of intrinsic motivation and learning strategies following QPA's guidelines.

Methodology: research/action and group work.

Participants: native, foreign and Roma students, school staff and intercultural mediators.

Contents: **Intrinsic motivation and learning strategies**

- Electronic games and the stimulation of one's own attention and concentration
- Intrinsic motivation and constructive thoughts
- Learning strategies and classwork
- Learning and gender characteristics
- Metacognitive didactics and gender teaching

Training: building concrete motivational paths and learning strategies using the QPA (colour boards)

MODULE 3

Objective: To know the role of learning in the acquisition of knowledge and social behaviours.

Methodology: cooperative learning, group work.

Participants: native, foreign and Roma students, school staff and intercultural mediators.

Contents: **Learning and behaviours**

- Self-esteem and superficial learning
- Self-efficacy and consolidation of learning
- Learning and socialization
- Learning in interculture

- The support of self-efficacy and self-esteem in learning

Training: Enhancement of learning and self-esteem and QPA (colour boards)

MODULE 4

Objective: To expand the knowledge of the link between learning and the students' future work.

Methodology: cooperative learning and group work.

Participants: native, foreign and Roma students, school staff and intercultural mediators.

Contents: **Management of learning and work**

- Metacognition and the investigation of learning
- How memory works and the consolidation of learning
- Self-regulated learning, technology and free time
- Self-regulated learning and job qualifications
- Management of learning and life choice.

Training: QPA, management of learning and work (colour boards).

MODULE 5

Objective: Management of learning based on the return of the QPA administration results and individual and group planning work.

Methodology: cooperative learning and group work.

Participants: native, foreign and Roma students, school staff and intercultural mediators.

Contents: **Management and planning of one's own enhancement of learning processes**

- Return of the results of QPA administration
- Development of learning processes and personal resources
- Learning enhancement techniques and QPA
- Planning of educational and behavioural learning.

Training: Individual and group planning of learning enhancement.

MODULE 6

Objective: Parents' active participation in the group work to be carried out at school with students and teachers.

Methodology: Cooperative learning and group work.

Participants: native, foreign and Roma students, parents, school staff and intercultural mediators.

Training: QPA and educational and social learning strategies (colour boards).

MODULE 7

Objective: Monitoring and evaluation of the action in the classroom.

Envisaged activities:

- On-line support to the work done by the Partners and monitoring of the implementation of the educational path in the classroom.
- Meeting with the staff to identify results and manage educational planning.
- Additional QPA administration to assess the work done.
- Processing of final results and new educational planning.

III.5 Expected Outcome

QPA was successfully implemented in many schools of various Italian regions. The relevant educational path contributed to guiding its beneficiaries to effectively acquire educational and behavioural knowledge and the results were more than encouraging.

More specifically, the QPA method ensured the following results in the classes in which it was implemented:

- Development of effective learning strategies which considerably improved students' performance
- Reduction of absences from school, mainly of immigrant and Roma students
- Regular performance of homework and classwork
- A more serene atmosphere in the classroom, also in relation to discipline
- Attention and active participation to lessons.

Classes in which the QPA method was implemented registered a decrease in dropping-out, above all in the first years of upper secondary school, in some cases equal to 80%.