

Final report of evaluation June, 2011

Monitoring in the participating first- and second-year classes (December, 2010)

About halfway through the temporal development of the Project, it was realized a monitoring in order to test the situation of the schools and Vocational Education Training, through differentiated questionnaires, one addressed to the first-year classes, one addressed to the second-year classes. The questionnaire, divided into three sections, intended to register the structural features of the classes, the procedures of teaching and evaluation, as well the condition of the atmosphere and of the internal relationships. The first, relating to the structural situation of the class, highlighted varied situations; most of classes have a number of pupils repeating a year, of foreign pupils and a not high *turnover* of teachers, anyway in the average of the Italian school; but there is also the case of classes (not many) with a high number of pupils repeating a year, with a high presence of students successful with “suspended assessment”, with strong concentration of foreign pupils and high turnover of teachers, therefore classes that are distinguished for a context in which the realization of ValeRIA could find on one hand a more complex situation, tensor and full of difficulties, but, on the other hand, a fruitful field in promoting a reflection on the teaching procedures, on the relationships between teachers and students, for a didactics more effective from the point of view of the learning.

From the second section of the questionnaire, through which the procedures of teaching and evaluation implemented in the classes have been registered, it results that in the large majority of the cases teachers think they implement proper procedures of information and evaluation. To a great extent, teachers of schools and VET who filled in the questionnaires (they should have reported the average opinion of the Class Council) state, for example, that in the classes it is a common and widespread practice to explain at the beginning of the year the assessment procedures, to explain the objectives, the contents and the teaching methods, to talk with colleagues in case of problems in the class, to carry out periodically tests. In all these cases the marks given are over the value 6 (it was used an evaluation scale included between the value 1, which means “ never ” and 7, which means “ always ”). The practice of diversifying the teaching strategies in relation to the objectives and to the situation of the class and to the features of the pupils is lower, but anyway it is in the area of a positive evaluation.

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Completely different it is the evaluation that the teachers who filled in the questionnaire, give about the classroom atmosphere and the students' behavior. Above all the aspects relating to the behaviours that influence the learning receive a moderate evaluation, at the sufficiency limits. In fact, always in the scale from 1 (never) to 7 (always), for some students' behaviours such as the discipline in the classroom, the attention in the classroom, the organization in studying and the involvement at school as well the respect of the agreements and of the deadlines, the evaluation given is a bit over the value 4, that is at the limit of the negative evaluation (it has to be remembered that in this scale the value 4 represents the “neutral” value, between negative evaluation, included between 1 and 3, and positive evaluation, included between 5 and 7). In the VET centres the evaluation on the students' behaviours of the first- year classes is even more negative compared to the one of the secondary schools; but in general it is advisable to underline that- with few exceptions- the overall evaluation gathered in the questionnaires expressed by Schools and VETs is on the whole similar.

In brief, it is important to point out that in the classes- at least according to the representations given by the teachers who filled in the questionnaires- certain aspects not only communicative but also of substance, if we refer to “ good teaching practices” as the clarity of the evaluation criteria, the periodicity of the tests (homework, tests, etc.), the comparison with teachers seem to be a common practice; the picture that is drawn is that of a teaching staff that by and large works well, even in classes that have behaviours often described as difficult and few cooperative.

Final monitoring of the Project- June, 2010

Clarity of the aims of ValeRIA

In the final monitoring Schools and VET centres were asked to reconstruct and assess all the important steps of ValeRIA. Firstly, it was asked to assess in quantity terms the clarity of ValeRIA, perceived by Schools and VET centres, at the beginning of the experimentation.

The average value (measured on a scale: 1=not at all clear, 5= clear at the maximum) resulting from the answers is 3,4 for the Schools, and 3,9 for the VET centres.

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Interviewees were asked to reconstruct (through an “ open answer ”), the aims of the Project, as they were meant and followed through by Schools and VET centres. Many interviewees have correctly indicated the central nucleus of the objective of ValeRIA, that is the improvement of the relationship between teaching and learning through the survey of the factors that apparently affect badly this relationship, in order to, as declared by a school “... improve the educational methodologies and increase the educational success of students. It is interesting to note that many Schools (more than VET centres) detected as main objective of ValeRIA the analysis of the *relationship between teachers and students*, and the consequent effects on the learning processes.

The relational aspect teacher- student (that is the classroom “ environment/atmosphere ”) as decisive factor in the quality of the teaching and consequently of the learning has been therefore interpreted by many Schools as the “ substantial ” objective of the Project, beyond the formal one, and on this topic it has been focused the reflection of teachers in many institutes where it was realized the experience. Some teachers consider ValeRIA as a useful instrument to rouse processes of self-assessment in the schools and in the teachers. A useful instrument to “...lead the teacher to self-assess and bring into discussion his/her own doings, learning to see himself/herself through the eyes of his/her own students and their families”.

The realization of ValeRIA has not met generally significant difficulties inside schools and VET centres. In some cases, teachers showed a critical attitude towards the Project, but it has to be underlined that this occurrence happened only in few schools, while in most cases, the teachers, also the ones not involved in the Project, had a basically favourable attitude.

The instruments

The instruments (that is the questionnaires), transferred to Schools and VET centres in order to be used and tested in the area of the Project, have been, even if with a different degree, evaluated positively, both from the point of view of the *understanding* by the subjects to which they were addressed (students, teachers, parents) and from the point of view of the appreciation for their *usefulness*. Firstly it is important to note that all the instruments have been well understood, and this means that the language and their contents was clear and advisably aimed at single interlocutors. In particular, the questionnaires addressed to teachers and parents receive a very high evaluation (they have reached the value 4 in a scale in which 1 means “ not at all ” and 5 means “ very much ”). If the comprehension of the questionnaires was very high, the appreciation of the questionnaires resulted a little bit lower, even if still generally positive (according to the evaluation given by teachers who answered the monitoring); in fact, in three cases, that is the

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questionnaires “ Student’s self-reflection”, “Parents”, “ Self-reflection on assessment (teachers)”, have been considered useful and appreciable to a degree not completely positive (the average values of the answers about that are generally under the value “3”, that represents the limit between negative evaluation and positive evaluation).

The impact of ValeRIA in the schools

The administration of questionnaires and evaluation of results has sparked some debate within schools, in 30% of cases, even outside classes directly involved. With the exception of a few cases, the vast majority of class teachers have discussed with interest the results of the questionnaires, especially those compiled by the students, who have called attention to, as stated by a school “.. critical issues not perceived as such by the teachers.” In essence, it seems that teachers have considered with willingness and attention the critical remarks emerged by the questionnaires, that have in some cases given ideas in order to develop a dialogue between teachers and pupils.

Another positive effect of the administration of the questionnaires was the perception of students and parents to feel *players in the educational process*. It is, in this case, an “ unexpected ” objective, not expressly expected in the formal aims of ValeRIA, but that gains substantial value on the basis of the perception of its significance testified by many players of the experimentation.

In schools, in addition to the questionnaires, great interest has been aroused by the *focus groups*, firstly because they were considered (especially by those that had never met them) as an interesting new survey methodology; secondly, because also the students recognized that this instrument has allowed them to identify and focus with an in-depth view on issues that concern them directly.

Some schools have underlined that the impact of ValeRIA , beyond its undoubted real interest, has narrowed forcibly only to the classes participating into the Project, and to Mathematics and Italian. But the echo of the Project has crossed over the single classes, and many teachers have shown the interest to extend in the next school year the administration of the questionnaires also to the classes that did not take part into the experimentation.

Final assessment

The final assessment assigned to the project by the interviewed schools is 3,8 points, the one assigned by VET centres is higher, that reaches the value 4,0 in a scale that goes from 1 (negative) to 5 (positive). Among the reasons that supported the positive opinion, it is highlighted the general interest of the project, its usefulness to help “... teachers to understand better the needs of the students and parents and to make corrections in the approach with students and in the teaching”. It is also appreciated the usefulness and appropriateness of instruments, and also their easy

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administration. Above all, it is underlined that through ValeRIA not few teachers have started to reflect with full knowledge of the facts on the effectiveness of their teaching action and have undertaken in this context a useful and meaningful dialogue with the students.

By the schools that instead raised criticism towards ValeRIA (without giving necessarily a negative evaluation, but formulating rather a “ neutral ” opinion, that is the value 3 in the scale mentioned above) it is underlined the little time available to test and assess properly the project, the limitation only to Italian and mathematics, the high number of questionnaires administered to the several interlocutors, the need to discuss better with teachers and students the significance and the goals of the Project before proceeding to the administration and evaluation of the questionnaires. In this sense, a School believes that ValeRIA should develop in optimal way in many school years.

Future opportunities

A contradiction could turn out between the generally positive evaluation of the Project, and the future intentions of the schools concerning its development. The bigger contrast is in the fact that expressly only three schools state they want unconditionally to develop in formal way ValeRIA; other five schools (equal to one fifth of the sample) state they want to continue ValeRIA but only with adequate external supports; the majority of the sample, equal to 60% of schools answer that they do not know if continue developing ValeRIA, but it has to be underlined that nobody says expressly they will not continue. The will expressed by VET centres is more determined, half of VET centres say they would intend to continue the experience “ with adequate external supports ”.

About half of the schools maintain that they want to develop autonomously some of the activities started with ValeRIA, and among these the administration of questionnaires in other classes, in addition to the ones already involved in the experimentation; not few schools state their intention of developing the practice of the Focus Groups.

The external evaluator

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