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Professional Development



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Heads Association

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CONTACT ESHA

Visiting address: Herenstraat 35, Utrecht, The Netherlands

Postal address: Post box 1003, 3500 BA Utrecht, The Netherlands

e-mail: fred.verboon@ESHA.org

THE EDITORIAL TEAM FOR THE MAGAZINE

Marlon Pot, Fred Verboon (editor)

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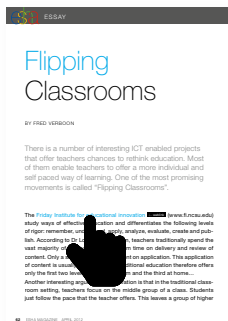
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Some articles in this issue contain direct links to websites. **Simply click on the coloured text and you'll be automatically linked to a specific website or videopresentation.** Try it yourself and enjoy.

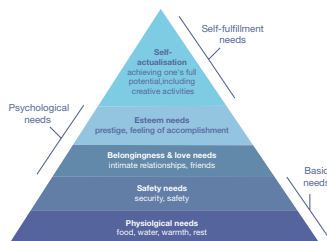


The Student's Portfolio

New Perspectives in Education

BY: MARIA ROSARIA D'ALFONSO, SCHOOL PRINCIPAL OF I.I.S. GALILEO GALILEI TREBISACCE, ITALY

One of the many challenges an educator has to face nowadays, be it the teacher, the parent or the school principal is **coping with drop-outs**. Among the many definitions pertaining to the issue, a drop-out may be defined as an **unmotivated learner**. Abraham Maslow and Falko Rheinberg are two authorities on motivation. On one hand motivation concerns one's needs, from the basic to the self-fulfilment: physiological, safety, love/belonging, esteem, self-actualization (see Maslow's Pyramid).



Pyramid of Maslow

On the other, there are motivational models like Vollmeyer and Rheinberg's, which are especially connected to the learning process. In his work "Motivationsdiagnostik", Rheinberg describes one's behaviour as the result of motivation, where motivation itself focuses on individual needs and situational stimuli. When students drop-out, there could be traces, which are rather consequences of feeling unmotivated, unstimulated, neglected or left out.

Thus, we experience:

- Ditching school or Truancy
- Tardiness
- Laziness in the classroom
- School failure
- Verbal or physical aggression

In today's post-modern context, where technology oftentimes and improperly replaces the teacher, unless it is required by the teacher himself, all this is more than likely.

Then, there are the side effects:

- Disagreements with the teacher
- Disagreements at home
- Disagreements with classmates
- Conflicts in general terms

Albert Bandura points to self-efficacy and self-esteem, both focusing on the learner's autonomy. He defines self-efficacy as follows: "the belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage perspective". Through the Bobo Doll experiment, he proves how important modelling or rather role-modelling may be. The social cognitive theory by Bandura centers on how aggressive models can generate aggressive behaviour, for instance.

For some time, [as a school manager I have considered wellness as a priority at school](#) with new learning environments that are entertaining, relaxing, student-centered and student-modelled. We used Georgi Lozanov's Suggestopedia breathing, relaxing and biofeedback and extended to suggesting colours, sounds, fun things to learn with. In my school in Calabria, for instance, the Inclusion Room for Special Needs includes all this, and we exposed it on Open Day. Our belief is that a welcoming school, open to one's emotions besides nurturing the mind, is essential in order to inspire the learner and allow him to feel at home while at school.

[The Italian school system is only one of the many worldwide that fortunately focus on the student- centered approach and on the learning-teaching process](#), with its reminiscences of the Montessori Method which was centered on the observation of the child. Nevertheless, the curriculum is yet to be defined thoroughly on these terms. The "what's" are most often prioritized and not the "how's". Unfortunately, many teachers still experience the anxiety of completing programs, and principals check even too often on this and not on student-effectiveness. Somehow, school policies are still distant from allowing for Meaningful Learning, Wellness at school and a Life Project, beyond the so-called "formative success", in the lifelong learning and being process.

According to the Italian school system upper secondary education is divided into professional and technical schools on one hand and lyceums on the other. In order to lessen the Educational divide or gap here, new norms have been provided for, such as increasing Job Placement experiences. The latter, however, are still relatively effective and are seldom really "hands-on", especially because they must comply with security norms. The point is that for one reason or another high-school students are often well beyond the feeling of

belonging, so that one could rather say that dropping is about feeling being left out and adrift. Front lessons, that are more teacher-centered than student-centered, have not yet been replaced by more interactive activities, like circle time, problem-solving, case study, task-based learning and problem-based learning or other solutions, such as the Peripathetic Aristotelian model (walking around, observing and talking outdoors, outside of the classroom). That is why perhaps increasing numbers of students are often caught “fooling around in class” with technology or other forms of “distraction”. A principal has to cope daily with “black-lists” and “reports” from the teachers, and even complaints from the shareholders (parents), willing to replace this or that teacher, who may be considered either ineffective, too lean, or simply unwanted. Today, principals have to face dozens of issues by the hour and have to think up solutions asap. One could be the opportunity [of the Formative Offer for the New Three-Year Period 2019-2022](#). It is a precious tool in the hands of the Teaching Staff, following the principal’s Mission and Vision. [It is a way to suggest new perspectives, towards a more realistic student-centered approach and student-centered school policies](#)

What is the Student’s Portfolio?

The Student’s Portfolio is an idea already suggested nationally in 2003 with the Moratti Reform, which, if my memory does not fail me, certainly caused a lot of trouble and strikes at the time. I recall one of my students crying out loud in the hallway against the reform: she was dyslexic and had other problems as well. I suppose nobody really knew what all the turmoil was about; it might just have been another occasion for the new generation to go on strike. In reality, it was a breakthrough with an ill fate at the time.

[The Student Portfolio is a self-made program or agenda, where the student takes up compulsory subjects as well as the optional ones.](#)

This could bring about the opportunity to overcome the professional-technical-lyceal barrier, which goes all the way back to the Gentile Reform of 1923 and still prevails today! The Student's Portfolio is a new learning-model far away from the idea that in school "one size fits all". Experimentation, either maxi or mini, is a possibility. The Brocca reform in the 80's had already made it possible for the students to choose their courses of specialization after the first two years of high school and perhaps it could still be taken into account today.

When I first became a public-school teacher, [I was able to experiment it in Naples \(Istituto Tecnico Commerciale "A. Serra"\) with excellent results](#). The students would choose continuity in the three years to follow, when they would "specialize" in one of three fields: Linguistic-literary, Mathematical-scientific, Business and Management. The Student's Portfolio could begin this way through personal choice in the three year following the first two years of high school. Moreover, the students could be left free to choose their own classes and their own teachers, according to a range of solutions within the "formative offer". This could also be done in terms of flexibility "levels", like it is done in some countries like the USA. "Level" is perhaps too much of a word and it could be turned into "pleasure". This means that the teachers ought to understand with the students really want and who they want to be. It also means that syllabuses can be made more challenging and appetizing by grasping true needs. This way the curriculum could become more student-centered. After all, it is in the hands of the teachers to win the heart of the students.

The student's portfolio could also solve economic and organizational problems for the Ministry of Education, for instance like having one principal, with a series of vice-principals at his side: a Project Manager and Chief Executive, working with a number of vice-principals at his side, and with an extended middle-management. Mainly for budgeting

purposes, Italy has been considering re-dimensioning schools for some time, although it has still not focused on “how” one principal could work more effectively and without all the burdens and the burn-out. Up to the present moment, Italian teachers and others worldwide are still not required by law to present their own portfolio, although it would not be difficult to conceive along the way. A Good School is a school of wellness one that respects the learner’s needs, the learner’s pace, the learner’s Life Project. Counselling is always advisable, especially where doubts may persist. **The Student’s Portfolio could change our schools into better ones if only the learner could be free to choose.** Open classes, better-defined curricula, and more engaged teachers could certainly pave the way towards a better future. A student’s portfolio comes kind of naturally in a system of Centrality and one of Transparency where the principal is required to make his own portfolio by July 30th each year. Perhaps a look at the Formative OFFER 2019-2022 (which is published on-line for the I.I.S. Galileo Galilei Trebisacce. Cosenza, following its approval by the Teachers’ Council on December 19th 2018 and then by the School Board on January 7th 2019) could help one to understand our proposal here. You can find the offer here: <http://www.liceotrebisacce.it/>

What is for sure is that the Italian “passerelle” (i.e. passovers from one school to another) could be solved if only syllabuses and curricula were made more challenging and the learning experience could be focused more on individual needs, attitudes and talents. The school of the future is one where you can “do your own thing”, according to your own style. I can recall the Soul Train from my childhood years. Here, everyone gathered around while you were dancing the way you wanted, in a kind of chain



connected by “Each its own”. It was a lot of fun and we were altogether. Isn’t that what learning and growing up is really all about?

REFERENCES:

Albert Bandura- Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control

Abraham Maslow: Motivation and Personality

Falko Rheinberg: Motivationdiagnostik

Also see:

L’Avventura del Nuovo Dirigente scolastico: Maria Rosaria D’Alfonso

Il Dirigente scolastico e il Case Study: Maria Rosaria D’Alfonso

Dirigere la Scuola Oggi: Tra Piccoli e Grandi Contesti: Maria Rosaria D’Alfonso

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OF THE ESHA MAGAZINE

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A perfect programme?

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Found knowledge you have to share?

Found out something great?

An answer to all our questions?

Do you have an upcoming event you want everyone to know?

Something that shouldn't be missed?

A thing you have to go to?

A date which no one should forget?

Do you want to read something about a certain theme?

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