

## SMILE

Coming to school with a smile

Reducing drop out in school

**Project Number: 2015-1-ES01-KA201-015747**

Report: DESIGN OF EXPERIMENTAL ACTIVITIES

Working with a heterogeneous group.

IES ALBAYZÍN

The decision of participating in the SMILE project with a heterogeneous group of students was based on two ideas. Firstly, the topic of the Project, “School Dropout”, which seemed to invite us to offer this opportunity to students at risk of dropout. Secondly, the project methodology encouraged us to try the creation of new and experimental activities. With these two ideas in mind we decided to create a heterogeneous group, a mixed-age group, with an important proportion of students “at risk” of School Dropout. Alongside this approach we considered that if we wanted to offer the same opportunities to all members of the group we had to organise a program of activities without any cost for the students.

The following considerations try to reflect the most important aspect of this experimental project, working with a heterogeneous group:

### 1) Selection of students involved in the Project:

It is really important in order to avoid or, at least to minimize, misunderstandings with families and other students, to have a clear and fair selection criteria, especially when the implementation of the Smile project try to guarantee that the students participation is free of charge.

Selection Criteria:

- Volunteers who expressed their interest in participating in the Project and who were finally involved in some of the activities designed within the Project such as: Logo Contest, SMILE Context Analysis, Peer Mediation Group and Dropout Survey.
- Students proposed by the school. According to a joint decision made by the Head of Studies, the School Counsellor and the Smile Coordinator. This criterion was addressed to motivate and involve

in the project students (and their families) at risk of dropout because of social, economic or academic reasons. Because of their particular situations, these students were not obliged to host any Italian student.

- Students and families who were interested in hosting a young Italian student for one week and participating in all the activities develop during the mobility carried out in Granada (may 2017). The selection took into account the age, preferences and pet allergies of Italian students.
- 2 Vocational students selected according to their academic records.

## 2) The Smile group:

The group consists of:

- A main group of 13 students who participated in the majority of the Smile Project activities, included the mobility, they travelled to Campobasso (Italy).

The characteristic of the group: Students from 13 to 17 years old. Students with good prospects for the future from the academic point of view: 7

Students who study in special educational programs like PMAR: 1

Students at risk of school failure or grade repetition: 5

Students who live in foster homes: 3

Students who are experiencing any kind of social or economic difficulty: 2

- 2 Vocational students: One of the targets of the Project was involving 2 Vocational students of Image and Sound of our School (over the age of 18) to record the experience of participating in the Smile Project, especially to film a documentary and take pictures during the Italian mobility. The documentary aimed to capture the student's experience at all levels: academic, cultural and emotional.
- A group of 6 students involved in hosting an Italian student and participating in the activities carried out during the mobility in Granada.
- It is relevant to point out that some students left the group after having participated in it because their families considered appropriated not to continue belonging to it. The School tried to mediate with the families explaining the importance of the project for the participants but without success.

3) Report of the Activities I: Activities developed before the students' exchange meeting in Campobasso. (September 2016 – March 2017)

Objectives of these activities:

- Giving students group the opportunity to get to know each other.
- Giving students some information about the problem of drop out, asking them to look for possible solution using creative intelligence, different means of communication and technological devices.
- Disseminating both the existence of SMILE project and the target of the project, prevention of school dropout, among all members of the educational community.
- Developing certain level of knowledge about the topic of the project and organising it (creating presentations) in order to be showed and used during the students' exchange meeting in Campobasso.

Methodology: it was based in the following strategies:

- Establishing a realistic meeting schedule taking into account the group diversity and the normal functioning of the syllabus. We normally used some of the break times and (only if necessary) we met after the school classes.
- Establishing roles and responsibilities among the members of the SMILE group.
- Establishing different methods to collect relevant information related to school dropout: Summary of the debates and Students Reports about School Dropout. Report of Personal Interviews (members of Educational Administration). Survey aimed at teachers and families.
- Using different dissemination techniques: organising the "Logo Contest", involving all members of the educational community of IES Albayzín in a Drop out Survey, involving different teachers and departments designing activities.
- Using different technological tools: Google Drive, Excel, Word and Power Point documents.

4) Report of Activities II: Activities developed during the students' exchange meeting in Campobasso and Granada.

With regard to this point I would like to draw the attention to the detailed report made by our partner Marilena Ascione, the Italian responsible of the project.

We share similar methodological principals, means and instruments during our students' exchange meeting in Granada given the students:

- the possibility to freely express themselves,
- free choice of different communication languages,
- the possibility to work in a collaborative way,
- a different educational framework where it is perceived the importance of teachers collaboration.
- the opportunity to participate in workshops together with students of different nationalities (Italian, French and Spanish) and to share ideas and cultural experiences.
- the possibility to present their arguments and conclusions to a specialized audience.

Activities developed during the Granada exchange programme:

- Summit: Italian, French and Spanish working together comparing and contrasting social and cultural experiences.
- Lecture: Approaching Alhambra: From Oblivion to Overload.
- Presentation: cultural heritage of Molise.
- Round table I: Working and preparing 12 conclusions to be presented in a Round table with members of the Educational Administration: Dropout Video clip introduced by Campobasso students, Drop out Survey.
- Round table II: 12 conclusions presentation.
- Cultural visits.

5) Conclusions working with a heterogeneous group within the Smile framework.

Positive achievements:

- Students perceived the language not just as a school subject they must study but as a valuable communication tool.
- The project methodology made them to feel listened, respected and valued.
- Students perceived the importance of studying in a positive and healthy learning atmosphere and they modified in some way their points of view about the role played by the education in our personal and social development.
- The mobility was highly satisfactory. Students were able to compare and contrast their own ways of life with the standards of life of their Italian partners at all levels (social, economic, cultural

and academic). This experience was also relevant in order to improve the social skills and the maturity of our students.

- The participation in the Smile group of 2 vocational students with the specific target of recording a documentary about the Smile project can be considered a successful idea. Filming the documentary contributed to generate a group spirit. Vocational students were really helpful during the Campobasso mobility because they collaborated with teachers solving everyday problems.
- Students have contributed to spread the impact of the project among their schoolmates participating in every activities organised by the school to disseminate the message of the project.
- The idea of working with this special group and also the possibility to participate in the project free of charge, have in general improved the perception that our families held about our school. We don't want to hide the fact that some families and teachers have considered our decision problematic.
- All the students involved in the project have obtained good academic results last school year or at least they have avoided the possibility of grade repetition.

#### Difficulties:

- The explanation of the selection criteria.
- The organization of the meeting schedule to work with the group.
- The integration of some of our students in the group and with their Italian families. It was a risk we knew when we decided to open the programme to students with different ages and personal profiles. However, these difficulties were completely overcome, (in one case), thanks to the mediation of Italian teachers, and minimized, (in other case), thanks to the mediation of our own students and teachers.
- The involvement of some Spanish family. The lack of planning of a family made us to change the accommodation for one of our Italian guests in Granada.

Smile Project Coordinator  
Luis Rodríguez