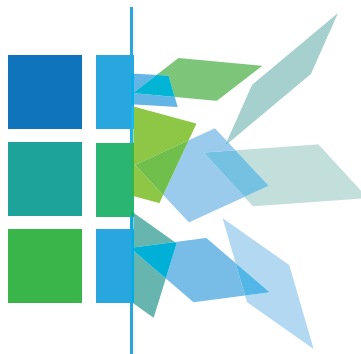


AVANGUARDIE EDUCATIVE



An innovation Movement open to all Italian schools which aims to create a network by identifying and supporting experiences that transcend limitations and inertia at educational, structural and organizational levels. Founded in November 2014 on the joint initiative of INDIRE and 22 founding schools which have tried out the so-called «Ideas», inspired by the Movement's Manifesto and its 7 «horizons».

HEURISTIC DIALOGUE

This is one of the **Ideas** which, from year to year, enrich and expand the **Gallery of Ideas for Innovation**, a place that gathers experiences verified in the field by an ever-growing number of Italian schools.



HEURISTIC DIALOGUE

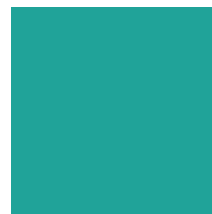


«Our first task as teachers is to recognize that all boys and girls have the fundamental rights of presence and citizenship. And the first way to make room for and substantiate their different ways of attending and experiencing school lies in our listening ability. However, attentive participative listening arises and has life only if we are deeply convinced that boys and girls really do think, create and make connections, in other words, if we consider that all their assumptions, even of the wildest kind, are epistemic tools, a way of understanding the world. We must therefore acknowledge and

convince ourselves that children not only desire to have their say, but at every age are thinking and formulating hypotheses using a logic that might occasionally appear different from ours as adults, but always has within it a consistency and a profound cognitive tension that must be recognized while pursuing all possible ways to valorize it. It is a fact that boys and girls are always thinking and many times they are doing so with a particular depth and clarity, but too often most of them remain unaware of the quality of their thoughts, unless these are gathered and reciprocated by us adults. Consequently, each boy or girl must be recognized as a subject whose gestures and words are welcomed carefully and attentively. This means building an appropriate space to encounter ways of looking at the world and behaving differently and placing reciprocal listening and conversation at the centre of the educational practice. It is within just such a scenario, which we can call the pedagogy of listening, that the heuristic dialogue is born and thrives. The spark of dialogue is kindled when children's intense mental workings contend and connect with the various cultural items introduced by the teacher or come across by chance. When their more-or-less encoded knowledge encounters new experiences and contents introduced by us adults, their surroundings, or their classmates. Only if the teacher does not look on with suspicion and does not become intimidated by the apparent confusion of children's free thinking, can conditions be created to discover something new together "by rubbing and polishing our brains against that of others", as Montaigne suggested doing» (Lorenzoni, 2018).

The «horizons» of the Movement's Manifesto which specifically refer to this Idea are nos. **1** and **4**, namely ***Transforming the transmission school model*** and ***Reorganizing teaching time***.

The text of this leaflet comes from the words of the teachers who participated in research born from a collaboration between «Casa-Laboratorio Cenci» (Centre for educational experimentation at Amelia, Terni) and INDIRE: Doris Antonini, Alfina Bertè, Oreste Brondo, Alessandra Bruzzi, Diana Daino, Alessandra Franchi, Linda Guarino, Franco Lorenzoni, Roberta Passoni and Marco Pollano.



The theoretical benchmark framework

The *heuristic dialogue* came to maturity in the experience of the teacher Franco Lorenzoni and in educational research conducted by the «Casa-Laboratorio Cenci», which he founded in 1980 at Amelia, Terni. This educational technique is related to the principles of Alessandra Ginzburg's *pedagogy of listening* (1981), and to the idea that, from the very earliest age, children express their cognitive tension through *imaginative hypotheses* on the origin and functioning of the world. Schools often work hard to eradicate this epistemic procedure, considering the student as a blank page to be filled with knowledge already formulated by adults. Instead, according to the *pedagogy of listening*, it is possible to reconsider the educational relationship and education itself as a continuous process of research where *knowing* means first and foremost *learning how to present oneself and to ask questions*.

Ginzburg's research developed within the pedagogical coordinates of the *Movimento di Cooperazione Educativa* [Educational Cooperation Movement] and of the *popular pedagogy* of Célestin Freinet (1949); for Freinet a child is a natural experimenter who learns through a direct relationship with his or her physical and social environment.

This relationship arises from concrete needs, interests and wishes and proceeds by trial and error (*tâtonnement*) first mechanically, and then by developing a capacity for *intelligent action* which originates from the traces left by the *successful acts* of this 'groping' search. The teacher's task is to create the conditions for *successful acts* to happen, to be repeated and to interlink with one another by cultivating *experimental tâtonnement*, a way of relating to the environment in which the child is placed in conditions to problematize, formulate hypotheses and test them, while identifying correlations and making generalizations. This process – which allows children to use different forms of thought (inductive, deductive, dialectical, inferential) – is both individual and social, since it is by making comparisons that participants can clarify their reasoning, produce justifications, and welcome different points of view which expand their tools to interpret reality.



Why you should adopt the Idea

Giving dignity to the thinking of each child of whatever age is a way to counteract the school of 'the correct answer', which brings everything into line and pursues superficial mechanical learning. There are those who think that the mental workings of children are not useful or are even hostile to the transmission of knowledge by the teacher, when in reality children's thoughts and words constitute an initial patrimony to start locating learning within a social construction of knowledge process. When others offer us their point of view, when they tell us something unexpected that is 'earth-shaking', it helps us become aware of things that we do not notice on our own. The words of others allow us – sometimes abruptly – to clearly organize our thoughts and intuitions and make them genuinely communicable and usable. Building knowledge in a group by proposing hypotheses, striving to rigorously confirm and deny things by drawing on data and cultural investigations, leads us to understand not only a little more of the world, but also a little more about how others think. The *heuristic dialogue* then becomes a democratic training ground where children of any age can learn to be responsible for what they say and to substantiate their ideas thereby rediscovering and giving meaning to studying together.

In this work, the teacher has the responsibility of building a relationship between the thinking of children of whatever age and social and collective memories, cultivating that internal memory which allows us to perform mental operations and interconnect ideas. A class that is learning a fact is performing a delicate and complex operation: evoking moments from the history of culture and thinking is a way to valorize this operation. In a *heuristic dialogue*

there are discussions within the class, with the chance to 'climb onto the shoulders of the giants' and ask the big questions that may come to us spontaneously or are suggested by classmates, teachers, or personalities from the past.

Let's do it!

Video. *Appunti di Luna. Frammenti scomposti di un percorso educativo* [Notes from the Moon. Scrambled Fragments of an Educational Pathway]. A teaching activity carried out at the «Giove» primary school (Giove, Terni) part of the «Attigliano-Guardea» Comprehensive Institute (Attigliano, Terni).

<https://youtu.be/sV9t7N3F44g>





Example of an 'Implementation Guide' for the Idea

For one year, ten teachers were questioned on the construction of the context in which the *heuristic dialogue* was born and developed, swapping notes starting from the classwork. From this research, led by Franco Lorenzoni and the fruit of a collaboration between INDIRE and the «Casa-Laboratorio Cenci», some families of *guidelines for the teaching practices* emerged:

Sailing close to the wind¹. At the centre of the dialogue is the class's search around cultural objects (*flotation, sky, time*) to be identified from a proposal of the teacher or from a question or discovery of the children. The teacher's task is to ensure that the students' thinking and their relationship with culture remain focused: two tensions that are only apparently opposing and which are at the heart of a patient unwavering recalibration. «Sailing close to the wind» means knowing how to abandon the programme, learning how to improvise «in the stormy seas of mutual relations, which so influences every learning process» while keeping in mind the 'bare bones' of essential knowledge that we wish the children to learn.

Docking manoeuvres. «Docking manoeuvres»² are activities and tools that the teacher prepares to «help children become aware», to enable them to make discoveries, or to «give them a leg up», so that an intuition of theirs can develop and receive confirmation. The teacher has the responsibility of letting the children approach a piece of knowledge by organizing observations, working with the body, through drawing

or the use of other materials, building 'tools of discovery' and introducing them to the thinking of the greats of the past. By means of the many languages of the dialogue, the teacher builds the group's mutual culture and conditions which allow everyone to participate.

Learning to «rub brains». The teacher has the responsibility of creating an environment in which children can relaunch ideas and criticize, confirm or refute them. This building of reciprocal listening cultivates the ability to recognize 'fertile' questions and to linger over them for a long time, tempering the teacher's opinion and returning to the words repeatedly to build the group's memory.

Documenting the listening. This serves to keep track of the research work done by the class. At the core of this work is a recording of the *imaginative hypotheses*, a systematic activity of transcribing the words that the children have exchanged in their dialogues. Transcription is indispensable for the teacher and to offer feedback to the students; to this must be added various productions (texts, posters, objects, etc.) which constitute the material memories of the research carried out by the class.

¹ The work of a group of teachers from Montecastrilli (Terni) who, some years ago, identified eight key competencies for the profession of education (see: *E noi insegnanti, che competenze dovremmo avere?*, In «Sesamo. Didattica interculturale», Giunti Scuola, Firenze, 20th December 2016).

² The expression recalls the pedagogic research work of Nora Giacobini (1916-1998), an educator and founder of the Roman *Movimento di Cooperazione Educativa* group.





Actors/Roles

The Head Teacher. A class that practises *heuristic dialogue* needs long time frames and the possibility of working both inside and outside the classroom. The Director's support can make this way of working easier. In accepting the students' hypotheses and theories, the *heuristic dialogue* is a lever to break the sequential order of the topics followed at school and the separation between disciplines. All of which creates important opportunities for research into the different ways of organizing educational planning and the curriculum for both the Head Teacher and the teachers.

The Teacher. Participates in the *dialogue* by drawing on his/her intellectual experience to fuel development of the students' intuitions and hypotheses. In this sense, the *heuristic dialogue* must also be for the teacher a path of discovery, of cultural research: failing this research approach, scholastic knowledge becomes 'museum-like' and is no longer nourished by the educational relationship.

The Students. The school has the task of letting children of all ages understand the value of their thoughts, that they have a place to express them, and that there is someone who listens to them and pays heed to what they say: this is the way to feed their desire for knowledge.

The Family. The *heuristic dialogue* sees parents comparing expectations fuelled by their own memories of school. When the educational experience their children are having is far from or discordant with these expectations, parents can react with attitudes of resistance. It is very important, therefore, that the family understands the meaning and value of the educational project which underlies the practice of the *heuristic dialogue*, and that a relationship of trust is developed with the teacher which will help them to overcome their anxieties and concerns.

Spaces/Resources/ Infrastructure (tips)

In the classroom or in other spaces of the school. The «docking manoeuvres» which feed the *heuristic dialogue* are mostly experiences that put the student in contact with the object of knowledge. These direct educational transpositions are vital to launch a path of discovery because «if you make a model in some way the model will already explain». To foster the *dialogue* it is necessary to organize observations both inside and outside the classroom, to create tools to make discoveries, and to test imaginative hypotheses by experiencing the intelligence of the materials.

Layout of the environments. In a *heuristic dialogue* it is important to give value to children's discoveries, and to systematize the sense of the research work. Documentation is an indispensable resource to give feedback on the work of a *class that is producing culture*, through transcriptions of the dialogues and by using the classroom space for the students' work.





Bear in mind that...



Heuristic dialogue is a practice that may encounter resistance

given that it has an effect on certain routines, and certain mental habits of «teaching/learning». The first to feel lost may be the students themselves, because they are often used to receiving some content, studying it and then repeating it. This is what makes a 'good student': a lesson that consists in performing a task, writing things down, and doing a test. The fact that some children find it difficult to 'enter' the *heuristic dialogue* hinges on the poor education we have given them, that they have been subjected to, which is also

the education that we ourselves were subjected to. Children ask questions that they already know the answer to, precisely because we often do the same. Undoing this poor education is not easy but, if we work systematically, the children eventually develop a taste for it.

Why change?

In his works, *I bambini pensano grande. Cronaca di una avventura pedagogica* [Children think big. Chronicle of a pedagogical adventure] (2014) and *I bambini ci guardano. Una esperienza educativa controvento. [Children watch us. An educational experience sailing against the wind]* (2019) Franco Lorenzoni documented the quality and depth of thought which students are capable of and how their words can trigger the possibility for the teacher to work on 'contents' from different disciplines, interweaving them with one another and with the students' reasoning. When

we saw that a similar 'quality of thought' emerged in the transcripts of other teachers, we thought it important to give visibility to this work technique. What impressed us was the way that *documenting the listening*, the patient and systematic work of transcription and reflection on conversations held in class, was able to counter what Françoise Dolto labelled the «digestive-bureaucratic school», in which the students' words are only heard in the procedures of repetition and testing; a school that tells the child «swallow these sounds and their signs, and repeat them» (1971).



To join *Avanguardie Educative* a school needs to be in agreement with the inspiring principles of the Movement's Manifesto and fill in the form available at avanguardieeducative.indire.it, entering the data of the institute and indicating one or more **Ideas** which it intends to adopt. The school can also propose an experience, an innovation experience that it has developed and consolidated: this will be analysed by INDIRE in collaboration with the 22 founding schools, to potentially transform it into an **Idea** or to add it to the **Gallery** as a deeper look at some **Ideas** already present in it.

Membership gives right of access to the assistance/coaching platform which, in addition to supporting the school in implementing organizational and teaching practices oriented towards innovation, allows the school to follow and participate

in webinars, workshops, talks, and face-to-face training activities. From the point of view of study and research, the objective which the *Avanguardie Educative* project has set is to support schools as they are changing in terms of education, structure and organization, while investigating possible propagation strategies and systematization of the innovation, with particular attention to enabling factors and any that hinder dissemination.



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Avanguardie Educative is also on the social channels FaceBook™, YouTube™ and Flickr™.



Each Idea is a piece of a mosaic which aims to revolutionize the organization of teaching, and the time and space of 'teaching/learning'; each **Idea** is the product of concrete experiences verified 'in the field'. The **Ideas** present in the **Gallery** should not be regarded as 'independent units', but rather as the tesserae of a mosaic. A single **Idea** alone does not have the strength to 'unhinge' certain mechanisms that 'hamper' schools, which are often lost in red tape and disinclined to carry out experimentation and research; however, it can be a first step to break the inertia and a driver for change and 'contagion' between schools.

To learn more about this Idea, point the camera at the QR Code here at the side.



INDIRE ISTITUTO NAZIONALE DOCUMENTAZIONE INNOVAZIONE RICERCA EDUCATIVA

INDIRE is the Italian Ministry of Education's oldest research organization. Since its foundation in 1925, the Institute has worked closely with the Italian school system, investing in training and innovation while improvement processes in schools. INDIRE is the benchmark for educational research in Italy.

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European Structural Funds Programme 2014-2020 - Multi-fund National Operational Programme «For the school - Skills and learning environments» FSE/FESR-2014IT05M2OP001 - Axis I «Education» - OS/RA 10.1 - Project «Processes of organizational and methodological innovation - Avanguardie Educative», Code 10.2.7.A1-FSEPON-INDIRE-2017-1 (CUP B55G17000000006).

[EN/AE-DEU-12-2018]



cod. 10.2.7.A1-FSEPON-INDIRE-2017-1



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