

Reflective report

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The Local Education Authorities in the southern region of Campania, together with the Italian Ministry of Education and the D.f.E.S., organised a seminar aimed at 20 British and 20 Italian Nursery School teachers.

The objectives of the seminar entitled *Playing, growing and learning together in the early years*' were as follows:

- To promote an exchange of ideas on the two educational systems
- To reflect on different teaching methodologies
- To share best teaching practices

The seminar took a practical approach and was carried out through workshops, research and reflective activities on teaching material and documentations and observation within the classroom. To ensure an active and comprehensive participation to the daily activities each teacher was asked to bring to the seminar his/her own material ranging from project work, childrens' work, photographic documentation, evaluation and observation grids, videos, CDs etc. The observation and analysis of this material triggered group discussions and exchange of ideas on important themes such as children identity and well being, educational and teaching contexts, relationship with families, integration, teaching children with learning disabilities, methods and approaches. Prior to the school visits teachers worked in groups developing observation grids and evaluation criteria. The tour within the schools was supported by interviews and discussions with the team members, the parents, and the other members of the staff. This practical experience was then followed by a reflective discussion on observations that also led to highlighting some cultural differences between the two countries and methodologies applied. Didactic aspects and pedagogical topics were also discussed during group sessions and plenary sessions. These were then evaluated and contextualised in the teachers' own environments.

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The seminar was one of the most enriching experiences in terms of personal and professional development. Through an approach based on the exchange, the sharing, and the comparison of teaching practises each participant had the opportunity to improve as teachers and as people. The communicative interactions based on the use of a different language were opportunities for an intercultural exchange and for a deeper understanding of teachers' choice of methodologies and strategies. Teachers had also the invaluable experience of increasing cultural understanding by a discovery process of comparing differences and similarities between their culture and that of another country.

On the basis that these exchanges produce the value added to our profession, the attendees felt the need for more recurrent and regular encounters. The organising bodies seemed positively pleased about our request and committed themselves to an improvement of the training programme. The themes suggested for future meetings were that of relationship between families and teaching staff and that of differentiation of teaching.

Back in school I reported on the seminar and on what I gained from it. I am now even more convinced that to be a teacher is not a simple and straightforward activity as some people imagine it to be; in fact it constitutes one of the most complex of all professional occupations. To be informed and effective, a teacher needs to have both a wide knowledge base and an extensive range of skills above all analytical and self-assessing. They should also be open to new methods and methodologies, to different ways of doing things and share these with other colleagues. This is the way to develop a comprehensive and global dimension of education and promote cooperation amongst teachers.