

The Balenyà of Children. Basseroles Primary School imagine how the town can be improved!

A town where children and the elderly are comfortable, is a town with a good quality of life, where everyone can live well. Children are the best guarantee of the needs of all citizens. A child friendly village is a town for all, as writes Francesco Tonucci, Italian pedagogue, in his book "The City of Children". On the other hand, allowing children to participate in improving towns and cities enhances their self-esteem, and autonomy.

Children should be asked and listen. One way to do it well is following the process called co-creation, where intuition, observation, generating emotionally significant ideas are reinforced. In the process, children gain empathy for their community, search and select creative solutions in a group, rehearse or prototype their ideas and ultimately reflect on the process of co-creation they have lived. This process is based on the principle of learning by doing, therefore encourages experimentation.

On Friday April 15, in accordance with the Basseroles School faculty, and with the active participation of teachers, we organized two creative workshops, a workshop with students from 3rd and 4th grade and another workshop with students from 5th and 6th grades. Both workshops were structured in five stages (Feel, Imagine, Act, Reflect and Share), from the identification of a challenge to the generation of many ideas to imagine possible solutions, prototyping and communication of proposals for improving their town.

Feel! (First stage)

We encourage students to think in their community, mentally observe the people, and their lives, the physical infrastructure and spaces, social traditions and culture, and asked themselves: What bothers me?, What would I like to see changed? The process was simple, they thought something, they wrote it, they said aloud and put it on the board.



Once we had information, we asked students to come out to the board to order the post-its, gathering the observations that, in their opinion, had more in common. Then we talked about how they could express synthetically what each of those groups contained. So, they did it and identified the following:

Children from 3rd and 4th grades:

- On the street there is no security because the cars go fast and do not respect traffic signs
- The playing space for children is not enough, nor safe
- Many grandparents do not watch when crossing the street
- Dog owners are not responsible for their pets, they do not pick up the poop and carry them unlaced
- There are not enough services in the town
- Many humans mistreat nature, the forest is dirty
- The streets are dirty
- During summer this town it's sweltering hot!

Children from 5th and 6th grades

- We want to ride our scooters but cars do not respect the signals
- There are few artistic and sports activities for us
- There is little care for fauna and flora in this town
- Not everyone is well respected!
- This town doesn't have enough shops and services

Then we ask children to vote for the one situation that they would like to see changed.

In the first round of votes, students in 5th and 6th selected they wanted to work on the problem that cars do not respect the traffic signals; But in a second round everything turn upside down and they decided that they wanted to find solutions for the the lack of leisure (sport & artistic) activities in the village.

In the voting session held in 3rd and 4th grade two challenges emerged: take more care of nature and encourage dog owners to take responsibility for them.

Imagine! (second stage)

We invite student to imagine what could they do to improve the lack of artistic and sporting activities, to take better care for nature and to get dog owners to take responsibility about their pets.

Since the best way to find good ideas is to generate together a lot of them, we had a brainstorm. On a large sheet of paper we began to jot down ideas. We encouraged them to take bold, imaginative ideas, without judging any proposals and building on others' ideas.

Many ideas came out, some to them very good. For example, 5th and 6th grade students wanted to make a youth club, with activities designed for them and by them. "Our headquarters could be in the wasteland on close to the football field, we can start by camping this summer"; "We may organize adventure activities in the Muntanyeta, so to keep an eye on everyone, to take care of the forest"; "We will make a space for dogs, so we can control where they poop"; "We can organise a day without cars and assemble a bike and scooter circuit, during the town summer fest."

Students in 3rd and 4th Grade opted to develop an awareness campaign: "we will make informative posters that serve us as costumes," "we will be the policemen of nature", "we will design special fines", "we will do a play about the problem of dogs in this town, we will act as owners and dogs".

Do! (make a prototype, "first issue" of an idea)

On Monday April 18 we organized groups for each of the activities that had been proposed as a solution. It was fun to work together making a first prototype or visual example of their ideas. Making prototypes helped them to better define what they wanted and to better explain their wishes.



At the end of the day, students in 3rd and 4th graders made the theatrical performance and both groups showed prototypes of how they wanted to see their town changed. Currently, all prototypes are exposed at school.

The following stages

To be meaningful this educational activity, children who have participated in the project should be able to carry out some of their ideas for improving their community and so to believe they can produce significant changes in it.

The most valuable lessons start with a real action for change, so 3rd and 4th grade students will soon go out to identify the places in the village where nature should be better care and students in 5th and 6th grade will present their proposals to the town mayor, with the idea that some activities could be implemented in the town summer festival this year.

The benefits of involving children in educational activities like this are many. From the individual point of view, a direct benefit is that it helps the personal development and improves self-esteem, while boosting critical thinking, creativity, knowledge and, ultimately, the possibility of claiming one's rights in a reasonable manner. It also facilitates communication and exercise skills as the expression of feelings and ideas through dialogue and collaboration with others.

But the list is long when it comes to the collective benefits: promotes good group climate, helps to manage conflicts, fosters empathy toward others and in a more concrete level, can even generate excitement in the school. We must also add that participation facilitates a positive vision of childhood, making it visible by giving them voice and presence in society.

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