

## Civil awareness, legality and liberation from the mafia. Citizen education today through audiovisual language promoted by Libera

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### Introduction

In Italy, in many contexts such as the South and Sicily in particular, the underworld logic is very deeply rooted in popular culture, because belonging to the mafia constitutes a bond and a family heritage that is passed down from generation to generation. The values that this heritage conveys represent the first content with which children are inculturated in the family. This makes it extremely difficult for the educational institution to perform its main educational task, namely that of educating to citizenship and forming democratic personalities, capable of living together in mutual respect and diversity while observing the principles enshrined in the Constitution, the only true common heritage of Italian culture.

In such a delicate educational task, the school is supported by a very extensive associative network, *Libera*, founded in 1995 with the dual objective of fighting mafia phenomena and promoting social justice. The network has become over time a very consolidated reality that supports the socio-educational action of the State from below (<https://www.libera.it/>).

The main instrument through which *Libera* works is memory, in the commitment to keep alive the memory and sacrifice of the innocent victims of the mafia. It is a remembrance that is shared in the common feeling of injustice and grief that, starting with the families of the victims, comes to emotionally involve the whole of civil society. In this emotional involvement, memory seals a collective commitment to civil change.

It is precisely from an experience of injustice originates the celebration of 21 March, the first day of spring, on which *Libera* promotes the “Day of Memory and Commitment in Remembrance of Innocent Victims of the Mafia”. The initiative stems from the grief of a mother who lost her son in the Capaci massacre (Mafia attack in 1992 in which Judge Giovanni Falcone, his companion and his entire escort lost their lives) and never hears his name spoken. For the woman, the pain becomes unbearable if the victim is also denied the right to be remembered by his name. Thus, since 1996, every year, in a different Italian city, a long list of names and surnames is read out, like an interminable civil rosary, to bring them to life again and to affirm closeness to their families, but also to affirm civil commitment to social justice. On 1 March 2017, with a unanimous vote in the Chamber of Deputies, the government approved the legislative proposal recognising 21 March as a national celebration (Law n. 20, 8 March 2017).

Starting in 2017, therefore, all Italian educational institutions - schools, universities, courts, local educational agencies - are called upon to prepare for this celebration by working synergistically so that 21 March is not just the celebration of a day, but the conclusion of an educational journey that has engaged students in the preceding weeks. To this end, every year the Ministry of Education provides guidelines for schools to organise this day autonomously and in cooperation with the region.

## 21 March 2022 in the Giovanni XXIII middle school in Messina

The experience of preparing for the day of 21 March 2022 in the Giovanni XXIII secondary school in Messina, also following the indications provided by the Ministry of Education, followed the theme of 'giving voice': giving voice to the discrimination suffered, to the injustices experienced on one's own skin, giving voice to one's own reasons without submitting to the reasons of the strongest, giving voice to fear and other emotions that one often prefers to keep hidden, giving voice to feeling "victim".

The theme of "giving voice" automatically recalls the theme of "listening": what it means to listen not only with the ears, but also with the eyes, to read and decode non-verbal languages, and with the heart, to identify with the moods of others, to understand the emotions of others.

Listening in turn calls for reflection: what one understands about the other changes one's own thinking; it increases one's knowledge and understanding of situations, one's own and those of others; it makes one make more conscious and more careful choices about oneself and others.

The workshops held in collaboration with other figures outside the school (academics, judges, musicians) therefore involved the students in activities of expression, mutual listening, reflection. But subsequently also in creative activities to communicate what they have learnt.

To this end, audiovisual language has been favoured as the most appropriate educational tool, since it is able to exercise not only intellectual, but also emotional and creative interest and involvement in students (Paderanga, 2014; Mittiga, 2018). Moreover, in ministerial and Libera guidelines, video production is strongly recommended for the possibility of communication and dissemination at national level.

The experience confirmed that already in the selection, organisation of materials and operational choices, the video production by the students, as group work, entails a commitment and collaboration that facilitate the activation of legality-oriented attitudes: respect for rules, awareness of one's own work and that of others, active listening, mutual respect (Ranker & Mills, 2014; Joseph & Brennan, 2013; Ranker, 2008; Badoer *et al.*, 2003; Brown, 1993). Thus, the production of videos, following the activities of self-expression, use of multiple languages, listening to each other and reflection, was the final conscious and responsible activity to be communicated outside the school.

Specifically, the school's choice was to work on various forms of language: the language of 'law', which is the language of our civil coexistence, brought to school by two judges invited for the occasion, and the language of art. Among the artistic languages, the song was favoured, exploring the infinite communicative and liberating potential it possesses - as has been demonstrated at various times in history - and dwelling on the analysis of a powerful Mafia liberation text, extremely topical for young people (F. Moro, Think). The text is worth quoting below:

THINK

There were men who wrote pages  
Notes of a priceless lifetime  
Irreplaceable because they denounced  
The most corrupt systems too often ignored  
Men or angels sent to earth  
To fight a war of feuds and of families  
Scattered like so many balls on an island of blood  
That among so many wonders, among lemons and seashells  
They're slaughtering sons and daughters of a generation  
Forced not to look, forced to speak in a whisper  
To turn off the light, to comment in silence  
Each and every bullet in the air, each and every body in a ditch  
There were men that little by little  
Have left a mark with courage and with commitment  
With devotion against an organized institution  
Our thing ... your thing ... what is yours?  
The freedom to speak ... it's ours  
Because our eyes were made to see  
Our mouth to speak, the ears to listen  
Not only music, not only music  
The head turns and adjusts the aim, it's clever  
At times it condemns, at times it simply forgives  
Think before firing  
Think before speaking and judging, try to think  
Think that you can decide  
Wait a moment, only a moment more  
With your head between your hands  
There were men that died young  
But aware that their ideas will last for centuries  
As important words, unbroken and real as little miracles  
Ideas of equality, ideas of education  
Against every man that exercises oppression  
Against everyone against a weaker one  
Against he who buries his conscience in the cement  
Think before firing  
Think before speaking and judging, try to think  
Think that you can decide  
Wait a moment, only a moment more  
With your head between your hands  
There were men that continued  
Although everything around was burning  
Because, in the end, this life has no meaning  
If you fear a bomb or a pointed gun  
Men pass and a song passes  
But no one will ever be able to stop the belief  
That justice is not only an illusion  
Think before firing  
Think before speaking and judging, try to think  
Think that you can decide  
Wait a moment, only a moment more  
With your head between your hands  
Think

The song was later orchestrated in chorus by a music teacher and recorded on video (Figures 1 and 2).



Figures 1 and 2 – Fragments of the video of the choir on the notes of the song Think

This activity was succeeded by the exercise, in pairs, of expressing and listening to each other's experiences of injustice and discrimination, followed by a written reflection in diary form (Figure 3).



Figure 3 – Exercise of mutual listening

The videos were subsequently published in open on the school's website so that they can be viewed by anyone who wants to access them and can be an inspiration for other schools.

## Results

The change recorded in the students as a result of the course can be traced in their written reflections in the form of a diary, but first and foremost in their souls. We publish an exemplary testimony that needs no further comment (Table 1).

Table 1. *Exemplary testimony by student involved in this experience*

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*I did not choose to be born, I did not choose where to be born and I did not choose my family either. Whether I have been lucky in all this chaos I will only know as I grow up, but even now I realise that it is not all chaos.*

*That not everything is a lucky or unlucky turn of the wheel but that every day I too can choose.*

*I like this freedom, sometimes it makes me anxious and at other times afraid, but the possibility of building my life with my own choices fascinates me.*

*How do I do it? I imitate the great ones, it seems to me the best way not to make mistakes, but sometimes I notice that they contradict themselves between what they say and what they do, and then I look at my companions.*

*Each of them opens up a new path for me to follow, a different way of being in the world.*

*In the neighbourhood where I am growing up, I am fine, but there is no point in hiding the fact that there are many things wrong.*

*For example, there are no spaces to play, no equipped areas where I can spend afternoons with my classmates.*

*And then not everyone respects the rules of civilised living, of being well together. Respect for those rules which, I understand, allow us to live our freedoms while respecting those of others.*

*The observance of laws, which, I learnt at school, we call legality. I have heard this word many times, but I understood its true meaning on one particular day, when two magistrates came to our school to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the death of Judge Falcone, his wife and escort.*

*I found out that he also lived in a neighbourhood similar to mine, where many things do not work and where many of his friends, like mine, make choices that ruin their lives and sometimes those of others. I realised that sometimes the wrong friendships and underestimating the risk of certain choices can ruin many people's lives. I have discovered that the real heroes are not the indestructible ones, but are those who despite problems face life step by step, without easy shortcuts, step by step... The important thing is to think... I can decide! And so I THINK ....*

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