

21<sup>st</sup> century  
European  
Teachers

Study visit Palermo, Italy

6<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> November, 2023

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## Report

### ***Institutio Compressivo Statale Giovanni XXIII- Piazza & Trieste***

On November 6, 2023, we had the privilege of visiting Institutio Compressivo Statale Giovanni XXIII- Piazza & Trieste schools Palermo, Italy. This educational institution comprises two distinct buildings, each with a unique focus. The Trieste school caters to pre-primary, primary, and lower secondary education (cycle 1), while the Piazza school is dedicated to higher secondary education. Additionally, one remarkable feature of the school is the presence of a science museum within one of the buildings, showcasing a collection of tools and devices from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These historical artifacts are not mere relics; they play an active role in student learning, with the laboratory being utilized for projects, group work, and teacher-guided explorations.



*Visit in school museum.*

### Values and Principles:

Institution Giovanni, also known with names Trieste and Piazzoli school, operates on a foundation of core values that permeate its educational approach. The four pillars of their educational philosophy are Legality, Affectivity, Inclusion, and Continuity.

**Legality:** This principle is deeply rooted in addressing the historical context of Sicily, particularly the crimes of the Mafia. Giovanni institute pays tribute to important citizens who lost their lives during the era of Mafia dominance. Annually, the school commemorates these individuals, emphasizing the importance of legal actions. This commemoration serves as a reminder to students about the significance of lawful conduct in society.

**Affectivity:** The school actively promotes the safety of women and works to prevent violence, bullying, and discrimination. The "Demonstration of Hearts" is a student-led initiative that symbolizes their commitment to creating an atmosphere of love and compassion within the school.

**Inclusion:** Giovanni institution schools firmly believe that "school is for everyone." They take into account the diverse backgrounds of their students, including those with disabilities and immigrant students. Teachers aim to establish strong relationships with each student, and special needs teachers provide regular support to both students and their fellow educators. The commitment to inclusion ensures that every student feels valued and accommodated.

**Continuity:** The curriculum at the school is designed to bridge the gap between pre-primary, primary, and secondary education. Teachers work collaboratively with students who will be in their class in the following academic year, and the school takes the transition between classes seriously. This approach ensures a smooth educational journey for students throughout their time at the school.

### International Engagement:

Scola Europa actively participates in various Erasmus+ projects, including the "XXI's Century European Teachers" project, which involves students in ballet and dance activities.

However, during the presentation, there was a noticeable absence of information regarding how teachers would be trained or experience professional development to enhance their competencies. Additionally, the school is involved in the "National Plan of Recovery of Resilience," a project focused on next-generation classrooms. While the project includes the provision of new digital devices for classrooms, there was no mention of in-service training for teachers, raising questions about their readiness to embrace these technological changes effectively.

### ***Space Adventure Game***

During our visit, we had the opportunity to observe an engaging educational activity known as "Space Adventure Game." The goal was to show how playful learning activity can be implemented in small scale and therefore also to give ground for further discussion with teachers. This activity was organized for 21 students and five teachers from the school. The game revolved around students assuming the roles of astronauts while teachers were designated as Intergalactic assistants, guided by the game master. The game was based on

playful learning and structured as project-based learning through gamification. Each phase of the game had a defined timeframe, and the game master introduced extra challenges in the form of spacecraft malfunctions.



*Tomi Tolonen acted as the Master of the game.*

One central theme of the game was to encourage students to contemplate what constitutes a civilization and what is required for human habitation within a community. The underlying idea was that our cities cannot thrive without an understanding of the various roles and functions within them. Each team of approximately five students had a specific task related to their assigned role, such as addressing food and water supply, transportation, housing, or social spaces within a small community.

Initially, the game appeared somewhat chaotic, with students uncertain about their roles and teachers overly focused on time constraints, leading to expressions of urgency. However, as the game progressed, students developed a stronger sense of ownership over their self-designed roles, spaceships (with names such as Black Cat, Space Burger etc.), their teams, and their fictional planets. The imaginative aspect of the planets, including features like rivers of molten cheese in the "Pizzaplanet," added humor to the process of designing habitable areas.

During the interaction, the game master played a central role in guiding the students' activities, while the researchers primarily observed the students' reactions and their group discussions. Students had the opportunity to engage with the researchers, but only a few groups sought clarification by asking questions related to their mission. Consequently, researchers concentrated on interpreting the non-verbal cues exhibited by students and the noteworthy comments made in both English and Italian languages. The emotions expressed by the students were diverse and included for example excitement, joy, laughter and humor, puzzlement, and amazement:

The students were notably excited about the game, and their enthusiasm was reflected in their actions and expressions as they engaged with the challenges presented to them. The

playful nature of the game, combined with the imaginative elements, often led to bursts of laughter and humor among the students, creating a lighthearted and enjoyable atmosphere. Many students exuded a palpable sense of joy throughout the activity, which was evident in their smiles, laughter, and enthusiastic participation.



*Students problem-solving process during the game.*

Some moments during the game left students visibly puzzled as they contemplated solutions to complex challenges, furrowing their brows and engaging in thoughtful problem-solving. However the imaginative aspects of the game, such as fantastical planets with unique characteristics, often elicited expressions of amazement from the students as they explored and adapted to the unconventional scenarios.

The variety of emotions displayed by the students throughout the activity added depth to their engagement and underscored the effectiveness of the playful learning approach in fostering enthusiasm and active participation.

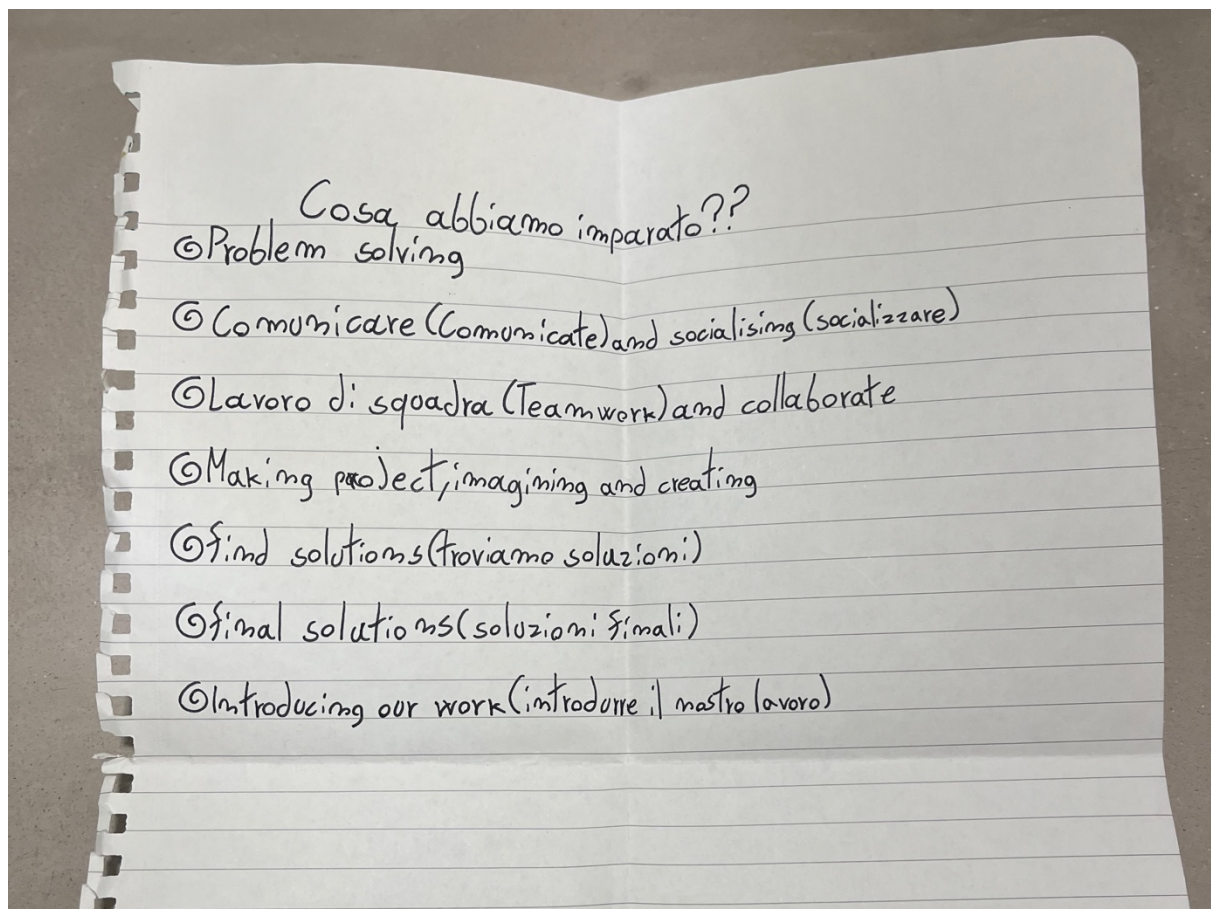
During the mid-game phase, the researchers engaged the teachers in a discussion about playful learning, allowing the students to focus on problem-solving quests. The students displayed a range of emotions, from laughter and joy to expressions of wonder and occasional frustration, which they quickly overcame. Teachers observed that students seemed to enjoy the activity and were more engaged, interactive, and motivated. This level of enthusiasm and motivation was attributed to the immersive and imaginative nature of the game.

### **Discussion with teachers during the visit**

Teachers noted that in playful learning, the focus shifts from content knowledge to the development of communication skills and other broader competencies. They saw the game as an exciting opportunity to introduce real-life situations into the classroom and expressed a desire to use this approach for problem-based learning, thereby allowing students to apply their knowledge to solve complex challenges.

As a whole our visit provided valuable insights into the institution's educational philosophy, values, and innovative teaching methods. The commitment to values such as Legality, Affectivity, Inclusion, and Continuity reflects the school's dedication to nurturing well-rounded and responsible individuals. However, there are areas for improvement, particularly in terms of providing comprehensive teacher training and professional development opportunities to support the integration of new digital technologies.

Provided "Space Adventure Game" activity was a shining example of how playful learning and gamification can engage students and enhance their learning experiences. The game not only stimulated creativity and problem-solving but also fostered a sense of wonder and enthusiasm among the students. Teachers recognized the potential of such activities in the classroom and expressed a desire to incorporate them into their teaching methods.



Notes from one teacher after the Space Adventure Game and reflective discussion.

Overall, the school is a dynamic educational institution with a clear commitment to holistic education and innovative teaching practices. The visit left us inspired by their dedication to creating a stimulating and inclusive learning environment for their students. In the aftermath of the engaging game-based learning experience, both students and teachers shared their reflections, shedding light on the profound lessons they had gleaned from the activity.

The teachers, too, provided valuable insights into the impact of playful learning on their students' development. One teacher emphasized, "It is not about the content but the communication and greater, perhaps transformational, skills." This statement underscored the shift in focus from rote learning to the development of essential communication and higher-order thinking skills. Another teacher acknowledged the pedagogical challenges, stating, "It's hard to manage, to give students the advice... the world will be theirs in the future." This comment acknowledged the complexities of facilitating game-based learning but also highlighted the significance of preparing students for a rapidly changing world. The sentiment was echoed by another teacher who stressed, "We can foresee the future starting from now and support students to be polite, to recycle, and have other skills to preserve their environment." This statement emphasized the role of education in shaping responsible and environmentally conscious citizens.



*We had great opportunity to hear students presentations about sustainable development. Picture from future school model.*

The students, their faces reflecting the excitement of their recent adventure, articulated their newfound insights. One student eloquently expressed, "We met other people not familiar to us, but with a shared objective, we could do the task even with a foreign language (English)." This statement underscored the power of collaborative learning and the ability of shared goals to bridge language and cultural barriers. Another student chimed in, stating, "We learned how to build something... to work with brand new ways." This comment highlighted the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills that had unfolded during the game. The sense of empowerment and achievement was palpable as another student remarked, "Together we could do anything, we could make impossible possible." This sentiment encapsulated the spirit of teamwork and the realization that collective efforts can overcome seemingly insurmountable challenges.

Furthermore, the teachers recognized the importance of scaffolding students' problem-solving skills, acknowledging that this is "what we can actually do today." This sentiment highlighted the practical and actionable aspect of game-based learning in equipping students with the skills they need for the challenges of the present and the uncertainties of the future.

In this narrative, the voices of students and teachers converge, illustrating the profound impact of playful learning on fostering collaboration, problem-solving, communication, and critical thinking skills. The reflections of both groups serve as a testament to the transformative power of innovative educational approaches that transcend traditional content-focused learning.



*Teachers and visitors*