

Scuola Primaria Statale **Michele Amari**

C. F. 80016560825

Distretto 2/40
Via Gian Filippo Ingrassia, 33
90123 Palermo

Tel 091 616 3245 – 6754
Fax 091 616 4853
pae00200g@istruzione.it
www.scuolamari.it

Presentation of the twinning project between the Michele Amari State Primary School in Palermo and the SATIT Demonstration School at Chiang Mai Rajabhat University.

Overview of the twinning project between the Michele Amari State Primary School in Palermo and the SATIT Demonstration School at Chiangmai Rajabhat University

In June 2008, the Italian Academy of Nuad Bo Rarn cultural association proposed to the Director of the M. Amari State Primary School in Palermo, Lucia Sorce, a collaboration for the creation of a twinning project between Sicilian and Thai schools entitled: “Sanook, primary school and intercultural competences in the Land of the Smile (Thailand) and in Sicily”;

On 30 June 2008 the twinning project was approved by the teachers of the school and inserted in the Training Offer Plan (P.O.F.)

The project can be seen on the site web of the school at the address:
<http://www.scuolamari.it/scuola/page/88>;

On 1 September 2008 the protocol of agreement was signed between the Italian Academy of Nuad Bo Rarn and the M. Amari State Primary School;

In October 2008, the Commercial Business Office of the Ministry of Commerce in Rome forwarded the twinning project to the Ministry of Education in Thailand with a request to designate a school that had the following requisites:

- innovative teaching methodologies, especially with reference to artistic-expressive disciplines, to education to citizenship and civil coexistence, and to the teaching of traditional Thai culture;
- teaching of English and computer technologies and connection to the web net;
- willingness to insert, in the school and the classes, a teacher of the twinned Italian school;

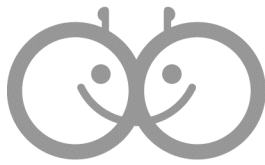
The Thai Ministry of Education designated the SATIT Demonstration School at Chiang Mai Rajabhat University

On 10 November 2008 at the Satit Demonstration School of Chiang Mai there was presented the twinning project promoted by the Italian Academy of Nuad Bo Rarn cultural association and it was made operational by the M. Amari State Primary School in Palermo.

The following were present:
For the SATIT School:



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- Ass. Prof. Saowanee Jairak, Vice-President for Planning and Development, Chiang Mai Rajabhat University;
- Mrs. Supinya, Deputy-Director of the SATIT School;
- Miss. Cheerily, English language teacher at the Satit School;

For the Ministry of Commerce:

- Mrs. Somjai Thanasitsomboon, Deputy-Director of the Ministry of Commerce in Chiang Mai and the secretary;
- Mr. Kuldilok Rujakom, interpreter of the Ministry of Commerce in Bangkok.

For the Italian Academy of Nuad Bo Rarn cultural association:

- Mrs. Anna Terminello, President of the Italian Academy of Nuad Bo Rarn;
- Mr. Pasquale Augello, Director of the Italian Academy of Nuad Bo Rarn.

PROJECT FOR TWINNING WITH DETAILS OF THE PHASES AND TIMES OF ENACTMENT.

TITLE: “Sanook”, Primary School and Intercultural Competences in the Land of the Smile (Thailand) and in Sicily.

PREMISE: The research intends to bring out and analyze the educational models of compulsory education and the teaching of artistic-expressive disciplines in a country of the East, North Thailand, known as ancient SIAM or the “Land of the smile.”

The definition “Land of the smile” arose from the observation that all the inhabitants of that place, independently of the social and cultural class to which they belong, are always happy and smiling. The smile that characterizes them is not, however, the forced smile or emotional impenetrability typical of the Chinese but a true manifestation of cheerfulness and wellbeing, to the extent that, in their industrial law, the right to “Sanook” is enacted (Calvani S. - representative of the United Nations (ODCCP) for Asia and the Pacific at the ACLI conference “Towards associative democracy”, Vallombrosa, 2 September 2001. Talk on “East and West: which equilibrium?”).

Sanook means “fun.” The love that the Thais have for sanook, their joy of living, is deeply rooted and insuppressible and pervades all aspects of daily life. The experiences of life are divided into those that are “sanook” and those that are not or “never sanook.” Going to the cinema, to a party, paying a visit to an old friend, making a trip etc. is sanook. Work too has to possess an element of “sanook”, otherwise it immediately turns into a heavy commitment. The Thais’ passion for “sanook” is not indicative of a frivolous mentality or of a refusal to face up to the least pleasant aspects of life; instead, it reveals a deep sense of joy without which life would just be something colourless and meaningless.

This decisive element of Thai culture is reflected in the organization of school.

In Thailand very great importance is attached to activities outside school: music, dance and theatre. Moreover, every day, at the opening of the school day, all the pupils assemble in the courtyard of the school, pray, sing and do sporting activity. Religion too is intrinsically linked to scholastic life. Personal meditation is considered an effective means for solving the problems of



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the individual. The happiness of the individual and his internal illumination is obtained in the East in a sublimated way in relation to the real conditions of everyday life. The satisfaction of spirits in collective happiness favours the physical health of bodies.

In 1663 Jaques de Borges, a Jesuit missionary, wrote: *“The precepts that the religion of Siam prescribes for a person’s moral behaviour conform to the natural law that God has given to human souls to lead the actions of their bodies. Moreover, the Thais profoundly detest injustice and for them charity towards the poor and **strangers** is a natural action more than a decision of the free will.”*

Respect for the stranger and for the “different” is a *natural action* in Thailand today as it was then.

Homosexuality, illness, poverty and “difference” are faced through socialization and the constitution, in actual fact, of group integration networks. The community thus becomes the normal sphere for the prevention of loneliness and the affirmation of citizenship.

Thai school, a place of formation and aggregation, a group integration network, tacitly educates people to respect cultural difference as the root of development conceived of not only in terms of economic growth, but also as a means to reach a more satisfactory existence from the intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual point of view.

Although in Thai school the concept of intercultural education does not exist, in practice openness, respect and friendliness towards the foreigner make Thailand a country with a strong intercultural “vocation.”

OBJECTIVE:

One research objective is to connect the philosophy of Thai life, represented by the concept of Sanook, with intercultural competence seen as: *“The ability to acquire sensitivity to intercultural differences and to adapt one’s behaviour to the cultural context in which one finds oneself.”* (Milton Bennet)

Indeed, it can be hypothesised that those who are favourably predisposed towards life, those who put a pinch of “Sanook” into everything they do, are favourably predisposed towards the other and the “different.”

Another research objective is to connect the organization of Thai school and, particularly, the centrality of cross-cultural artistic-expressive disciplines, which do not require specific linguistic competence but draw on nonverbal communication modalities, on one side with the philosophy that is at the basis of Sanook, since these activities are in themselves joyful and amusing, and on the other with the intrinsic learning of intercultural competences.

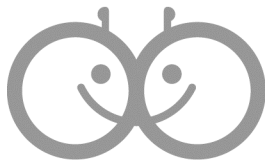
The research also intends to have cognitive and formative aims and is based on the hypothesis that the creation of opportunities for communication and dialogue, allowing interpretative exploration, can:

- a) promote processes of knowledge and in-depth examinations of the educational models and social representations of other cultures and
- b) contribute to rigorous and well founded planning of intercultural educational contexts.

The objectives of the research can hence be summed up as follows:

– Getting to know the educational-scholastic system of Thailand;





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- Getting to know the ideas, representations and beliefs on the educational and formative function of school in countries that are culturally distant from our own, like Thailand;
- Understanding the cultural bases of the concept of Sanook and the way that this influences the modalities of teaching/learning;
- Investigating the relationship existing between the concept of Sanook and intercultural competences;
- Getting to know the modalities of teaching artistic-expressive disciplines in Thailand;
- Investigating the relationship between the teaching of artistic-expressive disciplines and the intrinsic learning of intercultural competences;
- Verifying the effectiveness of the Thai scholastic model, especially with reference to the centrality of artistic-expressive disciplines, in relation to the intrinsic learning of intercultural competences through an annual plan of experimentation with teachers and pupils at primary school.

METHODOLOGY:

The research is characterized by its intercultural framework (east-west).

The method contemplates video recording of a typical day in a Thai primary school and discussion and analysis of the materials with Thai teachers through focus groups.

In this approach video represents a reagent and a stimulus for discussion useful for inducing the participants to render explicit their own ideas, beliefs and representations on the formation of children, on the role of school and on the differences from the European educational system.

The hypothesis is that this method favours the emergence of cultural constants and of specific models of a culture and reflects the ideological value constants and those of educational politics inside the country.

The methodological approach, introduced in the educational field by J. J. Tobin and defined as one of “visual ethnography” (Tobin, et al. 1998), uses video materials to elicit comparisons and interpretative processes on the part of all the subjects, inducing processes of reflection with the aim of producing interpretative enrichment.

After the exploratory phase in Thailand, the research becomes “action” in Sicily.

After collection of the video material on the “typical” school day, the recordings of the focus groups conducted on the teachers and the survey questionnaires on the intercultural competences of the Thai pupils, the videos will be shown in the primary schools chosen for experimentation.

In this case too there will follow a focus group with the teachers for the purpose of rendering explicit ideas, beliefs and representations, emerging after seeing the videos, on the education of children and on the organization of school in Thailand.

There will then be analysis of the strong and weak points of the foreign school system, above all concerning the learning of intercultural competences through the teaching of artistic-expressive disciplines. Reflection will be stimulated on teaching methodologies in the field of intercultural education and on the possibility of experimenting, within people’s own classes the methodologies considered particularly effective in the Thai scholastic model.

PHASES OF THE RESEARCH

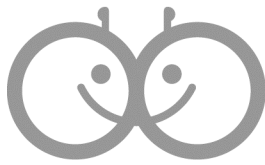
Phase 1

Definition of the research plan

- Definition of the operational research hypotheses;



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- Definition and construction of the survey instruments (definition of the grid for systematic observation; definition of the typical video; definition of the method for management of focus groups on teachers; choice of the questionnaire on intercultural competences to be administered to the pupils)

Place: Sicily

Times: January -April 2009

Phase 2

Opening conference

“Scholastic-professional training in the Far East. Comparative analysis of the systems of education in Italy and in Thailand”, organized by the Amari School in Palermo in collaboration with the Italian Academy of Nuad Bo Rarn.

The following will be invited to talk at the Conference: representatives of the Thai Ministry of Education, of the Thai Embassy and of the SATIT Demonstration School of Chiang Mai alongside representatives of the Italian Ministry of Education, the University and Research, of the Regional Department for Education and experts on the theme of the conference.

Within the same conference, there will be presented the twinning project “Sanuk, primary School and intercultural competences in the Land of the Smile and in Sicily” and the protocol of agreement will be signed between the Amari State Primary School and the SATIT Demonstration School.

For the Conference the patronage of the following is requested:

- Ministry of Education, the University and Research;
- Regional Ministry of Education of Sicily (to which the application for funds has already been sent);
- Ministry of Commerce in Rome – Royal Thai Embassy and the Honorary Consulate of Thailand in Sicily;
-

any other public and private bodies that are willing to support the initiative.

It is planned that in the period immediately preceding or following the conference, and for a brief period (1 or 2 weeks), a teacher from the SATIT school will be inserted in a class at the Amari school to get to know the organisation of Italian school, teaching methods and study disciplines.

During this period the Thai teacher will provide documents, material and information on Thai school and everything necessary to delineate a general picture of the system of education and the organizational-teaching model of the SATIT School.

Moreover, the Thai teacher will be engaged, together with the planning team, in the definition of the prototype of films and the interview card to be submitted to the teachers of the SATIT School, contemplated in phase 3 of the project.

Place: Palermo

Times: May-June 2009

Phase 3



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Exploratory research

The teacher of the Amari School will be inserted for 3 or 4 weeks in a primary school class at the SATIT School.

The research project will move towards the most crucial phase through experimentation that will use, as investigation instruments, the methodologies of qualitative-quantitative research:

- systematic observation;
- video recording during scholastic activities;
- focus group with teachers;
- administration of questionnaire on intercultural competences to pupils

Place: Chiang Mai (Thailand)

Times: July - August 2009

Phase 4 Research-action

The teacher from the Amari School will report to the teachers at the M. Amari School on the experience of insertion in the Thai school and will present the school situation through the data collected with the following:

- video recordings during scholastic activities;
- focus group with teachers;
- administration of questionnaire on intercultural competences to pupils

Moreover, the teacher will plan and experiment with his/her team and in his/her class on the application of the methodologies deemed most effective in the Thai school model with reference to:

- the teaching of artistic-expressive disciplines,
- education to citizenship and civil coexistence,
- the teaching of traditional culture for the development of local identity.

Place: Palermo

Times: September 2009 – April 2010

Phase 5 Documentation on the results of the research

- production of the documentation on the development and on the activities of the research project;
- closing conference on the twinning project entitled: *“The school of excellence: a place of Knowledge and Smiles. The results of a good practice of twinning between schools in Sicily and Thailand.”*
- publication of the results through CD-ROMs and accompanying brochures to be distributed in primary schools at Palermo and Chiang Mai.

Place: Palermo

Times: May – June 2010

THE SCHOOL DIRECTOR
Lucia Carmela Sorce (writing)



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