

At the LIUC, teachers back behind the desks

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Over one hundred Varese teachers, with a variety of backgrounds (technical, professional and commercial colleges, institutes that train business experts, science and classics high schools, professional hotelier colleges), were back behind the desks at the “Carlo Cattaneo-LIUC” University. They represented state and private schools from throughout the province: Varese, Castellanza, Sesto Calende, Luino, Gazzada, Tradate, Saronno, Busto Arsizio and Gallarate. And from outside the Varese Province, there was one teacher from the “Tullio Buzzi” Industrial and Technical Institute, in Prato. It was a sign that the teachers in schools in Varese, and not only, feel the need to put themselves to the test, to reinvent themselves, and above all to refresh their ideas of how to teach and how best to help children to learn. How to combine new methods (for example, using the laboratory) with the traditional approach to teaching. For this purpose, the Union of Industrialists in Varese Province, together with the LIUC University and with the Provincial Schools Office in Varese, organised a workshop this afternoon in the halls of the LIUC, in Castellanza. This event was the first in a series of meetings organised for teachers in Varese Province, dedicated to the topic of laboratory teaching. The objective is to spread the awareness of teaching and learning in the laboratory, which is intended not only as a physical space where students can apply the theories that have been explained in the classroom, but as a complementary tool to traditional teaching, creating mental spaces that encourage students’ learning, making the process easier, and more interesting and personalised.

The objective to be achieved is shared by the teachers that work in the province. This is demonstrated by the large number of teachers that attended the first event this afternoon, and by the numbers that have enrolled for the following events. The limit on enrolments, which was initially planned, eventually had to be ignored. Many requests to take part in the next three events have come from the Union of Industrialists. Indeed, the second meeting, on the general and psychopedagogical aspects of laboratory teaching, is going to be repeated. It is first being held on Monday 1 March, as planned, and then on Friday 5 March. After this, there will be another two meetings, one on Monday 8 March, for maths teachers, and the other on Monday 15 March, for teachers of Italian. All of the events will be held in the lecture halls of the LIUC University, between 2.30 p.m. and 5.30 p.m.

This programme of refresher courses comes at a time of change in the Italian and Varese school systems. According to the director of the Provincial Schools Office, Claudio Merletti, the high school reform has been implemented throughout the province, giving rise “to the most significant change in high school education in

Varese". With reorganisation that focuses on what is essential, "we've cut courses, where there were duplicate courses in nearby schools. We've reorganised the education that is on offer, giving each school its own identity. There are no longer "general" schools that offer everything, but institutes specialised in educating for certain roles. This gives every school the ability to become the point of reference for specific aspirations." It is in this context that there has also been the need for "teachers to grow, together with the students, in order to act on wastage, which occurs particularly in the subjects of Italian and maths."

It is this need that the refresher course program organised by the Union of Industrialists, the LIUC University and the Provincial Schools Office seeks to satisfy. Michele Puglisi, the director of CARED, the University Centre for Educational-Teaching Research and Training of the LIUC University explained, "This is not the first time that these three organisations have got together to create training events for teachers. Our intention today is to make an opportunity out of the crisis currently affecting school systems. We are trying to do our bit, with a course that has a variable structure, that will cover a variety of spheres and that will focus on two fundamental aspects: language use and methods."

Rethink teaching in the classroom, focus on students' learning, instead of the curriculum; this is the basic message launched today from the lecture halls in Castellanza.

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