

A BRIEF FEEDBACK ABOUT MY VISIT

From N.Venu, Centre For Learning, Bangalore, India

I visited Padua from the 7th of October 2006 to the 23rd of October. The visit was intended to facilitate interaction with teachers and students in some of the public schools in and around Padua. The visit was structured as part of a study-project that many of the schools initiated with senior classes. The theme of the study focused on children's rights and other related issues.

On the whole, the visit was very rewarding and enjoyable both from a personal perspective and from the point of view of inter-cultural exchange and learning. I found the staff at the schools, at least the people I interacted with, very motivated and concerned to contribute to effective learning and relationships at the schools. I enjoyed excellent hospitality in all the schools I visited and also at a personal level as a guest.

It was clear that the public school system in Padua (perhaps in most parts of Italy) is well endowed with infrastructure and other facilities comparable to any developed nation. And the gap between the facilities available in the schools I visited and third world settings is, not surprisingly, very wide.

The students were, by and large, responsive and curious about India. They were keen to ask questions and understand many aspects of Indian society. There was a keen understanding of global economic and cultural changes and the awareness that many of these changes will affect their lives in unpredictable ways.

Some of my interactions and observations raised questions and concerns that led to interesting discussions with many of the teachers in the schools. Some of the issues that come to mind are:

1. It appears that availability of resources, while necessary, is not sufficient to ensure a highly effective learning environment. It seemed to me that many socio-cultural factors may contribute to poor learning in these schools, in spite of large social infrastructure.
2. Highly individualistic assumptions about learning, and personal relationships can make the learning environment less effective. Do the teachers feel able to challenge students and their families with regard to lifestyles, motivation for learning and family environment? Is there an adequate level of dialogue between students, families and educators that would make the process smoother from a societal point of view?