

# Taking Anti-Corruption Heroes into Schools (Italy)

## Summary

TI-Italy's ethics education programme focuses around school and university seminars. Through using speakers who are local 'everyday heroes' the organisation captivates students' interest by providing situations they can relate to. TI-Italy is supported by parents' associations and its programme is accredited by the Ministry of Education.

The programme aims to stimulate students' reflection on personal responsibility and independent thinking, and to strengthen their ability for moral judgement and decision-making. TI-Italy has carried out these seminars since 1997 in various Italian provinces (covering approximately one third of the country). Costs are covered by donations of local government and the private sector.<sup>1</sup>

## Background

Following the revelations of the Mani Pulite (clean hands) scandal in 1992, Italy dived into a profound political and moral crisis. Investigations implicated high level politicians as well as industry leaders, leading to the dissolution of the Christian Democratic Party, suicides of top leaders and violent disputes on the political involvement of the judiciary. The Mani Pulite had wide citizen support and swept away a generation of politicians, managers and public officials. Many citizens asked why the judiciary had waited so long to undertake this investigation, and why there had not been civic action against it.

During this time, TI-Italy was granted permission by the Mayor of Milan to access the records of the municipal general accounting department, in order to carry out a research project entitled *The Cost of Corruption*. The project compared the cost of public works and procurement in the Milan municipality before and after Mani Pulite. The study investigated the causes of corruption and found citizens' toleration of corruption as a way of doing things to be a decisive factor. Many Italians still perceive corruption as something removed from their own lives, touching only the public sector, politicians and enterprises.

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1 The programme is funded by the Lombardy Region and Province of Milan, and private sector companies Comint, Shell spa, Cariplo Foundation, BNL and Nuovo Pignone.

## The project

Based on these findings and the initiative of experienced TI-Italy pedagogues, the Board of Directors of TI-Italy chose ethics education to be a priority for the organisation, and an ambitious programme was launched in 1997. TI-Italy's members believed education was crucial to raise public awareness of corrupt practices and to strengthen citizens' trust and confidence in public affairs.

The ethics education programme has three components: A series of seminars carried out at secondary schools and universities, school theatre and a project on ethics and sports. This text focuses on the first component only.

### School and university seminars

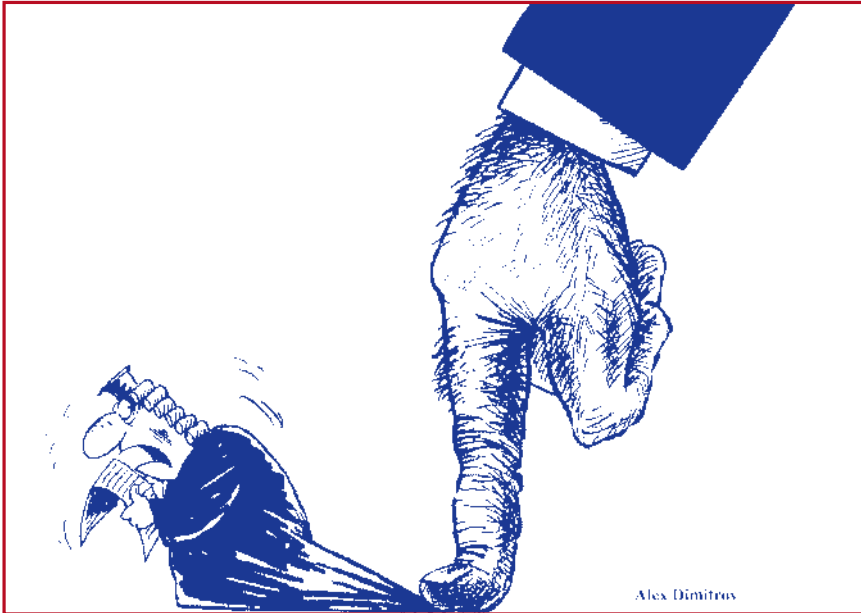
Since 1997, TI-Italy has held 50 seminars in secondary schools and 15 in universities. Seminars are held once or twice a month, taking into consideration the school calendar. To reduce travel costs, two seminars can be held on consecutive days if venues are close enough.

A seminar usually lasts a half day for secondary school students and a full day for university-level participants, and it is limited to 150 participants.

Each seminar begins with presentations from speakers. There are usually six speakers from a cross-section of society, mostly local personalities: Judges, representatives of public institutions, journalists, entrepreneurs, athletes and TI-Italy members. The speakers are 'everyday heroes', i.e. people that have struggled in their regular lives to adopt and uphold an ethical code. They are chosen on the basis of their professionalism, integrity and ethical values. For example, one of the speakers was a businesswoman who successfully runs a factory without using corrupt practices, which has belonged to her family for 400 years. Journalists are often in demand, as they inform students how to read between the lines in the newspapers. All speakers participate free of charge.

The format of speakers' presentations vary but they generally cover a number of suggested topics and new themes within the subject of ethics. Speakers are encouraged to address real corruption cases and local stories that students are familiar with. Their presentations are backed up by facts and figures, and supported with visual or audio material, if available.

After the presentation, a debate takes place between speakers, students and teachers. This climax of the seminar is usually followed by enthusiastic responses from the participants. Often representatives who are present from other schools request TI-Italy to stage a seminar at their institution.



Poster TI-Moldova

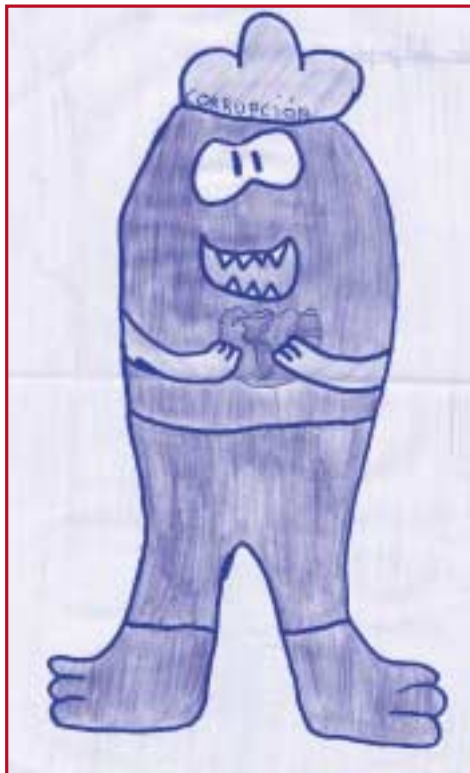
### **Working as an accredited training organisation**

The seminar project has been accredited by the Ministry of Education, which is a rare and prestigious acknowledgement of a civil society initiative. The seminars serve as an adjunct to regular instruction, so they take place during school hours and students get credit for their participation. TI-Italy, as the responsible training organisation, sends the lists of seminar participants to the Regional School Directorate and to the Ministry at the end of the school year, to ensure that academic recognition is given to all participants.

Participation in the seminars is restricted to teachers and students who are interested in the subject and who will serve as ambassadors, promoting subsequent student-run seminars in their own schools. Suitable students are identified through preliminary debates and their schoolwork on the topic of ethics.

### **The planning process**

TI-Italy starts planning for the forthcoming school year in July. A list of potential discussion topics is sent to each participating school in September, when extra-curricular activities for the coming year are planned. Teachers are then asked to choose the most relevant topics.



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and student. The certificate provides professional credit for teachers and academic credit for students.

## Results and recommendations

Since 1997 a total of 5,000 students and 300 teachers have participated from 50 provinces. Anecdotal evidence suggests that both their awareness of the costs and damage incurred by corruption has grown, along with an increased motivation to play an active role in civil society.

A key factor of the success of the programme has been the involvement of TI-Italy's members and volunteers, who play important roles in organising and facilitating the seminar events. In addition, it has proved extremely important to maintain good working relations with participating teachers and school headmasters.

Venues, usually a school auditorium or a public hall, are booked a month in advance.

Schools and speakers are sent a letter of introduction, background documents and an invitation indicating the date, themes and location. Once speakers have confirmed, a final invitation is sent to schools, who confirm their participation by returning a list of participants. A folder with TI-Italy's publications is given to each student in order to support their debate and coursework.

At the beginning of each seminar, students and teachers sign the attendance list. These lists are sent to the Ministry of Education each year, together with the student coursework, following the requirements of the regulations for accredited learning institutions.

At the end of the seminar a certificate is given to each teacher

Many of the presentations and stories from the seminars have been documented in TI-Italy's publication *Manual of Ethics for the Third Millennium*.<sup>2</sup> The book deals with ethics in different fields such as education, sport, public service, and politics, and is used as a teaching tool in Ethics classes in secondary schools.

The seminars have received good coverage in the press, with articles published in newspapers, magazines and parents associations' publications.

Another rewarding result is that seminars progressively involve different groups of society, such as parents, parents' associations, universities, sport clubs, rotary clubs and the Lyons Club. Parents' associations in particular have an important role in promoting the school seminar programme.

**Project description: TI-Italy**

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<sup>2</sup> Angela Leuci (2003): *Manuale di etica del III Millennio*. Available in Italian only.