KNOWING – PROCESS OR PRODUCT?
The role of the teacher-mediator in the construction of meaning

Teaching at school is not only transmitting content but also preparing students to cope with the changing world in which they will be living. Whatever that changing world will be, it shall need people who can communicate on common grounds, negotiate meanings, arrive at shared understandings - even if they disagree. To learn this at school is a challenging task which demands of students the ability, and the willingness, to get into someone else’s thinking - be it that of Einstein, Renoir or Proust - in order to understand what is at stake. It further needs to acquire the language and the knowledge to grasp unknown ideas, then to use them in their own thinking, to guide activities and form judgements of what is relevant. How can schools prepare students to acquire the habit of such reflective learning in the various disciplines so that they can construct meaning based on deep understanding and values? This way of knowing, in Jerome Bruner’s words, *is a process not a product*. Such a process does not develop inside a person’s head alone, but its quality depends on what we think with, with whom we think and on the symbol systems that support our thinking. In this perspective, then, it is the teacher-mediator’s responsibility to enhance it. The presentation will give examples of such a procedure.

Learning seen as a co-construction of meaning needs to reconceptualize the teaching-learning process and the role of the teacher. The paper proposes five principles underlying such an approach of pedagogy, with special emphasis on the role of the teacher as a mediator between learners and knowledge. In terms of day-to-day school work, the presentation will give further examples of what teachers could do to give to students both the thinking and linguistic tools to enable them to get into the heart of meaning.