

VareseNews

“My desk began to shake and I ran out”

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“The children came down from the upper floors and told us that there was an earthquake. We were afraid, but we followed the emergency procedures. We rang the bell, then we went down into the schoolyard.” The caretakers of the Manzoni High School did their duty. The children went out in twos and threes, and gathered at the collection points. Some went out into the schoolyard and stayed there from 9 to 10.30 a.m., while other students talked with the headmaster, Giovanni Ballarini, because they did not want to go back in. It is not easy to be a headmaster when the children are scared, and the frightened teachers are asking, “What shall I tell the children in the first year? I don’t know how to convince them; they’re all scared.”

It certainly tests your nerves when you have to spend a morning in a school, where there are cracks in the walls after an earthquake. “But the cracks were already there; they’re really not that important, don’t blow it up out of all proportion,” said the headmaster, who, at 10 a.m., decided to make an inspection, together with some of the teachers. He inspected all of the halls and classrooms, and went down the stairs. He telephoned the town council, the province, and the civil defence. They all assured him that there was no emergency that required evacuation.

“The tremor is just the end of an earthquake that has struck the whole of north Italy,” he said. “No one has predicted another one.” The children looked at their cellphones and said that they had received messages about an imminent tremor. Technology had become the amplifier of uncontrolled fear. Some said that they had read about it on VareseNews, but the claim was unfounded.

Stefania Montonati is an adult student in experimental year 3A. She said that she felt the desk shake, and she ran out. She did not want to go back into the classroom. “I’m an adult and I’m going,” she shouted with determination at our television cameras.

A few parents arrived and signed an absence note before taking their children away. A little while ago, the children in this school went on strike because of the buildings, which they claimed were not very safe. Some students were scared, because flakes of plaster had fallen in the school’s classrooms in Via Brunico. Someone picked up a guitar (the school has a music department) and the children start singing Lucio Battisti songs.

In the meantime, the other schools in Varese had already gone back into the classrooms; here too, the alarm was over. In the nearby commercial school, the ITC Daverio, there were still 50 children in the schoolyard, who did not want to go back in. Mr Piccinelli called, among others, the Sub-Alpine Geophysics Centre, and got reassurances. The headmistress shouted at the children that they were just being insubordinate. They appeared to be more scared of a classroom exercise, than of the earthquake.

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