

IAF SPACE EDUCATION AND OUTREACH SYMPOSIUM (E1)
Ignition - Primary Space Education (1)

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”MISSION X – TRAIN LIKE AN ASTRONAUT” IN ITALY: AN EDUCATIONAL BEST PRACTICE

Abstract

The Italian Space Agency (ASI) is deeply involved in developing educational activities oriented towards schools and students, aimed at improving the knowledge of space topics and encouraging the study of scientific subjects and space technologies. ASI commitment in this field is to conceive and participate to programs that represent didactic tools worthwhile to explain the important results of space exploration in an easy and appealing as much as scientifically correct way. This commitment is particularly noteworthy when addressed to primary schools students, audience nuts on everything is discovery, mystery and conquest and very fascinated and curious about space enigmas and about the figure of astronauts, the new pioneers, the nowadays heroes; the positive example that their lifestyles and careers represent for pupils seems to be more than ever decisive in Italy, considering the worrying results of the last OCSE Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) Report about Italian students bad school performances and low scientific knowledge. The number of students that choose scientific faculties at University are, consequently, decreasing. Moreover, Italian lifestyles are becoming dangerously unhealthy, with a worrying increasing of obesity and metabolic disorders, such as type 2 diabetes, also in children. For those reasons ASI coordinates and promotes in Italy ”Mission X: Train like an Astronaut”, an international educational challenge focusing on fitness and nutrition, where teams of 8-12 years old students learn principles of healthy eating and exercise, based on the same types of skills that astronauts learn in their training and use in spaceflight. The paper presents the implementation of Mission X in Italy, illustrating the virtuous objectives of the program, the importance of astronauts as role models for young students, detailing the special meetings organized with experts of astronauts’ training and nutrition, indicating schools and students increasing participation, lesson learned from past seasons and future plans of expansion. The project represents an educational best practice, aimed at developing key skills, engaging students in STEM and fostering healthy lifestyles together with passion for space. Teams of students participate in final national and international events with the in-person or remote attendance of astronauts (in-flight calls to ISS or video connections with astronaut training centres all over the world). It also foresees a two days teachers training, with didactic material distributed to schools.