

Chapter 42

Let's Make a Try!

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ABSTRACT

An educational/sporting experience known as “Let's Make a Try!” is presented. The aim of the project was to introduce the sport of Rugby into the contexts of education and schooling, with specific attention to the learning and social aspects. From the context of extramural educational projects – related to the important experience “Progetto Provinciale Extrascuola” (1) in the Province of Bergamo – and a reading of the needs of children from 6 to 13 years old, particularly of those who took part in those projects that aimed at promoting the learning process, the attempt was made to create innovative situations for learning through the proposal of a little known and little practiced sport: Rugby. The experience gave interesting results in relation to the initial problem areas of these minors such as difficulty in respecting rules, the control of aggressiveness, low self esteem, and frustration in competitive situations. Contrary to the opinion commonly held by volunteers and educational professionals, these weaknesses were shown not to be structural, but open to improvement if put to the test in innovative and purposeful ways. The project has brought to life a new way for these children to approach relationships through the discovery of controlled physical contact, the sense of belonging to a group (team), and the taking of personal initiative.

INTRODUCTION

Overview

The Provincial Extrascuola Project conducted by the Province of Bergamo links the activity of 14 territorial groups (subdivided locally for the organization of services to the individual) in the

area of social and educational policy, through the provision of conferences, training, publications and joint networked initiatives. Specifically, the catchment area of Grumello del Monte has about 4000 young residents in the age range of primary (6 to 10 years old) and lower secondary (11 to 13 years old) school, out of a total population of about 48000 residents. The population is

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relatively young, due to a significant influx over the last twenty years of people moving in search of work in the factories and businesses in the territory, resulting in rapid social changes which are not easy to manage. Currently the proportion of residents of foreign origin is 16.5%, but for the scholastic age range the figure is 24.5%. These values are above the provincial and national levels. Furthermore the calculation based on nationality does not take into account those immigrants who have acquired Italian nationality, and yet these people are part of the migratory phenomenon. Many children of immigrant families have in recent years shown weaknesses both in school (problems of literacy, socialization and adaptation to the schooling environment) and out of school (different use of free time, lower purchasing power, different family models for aggregation and use of territory, cultural and religious isolation from some of the principal community and educational points of reference like parish youth clubs and sports centres). The considerable effort by the civilian authorities in following policies of integration and inclusion has seen schools in the front line, being the first to have had to face the migratory phenomenon and the problems of foreign pupils and their families. In a subsequent phase various initiatives have been taken to meet the emergency and special needs, often harnessing the spontaneous energies of the civilian population in various ways for each town: many language courses for foreign women, homework groups, many initiatives of voluntary service and good neighbourliness, not connected with institutional initiatives but no less important from the point of view of opportunities provided.

The awareness of this informal movement, and of the unevenness of its distribution, suggested to the managers of the Bergamo's Province Social Policy Sector the development and planning of projects in this area. It was important to recognize the entity of the phenomenon (more than 200 active projects in the 240 towns in the province) and to develop tools for support and networking that

the single projects lack the resources or vision to create. A particular awareness arose among the leaders of these spontaneous projects, who have progressed from a "fix it or compensate for it" approach to the problems to centering their attention on "the community that takes care of its children's learning"

The Extrascuola movement is now perceived not as the sum of isolated experiences but as the expression of an intent to optimize, creatively, their capacity to care by sharing individual and group resources to achieve much more than just helping with homework and resolving learning problems. From this point of view the workshop experiences have been particularly interesting: by going beyond the limitation of "catching up on schoolwork" to making the widest range of activities – creative, manual, expressive – and games available to the groups of children and youths who were thus challenged to learn in a different way, often positively acting out the role of adults and employing those abilities which are less valued in the field.

The experience of the project "Let's Make a Try!" has thus been followed, monitored and verified at the provincial level of the Extrascuola Project, with the help of an adult-educator and the involvement of all the practitioners in the territory, thus becoming a shared experience. The district of Grumello del Monte covers 8 towns, and in 2009 undertook an interesting experiment combining two Extrascholastic initiatives: the Rugby workshop as part of the Chiuduno In.Gio.Co project and the joint celebration of all the territorial Extrascholastic Projects in "éStrafesta!" (Figure 1). The shared activity of all the participants in extrascholastic education (the "festa": festival) was thus the opportunity for giving visibility to the Rugby workshop, when in the joint celebration the children ("at risk") of InGioCo challenged the young athletes of Rugby Bergamo, sharing the "third half" (this is a typical ritual after a rugby match, when the two teams meet for a festive moment to get to know each other: an experience that

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