

Gancio Originale and its products: 1. Workshops, 2. Stanze di Dante, 3. Free Student Box (EN)

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Brief description of the project

Reggio Emilia is rapidly transforming: The transformation from a rural to a proto-industrial, industrial and finally tertiary society, which in England and France required 7 to 8 generations, only took 2 generations in Reggio Emilia (between 1945 and 2000). The situation has become even more challenging due to the recent migratory flow that has had a massive impact on the local area.

Risks of anomy and mental suffering in a similar situation are high; over the last few years, focus has been on 3 equally problematic areas in the age of development: 1. hardships, 2. the reception and integration of second-generation migrants and lastly, 3. the intergenerational relationships facing increasing crisis today with respect to a new emerging infancy and adolescence very unlike those of parents and teachers.

Therefore, the critical problem areas - which started as early as in the 90's - have been: 1. hardships, 2. welcoming newly arrived children, boys, girls and youth to school, 3. counselling for adolescents, their families and the school.

For each of these 3 problem areas, **Gancio Originale (a volunteer activity involving youth from the Clinical and Community Psychology service-Youth Advisory Clinic)** has prepared a set of **local community services** that can be integrated with the traditional services offered by the Local Health Board; at the same time they enrich the more traditional services offered specifically by the Department for Mental Health, the Clinical Psychology Service and the Youth Advisory Clinic at all 3 levels. More specifically:

1. for the hardships in the latency and pre-adolescent period, **workshops have been set up in the schools providing compulsory education:** they involve groups for afternoon activities addressed to children and boys and girls at risk (the more serious cases or those with specific problems continue to be followed by traditional services);

2. For the newly arrived migrants in the age of development, the **Stanze di Dante** have been created in Reggio Emilia. These places welcome those looking to learn Italian, who are taking the first steps to settle in and are at all levels of schooling;

3. A psychological counselling service, the **Free Student Box**, is also available at the Youth Advisory Clinic (which has been operating in Reggio Emilia for 10 years) to adolescents, their families and teachers from secondary schools.

These 3 activities were prepared upon request by and in agreement with the school.

Purposes and goals

Let's take a closer look at the purposes and goals of each of these 3 products offered by Gancio Originale:

1. In the case of the **workshops**, every year each school and the reference teachers collect reports of less serious cases from the Local Health Board services, from social services and from the school itself. These individuals are integrated in afternoon groups – precisely the workshops – that operate in the school and are guided by young volunteers from secondary schools, who in turn are guided by young scholarship-holding psychologists supervised by Gancio Originale staff.
2. The same structure that focuses on guided learning is applied to the **Stanze di Dante**, which concentrate on learning Italian. They are also located in schools and in addition to involving young, autochthonous volunteers, they also include young immigrant volunteers who already have a good command of the Italian language.
3. In the case of the **Free Student Box**, the guided learning service, which includes both reference professors and young, peer counsellors, has the goal of performing *social marketing* in all classes and among adults (parents and teachers) so the young counsellor psychologists working at the school are sent all those individuals who feel the need to turn to an organization (that is close by and always free) for personal or relationship-related reasons.

Methods - actions

The local community services are based on a combined series of measures that are implemented in every school, and are guided and supervised by Gancio Originale staff. In brief:

- a. It all begins with an agreement with an individual school based on the principle "who needs who", an agreement implemented by memorandums of understanding that are re-negotiated and signed again with each individual school year after year;
- b. Annual work involves identifying volunteers and peers in secondary schools;
- c. The physical places in which the work is done are set up after being located by headmasters and reference professors;
- d. Volunteers are matched with young psychologists who work in the individual schools;
- e. Volunteers are trained and the young psychologists are also trained and tutored;
- f. Staff is tutored on aspects concerning the system's framework;
- g. Finally, a network is put together including health and welfare services, a network that must be continuously maintained to provide a back-office for those working on the *front lines*.

The 5 basic principles essentially permeating the system are:

1. **inductive logic**, which allows us to have a "weak" but perfectible model;
2. **Guided learning and tutoring**, based on which every tie in the 3 networks (workshops, Stanze di Dante and Free Student Box) always relates to another tie close to the first, to call on in case of need and with whom to plan things;
3. **a tie with the back office** of public services to which more severe cases can be sent or delegated;
4. **adolescents as a resource**, that is an optimistic behaviour towards the possibility that young people – in our case secondary school students – can creatively make themselves available in the 3 service networks;
5. and finally, **the principle of the "minimum common denominator"**, that is not the search – which is often vain in psychology and unacceptable in public services – for an agreement on the reference scientific background of all professionals involved, but the search for an agreement on the 4 previous points.

Primary individuals targeted

- a. children and boys and girls at risk;
- b. migrant children and boys and girls who have just arrived, or who have resided or were born in Italy but have learning and/or behavioural problems;
- c. secondary school students and their parents and teachers.

Assessment of the results and conclusions

In brief, these are the results:

a. **Workshops** – over 18 school years (1990/1991 to 2007/2008):

no. of children and boys and girls at risk who were followed: 3503

no. of volunteer youth involved: 3406

no. of workshops opened: 165

b. **Stanze di Dante** – from 2002/2003 to 2007/2008:

no. of immigrants in the age of development followed: 533

no. of volunteer youth involved: 558 (of which 297 immigrant volunteers who already had a command of the Italian language)

no. of Stanze di Dante opened: 38

c. **Free Student Box** – from 2003/2004 to 2007/2008:

no. of accesses to the service: 2438

no. of peer youth involved: 645

no. of service points opened: 19

The satellite activities of the Youth Advisory Clinic have become a tool, a place that has become well-known and recognised in which, paraphrasing the words of the WHO, an effort is made to favour a global approach to the person who is the subject of his/her own well-being, especially if the individual is a young person trying to grow.

These activities have always been openly offered as a continuous way to interact with the surrounding environment, which mutates rapidly and causes an individual's goals to be constantly revised. They can be regarded as practical actions aimed at modifying situations with a two-fold approach: Careful listening and support based on the initial values, which consist in an attempt to develop, starting with a public institution, a process of integration and synergy between the school and the families in order to improve the offering of health services.

The area of the health of infants, pre-adolescents and youth is not simple. It usually emerges when expressed in its most exasperated and dramatic ways, but rather than looking for "great strategies" that are only useful to describe the problem, the challenge is to identify daily actions involving transformation, a series of "hooks" thrown into the places where young people live and study.