

From the Margin to the Stage

Empowerment Education through
Non-Formal Learning

- Alexander Farrugia -

The message of exclusion

- Working definition of “Social Exclusion”: the inability to **participate in** and **be recognised by** society on terms of **equality** and **equal opportunity** (Klasen: 1999)
- The message sent to the socially excluded is that **they do not have potential**
- This makes the socially excluded feel:
 - A) That they have an inferior standing in society;
 - B) That they can never be good enough;
 - C) That theirs is a situation for which there is no remedy.

Material & Emotional Barriers

- **Material:** the lack of resources for general wellbeing, including such basic resources as food and educational material
- **Emotional:** the difficulty to formulate and express emotional communication, including that about one's own wants and needs, aspirations, relationships, fears, etc.
- Such emotional barriers keep the socially excluded from owning a 'public voice', where they make their citizenship matter

Breaking the barriers

- As educators our aims to break the barriers of exclusion should be:
 - a) To instill a sense of equality;
 - b) Give them confidence in themselves and their abilities;
 - c) Show them examples of achievement;
 - d) Stimulate them to achieve;
 - e) Celebrate their achievement.

The role of non-formal learning

- **A working-definition** for our scope:

“Non-formal learning involves the transmission of skills in a constructive approach based on shared experiences in a non-formal setting”

Transmission of skills: technical/soft-life-citizenship skills

Constructive approach: empowerment to construct one’s own knowledge through enquiry, analysis and self-discovery

Shared experiences: the idea of practicing together, conducting a project, achieving a common goal where each member has value as an individual part of a whole team

Non-formal setting: learning as an ongoing process, free from systemic rigidity, breaking the teacher learner duality to create a more democratic set-up

The Ritmi-KA Project

- Project in conjunction with the International Spring Orchestra Festival
- 3 Percussion Workshops + Public Performance as part of one of the major festivals in Malta
- By the end of the project the students would create their own piece to perform
- Although using music, the objective was social in nature, to empower students from difficult backgrounds to discover their own potential
- ISO provided three percussionists/teachers forming the HOP!Trio (Conservatories of Brussels, Marseille and Amsterdam) + our own music teachers from the selected schools

The participating schools

▪ School A

- 25 students
- Ages 11-13 (Middle School)
- Gender Mixed
- Problematic urban area with a number of social problems incl. poverty, drug abuse, domestic violence, neglect, etc.
- Considered as one of the most problematic schools in the country
- No previous musical training

▪ School B

- 25 students
- Ages 11-13 (Middle School)
- Gender Mixed
- Rural area renowned for high academic achievement, low on social problems
- Considered one of the best state schools in the country, new building, excellent facilities, targeted towards excellence
- Mixed musical training

What we set out to achieve

- Through this project we wanted to mix the 'talented' students with those perceived (even by themselves) to be talent-less and challenge them towards a common goal
- We wanted to present the students as one group, for the audience to see them only for their achievement, without any distinctions
- For the students it had to be an opportunity to discover their potential, to work together towards a common goal and feel rewarded for their achievement
- For our teachers it was also an experience to learn from each other and from the musicians' experience with children from marginal groups



The Ritmi-Ka logo, designed by the students themselves



During general rehearsal



The performance

What was achieved

- Getting involved the students felt motivated, also by having a clear goal ahead to make it to a national stage (Piazza Teatru Rjal, the open air theatre in the heart of Valletta)
- Felt purpose and could celebrate achievement
- The sense that they created something of their own (an original composition + opportunities for solos)
- Working as a team, getting to know each other and interacting together
- Entrepreneurial spirit (for example, in school A students with their teachers transformed a store-room into a music room to be used by all students)

The role of the school in breaking barriers

- Teachers that believe in the potential of their students can make a difference
- Teachers need to be educated well to fight their own inner prejudices and fears, otherwise they cannot be good promoters of inclusion
- The school needs to reach out to parents/ guardians as much as to the students, but sometimes it must be required to walk the extra step when parents are absent or outright hostile
- There is more need to focus on collaboration between schools on common projects, where students are given the opportunity to know other students from different backgrounds



Thank you