



ISSN 2543-506X

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.12775/CSNME.2017.015>

Received: December 3, 2017 / Accepted: a) May 13, 2017; b) May 14, 2018

---

## Monika Delmanowicz

La Fornace degli Gnomi Agro-Nursery in Gagliole, Italy

e-mail: [kingad@libero.it](mailto:kingad@libero.it)

# Innovative quality of education in the agricultural environment

**Abstract.** The experimental project Agrinido di Qualità (The Agricultural Nest of Subjective, Conscious Experience) was created, for the purposes of media and direct confrontation, between territories, institutions and specialists in various fields on natural education. The Agrinido model, which is an expression of education through a suitably prepared rural environment, natural materials and specialized staff, is a high-quality proposition that is useful for the global psychomotor development of children.

**Keywords:** Agrinido.

The Agrinido project (DGR 722 of May 24, 2011), which began in 2012 in the Marche Region in Italy, is part of the Multifunctional Agriculture sector, that is the possibility of combining traditional agricultural work with a number of parallel activities such as agro-tourism, agro production of bio energy and social farming. The concept of Social Agriculture aims to rehabilitate and employ disabled people, organize activities to prevent the isolation of elderly people, complementary activities for people with mental disorders, addicts, ex-prisoners and, among others, an initiative to create early-education centers in rural households.

The project was created thanks to the cooperation of the Marche Region and the city of Chiaravalle (DGR 1107 of 12 July 2010), the founder and promoter of the Chiaravalle-Montessori Foundation. Thanks to the

cooperation of interdisciplinary specialists, a technical and scientific commission was established, which includes pedagogues, Montessori and traditional teachers, representatives of social and social services, agricultural services and organizations. The team's task is to create an innovative educational format in the rural environment, which would be a source of significant experiences for children. In addition, the Commission deals with pedagogical coordination, education and support of teachers and farmers. It also deals with a communication format, which is to ensure the recognition of the Agrinido model and certify its quality.

In addition to the supervision of the Pedagogical Commission, in order to ensure the continuity and quality of services, the Marche Region also established the educational, structural, organizational and administrative parameters that farms involved in the project must have. The guarantee of the quality of the project is devoting special attention to acclimatization of the child in a nursery, adaptation of rural areas, agricultural environments and natural materials for educational purposes, and comprehensive preparation of teachers who work with a small group of only seven children.

The experimental project from Agrinido in Pieveboviglia, which began in January 2012, succeeded and in two years five new Agrinidos joined it in the Marche Region. The creation of the Agrinido network was another advantage for the communication format of the project, as it enabled the innovative development of the welfare farms and the creation of cooperation between the countryside, the world of education and institutions. The Agrinido network is helpful in exchanging experiences, ensures safety and professionalism of employees and gives the project a reputation.

The logo and the graphic format of the network have been created and designed in an optimal and modern way to ensure a positive image and brand recognition.

Technical and information meetings of the Pedagogical Commission, teachers, agricultural workers take place once a month, while educators are obliged daily to put their observations, educational experiences and photos on Facebook, which serve to create documentation of the Agrinido Project and encourage to deepen research on the development and education of children in an agricultural context. Posting photos and summaries of children's activities and tasks on the web is also a kind of

report for parents and an inspiration to actively participate in the educational experience of their children.

The Agrinido network is a place where both pedagogues and the families of children or any interested people can benefit from “natural-ecological” experiences, pedagogical advice and educational training, as well as contribute to the enrichment of the existing material. The network also forms the basis for the visibility of farms, strengthening relations and bonds with institutions, regional bodies and the region. Through reliable, up-to-date and useful communication with the environment and seeking for a favorable opinion from the media, the Agrinido project has built a positive image.

The Agrinido Initiative is also the subject of research at the University of La Sapienza in Rome, at the University of Macerta and aims to develop a new chapter in ecological pedagogy and natural education.

Agrinido is located on a farm and includes issues related to early childhood, development, nutrition, health and the rural environment. Agrinido accepts children from the age of 1 to 3 years of age in an environment in which a reference to the rustic lifestyle, everyday contact with nature and animals play a significant educational value, stimulating the attention, curiosity of children and offering a wide range of opportunities to learn, observe, discover and reflect.

Children can observe the daily work of the farmer and the commitment needed to take care of the animals and to produce food. The contact with nature is real and daily, as children come outside at any time of the year and in all weather conditions. In Agrinido most of the activities take place outside, therefore, the farm must be multifunctional, diverse and characterized by gardening, fruit farming, animal husbandry and have the structure of a traditional farming family.

In the context of the La Fornace (The Brickyard) agricultural farm in Gagliole, in 2013, Agrinido La Fornace degli Gnomi (The Brickyard of Dwarfs) was founded. Apart from traditional agricultural functions, the farm also offers classes in hippotherapy, onotherapy and an educational enclosure. The nursery building is a restored eighteenth-century brickyard, where children can view the historic brick kiln, and the surroundings, full of clayey hills, motivate to design educational paths that promote and support children’s meetings with nature and the rural environment.

The environment, created according to the psycho-physical capabilities of the child, is designed to stimulate the desire to act and at the same time ensure the safety of small guests.

The space, blended with nature, is friendly, inviting, well-groomed and provides a place where the child feels free and can act and move according to his own motivations. The agricultural landscape, which contains natural elements such as fields, a stream, a forest, growing aromatic plants, a garden and an orchard, provides real incentives and activates all the senses of the child. The complementarity of various external information, sensory and perceptual integration promote the learning of various concepts and issues. The vegetable garden and the growing of aromatic plants are a pretext to work on shapes, colors, scents, sequences of activities and help to get to know the names of plants, tools and activities.

To feel safe, the child needs reference points that are conducive to orientation in space. Places, such as a chicken coop, rabbit cages, horse and donkey stables, sheep and goat pastures, are arranged in a competent manner and are an educational tool. Everyday caring for animals, feeding chickens, brushing a donkey, taking care of a cat gives small children, who are very self-centered, great satisfaction and model the brain's neural structure, teaching them empathy and responsibility. The experiences, what individual animals eat, or what preferences they have in selecting leftovers from dinner, make it easier to acquire logical associations. A decision, such as turning right or left, leading a dog on a leash gives you the opportunity to test your skills in making decisions.

In the natural environment, everything is an opportunity for the child to watch, amaze and play; a twig is used for mixing in a puddle, a leaf becomes a ship, some pebbles are interesting for pouring and a butterfly is intriguing for tracking. Nature teaches children to "slow down" and observe snail races, allows to observe the work of a spider or ants and educates the ability to wait for example for the first strawberries.

The educator programs and organizes classes, and above all arranges the environment so that it is made to measure the child, does not interfere but observes and helps, only at the explicit request of the child. Also people working on the farm offer various stimuli for learning and playing through their work.

During grape harvest, for example, children not only look at how adults work but have the opportunity to participate in teamwork, pick

bunches of grapes, carry small baskets full of fruit together, crush the grapes with bare feet and prepare the grape must cakes.

The nursery in the open space is an excellent natural gym where elevations and falls, various areas (rocks, sand, mud, hay) stimulate the balance, coordination and dissociation of movements. Nature also offers unlimited possibilities of manipulation (stones, seeds, twigs), modeling (clay, sand) and observing the cyclical nature of phenomena, which strengthens the time perception.

The participation of children in the harvest of fruit and vegetables, the processing of products and the preparation of meals promotes knowledge about what they eat and encourages them to acquire positive eating habits. A child who plants carrots, sees how they grow, cares for them and then pulls them out, such a child will be more willing to get to know the taste of carrots than if it was bought in the store. Children in Agrinido also know that food is not to be thrown away, and leftovers can be given to animals. Through the advice provided on Agrinido websites and through meetings with a dietician, also parents take part in an educational project related to healthy nutrition.

Observations, experiments, photos and various materials collected during expeditions are brought to the nursery and constitute an operative and sensory base in various laboratories. Photographic workshops allow to consider the moments lived “outside” thus giving a continuum of experience, teach the stability of the subject, they are also support for work on sequences, memory and verbal expression.

The description of just a few aspects and activities at Agrinido, aims to bring this innovative model to light, the model which is helpful in the diversification of farms and constitutes a return to nature in a new, professional and competent light. The project is still in the testing phase, but observations indicate that Agrinido is transforming the lifestyle of entire families, because along with the growing fascination of toddlers, parents, too, must overcome their fears and forget about an education which is excessively safe, sterile and comfortable. Children, in addition to being less ill, become more independent, interested, tolerant and patient in a short time.

Thanks to its openness to the outside world, Agrinido has created ties with the local community and has become an important component of the local reality. Children meet and dialogue with the elderly, who

help in growing the garden, the toddlers also, participate in mini-trips to a nearby village and pay visits to the local school. In addition, students of various schools and people with different types of handicap visit the farm, where they participate in gardening, claying, baking bread, hippotherapy and pet-therapy, thus offering agro-toddlers the opportunity to interact with older children and contact the world of disability.

All activities are documented, photographed and posted online, both for the needs of parents and to share reflections on the innovative integration of the agricultural world and education.

Agrinido has been participating in the setting up phase since September 2016, which is trying to extend the educational offer to the 3–6 age group. As part of the new concept, Agrinido started afternoon classes three times a week for children who in previous years bragged to our nursery. The Agri-Infanzia initiative was created, among other things, with the intention of creating an Agro-kindergarten that will ensure continuation of education in the same environment and under the same pedagogical priorities as well as in accordance with the recently established decree on the integrated education system for 0–6 year-olds. (Decreto Legislativo 13 aprile 2017, n. 65).

In terms of the setting up stage, Agrinido has established a cooperation with the Social Welfare Nursing Home as part of the Agro-intergenerational bridge project, where children and older people meet together to cultivate the land, grow plants and look after the animals. Once a month, children visit the residents of the Nursing Home, and also a group of older people come to our center. In a specially prepared garden for the needs of people in wheelchairs or with problems of the deambulation there is carried out cooperation, exchange of experience, joint preparation and consumption of snacks and above all establishing intergenerational bonds. During the project, research is collected and analyzed, which is consulted with a group of specialists.

In October last year the central territory of Italy was affected by a large and powerful earthquake that caused great damage, many towns were destroyed, the population was left without homes, schools were damaged and, above all, anxiety and uncertainty prevailed. During these difficult moments, our center and Agro-Nursery hosted children from various surrounding schools for a month, because the team of educators together with their parents stressed that being surrounded by nature,

animals and peers is not only safe, but also has a relaxing effect. Children who took care of animals, absorbed in various practical activities, relaxed and learned to deal with stress in a difficult post-crisis situation. In addition, children and parents could benefit from a specially developed program: Principles according to the method of emotional education: a project of rational-emotional education regarding legality, which promotes proper behaviour in crisis situations, recognition, expression and conscious control over emotions.

The consolidation, which has more and more effective impact on the regional education, is an influential network on the national scale. It raises the attention of the academic world and, let's hope that with time, it will trigger international interest of educational institutions in Poland to establish cooperation in the exchange of experience and skills, research, refinement and specialization of students as part of natural pedagogy.

### **Internet sources**

*Marche Region Home Page*, <http://www.regione.marche.it/Regione-Utile/Agricoltura-Sviluppo-Rurale-e-Pesca/Agricoltura-social>

*Innova Marche Home Page*, <http://www.innovamarche.it/>

*Facebook Profile Agrinido "The furnace of the gnomes" – School – Gagliole – 26*, <https://it-it.facebook.com/laforncedeglignomi/>

*Facebook Profile Agrinido Marche Region*, <https://it-it.facebook.com/Agrinido-RegioneMarche/>

