

Italy: “Born to Read” (Nati per Leggere)

Organizations implementing the project

Name: Associazione Culturale Pediatri (Paediatricians Cultural Association), Associazione Italiana Biblioteche (Italian Libraries Association), Centro per la Salute del Bambino (ChildHealth Centre)

Country: Italy

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Context

Advanced research points conclusively to the major influence which reading aloud has upon a pre-school child’s ability to learn to read and write and upon the development of his/her interpersonal skills and cognitive functions.

A survey submitted by family paediatricians during well-being visits of children from 6 months to 6 years of age found that parents/grandparents engagement towards reading aloud is about 20% at national level.

In view of the need to promote the practice of reading aloud amongst specific target groups (parents, grandparents, pre-school teachers and youth-adults-elders who volunteer as readers), in 1999 three institutes established and implemented “Born to Read”, a non-profit initiative, one of the leading Italian programmes in Intergenerational Learning (IGL).

Action

Forged from an alliance between paediatricians, librarians and child-health centres, *Born to Read* is a non-governmental nationwide programme, which aims at constantly involving the community in order to give children a better chance to grow, and grant them the opportunity to develop from an intellectual and emotional point of view. The programme is articulated in regional and local projects aimed at establishing an extended support network to enhance the inclination to read in children from a very early age: the network is composed of librarians, paediatricians, educators-teachers, associations and volunteer readers from three different generations (youth, adults and elders).

The training of the local project promoters, parents, grandparents and volunteers is the programme’s most important aspect: training is essential to create a common language among people of different ages, professional and cultural backgrounds.

The following materials were produced: leaflets for parents, an age-appropriate children’s book donated by paediatricians, the start-up of small libraries in pediatrics consulting rooms, crèches, nursery school and family consultation rooms. The National Prize “Born to Read” was awarded to the best pre-school children’s books and an international exhibition of books for babies and toddlers was organized together with events aimed at promoting the programme extensively.

Bibliographical tools: *Born to Read, a guide for parents and future readers*

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<http://www.natiperleggere.it/index.php?id=22>

The decision to start the programme from the age of 6 months is consistent with the research conducted by James Heckman (Invest in the Very Young, Chicago 2002) which demonstrated the great importance of early intervention for infants, as the benefits accrued to the development of the child's cognitive functions and, above all, interpersonal skills are major. "Born to Read" aims at breaking the vicious circle of intergenerational reading difficulties and subsequent poor student performance.

Outcomes and impact

According to the most recent available national findings (2007), the programme was implemented in all of Italy's 20 Regions, with over 400 local projects conducted in 1195 communities. The participants included 137,369 families with 258,698 children from 0 to 5 years of age, and 7468 professionals: paediatricians, librarians, educators-teachers and volunteers. The percentage of the Italian population which took part in the programme rose from 15% in 2003 to 33% in 2007.

"Born to Read", as an IGL reading programme, encourages volunteer participation on the part of the parents and grandparents of each family unit, young students and elders within the local community facilities (libraries, hospitals, waiting rooms, crèches and primary and nursery schools), and in public spaces (namely, playgrounds, parks etc.). In addition to the objectives of the programme, the role played by the promotion of Family School Partnership and IGL in schools is demonstrated by the high number of participating educators and pre-primary school teachers (3162).

Outcomes and impact on:

Children: an increase in phonological awareness, the acquisition of a larger vocabulary and stronger communication skills, a greater interest in literature and in books, an increased attention span and level of self-esteem, a greater possibility of overcoming the disadvantages deriving from deprived backgrounds. Reading aloud is the most important activity in equipping children to achieve their potential in school.

Parents and grandparents: heightened awareness of their central role as educators of children/grandchildren in infancy and of the importance of reading aloud during these pre-school years, initial steps in Family Learning as a basic form of IGL and in family-school forms of collaboration (Parental Involvement, Family-School Partnership), improved emotional-cognitive relationships with children/ grandchildren.

Paediatricians: inclusion of an educational dimension in their professional work ethos.

Librarians: increased attendance in libraries on the part of parents/ grandparents and children, a rise in book loans, the creation of groups of volunteer readers in libraries, public spaces and pre-primary schools

Educators/pre-primary teachers: increased cooperation with families and libraries, greater time dedicated to reading aloud in class, a wiser use of local resources.

Volunteers: trained to read aloud and an increased diversity in the functions assigned to them within IGL, a growing passion and satisfaction with the activities carried out with a trend towards the establishment of study groups which regularly bring together individuals from different generations to exchange experiences and good practices.

For many students, adults and elders, *Born to Read* often represents their first experience with voluntary work.

Quotes

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“How to instill a love for reading through an act of love: an adult reading a story” (Born to Read slogan)

“The training course which I attended with 5 other individuals was extremely useful. Parents and grandparents express their heartfelt thanks to me when I read stories in the paediatrician’s or hospital waiting room. It’s wonderful to be able to show members of another generation the importance of reading aloud to infants. The most enthusiastic are the younger parents.” (A voluntary reader, student, 16 years old)

“Without the support of the Born to Read programme, I would never have thought that reading aloud could be so important to the emotional and cognitive development of my child. I have learnt that I can play a decisive role in the education of my son and, when he starts school, I shall be committed to cooperating with his teachers.” (Parent of a three-year old child)

“A valuable element of the Born to Read project are the regular readings which we organise for children aged 3 to 5 years accompanied by parents/ grandparents and teachers. Everyone recognizes the importance of creating greater collaboration between families, schools and public libraries to improve children’s reading abilities and school performance.” (A librarian)

“I am passionate about the work carried out by the Born to Read programme (...) I am thrilled that with the aid of a simple picture book, already at 18 months (...) I have the opportunity to transmit something of great value to my daughter.” (Mother of a 2-year old Down’s Syndrome child)

“The emotions displayed by parents indicate that they are surprised by how attentive the local community is towards their children, that they would never have imagined that reading aloud to infants could strengthen the mother/child and father/child bond; or otherwise they are highly proud of the fact that their child, at such an early age, can already start his/her own book collection.” (Family Paediatrician)

“The crèche teachers recommend the “Born to Read box” books to children aged 1 to 2 years, they read them aloud and lend them to parents at the weekend.

Two teachers put at the children’s disposal the box of books, they read or relate them to them, a third teacher observes the children when they are invited to sit in the “comfy” corner; the books are distributed amongst the children and they are free to choose where to “read it”: seated on the carpet, at the table, stretched out on the sofa.”

(Nursery teacher)

“After having attended a training course divided into three sessions, 57 secondary school students – contacted via the Voluntary Services Department and the precious cooperation of two teachers - read aloud to children and accompanying parents in the paediatrics hospital ward, in all paediatric practices and in the family consulting waiting room.” (Local project coordinator)

Famous writers’ quotations:

<http://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.468091991746.250135.305712251746>

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Video material (links are also available on the ENIL project)

Born to Read during paediatric check-ups: <http://www.youtube.com/user/alesila76#p/f>

Born to Read Award in the Piedmont Region:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PxiNFdfP4eA>

Voluntary readers' party: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eQYweW_chHM&NR=1

Born to Read in Macerata: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qlHKn2L2Ve8>



Foto: Salone del Libro, iniziativa "Nati per leggere". Sotto a dir foto GZ.



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