



## ***REPORT***

### ***On the Dissemination in Luxembourg (17, 18 and 19 June 2016)***

Last June the Dante Committee Luxembourg has held in Luxembourg three days of dissemination of the Vision Project, from the 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> June.

The main idea of the Vision project has always been that theatre is the most effective tool to break down barriers, especially the most difficult to eliminate, namely social ones. Thanks to theatre workshops visually impaired people acquire more confidence in themselves and in their skills and are able to fully develop their potential.

In Luxembourg we have tested this idea all the way, inviting two visually impaired trainers to work with children and teenagers normally sighted.

Mared Jarman and Megan John, two extraordinary theatre trainers, sensitive and very prepared, came to Luxembourg to lead the workshops. Claudio Ingolia has helped the Dante Committee with the organization and planning of the event, as well as with videos and pictures.

Here follows the report on the three days of dissemination in Luxembourg.

#### **Friday, the 17<sup>th</sup> June**

The first theatre workshop took place at the European School Luxembourg II of Mamer, in a first grade class with 23 children. The teacher had worked

with the children on a program on the five senses and had prepared them especially on the sense of sight.

Before starting the workshops we showed to the children some slides on the various visual defects, provided by the UCAN. It is important to stress that people commonly know only the dichotomy *blind* / *visually impaired* and are not aware of all the nuances of visual perception that exist between normal sight and blindness. In particular for children exist "those who see " and "those who are blind." This ignorance of the situation of the visually impaired certainly does not help the perception that we have of them and their integration in the society. Children looked at the slides with great attention and interest.

Then the theatre trainers began their workshops. Games and activities were varied and well chosen and children grew passionate about them.

Then a strange thing happened. Children almost forgot that the girls were visually impaired. Some even expressed their concerns to the teacher, saying they did not believe that the girls could not see well and that she (the teacher) was probably pulling their legs. The trainers had the opportunity to explain the children a very important lesson, namely that they themselves were living proof that in life many difficulties can be overcome creatively. Just learning to do things in a different way.

The workshops with Mared and Megan left a tremendous impact in children, both for the outstanding preparation of the girls and their kindness and communicativeness. A week after their departure, when I went to deliver the Braille Vision material to the teacher, the children welcomed me enthusiastically asking for Mared and Megan (who by then had become two celebrities at school). The thing that struck me most was that some girls had worn the Vision t-shirts, that not being of their size (in fact we had given them to their parents), had been transformed into little dresses.

Parents were enthusiastic about the project, for both the validity of the workshops and the outstanding educational message that they had given to the children. Parents have particularly enjoyed the message of learning of not to be afraid of diversity. Many parents, as well as the teacher, asked us

if we could repeat this experience by organizing workshops for a longer period. The project could be called "theatre without borders".

Everyone appreciated the idea that visually impaired trainers conducted these workshops; but in the end parents just saw them as two extraordinarily gifted and professional trainers (forgetting the visually impaired labeling). We can then consider our objective of full integration completely achieved.

### **Saturday, the 18<sup>th</sup> June**

On Saturday we have organized theatre workshops in the contest of the annual European School's celebration.

We organized two workshops, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. Workshops were advertised on the school's website (where teachers gathered inscriptions) and then the same day at the school theatre, where Claudio Ingoglia made a beautiful presentation of project Vision. Participants' age ranged from 7 to 15 years. Often parents asked to participate too. Working languages were French, English and Italian.

Both children and parents loved the initiative. Many children who had already participated to the workshop the previous day ran happily to hug Mared, Megan, Claudio and the other Dante Committee's members, when they met them at the school's celebration. Lot of these children advertised our workshops to other schoolmates.

We had thirty participants in total.

### **Sunday, the 19<sup>th</sup> June**

On Sunday we organized two workshops at Dante. We divided the participants into two groups of 15 people: from 7 to 10 years and from 11 years onwards. This time as well workshops were a great success and were greatly enjoyed both by children and adults. At the end of each workshop, participants were invited to ask questions to Mared and Megan. Once again, the children could not believe that the two girls could be able to organize all these theatrical activities being visually impaired. Children have asked the girls all kind of questions, mostly how could they do this and that being

visually impaired. Each time Mared and Megan told the children about an alternative and creative way of doing things to overcome the visually impairment obstacle. Between the workshops we organized a lunch during which all participants (including parents) had the opportunity to interact with the trainers and the organizers. Once again parents asked us to organize other workshops, and for a longer period.

Before the workshop we had done a lot of publicity on the local radio (Ara), and through Facebook social groups. The rumor spread afterward through word of mouth, thanks to the enthusiastic comments of parents, children and teachers. Eventually even the local paper, L'Essentiel, talked about our initiative and the Vision project, helping us to a further publicity in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg.

<http://www.lessentiel.lu/fr/luxembourg/story/24979366> (via lessentiel.lu)

In conclusion the feedback has been very positive, both of children and young people who have participated, institutions who have welcomed us and teachers with whom we have cooperated. The children have learned to know diversity in a playful way, discovering that there is nothing to fear, and indeed there is much to learn by seeing the things creatively and in an original perspective.

It would be very nice if workshops like these could become usual appointments instead of a unique project.