

*Roberta Raimondi, Mario D'Agostino – KAMALEONTE (Italy)*

## **Dragonboat**

The dragon Boat is a 10 to 20 seated long and narrow canoe, equipped with a tail, a rudder, a drum and a choreographic dragonhead. It is usually used as a sport activity that can be practiced at any lake, river or sea. The boat's limited size facilitates the collaborative aspect, since the 16 paddlers, sitting side by side, are obliged to coordinate their movements with the companion sitting next to them. The boat proceeds if and only if all the crew coordinate themselves according to a common rhythm, given by the "drummer" in the bow. It's a dynamic and educational sport activity, which allows experiencing the true meaning of "cooperation" and "coordination."

We proposed this activity during the second day of our Partnership meeting in Italy (September 2016). The steps were:

- Preparation: All together we took out the materials necessary to perform the activity (paddles, life jackets and the drum). Then we put the boat in the lake: through forming a human chain, from the lawn off the shore, we moved the boat together in the water as an equipage.
- Briefing: We were taught how to use the paddle correctly. How to go forward or backwards; we've been informed about the rules for being together on the boat, etc. The team was composed of experts. The instructors were: 1) the drummer, who gave the rhythm with the drum; and 2) the captain, who directs the boat, using a helm. The Staff coordinated the process of getting on and off from the boat.
- Performance: The group went paddling all together on the lake for an hour (more or less). Halfway through the activity they stopped and were instructed to stay in silence for one minute, to connect themselves with the nature around, with the sounds, the smells and with everything they could notice in the "here and now". Then the group started paddling again all together to go back.
- End of the activity: We took the boat out of the water and, as we did on our way to the lake, we made a human chain to bring the boat back and we replaced the materials.

- **Group Reflection:** We sat in a circle and the trainers asked who wanted to share something about their experience. At the beginning of this reflection, the trainers let the group free to express their immediate feelings. Then they went on with some more specific questions to debrief the activity: "What happened?" (Referring to the facts). Then participants were asked about their thoughts and feelings. "What has this meant for you? What did you feel? What have you experienced? What did it do to you?" The last reflection questions were: "What are your learnings? What will you use in your working context?" These last questions had the aim of connecting and transferring the learnings to their daily life.

### **Target Group**

Up until now we've used this activity with all our target groups: children, school class groups, youth at risk and people with disabilities, young adults and adults.

### **Trainer**

The trainers are experts in experiential learning, psychology, education, and animation. For each of our projects, the staff is always composed by:

- 1 coordinating trainer (logistic and pedagogical manager and outdoor trainer)
- 1 support to the coordination (outdoor educator and dragon boat instructor)
- 2 or more educators / facilitators, depending on the age of the participants and the size of the group. The rapport is usually 1:12. These people specifically accompany the group in all the experiences providing an operative and pedagogical support.

The skills required to be part of these working teams are:

- being able to read and facilitate group dynamics
- being able to manage the group
- having good interpersonal skills for creating trustful and respectful relations

The coordinator deals with the logistic and pedagogical issues, manages and coordinates the team of educators and handles the suppliers. The entire team is qualified and suitable for the implementation of the program in terms of assistance, education and entertainment. In this sense, all the staff

members are selected with special attention to their personal abilities, professional skills and previous experience. Each person has technical and outdoor skills, is expert in group facilitating, experiential learning and education. A future task for our team of educators and instructors will be to enhance technical skills that can be used in any other natural environment.

### **Methodology**

The methodology applied is a combination of different approaches: Experiential Learning, elements of Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy and sport methods. The activity is implemented in nature, and has a strong adventurous dimension. It represents a powerful group challenge and the possibility to learn together.

### **Why do you use this practice?**

This practice has a strong effect, both on the individual and the group. On an individual level one becomes aware of the impact that his/her behavior has on the group. On a group level the goal is to create harmony, rhythm, and to listen with all the senses, not only with the eyes. The proposed activity promotes and strengthens the team spirit, collaboration, self-esteem and courage.

### **Adventure Therapy components**

The most relevant AT components used in this activity are:

- Nature, not only as a setting but also as a way to facilitate the connection with people's inner process, emotions and strong behaviors
- Sharing moments and reflection
- Group process
- Challenging and adventurous characteristics

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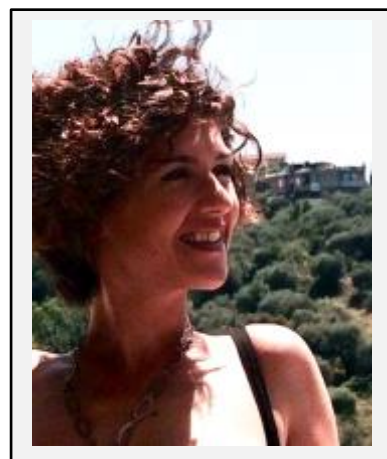
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