

GIOCO ANCH'IO, FROM THE IDEA TO THE SHOP

Designing, communicating and selling toys for all

by Bice Dantona

Since our first experiences in designing toys, we've been always very focused about kids with special needs. All the educationalists, psychologists and therapists we have been talking to over the years agree with the importance of the play activity in particular for children suffering from some kind of disabilities, whether they are physical or cognitive, temporary or permanent. Playing is not only a game for them, but it's often one of the main aspects of their therapy.

The problem is that these specialists (and the parents, too) can't find appropriate toys on the market, unless they buy them on some specific e-commerce devoted to children with special needs. They often have to modify by themselves some common toys to make them useful also for disabled children.

→ DESIGNING TOYS FOR ALL

Actually, if we look at the problem through the eyes of a designer, we notice that sometimes only a few expedients during the designing process would be enough to increase the value of the toy and make it accessible for all the children, without detracting anything from their aesthetic, playability or saleability potential.

In our vision, designing a *toy for all* doesn't mean to design something that is *different* or *special* or to sell in a different place than the traditional toy shops: a

toy for all is simply a toy designed in a conscious way by adopting some simple expedients (i.e. a particular care for grips, handles, colour choice, graphic outlines, adjustable play modes...) to make sure that any child can use it *without obstacles* and *according to his/her own abilities, needs and preferences*.

And if it's true that playing is *food for the mind* - as Assogiocattoli says in its slogan - for any child, it is even more important for disabled kids, because playing is not only *food* for them, but also *medicine*. And therefore the toys are even more important tools for this purpose.

→ WHERE TO FIND TOYS FOR SPECIAL NEEDS?

A more accurate analysis on the market reveals that they already exist, indeed, a lot of toys that can be successfully used for either therapeutic or ludic aim by kids with special needs: common toys, produced by well-known brands, that can be found in the any toy shop or in the GDO. And we really like this, because we think that the real meaning of the world *inclusion* is related to an offer that is *really for all and by the same channels*, not a special and ghettoised one. Rather, what was missing was *an annotated guide for helping parents and therapists to choose the most appropriate toy for each need while browsing in the web or in a shop*.

→ GIOCO ANCH'IO

Based on these considerations, together with Assogiocattoli some years ago we started working at the project *Gioco anch'io* that is focused on the value of inclusion through the play activity and on the idea that toys have to be the inclusive products *par excellence*.

From the start the project took the form of a collective exhibition format and we displayed it in several fairs: from *Reatech* and *Exposanità* - focused on medical and health subjects and frequented by families and specialists looking for solutions for users with special needs - to a most popular and general event like *G! come Giocare*. Here it was interesting trying to sensitise neurotypical children to the disabilities by let them playing with some physical restrictions: i. e. wearing eye masks to fake blindness or stuffed gloves to simulate some difficulties in grabbing objects.

Since a couple of years, we have cooperated also with *AITO* (Associazione Italiana dei Terapisti Occupazionali) and *OPL* (Ordine degli Psicologi della Lombardia), who are helping us in selecting toys and above all in creating a sheet for each selected product reporting the required motor and cognitive skills, the achievable skills and what kind of users can especially benefit from that toy. This little guide has been very appreciated from parents and

therapists and we hope to enlarge it even more in the next times and make it also more known and available outside these isolated events.

→ FROM THE IDEA TO THE SHOP

The project *Gioco anch'io* is addressed to two main recipients:

- *toy companies*, in order to sensibilise them to a conscious design and a good communication;
- *families and therapists*, who need to be oriented in their choices for good toys.

Between them - the producer and the client - there is the *crucial role of the retailer*, who needs to get the right knowledges and tools to become able to communicate the values of some products to his clients.

The *demand for inclusive toys* is concrete; the *supply exists* too, but sometimes it's hidden and *needs to be supported by reliable and certified arguments*.

Our aim is to give visibility to the project from the product idea to the shop shelves, where supply meets the demand. Under the name of *Gioco anch'io*, we would like to create *a thematic path* that crosses the global proposal of brands and points of sale: something *useful for the producers* to communicate some of their products; *helpful for the purchasers* to identify the best products to buy; *in support of the retailer* to give a coherent and argued proposal in response to particular needs.