


# "CELEBRATING DIVERSITY: THE KEY ROLE OF MOTOR EDUCATION TEACHERS IN INCLUSIVE PROCESSES"

## "CELEBRARE LA DIVERSITÀ: IL RUOLO CHIAVE DEGLI INSEGNANTI DI EDUCAZIONE MOTORIA NEI PROCESSI INCLUSIVI"

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### ABSTRACT

The article highlights the importance of social inclusion in schools, celebrating diversity. It analyses the evolving role of educators, with a focus on physical education teachers, in promoting inclusive environments. It also emphasises innovative teaching methods, bringing a modern perspective to educational practice, thus strengthening meaningful connections and enriching the learning experience.

L'articolo mette in evidenza l'importanza dell'inclusione sociale nelle scuole, celebrando la diversità. Esso analizza l'evoluzione del ruolo degli educatori, con particolare attenzione agli insegnanti di educazione fisica, nel promuovere ambienti inclusivi. Inoltre, pone l'accento sui metodi didattici innovativi, conferendo una prospettiva moderna alla pratica educativa, consolidando così legami significativi e arricchendo l'esperienza formativa.

### KEYWORDS

Inclusion, Educators, Innovative Didactive Strategies  
Inclusione, Educatori, Strategie didattiche innovative

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## Introduction

Social inclusion in schools is not only about accepting differences, but also about creating an environment in which each student feels part of the educational community. This implies promoting a culture that not only tolerates diversity but celebrates it as an intrinsic richness in the educational process (A. Fiorucci, 2019). Through inclusion, the school becomes a laboratory of coexistence, where students learn to understand and respect the perspectives and experiences of others. Beyond physical barriers or individual diversity, the goal becomes to create a context in which each student can contribute in his or her own way, feeling valued for his or her uniqueness. It is a principle that recognises diversity as an invaluable value and emphasises the importance of creating educational environments that welcome and support all learning styles, regardless of their differences and abilities. This concept is not only about everyone's right to education as the acquisition of knowledge, but also about creating an environment in which every student can grow, flourish, and reach his or her potential. The figure of the educator, in the context of social inclusion, plays a crucial role. His task is not only to impart knowledge but, above all, to create an environment in which each student feels valued, respected and supported (Canevaro, 2013). In recent decades, the role of the educator has undergone a significant evolution. No longer mere dispensers of information, educators have become guides, facilitators, and supporters of learning. This transformation, which is still ongoing, is crucial to the success of school inclusion, as it requires a deeper understanding of students' needs and greater flexibility in adapting educational practices to meet those needs (A. Fiorucci, 2014). And to reduce the concept of individual differences as a limitation with a view to supporting them as a strength within a group. However, inclusion goes beyond simply changing the role of the educator. It also involves the creation of meaningful and powerful educational relationships. These relationships go far beyond the transmission of knowledge and include empathy, emotional support, and the building of an authentic bond between educator and student (Canevaro, 2006). Positive educational relationships are the beating heart of the inclusive environment, as they foster a sense of belonging and acceptance among students, regardless of their diversity. Therefore, this work aims to explore the essential role of the educator in social inclusion processes, and, of the physical education teacher, in the context of school inclusion. The main objective is to analyse how this teacher can contribute to the

creation of an inclusive environment, going beyond mere motor instruction. We will examine the strategies adopted to foster inclusion, focusing on how physical education can positively influence students' emotional and social development. Paying particular attention to building authentic relationships, we consider empathy and emotional support as key elements. Ultimately, we aim to provide a clear and informative perspective on the importance of school inclusion, highlighting the distinctive role of the physical education teacher as an active promoter of accessible educational environments conducive to the success of every student.

### **1. The role of the Educators through the Years**

Within the ever-evolving educational landscape, the historical context has been a fertile ground for a redefinition of the educator's role. Previously grounded in a more traditional and disciplinary approach, the teacher primarily acted as a disseminator of knowledge. However, with the advent of the inclusive education movement, the educational paradigm has undergone a significant metamorphosis, necessitating the adoption of new pedagogical models. Vygotsky's historical-cultural constructivism (Vygotskij & Cole, 1980) and Bruner's socio-cultural model (Bruner, 2002), both critical of the traditional approach based on one-way logics and the mere transmission of knowledge by the educator, have revolutionised the very conception of the educational process (A. Fiorucci, 2014). These theories highlight that knowledge is not simply passively transmitted but is the result of a participatory construction. In this context, the process actively involves not only the educator but also the students, becoming a collaborative experience that shapes and influences the entire identity of both the teacher and the learner (Hermans, 1996).

This innovative perspective implies that students are not merely passive recipients of information but are actively involved in constructing their own knowledge through direct experience and interaction with the surrounding world (Altay et al., 2016; Klemencic et al., 2020). Simultaneously, student-centred learning has emphasised the importance of the individual as the main driver of their own learning (Smit et al., 2014). In this new approach, educators have been called upon to personalise learning experiences based on the specific needs and interests of each student, thereby expanding their role from teachers to attentive and personalised guides. However, the effective implementation of these models requires a crucial component: continuous teacher training. Before the advent of more student-centred pedagogical approaches, teacher training was often focused

on the transmission of academic content and traditional teaching methods. The transition to a more interactive and empathetic role, therefore, requires training that supports educators in this process of change.

Continuous training is the means through which teachers can acquire updated skills and adopt innovative approaches(M. Fiorucci, 2015). It is only through continuous training that educators can deepen their understanding of inclusive methodologies, differentiated assessment techniques, and strategies to address the diverse needs of students. This training is particularly critical in today's technological context. Technology not only provides educators with access to digital resources and online platforms but also offers interactive tools that allow them to experiment with new methodologies directly in their teaching context(Ranieri, 2012).

Ultimately, continuous training is the keystone that enables educators to stay informed about best educational practices and maintain a dynamic and adaptable approach. It not only supports teachers in their professional journey but is also a crucial element for the success of inclusive education, contributing to shaping educators prepared to face the changing challenges of the modern educational environment(Galliani, 2009).

## **2. The Role of the Physical Education Teacher as a Promoter of Psychophysical and Social Well-being**

In the educational realm, the role of the physical education teacher stands out as paramount, playing a critical part in fostering both academic and social inclusion(Bailey, 2005). Beyond the mere transmission of motor skills, the physical education teacher assumes a multifaceted role, acting as a key agent in crafting an environment that not only celebrates diversity but also nurtures the psychophysical well-being of students.

Psychophysical well-being, within the scope of this discourse, encompasses the delicate equilibrium between mental and physical health, constituting a foundational concept that intertwines the emotional and physical dimensions inherent in motor activities.

It is important to note that, commonly, physical activity is primarily considered for its several physical benefits(Warburton et al., 2006). However, it should be emphasised that it also has a significant impact on psychological and social levels(Eime et al., 2013; Wankel & Berger, 1990). In addition to the release of

endorphins during exercise, which improves mood and reduces stress, physical activity can play a fundamental role in promoting self-confidence and resilience in the face of daily challenges.

From a social perspective, participating in group activities or team sports provides a unique opportunity to interact with others, fostering social bonds and developing skills in cooperation and mutual respect. This social dimension of physical activity is often underestimated but is fundamental for building positive relationships and creating a sense of community.

This holistic perspective underscores the importance of the Physical Activity in the educational settings and highlights the educational teacher's responsibility to cultivate not only physical competence, but also an awareness of the interconnection between physical and mental health.

Imagine the physical education teacher as an active facilitator, tasked not only with imparting physical skills but also with creating an environment where students find themselves in a space that fosters their overall well-being(Moen et al., 2020). This goes beyond encouraging an active lifestyle; it entails providing emotional support and addressing the intricate social dynamics that students may encounter. Social well-being, reflecting an individual's capacity to meaningfully participate in the community and construct positive relationships, becomes a cornerstone in our analytical framework.

The bio-psycho-social approach, foundational to the training of physical education teachers, guides us towards a comprehensive, systemic, and interactive perspective(Minino, 2023). This paradigm transcends the mechanical execution of physical activities, introducing elements of body awareness and contributing to the development of self-esteem and mutual respect. The physical education teacher, therefore, transforms into an agent of well-being, fostering the growth and transformative journey of students.

Through the implementation of inclusive educational pathways, physical education emerges as a fundamental tool for enhancing students' social leadership. The corporeal dimension assumes a central role in shaping the identity and social interactions of individuals. The teacher actively engages in creating an environment that surpasses the mere dissemination of technical knowledge, promoting active participation, and facilitating the construction of authentic connections. Educational motor planning, consequently, necessitates an approach that not only celebrates individual diversity but also fosters constructive dialogue and embraces a multi-perspective view(Castelli et al., 2013).

In summary, motor activity transcends its conventional role as a vehicle for skill transmission; it metamorphoses into an inclusive tool capable of stimulating creativity and embracing differences. Within this nuanced analysis, the role of the physical education teacher emerges as pivotal in sculpting mindful, socially engaged individuals who appreciate diversity in all its intricate facets.

### **3. Innovative didactic strategies to promote social relationship and inclusion**

The importance of continuing education for teachers of motor activity is crucial, as it helps to keep skills updated and explore new pedagogical methodologies. This aspect not only enriches teachers' training experience, but also relates directly to the discussion on innovative teaching strategies. Teachers, through ongoing training, are able to integrate modern and dynamic approaches into physical activity lessons, creating a stimulating and state-of-the-art educational environment that fosters the integral growth of students in all aspects.

Among the best-known and most widely used innovative strategies due to their effectiveness in the relational and social spheres and capable of fostering the inclusive process are cooperative learning, Gamification and Peer Teaching.

Cooperative learning is a teaching strategy that involves students in collaborative group work to achieve common goals (Slavin, 2012). In this methodology, students work together interdependently, each contributing to their own role or task, with the aim of achieving shared outcomes. Cooperative learning is widely recognised as a highly effective innovative teaching strategy in the relational and social context. Cooperative learning in physical education is not limited to collaboration in the simple execution of exercises but is designed to foster meaningful social interactions between students (Klavina et al., 2014). One effective way is the organisation of group motor activities in which students must work together to achieve specific goals. For example, creating a shared choreography or participating in team games requires collective effort and stimulates cooperation.

During these activities, teachers can encourage open communication, shared responsibility and collaborative problem solving. For this reason, this not only improves students' motor skills but also helps them developing social skills such as active listening, conflict management and mutual respect (Dyson, 2001).

A key element of this didactic approach is the diversity of roles within the group. Indeed, assigning specific tasks to each member of the group promotes awareness of individual contribution and reinforces a sense of responsibility for collective success. For instance, in a team game, each member might have a unique role that contributes to the final result.

Furthermore, cooperative learning provides an environment in which individual differences are valued and respected. Educators can encourage their students to share their own experiences and skills, fostering an inclusive climate. This approach not only improves group dynamics during physical education lessons but also has a positive impact on the development of social relationships within the class (Slavin, 1980).

Another educational approach that is increasingly being used in educational contexts to foster social relations and inclusion is Gamification, which has its roots in the world of video games and represents an innovative and active approach that has become increasingly relevant in educational and sports contexts. Its effectiveness derives from its ability to take elements characteristic of video games and apply them in non-game contexts to encourage participation, motivation, and skills development. In the educational context, gamification has been integrated to make learning more engaging and motivating. Elements such as passing tests, scoring, timed challenges and teamwork are used to structure learning activities. This methodology offers an interactive learning experience that goes beyond the traditional approach, encouraging students to be active participants in the educational process (Vezzoli & Tovazzi, 2018). In addition, gamification allows the creation of customised and inclusive learning paths. Students can explore guided and autonomous learning, developing skills not only in the specific subject area, but also in collaboration, problem-solving and critical thinking.

However, it is crucial to emphasise that the correct implementation of Gamification requires careful planning. Maintaining a delicate balance between gaming elements and educational content is crucial to avoid potential issues such as gaming addiction and a loss of interest in activities not based on gamification. Furthermore, it is essential to recognise that gamification may not be universally suitable for all educational objectives, as some topics require more attention and concentration.

Again, it is therefore crucial to highlight the importance of educator training in guiding this process. Educators, with their expertise, play a crucial role in adapting gamification to the specific needs and challenges of students. Continuous training

is imperative to ensure educators can apply gamification in a thoughtful and informed manner, minimising the risks of improper implementation. The expert guidance of educators is key to creating a learning environment where Gamification enriches the educational experience, promoting a balanced and constructive engagement with technology-based strategies(Galliani, 2009). In the sports context, Gamification has addressed the challenge of maintaining young people's motivation towards physical activity, especially in the school setting where physical education may be perceived negatively. Incorporating playful elements into sporting activity not only makes the experience more fun, but also contributes to improving physical fitness and cultivating positive sporting habits(Gómez-Carrasco et al., 2019).

Finally, another method worth highlighting that promotes overcoming differences and increased social inclusion in the school context is Peer Teaching. It stands out as a dynamic and engaging approach, transforming students from mere recipients of knowledge into active participants in their own learning. This methodology promotes active learning, individual responsibility, and the creation of a collaborative learning community(Prater et al., 1999). Peer Teaching, based on the idea that teaching others is an effective way to consolidate understanding of a topic, offers numerous benefits in the overall educational context and, specifically, in the field of physical education. Students involved in Peer Teaching develop advanced communication skills by clearly presenting concepts and topics to their peers(Cesarano & Valentino, 2022). This process not only improves language skills but also fosters clarity in presentation and the ability to adapt language to different audiences. The active involvement of students in Peer Teaching fuels enthusiasm for learning, contributing to the creation of a dynamic and stimulating educational environment. The methodology supports the building of positive relationships, promoting social cohesion, and enhancing students' emotional well-being. Applied to the field of physical education, Peer Teaching becomes an effective tool for showcasing individual motor skills. Students share knowledge about exercises and activities, adapting them to the diverse abilities present in the class, fostering an inclusive and participatory environment(Munaro & Cervellin, 2016). Collaboration in the realm of physical activity through Peer Teaching contributes to the development of essential social skills such as cooperation, mutual trust, and respect. These skills not only enrich physical education lessons but also have a positive impact on students' daily lives. In addition, Peer Teaching makes a significant contribution to boosting students' self-esteem by providing them with a sense of personal achievement through reciprocal teaching and collaboration for common success(Topping et al., 2017). In summary, it emerges as a versatile



educational approach that not only enriches learning but also contributes to creating an inclusive, collaborative, and positive environment, especially in the field of physical education.

Thus, it is evident that the examined innovative teaching methodologies of Cooperative Learning, Gamification and Peer Teaching, converge on common strengths that make them powerful tools for promoting social relations and a solid inclusion process. A distinctive feature of these strategies is the positioning of the student at the centre of the educational journey, reversing the traditional role of the teacher as the sole dispenser of knowledge. In this new approach, the teacher acts as a guide and facilitator, allowing students to become active agents in their own learning. A key element that emerges from these methodologies is their applicability not only in school educational contexts but also in all formal and informal learning contexts. These innovative approaches transcend the boundaries of the classroom, offering engaging and inclusive learning opportunities in various learning situations.

To summarise, these methodologies represent a paradigm shift in education, placing students at the centre of the learning process and promoting active participation. These approaches not only enrich the learning experience, but also emphasise the importance of forming aware, collaborative, and socially competent citizens. The continuous training of educators plays a crucial role in the successful implementation of these methodologies, ensuring that students derive maximum benefit from an active and inclusive learning-centred approach.

## **Conclusions**

In conclusion, the article explored in detail the fundamental role of social inclusion in schools, emphasising the transformation of educators from mere transmitters of knowledge to flexible guides and supporters of learning. Ongoing training emerged as an essential component, providing educators with the necessary skills to embrace new approaches in a constantly changing educational environment.

Particular emphasis was placed on the crucial role of the physical education teacher in shaping not only motor skills, but also the psycho-physical and social well-being of students. In addition to the traditional transmission of skills, the teacher becomes an active promoter of an environment that values diversity and fosters authentic relationships that overcome any differences barrier.

The analysis explored innovative teaching strategies, such as Cooperative Learning, Gamification and Peer Teaching, recognising them as effective tools for promoting social relations and inclusion.

In sum, the article emphasises the importance of prepared and innovative educators in addressing inclusive challenges in schools. Celebrating diversity and adopting modern teaching strategies emerge as key elements of successful inclusive education, helping to shape a dynamic, stimulating educational environment that is responsive to students' changing needs.

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