

Daniela Gulisano
Università degli Studi di Catania
daniela.gulisano@unict.it



Double Blind Peer Review

Citazione

Giulisano D., (2023) The debate strategy in the teacher's inclusive teaching action; *Giornale Italiano di Educazione alla Salute, Sport e Didattica Inclusiva - Italian Journal of Health Education, Sports and Inclusive Didactics*. Anno 7, V 4. Edizioni Universitarie Romane

Doi:

<https://doi.org/10.32043/gsd.v7i4.1036>

Copyright notice:

© 2023 this is an open access, peer-reviewed article published by Open Journal System and distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

gsdjournal.it

ISSN: 2532-3296

ISBN: 978-88-6022-485-9

ABSTRACT

The cultural and professional profile of the teacher and his *teaching action* represent some central themes of the contemporary didactic and pedagogical debate. Teachers are required to make an educational investment that is increasingly capable of innovating and differentiating *teaching strategies* for "each and every one" in a creative and flexible way. To this end, in this contribution the Author analyzes the fundamental elements of the *debate teaching strategy* within a class group.

Il profilo culturale e professionale del docente e la sua *azione didattica* rappresentano alcuni temi centrali del dibattito didattico e pedagogico contemporaneo. Ai docenti è richiesto un investimento educativo sempre più capace di innovare e differenziare in modo creativo e flessibile *le strategie didattiche* per "tutti e ciascuno". A tal fine, in questo contributo l'Autrice analizza gli elementi fondamentali della *strategia didattica del debate* all'interno di un gruppo-classe.

KEYWORDS

Docenti; Azione Didattica; Metodologie Attive; Inclusione. Teachers; Didactic Action; Active Methodologies; Inclusion.

Received 19/11/2023

Accepted 23/01/2024

Published 27/02/2024

Introduction

Numerous studies, at a national and international level, have attempted to outline the new profile of the third millennium school teacher, called to operate in increasingly heterogeneous and inclusive classes and to modulate the profession in a continuous relationship between what happens internally but even outside the classroom. Therefore, the didactic action is not limited to a process of "assembly of didactic lessons" (Laneve, 2017) in a linear, sequential sense, but represents a construct with a pedagogical and formative character, which is based on a situated context and requires the teacher to move from a professional center of gravity planned and implemented individually in the isolation of the classroom, to professional practices of an active, planning, organizational and evaluative nature that are increasingly laboratory-based and cooperative, oriented towards an ethical profile of teaching professionalism, as indicated by *Lisbon 2010 to Europe 2020 up to Education 2030*. In this sense, active and laboratory teaching assumes the premises of the theories of experience, of progressive and transformative pedagogy (Dewey, 1949) and expresses in action the methods through which one learns, from the forms of classroom organization to the forms of collaborative teaching/learning, the roles of teachers and students analyzed during the new learning process.

To this end, the *Debate methodology deserves specific in-depth analysis* as it promotes cooperative and *peer learning education* not only between students, but also between teachers and between teachers and students. The *Debate*, or *regulated debate*, is a regulated dialectical interaction in which participants, divided into teams with incompatible points of view, attempt to make a jury adhere to their position through arguments (De Conti, 2019). The debate consists of a comparison between two teams of students who support and counter a statement or argument given by the teacher, placing themselves in one camp (pro) or the other (against).

Generally carried out in tournament form, the *regulated debate* is also adopted as *a teaching method* in every level of study to acquire disciplinary knowledge and develop transversal skills. As an *active methodology*, in fact, it requires students to participate in the learning process in a more dynamic way than other teaching methods, leading them to acquire and retain knowledge more effectively.

1. The inclusive professional action of the teacher: methods and strategies of active, cooperative and laboratory teaching

Teaching involves taking mutual responsibility for joint actions that requires teachers to negotiate professional boundaries and work flexibly. The subject-person is not a passive spectator of what happens around him, but an active subject capable of *agency* (Gulisano, 2021), that is, capable of actively intervening in reality, of acting in an enabling manner. From this perspective, it is within itself that the «class should promote shared, co-constructed, co-defined learning; this is why teaching aimed at promoting relationships, exchanges and interactions within the classroom comes to her aid» (D'Alonzo, 2004).

Teachers should consciously and responsibly design learning contexts to promote the intentions explained above; «we need a thoughtful design that can refer to learning objectives and inclusion needs» (Mulè , 2021, p. 18).

It is therefore essential that teachers have a clear understanding of the the existing link between *active teaching* and *values*, aim to design teaching practices that support inclusive values.

Furthermore, "active" learning is a well-distributed action between teacher and student through the classroom understood as a laboratory, which simultaneously becomes cohesive, welcoming, capable of expressing inclusiveness for all students. To put it in the words of Dewey (1949, p. 46), «the method of teaching is the method of action intelligently directed by ends». It therefore concerns the "how" to teach, intertwined with two further factors, namely the "what" you want to teach and "to whom". Along this direction, the active method refers to "*learning by doing*", that learning by doing which characterized Dewey's pedagogical perspective and animated active schools. In other words, the use of active, laboratory and group management methods, such as *Cooperative Learning*, *Problem Based Learning*, the *Debate*, the *Role Playing*, the *Focus Group*, the *Flipped Classroom* constitute a "strength" for the teacher, as they ensure direction to action on the one hand and on the other intrinsically develop attitudes and skills required by the cultural and professional profile.

Class group management techniques

- a) *Information*: from the teacher/leader to the class group;
- b) *Self-representation*: round the table, registration, questionnaire, cards, etc;
- c) *Cooperative learning*: creating a climate of positive interdependence and inclusion;
- d) *Simulation and role-playing games*;
- e) *Brainstorming*;
- f) *Class group evaluation*.

Figure 1: *Class group management techniques*

The emphasis is therefore placed, in *Active Methodologies*, on those practices in which the student is at the center of the learning process, that is, he plays an active role in the dynamics of building his own knowledge and competence.

Valuing and taking into account this internal process, this faculty of processing information on the part of the student, essentially means placing the emphasis on action, giving prominence to the faculty of actively processing information and implementing it in a given context. organizational behavior is appropriate. The theoretical assumption of active methods is that «effective learning is above all learning from experience. [...] and it is precisely the use of the group and the related techniques and methods of relating that implies overcoming the purely academic conception of production and transmission of knowledge. The process of the life cycle of a group could never take place in an environment that wanted to abstain from the impact with emotions, conflicts, interdependencies, combinations of cooperative actions» (Di Nubilia, 2013, p. 97).

Active teaching is carried out according to a relational style which by its nature cannot be the object of «ready-to-use recipes but built on procedural principles» (Gherardi, 2013, p. 14). The experiences directly lived by the students assume importance, as they will be involved by the teachers in complex situations starting from these experiences.

«Teachers usually ask to be put in a position to learn practical things: which contents to choose, how to organize a research plan, how to build particular

research tools, how to encourage socialisation, how to prevent phenomena of leadership and gregariousness, what to do with an apathetic or aggressive or hostile student» (Gherardi, 2013, p. 14).

In this sense, we briefly indicate below what these "active" methods and some of their variants consist of (Pavoncello, 2003, p. 83):

– *Case method*: situation analysis techniques that make use of real cases (*problem solving*, *case study*, *incident* and *debate*). With the *problem solving*, a "problem-type" situation proposed by the teacher is analyzed and discussed in a group and the most appropriate solutions are analysed; with the *case study*, analytical skills and ways of approaching a situation or problem are developed; decision-making and predictive activities are added to the *incident*; the *debate* consists of a comparison between two teams of students who support and counter a statement or argument;

– *Simulations*: recitation of pre-established parts – *role playing* – for the interpretation and analysis of behaviors and social roles in interpersonal relationships and *action maze* (action in the labyrinth) for the development of decision-making and procedural skills;

– *Demonstrative simulations or "analog" exercises*: these are already "coded" exercises that are used by the teacher to highlight social phenomena, allowing him to demonstrate some theses relating to interpersonal behaviors (*sociogram*, *Johari Window*, etc.);

– *Cooperative production techniques*: inside we find the *cooperative learning method*, for the integrated development of cognitive, operational and relational skills.

These approaches, in their diversity, are united by the objective of making the student participate as much as possible, for this reason moments of knowledge construction mediated (and not "provided") by the teacher and by the relationship with classmates are privileged. In this scenario the space for frontal explanation is reduced to a minimum, «the terrain of theory is precisely practice, even if it is not to be expected that theory will automatically emerge from this. Particular and deliberate attention is needed for a flexible methodology of theorization which at a didactic level considers not only the cognitive aspects but also the emotional and personal ones» (De Bartolomeis, 1978, p. 253).

This connection of the acquisition of knowledge and skills with theoretical work (aimed at producing systems of meaning) cannot be clarified in words. It becomes evident only in the actual experience which, starting from problems, tends to resolve them with a productive commitment that comes out of a local area and progressively generalizes. In conclusion, if the class group grows and matures, it can contribute to the quality of learning and therefore of teaching by the teaching staff. Furthermore, the use of active, cooperative and laboratory teaching techniques and methods allows students to benefit from greater opportunities, as well as freeing themselves from the anxiety that individual work can cause, making them more receptive to new ideas.

2. Debate teaching strategy: arguing and debating "*for each and every one*"

The *Debate* finds its foundations in history and classical heritage, however, the terminology that describes its structure and organization is often steeped in anglicisms, which have now become specific terms of this methodology. The Debate has in fact returned to Italy after having carried out a linguistic 'bath' in the Anglo-Saxon world, where it has now fully become part of the culture and formal and informal education of both young people and adults, often even outside the school context, in the so-called "*Debate Clubs*" (www.sn-di.it). Today, within the Italian scholastic panorama, the *regulated debate* is configured as an innovative teaching strategy promoted mainly by the INDIRE initiative within the action-research project *Avanguardia Educative*, which associates this methodology with some of the horizons of change proposed in within its Manifesto, and in particular these (Avanguardia Educative, 2014):

1. *Transform the school's transmission model;*
2. *Exploit the opportunities offered by ICT and digital languages to support new ways of teaching, learning and assessment;*
3. *Create new spaces for learning;*
4. *reorganize school time;*
5. *Reconnect the knowledge of the school and the knowledge of the knowledge society;*

Debate is a teaching strategy that is increasingly spreading in Italian schools due to its strong training and educational value. It is a comparison between different positions (*for* and *against*), structured by very precise rules, on a *topic* (i.e. a topic of a general nature, both curricular and extracurricular, as well as current affairs,

etc.), from which a *claim arises or motion*, i.e. a debatable statement, which therefore admits the possibility of a side for or against (Cinganotto et al, 2019, p. 6).

The phases that make up a Debate can be summarized as follows (Cinganotto et al, 2019, p. 11):

1. *Identification of themes and disciplines* : definition at Class Council level;
2. *Introduction* : presentation of the topic (*topic*) and pronouncement of the teacher's statement (*claim*);
3. *Identification* (in the classroom, all together) of the main arguments for and against the proposed claim;
4. *Research laboratory at home and in the classroom* (in-depth analysis): collection of data and sources to support the arguments identified;
5. *Division of the class into working groups* (for and against): for the development of debate strategies and development of the schedule of interventions;
6. *Preparation of arguments and counter-arguments* : work to be carried out in groups in the classroom;
7. *Debate* : presentation of the theses for and against (*argument*), at least 3 pros and 3 against, and the evidence to support the validity of the arguments: examples, analogies, concrete facts, statistical data, authoritative opinions, universally recognized principles, etc. ; synthesis and balancing of arguments;
8. *Evaluation* : vote on the single discipline (content) and vote on the Debate (research, argumentation and public presentation).

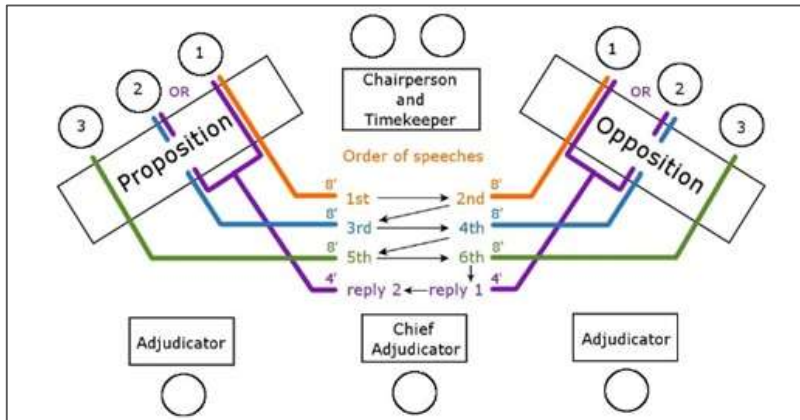


Figure 2: WSD: World School Debate

The roles expected within a Debate are usually the following:

- the *teacher* who launches the *claim / motion* within a defined topic , which can be curricular, transversal, taken from current events, etc.;
- *two (or more in some formats) teams of debaters* , lined up respectively for and against the claim / motion launched by the teacher, who alternate according to very specific times and rules;
- the *audience* who attends the performance and can be made up of the rest of the class, or families, the wider school community, etc.;
- the *jury*, which evaluates the style, content and strategy of the interventions, generally on the basis of very specific grids and which can be represented by the students themselves, by the teachers or by expert judges.

An important phase of the Debate is represented by documentary research - or research of sources - which allows students to delve deeper into the topic that will be the subject of the Debate , even before knowing whether they will have to support the position for or against: in this way will be able to have a holistic vision of the phenomenon and will be able to take sides on one of the two fronts, also managing to possibly anticipate the refutation of the opposing team.

Before the actual debate, the team - generally made up of three *debaters* - must agree on their strategy, i.e. the choice and attribution of the various arguments, the citation of sources, etc.

A method referring to the ability to argue and counter-argue, the Debate therefore allows you to acquire transversal skills (the so-called " *life skills* ": knowing how to solve problems - knowing how to make decisions - creativity - critical sense - self-awareness - relational skills - effective communication - management of emotions - stress management - empathy) (WHO, 1999) and to dismantle some traditional paradigms , favoring *cooperative learning* and *peer education* not only between students, but also between teachers and between teachers and students. At the end of the comparison, the teacher/teachers or the jury, where applicable (which can be made up of the students themselves), evaluates the performance of the teams or the individual by assigning a grade that measures the skills achieved, both in relation to the content and the soft skills (e.g., presentation skills, posture, etc.). For the objectives that the methodology sets itself, the use of ICT is important in the preparatory phase to be able to carry out targeted research, know how to use Internet sites, evaluate sources, even though no technological aid is permitted in the actual debate phase. on its own or during any races/competitions.

Il debate has a positive impact on both argumentation skills and the *problem solving*, by virtue of dialectical comparison and contrast with alternative methods. The comparative analysis of alternative strategies, combined with the push to *disbelieve* and *change* one's mind, allows one to refine metacognitive competence understood as the disposition to (self)control processes (Cornoldi , 1999), commensurate the resources available with the problem to be solved and be able to make good decisions during the process. Differently from other teaching strategies, the debate is characterized both by verbalizing internal reasoning in arguments that are intended to be well structured and clear, and by the fact that the entire dialectical process, including preparation, takes place in a social dimension, which it is natural to experience it as playful, and through communication, internal to the team first, between the teams during, and then with the teacher (Giangande, Matteucci, 2021).

Conclusions

Among the many methods, even original ones, already tested in the long tradition of every educational system, that of teaching and learning in groups is experiencing great delays. «Working, studying, teaching "together with..." has always taken a backseat, compared to the experienced and suffered security of proposing a frontal didactic scheme, of simple and also lucid transposition of knowledge» (Di Nubilia , 2008, p. 162). Along this direction, the Italian school, in particular, needs to recover the culture of a cooperative and laboratory teaching practice, of a pedagogical concept better inspired by the cooperative and laboratory ars of Deweyan memory.

In fact, one could only briefly recall here the thoughts of Dewey , who was strongly convinced that «school can constitute a “special environment”, a real laboratory for learning to learn in a collaborative climate, in which one finds oneself and experiences the essence of democracy” (Dewey, 1949, p. 55). We could also remember Piaget himself who attributed great weight, both on a moral level and on that of cognitive development, to discussion and comparison between peers: «to the collision of our thoughts with those of others which produce doubt in us and the need to demonstrate” (Piaget, 2016, p. 45). Along this direction, inclusive teaching is committed to creating the best conditions for learning, overcoming methodologically rigid and transmissive procedures, in favor of active and flexible strategies tailored to all students, in their own uniqueness. This implies the implementation of some relevant variables, such as the organization of the class group, the teaching methodologies, the materials to be proposed but also the organization of the teachers and the learning environment (Gulisano, 2019).

Hence the need for «teachers or, better yet, a group of teachers to know how to use the potential of the cognitive, affective and organizational relationship. It is now a consolidated pedagogical culture that group work, if properly set up, can represent, on a cognitive level, a potentially very useful potential for learning processes and not only for socialization processes» (Di Nubilia, 2008, p. 161).

References

Avanguardie Educative. (2014). *Il Manifesto delle Avanguardie educative*, in <<https://innovazione.indire.it/avanguardieeducative/il-manifesto>>.

Cinganotto L., Mosa E., Panzavolta S. et al. (2019). *“Avanguardie educative”. Linee guida per l’implementazione dell’idea “Debate (Argomentare e dibattere)”*. Versione 2.0. Firenze: Indire.

Cornoldi C. (1999). *Le difficoltà di apprendimento a scuola*. Bologna: Il Mulino.

D’Alonzo L. (2004). *La gestione della classe. Modelli di ricerca e implementazioni per la pratica*. Brescia: La scuola.

De Bartolomeis F. (1978). *Sistema dei laboratori*. Milano: Feltrinelli.

De Conti, M. (2013). Il dibattito regolamentato come metodo per acquisire competenze di gestione dei conflitti nella scuola. *Formazione & Insegnamento*, 3 (1), pp. 145- 152.

Dewey J. (2014). *Esperienza e Educazione*. Milano: Raffaello Cortina.

Dewey J. (1949). *Scuola e Società*. Firenze: La Nuova Italia.

Di Nubilia R. D. (2008). *Dal gruppo al gruppo di lavoro. La formazione in Team: la conduzione, l'animazione, l'efficacia*. Lecce: Pensa Multimedia.

Fantin S. (2022). Spunti di innovazione didattica. La metodologia del debate alla scuola dell'infanzia. *DIDI*, n. 2, pp. 165-183.

Gherardi V. (2013). *Metodologie e didattiche attive. Prospettive teoriche e proposte operative*. Roma: Aracne.

Giangrande M., Matteucci A. (2021). Il Debate matematico: un nuovo approccio orientato alla metacognizione per la didattica della matematica. *Formazione & Insegnamento*, XIX, n. 3, pp. 276-297.

Gulisano D. (2012). L'azione didattica inclusiva del docente: verso una scuola post Covid-19 equa e sostenibile. *Formazione e Insegnamento*, XXIX, n.2-2021, pp. 237-245

Gulisano D. (2019). *Scuola, competenze e capacitazioni. Nuove sfide didattico-pedagogiche per la professionalità attiva del docente. Un'indagine esplorativa*. Lecce: Pensa Multimedia.

Laneve C. (2017). *Manuale di didattica*. Brescia: Scholè.

Mulè P. (2021) (Eds.). *Scuola, dirigenti scolastici e docenti curricolari e di sostegno al tempo del Covid-19*. Lecce: Pensa Multimedia.

Pavoncello D. (2003). Le strategie didattiche e metodologiche per promuovere l'apprendimento, in *Rassegna CNOS. Problemi esperienze prospettive per la formazione professionale*, n. 3, pp. 80-88.

Piaget J. (2016). *Logica e conoscenza scientifica*. Roma: Studium