

THE BODY AS A KNOWLEDGE DEVICE: EDUCATING TO CORPOREITY, EDUCATING TO AFFECTIVITY

IL CORPO COME DISPOSITIVO DI CONOSCENZA: EDUCARE ALLA CORPOREITA', EDUCARE ALL'AFFETTIVITA'

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ABSTRACT

The contribution starts from a reflection on the didactic design aimed at the promotion of Affective Education at a Secondary School of First Grade in Fabriano, with respect to the possible repercussions in didactic practice and the possible implications with respect to Physical Literacy, with a methodological focus on the HDW Workshop, used for classroom activities and based on corporeity for the activation of mental, emotional and cognitive processes.

Il contributo prende l'avvio da una riflessione sulla progettazione didattica rivolta alla promozione dell'Educazione Affettiva presso una Scuola Secondaria di Primo Grado di Fabriano, rispetto alle ricadute possibili nella pratica didattica e le possibili implicazioni rispetto alla Physical Literacy, con un focus metodologico sul Laboratorio HDW, utilizzato per le attività in classe e che si fonda nella corporeità per l'attivazione dei processi mentali, emotivi e cognitivi.

KEYWORDS

Adolescents, Children; Pedagogical and Didactics Models; Physical Literacy; Physical Education.

Adolescenti, bambini; modelli pedagogici e didattici; alfabetizzazione fisica; educazione fisica.

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Introduction

Physical Literacy (hereafter, PL) represents a complex construct that concerns, according to a prospective and integrated approach, the definition of the skills required to realise human potential to the full through the experience of the body (Whitehead, 2010). PL, which is distinct from physical activity (Whitehead 2010, 2013), represents a key component in the construction of the properly human expression in the reality that surrounds us, involving factors such as motivation, confidence, physical competence, requiring a responsible engagement in the activities of human life, declined according to each person's own capacities (Colella, 2018). By ecologically involving the individual, motor literacy cannot fail to have important repercussions on the Quality of Life (Schallock, Verdugo Alonso, 2006) perceived by the person: in this sense, this construct takes on a strongly inclusive connotation insofar as, by soliciting the development of soft and hard skills through knowledge and practice of and in one's body in its action on and in reality, it allows the person to enrich his or her existential trajectory, helping him or her to recognise it, build it, design it (Giaconi et al, 2024). In other words, it forms the basis for the integral development of the person throughout his or her life course: 'When purposeful physical pursuits become part of an individuals' life pattern they can enrich lives. When people are engaged in something they consider valuable and worthwhile they become aware of how participation can enable them to flourish and enhance their wellbeing. "(Almond, 2013, p.35). In this sense, it is necessary to overcome those philosophies and theorisations that belong to those social models that understand the body as an object (Broekhoff, 1972, p. 88): a body that is controlled and trained to those capacities that are useful to reach the standards envisaged by a socially acceptable system of behaviour and that can make it able to make a significant contribution within the economic system (Kirk, 1993, p.13). This decisive change of perspective can be seen in the socio-cultural approach that has led to a radically different declination of the discourse on the body, focusing on social and cultural factors on health (Cliff et al., 2009), bringing the concept of corporeity back to a holistic and integrated perspective, in which it is immersed in a constant connection with the mind, the spirit, perceived well-being and in a relationship of profound interdependence with the socio-cultural connotations in which and on which this system is nourished (Cliff et al.,2009). This paper begins with a reflection on the didactic design aimed at promoting affectivity education at a Secondary School in the Fabriano area (Province of Ancona), also with regard to the possible spin-offs in didactics built on an Embodied Cognition Based approach (Caruana, Borghi, 2013).

1. Embodied Education: the body as epistemic device

Before proceeding to expound on the didactic experience that is the subject of this contribution, it is considered useful to outline the basic perspective that animated the design of the activities, a perspective that recognises the body's value as an epistemic device, electing it as a place of embodied cognition (Gomez Paloma, 2013, p. 31). The brain is not the only resource available to human beings to determine a behavioural, lived, acted declination of their life experience. Only from the instantaneous interaction between body and environment (Mufanò, 2017) can complex decision-making outcomes arise, integrated by the constant exchange of information that is created between the body and the environment in which it manifests its presence, its action, its existence (Pennisi, 2023). From the viewpoint, therefore, of a properly intentional and formative action on the part of the teacher, who considers the uniqueness of all the actors involved, the activities put in place have been structured functionally towards inclusive thinking, sticking as closely as possible to the lines of Universal Design for Learning (Savia, 2016). The continuous tension towards an approach that is not assistive but *existential*, substantial, attentive to the particularities of each one, open to all, each according to his or her possibilities represents the soul of educational design. The teacher must, therefore, accompany the learning action of the subject, respecting the times and characteristics of the other, understanding it as a complex system of meanings, which learns new meanings and, at the same time, continuously produces new ones. In this sense, the teacher's work is supported by those pedagogical and scientific approaches that tend to integrate bodily movement with learning phenomena, providing teachers with the necessary scientific framework to improve their teaching action, involving learners more and more in the construction of their own educational pathway (Valentini et al, 2018; Maggi, 2020). It may be useful to make use, at a methodological level, of operational tools that can be rooted not only in formal didactic theorising but can help to develop significant improvements in emotion regulation and concentration such as mindfulness (Mori, 2012; Di Donna et al, 2014; Fedeli and Frison, 2018; Spaccapanico, 2022), or techniques that use and enhance artistic languages such as theatre, music, dance, visual arts (Cong et al. 2013; Poikonen et al 2018; Mansen et al., 2023; Cuccaro, et al.2021, 2024; Gentilozzi et al. 2024), as in the case presented below. Finally, it is increasingly necessary to recognise teachers as levers of change (Ainscow, 2005), reading their action as generative of possibilities and promoting learning paths where the context is finally recognised as facilitator of the person's functioning in terms of activity and participation (WHO, 2001). It is precisely the biopsychosocial perspective, which considers the individual in his or her entirety by outlining the

biological, psychological and social factors that contribute to his or her life experience, at the basis of the vision promoted by the ICF that allows us to adopt an ecological and holistic perspective of the person: a perspective that takes into account the complex interaction between cognitive, bodily and environmental functions, lays the scientific foundations and outlines the pedagogical guidelines for a person-centred approach and his or her global well-being, which are substantial and substantive elements for the professionalism of the teacher (Giaconi, Del Bianco, 2019). Teachers, in fact, make a decisive contribution to the creation of a positive and activating environment in which people can further develop their self-perception, their self-efficacy, their agentivity, laying the foundations for educational and training success. The possibility of creating moments of collaboration between teachers to encourage the exchange of ideas and good practices is becoming increasingly important (Ghedini et al., 2015; Aquario et al., 2017; Cusi and Robutti, 2017; Mura et al., 2020; Ferri and Bonometti, 2024) to open the door to the design of quality training, just as, continuous professional development (Maienza, 2021) is a fundamental element to allow teachers to be always updated on the developments of pedagogical, didactic and methodological possibilities.

2. Educating for affectivity: an EC-Based pilot project in the Fabriano area

The experience proposed at the 'Gentile da Fabriano' Comprehensive Institute, which is still in place as a pilot project for the promotion of affective education, involved five sections of the first grade class of the secondary school, thanks to the commitment of the Fabriano Municipality's Equal Opportunities Commission. Structured over a three-year period, the project envisages a primarily formative approach, open to parents and teachers, so as to provide pedagogical, didactic and methodological tools that can be immediately used in everyday life, both at school and in the family, and is structured along two lines: training for teachers and families on the one hand and interventions with students on the other. The following have been planned and are currently being implemented: A. Initial Training Meetings open to all staff teachers: (scientific reference framework (E.C.S.- Embodied Cognitive science); pedagogical and didactic aspects of the project; methodologies of intervention and didactic innovation project contents and expected outcomes. B. Training of the reference teaching team and co-planning of the interventions: initial assessment and detection of emerging training needs; definition of the objectives set in relation to the intervention context; activity planning; evaluation and verification of the training processes. C. In itinere project

follow-up by the referring teaching team: Evaluation of classroom interventions; recalibration of interventions; barriers and facilitators noted in itinere; comparison and sharing of key emerging; D. Periodic training meetings for parents and final restitution open to teachers, students and families: restitution of training paths; sharing of project products and artefacts with families; short concluding seminar. Between November 2023 and May 2024, shared planning/training meetings were held with the teachers involved in the project (six teachers from different subject areas) in which an overall assessment of the classes involved was drawn up in order to elaborate the pedagogical and didactic objectives, contextualising them to the training needs identified by the teachers (16 hours in total); in addition, sharing and training meetings were held for the families of the students involved in the project (one initial meeting and one final meeting, four hours in total). To involve the families in the educational planning, during the first meeting. An anonymous questionnaire was administered in which parents were asked the following questions: 1. *In your opinion, what topics would you like to be dealt with in relation to adolescence?* 2. *What risks do you think you run during adolescence?* 3. *What difficulties do you experience in your relationship with your child?* 4. *What are the strengths of your relationship with your child?* 5. *Express, in three words, your idea of adolescence.* 25 replies were received to this questionnaire, replies that provided further stimulus for the action of planning the contents and methodologies to be applied during the course. Five meetings were held for each section involved, four of which were conducted by expert pedagogues, music therapists, experts in social theatre techniques and one by a psychologist), for a total of forty hours of workshop meetings. Following the planning meetings, it was decided to use the methodology of the HDW habilitative drama workshop (Cuccaro, et al. 2023), proposing five ninety-minute meetings for each section group, to be modulated according to the group's responses to the stimuli. At the end of each meeting, a feedback moment with the teachers of varying lengths of 15-30 minutes was scheduled, depending on the criticalities and feedback noted during the delivery of the activities. During the course, observations on the activities were recorded using a semi-structured grid (Table 1), concerning the activities carried out, the reactions of the group, significant individual reactions and any notes by the teachers involved. At the end of all meetings, a cognitive autobiography containing the following guiding questions was administered to all participating students: 1. *What topics were covered during the meeting?* 2. *What were the things that involved you the most?* 3. *What were the things that involved you the least?* 4- *What do you think you learnt from the meeting?* 5. *How did you feel during the meeting?* In addition to the semi-structured

grid in table 1, the teachers were given an interview at the end of each meeting containing the following questions: 1. *What topics were covered during the meeting?* 2. *What did you observe/discern with respect to the participation of the working group?* 3. *What did you notice/observe with respect to the individual elements of the working group?* 4. *What did you observe/detect with respect to the relationships between the individuals in the working group?* 5. *Do you think you have deduced useful insights for your daily professional practice with respect to the work cues?* At the end of the course, interviews were administered to the teachers to evaluate the activities, which formed the basis for a closing discussion between teachers and operators. At the conclusion of the first year of project implementation, an activity evaluation questionnaire was administered to the participating teachers in order to be able to proceed, on the basis of the teachers' perceptions and the processing of the data reported in the students' cognitive autobiographies, to the redesign of the activities for the following years. The questions in the questionnaire administered are as follows: 1. *Summarise your experience of the project in three key words. Reasons for the key words you listed in the previous question;* 3. *Do you think the training course was useful? Please give reasons for your answer;* 4. *Do you think that the training can be applied in your professional practice?* 5. *Please rate the competence of the trainers (from 1 to 6, where 1 is poor, 6 is excellent);* 6. *Please rate the structure of the contents (from 1 to 6, where 1 is poor, 6 is excellent);* 7. *Please rate your experience overall (from 1 to 6, where 1 is poor, 6 is very good);* 8. 9. *What strengths did you detect?* 10. *Do you have any suggestions for the future development of activities?*

Activity presented by the facilitator	Group reactions	Significant reactions	Notes
Activity #1: Form a circle holding hands in a progressively smaller space.	At first, the group is not able to perform the task. After a few attempts, the pupils begin to occupy the space correctly.	K. is likely to leave the group repeatedly; D. abstains from the activities altogether.	The facilitator had to get the children's attention several times. Duration: about 12 minutes.

Table 1: Observation grid

The analysis of data and emerging project data will be the subject of a more extensive research work that will be developed at the end of the project activities.

3. Methodological Focus: The Dramatic Habilitative Workshop (HDW)

The possibility of using artistic languages allows for a complex activation of bodily and cognitive resources, according to the Embodied Cognition paradigm (Gallese, 2013), allowing for their explication and observation. The body, as perceived, experienced, communicated to the other becomes a determining element in the acquisition of new awareness and skills (Gamelli, 2012). The EC-Based Enabling Drama Workshop (Cuccaro, Gentilozzi, Gomez Paloma, 2021), using plural methodological tools derived from different fields of artistic expression, attempts to promote the activation of the individual's resources thanks also to the work group and the dynamics that occur within it (Di Dago, 2008). Implemented in different educational and training contexts, in schools of all levels, in teacher and university training, in socio-educational and health care environments, the workshop aims to foster self-expression and self-knowledge through the proposal of activities based on relationships, body movement, play and discovery, to ultimately allow for the recognition of one's abilities and the possibility of acquiring new ones (Pitruzzella, 2004). The method is based on a flexible project approach, adapted to the needs of the specific context and target group. In-depth knowledge of the intervention context and the people involved is crucial for the effectiveness of the process. The guidelines of the intervention are established with the reference educational team, and include the definition of the general aims, the number of participants, the duration and timing of the meetings, the prerequisites in terms of skills and knowledge, the contents, the objectives divided by areas of functioning, the expected competences, the structure of the meetings and the evaluation of the intervention. Starting from the analysis of educational and training needs, and through constant dialogue with the reference team identified as the client (Centonze, 2010), the general aims of the intervention are established. It is essential to share a clear and well-structured project line, which takes into account the needs of the context. This allows the conductor to clarify any misunderstandings related to stereotypes, particularly those concerning expressive artistic languages, such as theatre. Often, theatre is associated with the idea of stage and show, generating erroneous expectations. However, the HDW workshop stands out because, while using theatre techniques, it does not aim at a final performance, but at creating a dramatic experience, where action and individual involvement are central. The number of participants may vary according to the needs of the context, but it is recommended to be between eight and twenty people to facilitate group dynamics (Picone & Ruvolo, 2010; Bertani & Manetti, 2007). The duration of the course depends on the objectives established with the educational team and the resources available. The intervention period can vary

from a minimum of three months to a maximum of three years, with weekly meetings to ensure continuity of work. There are no specific prerequisites, and everyone can participate regardless of their abilities. The main objective is not performance, but individual well-being, through a path of self-discovery and self-skills (Oliva, 2005). The contents of the course are defined together with the educational team on the basis of the needs identified. The thematic possibilities are broad, including literature, visual arts, current affairs, politics and humanistic or scientific disciplines. The activation of personal resources takes place through cooperative and metacognitive approaches (Miato & Miato, 2003), using different expressive channels to stimulate personal experience and the involvement of the body as an instrument of knowledge. The objectives, which vary according to needs, are divided into different areas of functioning: autonomy, physical, cognitive, motor, emotional and relational skills. Each area is developed through activities that promote autonomy, planning and organisational skills, emotional management, social interaction and collaboration. The operational methodologies used are agreed with the team and may include cooperative learning, metacognition, brainstorming, role playing, circle time, and experiential art workshops (music, theatre, photography, painting, dance, etc.). The pedagogical focus is on self-reflection, the development of metacognitive skills, perception of self and other, creative and divergent thinking, collaboration and social responsibility. The development of emotional and kinaesthetic intelligence is encouraged, promoting critical thinking and the capacity for autonomous judgement. To monitor group dynamics, the presence of a participant observer is envisaged (Semi, 2010). The assessment of skills can take place through different modalities: ethnographic observations, questionnaires, cognitive autobiographies (Capobianco, 2021) and observation grids. During the meetings, participants are stimulated to reflect on the stimuli received and to narrate their own experiences. The meetings follow a circular and hermeneutic structure (Deiana, 2017), divided into five phases: introduction, core activity, work sharing, feedback and discussion, and final synthesis. At the end of each meeting, the team meets to evaluate and redesign the interventions, ensuring a continuous evolution of the training course. A central aspect of the HDW workshop is the value placed on participants' experiences and actions. With the guidance of qualified professionals, it is possible to draw from the narrative useful elements for reflection and the construction of new perspectives, favouring a path of personal and social growth. This process has an important pedagogical and psychological meaning, representing an opportunity to reflect and take care of what has been experienced and elaborated during the workshop. Although HDW is not a therapeutic activity, it can produce therapeutic

effects, thanks to the reflective and relational nature of the intervention, and was therefore defined as a methodological activation useful for achieving the project objectives.

4. Data presentation and analysis of initial research findings

From the analysis of the findings concerning the first project activations, several perspectives emerge, which may be realised at the end of the educational experimentation. With respect to the families' perspective (Figure 1), which emerged from the 25 answers to the questionnaire, there emerges the need for support in dealing with topics such as affectivity education (60%), gender equality (44%), rule management (20%), conflict management (40%), peer relationship management (24%), managing relationships with adults (32%), managing psychological change in adolescence (48%), managing body changes in adolescence (40%). With respect to students' perceptions of the risks they face during adolescence, families (Figure 2) note as preponderant: bullying and cyberbullying (72%), technological addictions (76%), conflictual relationships with adults (44%), psychological (44%) and social discomfort (32%), substance addiction (40%), while issues related to gambling addictions (4%), affective addictions (12%), errors in school orientation (20%), phenomena of dispersion and abandonment (12%), demotivation and apathy (24%), eating disorders (4%) are perceived less strongly.

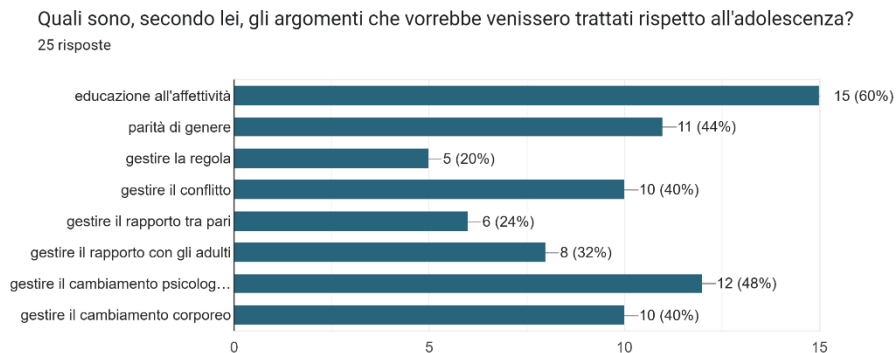


Figure 1: Topics of interest to parents

Quali sono i rischi che secondo lei si corrono durante l'adolescenza?

25 risposte

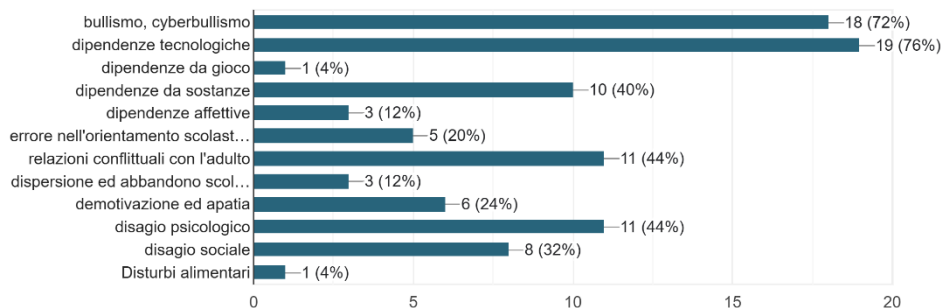


Figure 2: Risks perceived by parents in adolescence

In the difficulties related to the relationship with their adolescent children, parents note: the management of emotions, little dialogue, conflict, the management of requests to get a mobile phone, time management with respect to the execution of homework and time spent on social networks. While active listening, complicity, constant dialogue, communication, understanding, the ability to defuse, family affection are noted as relational strengths. The parents' perceptions of adolescence, summarised in key words, made it possible to detect relevant semantic aspects, such as the recurrence of terms such as: conflict, change, immaturity, fear, friendship, disorientation, autonomy, difficulty, insecurity, restlessness, identification, emotionality. From the teachers' perspective, the training interventions made it possible to make several dynamics explicit (the teachers' words contained in their answers to the questionnaire evaluating the training activities are quoted here): 1. *Discovering the needs of the pupils, using the body in the learning process, difficulty in implementing teaching in line with the pupils' interests, also taking into account bureaucratic constraints*; 2. *Stimuli and ideas (new ideas to propose in class); awareness (awareness of the limits of the usual teaching proposals and the effectiveness of new proposals and a new structuring of teaching)*; 3. *Sharing because they were moments in which one could recount one's own experiences and receive points of view and advice, reflection on what one is doing, what one wants to achieve and how one can act to improve, exchange because through discussion everyone was able to bring their own experience and share it with others*; 4. *Stimulating topics, teaching ideas to apply in the classroom, awareness of the fact that one cannot apply a standard teaching model, even if it was valid until a while ago*. 5. *Dialogue: exchange of experiences*

with trainers and colleagues; Cues: re-applicable ideas suggested by colleagues/trainers Examples: examples of situations experienced/experienced at school and their "management" by the teacher. I found the training useful: 1. because it gave me methodological and didactic cues; 2. because it created a small window for exchanging views with colleagues from parallel classes with whom I don't usually have the opportunity to compare myself; 3. to understand how to combine didactic content with socialising activities that can appeal to self-knowledge and knowledge of others; 4. because I discovered that children can also learn with their bodies and emotions 5. because it gave me different ideas to implement in the classrooms. Among the critical points noted by the teachers, the need to have more time available for workshop and teaching activities structured according to the model described above is evident. From the students' perspective, from the first analyses of the cognitive autobiographies, it is important to emphasise a general perception of well-being, involvement, and interest in the topics tackled. With respect to the latter, the students also showed, in their reflection papers, that they appreciated the interactive and physical approach of the didactics presented, on the one hand, and the possibility of expressing their own opinion with respect to emotional and affective issues and learning about the other's perspective, on the other.

Conclusions

The exploration of the didactic possibilities opened up by PL and the Embodied Education perspective, can be an advantageous working perspective for all those involved in the complex world of education. What is particularly interesting is the possibility, as in the case described so far, of starting from a corporeal literacy in order to access a more complex and integrated perspective of emotional literacy. If literacy presupposes a constant and recursive process of acquiring meanings in a progressive manner in order to bring about a deeper understanding of ourselves and what surrounds us (Ennis, 2015), building skills that are useful and expendable in different and multiple fields, it is necessary to free ourselves from the merely performance-based logic of motor activation (Ennis, 1996). According to Cobo (2013), literacy contains the ability to apply skills learned in educational contexts in other, more operational and functional contexts. The question that the teacher of the present and future will have to deal with is, quite simply: what do I have the responsibility to teach my students? (Young, 2008). The link between teaching and responsibility is essential, a link that allows the generation of increasingly complex knowledge and professional skills to meet the educational challenges of

contemporary society. The teacher's task becomes, therefore, the design and planning of interventions aimed at building pathways that can predict and define what essential knowledge, skills and abilities are needed to go beyond their own level of understanding (Young 2013). Physical literacy goes far beyond physical education in schools or structured sports activities, offering instead a broader conception of physical activity. Through the interplay between different pedagogical models and paradigms, the adoption of new ways of thinking, physical literacy promises more realistic models of physical competence and physical activity by offering everyone the opportunity to participate with motivation and activation in their own expression of humanity in the world (Whitehead, 2013). If the motor alphabet is related to other alphabets (Colella, 2018), this alphabet is determinant and constitutive of the very ontology of the subject who learns, who lives, who exists: the considerable repercussions in terms of perceived self-efficacy (Bandura, 2000) are well known, since through corporeity the individual communicates, processes, perceives the world inside and outside him/herself, operating continuous adaptations and integrations (Gallahue et. al., 2012). Ultimately, PL thus stands as a fundamental construct that connects the bodily, psychological and behavioural aspects of learning (Giblin et al., 2014). The investigation with respect to these two fundamental constructs, PL and Embodiment, turns out to be potentially generative of numerous possibilities of application, also following a systematic review of the literature, operational applications, and experiments, in the search for a substantial narrowing of the gap between academic research and practical modelling of designs that can be implemented in everyday life and school practice (Lambert et al., 2024).

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