

WHEN THE CLASSROOM BECOMES A STAGE.
DIDACTIC PROPOSALS FOR CULTURAL INCLUSION THROUGH CHOREOGRAPHIC, MUSICAL AND
PERFORMATIVE MOTOR ACTIVITIES IN THE EDUCATIONAL FIELD

QUANDO L'AULA DIVENTA UN PALCOSCENICO.
PROPOSTE DIDATTICHE PER L'INCLUSIONE CULTURALE ATTRAVERSO ATTIVITÀ COREOGRAFICHE,
MUSICALI E MOTORIE PERFORMATIVE IN AMBITO EDUCATIVO

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ABSTRACT

In light of the different inclusive needs and in line with the transversal perspective of the National Guidelines for the Curriculum, a teaching method is proposed through musical, choreutic and performative motor activities that can be achieved both in the classroom and in the gym. The intent is to amplify the possibilities of socio-cultural inclusion of newly belonging learners with potential communication difficulties also linked to the knowledge of the language, emphasizing the enrichment deriving for all students and breaking down social, cultural or economic barriers, in a captivating and motivating mode. Therefore, the conduct of the proposals by the teacher will be particularly complex, but no less engaging and fascinating. He must be able to manage the dynamics of the individual (emotional states and any discomforts) within the groups composed also by learners with different cultures of origin who will be enhanced (thanks primarily to the different musical proposals). Each student will be called to collaborate and accept choices and relational situations (social skills and respect for the rules), *through movement proposals* (knowledge and skills) with deep personal participation (music-motor interpretation). This context will be a privileged place to acquire important skills for life *through movement* (personal acceptance and mutual respect, trust in others, commitment to a goal and the common good, spirit of initiative, problem solving).

Alla luce delle diverse necessità inclusive ed in linea con l'ottica trasversale delle Indicazioni Nazionali per il Curricolo, viene proposta una modalità didattica attraverso attività motorie musicali, coreutiche e performative realizzabili sia in classe che in palestra. L'intento è quello di amplificare le possibilità di inclusione socioculturale di discenti di nuova appartenenza con potenziali difficoltà comunicative legate altresì alla conoscenza della lingua, enfatizzandone l'arricchimento derivante per tutti gli studenti ed abbattendo le barriere sociali, culturali od economiche, in modalità progettuale, accattivante e motivante. Pertanto, la conduzione delle proposte da parte del docente sarà particolarmente complessa, ma non per questo meno coinvolgente ed affascinante. Costui dovrà essere in grado di gestire le dinamiche del singolo (stati emotivi ed eventuali disagi) all'interno dei gruppi composti anche da discenti con diverse culture di provenienza che verranno valorizzate (grazie *in primis* alle diverse proposte musicali). Ogni allievo sarà chiamato a collaborare e accettare scelte e situazioni relazionali (competenze sociali e rispetto delle regole), *attraverso proposte di movimento* (conoscenze e abilità) con profonda partecipazione personale (interpretazione musicomotoria). Questo contesto sarà un luogo privilegiato per acquisire importanti competenze per la vita *attraverso il movimento* (accettazione personale e rispetto reciproco, fiducia negli altri, impegno per un obiettivo e per il bene comune, spirito di iniziativa, risoluzione dei problemi).

KEYWORDS

Physical Education and Sports, Socio-cultural Inclusion, School, Music, Performing Arts.

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1. Introduction¹

Physical Education and Motor Sciences use movement activities to promote in students a global development that includes skills not only of a motor nature, but also social, cognitive, affective and moral (Casolo & Frattini, 2021). In fact, *"through the Movement, with which a vast range of gestures is carried out ranging from facial expressions, to dance, to the most varied sports performances, the student will be able to know his body and explore the space, communicate and relate to others in an adequate and effective way"* (MIUR, Physical Education, 2012); Moreover, *"through the motor dimension the student is facilitated in the expression of communicative instances and discomforts of various kinds that are not always able to communicate with verbal language"* (ibidem).

Inclusion and integration are of fundamental importance in the context of insertion in the socio-cultural system of belonging and/or new belonging, especially of *"subjects with social and cultural disadvantage, specific learning disorders and/or specific developmental disorders, difficulties deriving from the lack of knowledge of the culture and language because they belong to different cultures"* (M.I.U.R., Ministerial Directive, 27 December 2012).

Therefore, an inclusive modality is outlined below through proposals for motor animation and choreographic-performative activities through the use of the musical element, with particular reference to learners from different cultures compared to that of current life, with potential communication difficulties related to learning the language. The proposal can be applicable to school and extracurricular contexts, also declinable to situations of disability and/or Special Educational Needs.

The choice of activities starts from the search for a spontaneous, cultural, dynamic and shared communication that allows personal expression through motivating and socializing experiences: this "language", common and universal, can find fertile ground in the combination of motor activity, music and performing arts. *"Music [in fact] in the history of mankind is mostly associated with moments of joy and leisure as well as pleasant activities and learning environments"* (Dugnani et al. 2015). Moreover, *"as a means of expression and communication, music constantly interacts with the other arts and is open to exchanges and interactions"*

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with the various fields of knowledge" (M.I.U.R., Music, 2012) contributing to the global formation of the person since learning *"needs to connect to infinite interdisciplinary issues"* (Frauenfelder, 2018). *Music "through identity and intercultural functions, provides students with the tools for knowledge, comparison and respect for other cultural and religious traditions"* (MIUR, Music, 2012) and, moreover, will provide the same knowledge, skills and competences suitable for *"creating sound events that integrate other artistic forms, such as dance, theater, visual and multimedia arts"* (ivi).

The proposed activities aim, in particular, the objective of *educating the movement and through movement* (Dugnani & Invernizzi, 2013) in order to facilitate the inclusion and integration of subjects belonging to different cultures and/or characterized by social and cultural disadvantage.

2 - "Silence": the word to Music

From the operational point of view, the use of the musical element can be at the same time a tool and a catalyst, objective and expression, for the activity of the individual and the group: the proposal uses, in order to pursue objectives of motor, emotional and communicative activation "without borders", the effect that music has on the human being: it has been found to activate the brain just like a chemical stimulant and to offer amplified sensations of pleasure, excitement or satisfaction (Levitin & McGill, 2007), as well as physical reactions such as sweating, sexual arousal and "shivers down the spine" (Blood et al., 1999).

In light of all this, it is fascinating to note the dynamic opportunities offered by the use of music in the teaching of Sports Sciences. The teacher, whose figure must rest on scientific and design bases, proposing motivating, polyvalent and multilateral situations (Dugnani et al., 1996), once analyzed the group with which he is about to work, will be able to choose the songs and music together with the learners, in order to pursue the different needs and skills, among which certainly trigger emotional states, eliminating socio-cultural barriers through group experiences, aimed at free joyful personal expression, in full respect of the other, according to common rules of civil coexistence. The possibility, moreover, to favor situations of *ideomotor co-execution* (objective rhythm shared with others) which *"can assume a social and communicative role"* (Casolo, 2020), will really allow everyone to participate in the proposed activities according to their peculiarities and without excluding anyone.

3 - "Engine": the teacher-animator

Motor activities pervade many didactic moments, regardless of the type, at the level of formal, non-formal, informal learning and, in the case of the treated area, must be aimed at developing skills transferable to everyday life contexts, both directly and transversally.

The teacher must try to find a "breach" in the potential reticence of the learner and in order to be able to stimulate it in the realization of a task with an important transversal value, in the context of group work through deep and real interactions between its components. It is essential that the proposals allow gratifications for the student and for the group to create a virtuous circle in different respects.

The didactic criterion, "*defined as the set of skills and methodological choices that a teacher activates in a personal and individual way in order to teach effectively*" (Casolo, 2011), in addition to the competences par excellence related to motor activity, should also include some peculiar elements:

- Communication: "*... It is not possible not to have a behavior ... It follows that one cannot fail to communicate. Activity or inactivity, words or silence all have the value of a message: they influence others and others, in turn, cannot fail to respond to these communications and in this way they also communicate*" (Watzlawick et al., 1971). The first axiom of communication (Palo Alto School, California) unequivocally outlines a fundamental peculiarity of the human being: it is impossible not to communicate since any human interaction is a form of communication. Any behavior assumed by an individual, immediately becomes a bearer of meaning for others. The attitude and behavior of the teacher must therefore transmit positive messages in verbal, paraverbal and non-verbal form. Especially during the group activity, the charisma of the teacher can be an important source of trust in the students who will see in the authority of her/his style a feeling of welcome and respect, in order to instill in them emulative behaviors of loyalty and mutual correctness.
- Theory of Mind and Empathy: closely related elements must inevitably permeate the *Being* and *Being with* of the teacher. In this regard, it is interesting to remember the correlation between the two concepts, in the light of the latest studies of Neuroscience. The Concept of Theory of Mind

(Premack & Woodruff, 1978) is defined as the cognitive ability to represent one's own and others' mental states, in terms of thoughts and beliefs, but also of desires, requests and feelings, in such a way as to be able to explain and predict behavior. It seems plausible to hypothesize that the Theory of Mind is an innate cognitive capacity in the human being, whose development process is partly influenced by the cultural context of the subject and is relatively independent of his intellectual level (Fletcher et al., 1995). Directly from this possibility, Empathy arises, understood as the ability to identify and make one's own the moods of another person according to the hypothesis that the brain recognizes and shares emotional states through a mirror mechanism in which the same brain areas are activated both in the case of the observation of an emotion, and in the case of its actual experience. This mechanism would involve *mirror neurons* that have the surprising property of responding both when the subject performs an action and when he observes another individual perform the same action (Cattaneo & Rizzolatti, 2009). Mirror neurons have motor characteristics identical to motor neurons but have peculiar visual properties: they do not respond to the simple visual presentation of objects, nor are they influenced by their physical qualities; their activation depends rather on the observation of finalized acts: the sharing of an action, even if only observed, activates a simulation process "*with one's own motor system, in one's own motor system*" (Gallese & Guerra, 2015). It has been proposed that mirror neurons act as generators of internal representations that lead to the recognition and understanding of the meaning of the acts of others. If applied to the sphere of emotions, the mirror mechanism would immediately make available in the brain the reproduction of the observed emotional state, thus allowing to understand in a direct way the emotions of others. Based on what has been described, the discoveries of Neuroscience offer very valid possibilities regarding the close connection of mirror neurons with motor activity and with the emotional sphere. The scientific references, declined to the practical-educational reality, indicate, therefore, that the teacher expert must try to grasp in the eyes and through behavior of the learners their emotions and potential discomforts, to permeate the proposed activity on the basis of their needs and adapting it, as far as possible, to the needs that arise.

- Prevention: according to the *Preventive System* in education of St. Giovanni Bosco, understood as "the desire to prevent the emergence of

negative experiences *that could compromise the energies of the young person or force him to long and painful recovery efforts*" (Braido, 1999), it is necessary to remember precise methodological criteria, such as: the art of educating positively, proposing the good in adequate and engaging experiences; the art of making young people grow "from within", relying on inner freedom and not on external conditioning; the art of winning the hearts of young people to entice them with joy and satisfaction towards the good, correcting deviations and forming their character.

Although it may seem obvious or even redundant, the indications of the *Preventive System* are absolutely valid, now more than ever, and can support the teacher in the most delicate moments, even when, sometimes, the educational path seems particularly fraught and tortuous...

- "Principle of Hope": possessing a "Principle of Hope" (Bloch, 2005) requires the awareness that often it is the simple gestures of everyday life that can introduce into people's history a change and redemption of their condition. There are no human situations, individual or social, that can be defined as irredeemable and often change is not generated by power, but by authenticity and love.
- Creativity and Versatility: the combination of creativity understood as *"circular art that comes from the genius of someone and offers its benefits to all others"* (Casolo & Melica, 2022) together with a great teaching of St. Giovanni Bosco according to which joy is not only recreation and fun, but authentic, irreplaceable pedagogical reality, recalls the to the proximity of the educator to young people especially in recreational moments: considerable pedagogical emphasis is in fact placed on parties, theater, music, singing and excursions (Braido, 1999).

4 - "Action": the didactic proposal

As anticipated, the proposal aims, through the use of the musical element and choreutic and performative activities, to contribute to the inclusion and social integration of subjects in developmental age both in school and extracurricular context.

The possibilities can also arise from the specific skills of each learner in the field of singing, instrumental and acting: these forms of art are real examples of refined

body expressiveness and evolved fine motor skills as the articulation of verbal language depends substantially on the contraction of the muscles responsible for phonation and movements of the tongue with respect to the palate (Casolo & Melica, 2022); in this regard, it is also interesting to remember that the brain areas responsible for controlling the motor skills of the hands and face represent more than two thirds of those responsible for controlling the rest of the body, thus responding to the needs of quality and precision of movement rather than the size of the parts (*ivi*).

In practical reality it is not a question of merely and casually inserting musical proposals during motor activities: the teacher will gradually introduce musical activities drawing from the preferences of the learners and their cultural background, "working behind the scenes", to monitor the effects in the immediate and medium term. In fact, if the proposal has taken hold, it could happen that learners request musical activations by proposing contributions and songs themselves. The first objective is to create a welcoming and stimulating atmosphere, pervaded by feelings of collaboration and mutual trust, especially among the students. Subsequently, the proposal provides for a progressive crescendo that, depending on the groups, can lead to different levels of activation and participation. The teacher will have the task of proposing appropriate activities with optimal musical selections, monitoring at all times the response of the boys and girls, especially through non-verbal communication. The feedback that will be collected will lay the foundations for subsequent proposals.

The level of involvement and participation of the group will allow progressively diversified proposals, which can be divided into levels according to the degree of involvement:

- *Level 1*: the learners welcome the musical element, but maybe they still struggle to get fully involved. The proposals will use music as a "catalyst", especially where motor and sports activities see little emphasis or participation, looking for a "breakthrough" in reticence and stimulating the motivation of the group. In particular, choreographic *active breaks* (Watson et al., 2019) in the classroom during curricular lessons can be very valuable.
- *Level 2*: the students welcome the musical element and propose motor activations depending on the genre and songs chosen (*active-breaks* in class and/or music-sport choreographies). It is possible to detect sufficient involvement to propose activities of musical interpretation and sharing that will lay the foundations for the subsequent activities.

- *Level 3*: the group is interested and involved in the musical-choreutic activity. The collaborative climate allows multiple music-motor proposals, especially choreographic, with peculiar contributions from the students also of a personal and technological nature aimed at the scenic and performing arts (singing and instrumental performances, dramatization and dance, costume design, scenography, musical productions, live music, D.J. set etc.). The conditions allow the organization of a real show in which to bring out the attitudes and skills of the learners, in a context of absolute exchange and mutual enrichment, thanks to the different backgrounds of cultural and personal peculiarities put into play.

When choosing and selecting music, it may be useful to take into account some peculiar elements of most of the currently best known songs (*genre, bpm, measures and musical phrases*), without neglecting compositions typical of different cultures that need specific *remixes* for their use (for example, mashups and combinations of ancient ballads and traditional music on modern bases).

In the field of body expressiveness, movements can be potentially infinite: choreographic activity can draw useful indications from typical, ethnic or transfer choreographies (for example Tribal Dances, Capoeira, Martial Arts etc.), from the basic steps of the main forms of dance (Classical, Modern, Jazz, Hip-Hop, Latin-American, Breakdance etc.) or, perhaps for beginners, from the world of Fitness (Aerobics, Step, Zumba etc.).

The musical proposals, respecting the above suggestions, can be very simple at first and then evolve towards deeper forms of expressive-motor and recitative interpretation.

The level of involvement and participation of the group will allow progressively diversified activities, which can be divided as follows:

Step 1: "Icebreaker: a motivating catalyst..."

Music-sports activation: in order to progressively approach the musical proposals, it is possible to "break the ice" through the combination with sports activities, becoming familiar with the technical gestures or the specific tools of the discipline through musical activations, proposing simple choreographies in the initial phase of the teaching moment (or possibly *active breaks* with small materials in the classroom). Very valid are the Freestyle variants of the different sports disciplines,

which can evolve towards real choreographic structures with tools of various kinds (*Freestyle Basketball, Freestyle Soccer, Freestyle Frisbee, Trick Shots, Freestyle Nunchaku* etc.).

Step 2: "Listening to the music and trying to interpret it with companions..."

- a) "*Roda Circle*" (*Capoeira transfer*). Circular deployment, reproduction of a movement proposed in rotation by each learner (or small group) on references and musical bases (or live instrumental performances). No coercion: those who do not feel like it will eventually propose later or will do it together with the teacher.
- b) *The Universal Theatre*. Free movement in the operational space, everyone tries to interpret music with the movements of their body, both from the rhythmic and mimic-expressive point of view, also through translocations in the space available individually, in pairs, in groups. The *playlist* will be compiled both from the contributions of the learners, and from the project of the teacher who will insert at least one specific track and the culture of origin of each student (music as a universal language).

Step 3: "Live Performing Show Project"

If the group is active, participatory and involved in the musical and choreographic proposal, the teacher can, therefore, "dare to the end" and propose the creation of a show to be presented live at an event (school party, anniversary etc.) or to "compete" with (and not against) other groups (belonging to the same institution or to other districts, at an intra-school level, between classes, or inter-school between schools, etc.) in a real "*Live Performing Arts Show*". The students would not only create the choreographies but also the scenography, the costumes (very valid in this regard the opportunities offered by the world of *Cosplay*) and, if the possibilities allow it, the production/reproduction of the songs (possibly presented with *live performances* singing, instrumental and/or *D.J. set*).

Particularly delicate is the role of the teacher who must: welcome the various proposals, guide the group and assist it in the choices with vivid attention to any *Special Educational Needs* in order to avoid frustration or escape; implement the methodologies most appropriate to the type of activity according to the group (in this regard the forms of *Peer Education* and *Peer Teaching* are very valid, stimulating *Life Skills* such as *Decision Making* and *Problem Solving*) and above all in relation to age, sex, origin, socio-cultural and economic background.

The progression of the proposal provides for a timing that varies in relation to the weekly frequency and duration of meetings with the group (from two hours per week of the Physical Education curriculum to a schedule usually more malleable in the extracurricular field) bringing the same to a real task of reality (*Live Show*).

5 - Conclusions

We are aware that this proposal can be energetic and challenging. However, the full participation of those involved, especially of teachers, can give truly surprising results, sometimes beyond expectations. And when, at times, the journey seems to reach a point of stalemate, it is essential to give proof in first person to the students, through personal example, to go forward without being discouraged, remembering that *"... [Everything] always seems impossible, until it is done..."* (Nelson Mandela).

Students can present themselves with realities of origin that are sometimes particularly difficult, prohibitive and painful and this proposal does not presume to provide solutions to every problem. Our intent is to concretely suggest some activities that can be carried out in multiple educational contexts, with particular reference to the school reality, *"to increase the effectiveness of learning in terms of inclusiveness and contrast to educational poverty, to promote a vision of the school in profound dialogue with society and society as an educating community"* (Colazzo & Manfreda, 2019), as well as making the student protagonist through the performing arts, empowering him without leaving him alone and making him experience the joy of even the smallest success of his and his group mates.

Every teacher, in the difficult task outlined by this proposal, could always remind himself that *"sowing is the basis of the art of educating. Educating, in fact, presupposes having a long patience: today a seed is sown... tomorrow it will be gathered"* (St. Giovanni Bosco).

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