

PERFORMING ARTS AND EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH: THE CASE OF THE UNIFG MASTER OF INCLUSION AND MUSIC

ARTI PERFORMATIVE E RICERCA EDUCATIVA: IL CASO DEL MASTER DI INCLUSIONE E MUSICA DELL'UNIFG

Francesca Finestrone¹
University of Foggia
francesca.finestrone@unifg.it

Guendalina Peconio²
University of Foggia
guendalina.peconio@unifg.it

Giusi Antonia Toto³
University of Foggia
giusi.toto@unifg.it

Abstract

In the context of recent educational research, the interest in the role of the performing arts as a strategic factor in an inclusive curricular design aimed at achieving the educational success of all students, retracing the regulatory stages and the neuroscientific discoveries that have established the educational value. Among all the facets of art, the one investigated and deepened with particular attention concerns music with its repercussions on the learning of subjects characterized by special and non-special educational needs. To circumscribe this field of research, the Master "Inclusion of Disabilities and Social Fragility through Ensemble Music and Performing Arts" was examined as a virtuous example of commitment in the training of qualified teaching staff. The University of Foggia carried out this fruitful collaboration between highly specialized figures belonging to this institution and the Higher artistic, musical and dance training.

Nell'ambito della ricerca educativa degli ultimi tempi, l'interesse rivolto al ruolo delle arti performative come fattore strategico in una progettazione curricolare inclusiva e volta al raggiungimento del successo formativo di tutti gli studenti, ripercorrendo le tappe normative e le scoperte neuroscientifiche che ne hanno sancito il valore formativo. Tra tutte le sfaccettature dell'arte, quella indagata ed approfondita con particolare attenzione riguarda la musica con le sue ricadute sull'apprendimento di soggetti caratterizzati da bisogni educativi speciali e non. Volendo circoscrivere il campo di azione, è stata esaminata, come esempio virtuoso di impegno nella formazione di personale docente qualificato, l'esperienza del Master "Inclusione delle Disabilità e delle Fragilità Sociali Attraverso la Musica d'Insieme e le Arti Performative", indetto dall'Università degli Studi di Foggia e svolto in una proficua collaborazione tra figure altamente specializzate appartenenti a tale istituzione e all'Alta formazione artistica, musicale e coreutica.

¹ The abstract and paragraph 1 were written by Francesca Finestrone.

² The introduction was written by Guendalina Peconio.

³ The conclusion and supervision of the full contribution is by Giusi Antonia Toto.

Key-words

Music, inclusive education, training, educational research, experimentation.
Musica, didattica inclusiva, formazione, ricerca educativa, sperimentazione.

Introduction

In 2015, the 193 countries belonging to the UN signed the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, committing themselves to an action program aimed at achieving 17 objectives on issues important for the development of a sustainable society. By observing these goals in detail, it is possible to see a particular attention not only to the protection of the planet, but also to ensuring that all people are equally able to realize their potential with dignity (Agenda 2030, 2015), without distinction of any kind, ensuring a quality education to the most vulnerable students, such as those suffering from forms of disability, specific learning disabilities or other special educational needs, trying to create or strengthen, in concert, healthy environments and sensitive to the theme of inclusion, so that learning opportunities for all materialize.

In this context, an eminent role is played by the school, which must prove to be capable of integrating teaching methodologies and using strategies to respond effectively to the aforementioned future perspectives in the educational action.

To implement an improvement in the quality of education, already in 2010, a document was produced, the Seoul Agenda, aimed at outlining the importance of the arts in learning and highlighting best practices in the context of structures training (UNESCO, 2006). The artistic sectors must therefore find space and resonance in school and extracurricular programs; in particular, it is essential to correct the perception of some teachers, educators and school administrators, who are still struggling to develop a culture of creativity, although this has been valued on several occasions in European programming.

Art and creativity are means of social cohesion, and they involve different cognitive abilities: relationality, memory skills (Ferreri & Verga, 2016), pro-social behavior, identity construction and transversal skills, all of which occur while having fun.

The literature is full of studies on the pedagogical value of art, which could be functional to the development of the potential of students, especially those with disabilities, for which it is necessary to enhance residual skills and cauterize critical ones.

In the wake of the Seoul Agenda, the Bonn Declaration on Music Education in Europe (EMC, 2011) was created, in which music is the most effective resource in schools to promote the holistic development of the individual. Music also promotes inclusion and stimulates the process of representing reality symbolically (Frabboni et al., 2007) and is a pleasant cross-cultural and accessible practice, as it can be adapted to multiple situations and to individual abilities.

In particular, improvements were found in the synchronization of brain activities, in verbal and non-verbal skills (Cooper et al., 2020), in executive and rhythmic-lexical functions of preschool children with dyslexia that resulted from music training (Rizzo, 2021). Improvements were also found in the maturation of socio-emotional areas in preterm infants (Almeida et al., 2020), as well as having acquired a crucial role in the regulation of emotions in adults.

Numerous neuroscientific studies have investigated the effects of music as a rehabilitative tool in different clinical pictures: motor, cognitive, linguistic, emotional and social deficits, in people suffering from debilitating neurological diseases, in cases of autism (Geretsegger et al., 2014), of hyperactivity and special educational needs (Flaunacco et al., 2015), in relation to its ability to modify brain functions and structures (Rolka & Silverman, 2015); Patel (2018) defines music as a transformative technology for the mind due to its powerful ability to reshape the brain and to increase connectivity (Proverbio, 2019) through the mechanisms of neuroplasticity (synaptogenesis).

In light of these findings, we can deduce that the teaching of music, beyond an exquisitely aesthetic dimension, is able to enhance an individual's originality and diversity, providing authentic expression in languages and opportunities for experimentation, both individually and in groups (e.g. ensemble music), both in the school community and in non-institutional significant learning environments, multiplying the opportunities for growth, dialogue and inclusion, admitting "the coexistence of differences in each and every 'other in the community sense'" (Saverio, Batini & Scierri, 2020). Anthony Storr (2015), in his book *Music and the Mind*, underlines precisely the community value of music and how a sort of "neurogamy" is established between the participants in the same musical event. This bond is sanctioned precisely by the rhythm, which makes listening an active motor process and produces a sense of collectivity and shared emotionality, creates a sense of belonging, induces prosocial behavior, strengthens cohesion and the sharing of meanings and strengthens the sense of identity in a group. In a context in which individuals know and recognize each other in their specificities, one can glimpse the opportunity of educational planning based on inclusion through music. This is the educational path that allows the expression of emotions by building something of beauty (Rizzo, 2021) and by tuning in to the same emotional frequency (Lucangeli, 2019). However, to ensure its realization, it is necessary to provide tools and to calibrate the real needs of each learner inserted in a school community, which must be accessible to all, regardless of the temporary⁴ presence of special educational needs. To design artistic-cultural paths aimed at guaranteeing equal learning opportunities and inclusivity, it is essential that the reference context is equipped with the indispensable human and instrumental resources, in accordance with the provisions of the Declaration of Human Rights on the right to participate freely in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and therefore to be able to express oneself freely through them and therefore also through music. The reflection that arises spontaneously at this point, beyond the objective difficulties of some structures in rethinking the spaces useful for fostering the processes of participation and belonging (in line with the theories of social socio-constructivism), concerns the skills that characterize teachers and operators in third sector entities with a view to an integrated approach between the dimension of social promotion and that of artistic quality. These educational protagonists must act as facilitators and remove barriers of any nature that hinder the development process of the individual as a whole (Inclusive Perspective MIUR 2012, 2013; WHO, 2007; Index for Inclusion, 2014) and for this purpose, the musical experience constitutes a favorable environmental factor, referring to the ICF model which identifies disability as a socio-cultural construct and not an individual deficit (Model ICF-CF, 2007).

⁴ Assembly, UG Universal Declaration of Human Rights; United Nations General Assembly: New York, NY, USA, 1948.

Among the sociocultural interventions of relevance in the demolition of preconceptions and in the construction of sociality in environments inhabited by heterogeneous abilities, there is the project of José Antonio Abreu, a visionary musician and economist, who conceived, promoted and actually concretized El Sistema, a musical didactic model that provides for orchestras and choirs, whose members come from situations of socio-economic hardship or other circumstances of social fragility.

This project inspired several initiatives that followed, including the Manos Blancas Choir ⁵. This was created by Naybeth García and Jhonny Gómez, co-founding members of El Sistema, who strongly wanted this model to embrace an ever widening pool of aspiring musicians. They wanted to involve all children and young people with disabilities, with sensory and cognitive deficits, allowing them to live the experience of making music together, each according to their own expressive possibilities. The people involved were able to play and sing with sounds and gestures and to visually interpret the songs performed, all while collaborating to provide an inclusive and enriching experience for everyone.

Although music education was made compulsory in lower secondary schools about forty years ago (Ministerial Decree, 1979), and the troubled birth of the Music and Dance High School was sanctioned in the 2010-2011 school year ⁶, it is much more recent is the socio-psycho-pedagogical interest related to the key role that this *Ars combinatorial* plays (Brancacci, 2019) in mending situations of more or less accentuated social fragility and to guarantee "a symphonic development of the student" (Ciarocchi, 2021) in a personality resonance.

Music teachers and other professionals that work with music, in the perspective of pursuing a state of psycho-physical well-being, cannot be configured only as experts and virtuosos of the subject, only as dispensers of static teaching (and being static has very little to do with musical practice), anchored to an ancient vision of notions inoculators, but must also have a panoramic vision (Schön, Akiva-Kabiri & Vecchi, 2018) to create relationships, to invest in a social dimension through music, and to support the acquisition of transversal skills that can be spent throughout the student's entire life project, which allows the students to achieve autonomy in a manner consistent with their abilities (Palladino, 2021), therefore they must possess authentic and specific pedagogical and musical skills (Elliott & Silverman, 2015).

At the beginning of the 20th century, Dalcroze, Orff and Kodaly had theorized the teaching of music according to teaching methods still considered innovative today, with a multisensory, dynamic and operational approach (Bottero & Carbone, 2003), born from a reflection on the need to adapt teaching to the psychophysical development of pupils, claiming the centrality of the body as a forge in which music takes shape and confirming the need to make music through music, stripping itself of inert grammaticalities (Dalcroze, 2008) and providing, through laboratory teaching, positive relapses in more perceptive spheres, on motivation, hooking the attention and curiosity of students with the *expressive mysteries* of music (Machover, 2004). In order to construct settings, in which disciplinary objectives and training objectives converge, a capillary preparation in the subject is necessary, but not sufficient, as this alone would be sterile for the purposes of building an inclusive school community. Teaching is one of the design sciences (Laurillard, 2015) and requires continuous updating to carry out the educational mission, and teachers cloak themselves with knowledge and skills that do not always pertain to the field of their initial training, such as digital skills. Today,

⁵ <http://www.alberodeisorrisi.org/index.php/italia/97-coro-manos-blancas-2016-17#:~:text=Nato%20in%20Venezuela%20grazie%20a,del%20'fare%20musica'%20together.>

⁶ <https://www.miur.gov.it/web/guest/licei-musicali-e-coreutici>

digital skills are fundamental in teaching and also in music, considering the constant progress of music technology, which allows everyone active participation in musical practice and to create personalized and accessible digital musical instruments, equipped with different interface types: tangible controllers, touchless controllers, Brain-Computer Music Interfaces (BCMI), adapted instruments, wearable controllers or prosthetic devices, mouth-operated controllers, audio controllers, gaze controllers, touchscreen controllers, and mouse-controlled interfaces (Frid, 2019). The possibility of playing a nontraditional instrument highlights the versatility of this discipline, which adapts to the spectrum of the performer's skills, allowing him to express himself independently and with others in ensemble music laboratories, hence the definition of these tools as adaptive (Vamvakousis & Ramirez, 2016), an intrinsic characteristic of musical intervention, as it is shaped on interindividual differences.

A widespread $\Delta\acute{o}\xi\alpha$ is that musicality is an innate characteristic, a talent engraved in the genetic makeup and not susceptible to epigenetic factors, but this is not true because both nature and culture contribute to the development of the brain (Schön, 2018) and it has been confirmed from neuroimaging techniques and research in this area, so it is advisable to focus on the applicability of the current knowledge of this pedagogical tool on teaching techniques and invest in the training of professionals working in this sector, providing them with a useful road map to orient themselves by tracing punctual, shareable, effective and inclusive educational coordinates.

1. The UNIFG Educational Challenge

In the wake of a shared and participatory sensitivity in educational research towards authentic inclusion in formal and informal contexts, the University of Foggia has established, for the academic year 2021–2022, a first-level master in "Inclusion of Disabilities and Social Fragilities Through Ensemble Music and Performing Arts", aimed at graduates in possession of qualifications issued by institutions of higher artistic, musical and dance training (AFAM) or obtained at the University, according to the new system or the previous to Ministerial Decree 509/99 (equivalent qualifications).

The course aims to build a professional profile with specific skills applicable to tailor-made educational itineraries, providing resources and ideas on how to work in and for inclusive classes. A multidimensional training is necessary, in which knowledge, collaboration skills and participatory planning are coagulated, and considers the social contexts in which they operate or in which they will want to interact, such as schools, associations and conservatories. Creating new educational horizons, intuiting a plurality of perspectives and building bridges instead of barriers are the first steps to take to conceptualize and then concretize an interdisciplinary opening towards the art of Orpheus, which acts as a support in a polyphony of knowledge and as a meeting place for transdisciplinary dialogues, such as mathematics, history and foreign languages, as it is open to exchanges and interactions (MIUR, 2012).

The announced master has an annual duration of 1500 hours corresponding to 60 training credits and is divided into three teaching modules, each with increasing specificity that is accompanied by 747 hours of individual study. The first two modules present a number of hours (198) dedicated to distance theoretical training, addressing inductive and reflective approaches and is delivered online in mixed or asynchronous modes, aimed at providing a background of essential knowledge needed to face the planned laboratories in a conscious manner for the third module. The lessons present in the first two modules, of a purely theoretical nature, range from intertwining different disciplinary areas, providing knowledge

in the fields of medicine, psychology, pedagogy, teaching and educational research. In particular, in the first module, the students were able to benefit from general training in the aforementioned disciplinary sectors (in particular M-PED / 01, M-PED-03, M-PED / 04, M-PSI / 04, MED / 43), the foundations necessary to understand and experience the musical experience as an artistic, subjective and group experience with full inclusive value.

The planning of the courses in the first module is structured as follows:

- community medicine;
- social psychology;
- pedagogy of art in the contexts of care;
- teaching and special pedagogy;
- community pedagogical intervention methods;
- methodology of educational research 1–2.

The arrangement of the second module, structured in the perspective of the FAD, involves important personalities (musicians, conductors, and other experts in the sector) of national and international levels, who took care of the lessons relating to the sciences historical-artistic (L-ART / 5, L-ART / 08, CODM / 02, CODD / 04, CODD / 06) and aimed to create a didactic, artistic and musical profile that can be projected into learning contexts that are consistent with the provisions of current legislation:

- performance theories and methodologies;
- acoustemology in an anthropological-musical key;
- musical ethnography;
- methodology of music education;
- elements of composition for music teaching;
- listening didactics;
- pedagogy and didactics of music for the disabled.

The third and last module is laboratory-based and the teaching methods adopted will be participatory and cooperative. Also, musical didactic planning workshops have been planned in both traditional and e-learning environments, integrating the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) as skill amplifiers and learning facilitators (Bauer & Mito, 2017) and to conduct activities for ensemble music (CODD / 01, CODD / 04, CODD / 03, INF / 01, M-PED / 01). For this module, the number of hours (80) was segmented over the workshops, which are organized as follows:

- choir conducting;
- conducting of orchestra;
- methods and techniques for conducting and managing musical groups;
- computer science for writing music;
- music teaching in digital environments;
- elements of didactic planning of educational activities of a performative nature;
- laboratory for the development of entrepreneurship;
- reticular didactics for music learning.

At the completion of each module, there is a multiple-choice test for the detection of the knowledge and skills acquired. In the constitution of the master, each activity is a fundamental piece in the composition of an effective and complete design mosaic, in which the laboratories are configured as learning workshops, fueled by motivation and desire to do and know how, with the contribution of peers and continuous cooperation between the actors involved. A highly motivating activity, as well as an inalienable right in kindergarten, is play,

the privileged seat of social and cognitive development, and the most natural way in which children learn (Piaget, 1967).

The educational and inclusive potential of play is optimized in the typology of musical play, which is a fundamental experience for growth and promotes playfulness even in individuals with special educational needs (Barnett, 1990). Examples of games that can be implemented in a laboratory and an inclusive context are sense-motor games (such as clapping games in which you have to clap your hands according to a precise rhythmic-motor pattern), symbolic games, rules and listening (Ferrari, 2019). Music, being a syncretic vehicle of several languages, also favors the didactic use of dances (in choreutic organizations, with variable difficulty) that favor the construction of the image of oneself, of the body scheme, of perceptive abilities and awareness of one's body in space and in relation to others (Rizzo, 2021).

Among the training activities included in the master's study plan was the completion of 60 hours of internships and traineeship cycles carried out at educational institutions, theaters and music production bodies throughout Italy, which represent a constitutive and qualifying part of the operational-professional and psychological training course that teaches one to attribute positive meanings to what they have learned. The internship therefore takes place as a γυμνάσιον, as "the teacher-artist needs a long training, initial and ongoing, theoretical and practical, scientific and creative before being able to express the student in a truly educational relationship" (Castoldi et al., 2007).

At the end of the training activities, there is a final test that consisted of an intervention project in which the student had to demonstrate possession of a solid theoretical framework and the ability to strategically organize didactic actions, demonstrating that possess, as per the admission notice, a professionalism capable of

- designing social inclusion projects characterized by the philosophy and practice of El Sistema, the Abreu system (Acosta et al., 2015);
- design courses characterized by the main expertise in ensemble music and other performing arts;
- implement and evaluate activation practices for youth and children's choirs and orchestras with educational, cultural and social purposes;
- activate partnerships between public and private welfare in the territories in relation to connections between musical experience, artistic experience and community activation supportive and inclusive.

The students were subjected to two assessment questionnaires on Google Forms, which had multiple choice questions and questions with a Likert scale (5 or 7 points), aimed at investigating the perception and satisfaction with the course attended, noting the strengths and areas for improvement, highlighting the clarity, coherence, interest and exhaustiveness of the contents; in addition, the competence, preparation, and communication skills of the teachers, along with their ability to develop metacognitive skills, were investigated.

In the same way, the teachers of the master filled out a questionnaire, aimed at detecting their opinions of the functionality and quality of the management of the Moodle platform ⁷of the University of Foggia, the efficiency of the staff support and the organization of teaching. From this last survey, very satisfactory evaluations emerged. In all sections, the average of the answers is higher than the value 4 (4.43 / 4.50), which in the 5-point Likert scale of reference (in which 1 = very poor and 5 = very good) corresponds to a positive level of satisfaction.

⁷ <https://elearning.unifg.it/course/index.php?categoryid=921>

Conclusions

This paper examines the studies conducted over the last decade on the benefits of education for musical and extra-musical skills, and the impact on the students with special educational needs (Cornoldi et al., 2018). The need emerged to add musical practice in formal contexts such as schools, but also to authorize informal training bodies to reduce social difficulties and in the acquisition of contents, in particular with subjects considered "at risk" of school failure, marginalization and *drop out*. The adaptive and inclusive qualities inherent in musical practice, and more generally in the performing arts, have led to an ontological reflection on the professional figure of the teacher/musician who must operate in many different contexts under many aspects. The Master that has been discussed fits precisely in the wake of these considerations, with the aim of shaping competent professionals in the anthropo-psycho-pedagogical, organizational, planning and digital dimensions ⁸.

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⁸<https://www.camera.it/leg17/824?type=A&anno=2017&mese=03&giorno=16&view=&commissione=0711#data.20170316.com0711.allegati.all00050>

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