

**PERFORMING ARTS AND MUSIC PSYCHOPEDAGOGY: HOW TO PROMOTE
INCLUSION THROUGH MUSIC**

**ARTI PERFORMATIVE E PSICOPEDAGOGIA MUSICALE: COME FAVORIRE
L'INCLUSIONE ATTRAVERSO LA MUSICA**

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Abstract

The performing arts can be defined as an effective means of learning because their teaching is configured with high emotional involvement. Specifically, the following article focuses on the role of music and music teaching interventions and the positive effects in terms of learning and social- emotional development of learners with disabilities-even severe ones-or with specific learning disorders.

All this is useful from the perspective of inclusive didactics, defined by Heidrun (2019) as the set of actions for the design, implementation and evaluation of educational practices that activate the learning and participation processes of all pupils. Being, therefore, a teaching of all pupils, the recipients of inclusive teaching are not only students with special educational needs, but every student in the class group, welcomed and valued by the teacher, based on their individual specificities (Rossi, 2021). In this sense, music assumes great inclusive value because, in addition to being an enjoyable and accessible activity even in the presence of severe disabilities, it engages a rather extensive neural network therefore it involves numerous cognitive and socio-emotional resources of learners, including those with special educational needs.

Le arti performative possono essere definite come un mezzo efficace di apprendimento in quanto il loro insegnamento si configura ad alto coinvolgimento emotivo. Nello specifico, il seguente articolo si sofferma sul ruolo della musica e degli interventi di didattica della musica e sulle ricadute positive in termini di apprendimento e sviluppo socio-emozionale degli allievi con disabilità – anche gravi – o con disturbi specifici dell'apprendimento.

Il tutto è utile in un'ottica di didattica inclusiva, definita da Heidrun (2019) come l'insieme di azioni per la progettazione, realizzazione e valutazione di pratiche educative che attivano i processi di apprendimento e partecipazione di tutti gli alunni e di tutte le alunne. Essendo, quindi, una didattica di tutti gli alunni, i destinatari della didattica inclusiva non sono solo gli studenti con bisogni educativi

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speciali, ma ogni studente del gruppo classe, accolto e valorizzato dal docente, sulla base delle sue specificità individuali (Rossi, 2021). In tal senso, la musica assume un grande valore inclusivo in quanto, oltre ad essere un'attività piacevole e accessibile anche in presenza di disabilità severe, impegna una rete neurale piuttosto estesa quindi coinvolge numerose risorse cognitive e socio- emotive degli allievi, anche con bisogni educativi speciali.

Keywords

Performing arts; music education; inclusion;
Arti performative; didattica della musica; inclusione;

Introduction

In the literature, starting from the systemic-constructivist approach, the learning process is defined as a circular process and the performing arts in this sense represented a multiple approach to the person (Moscatò et al, 2022). For this reason, they can be defined as an effective means of learning because their teaching is configured with high emotional involvement (Colombo, 2014). Moreover, they are a powerful inclusive medium in that, as Moscatò and colleagues (2022) state, "the performing arts educate the parts, solicit the senses, gestures, words, body and mind while they contribute to forming and developing that psycho-physical unity that is an indispensable condition for self-realization, the awareness of being able to be other than oneself, and the capacity to welcome different originality in an inclusive perspective. [...] The performing arts stimulate emotional intelligence and create empathetic, borderless mental and physical spaces."

The performing arts, therefore, are useful in order to ensure inclusive teaching; specifically, music education offers the opportunity to distance oneself from one's own reality and beliefs in order to analyze, question and transform them; music education is recognized as having a decisive role in the development of disciplinary and transversal skills but also inclusive attitudes. In fact, music, as Concina (2019) states, is considered a facilitator of learning and participation even in the presence of severe disabilities as it "offers the possibility of activating creative and innovative practices in the school that enhance the expressive dimensions of the other disciplines and optimize educational processes. This contributes to the promotion of holistic development that integrates linguistic, cognitive, motor and socio-affective aspects, motivating participation in collective activities and the building of attitudes open to respect for differences."

1. Psychopedagogy of music and Special Educational Needs

The teaching of music is fundamental to the cognitive, emotional and motor development of individuals and can, without a doubt, be a valuable support for the intellectual faculties of all students, especially those with Specific Learning Disorders (SLD) or generalized, non-certified difficulties.

Special Educational Need (SEN) is any developmental difficulty of functioning, permanent or transitory, in the educational and/or learning sphere, due to the interaction of various health factors and requiring individualized special education (Peconio et al., 2021). The expression "Special Educational Needs" (SEN) came into use in Italy after the issuance of the Ministerial Directive of December 27, 2012 "Intervention tools for pupils with Special Educational Needs and territorial organization for school inclusion" (Nocera, 2013). The area of school disadvantage is much broader than that which can be explicitly referred to the presence of deficits. In every classroom there are pupils who present a demand for special attention for a variety of reasons:

1. social and cultural disadvantage;
2. specific learning and/or specific developmental disorders;
3. difficulties arising from not knowing Italian culture and language because they belong to different cultures.

The acronym SLD is the abbreviation used for "Specific Learning Disorders." This expression refers to a heterogeneous group of disorders characterized by significant difficulties in the learning and use of reading, writing, or computation skills, usually manifesting with the onset of schooling (Bachmann, 2020). Specific Learning Disorders present as a diverse range of problems in learning that are explained by the presence of a specific learning deficit, investigated and highlighted through a clinical-diagnostic procedure (Molisso et al., 2019). It is important to consider that the term "characteristic of functioning" is increasingly being used. Specific Learning Disorders also have a developmental matrix, showing up as a developmental atypia, modifiable through targeted interventions. Pupils with ASDs develop specific learning styles, aimed at compensating for the difficulties encountered as a result of the disorder. Involved in such disorders are:

- the ability to read;
- of writing;
- of doing calculations.

Looking specifically at the various deficits, developmental dyslexia is the specific disorder of learning to read, that is, it impairs the ability to read correctly and fluently; it does not depend on subjective psychological factors, poor motivation to study or low intelligence. The main characteristic of readers with dyslexia is the difficulty in automating the process of decoding the graphic signs that characterize written text (Cardano et al., 2021). This difficulty is reflected in performance, which is often characterized by low reading speed and/or poor accuracy, and this often impairs text comprehension. Dyslexia involves difficulty in reading written texts, and the consequences for learning also depend on the way in which the study material is presented. The difficulties that characterize learning in learners with dyslexia, in fact, do not manifest themselves in the same way whether the information is provided by supporting the oral channel or the visual channel, for example by using pictures. It is immediately clear, therefore, how important it is for the learner with dyslexia to use study materials that do not only present themselves in the written mode, but also in the auditory or graphic mode, such as voice notes and/or concept maps (Protopapas, 2019).

Developmental dyscalculia, on the other hand, is the specific learning disorder of the number system and calculations that is manifested by a difficulty in writing and reading numbers and in the calculation system (van Luit, 2019). People with dyscalculia often make errors in identifying numbers and writing them down (especially if they are composed of many digits), associating a certain quantity with the corresponding number, recognizing the units that make up a number, comparing digits, grasping mathematical connections and relationships, performing the four mathematical operations and recognizing the related signs, learning the rules of calculations, and, more generally, spatial-temporal and visuospatial organization (van Luit, 2019).

Dysgraphia and dysorthographia consist of difficulties in controlling graphic aspects and errors in writing text. The specific writing disorder is called dysgraphia or dysorthographia, depending on whether it affects handwriting or spelling, respectively (Dimauro et al., 2020).

There are various approaches to be made with individuals with special educational needs through music. However, before discussing the latter's inclusive value, it is necessary to make a historical excursus about the psycho-pedagogical value of music learning. In the 1960s, in fact, the idea that music could elicit deep and complex affective responses became widespread, but without being able to define a cause-and-effect link between them (Monacis & Toto, 2017). From this time on, the study of musical perception has been interested in the physiological responses and functioning of the human nervous system. In fact, there have been several studies about the effects of music on respiration, blood pressure, and heart function, showing that music produces changes at the physiological level. With the advent of cognitivism (Neisser, 1967), music will be understood as a complex network of languages and situations that produces multiple cognitive processes by investing diversified brain functions. In the early 2000s, there have been several studies on the relationship between music learning psychopedagogy and neuroscience; specifically, the discovery that experience and learning can drive plasticity has led to a large number of studies investigating brain plasticity also induced by

musical learning. Indeed, from the analyses conducted, it appears that music has surprising effects by inducing changes in specific areas of the brain namely the movement- or visuospatial- and cognitive areas. In fact, the latter, when trained through intense musical training can undergo qualitative and quantitative changes or become activated through the creation of new neuronal circuits (Nayak et al., 2000). In recent years there has been much interest in studying the connection between dyslexia and musical learning. Studying this connection has a twofold advantage. Indeed, on the one hand it is useful for understanding how to improve musical learning in dyslexic pupils (in the specifics of reading musical notation), and on the other hand it is useful for studying the rehabilitative effects of transferability of musical skills as a contribution to overcoming reading difficulties associated with dyslexia (Toto, 2017).

As mentioned earlier, the cognitive difficulties associated with developmental dyslexia involve issues related to the development of phonological processing and awareness, as well as difficulties with language perception, learning sounds and letters, and phoneme recognition. According to Patel (2010), music and language share some cortical areas, specifically the left primary auditory cortex and the right prefrontal cortex. Moreover, the administration of a music intervention strengthens auditory perception skills in dyslexic children and improves impaired skills in language deficits. Consequently, the whole seems to promote learning processes in individuals with SEN.

2. Inclusive Music Education

Music is one of the most powerful tools for the effective implementation of inclusion at school: it is a universal language, capable of connecting even seemingly distant worlds. Using music in both formal and informal settings allows for a multisensory approach that supports the activation of different learning processes: from sense-motor response to symbolic and abstract language, along the full range of cognitive modalities (Draper, 2022). Music education has positive effects on the learning and social-emotional development of learners with disabilities-even severe ones-or with specific learning disorders (Rizzo et al., 2020).

In the Italian scenario, finding a close link between inclusion and musical activity has made it possible to introduce into schools (Chiappetta Cajola & Rizzo, 2017):

1. Interdisciplinary music workshops conducted by the musician support teacher and teachers;
2. Music pathways for pupils with SEN;
3. Identification of "ensemble music models" to develop participation and learning in secondary school.

In addition to being an enjoyable activity that is accessible even in the presence of severe disabilities, music engages a rather extensive neural network so it involves numerous cognitive and socio-emotional resources of learners, including those with special educational needs (Rizzo & Pellegrini, 2021); it also brings great benefits in relation to enhancing general levels of well-being, self-esteem and the possibility of increasing motivation to encounter others within a positive emotional experience and to develop one's potential (Chiappetta Cajola & Rizzo, 2017).

Music education allows the challenge of inclusion to be addressed on an operational level, especially if it is implemented in interdisciplinary workshops in the classroom and institute curriculum. Indeed, music promotes the participation and learning of all learners and helps build attitudes open to respect for differences (Chiappetta Cajola et al., 2017). Music education takes charge of promoting the educational success of students by activating organizational models aimed at the full implementation of the principles of freedom, equality and equity while respecting everyone's differences and identity, and allows for diversity-friendly spaces to operate. This discipline activates processes of cooperation and socialization, enhancing the creativity and active participation of students (Toto, 2017).

In light of the above, it is possible to say that the cognitive, linguistic and social-affective skills promoted by music are consistent with the inclusive perspective (Chiappetta Cajola & Rizzo, 2017). In fact, musical activity allows the subject to gain confidence in his or her own resources, musicality

and bodily means suitable for expressing it, which further lead the subject to overcome attitudes of fear and inhibition with respect to personal exposure, which is necessary when playing or inventing something new. This allows the development of self-centered skills-which enable participants in the musical activity to get to know and appreciate themselves bodily and emotionally, learning to orient themselves in the world and to value the positive aspects of events-and relationship skills-which allow them to develop listening to others, eliminating prejudices, recognizing their mistakes, participating constructively in interactions and dealing civilly with conflicts (Vannini, 2013). It is therefore possible to state that "full participation in the collective musical experience also fosters the construction of mental paradigms of interpreting the world that are more respectful of the other, welcoming of diversity and curious about the unknown" (Chiappetta Cajola & Rizzo, 2017). The goal is to interpret music through the lens of inclusive education in order to foster the co-design and co-creation of joint educational activities during which the student with disabilities can participate systematically and normally with peers (Rizzo et al., 2020).

Music psycho-pedagogy interventions are useful not only to promote the inclusion of individuals with SEN but also for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Autism Spectrum Disorder is a neurodevelopmental condition characterized by social communication and limiting behaviors restricted to certain domains (Gueli, 2020). Music intervention with autistic individuals has tremendous value as it is helpful in increasing the prospects for meaningful relationships; this is because, often, autistic individuals are not involved in social contexts (Meini, 2020). Sacks, for example, already in 2007 demonstrated the positive impact of music in terms of social interaction, showing how children are more likely to play with another child if this was followed by a shared musical experience. Furthermore, as Guiot and colleagues (2012) state, musical activities could be very useful in helping autistic individuals understand emotions. In fact, one of the most problematic aspects of autistic individuals is the recognition of emotions as it is difficult to understand obvious states such as joy, sadness, happiness or worry. With music and ensemble music workshops, it is possible to link emotions to listening dynamics, movement and games to be played. Specifically, "some songs aim to encourage phonation, especially in children with emotional closures or marked language or phonological difficulties" (Guiot et al., 2012). In addition, with autistic individuals it is particularly useful to structure music therapy interventions, which are useful for improving communication, developing concentration skills, learning how to relate better to people, greater self-confidence (Politano, 2020). One possible course of intervention to be implemented with music is constituted through, for example, affective attunement-that is, the subject's free spontaneous productions that activate and constitute a shared attention skill; involvement follows their interest, such as the possibility of producing and listening to sounds in a rhythmic, repetitive, structured and perceptible way - and interventions at the attentional level - in which absorbing the perceptual apparatus and excluding other stimuli manifests the containment of emotions such as anxiety or arousal, which the subject usually tries to control with redundant behaviors or stereotypes (Politano, 2020). Music, moreover, plays an important role in all those interventions that are on the borderline between verbal and nonverbal. It is necessary to empathize with the autistic person, with his or her lifestyle and communication patterns, including his or her affective and emotional responses; using music as a communicative and personal growth channel and making the child musically competent, according to his or her chords, resources, interests and possibilities is the goal to be achieved through music therapy interventions (da Silva & dos Reis Moura, 2021).

Conclusions

In the light of what has been stated, it is clear that the performing arts, and specifically music, take on a fundamental value with a view to inclusion. This latter aspect is supported by various components, one of which refers to emotional intelligence (Moscato et al., 2022). A key role is assumed by the emotional aspects linked to learning processes: studies emphasise the contribution that affectivity has on the child's individual background. A good relationship and attachment built

with the teacher can be, in fact, predictive of good learning (Pianta, 2012). Motivation appears, in fact, correlated to a meaningful relationship with reference figures that the student builds within the school context. Alongside the traditional methods aimed at implementing it, more innovative methodologies appear that use differentiated tools and one of these may be the use of performance art. The latter appear, therefore, to be useful from an inclusive perspective, as music teaching manifests positive effects on the socio-emotional development of pupils, even in the case of specific learning disorders or disabilities (Rizzo, 2020). In order for music teaching interventions to be truly inclusive, it is necessary, firstly, to reject static and transmissive paradigms of musical content and skills and to design dynamic learning environments of a processual nature, which enhance and enable the contributions that each participant can make to the best of his or her ability and, secondly, to allow everyone to benefit from the interventions without distinction of ability, gender, and social and linguistic level, enabling participation and personal learning. An example given is that which refers to individuals with autism spectrum syndrome who, through music, can grow in their social relationships and, therefore, in their emotional dynamics (Meini, 2020). Indeed, using music allows them to explore their emotionality, discover their inner dimension and thus develop and refine their affectivity.

Moreover, as Vannini (2013) states, the field of music education "becomes in this way an opportunity for didactic experimentation. Music, as a boundary discipline, represents an opportunity for interdisciplinary openness and the use of diverse and innovative teaching methodologies".

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