

THE LABORATORIES ATELIER IDEAL CONTEXTS TO PROMOTE SCHOOL INCLUSION THROUGH THE PERFORMATIVE ARTS

I LABORATORI ATELIER CONTESTI IDEALI PER PROMUOVERE L'INCLUSIONE SCOLASTICA ATTRAVERSO LE ARTI PERFORMATIVE

Corrado Muscarà
Università di Catania
corrado.muscara@alice.it

Abstract

The atelier laboratories are appropriately designed and organized learning environments that are ideal for promoting school inclusion through performative arts activities. In these school spaces, each pupil, regardless of the type of his or her educational needs, finds an opportunity to learn and combine the different languages of the performative arts, moving with his or her body in a different way than in the classroom, expressing his or her bodily dimension and using codes of communication that are not only linguistic, but also sensory, perceptual, symbolic and bodily, through which he or she experiences the different forms of civil and democratic coexistence.

I laboratori atelier sono ambienti di apprendimento, opportunamente progettati ed organizzati, ideali per promuovere l'inclusione scolastica attraverso le attività arti performative. In questi spazi scolastici ogni allievo, indipendentemente dalla tipologia dei suoi bisogni educativi, trova l'occasione per apprendere e coniugare i diversi linguaggi delle arti performative, muovendosi con il proprio corpo in modo diverso rispetto alla classe, esprimendo la propria dimensione corporea ed utilizzando codici della comunicazione che non sono solo quelli linguistici, ma anche quelli sensoriali, percettivi, simbolici e corporei, attraverso i quali sperimenta le diverse forme della convivenza civile e democratica.

Key-words

Laboratory; Inclusion; Multidisciplinarity; Cooperativism; Performative Arts
Laboratorio; Inclusione; Multidisciplinarietà; Cooperativismo, Arti performative

Introduction

With the introduction of the new school inclusion protocols, following the recent Italian ministerial and inter-ministerial decrees (MIUR & MEF, 2020), the Italian school is experiencing a season of pedagogical-didactic metamorphosis, in which it appears to be increasingly engaged not only in a process of cultural reorganization, but also in the search for good innovative and inclusive teaching practices that are of enrichment to the plan of educational offerings, and alternatives to the outdated period of integration (Fabbri, 2019), which has already blossomed for some years - in Canevaro's opinion - into a form of forced egalitarianism (1999, p. 2). Through, also, the *Regulation on the Autonomy of School Institutions* (Presidential Decree No. 275 of March 8, 1999), the school is attempting to expand and raise the quality of the curriculum, designing and organizing innovative and enriching educational-didactic activities to the curricular ones,

providing for the systematic collaboration with other education and training professionals outside the school, who are not necessarily teachers (Contu & Campione, 2020).

The performative arts are part of this perspective, understood as flexible, differentiated, multi-purpose and multidisciplinary forms/events of educational activities (Carlotti, 2018), which can facilitate the promotion of inclusion, through the use of artistic-theatrical, musical and motor disciplines, and which, being feasible also in a joint way, require the preparation and organization of alternative contexts to traditional classrooms, such as the laboratories (Salati & Cristiano, 2019; Ferri, 2022). In fact, the School Legislature, as early as the first cycle of education, prescribes schools to set up alternative places to the classroom, spaces that facilitate operational approaches to knowledge for music production, theater, pictorial activities and motor skills (MIUR, 2018, p. 17).

Equipped with technological devices, the laboratories are school spaces generally intended for cognitive brand of knowledge processing-invention activities, suitable for promoting, for example, action-thinking and mind-body dialectical interaction, nurturing the taste and pleasure of learning (Laneve, 2005). Within the laboratories, students, as well as teachers and professionals outside the school, have the opportunity to co-construct together, to move and relate with their bodies as well, thus not to remain still, motionless, sitting on chairs moving only their arms and hands to write, as generally happens inside a traditional classroom. The Performative events, artistic-theatrical, musical and choreographic events, designed and organized in a space-laboratory, on the other hand, offer learners the opportunity to be able to move in a different way than in the classroom, to express themselves with their own bodily dimension and to observe the learning environment in its physical and architectural dimensions, keeping in mind the potential of that space and how to experience themselves in it, moving, being together with others, but also alone (Faggioli & Schenetti, 2020).

1. The laboratory: from craft workshop to school learning environment

In common language, the term laboratory, from the medieval latin *laboratorium* (from *laborare*, to work), is generally used to indicate a place suitably equipped with materials, tools and equipment useful for carrying out work, studies, research and experiments (Valdrè, 1990).

Initially, the laboratory, which originated in the distant Middle Ages, is a room equipped with various materials for the performance of mainly craft activities, a physical space in which a craftsman works on his products and at the same time teaches his pupils the working profession. For years, the laboratory has maintained this connotation, of a craft room intended for manual labor activities, until it began to receive attention from experts in pedagogy, who saw in it the possibility of transforming it into a school room as an alternative to the traditional classroom, suitable for pupils' exercises, experimentation and the promotion of activities in which it is possible to work on enhancing the different skills of each one of them.

In the history of international didactics, the laboratories appeared in schools at the beginning of the 20th century, thanks to the commitment and work of John Dewey who, with the collaboration of Francis Parker, proposed the laboratory as a teaching space capable of revolutionizing the traditional school that was unable to keep up with society's demands, promoting education through frontal lessons. For Dewey, the laboratories are real places-workshops that allow those, who live in them, to keep the connection between thought and action alive. They are contexts in which it is possible to experience the

different forms of democratic coexistence and, above all, in which the learner learns through doing (learning by doing) (Cambi, 1995; Catalfamo, 2000; Bohm, 2017).

In Frabboni's opinion, the school models that "have given the green light to laboratories" are the post-Deweyan active school (internationally) and the Italian full-time school (Frabboni, 2004, p. 78).

The first model, from the first half of the 20th century, refers to Kilpatrick's Project Method, Washburne's Winnetka Method and Parkhurst's Dalton Plan (Massa, 1990). In these perspectives, the laboratory is seen as a space and also an appropriate tool for the individualization of school work. Helen Parkhurst, a young teacher in a rural school in Massachusetts in America, prompted by reflections on her reading of Edgar James Swift's book *Mind in the Making*, devised a didactic system that she called the *Laborator Plan*, applying it in an experimental form at a school for disabled children in Berkshire and, after experimenting with it, around the 1920s, she implemented it in a secondary school in Dalton (hence the name Dalton Plan). The young teacher changes the didactic organization of that school, organizing alternative contexts to the traditional classrooms, which she replaces entirely with specialized laboratories. She abolished the school timetable and the centrality of the lesson, divided the syllabus into monthly blocks, defined assignments, drew up work contracts with the pupils and organized an evaluation system, which she called a chart system, through which she periodically checked and assessed the pupils' academic progress (Parkhurst, 1955). The Dalton Plan was a great success not only in America, but also in much of the world, so much so that the young teacher's book, entitled *Education on the Dalton Plan*, has been translated into many languages (Hessen, 1959; Mazzetti, 1962).

Parkhurst's perspective corresponds to the one that today considers school laboratories as ateliers or expressive-recreational activities interest centers, organized to "satisfy the motivations to imagination, adventure, movement, exploration, construction, self-making strongly downgraded and mutilated by the old school models: notional, mnemonic, abstract" (Frabboni, 2004, p. 78). Through this scientific paradigm, which takes shape starting from American pedagogical activism, the school laboratory takes on the connotation of a space rich in materials, both formal and informal and not necessarily structured, which lends itself to the realization of graphic-pictorial, musical, mime-gestural, motor-praxic, manipulative-creative activities, etc. (Frabboni, 2004, p. 78).

The second model, the full-time school, refers to the *Italian popular pedagogy* of the 1970s, that is, to democratic and progressive pedagogy, which saw in laboratories and in the methodologies connected to them a fast track for an innovative school, in step with the demands of society and, therefore, of quality. Francesco De Bartolomeis is the pedagogical academic who was the first in Italy to believe in the laboratory. While Helen Parkhurst transforms the classroom into a laboratory, the Italian pedagogist makes the laboratory an additional space compared to the traditional classroom, however without replacing it. Laboratories are, according to De Bartolomeis, an additional classroom resource, but they do not eliminate the classroom. They are learning environments equipped with materials, tools, machines, etc., in which mainly productive activities are carried out with the means of research; they are physical and social places where pupils learn, through cultural initiatives, originality, the analyze and understand reality ability, the management of emotions and above all the experience of collaboration (De Bartolomeis, 1978).

In this perspective, the laboratory represents what we nowadays call a didactic corner (for linguistic and logical-mathematical literacy), a specialized classroom (for the acquisition of specific reading skills), a scientific laboratory (of motor, physical,

chemical and technological sciences), a communication laboratory (of photography, audiovisuals, mass media), an equipped outdoor area (for the practice of constructive, motor and play experiences) (Frabboni, 2004, p. 80).

In both models, the laboratories are appropriately equipped teaching environments used for specific pupils' exercises, qualifying as spaces opposed to traditional lessons and formal relationships between teacher and pupil. They are physical and social places that offer students, but also teachers, the possibility of realizing an authentic intersection between theoretical and practical activities. Within these spaces, learners can deepen specific topics, objects of study addressed during lessons, but they can also learn the method of scientific research and educational-didactic cooperation, as well as the value of active and collaborative participation inescapable for the construction of a common educational project, in which it is possible to discover and experience, together, personal skills, solidarity and inclusion within an area of common interests (UNESCO, 2018).

In Italy, the setting up of laboratory spaces was initially more widespread in secondary schools, especially in what are now called 'second degree' and technical-professional schools. Subsequently, within the school pedagogical literature, the idea and above all the awareness of the educational and training value of the laboratory made its way, beginning to be considered a pedagogical environment-device in which terms such as projectability, freedom of expression, cooperation, productivity, objective processes, determinism of things and inclusion processes find fertile ground to develop.

2. The laboratory: cooperativism and inclusion

In scholastic pedagogical literature, the laboratory is considered as a "privileged place in which a learning situation is realized that combines knowledge and specific skills on unitary and meaningful tasks for the pupils, possibly in an operational and project dimension that puts them in a position to (and must) mobilize all the explicit and tacit knowledge they have" (Laneve, 2005, p. 18). It is a learning environment in which the meaning of knowing how to do is central, "a complex knowledge that embraces ideation and realization, that enhances the mind-hand link, that generates the dialectical interaction thought-action, and also includes those procedural characteristics of the mind that fall into the category of doing" (Laneve, 2005, p. 66), also, that allows the learner to use thought to pervade theoretical and operational, declarative and procedural paths, such as those related to the performative arts, living learning experiences rich in positive emotions.

As research in the field of humanistic psychology and the phenomenological approach have already shown, learning is not only developed through educational interactions in which the cognitive variable prevails. It is a process that also presupposes the activation of dimensions of an emotional-affective character, which influence the structuring and cognitive growth of the learner, but also the social dynamics by which the latter weaves relationships with the context in which he lives and in which he moves, and above all influences communicative processes. The emotions contribute, therefore, to deepening learning, qualifying the learning experience as effective and also rewarding, with inevitable positive effects on the final outcomes of interventions of a formative nature (Cipollone, 2021). In the laboratory, the learner has the opportunity to take note of what he builds together with others, what he does with what he has learned, with his body, with his way of expressing himself. It is through confrontation with others, he promotes in himself metacognitive processes (La Marca & Cappuccio, 2020), by which he

develops awareness of his knowledge, the acquisition of his skills and performances in the different domains, especially in the expressive-body domains.

The laboratory is the space in which it is easier, compared to the traditional classroom, to carry out activities characterized by the cooperative teaching style: a teaching methodology that allows learners to structure positive interdependence, an essential element to ensure that among the members of the working group relationships are developed such that no one can succeed individually except with the success of the inner group (Martinelli, 2017; Comoglio, 2000).

In this perspective, the laboratory represents the ideal context for the promotion of inclusive processes, an educational environment that, thanks to the conspicuous socio-affective and cognitive figures that are determined in it, proves to be appropriate for the socialization and literacy processes of all learners, especially those with special educational needs, who require and need to be with others, to be able to interact with concrete objects, to be able to do like everyone else and to use the different channels of communication, such as sound, mimic-gestural, iconic, symbolic, etc. (Cottini, 2017). In the laboratory, the learners have the opportunity to build inclusive relationships and, through the various cooperative and collaborative activities, such as those, for example, related to the performative arts, they also have the opportunity to cultivate friendships and, at the same time, to develop prosocial attitudes, based on valuing their own and others' being, as well as building empathy and promoting helping and supportive behaviors (Dainese, 2020).

3. Multidisciplinary ateliers: school laboratories of the inclusive performative arts

Among the many types of laboratories, indicated and defined in school pedagogical literature, multidisciplinary ateliers are the most suitable ones, in our opinion, to realize the different forms of performative arts while promoting school inclusion. These are laboratories that are named as *theatrical*, *musical*, *mimic-gestural*, *motor-praxic*, *graphic-pictorial* and *artistic*, within which pupils have the opportunity to combine the different types of language they have already learned on other occasions (verbal, oral, written, visual, gestural, musical, artistic, motor-praxic), using them to communicate, with themselves and with others. This is a type of laboratory in which it is also possible to organize and carry out theatrical and musical performances, graphic-pictorial exhibitions, in which their communicative intention is evident (Laneve, 2005), in which the presence of multiple languages - in addition to spoken language, also nonverbal languages such as dance, movement, singing, artistic, mime, theatrical - allows to promote the culture of performance. The different languages combination facilitates experiences that activate sensory, perceptual, and symbolic codes, such that each language adds a specific message to the message (Turner, 1986).

Usually, the ateliers are based in specific, autonomous interclass spaces, set up and equipped with tools that awaken, stimulate and motivate pupils to learn, socialize, explore, build, fantasize, communicate with the different expressions of their bodies, and do it themselves. By discovering the communicative potential of their own bodies, pupils learn to express themselves with it, co-constructing a product of research that does not necessarily have to be a concrete object, but also an opportunity for research-production-creativity, a way not so much to achieve cognitive goals, but to enhance motivation and the desire to discover and to enhance skills and competencies and, at the same time, to enhance the use of the body in an educational way (Bertagna, 2012). Through different

activities, such as graphic-pictorial, theatrical and musical activities, guided by teachers, students discover themselves, their aptitudes, their interests, the communicative potential of their bodies, relating to others and learning to manage their bodies in the group, also strengthening the dialogical and communal dimension of the educational and training events they experience within the workshop space.

In this direction, the laboratory-atelier becomes, therefore, an ideal context of sociality and inclusion, in which everyone, discovering themselves and others, is motivated to participate in the proposed educational activities. In the ateliers, students can transcend the behavioral register of the classroom, which often forces them to remain motionless in chairs, moving only their arms and hands to write, using their voices only at certain times of the day and through school speech. In these spaces, alternative to the classroom, learners have the opportunity to fulfill their needs, their potentialities that they cannot express in the classrooms, moving in a teaching setting that facilitates their artistic and bodily entity to experience and observe the physical and architectural dimensions of such space, discovering how it is possible to experience themselves in it, to be able to move alone and together with others, within the group, to express themselves through other codes of communication that are not necessarily only linguistic, but that involve the different genres of the performative arts.

Through the different activities that can be carried out in the ateliers, such as artistic, theatrical and musical activities, the students can express themselves, learning to do so, for example, with drawing, with movement, with music, also realizing performative events, understood as an opportunity for co-creation in which the educational event takes shape through a pedagogical action that enhances the dialogical, communal and inclusive dimension of being in relationship with the other (Bobbio, 2012), in which the body has the opportunity to express itself in its different expressions and artistic productions.

Inside the ateliers, the teachers, who in such spaces assume the role of directors of the performative arts, can organize the different performative activities by declining them also from the theoretical assumptions of the *National School Directions*. In fact, already in the ministerial documents of the first-cycle school, the School Legislature - in order also to make the school achieve one of the goals of the *Agenda 2030*, Goal No. 4 "*To provide quality, equitable and inclusive education and learning opportunities for all*" - thought of prescribing the *Cultural Tools for Citizenship for schools* (MIUR, 2018, pp. 7, 9). In this section, the Legislature urges the schools to organize performative arts activities through *The Arts for Citizenship* and *The Body and Movement*.

The first ones "are fundamental for the harmonious development of personality and for the formation of a person and a citizen capable of expressing themselves in different ways, of consciously enjoying artistic, environmental and cultural goods, recognizing their value for social and cultural identity and understanding the need for their preservation and protection" (MIUR, 2018, p. 14). The Legislature considers the music and the arts as cultural experiences, indispensable for the integral development of the person and for cultural awareness and expression. A careful reading of the *National Directions* shows that music is thought of as a fundamental component of the human experience, capable of offering the students the possibility of a symbolic and relational space favorable to the activation of processes of cooperation and socialization, the acquisition of knowledge tools, the enhancement of creativity and participation, and the development of a sense of belonging to a community (MIUR, 2018, p. 14). The Art, on the other hand, contributes to raising awareness and enhancing creative, aesthetic and expressive skills in students, strengthening cultural identity through educational processes that promote active and responsible citizenship, as well as the preservation and

conservation of artistic and environmental heritage. Through the different artistic languages, the learners have the opportunity to develop intercultural relationships, based on communication, knowledge and comparison between different cultures (MIUR, 2018, p. 14).

Concerning *The Body and Movement*, the Legislature dwells on the importance of movement, the need for each pupil to know his or her own body, the value of motor activities, which are considered capable of providing the pupil not only with opportunities to reflect on changes in his or her own body, but also opportunities to reflect on the values that self-image takes on in comparison with others, likewise to promote cognitive, social, cultural and affective experiences. It is through the movement of one's body that the student gets to know his or her body, explores space, communicating and relating to others in a different way than through the use of voice, learning the value of respecting the rules of the space shared with others and, therefore, the ethical values that underlie civil coexistence (MIUR, 2018, pp. 14-15). Through the motor activities, which also include those related to dance movement, the pupils develop awareness of their bodies, development of body schema, as well as an effective coordinative control as self-expression (Ceciliani, 2020).

Thanks to the multidisciplinary ateliers, the pupils have the opportunity to experience performing arts, to learn about and develop a language made up of sounds, artistic and bodily expressions: a language that is natural and, above all, inclusive, because it is suitable for everyone and can facilitate communication among all pupils, regardless of their special educational needs.

The atelier laboratory, through the performing arts, allows the learners to share experiences of positive interdependence, of solidarity, especially with regard to their classmates with special educational needs, with disabilities who, at times, in classrooms are prevented from sharing the didactic activities proposed by the teacher, because they require didactic perfectionism, in which the body is demanded to be still, motionless, devoid of any movement except that of the hands, in which artistic production and expression are not relied upon. The performative arts atelier becomes an ideal school space to establish a welcoming climate among all the pupils who are part of it, to eliminate cultural and social barriers, which are the main cause of marginalization and disadvantage situations; it also allows, as well, to better formulate educational responses for the pupils with special educational needs, for their abilities and functionalities, to welcome the pupil for who he is, respecting his functioning profile and interests. Through performative arts, the atelier laboratories become places in which all pupils, no one excluded, have the opportunity to express their emotions, to experience skills and potentialities different from those required in the classroom, also to experience a different relationship with the teacher, who in these spaces proves to be more flexible didactically and closer to the pupils in terms of affectivity, transforming the atelier laboratory as a space in which the didactic diffraction between teacher and pupil is gradually eliminated in favor of a didactic symmetry. In fact, the atelier favors a relationship in which each, teacher or pupil, influences the other in terms of balanced reciprocity (Gennari, 2002).

The performative arts ateliers can provide for the presence of experts from outside the school, such as qualified artists in theatrical activities, singing, dance, music, painting, etc., that is, professionals who, with the different languages, which they prepare and which are different from those of teachers, enable schools to increasingly qualify the educational offerings. The presence of such professionals favors, in fact, the negotiation of new resources, the educational enrichment of pupils and also teachers.

For the operation of the atelier laboratories, however, it is necessary to promote didactics different from the traditional one, which is done in the classroom. It is necessary to adopt inclusive teaching strategies declined by a didactic form characterized by the spirit of educational animation, whose main objective is to achieve a comprehensive formation of the person, in which the body and mind, logic and invention, work and play, science and art are approached from the perspective of pedagogical balance (De Rossi, 2018). The adoption of these teaching strategies, allows the pupils to learn by thinking, interpreting, exploring, feeling emotions, acting, dancing, singing, moving, likewise, discovering their own potential and that of others within a shared space. From this perspective, the pupils participate with enthusiasm, with joy, with a spirit of sharing and, above all, with an intrinsic motivation, that is, with an inner motivation that urges and strengthens them to carry out an activity that is a prelude to happy fulfillment.

In these terms, the atelier laboratory of the performative arts can be considered as a school space that promotes inclusion through - as Laneve argues - "the richness of a multiplicity of cultural stimuli, suitable to represent an organic space of socialization of experiences and knowledge, but also as a venue capable of promoting a community climate dense with civic values and high ethical figures, as well as basic" (2005, p. 90).

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