

**THE BODY AND MOVEMENT AT THE CENTER OF SCHOOL EXPERIENCE.
SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE INTRODUCTION OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION IN
PRIMARY SCHOOL**

**IL CORPO E IL MOVIMENTO AL CENTRO DELL'INTERA ESPERIENZA
SCOLASTICA.
ALCUNE RIFLESSIONI SULL'INTRODUZIONE DELL'EDUCAZIONE MOTORIA
NELLA SCUOLA PRIMARIA**

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Abstract

The idea that the cognitive experience of the world originates in the body and that the transformative potential of existence is contained within it is assumed to be fundamental. The global involvement of the Self, even in its bodily dimensions, in the knowledge processes represents an educational requirement that can no longer be evaded and that calls the school to respond in an incisive way on the reformulation of teaching practices. Despite the numerous advances made in this direction, many questions still remain open, especially in relation to the ways in which they can give space to the different languages of human communication and build learning settings that involve pupils from every point of view. Starting from the theoretical framework outlined, we intend to reflect on the recent introduction of the teaching of physical education in primary school, placing in the foreground the specific areas of teaching and the repercussions on the side of teachers' education, but above all the dialectic between performative and educational aspects.

Si assume come fondamentale l'idea che l'esperienza conoscitiva del mondo abbia origine nel corpo e che in esso sia contenuto il potenziale trasformativo dell'esistenza. Il coinvolgimento globale del Sé, anche nelle sue dimensioni corporee, nei processi di conoscenza rappresenta un'istanza educativa che non può essere più elusa e che richiama la scuola a rispondere in modo incisivo sulla riformulazione delle pratiche di insegnamento. Nonostante i numerosi progressi fatti in questa direzione, ancora molti interrogati restano aperti, soprattutto in relazione alle modalità attraverso le quali poter dare spazio ai diversi linguaggi della comunicazione umana e costruire setting di apprendimento che coinvolgano sotto ogni punto di vista gli alunni. A partire dal framework teorico delineato si intende riflettere sulla recente introduzione dell'insegnamento dell'educazione motoria nella scuola primaria ponendo in primo piano gli ambiti peculiari dell'insegnamento e le ricadute sul versante della formazione degli insegnanti, ma soprattutto la dialettica tra aspetti performativi ed educativi.

Keywords

physical education; embodiment; physical literacy; teachers' education; meaningful learning.
educazione motoria; embodiment; physical literacy; formazione degli insegnanti; apprendimento significativo.

1. Resignifying the body and movement in the school experience

Despite the wide debate that leads to conceiving the body and movement as elective instruments in learning processes, the world of school still today shows a resistance to offering a representation of knowledge that is not fragmented and divided or that places the body and the mind, reason and emotions as irreconcilable dimensions (Baldacci, 2009; Cunti, 2016; Dato, 2019; Gamelli, 2012). The body is an emotional and affective experience for everyone and for this reason the bearer of complex meanings and representations that require specific educational work on subjectivities. It is assumed as fundamental the idea that the cognitive experience of the world originates in the body, that it emerges from the body and its relationship with the surrounding environment made up of bodies-objects and bodies-individuals and that the potential transformative of existential experience is contained in the body (Cunti, 2015). The bodily dimension and of doing is not distinct from that of feeling and thinking and a possible hypothesis on the level of educational practice could concern the enhancement and interaction between multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983). Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, which "looks at the world not to discover it, but to inhabit it" and spatial intelligence, "all gathered in the bodily dialectic between environment and action" (Galimberti, 2005, p. 9-10) should find more opportunities to get in tune with the forms of personal intelligence, linked to the knowledge of oneself (intrapersonal) and of the other (interpersonal). In educational practice, this assumption can translate into an action aimed at promoting in the individual an integration between the forms of corporeality and relationality, starting from the postulate that the human being is naturally a body but also biologically cultural, or endowed with interactive skills (Rogoff, 1990). Bodies, languages and relationships are, therefore, considered fundamental instruments for appropriate knowledge about the world and about the Self; in particular the languages, of the body and not, and the forms of social interaction represent extensions of the potential of the body and dimensions of its expressiveness. The educational process therefore takes place in making the body become "mediated" (Nelson, 1996), that is, capable of being in relationship, of negotiating and of constructing meanings in a social sense. The educational process of mediation of the body assumes a weight on the way in which the individual will build a personal culture and bodily experience in interaction with the environment. In fact, we are talking about corporeality, or rather the experience of the body and the experience of one's own body, and consequently of an "education through corporeality" (Gamelli, 2001, p. 10). The anthropological, social and technological discovery of the body has produced its own new statute, "its centrality. Its complexity. Its own dialectic. Centrality: in the ego as self, in communication, in the imagination, in culture in general [...] Complexity: we are faced with a multiform body, biological, social, imaginary and, again, emotional, cerebral, communicative [...] Dialecticity : lived and thought in relation to the body and dialectic as tension and as a problem in a multiple body" (Cambi, 2010a, p. 70). The recognition of the plurality of the body coincides with a tension towards an ecological, formative and self-formative synthesis of its factors that Cambi (2010b, p. 24) identifies in forms of *cura sui*, to be understood as a commitment "to enhance the mind in the body , therefore a mind also capable of communicating with the body, with its movements, passions, feelings, with its drives to act, to communicate, to socialize". In the enhancement, cure and authentic recognition of the body, the identity of a Pedagogy of the body and corporeality can be traced as an educational space aimed at the intertwining of bodies and biographies, between gestures and words. The global involvement of the Self, even in its bodily dimensions (Winnicott, 1970), in the processes of knowledge therefore represents an educational requirement that can no longer be

evaded and which is based on the recognition of the body's potential and on movement as forms of self-expression in the world and as relational languages. In fact, overcoming a marginalization of bodies (Aucouturier, 2015) in educational contexts has contributed to enriching the concept of learning, which has come to detach itself from its exclusive relationship with the cognitive component; the emergence of an ecological educational perspective with and on the body and a broad learning idea that takes into account the world of the mind as well as of the body in a global and intertwined sense is highlighted.

When we talk about the body and movement at school, we do not want to refer exclusively to that of the pupils, but to encourage reflection also extended to the "movements" of the teachers and their ability to use the body as a medium for effective didactic communication (Priore, 2015; 2016). In fact, in the context of a traditional perspective that has long oriented teaching-learning practices, conceived as purely cognitive processes, not only the body of the students has been neglected, but also the "body of teachers". The generalized marginalization that bodies have undergone in educational contexts has contributed to impoverishing the complex qualities of learning and has prompted many scholars in the pedagogical field to be interested in how to make the school the place of aware recognition of corporeality in educational processes. Any individual process of change can only be based on forms of action and "movement" that push him towards the new, not only in the sense of a cognitive leap, but of a transformation that concerns his complexity. Despite the numerous advances made in this direction, many questions still remain open, especially in relation to the ways in which they can give space to the different languages of human communication and build learning settings that involve students from every point of view. The value of the setting, to be understood as an "intangible and incorporeal device [...] which structures the symbolic and material components of a certain reality and a certain educational form" (Massa, 1997, p. 87), lies in staging a background broad functional that does not look at the body as something separate, intrusive or even disturbing the school experience.

The problem can be dealt with on several levels and certainly one of these concerns the role of teachers, the competences they express and, more generally, the area of teachers' education. To the knowledge, know-how and being of the teacher is added the need to "know how to move" in the educational relationship and to place educational work for and with the body at the center of professional action; think for example of how the way in which the teacher uses his body and his movement can determine not only the use he himself makes of space, both in its material dimension and in its symbolic dimension, but above all how he teaches the his students to get in tune with their own corporeality. How teachers prepare the learning experience and the "space" they assign to the body implies a particular disposition that concerns both the personal sphere of experiences and subjective events and the professional training received. The full involvement of oneself, of the whole body in the processes of knowledge requires the activation of a didactic that makes the body visible and is capable of putting into action its potential and its languages. Assuming an embodied and situated perspective that conceives the individual in his intrinsic unity between cognitive, emotional and movement aspects, learning can no longer be detached from what we are and, consequently, from the body that we are (Malpeli, 2007); the assumption of the learning experience is that "there is no man outside his body, because his body is himself in the realization of his existence" (Galimberti, 1987, p. 4). Ultimately, what should be rethought is the potential that corporeality can activate in the teaching-learning processes and how to make congruent solutions feasible with the structural improvement of the school experience.

Some reflections on the introduction of physical education in primary school

Dominates the idea that qualifying the teaching experience means focusing on the methodological and instrumental aspects and chasing those elements of innovation that continually drag it towards the new without any possibility of accommodating the existing (Tafari & Priore, 2020); this fixation, however, overshadows the main purpose of the school to act as the organizer and generator of the students' experience and to have a hold on their life. There is certainly a need for concrete changes that affect the role of the body in the training experience and to critically question the categories through which it can best express. More often than not, in the face of the need for a radical change in the school, responses emerge on the level of didactic technicality, which in the specific case being discussed risk translating into forms of technicality of the body. As required by art. 109 of the Law of the State Budget for the financial year 2022 and multi-year budget for the three-year period 2022-2024 "in order to achieve the objectives of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan and to promote young people, starting from primary school, the adoption of behaviors and lifestyles functional to harmonious growth, health, psycho-physical well-being and the full development of the person, recognizing physical education as an expression of a personal right and a tool for cognitive learning, pending an overall revision of the teaching of physical education in primary school, is introduced gradually and subject to the adoption of the teaching of physical education in primary school in the fourth and fifth grades". These intentions, which are to be registered as positive in their nature, raise some questions on their declination in the educational and didactic sphere that concern the aims themselves on an ideal level, on the practical level the placement of teaching in the general curriculum and the possible drift of its disciplinary isolation. What we mean is that the need to make physical education a real teaching reveals the difficulty of placing the body and movement at the center of the entire school experience; the solution, probably less demanding and transformative, is precisely that of limiting the time of movement to school and assigning a separate niche to the body. The same reasoning applies to emotional-affective education which has more often been relegated to delimited planning moments, when instead we are aware that emotions permeate school life and play a fundamental role in learning processes and in the construction of logical thinking (Damasio, 1994; Lucangeli, 2020). How to use movement and emotions in an adequate way to facilitate learning processes and support the construction of effective educational relationships it pushes us to go beyond the discourse of the single discipline and its specific specializations. The brief arguments outlined do not go in the direction of defending primary school teachers from the "intrusion" of subject specialists or to claim their privilege, but rather to reflect, starting from real conditions, on how to eventually redefine their training in field of movement science. If it is stated that primary school teachers must be trained as scholars of a discipline, the educational purpose of providing them with those psycho-pedagogical skills fundamental to reach a global vision of the teaching-learning process takes a back seat. Following the same logic, we could say that graduates in the field of movement science and sports are to be considered experts in the discipline, but certainly lacking from the point of view of pedagogical training. It follows that the decision concerns the plan of training choices and the role to be assigned to the motor: if it is a question of validating its performative dimension, it is necessary to think about the introduction of specialist figures but if, instead, it is intended to emphasize that the movement can represent a possible bridge between the various disciplinary fields (D'Anna & Gomez Paloma, 2019) without there being radical changes in the school organization. As suggested by Beni, Chróinín and Fletcher (2019) the formative value of physical activities is not so much inscribed in the practical dimension of the motor gesture, but in the significance of the experience and in the relational framework that accompanies and guides the activity. In this last case, we are dealing with aspects that are to a greater extent referable to those pedagogical and epistemological

skills that make a teacher capable of using the disciplines for educational purposes, of carrying out a positive didactic communication and of knowing how to enter into a relationship with the students (Chróinín, Fletcher & O’Sullivan, 2018; Quennerstedt, 2019; Papageorgaki, 2018). What makes the child available to learn and the protagonist of his learning is the possibility of keeping active and using all his abilities, primarily movement skills or physical literacy ones (Nicolosi, Greco, Mangione, Sgrò & Lipoma, 2016). The latter is to be understood as a significant human capacity, “as motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding to maintain physical activity throughout the lifecourse” (Whitehead, 2010, p. 5). This concept was born in the context of philosophical approaches of existentialist and phenomenological matrix that have confirmed the centrality of embodiment in human existence, as a determining aspect of the interaction with the environment and the development of human capabilities. The embodiment perspective (Rosch, Thompson & Varela, 1991) is placed within the framework of the paradigm of complexity and is the spokesperson for a redetermination of the cognition construct as an aspect mediated and modeled by a body that performs the functions of distribution, regulation and filter. According to this elaboration, there is “a continuity between bodily experience, cognitive processes and life contexts” (Striano, 2015, p. 92) which has a clear impact on the way of conceiving the processes of human formation and the construction of knowledge. The embodiment is not, therefore, to be understood as a useful instruments for basic functional purposes, but above all as an underlying capacity for the possibilities of emotional and cognitive development. In the past, the tendency has been to apply the concept of physical literacy mainly to children of school age or adolescents with a particular talent, excluding that each individual was “gifted” with an embodied capability. On the contrary, today it is conceived in a universal and broader way as a capacity to be developed, applicable to every individual and at any age. Thus described, physical literacy underlines the importance and value of motor and physical activity in the school curriculum, refutes its reduction to a mere recreational purpose and promotes a holistic view of the human being. However, it should be noted that the construct is most often used with a performative meaning linked to the excessive emphasis on “physical” which still too much allows us to imagine working with the body as something purely technical and unrelated to the entire school experience.

As has already happened in the past, with the intention of applying the principle of interdisciplinarity, we end up with improvising aggregative solutions; it accumulates, is added but the overall vision is lacking. The central question concerning movement in primary school can conceivably be best realized only within a global educational project, in which the precise specificity of physical education can then be sought.

The problem of interdisciplinarity is intertwined with that of teacher training and not least with that of scientific research. As regards the first point, it should be emphasized that primary school teachers are not trained as scholars of a discipline, but on the contrary they are prepared to have a global pedagogical and didactic vision, which deserves to be better exploited in the school context. . The organization of primary school should be oriented even more towards the full adoption of an interdisciplinary approach to knowledge that sees disciplines as tools for formulating and addressing problems, rather than for reducing and simplifying the interpretation of reality. The isolated specialization of physical education would lead to a further loss of cohesion between the knowledge and the knowledge proposed by primary education; the central challenge for the school, on the other hand, should be to become generative of integrated and creative learning and to do so it needs experiences that activate the student as a whole. In the context of knowledge training, this suggests a revision of the school organization, but above all the abandonment of traditional teaching practices that still adhere too much to the image of the division of knowledge. This clearly invests the school in an active

role, which can be traced in the forms of collaboration it maintains with the academic world; only together, can research and school favor the full assumption of an interdisciplinary perspective that is projected at the same time on the contents of the disciplines and on the most functional methodologies to them. The role that universities and research play on initial training, the induction phase and lifelong professional development of teachers is crucial in this discourse; as part of the delineation of a complex profile of teachers' competences, it is essential to rethink the educational offer in the field of Methods and Didactics of motor and sports activities at primary education science courses (LM-85bis) through targeted laboratory activities. With reference to the application of the norm on the inclusion of the teaching of motor education, in conclusion, some questions remain suspended regarding the function to be assigned to the motor system, its particular areas of placement within the school curriculum and the applicative aspects implementation.

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