

Develop Individual Educational Potential Through Physical Activity and Sport

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Abstract

One of the main themes of contemporary educational discussion is the concept of school inclusiveness, which is achieved when the school becomes a learning environment that ensures the educational success of all students, no one excluded. Physical education is one of the school disciplines that contributes decisively to the formation of body identity, personality and the acquisition of communicative-relational skills.

This paper aims to highlight how physical education conceived and experimented in this way puts into practice a didactic that becomes a tool for the metacognitive development of the body and mind, in a framework in which subjects can recognize themselves in body and movement.

Key words: *Pedagogy; Special pedagogy; academic achievement; Inclusion; Educational context.*

Introduction

An inclusive school is a school that thinks and designs with everyone in mind, starting from the modification of the context and not acting only on the subject, but finding specific strategies, suitable for the disability and, at the same time, useful to the community. In inclusive schools, all students as persons have the right and dignity to personalize and individualize. The Italian school today is called upon to respond to the different and specific needs of each individual student. The current guidelines in the pedagogical and didactic field, in fact, affirm the dignity of diversity, enhancing it as a resource for the entire class group, capable, through the enhancement of the potential of each one, to become an inclusive class. In this sense, the disabled partner becomes an asset, a resource and even a strength because it allows one to measure oneself against one's own limits and potential (Merrigan & Senior, 2023)

To achieve this goal, the school must necessarily involve all those who play a decisive role in the learning processes (teachers, school managers, students and families, school staff, local authorities) and take advantage of all the resources and educational opportunities useful for carrying out interventions that aim not to separate, but to distinguish and "signal" the diversity of each student. but to include, enhance and harmonize differences.

In the 1970s in Italy, the closure of special schools (Law 517/1977) led to the inclusion of disabled pupils in mainstream classes. Over the years and the advancement of

pedagogical research, the term "insertion" was considered too static and incapable of expressing the work of co-education existing among the pupils.

For this reason, we moved on to talk about "integration", a term that better expressed the idea that the disabled classmate was not only physically present in the classroom, but shared the teaching activity of his classmates, integrating, precisely, into the work of the class with the necessary modifications, reductions, adaptations, and the support of the support teacher.

From the mid-nineties, however, questions began to be asked about the value of the term "integration", which risked taking on negative, purely compensatory connotations, forgetting unique aspects related to the person, such as originality, authenticity, and freedom. The term "inclusion" was born, with the intention of highlighting a mutual permeability and exchange between pupils with different potentials within the same class.

The concept of inclusiveness, as we understand it today, is therefore nothing more than the result of a slow and gradual evolution of the original concept of "tailor-made school", based on the centrality of the child, already typical of Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Fröbel and Aporti, and which takes the form of innovative educational proposals and pedagogical theorizations by particularly significant pedagogues of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries attentive to learning environments and development psycho-cognitive and social, disability and emotionality of the child (Pavone, 2014).

Inclusion thus becomes a two-way phenomenon, in which not only the disabled classmate adapts to the behavior of the non-disabled classmates, but also the whole class must strive to adapt and understand the partner's disability, learning and changing through experience with people with disabilities and vice versa. The new term "inclusion", therefore, refers to a process, a philosophy of acceptance, namely the ability to provide a framework within which pupils can be equally valued, treated with respect and provided with equal opportunities. It is a comprehensive approach, not only centered on the individual disabled person, but also aimed at all pupils and all their potential (Ianes, 2005).

The inclusion of students with disabilities in Italian schools has been implemented for forty years in regular schools and normal classes and is achieved through the individualization and personalization of educational activities, starting from the differences and potential of each disabled student, valued in the context of the class group.

1. Inclusive Didactic Design

Inclusive teaching is the teaching of all, which is based on personalization and individualization through active, participatory, constructive, and affective methodologies. The quality of inclusive teaching is determined by educational reflexivity and intentionality, by the search for alternative motivations and hypotheses, by the ability to change perspectives of meaning and to produce transformative learning.

As Pennac (2008) argues, *"Each student plays his own instrument, there is nothing to be done. The difficult thing is to get to know our musicians well and find harmony. A good class is not a regiment marching in step, it is an orchestra playing the same symphony."*

Inclusive teaching is, therefore, a teaching conceived, designed and planned, from the beginning, based on individual variability, capable of being accessible for all students and

not only for some with special educational needs. Designing in an inclusive way means thinking, whatever the content to be conveyed, of personalized, multi-modal, and multi-level forms of teaching, because each student faces learning at different levels and ways, thus avoiding "path emergencies" that force, a posteriori, to modify what has been designed for an "ideal class", thus avoiding loss of effectiveness of the teaching action itself. Poorly designed and poorly conducted teaching can run the risk of creating barriers to learning itself. Inclusive teaching is therefore an innovative and flexible teaching "style" that facilitates the participation, enhancement and educational success of all students (Demo, 2016).

Inclusive teaching challenges teachers to develop a wide repertoire of teaching strategies that are considered effective, not only for pupils with special needs, but for everyone. This means that every teacher can improve their effectiveness, first by knowing and then using, monitoring and evaluating the best strategy, so as to help students become more effective learners as well (Goodley et al, 2018). There is a lot of research that shows how meta-cognitive, cooperative strategies, the strengthening of social and emotional skills, as well as the creation of a positive classroom climate, are essential for inclusive teaching. Developing a broad repertoire of effective strategies is essential as long as they reflect knowledge of the characteristics, needs of students and environmental circumstances, as well as teachers' professional and personal knowledge and skills (d'Alonzo, 2016).

In addition to the dimension of effectiveness with respect to methodological-didactic choices and actions to be made, an inclusive teacher cannot forget the importance of relational and emotional skills. Numerous studies show that teachers' appropriate mental attitude, emotional closeness, and ability to give appropriate and positive feedback to students are decisive elements for their academic success and the creation of a good classroom climate. The training of teachers with respect to their social and emotional skills, in an inclusive school context, certainly cannot be underestimated. The quality of the classroom climate (made up of relationships and emotional experiences) is crucial for the success of students, who learn best when they are in an emotionally safe and predictable environment, which motivates them and stimulates them towards positive and inclusive goals (Benigno et al, 2018).

The concept of inclusivity in contemporary schools goes beyond disability, learning disorders, explicit difficulties in integration and behavior and concerns all pupils with respect to whom it is necessary to give different answers for their educational needs. The goal of inclusive teaching is, in fact, to make all students reach the highest possible degree of learning and social participation, enhancing the differences present in the class. UNESCO's Guidelines for Integration Policies in Education emphasizes that: "*Inclusive schooling is a process of strengthening the capacities of the education system to reach all students. [...]. An inclusive school system can only be created if mainstream schools become more inclusive.*" In other words, if they become better at educating all the children in their community. For pupils with certified disabilities, on the other hand, Legislative Decree no. 66 of 13 April 2017 lays down specific rules for the promotion of their full school integration. In particular, it refers to the so-called Inclusion Plan that each school must prepare to overcome all those factors that may hinder its implementation, for the coordinated use of resources and to design specific improvement interventions. The Inclusion Plan must include an analysis of strengths and weaknesses, objectives to increase

inclusiveness for the following school year, resources (support teachers, assistants, contact persons), methodologies, methods of involving families, relations with local social and health services that are intended to be activated, actions for the acquisition and distribution of additional resources for the implementation of inclusion projects, the preparation of interventions for entry into the school system, continuity between the different levels of school and future integration into the world of work (Fiorucci, 2016).

The inclusive school, therefore, equips itself in a synergistic way to propose multiple educational and didactic strategies, according to a holistic approach, which considers the student as a complex and multidimensional person with his or her own socio-cultural and biological characteristics, and aims at the overall development of the potential and skills of each one for the achievement of the highest possible level of learning and socialization (Cottini, 2017). In order to achieve this, however, schools must have the courage to renounce the standardization of teaching. It must enable all its members to feel part of a community in which the same educational ideals are shared, the individuality of all its members is respected, each with his or her own interests, needs and talents, and offers multiple possibilities and opportunities for formation, so that each one can realize his or her aspirations (Milani, 2017). Fundamental to this new vision of the school is respect for the right to self-determination and to the construction of future life projects adapted to the potential of each and everyone, to the aspirations of families and to the new demands of society and culture. The school intends to achieve these important educational objectives with the collaboration of families with whom it is necessary to share, in respect of roles and specific responsibilities, objectives, goals and strategies for the healthy growth of young people. An inclusive systemic vision must also consider the contributions that can come from collaboration with other public and private entities, and from associations operating in the area and that are able to contribute to ensuring the educational success of students (Piccioli, 2020). We are thus witnessing a radical change in the pedagogical ideals and in the aims and methodological choices of the schools of the twentieth century.

In the process of individualization of teaching, activities are provided for disabled pupils so that it is possible to achieve knowledge and skills common to the rest of the class. These objectives are therefore common to the class group, but different, individualized methodologies that take into account the potential, abilities and personal abilities of the disabled pupil, which become a resource, trying to eliminate the factors that originate or maintain the difficulty (Hansen et al, 2020).

Personalized teaching, on the other hand, provides for the achievement of objectives that are different from those of the class, because they are built ad hoc on the disability of the individual student, enhancing his or her strengths. In this way, by specifically considering the different ability of the pupil as a peculiarity of his own, the pupil will be given the opportunity to develop his full potential and give him the opportunity to transmit his different ability to others (Juvonen et al, 2019).

To interpret inclusion as a "day-to-day" way of managing classrooms, training must be aimed at both support teachers and all curriculum teachers. Indications and Guidelines remind us that diversity poses a great challenge to didactic and educational action, i.e. being able to face it, having adequate skills in inclusive teaching strategies, in order to respond adequately not only to the needs of disabled pupils or with Specific Learning Disorders, with other difficulties or developmental disorders and with social and cultural

disadvantage, but also by emphasizing the quality of learning of all pupils (Wang & Zhang, 2021).

A key aspect is also that of "taking charge" of the student, which must be carried out by the entire "educating community", avoiding processes of delegation to the support teacher alone. Hence, therefore, the need for targeted, specific, modular training interventions that consider the different starting levels of those who access training and, above all, based on a participatory vision of inclusion and oriented towards cooperation and cooperative teaching.

Nevertheless, the school, which for over forty years has been trying to be a welcoming and inclusive context, today feels it must oppose the adverse pressures that come from the outside with a decisive and constructive commitment to inclusion. These educational ideals are expressed through pedagogical challenges from which the school cannot depart (Cunti, 2016).

Learning and teaching practices can guide inclusive actions in the classrooms, through participation, cooperation, interdependence and laboratory methodology.

2. Physical Education as a means of inclusion

The stimulating encounter between physical activity and the world of disability takes place starting from the origins of school inclusion.

Physical Education, in fact, is one of the school disciplines that contributes to a decisive extent to the formation of one's body identity, personality and the acquisition of communicative-relational skills. It is considered fundamental for the harmonious development of the personality and for the formation of citizens capable of expressing themselves and relating to each other in today's world, so much so that it has been defined as "a discipline of hinge between the scientific, communicative and expressive spheres, of relationships and citizenship". Physical education and sports, in fact, promotes self-knowledge and one's potential in the constant relationship with the environment, others, objects. It also contributes to the formation of the student's personality through the knowledge and awareness of one's own bodily identity, as well as the continuous need for movement as a constant care of one's person and well-being. Motor and sports activities provide students with opportunities to reflect on the changes in their bodies, to accept them and live them serenely as an expression of the growth and maturation process of each person; They also offer opportunities to reflect on the values that self-image assumes in comparison with the peer group.

The primary objective of physical education and sports is, in fact, to promote the growth of physically educated people through the acquisition of skills, i.e. motor skills, knowledge, socio-affective behaviors and motivations such that they are urged to adopt healthy and physically active lifestyles based on self-awareness (Colella, 2018).

This orientation frames the discipline in a holistic approach, which identifies among its main purposes the physical, cognitive and social development of children, together with the promotion of a healthy lifestyle, assigning it the role of a privileged tool for the structuring of personality, social relationships and for the acquisition of the life skills necessary throughout the course of life (Sibilio, 2016)

It is for this reason that physical, and sports education is proposed as an essential element for integrated growth. It follows that, through a conscious pedagogical orientation aimed at proposing significant motor experiences and the acquisition of new skills, it is necessary to promote an adequate motor planning that correlates with a coherent pedagogical intentionality, in order to adequately define motor action and to attribute a fair value to it. Therefore, education through the body and movement cannot be linked to didactic strategies linked only to doing, but must also and above all be realized in a condition linked to the deepest meaning of being a person acting in the environment.

Starting from these assumptions, the School must, therefore, become the ideal setting in which to build a didactic of motor and sports activities that looks at the educational conception of the body and movement understood as a factor of promotion not only of the aspects of self-construction but also as an educational exercise for the acquisition of healthy lifestyles that allow to improve the well-being and health of the individual (Gomez Paloma, Damiani & Ianes, 2014) In this sense, it becomes necessary to integrate in the teaching practice both the purely physical and the socio-relational aspects, in order to allow a global taking charge of the psycho-physical health of the subject.

Physical education and sports education must, therefore, necessarily become essential to the formation of young people. In fact, it contributes to their growth both in structural terms and to the formation of the Self that concerns the body, its potential and its limits, its position in physical space, its perception in relation to others, its image. It also plays a crucial role in directing motivation to improve one's individual abilities and self-determination in achieving mental and physical well-being (Bailey, 2006). Therefore, it is not only the educational value that contributes to the development of motor skills, abilities and competences, but also and above all the value of all those activities that, through movement, contribute to the structuring of identity and awareness of the potential of one's own body.

The motor and sports education conceived and experimented in this way puts into practice a didactic that becomes a tool for the metacognitive development of the body and mind, in a framework in which the subjects can recognize themselves in body and movement. The education of the body and movement is therefore aimed at a training process capable of allowing learners to achieve an ever greater awareness of their body in movement in order to obtain that intrinsic pleasure and the achievement of cultural, social and expressive factors that identify the value aspect of motor activities (Cottini, 2008). It follows that the educational process represents the tool through which the individual gives shape to his or her personal identity, integrating all those knowledge, skills and competencies that allow him or her to live and mature an increasingly complete self-awareness. The body and movement are, therefore, two fundamental elements of the individual and social dimension in the personal development of the individual, it follows that physical activities provide a special contribution to the creation and strengthening of skills that can be used in other contexts of life. In particular, within the didactic path of physical education and sport, due to the specific experiential characteristics of the discipline, the curriculum helps to develop transversal skills capable of making students capable of transforming the knowledge, attitudes and values acquired into real skills, namely "what to do" and "how to do it" in every life circumstance (Perla, 2013).

This type of offering, characterized by a multiplicity of accessible, interdisciplinary, situated and immersive learning opportunities, based on plural and differentiated didactic

mediations in their complementarity represents the methodological framework within which the knowledge and skills acquired through physical and sports education can contribute to the development of educational and social equity.

Conclusions

Physical and sports education unquestionably assumes an educational value for everyone, able-bodied and disabled. For the latter, play, movement, and sport take on an added value by giving visibility to their physical and cognitive abilities. Every form of educational intervention stems from the teacher's ability to remove "obstacles", focusing on functional abilities and hypothesizing suitable, not adapted, educational proposals.

The presence of a person with disabilities within a group changes relationships, relationships, balances, emotions on an intra and interpersonal level: there begins to be more collaboration, sharing and there is a tendency to face any obstacle in order to resolve the various conflicts. Disability also produces advantages for able-bodied people to the extent that they are in an inclusive dimension that is not limited only to welcoming diversity. Various didactic and educational strategies must be put in place to create a learning community, a community that manifests solidarity and sensitivity.

Everyone should perceive difference as a value or resource and not as a threat. It is necessary to create a new educational paradigm, it is necessary to educate to the difference, to the other and to the different to create those effective conditions in which the subject can express his potential and the most hidden reactions.

It becomes necessary to identify the skills of the most "fragile" in order to enhance their abilities within the class group; The resulting teaching proposal will have to respond to the needs of the students, taking into account the conditions of extreme heterogeneity of the classes, aiming at the discovery of their own body and their motor and communication skills to increase self-esteem and self-confidence. Starting from the assumption that every student needs, indifferently, appropriate educational proposals and that whatever the "difficulty", the educator will have to create the conditions of welcome and collaboration such as to allow adequate participation in the activity, Motor and Sports Education could intervene as a facilitator of school learning in subjects with special educational needs.

The person, the goal and the context (rules and people) are the factors that unite the world of play and sport and the world of disability: everyone indiscriminately uses their skills and determination to achieve the same goal, that is, to reach the limit of their limits by overcoming obstacles. From this point of view, it is important to be able to train the teachers themselves in order to make them understand the real and personal needs of the students in order to create inclusive actions that can make the disabled person feel the protagonist of their own life project and no longer a simple spectator in which others play their game.

Physical education and sports education, in fact, becomes effective when the focus is on the student and not on sport, when the teacher is able to motivate the student and create a positive teacher-learner relationship, making him more and more autonomous in his activity and personal choices.

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