

The challenges of special pedagogy in inclusion processes

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Abstract

Considering the methodological and strategic structure of educational paths aimed at inclusion in a pedagogical view means, first of all, providing the cultural and anthropological framework to read and interpret special educational needs. This is significant in the light of an overall perspective of the person's functioning, respecting the inviolable principle of the holistic nature of his being and the interweaving in which the multiple aspects of his existence find space.

Recognizing the diversity and the singularity of the human being means knowing how to understand and value the intelligences, talents, attitudes, and preferences taking into consideration the learning methods and styles, knowing how to create a constant dialogue between educational and training opportunities and the individual's experience in terms of interests, knowledge, previous skills, situations, and significant experiences. Thus, the methodological framework in which knowledge, pedagogical and special teaching skills can contribute to the development of educational and social equity, is characterized by a multiplicity of accessible, inter-disciplinary, situated, and immersive learning opportunities, based on multiple and differentiated teaching mediation in their complementarity.

Keywords: educational paths, physical and sports education, disability

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Introduction

The topics of research in the field of Pedagogy and Special Didactic are very topical today for those who are actively involved in the development of educational paths related to the growth and improvement of the individual, regarding the various issues related to disability, special educational needs and, more generally, education in an inclusive view (Medeghini, 2013).

The concept of inclusion, in fact, refers to a horizon of thought and research not attributable to a single model or only to school integration but to a fundamental theoretical position which aims at putting an end to all forms of marginalization and social, institutional and educational exclusion. It also requires the focus of the attention not only on the individual and on shortcomings but on functioning, skills, and context (Canevaro, d'Alonzo & Ianes, 2009). It is therefore evident that, according to this interpretation, the social, educational, and school systems are called to make a change of thought and action within their organizations, in order to allow the full and active participation of all people, including those who are disabled (Boscarino, 2012).

In view of the changes that contemporary society imposes and the progress made during these years, it is necessary, on the one hand, to understand the current cultural, legislative, theoretical and methodological landscape to locate the educational paths of growth and development of disabled or non-disabled subjects, on the other hand to better understand their meanings, verify their quality and re-evaluate the actions in function of the new emerging theoretical constructs (Peacock, 2014). What has been highlighted so far is the result of a deep reflection on the different dimensions that come into play which interact closely with each other in order to undertake a wide-ranging task of considerable complexity and of collective and shared participation of various actors who, in various capacities, work for the realization of a horizon of sense of educational goals, adequately articulated, to respond to the principle of individualization for equality and personalization for differences (Ianes, 2005).

Paying attention to the needs and characteristics of each individual, in order to ensure that everyone has full mastery of the skills needed to participate actively and constructively in common life and, therefore, work for the inclusion of everyone, means turning our gaze to a critical reflection and a conscious choice of values that, starting from the theoretical and operational contributions elaborated within the Special Teaching, known as Inclusive Teaching, produces an innovation both on the organizational level and the educational methods and methodologies, lowered in a social and

cultural context characterized by the paradigm of difference and diversity (Gousset, 2013).

In this sense, working with an inclusion perspective involves a complex organizational system that necessarily is affected by a complexity of factors related to national policies, socio-cultural value systems of context, the related legislative norms, the contributions of the institutions in charge, as well as the training of educators, the experiences, and personal attitudes of everyone involved in the process. The process of inclusion, in fact, is made up of daily, continuous paths, in which all the actors involved and the educational paths themselves must be able to respond to the differences that characterize everyone in a perspective of distributed support. It is not enough to integrate diversity, it is necessary to give space to the richness of difference, adapting, from time to time, the environments, the practice, the methodologies according to every specific need and singularity (Morin, 1985).

Recognizing the singularities means knowing how to understand, value and respect the intelligences, talents, attitudes, and preferences of each one, knowing how to create a constant contact between the educational offer and their experience in terms of interests, previous knowledge and skills, significant situations, and experiences. In this sense, educators are called to design educational and formative opportunities that allow the subject to experiment and test actively in cooperation with peers and in the reciprocity of their respective contributions (Lascioli, 2011). In an inclusive perspective, therefore, the need to know how to combine the singularity and diversity of every human being is certainly not a simple task, but it is equally an essential and indispensable prerequisite for the development of inclusive processes focused on specificities which constitute the ultimate goal of Special Pedagogy (Laeng, 1987). Special Pedagogy, in fact, dealing with the educational and scholastic inclusion and recognizing the different singularities with particular attention to people with special educational needs and at risk of exclusion, as well as the development of the skills involved in inclusive processes in the different existential dimensions of the person, pursues inclusion as a way of living together, based on the belief that every individual has value and belongs to the community and «[...] by general consensus is now recognized to the prospect of inclusion the potential to indicate the path, in education and training, in two closely related directions that include, on the one hand, the promotion of the academic success of each student, regardless of individual and social characteristics, on the other hand an increasing socio-cultural cohesion among the many heterogeneities that populate the different societies» (Pavone, 2014).

UNESCO (2013) also refers to the theme of inclusion as a universal approach that should be strongly supported on the educational, cultural, scientific, and formative level by the contribution of Special Pedagogy. According to UNESCO, in fact, “inclusion is really about the practical changes we can make so that all children, including those with different backgrounds and abilities, can succeed in our classes and schools and in society. These changes will not only benefit children we often identify as children with special needs, but all children and their parents, all teachers, school administrators and all those who are part of the community working with the school”.

Scientific-pedagogical paradigms underlying the concept of disability

In the context of contemporary reflections, the concept of disability takes on a multidimensional and multi-prospective meaning (Palmieri, 2011). Disability, in fact, no longer concerns only the deficit and the residual biomedical and neuro-biological operations of the disabled person according to a purely classifying and certifying perspective but, rather, aims at achieving emancipation and self-determination in the perspective of rights by requiring the assumption of a pedagogical and didactic, evolutionary, and dynamic epistemology closely related to the processes of human development. Established within such interpretive frame the inclusion regards everyone, according to a model that tries to overcome the biomedical perspective tied to the consequences of the illness and to reflect, instead, the intention to work by highlighting functioning as an integral part of the health dimension (Ghedin, 2009). This radical change of perspective compared to the previous way of conceptualizing disability (bio-medical model, social model), represents in fact, a new way of looking at disability aimed at giving responses to the needs, desires, and aspirations of people with disabilities. The International Classification of the Functioning of Disability and Health (ICF, 2001) of the World Health Organization (WHO, 2002), through the introduction of the bio-psycho-social model of functioning, recalls the need to consider social and psychological influences on health and disease. This vision highlights a view of health as a multidimensional phenomenon, considering the complex interactions between the individual and the social and natural environment. It highlights the importance of psychological and social factors in the study of disease and health, stating an ecological vision of health itself, based on the balance of the person with the environment (Striano, 2010).

According to this perspective, the achievement of good health no longer affects only the subject, but also the community and society, in other words it involves the social environment in which the person lives. It therefore requires an individual commitment, showed in the ability to make choices aimed at promoting one's own well-being, and at the same time a collective work directed towards the capacity of the context to reduce or eliminate the barriers and obstacles in the environment that prevent the person from actively participating in social life (Santi & Ghedin, 2012). The bio-psycho-social model used by the recent WHO classification argues that well-being, functioning, health or difficulties are the complex product of a system of reciprocal influences between biological, social, relational and structural aspects, which facilitate or hinder participation in social roles. The inclusive approach involves, therefore, the assumption of a broad and ecosystem framework that combines a dynamic interaction between individuals and contexts of belonging. In other words, it is about transforming contexts using specific mediators that allow subjects, with their peculiarities and diversity, maximum participation in educational practices (Vehmas, 2010). The legitimacy of the inclusive approach cannot be separated from the removal of cultural and social obstacles and barriers that prevent the full participation and direct assumption of responsibility, in order to foster the personal autonomy of each subject, create truly inclusive contexts, with a view to improving the quality of life and the culture of participation (ICF, 2001).

Inclusive education is one of the fundamental principles for the promotion of a society capable of guaranteeing active citizenship rights to all its members, respecting the specific needs of autonomy, participation and belonging. It follows that disability is to be understood as "the result of a complex relationship between an individual's health condition, personal factors and environmental factors representing the circumstances in which he lives" (WHO, 2002) The environment itself can act as a barrier or a facilitator, therefore, it cannot remain in a situation of fixity, in a unique and rigid training model that risks being the cause of special needs. The axis of interpretation underlying the concept of disability and the models for improving the quality of life (WHO, 2002) must therefore be directed towards two specific directions: on the one hand towards the implementation of targeted and specific actions for the improvement of capabilities, or towards the improvement of individual skills (Biggeri & Libanora, 2011), on the other hand towards the organization of welcoming and inclusive living environments, which will enable everyone to improve their quality of life, taking into account individual differences. The tension towards the model of inclusive education needs pedagogical intentionality looking towards the ICF, or moving towards the realization of organizational tools and

parameters to be carried out for the improvement of those processes and methodologies that are really considered an advantage of the quality of educational paths. Finally, the inclusive perspective does not only concern people with disabilities, but also affects every vulnerable individual with specific needs. In this sense, inclusive good practices must necessarily outline paths that are not marginalizing, in which there is a widespread prosperity thanks to the often-radical changes in policies, strategies and methods of education.

Physical and sports education in the perspective of the ICF

In current socio-educational contexts, the pedagogical reflection about the methodological and strategic-didactic structure of ICF needs to provide a cultural and anthropological framework in which to read and interpret special educational needs in the light of an overall perspective of the person's functioning, respecting the inviolable principle of the holistic nature of his being and the complexity and interdependence in which the multiple aspects of his existence find space (Ianes, 2016).

According to this interpretative approach, the person is considered in a double existential dimension “of being a body” and “of having a body” (Gomez Paloma, 2019). It is through the body that we perceive, learn, and understand. For this reason, the body represents a node of living meanings, because it is through it that we can grasp the very essence of the world and relate it to our lives. The experience of human life is possible, in fact, only through the union body-mind and its functional and systemic organization is the vehicle of our moving in the world. It is in this sense that the ICF represents a relational and dynamic framework that underlines how the experience of human life is possible only through the body and movement. The ICF outlines a vision of the body-mind that redefines acting and living the body through relationships with other bodies (Damiani, 2016). Corporeality is, in fact, closely linked to the formation of one's individual identity, social and learning processes, by deep and inseparable relationships, which support a vision of motricity that cannot simply be the result of biological functions, but it must be considered as an expression of intelligence, affectivity, motivation and a decision-making ability. Moreover, as highlighted by Gomez Paloma (2019) “cognitive processes linked to learning, in a dynamic exchange with social behaviors and communication systems, can be considered as cognitive mechanisms that are based on motricity”.

In relation to this context of reference, it is clear how the educational setting that is determined in the field of motor and sports education represents an excellent educational framework for the implementation of inclusive processes. The class context, in fact, because of the structural and relational constraints that characterize it, often inhibits those relational and social expressions that, instead, young people wish and should manifest. As a matter of fact, the class context, as it happens for all the formal contexts, makes the observation of the students artificial and distorted as well as the understanding of their different and complex operations, as it deprives them of their expressive and generative potential (Perla, 2013).

Physical and sports education, on the other hand, represents a disciplinary area always recognized for its educational potential, which allows students to express their personality, to manifest motor behaviors related to school skills, to determine important positive repercussions on cognitive processes, as well as to generate relational dynamics resulting from intra- and interpersonal elements of great genuineness (Damiani & Gomez Paloma, 2019). In the light of what has been discussed so far, with a view to social and cultural recognition and a widespread culture of inclusion, the context of motor and sports education represents a crucial opportunity for the growth and accompanying of the individual who grows and matures in protected situations in which they can experience their citizenship and its active role with the progressive assumption of the social norms that govern the cooperative connection of the community. Acting on the bodily realization means, therefore, educating the person to become himself by keeping his gaze well oriented towards the complexity of the needs of each and every one in an inclusive perspective. This means helping the individual to become aware of being a whole person, who expresses himself and is fulfilled through movement, action (Gomez Paloma, Damiani & Ianes, 2014). This conceptualization is consistent with the body-mind vision of contemporary neuroscience and, in particular, with the founding principles of Embodied Cognitive Science (ECS).

The body dimension of inclusion in pedagogy

Looking at the complexity of people's needs in a truly inclusive perspective means putting in place paths that encourage the education of the person in becoming himself through his own bodily realization. Thus, the body and its action through movement becomes the fundamental focus of the evolutionary and formative process, since they allow the growth and global maturation of the person, promoting awareness of the value of the body and

the structuring of indispensable personality characteristics, such as the achievement of autonomy, the construction of personal identity and the acquisition of skills (Carraro & Bertollo, 2005), hence the need for an education of the body and movement oriented to develop fundamental motor skills for the growth of the person. The body, in fact, much more than a simple instrument at the service of the mind, is an expression in which the whole person manifests himself (Metz, 1996), representing the main way to express himself, communicate, understand, and learn. In this sense, the body becomes an expression of personality and a relational tool. Educating the body and movement also means ensuring effective social growth of the individual (Ceciliani & Tafuri, 2017). Implied within this interpretive framework, the motor and sports experience become a place of discovery of its riches, potential and expressive-creative abilities. This demonstrates the fact that the individual does not express his being in the world and his essence only through the forms of thought but also and above all through the way of moving, seeing, perceiving, and doing.

The educational approach in the context of motor activity seeks to outline a field of intervention mainly aimed at the growth and learning of the person throughout his formative growth from the beginning of the school experience, regarding the unity between psyche and action, between “actions” of the mind and “actions” of the body as fundamental (Berthoz, 1998). Physical and sports education is a disciplinary area that re-unifies the human being in a body-mind, through a global approach to the body dimension and its communicative and relational values, through a pedagogy of discovery that puts into action not only the physical part of the body, but also the psychic one, from which it results the trace of the significant presence of intelligence (Borgogni, 2016).

The current conception of physical and sports education intersects the sensory-perceptive and affective experience with the first perceptive and cognitive learning: it is through movement that the child experiences with his body, emotions, and feelings, which are transformed into concepts and competences (Rigal, Nader, Bolduc & Chevalier, 2009). The most recent neurophysiological theories state, in fact, that not only the perception is at the base of the movement, but that the movement itself is a source of perception, experience and learning, as the motor activity provides the means to explore the world and learn about its properties (Danish, Enyedy, Saleh & Humburg, 2020; Sullivan, 2018).

The learning process requires movements to be free of pre-ordered schemes and models, in order to foster sense-perceptions that act on cognitive and affective development. It is, in fact, from the circularity individual-action-environment that learning self-determines and new motor

schemes reinforce (Pesce, Masci, Marchetti, Vazou, Säkslahti & Tomporowski, 2016). Throughout the educational/ formative process it is appropriate to create situations in which the body becomes a mediator between learning, expressive forms, and socio-affective development of the person (Delle Fratte, 2001). This way of conceiving the educational and formative path of the individual allows to overcome the dualism between mind and body still present in the methodologies used in motor education nowadays, embracing instead a concept of active pedagogy based on the unitary vision of the person and using the dynamics of group work, as it is in this spirit that the educational movement can be used as an important means of development (Garbarini & Adenzato, 2004).

In this context, physical and sports education becomes a discover of the potential but also the limits of one's own body and distances itself from the methods of motor training, centered on the repetitiveness of movements, typical of some forms of technical-sporting activity (Ceciliani, 2015). To physical and sports education is therefore attributed the value of the opportunities to make experiences that have origin and confluence in the corporeality of each, to enter into relationship and communicate with others, to express themselves with different languages, and act as a trait d'union in learning contexts for the realization of an interdisciplinary teaching (Colella, 2019).

Physical education conceived and tested as such, sets off processes that become a tool of metacognitive development, in a framework in which the subjects can recognize themselves in the body and movement (Casolo, 2011). It follows that the educational process, as a whole, represents the instrument through which the individual gives shape to his personal identity, integrating all the knowledge, skills, abilities and competences that allow him to live and develop an increasingly complete self-awareness. In this perspective, educating cannot coincide in the simple attributing to the other a predetermined form and meaning, but in its ability to generate a relational plot that leads each one to the knowledge of himself and the world (Margiotta, 2009, 2016). Considering the methodological and strategic structure of educational paths aimed at inclusion in a pedagogical view means, first of all, providing the cultural and anthropological framework to read and interpret special educational needs in the light of an overall perspective of the person's functioning, respecting the inviolable principle of the holistic nature of his being and of the interweaving in which the multiple aspects of his existence find space (Gomez Paloma, Damiani & Ianes, 2014). From this point of view, it is evident that the deep and indissoluble relationships that connect corporeity to the building of one's own individual and social identity and learning, support a new holistic vision

of motricity that cannot be reduced exclusively to a simple result of strictly biological processes, but must be considered as an expression of intelligence, affectivity, motivation, and decision making. Basically, cognitive processes linked to learning, in a dynamic exchange with social behaviors and communication systems, can be considered as cognitive mechanisms that are based on motricity. The body is thus the main instrument of communication with the environment, becoming an essential element to express the potential of the individual. The education of the body in motion, especially in case of disability, is necessary for the development of one's personality and the consequent identification of the bodily self (Gardner, 2009; Berthoz, 1998).

In this context, motor and sports education, more generally education through movement, recognizes in the body a form of language that helps the subject in the delicate experience of recognition, management and sharing of their emotional states. It represents a fertile ground for the development of paths of growth and authentic formation in which the person can discover and rediscover himself and his personal and social potential. Through movement you have the opportunity to explore and know your potential and expressive skills, your moods, your needs and desires. The subject is able to know and explore his own body and personal identity (Galimberti, 2002).

In the field of educational activities, motor and sports education, within an inclusive dimension, offers the opportunity to express and enhance the richness and potential of each subject, but it can represent an inclusive and integral learning environment only if it brings with it and develops body consciousness and self-organization. Physical and sports education, moreover, promotes the development of a strong sense of self-esteem and self-efficacy, as through the interaction with the other the individual socializes with others and acquires a certain autonomy. In particular, motor activity, when it becomes an opportunity for learning and training, promotes the growth of the individual within a relational dimension in which he interacts with others and shares emotions (Lipoma, 2016).

The relational dimension acquires a strong value especially for a disabled person, in which an opportunity for psychophysical development and evolution is realized as well as the learning of behavioral models which are appropriate to social life. The cognitive experience through the body and movement represents an exercise that allows the individual to discover his own body image, through his own perceptions, his own sensations and, above all, through the relationship with the other and with the surrounding world. It is for this reason that motor activity assumes a strong cognitive value and represents an important moment of learning. The body and the movement represent, thus, educational and evolutionary factors of fundamental

importance that must necessarily be privileged in order to achieve fully integrated education forms (Scarpa, 2008).

In this way, the body, movement and motor and sports activities become the place of the communicative event returning sense to the interpersonal and educational relationship. Educational intervention based on motor experience determines the maturative growth of the person and, at the same time, the development of skills. It promotes feelings of security, autonomy, perceived self-effectiveness and moves towards the self-affirmation both in his evolutionary and integration process (Gelati, 2004). Through physical and sports education, it is possible to realize an educational relationship in which the disabled person lives his own body dimension and is helped in the construction of his personal autonomy. Thus, physical and sports education represents for the disabled person a means to develop their own qualities in relation to the remaining faculties, acquire greater awareness of their body in relation to the surrounding space, relate to others and, last but not least, improve their self-control skills (Medeghini, D'Alessio, Marra, Vadalà & Valtellina, 2013).

Conclusions

Physical and sports education, through the sensory dimension, elaborates the cognitive experience of the body, defining a healthy image of the self that allows the disabled person to explore their own body dimension and rebuild their identity. It becomes an educational and re-educational tool apt to create an environment rich in possibilities and positive and significant solicitations that determines the exaltation of what the subject can do and not of what he cannot do. This promotes personality formation and increased self-esteem. Physical and sports education becomes the great background supplement, in which you can contextualize emotional, cognitive and relational experiences, where the disabled person can find the essence of his being in the world and restructure an image of himself oriented to the fulfillment of his body by developing confidence and self-esteem, where the attention is paid to the possibilities and abilities rather than to the limits dictated by their own condition.

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