

## Difficult inclusion and physical activity for distance didactics

MONTESANO PIETRO<sup>1</sup>, GIUSEPPE MADONNA<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>University of Naples Parthenope, ITALY

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### Abstract

The study was carried out on a sample of 20 (twenty) SEN subjects (12 females and 8 males) aged between 14 and 16, with an average age of 15.7, in the months of April and May 2020, to verify the effects of the lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Was important verify that distance learning has include all disciplines. An inclusive school it must involve all students in the learning process. The students were given two lifestyle telephone interviews and were administered an entrance/final questionnaire to check the relapse of the lockdown effects. The conditions of distance learning were verified and the questionnaire was consisting of 5 items relating to academic performance and free time, the cohesion of the class group, the reduction of free time, adolescent crises and the increase in body weight. A DL path was proposed in support of disciplines and physical activity sessions with the use of the Jacobson method, in order to promote relaxation of about 40 days. The results were tabulated in the last ten days of the month of May highlighted growing difficulties in school performance, a growing lack of free time and the pursuit of class group cohesion, as well as an almost generalized increase in body weight. The increases percentage is about 3,5%. The percentage of the search for other interests, instead, decreases perhaps because the real ones have been replaced by virtual ones.

**Keywords:** Special needs, inclusion, physical activity, relax

### Introduction

The problem of inclusion (Banks, Frawley, Mc Coy, 2015) turns out to be a phenomenon that affects contemporary society, and particularly educational communities such as schools. Variables that are often unpredictable affect the effectiveness of the school's mission, which constantly faces educational emergencies requiring adequate responses. In order for this to happen, it is necessary to have suitable and competent learning environments and teachers (Hodge et. Al, 2004), of both male and female sex (Avramidis, Norwich, 2002), who face the teaching experience with ever greater enthusiasm and professionalism.

In the light of the regulatory evolution and the reconfiguration of the educational paths, the educational and training process within the school community (Lindqvist, Nilholm, 2011) has assumed, over the years, dynamic connotations according to the changed social conditions which have determined the extension of immigration phenomena, the expansion of multicultural communities (Italian Ministry of Education, 2012), and the need to combine different needs of subjects of school age. These variables have enhanced the need to create adequate learning conditions for an inclusive school, so as to promote the right according to which a subject is considered equal to the others, but at the same time different together with the others.

In relation to this, the term inclusion (Dovigo, 2007) has encompassed and replaced previous definitions such as the term integration, and has been interpreted as the process by which the school context, with the participation of its various protagonists (school organization, students, teachers, families, territory) assumes the characteristics of an environment that responds to the needs of all subjects, and in particular of subjects with special needs. The inclusive process is therefore based on a complex and systemic thought, shared by all the realities that belong to the school and that contribute to the construction of synergistic and significant educational-training interventions for all students, in particular for those with Special Educational Needs.

The school identifies the students for whom it is appropriate and necessary to activate a personalized didactic path summarized in the PDP, i.e. in the Personalized Didactic Plan. Identifying a Sen student means recognizing for him/her the need not only for a didactic path different from that of his/her classmates, but also for his/her formalization, as a formal assumption of commitments and responsibilities by the school and, if possible, also by the family.

In fact, in the last century, once the existence of "diversity" in the school environment was observed, the concept of exclusion was applied. It was only afterwards, starting in the Seventies, that we moved on to inclusion and integration at school, until we reached the concept of inclusion. Naturally, the regulatory sources have been updated over the years.

### Special Educational Needs

The subject showing Special Educational Needs (SEN) (Cornoldi, Giofrè, Belacchi, 2015), presents learning and / or relational difficulties, not necessarily supported by clinical and / or functional diagnosis, which must be addressed with diversified teaching strategies.

Identifying a SEN subject starts from an effective observation of his/her behaviour, the measurement of his/her attention and concentration during the teaching activities, as well as of the quality of the school performance, which, in school age subjects, is the result of many variables. The careful observation and detection stage must focus on the subject's relationship with his/her peers, teachers (Meegan, MacPhail, 2006) and parents, in order to achieve a global, and especially circular view of the problem.

Components such as character, cognitive style and learning style can undergo changes over the years, as well as personal identity, and motor identity in particular, can reconfigure not only in light of the changed physical conditions, but according to the diversification of experiences, of significant events that connote the whole life of the individual and that can determine good or bad interpersonal relationships, in addition to profoundly affecting school performance. Among these, motor behavior highlights the correct or lacking acquisition of the body and basic motor patterns, as well as of coordination and conditional skills; it represents the explicitation of the motor identity which is particularly related to the stages of childhood and adolescence, then persisting into adulthood, and which contributes to the shaping of personal identity.

School is therefore the place where the child can feel satisfied with his or her needs for protection / care and autonomy, so as to discover his or her own potentials and abilities, an exploratory territory of knowledge of himself/herself and the world. The school community, together with the family, represents a fundamental context for the cognitive and emotional development of the child first, and then of adolescents, thus constituting the privileged area for socialization and for the experimentation of individual autonomy. The achievement and overcoming of the auxological development stages will testify that the educational and training dimensions interacting with the students, which are that of the parents, teachers and peer group, can contribute to the achievement of the objective of support and inclusion, where each element of a set interacts with the other sets.

The teacher's action is also fundamental, because the instilling self-esteem (Kirkcaldy, Shephard, Siefen, 2002) and perception of competence generates in the student the desire to participate, to be active in the class group, thus supporting sharing and connection, feeling an integral part of a group and therefore included in it. Vice versa, if the teacher does not believe in the skills of a certain student, he or she may be influenced by a certain negative prejudice, so the desire to participate and be present will not be stimulated and reinforced. The comparison with the peer group within the class group in which relational skills are developed is significant. In the class group, the SEN subjects have their needs for acceptance, competence, confidence and involvement satisfied, and develop the ability to negotiate and distinguish different roles. The class group is an important social laboratory, in which there are aspects related to the performance of the task and others linked to the relationship; in this way, complex dynamics ranging from cooperation to competition, from involvement to exclusion, can be created. In the context of inclusion, the class group carries out a work of fundamental importance, representing a very important value both on a relational and educational level, as successes and failures are experienced and faced. The difficulties can be experienced as situations of failure and frustration, with a consequent negative reflection on the real perception of personal abilities, while the successes can be experienced in an amplified way, not adhering to reality, with implications of euphoric perceptions which may induce the subject to feel strong and, at the same time, fragile and intolerant of defeats (Torsheim, Wold, 2001). From the point of view of inclusion, the family variable that determines the perception of the value of school activity, the relationship of parents with the school and teachers, and the attribution of the importance of the specific role of the teacher, must be considered.

Thus the school context is one of the cardinal elements in the perspective of the inclusion of SEN subjects. Bateson affirmed that <<The learning of life contexts is something that must be discussed not as an internal fact, but as a matter of external relationship (...) the context is a matrix of meanings, we will have to pay attention to the influence of all the groups of which the individual in difficulty is part (school, family, work), from the reactions of the social means to the deficient behavior of which the individual has made himself protagonist, but also to the process of development of his way of relating, that is, his learning context (Bateson, 1972) >>.

School as a social context, as a learning context, is defined by the elements that make it up (parents, teachers, peers); in fact, these elements represent a fundamental aspect supporting inclusion because, being them rich in meanings, they strongly influence the child / adolescent in his or her needs, determining his or her social and educational path. In the complex world of Special Educational Needs (Vehmas, 2010), it is not possible to refer to a single place of observation, analyzing the question from a single point of view; instead, it is necessary to accept in the general considerations dimensions that can meet between a multiplicity of places of observation and explanation by continuously connecting with each other, creating a solid network of cooperation and collaboration.

In this sense, it is important to provide for inclusion paths that take advantage of the educational and training value of motor and sports activities. Paths which can be developed with different methodologies, but that must pursue the objective of the well-being of learners and the facilitation of learning and relationships.

**Difficulties in distance learning**

The conditions that emerged as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic have certainly changed/slowed down the inclusion process. The immediate passage from a face-to-face relationship to a distance-type one has left all students disorientated, but the most fragile ones could give up school attendance (Montesano, Tafuri, Mazzeo, 2016), with unexpected consequences on their lives.

The help-based relationship established in the classroom between the teacher and the student attending school has turned into virtual assistance, mediated by the electronic transmission, which has often left (Sassaroli, Ruggiero, 2002) students who requested supplementary explanations, and confrontation dissatisfied, regardless of the lesson hours established by a review of the school timetable.

Distance Learning has stimulated the learning of telematic tools, but has also highlighted the fragility of alternative didactic tools and the need for adequate training of school staff.

The development of the self-esteem and autonomy process slowed down, as well as a weight increase (Montesano, Mazzeo, 2019), an increase in the use of video games and television and a consequent increase in hypokinesia has been witnessed (Hamer, Chida, 2009).

This condition is often linked to incorrect physical-motor models with distortion of the body image, which cause inadequate motor responses (Asztalos, De Bourdeaudhuij, Cardon, 2010) or even motor regressions, determining not only evident physical problems and muscle, bones and tendons trauma, but also pathologies affecting large systems that lead to a progressive abandonment of motor practice, and to a decrease in self-esteem.

For SEN subjects, in addition to the usual motor activity sessions, the simplified Jacobson method, particularly suitable for dealing with the problems of insecurity, demotivation and drop-out risk, can be taken into consideration. This is because the method can be used both in situations of therapeutic setting and in daily life with advantages of application both at home, during school hours in the classroom, in a sitting position, and in the gym in all other positions, whether while standing up, sitting down or lying down.

**Materials and methods**

**Recipients**

The study was carried out during the months of April and May 2020 on 20 SEN subjects (12 females and 8 males) aged between 14 and 16, attending a high secondary education school in the city of Naples.

The students were given two lifestyle telephone interviews and were administered an entrance/final questionnaire to check the relapse of the lockdown effects.

Table 1 - Questionnaire

ITEM	NOTE
<b>Reduced availability of free time</b>	The person engaged in school and in motor-sport activities has little time available for relational and social life. There are few moments of leisure and few friendships that manage to consolidate, so that the subject often ends up being "marginalized and excluded" from the life of the "class group", and from meetings with friends. Moreover, little time remains available to develop other hobbies and interests.
<b>Difficulties cohesion with the group</b>	The group is fundamental, especially in the adolescent phase, because each individual within a group satisfies the basic needs of belonging, membership, contact, social and relational exchange. The group is united and cohesive, aimed at achieving the same objectives, if activities, discussions and meetings are organized to deepen knowledge about each other and to possibly discover common interests. The risk of a "non-group" is the lack of mutual help, the prevalence of individualism.
<b>Finding other interests</b>	A teenager needs constant stimuli and incentives, wants to acquire new knowledge in all fields, not only in sports. The absence of ever-changing stimuli very often determines the choice to give up, to abandon it all;
<b>Academic difficulties</b>	When parents and / or teachers complain of poor academic performance, they exert pressure, even if not explicit, so that the child reduces or leaves other activities, including sports, and focuses more on studying. This condition presents the adolescent with a choice that, at the beginning, leads him or her to hide the continuation of the sports activity, but over time, it can lead him or her to abandon one of the activities, getting caught up in the vortex of the drop-out;
<b>Adolescent crisis</b>	The rapid change in physical parameters and the consequent difficult acceptance of one's own body often lead to changes and a standstill in performance. The imbalances caused by the evolution of the new psychophysical structure are often faced with further commitment in the activities. Despite this, the efforts made do not often produce adequate results, for which the young subject tends to detach himself or herself from the source of discomfort, and to give up his or her activities.

**Purposes**

The purpose was to check the development of the inclusion process, and to encourage the participation of SEN subjects also in motor initiatives, albeit remotely.

**Specific objectives**

Detecting the level of self-esteem, the difficulties of using the new DL telematic tools and the change in lifestyle were the objectives set.

### Study

The research path was conducted by six teachers, coordinated by the authors, and was articulated over two months (April and May 2020), with an observational method and manual detection of the initial and final results. Interviews were carried out and a lifestyle questionnaire was administered. The surveys were carried out both in the morning and in the afternoon, compatibly with the personal needs of the learners and with those of their families.

### Stages of the research

**First phase - 10 days:** initial survey with interview and the questionnaire administration.

**Second phase - 40 days:** 6 hours per week of didactic support and development of motor proposals, with three sessions of about 30 minutes each.

**Third phase - 10 days:** final measurement of the results.

The last ten days of May were dedicated to the reorganization of the data as a percentage extrapolated from the final questionnaires.

### Mixed training session (30 '):

8 'general activation with slow running on the spot and / or exercise bike

5 'stretching

5 'Running on the spot with progressive increase in speed

2 'jumping with the rope

5 'Abs exercises

3 'Backbones exercises

2 'stretching

### Materials

Detection grid

Questionnaire

PC

### The Jacobson method

The method is based on relaxation training, which can increase the ability to successfully overcome daily tensions, strengthen health and improve life quality by means of progressive somatic changes, such as slowing down and breathing regularization, reduced oxygen consumption, decrease in heart rate (Tjønnå, 2009), reduced blood pressure (especially in the case of hypertension), relaxation of skeletal muscle, and changes in brain electrical activity (in the electroencephalogram it is possible to detect changes that indicate a state of mental calm).

Being characteristic of the Jacobson technique (Brenner, 1992), progressive relaxation is the response of the musculature to the psycho-emotional stimuli consisting of internal anxiety, stress and fear, as demonstrated also through instrumental measurements. The method pursues the objective of supporting a deep relaxation after muscle contraction (even concerning a small muscle), and the relaxing process can be strengthened by directing attention to the transition between contraction and relaxation. The relaxation proceeds step by step, which well connotes the systematic aspect of the method which tends to involve all the muscular districts.

### Results

In the last ten days of the month of May the results were tabulated, with the replies to the items of the questionnaire expressed in percentage. The analysis of the data shows that the lack of free time, the search for cohesion of the class group and the difficulties of school performance, as well as the increase in weight, are the items that show a percentage increase about 3,5%. The percentage of the search for other interests, instead, decreases perhaps because the real ones have been replaced by virtual ones.

Table 2 - Initial and Final Results of Questionnaire Items

ITEM	INITIAL %	FINAL %
Reduced availability Free time	23	26
Difficult cohesion with the group	21	23
Finding other interests	31	20
Academic difficulties	25	31
Increased Weight	58	62

### Discussion

The development of the inclusive and motor process observed at school is certainly different from the one monitored during the lockdown phase. The difference of the face-to-face relationship compared to the distance relationship is substantial. Fear of the future, lack of knowledge of the pandemic's developments, and lack of relationship among peers have led to states of discomfort among adolescents,

In particular, SEN subjects have reacted with slow reactivity to the stimuli of the teachers, conveyed through the telematic means.

The inability to go out and perform adequate motor activity (Kanning, Schlicht, 2010) has led the team of teachers to propose an intervention on the mechanism of relaxation, so as to enable the control of anxiety and contain the regression of self-esteem.

The effectiveness of the relaxation training practice is subject, after an initial period of adaptation, to regular training, preferably at least three times a week for about 60 minutes. It is advisable to avoid competitive interferences as it is possible that, at the beginning of the training, the performance anxiety may increase, which may decrease or disappear over time with the repetition of the exercises. Ultimately, relaxation training promotes knowledge about oneself, one's own body, and by inducing a state of well-being, helps develop a healthy sense of self-confidence and establish appropriate relationships with others.

Regular training improves the ability to perceive, as precisely as possible, the changes in the body's condition related to tension and relaxation. A considerable feature is the possibility to train while sitting down in between commitments, and therefore also in the classroom.

By focusing on feelings of relaxation and enjoying easing tension, the state of calm becomes markedly deeper. For this reason too, it is important that the relaxation phase is longer than the contraction phase; the emphasis should definitely be on relaxation. Any loosening after voluntary contraction of the muscles induces, by virtue of the contrasting experience triggered, very sharp feelings of relaxation. However, these vary a lot from individual to individual, and it may happen that some of the more subtle relaxation processes are more clearly perceived only over time.

### Conclusions

Distance learning has produced consequences that cannot be evaluated in the short term, but the possibility of controlling states of anxiety, of concentrating on a task, can be certainly favoured by relaxation techniques.

The relaxation practice should preferably develop within a quiet context, free of disturbance elements, but it is also effective in everyday situations where absolute silence does not prevail. The technique favours the achievement of a state of calmness which allows escaping from external disturbances, with one's own eyes closed and wearing comfortable and non-constricting clothing. We recommend performing the exercises while lying down or sitting; the latter is recommended for classroom exercises with back support for the spine, in plantar parallel position and with the knee at about a 90-degree angle.

The exercises end by flexing and stretching one's own arms several times, breathing deeply and opening one's own eyes, while sometimes feeling sensations of warmth, pleasant physical heaviness, itching or pulsation.

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