

## **BORDER PEDAGOGY. THE BODY AND ART FOR INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION AND INCLUSION**

## **PEDAGOGIA DI CONFINE. IL CORPO E L'ARTE PER L'EDUCAZIONE INTERCULTURALE E L'INCLUSIONE**

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### **Abstract**

The body and artistic languages can develop visions, effective, innovative and cutting-edge proposals on issues considered crucial for inclusion and interculturalism. Artistic practices, in particular Dance-Movement Therapy, are central to this contribution, which has as its object *art-based research* (Barone, Eisner, 2011; Leavy, 2009) and a methodological process that is other, in the educational/intercultural sphere. The research takes shape within the school context from reflections resulting from the use of art and corporeity to promote intercultural competences, and takes on the guise of a political-pedagogical project. The research question is to ascertain whether performing arts and Dance Movement Therapy can create inclusive and intercultural contexts, and the aim is to analyse the ways in which inclusion can take place, change or modify prejudices and stereotypes so as to bring about significant and transformative changes in growth processes. The research, moving within the theoretical and methodological framework of the research-intervention, followed a "mixed methods" preserving its qualitative nature, thus following the phenomenological and hermeneutic approach, and at the same time used a questionnaire (Pettigrew, Meertens, 1995), which characterises the quantitative part and completes the research itself. Following the operational methodology of Dance Movement Therapy, and the performing arts, one of the themes that emerged concerned the discovery of feeling moved to a new perspective from which to view the world. The results achieved reinforced the belief in the adoption of a methodological approach based on constructivist-inspired artistic exploration, as they produced an intercultural awareness in the interactions between the school and the local community.

Il corpo e i linguaggi artistici possono sviluppare visioni, proposte efficaci, innovative e all'avanguardia su temi considerati cruciali per l'inclusione e l'interculturalità. Le pratiche artistiche, in particolare la Dance-Movement Therapy, sono centrali in questo contributo, che ha come oggetto la ricerca basata sull'arte (Barone, Eisner, 2011; Leavy, 2009) e un processo metodologico altro, in ambito educativo/interculturale. La ricerca prende forma all'interno del contesto scolastico dalle riflessioni scaturite dall'uso dell'arte e della corporeità per promuovere le competenze interculturali, e assume le sembianze di un progetto politico-pedagogico. La domanda di ricerca è verificare se le arti performative e la Dance-Movement Therapy possano creare contesti inclusivi e interculturali, e l'obiettivo è analizzare i modi in cui l'inclusione può avvenire, cambiare o modificare pregiudizi e stereotipi in modo da apportare cambiamenti significativi e trasformativi nei processi di crescita. La ricerca, muovendosi all'interno del quadro teorico e metodologico della ricerca-intervento, ha seguito un "metodo misto" conservandone la natura qualitativa, seguendo quindi l'approccio fenomenologico ed ermeneutico, e al tempo stesso ha utilizzato un questionario (Pettigrew, Meertens, 1995), che caratterizza la parte quantitativa e completa la ricerca stessa. Seguendo la metodologia operativa della Dance-Movement Therapy, e delle arti performative, uno dei temi emersi ha riguardato la scoperta del sentire mosso verso una nuova prospettiva da cui guardare il mondo. I risultati raggiunti hanno rafforzato la convinzione nell'adozione di un approccio metodologico basato sull'esplorazione artistica di ispirazione costruttivista, in quanto hanno prodotto una consapevolezza interculturale nelle interazioni tra la scuola e la comunità locale.

**Keywords:**

Dance, art, border, interculture, inclusion.

Danza, arte, confine, intercultura, inclusione.

## **1. Border crossings**

This contribution aims to document an experience of *Art-Based Research* (Barone, Eisner, 2011; Leavy, 2009) i.e. research that uses the arts, in a broad sense, to explore, understand, represent and even challenge human action and experience (Savin-Baden, 2014) where priority is given to the artistic process as the main tool through which the participants live and observe experience (McNiff, 2012).

The research originated in the Department of Educational Sciences at the University of Roma Tre and was carried out in collaboration with the "E. Amaldi" High School located in the Tor Bella Monaca neighbourhood in the outskirts of Rome, and "Intersos Italia" office in Roma Est. The research, which is presented as a political-pedagogical project, has as its reference the migration phenomenon and, consequently, the intercultural and inclusive sphere in schools. In particular, the use of artistic languages, of the body and Relational-Creative Dance Therapy ("Dmt Rel-Cre") become tools of the educational process that define a transformation of the context, a passage from the idea of a borderline, seen as a limit, to that of a borderland that creates an opportunity (Zaccaria, 2004), a change of perspective, with particular reference to prejudice, which is the primary objective in the workshop meetings.

The research, named 'Pedagogy of the Border', is inspired by Giroux's (1992) definition that what can best promote intercultural competence are invitations to engage in 'border crossings'. This is because the act of crossing borders helps students develop intercultural competences and skills that enable them to consciously live together beyond diversity. The difference between a borderline and a borderland is a wide and difficult to define area that separates but at the same time connects, it is a kind of filter that serves not to block but to let through (Hannerz, 1997). Every step and proposal of the workshop went towards the shared construction of this middle ground, the symbolic realisation of which occurred when the borderline was played out in the dance, through mirroring, proximity, separation and distance, which marked the preliminary part of what was then a liminal passage of the new encounter, the celebration and thus, in conclusion, the construction of the borderland. This transformation allows us to look with other eyes at the experiences, ways of being of those who inhabit, garrison and cross this territory, being ourselves placed in the middle ground.

The study aims, therefore, to investigate a complex and dynamic reality of a school located in the Roman suburbs, using artistic tools, primarily the body and dance, to see if they can be tools for intercultural inclusion. The general aim of the research-intervention, which we can define as immersive, consists in reflecting and analysing how such a particular "Pedagogy of the Border" experience can contribute to:

- reflect and analyse how one can contribute to transforming a distorted information-media paradigm to an emancipatory-evolutionary one based on direct knowledge;
- a transformation of prejudice in context and deconstruction of stereotyped forms;
- a construction of critical and rhizomatic thinking, sheltered from toxic narratives.

In particular, an attempt was made to foster the narration of the life stories of migrants and male and female students, in order to deconstruct the dominant narrative and, at the same time, observe the cultural and social differences on which attention and reflection can be placed, both with respect to toxic information and for a projected vision of life.

"Pedagogy of the Boundary" wants to verify if and how it can contribute to deconstructing stereotyped conceptions, to forming new imaginaries with which to look at reality and to building a critical and rhizomatic thinking sheltered from toxic narratives. An experience, this, that we can define as a sort of rite of passage for all protagonists who cross that borderline, liminal or liminoid frontier (Turner, 1986), of their growth path. In this way, one can transform a recurring question addressed to people of a different ethnicity "where do you come from?" into "where do you want to go?" as Burriaud (2014) suggests: more than the origin, which is the background, what is important is the projectuality and how to go in that direction. A fundamental question also for adolescents, who are called upon to orientate their future and cultivate important choices for their being tomorrow's men and women. A question that for migrants and Italian students becomes a solicitation, the activation of an aspiration to be sought in a space where it is possible to express oneself authentically. Doing so through art makes it possible not to exhaust the desire in a defined material object; as Eisner (1998) reminds us, the arts celebrate multiple perspectives, allowing us to generate imagination, creativity, with the use of gestures or words that take the form of narration, the body, poetry, the graphic sign or sound action. All this allows for an approach other than verbal language alone to see and interpret the world.

The transformation of prejudice, according to Benasayag (2003), is based on encounters, on the establishment of bonds, on new belongings that can be the source of the common creation of thoughts and representations that suggest a new perspective, new projects and orientations, create new ties, relational of meaning. These are conditions that overturn the symptom-target-drug paradigm advocated by those who want to speculate on the suffering, illness and discomfort generated by migratory flows, in favour of an attitude that can truly bring about change through the creation of bonds between people. Direction in which the "Pedagogy of the Boundary" moves, where direction does not mean placing oneself within a hierarchical position, but in its original sense of orienting oneself towards, where taking care of someone, whether students or migrants, Italians or foreigners, means recognising where one is and where one wants to go. It is about starting to build a bridge to establish a relationship, a bridge that can be the viaticum to provide tools, not to chart the path for the other.

## **2. For a practice of theory**

The "Pedagogy of the Boundary" workshop wants to implement strategies linked to the paradigms of systemic and socio-cultural constructivism through the active involvement of students in the construction of knowledge. It wants to be a place of heuristic work, where the theoretical and methodological framework is linked to practical action, where experience is reworked in reflexive terms, where the fundamental paradigm becomes the relationship between body and mind, between the emotional and the rational, "a space of generativity and creativity that is self-motivating and increases the self-esteem of each individual, making them interact and compare with those of others" (Laneve C. 2005, p.18). We want to reiterate the importance of connecting 'the knowledge of feeling and the knowledge of thinking' (Manucci A., Collacchioni L. 2008, p. 48) in order to enhance corporeity not only as a physical act but as a dynamic process that includes cognitive, emotional and affective relational factors. This also means breaking down the boundaries between one thing and another, where trespassing means opening up the opportunity, as Contini writes, to a "possibility of encounter, contamination, and enrichment, opening up to change and the search for new and

unforeseen territories", making thinking as well as acting more "daring" because open to experiencing those "multiple zig zags, those small or large vertigoes" that connect "figure and background, the inside and the outside" (Contini M., Fabbri M., and others, 2006, p. 35) embracing an intercultural ecological vision. Taking on this vision means caring for people in the educational sphere and beyond, historicising migration processes, observing the conditions of economic exploitation that have caused disastrous conditions, colonial culture, looking at the human in a dynamic belonging that is broader than that of ethnicity, nation or reference group-

The research moves on methodological references linked to intervention research and an epistemological background dictated by the teachings of Bateson and Morin. The ecological background of relations (Bateson, 1977) is a fundamental basis for the operational methodology of the ethno-anthropologically oriented Dmt Rel-Cre where, to use Cohen's words (1997), the act of dancing creates a kind of cultural meaning. Body work reveals or unmask communication expressed through the verbal, as this language is often ambiguous and culturally determined. Dance-movement therapy structurally has the possibility of working with people from different cultural backgrounds precisely because its premise is that dance has always encoded and decoded myths and rituals (Kealiinohomoku, 1997), assuming a transcultural modality (Pallaro, 1993). The political, symbolic and ritual dimensions are closely related: "There is no politics without rituals, no ritual without symbols" writes Kertzer (p. 58). The characteristics of rituals made up of sound, gesture, action, dance, voice, suggested to Claude Levi-Strauss (1966) the definition of para language, which stands for distance from verbal language and the usual modes of reception.

It is precisely during these encounters, these confrontations or moments of reflection that people and the group recognise each other and the relationship becomes emotional (Battista, 2010).

The main objectives of the survey, identified during the design phase of the research intervention, can be described as follows:

- to know, bring out and analyse the factors, mechanisms and dynamics that educational dance, Dmt Rel-Cre and artistic languages can foster in the creation of inclusive and intercultural contexts;
- verify whether through a "Pedagogy of the Border" workshop intervention, a transformation of the context can take place through the reduction of prejudice and possible modifications or transformations over time;
- investigate and verify whether the intervention can contribute to transforming an informational-media paradigm into an emancipatory-evolutionary one based on direct knowledge, which fosters a mature and responsible growth of adolescents and the construction of a critical thinking sheltered from toxic narratives;
- stimulate and foster the empathic process to make relations visible and generate an ecological and creative inter-subjective connection capable of influencing the intercultural-educational-community-territorial connection.

The research was based on the idea of bringing migrants and adolescents together and doing so through the Dmt Rel-Cre, the body and the performing arts, educating people in a cooperative spirit, in mutual respect to achieve individual well-being within a community that thrives on differences. It was considered fundamental to start from neutral ground, foreign to most of them but where no one is advantaged, to start from the body, the substance of our being and the place of our identity, a slippery body for both, a body in transformation for the adolescents, a tortured, mortified, mistreated body for the migrants. To bring them together on that border, on that borderline that belongs to no one, defining a sort of "Pedagogy of the Border" understood as a non-place, free of signs of power and belonging. Migrants and adolescents have similar needs such as identity, autonomy, self-esteem etc., and similar characteristics such as transition, sense of belonging and identity. Dance has become

a tool for wellbeing and healing and can become a bridge between cultures, providing a framework for the friendship of foreigners with Italian students (Aleandri G., Battista F., 2021).

The forms of narration have taken on an extremely important role in that they bring back that personal *worldview* that must be fitted like a Byzantine mosaic with the other *worldviews* in order for the mosaic to be complete. This completeness is the result of attention paid to the how and not only to the what is being told, to the language of the body and voice, reading between the lines, paying attention to discrepancies, deliberate omissions. In particular, attention was paid to a modality that could give back a word to those who experienced those events first-hand, sheltered from a dominant colonialist narrative in the direction of a perspective of co-education favoured by the direct presence of migrant cultures, "inaugurating an innovative path of "dialogic education" that is built together, through relationships founded on the basis of equality, reciprocity and responsibility." (Fiorucci, 2019).

Brooks (1995) writes that storytelling stems from the need to be seen, to be heard, a need that is never satisfied or not completely satisfied, to feel understood, accepted, "the attempt to give a meaningful version of life" (p. 59). In these terms, it is essential for the construction of one's personal history and for fostering the definition of one's own identity, heritage and part of the collective identity of that group. At the same time, the intercultural-educational-community relationship takes on multiform connotations. Starting, therefore, from the hypothesis that the use of the body, dance, Dance-Movement Therapy and artistic languages can favour the creation of inclusive and intercultural contexts, the research-intervention seeks to represent the multiplicity of dynamic components called into play, analysing the results and significant changes that the use of the aforementioned artistic modalities can generate, bearing in mind the primary objectives of the research already stated.

The research, while maintaining a qualitative basis respecting a hermeneutic and phenomenological approach, adopted a *mixed methods approach*. The following devices were used for the quantitative part:

- Prejudice questionnaire administered to students, incoming-outgoing, developed by Pettigrew and Meertens (1995);
- check list, constructed ad hoc and filled in at the end of each meeting by the tutors, made it possible to detect changes in parameters such as body, space and relationship;

Different qualitative survey devices were used, such as:

- the semi-structured phenomenological interview;
- focus groups;
- participant observation
- logbooks made by the students and tutor teachers.

The interviews were conducted before and after the workshop experience.

### 3. Questionnaire analysis

As mentioned, a paper questionnaire was prepared to survey opinions and prejudices towards immigrants. The questionnaire is structured in different themes and consists of 20 questions. The first 10 are aimed at verifying manifest prejudice, while the second 10 items are aimed at verifying latent prejudice.

In the following figures, a number of significant questions were selected for which the answers collected through the administration carried out before the start of the workshop activities, in December (incoming), and those carried out afterwards (outgoing) in April were compared.

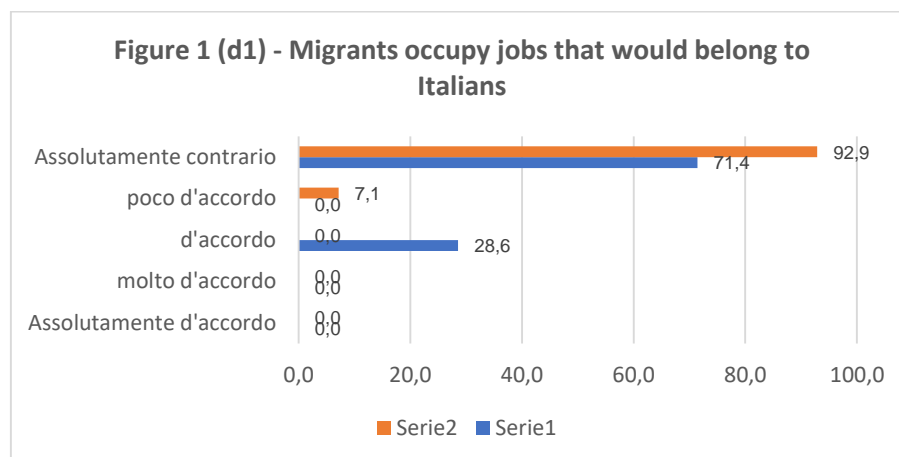


Fig. 1 - Question 1

(Legend: Absolutely opposed  
Disagree  
Agree  
Strongly agree  
Totally agree  
Series 2 Series 1)

In the more overtly prejudiced manifestations, we can identify a conceptual core around which stereotypical beliefs are organised, such as, for example, the idea that the out-group, in this case migrants, may represent a threat to the group to which the respondent belongs. One of the strongest nuclei is represented by the view that immigrants can fill jobs for unemployed young Italians. As we can see, before starting the research in its workshop phase, 28,6 per cent agreed with the statement posed, compared to 71,4 per cent who were absolutely against it. This result clearly shifts in the next test where the position 'agree' disappears to make way for a 7,1% who are 'strongly disagree', while those who are 'strongly disagree' rise sharply to 92,9%.

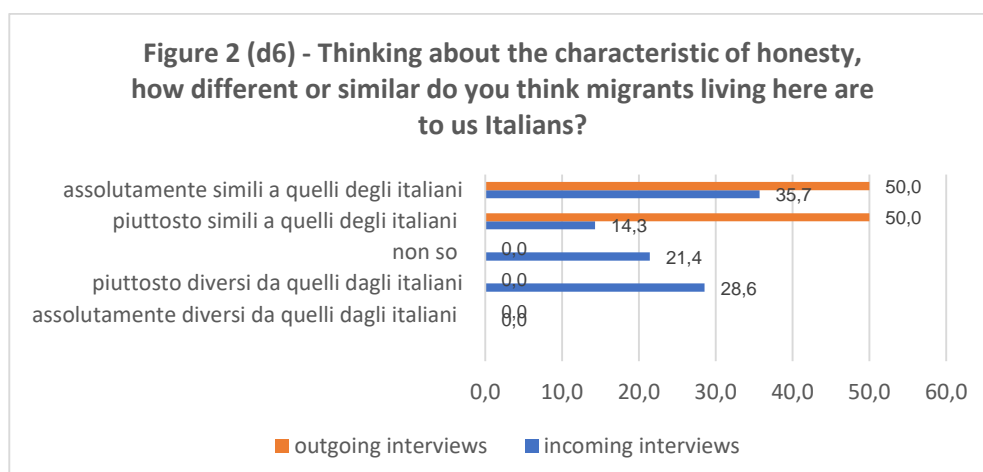


Fig. 2 - Question 6

(Legend: Absolutely similar to the Italians  
Rather similar to the Italians  
Don't know)



Rather different from Italians  
Absolutely different from Italians)

In figure 2 concerning question 6 we are still in the survey of manifest prejudice, in another of the labels attributed to migrants, namely the degree of honesty. Here the data before the workshop experience are distributed in four types of answer with a remarkable percentage: 28,6% leaning towards the opinion "rather different from Italians". Also significant and indicative is the percentage of 'don't knows' at 21,4%. After the workshop and the proposed activities, a substantial 50% distribution of the answers between absolutely and rather similar to Italians can be noted.

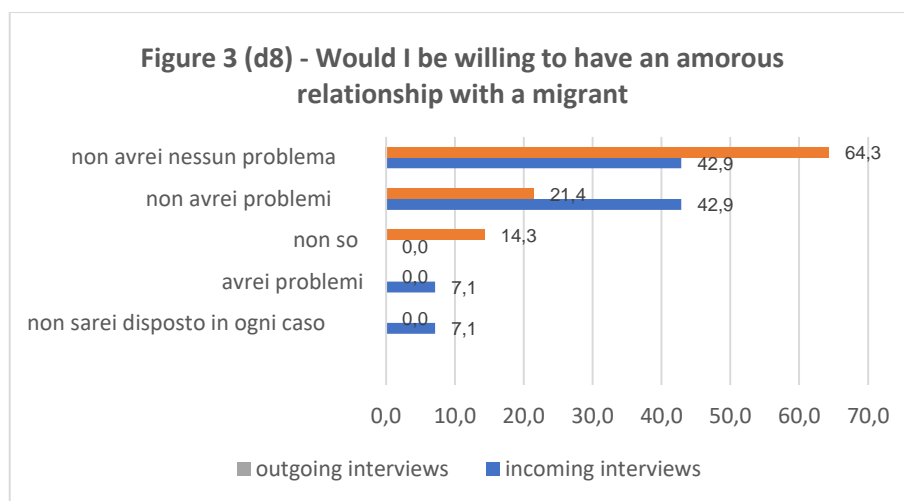


Figure 3 - Question 8

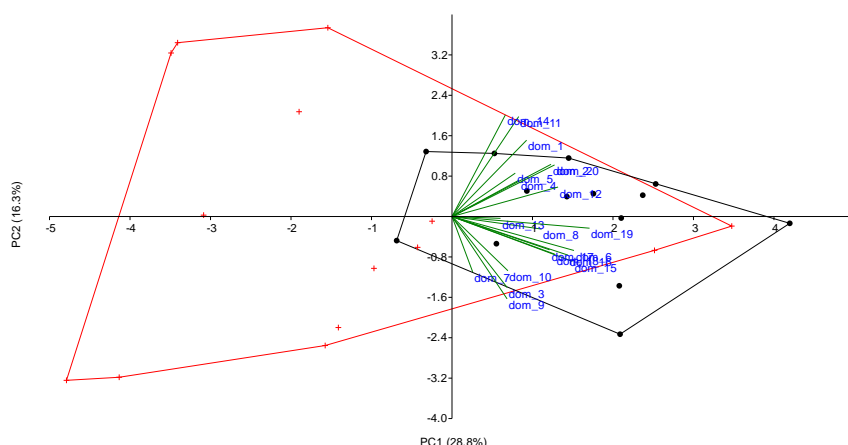
(Legend: I would have no problem  
I would not have a problem  
Don't know  
I would have problems  
I would not be willing in any case)

In figure 3 we move on to the question part, where the field investigated is still that of manifest prejudice, but the underlying idea is that any kind of contact with out-group members should be avoided. Here before the workshop proposal, there is no hesitation with respect to a 0% "I don't know". The clear rejection or "I would have problems" is 7,1%, while the percentages related to a willingness to relate are high, 42,9% would have no problems or no problems at all. After the artistic-body experience, doubts appear linked to a 14,3% "I don't know" and a shift is noted on the part of those who manifested problems or unwillingness with a percentage which is zeroed, towards percentages equal to 21,4% on the "I would have no problems" which in fact decreases, to the advantage of the 64,3% reached by those who manifest that they have no problems.

## 5. Graphical Analysis

During data processing, a Principal Component Analysis ('PCA') (Davis 1986; Harper 1999) was conducted on the 20 input and output questions contained in the questionnaire. PCA is a sorting technique for data simplification used in multivariate statistics. For analytical purposes, the response

modes were made homogeneous from the point of view of positive connotation towards the highest score (5). The data matrix (answers to the 20 questions) was divided into two groups (incoming/outgoing questionnaires). The matrix was standardised, the mean of the corresponding question column was subtracted from each value and divided by the standard deviation of the corresponding question column.



(Fig. 4 - PCA graph)

The PCA graph (Biplot, fig. 1) shows for the incoming questionnaires (in red) a greater dispersion of the points in the two-dimensional space of the first two axes (incorporating 45,1% of the total variance) than for the answers to the outgoing questionnaires (in black). This means that the people interviewed initially showed greater variability in their responses; whereas the interviews conducted at the end of the dance-movement therapy sessions show greater homogeneity in their responses (observable by the lower dispersion in the space of the black dots). The direction of the green vectors (loadings) indicates the highest scores (positive meaning) for the various questions. The vectors all tend towards the right side of the graph (positive side of PC1). It can be seen that those interviewed at the end of the meetings show a clear tendency towards the positive side of the first axis (PC1) and thus less bias. Only two respondents at the beginning are positioned on the positive side of the graph and only two respondents at the exit are on the negative side (but close to the origin).

## 6. Conclusions

One of the themes that emerged concerns the discovery of feeling moved to a new perspective from which to look at the world. A decentralisation/discovery that confuses and excites, concerns the question of identity, avoiding essentialism, living it in a social context in processes of interaction where different identities are written (Bhabha, 1992) and allowing you to reflect on writing and "the hands that write", which allow you to develop ways and thoughts independent of those matrices used to construct critical thinking (Mahamoud, Surian, 2019) and write or continue to write your future from this point of view. This means going beyond culturalism to rewrite participants' identities, encouraging hybridisation processes through bodily and gestural dialogues made of opposites such as closed/open eyes, structuring rhythmic modes using stop and go, or even the use of voice. Such practices can in fact help to define the body in its articulations in a dimension of dialogue between belonging and individuation, proposals for contact and mobilisation of the body form through tools,



such as photography, storytelling, and the emotional map of the body, that do not define black or white, empty or full, but allow one to 'feel' the difference.

Identity is a becoming continuum, made up of bodily sensorialities that in the encounter with the other interpenetrate, mix, hybridise until they separate in a re-created, different dimension that allows one to find oneself in the gaze of the other that gives meaning to one's being. All this stimulates the empathic process and bodily perception through the exploration of movement, allowing a definition of one's bodily self in a direct and integrative manner of the body's own vocabulary. As Bhabha (op. cit.) suggests, identities are 'written' in social contexts. This allows one to reposition oneself within one's being with a greater awareness of a vision connected to a reality that comes from a direct source, from a shared life experience.

Finding time to reflect on the experience allowed us to be more aware of our own existence and in several cases reformulate projects, dreams or simply look at the future with different eyes. In addition, observing the responses to the incoming and outgoing interviews, there is a clear concentration of responses in the context of content expressing a greater distance from prejudice towards overcoming patterns of judgement.

In general, an improvement was noted in several parameters related to the quality of movement and relationship, such as greater confidence in the use of space, a broadening of the use of the body, gradually leaving behind kinaesthetic or non-verbal stereotypes and gaining self-confidence and opening up to confrontation and mirroring with otherness. The results achieved reinforced the belief in the adoption of a methodological approach based on constructivist-inspired corporeity and art, in the knowledge that this approach can foster the development of a mediator role between the workshop participants and their social context, producing an intercultural awareness in the interactions between school and local community.

It is towards this direction of an intercultural ecology that it is necessary to point the compass, a pedagogy that is nourished by teaching how to *be*, *how* to care for people in order to feel part of "that structure that connects" to use Manghi's (2014) words about Bateson, where each polarity reproduces with the other in a circular manner. To create what Charim (2018) calls a zone of encounter where the encounter does not eliminate differences, but reduces their weight or, as Arendt (2006) suggests, a space of plurality, which allows differences, not diversities, to dialogue.

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