

" Children find everything in nothing, men find nothing in everything "
(Giacomo Leopardi – Zibaldone, 527)

The path of motor activity in pre-schools has developed over a very long period of time and it is possible to briefly divide it into two moments: taking as reference 1995, there was a before and an after with different characteristics but also with several important elements of continuity.

In the first long phase, teachers and experts explored the aspects of perception, of the children's body sensations, of the development of the body scheme, a phase that ended with the beginning of a reflection process based on several important studies.

In those years, research conducted in the more developed countries relegated Italy to the last places with regard to the time children and adolescents dedicated to motor activity. Contemporarily, we were ranked among the leaders for percentages of overweight and obese children. Furthermore, neuroscience and neuropedagogy were demonstrating the importance of tactile and motor experiences for the development of children and connections between motor, linguistic and cognitive functions. We questioned ourselves on everything, starting to observe and analyse the behaviour of children in various contexts. We realised that they had very little chance to move about, above all in outdoor spaces, how they weren't familiar with their environment (their own neighbourhood, city, territory) because continuously "transported" along few and rigid routes: house-school, house-shopping centres, house-gym. Children were by no means independent, often overprotected and unable to move freely within the environment in which they lived.

Accompanied by analyses of pedagogists, writers and urban planners, we reflected with the teachers on the importance of the sense of belonging to a place, of its knowledge through exploration, of how the environment is an extraordinary, rich, inexhaustible source of possibilities, stimuli and experimentations for the motor activity of children. We understood that games (above all motor) and movement could not be relegated to hyper- structured moments during the week but that it would have to constantly enter into day-to-day life. We discovered how much the children were involved, interested and creative, how important it was to care for the emotional aspect, the pleasure and fun, how necessary the active participation of teachers was. The children also experimented limit situations and shared systems of rules.

We started with some basic activities: walking to explore places and environments, playing in these new spaces using what was available, getting away from the excessive conditioning of the risk-fear relationship to "take the children outside" in any weather.

It is important to highlight that these initial activities created the conditions to collaborate with other sectors of the City council (Urban planning, Public Works) and, thanks to their experiences, explorations and reflections, the children have provided ideas to design their city. There have been important moments of tangible translation of this work: participation in urban design workshops with engineers, architects, urban planners and the important exhibition in which the children's designs were exhibited; setting up ("Panchinvento") the exhibition of the benches designed and built by the children and their positioning at bus stops; the painting of the walls of the pedestrian underpass of the railway station.

The richness and variety of the ever-growing number of experiences have been analysed and other cardinal points of the project have been set: the importance of observing and listening to children gathering their ideas and their interests to make them merge thanks to flexible organisation into the educational settings which were proposed; the involvement of parents in the theoretical and programmed part but above all in the experiential part; cooperation with local groups and associations to always offer new opportunities (for example: climbing, cycling, hiking).

The discovery and practice of orienteering before and of the extraordinary "framework" of the outdoors after, has represented the arrival point of this long process. Finally, in the last decade, the children, educators and parents of the crèche have participated in the project, opening up an important opportunity to analyse and know fundamental aspects of development in a wider age group (0-6), to recognise their incredible potential, which requires only space and time to express itself.

Comparing and exchanging ideas between teachers and educators has allowed for refocusing and redefining several fundamental concepts: observation of the child, respect for his/her timing, acceptance of the need to move, guarantee opportunities of exploration and free play, role of the adults. I conclude with a very brief note on methodology. In all these years of research-action activity, continuous and constant experimentation has allowed to develop and settle culture, awareness, preparation, interest and passion in teachers, educators and adults.

The children are grateful!