

# Bridges between people: nonverbal mediation in an intercultural perspective and training proposals

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**Abstract.** Starting from the meaning of terms prejudices and mediation, the paper will deal with the theme of “intercultural mediation”, discussing aspects that characterize it, focusing on the non-verbal and creative elements. It will then reflect upon the necessary professional skills and on possible trainings through the body-artistic language (focusing on dance-movement therapy methodology), drawing inspiration from training experiences with professionals who face emergency situations within very complex social contexts. Italy receives 89% of the unaccompanied foreign minors arriving in Europe. However, Italy does not have adequate laws in place to initiate life projects and social inclusion which could help the overwhelming influx of refugees and migrants. In this very complex situation non-verbal competences can give the possibility to build bridges between people and to create social networks, that could help bring about more effective actions and, may be, political change

**Keywords.** Intercultural pedagogy, nonverbal mediation, prejudices, creativity, foreign minors

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## 1. Some basic definitions, sharing language and a background

### 1.1 *Prejudices and racism*

The use of the word “prejudice” refers to an idea of closure and rigidity. A prejudice, literally, a judgment expressed before, influences our attitude towards the world and affects our interpersonal dynamics, both if it is negative or positive. Prejudice is a mechanism of strict simplification that ignores individual characteristics and focuses on collective ones. So prejudices can be considered the hardest obstacles that must be overcome in interpersonal relations, and they are worse when the other is seen as different, a stranger or inferior. A limited and prejudicial representation of the other often characterizes one’s relation with foreigners and it is the favourite field in which we can intervene in an intercultural perspective, to avoid that repeated prejudice becomes racism, seen as a way by which a social group defines other groups, or characterizes them according to physical features and deduces the intellectual and moral ones (Calegari, 1994). Various elements stoke racism: together with the initial idea of a natural and biological superiority – the idea that during colonialism determined the ideological invention of racism, of the difference among the human races, a theory widely rejected by scientific research – there have been elements that refer to the social, cultural and political levels that lead us

to despise others and their culture and these elements determine a hierarchical evaluation where “we” is superior to “others”. In this sense the path to awareness is fundamental (at first for those who work in an intercultural field but, in a larger perspective, for everyone). The cognitive processes at the bottom of racism are the classification of individuals inside well-defined groups and the stigmatization which damages people belonging to despised groups. It is a process that, introducing the other as possibly dangerous and supporting his/her expulsion, justifies morally deplorable behaviour and attitudes. The problem is that prejudices are unavoidable: we can't not have prejudices. Allport (1954) defines prejudice as a natural cognitive process linked to abstraction and generalisation, and also we always start from our own point of view. The only way to solve the problem is to be aware of our prejudices, to question ourselves and to be able to accept different perspectives.

### *1.2 Intercultural mediation, intercultural communication, intercultural communicative competence*

When we are faced with the diversity and we try to communicate with people who come from other cultures and who speak another language, we always activate a mediation process between ourselves and the others.

To define the meaning of “mediation” it can be useful to start from what some of the principal Italian dictionaries say about the word “to mediate”: according to Zingarelli it corresponds to “somebody's activity who places himself between two or more parts to simplify the relationship and the agreements”, for Garzanti the word means “to be inserted, to be in the middle”; for as Devoto Oli is concerned, it refers “an action made by people to reach an encounter and an agreement, particularly in the diplomatic and commercial fields”.

All the explanations emphasize a role that concerns, above all, the relational field, the ability to build bridges starting from the middle, to find new ways of meeting thanks to the ability to understand different points of view.

Particularly, intercultural mediation is a complex and multifaceted field that refers to the necessity to define the concepts linked to it, such as culture, and the fields concerning the relation between language and culture, the individual and social identity, the “social group” and the relationship between dominant and minor groups.

Understanding the social relations at stake and discrimination and marginalisation systems is therefore part of an intercultural mediation process and it entails a “binocular vision” (Bateson, 1979) that puts together the speakers' different perspectives, the context and the people themselves through a continuous reflective action on their own identity, their own “premises”, their certainties.

The foreigner is out of place in the two social systems with which he is related, in his country and in the arrival country: he exists by default in his home community and he is in excess in the receiving community, almost as if his existence – as absence or presence – causes embarrassment.

Sayad (1999) defines this particular condition as the migrant's “double absence”: the feeling of intruding is one of the elements that should encourage us to reconsider the legal foundations of citizenship. The type of hospitality and inclusion offered to migrants

are reveals the deepest contradictions of a society, of its political organization and of its relations with other societies. It stimulates a critical analysis of the exercise of power and the way by which the power itself is assimilated by dominant groups.

For those involved in intercultural processes, awareness of their setting and of their frames must be linked to a redefinition of the concept of culture, necessary if we want to adopt a perspective involving also the socio-political dimension.

When we speak about culture, the analysis units are not delimited and automatically identified with local groups or national boundaries, but they become dynamic configurations of social customs, of symbols and styles of life. As Callari Galli (2005, p.100) says: “the monadic vision of cultures lacking relationship and transformation is anachronistic and scientifically useless”. Relationships have always existed and human culture has developed by the incentive of new ideas, through contacts and mutual actions, but never as today has the problem been so dramatic because of globalisation which involves the economic, social and political fields; so it is necessary to find an agreement and common development: the idea that simple contact with the members of another society will create an increase of mutual comprehension is the victory of optimism over experience.

In an intercultural perspective the rhetoric about communication and intercultural education, about linguistic-cultural mediation and the coexistence of cultures is based on the assumption that cultures may become transparent if they are linked to correct behavior and that they may be known and appreciated in regard to the authenticity that characterizes them. It is redundant to emphasize that, from an epistemological point of view, this conception of culture is based on the same processes of generalization and materialization of the difference, features racist and multicultural discourse both.

As many critics of multiculturalism have cleverly pointed out, accentuation of cultural differences seems to have the function of removing from the political debate the problem of equality, justifying the political choices that make the gap between who is included and who is left out, wider and wider.

With regard to migrants, the insistence on their cultural difference and on the importance of the appreciation of their difference underlines neither a common status of citizenship or the status of persons is recognized (Quassoli, 2006, p.94).

In this perspective the delicacy and the complexity emerges, but at the same time, the importance of intercultural mediation for the promotion of a new perspective of citizenship and for encouraging the inclusion processes arises. *Intercultural communication*, in particular, is characterized by the superimposition and the interweave of different communicative competences that can be effective or ineffective in different contexts. It is therefore necessary to start from the awareness of the relativity of our own culture and from the idea that effective interaction is built by continuous negotiation of meanings and this leads to the redefinition of our own communicative experiences. (Sclavi, 2003).

Since daily interactions are based on a set of implicit processes and interpretative frames applied automatically, meeting with the foreigner can cause complications also in the relationship if the two persons follow different schemes and procedures: misunderstandings can be born caused by linguistic difficulties, few knowledges in common, cultural differences, presuppositions or, as often happens, a mixture of different variables. (Chang, 2016).

The difficulties of comprehension can become almost insurmountable if we don't start a process of decentralization of our perspective and of openness to the exchange of point of views.

In this case, but in general in communicative processes, a theoretical and practical reflection about the concept of *intercultural communicative competence* is useful. This competence corresponds to the capacity to reach a mutual adjustment among the speakers and it consists of the process aimed at finding an agreement in the situation in place (Zorzi, 1996).

Such a competence is a fundamental part of mediation, because it allows us to build interconnections and it simplifies the mutual encounter because it poses itself at a "meta" level that includes the different cultural backgrounds.

It implies training professionals who meet the problems and the needs of specific users, in specific contexts, but are able to interact in a flexible and creative way with new complex and unpredictable situations.

So we have to refer to the professional's creative ability which, in an eco-systemic perspective, can deal with the needs by interpreting them inside specific contexts and, at the same time, can understand different needs and different expressive and communicative ways of the individuals and the groups with whom he interacts.

It is concerned competencies which entail the comprehension one's own way of learning and self-awareness on the psycho-body level.

Therefore suitable training is fundamental, not only in the theoretical field but also through the acquisition of methodological and technical competences to be able to communicate in an effective way.

Context and relation, differences and mutual adjustment, self-awareness (also embodied), are for me the primary concepts to build a path leading to a consciously intercultural situation. For this reason it is crucial to think that not only the foreigner must adapt to the language, to the rules, to the cultural premises of the hosting country but also the people of the hosting country must reconsider their values, their beliefs, their individuality focusing on the attitudes and the verbal and non-verbal ways that marginalise and those which help the encounter and which are inclusive. During the intercultural interaction the recognition of a *third ground* where you can move has an important role; this ground is determined by negotiation and the mutual adjustments. They are approaches directed to meeting and cooperation where the non-verbal dimension plays a decisive role.

In particular, as we will see, a creative experience together through an artistic language, allows us a sharing and intimacy level thanks to which we all feel similar, belonging, all, to the human race.

## **2. Who are unaccompanied minors arriving in Italy ?**

I will focus my reflection on minors because the work with them is "paradigmatic": if you know how to communicate and to stay in contact with them and with their needs you know how to be in relationship also with foreign adults (and, in general, you are able to face diversity).

According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (of the United Nations), an

unaccompanied minor (UAM) is a child who arrives on the territory of a Member State unaccompanied by the adult responsible for him by law.

A distinction has been made between UAMs seeking asylum or granted international protection and UAMs not seeking asylum, including irregular migrant children and/ or child victims of trafficking. There is a difference between these two groups: the UAMs seeking asylum in the EU come mainly from Afghanistan, Eritrea, Syria, Somalia, Gambia and Guinea. The 89% of these minors were registered in Italy. Most of them are hosted in Sicily (43,9%), a small percentage in Calabria (7,9%) and other Italian Regions. Most of them are boys (94,5%). The age range is distributed as follows: 81,9% is between 16 and 17 years old; 10,4% is between 14 and 15 years old; 7,4% is between 7 and 14 years old.

According to the data collected by the Social Policy and Labour Ministry, at the end of 2017 the UAMs in Italy were 18.303. This phenomenon was growing until 2017; in 2018, due to new Italian laws, the phenomenon is decreasing. Migrants are no longer rescued at sea<sup>1</sup>, and minors' number fell to 13.151 (also because most of them in 2017 were 17 years old and at 18 they are "adults" for the law)<sup>2</sup>.

Most of the UAMs who arrived in Italy, come from Asia (23,7%), from North and South Africa (47,1%), from sub-saharian Africa (12%) and finally from East Europe (15,8%). The area they come from can tell us about the kind of journey they face and its dangers. Minors who cross the Sahara desert and Libia face a high-risk journey. However, most of them arrive in Italy on boats.

The European Commission Synthesis Report on unaccompanied minors emphasizes on one hand similar criteria in the reception arrangements in place for asylum-seeking and non – asylum seeking unaccompanied minors, on the other hand, it points out how the staff is often undertrained with respect to the needs of these children.

When countries of in-migration, like Italy, try to come to terms with the increasing pluralism of their population, they experiment various difficulties linked to the unawareness of the implications linguistic and cultural diversity have. Furthermore, when dealing with the specific situation of UAMs, difficulties increase because UAMs are particularly powerless due to their dual status as immigrants and as children. Compared to adults, minors are more likely to be involuntary immigrants with an age that tend to be over 10 years. This means that behind the legal condition of minors, the cultural and linguistic identity of these children should be taken into account, as well as their emotional condition that often is not comparable to that typical of western communities. Different cultures will, for example, differ over the role of women, the concept of family, the notion of minor and the meaning of unaccompanied. In the reception strategies of UAMs, it is crucial to consider the importance of the cultural, the linguistic and the emotional level in order to build effective relationships. This is particular urgent in a country like Italy and require a reflection on the reception strategies that are currently being applied.

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<sup>1</sup> For this reason over the past 4 years more than 17,000 people drowned (according to the estimates of UNO for refugees.)

<sup>2</sup> However there is an increasing trend more recently: nearly 10.000 unaccompanied children have been reported to abandon or disappear from the first reception facilities during the last five years. This number represents 42% of the total number of unaccompanied children cared in during the same five years period.

The crucial issue to start this process is the building of effective communication with UAMs. This means not only recognizing their linguistic needs but also and above all, realizing how communication works for them, what is appropriate and what is not, what norms do they follow even though they are probably unaware of them. It is possible, in fact, that UAMs are not fully aware either of the identity or of the culture of their community although their behaviour will have implicitly shaped by that culture. Understanding the nature and the importance of communication is then crucial in order to build an effective relationship, to enhance a true path of inclusion and overcome a distressful condition.

I believe that a well-structured relationship with the caregiver starts from being aware of what communicative needs are. In order to build effective models of inclusion, it is necessary not only to recognize that UAMs not only speak a different language, but also that they are members of a Community. Only then can we build paths of reception and inclusion that work effectively because they start from accommodating linguistic and communicative needs.

### *2.1 The reception of UAMs in Italy*

The first steps of UAM reception are particularly crucial (both for minors and for professionals) in order for the following phases to be successful. Indeed, it has been shown that the reception environment can play a very important role for the activation of inner resources in order to work out the past as migrants. Furthermore, a great number of needs together with various other requirements have to be faced in a very short time (Italian law requires that data has to be collected within 28 days). This affects the quality of reception which is based on emergency and responds to material rather than to emotional and psychological needs. In fact the initial actions are identification (data check and filling in personal records), definition of health status, search for the family group, selection of the first reception place and a certain number of legal and bureaucratic requirements.

Public Security agencies, social services, health services, law Court and affiliated associations workers are involved. Therefore, minors are involved on various different levels (in their contexts, in their social connections, in their life history and experiences conveyed by their body) in different kinds of multimodal intervention. The first aid and reception system is designed to provide food, sheltering, health assistance. Although in many cases, psychological support is guaranteed, it is not interculturally oriented.

The problem is that the reception system in Italy is not based on a stable and consolidated migration policy but on a series of actions which are disconnected and are justified by a continuous emergency and urgency. The UAM's new law 47/2017 is has been partly modified by the recent "security decree"(D.L.113, 4-10-2018). The Italian reception system guarantees the protection of UAMs, however, we face a paradox: on one hand these children are minors to protect; on the other they are migrants to be kept under control. The current situation then, does not allow both minors and professionals to cooperate first to understand the meaning of being protected and secondly to design a sustainable life project. For this reason, we maintain that when starting from analysing the nature of communication and of relationships, we have to think about what it is possible to do for UAMs at the individual and on community level.

We have to start from the meaning of the word ‘reception’ that implies an attitude based on the acceptance of diversity. Reception means being open to someone, to include otherness within a community and within our own inner self. In other words, reception is based not only on the welcome of the community but also of the individual. Reception is based on acceptance, accommodation, inclusion and excludes judgement. It is based on empathy and on the ability to understand the emotional states of other people. Any communication arises from an emotional dialogue and is shaped by empathy and modified by interaction.

The second fundamental step is the ability to listen deeply. In our perspective, listening is an emotionally active capacity that enables empathetic understanding (I listen to you to understand your story, your life, the person you are).

I want to highlight the importance of finding the best ways and strategies for communicating with UAMs by starting from looking for an emotional contact with them first, beyond linguistic and cultural differences.

In the reception of UAMs, it is important to take into account their experiences: in fact they faced very extreme situations and often had to make crucial choices very rapidly. This leads them to be constantly attentive and deeply suspicious towards an environment that forced them to an attack-defence and escape modality. It is then possible that the very first contacts with professionals in Italy can meet some obstacles in building relationships with others. These adolescents shift continuously from the need to show – even to themselves – complete autonomy and the need – not always explicated – to talk about their fears and uncertainties, to trust and to find support. UAMs first have to elaborate the early separation from their family context and their shocking journey. Sometimes they feel guilty to have survived – often when they lost their journey mates – and they feel also overwhelmed because they faced so many dangers and have assisted without giving help to abuses on other people. For many of them, this journey is experienced as a sort of ritual of transition: a way of moving away from family to build a subjective identity; for this reason, despite their young age, UAMs perceive themselves as ‘adults’ and do not accept caring attitudes. It is crucial to remember that in many countries, minors can play a very active role in maintaining their family if their social class allow them to. The urgency of showing their abilities and of building a positive self-representation at least in their home country, can sometimes lead them to leave the protection program, running the risk of being involved in rackets of human trafficking.

The main aim of a reception system is to protect these children. In this sense, we have to be able to meet their needs from the moment of their arrival. Institutions, services and professionals involved have to network to share aims one, have to promote and share modalities of communication and relationships that encourage trust, exchanges and contacts.

It is important to consider that the relation of care itself is pointed with power relationships, by nature asymmetric, often unaware, which would need structural reconsideration, so as to eliminate the reception – integration logic, and make the whole system more human. It means building realities where *uncertainty* is a cultural resource, where misunderstanding, embarrassment and frustration are unexpected resources, where a familiar environment and the help of the community make the difference.

## 2.2 Language, communication, needs

Hence, to understand how communication works, it is necessary to take into consideration what makes communication successful. Hymes (1972) introduced the concept of *Communicative Competence* that goes beyond what has been traditionally considered relevant (i.e. the grammatical competence). He suggested eight different aspects both at the linguistic (phonology, grammar, vocabulary, discourse) and at the pragmatic level (functions, variation, interactional skills, cultural framework). Gestural aspects are crucial in building effective communicative events. For example, children in Eritrea are not allowed to look straight into the eyes of an adult. It is a matter of respect towards people who are older than them. However, the same behaviour in Italy will be interpreted as rude, ambiguous, and inappropriate. Being appropriate implies the knowledge of the taboos in a culture, of politeness indices, of the politically correct term to use in each different situation, of how a specific attitude (irony, authority, courtesy, friendliness) is expressed.

This means that language users are able to use the language not only correctly (based on linguistic competence), but also appropriately (based on communicative competence). Communicative competence includes sociolinguistic competence, it is knowledge of the appropriate linguistic choice to be made in certain situation. In other words, appropriateness is related to the setting of the communication, the topic, and the relationships among the people communicating. In cross-cultural communication, assumptions made about other cultures can affect reciprocal understanding. If we consider that values, beliefs, perceptions and concepts are not the same, it may easily happen that assumptions based on one's own cultural experience may readily crystallise into a set of biases and prejudices about the minor. This could ultimately represent a great obstacle in establishing a dialogue and collecting his/her social history.

It is important to understand that language and the communication modalities express a culture. The meaning of what is right and wrong, good and bad, masculine and feminine, desirable and disgusting is defined by a cultural frame. What do UAMs need then? They need to make themselves at home, they need to be parented, they need to catch up with life: building a positive relationship based on reciprocal trust can support minors in planning their own lives and future.

Not only we have to take into consideration different ways of perceiving and representing the world, but we also need to think about the different ways of living childhood and the relationships between parents and children. Adults can meet some problems in accommodating their interactional modalities and their perspectives on the basis of age (children under 10 yrs, pre-adolescents, adolescents). Needs may differ in relation to subjects, their stories, the context they come from, but also to the different phases of life. Each phase has its own needs and require a great effort to converge towards different modalities of communication and appropriate response. The relationship with minors who are living a crucial period in their lives both on the emotional and existential level, is based on the capacity for empathy. We know what other people need because we know what we need and through empathy, we are able to understand their experience, so we are responsible for leaving space for new different perspectives of the minors' world. However, imaginative and creative processes (in Winnicott terms) are based, first, on our capacity to stay in contact with ourselves.



Here we are talking about professionals (psychologists, social workers, educators, etc.) with relational competences and communicative skills that are acquired mainly through an experiential training and through reflection on practises that can be called into question. This allows a self-awareness regarding our own personal way of functioning, our own difficulties and our own ways of communicating.

From this point of view, we need to be aware that defenses and prejudices are often activated in relationships toward the 'other', the foreigner or the different one. In socioanalysis the development of an attitude, the analysis of reality through the re-elaboration of basic anxieties and of strategies of defences, is called "negative capability".

"Negative capability" is a term that Bion (1961; 1965) borrowed from the romantic poet Keats. It relates to the capacity of facing a situation of crisis by coping with ambiguous situations and emotional challenge and tolerating the pain and confusion of not knowing. As Lanzara (1993, p.13) points out: "In *Negative Capability* there is a particular kind of action: it is an action that comes out of emptiness, from the loss of meaning and order but which is oriented to activate contexts and to generate new possible scenarios". Nevertheless, *negative capability* is not only an existential attitude to uncertainty. It also implies a cognitive disposition. This lack of direction allows us to pay attention to aspects that presuppositions and dependence from categorical knowledge avoid seeing and appreciating. Unexpected situations contain an innovation potential for those who are able to tolerate the temporary absence of order and direction (Morin, 1986).

It means taking advantage of experience to train 'reflective professionals' that are able to reflect upon what they are doing while they are doing it (Schön,1983). This would allow for a better reception process in terms of understanding UAMs' needs and psychic pain.

### 2.3 Active listening and attunement

As we have already pointed out, language is not only what is expressed but also what is left unsaid. Nevertheless, to come into contact with UAMs and support their life path, we might not need to share a language at first. We may need to create a space for emotional listening where silence can be also relevant. Many UAMs, indeed, need silence and time before finding ways to express their emotions and to tell their stories. On the metaphorical level, this means building a relational space where meaningful exchanges have a structuring and integrating function of the different parts of one-self. In this sense, special attention has to be paid to the non-verbal dimension through which the quality of the interpersonal contact is conveyed. It is not necessary to use language to get to specific aims, but rather to open a listening channel within the context where we are together with other people, and meet the others on a non-verbal level.

These kinds of meetings occur through body resonance which is activated by contiguity. They promote communion of internal states thanks to attunement processes linked to form, intensity and temporal characteristics of behaviours. Attunement takes place in the forms of vitality, a kind of experience that according to Stern (1985, 2010) is strongly connected to the sensation of being alive. It refers to qualities that express dynamism (such as "flow", "disappear", "spend", "explode", "grow" "decrease", "puffed", "exhausted", etc.). Discovering forms of vitality and getting attuned to them, allows human beings to be with the others, sharing similar interior experiences in an envi-

ronment of continuity. In a continuous line, we experience the existence of a connection between ourselves and others and the fact of being reciprocally attuned.

This is possible because of the awareness of Self and the capacity for observation and self-observation of the emotional and analogical aspects that include also gestures: paying attention to gestural nuances in communication means refining our self-perception, self-presentation and commitment in relationship. It means getting to the dynamics of our experiences, in those dynamic forms that allow for intersubjectivity and shape attention and understanding at a deeper level. (Stern, 2010)

In order for UAMs to start an active path of subjectivization and inclusion, it is necessary to build an active listening, which can generate the feeling of ‘being together’ and promote reciprocal trust.

The term “active listening” indicates an interactive modality centered on the acceptance and interest for the person we are in contact with. It is a relational behaviour that is based on listening as a crucial element in facilitating the relationship with the interlocutor and help him/her get into contact with his/her own inner feelings and emotions and express them. It is also empathetic listening that implies the search for the other’s perspective and point of view without prejudices.

More specifically, we think it is important to deepen a very effective technique, which is *mirroring* (verbal and non-verbal).

This technique, which was born within humanistic psychology in the fifties (Rogers, 1951) and is linked also to the psychoanalysis of early childhood (Bowlby, 1969; Winnicott, 1965), has also been applied to educational contexts (Gordon, 1975). Through it, professionals pay attention and listen to the interlocutor and avoid any form of evaluation (both positive and negative) following him/her in the contents, parts, steps and forms of his/her communication and allowing him/her to conduct the dynamic process that emerges from the relationship. In this way, not only is the recognition and elaboration of emotions possible, but also the perception of new paths and self-narrations are made possible. Generally, mirroring is based on a search of authenticity in relation to our own way of being towards an interlocutor and of coherence between verbal and non-verbal content. Particular attention is paid to the gestural level (also to paralinguistic units) that is considered part of communication and that plays a crucial role in the emotional dimension and in the recognition of the kind of relationship (Watzlawick et al. 1967).

### **3. The roots of intersubjectivity and the role of a specific training for professionals**

Non-verbal behaviour can be considered both in terms of its importance on the individual and intra-psychic level (respect to its links with the way you live in the world and how you feel yourself) and for its importance on the communicative and relational level. It is important to emphasize that all the body behaviours can be always explained as communicative acts, also beyond the purposes. (Argyle, 1978; Watzlawick et al. 1967).

Inside a communicative event, information about the quality of the relation goes through the analogical level and so through the paraverbal features of the language and through gestures:

it is important “how” you communicate beyond “what” and non-verbal behaviour has crucial importance in pointing out, over time, attention or indifference, affinity or

distance on the emotional level, etc. In the interaction, non-verbal behaviour regards “the recognition” (mutual, but above all from the caregiver), seeing and being seen, attention to the child (or the foreign) on his/her singularity.

The roots of intersubjectivity are in embodiment: new research in the field of neuroscience (Reddy, 2008; Ammaniti, Gallese, 2014), have shown that children’s first experiences of emotional and physical contact with adults, stimulate in the brain the development of patterns of neuronal connections which have possible consequences all during life. This research emphasizes on the one hand that body, mind and emotions are inseparable, on the other hand that the quality of such contact is decisive in the building of identity and self-image.

This reminds us of the importance of an intersubjective perspective: recent studies have shown how children, since their birth, look for other people to have mutual imitative exchanges and an emotional regulation with (Trevarthen, Aitken, 2001).

Children are active and constructive in the relation because they can, even in their first months of life, understand others as “persons”. We are dealing with comprehension linked to an “embodied” conception of mind, where intersubjectivity does not come from the assignment of one’s own subjectivity to the other but as a consequence of an exchange among beings who recognize themselves as similar.

It is a “second person approach” that focuses on a subjective involvement in the dialogue, that involves psychological aspects, “to feel” yourself and the other person “at the present moment”, it also entails being inside the relation from a psycho-body point of view (Gallese, 2015)

Perceiving the other is, in fact, strictly linked to the perception of oneself (for example when you see, you don’t limit seeing but you feel that you are seeing something with your eyes): perception and proprioception (the perception the organism has about its inner state) are interacting, just because proprioception always involves the perception of the surrounding world (Damasio, 1994).

Research, in this sense, confirms Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological perspective, according to which the innate connection among bodies shapes the basis of knowledge the other minds. Children and adults can meet in a relationship that entails emotional and affective involvement because they recognize themselves similar from a perceptive and proprioceptive point of view.

Since the first months of life a human being seems to be able to absorb what he understands in his present experience as “kinesthetic mimicry”, soon perceiving inside himself what he perceives in the actions of the others. Such “ability to step into the other’s shoes” has been confirmed by recent discoveries of the neurosciences linked to mirror neurons, specific neuronal circuits that act when we observe a other person’s movement or gestures (Rizzolatti, Sinigaglia, 2006; Ammanniti e Gallese, 2014; Gallese 2015). When we look at someone making a specific movement, in our cerebral cortex some areas are activated, the same that would be activated if we ourselves were making that movement: it simplifies the comprehension of what is happening and, so also learning by observation.

It is interesting to note that, like actions, also emotions are immediately shared too: the perception of the one other’s pain or joy activate the same cerebral cortex areas that are involved when we ourselves feel pain or joy. Considering the intersubjective level, the inter-body encounter seems to be the main source of knowledge for reading another’s

mind: human beings use their own mind states or processes, represented in body shape, in order to attribute them to their own kind in an effective manner.

Human beings are “social animals”: the motivation for coming into contact and into relation is biological but is, in parallel, at the origin of the cultural transmission (De Waal, 2016).

Significant relations, emotional attachments, intersubjectivity and learning are strictly linked and they depend on each other. To understand how this is possible, it is necessary to give up the idea of an isolated brain and to consider its strong connections with the body, going beyond Cartesio’s dualism which belongs to our culture (Damasio, 1994; Bloom, 2006).

The “lived body” has a central role in the relations with the world and with the way by which we understand another’s world. All this has deep pedagogical implications.

Considering the educational and intercultural field, it is not enough to consider the complexity of communicative channels, but we have to choose a double perspective, because the observation of the components connected with the body and with another’s movement can’t be separated from the observation of ourselves, from the awareness of our body, of our movement and from exchange at the non-verbal level.

In dance-movement therapy (DMT) we use the concept of “somatic countertransference” to refer to the therapist’s body sensations caused by the relationship with the patient and it is important in order to improve the comprehension of the “empathic connection” between the therapist and the other. It is a fundamental listening quality in the intercultural field too and it assumes that one is listening to oneself and the other here and now and, in parallel, the ability to meditate later, finding the time and the way to go back to the experience. This reflective process is very important because it promotes contact with the other and allows us to increase one level of awareness in terms of psycho body dimension, creating a circularity between these two different fields. (Mignosi 2015).

Developing knowledge of your way of reacting at a psychosomatic level to the internal and external solicitations and to be able to recognise your characteristics and gesture propensities is fundamental too for reducing the risks of interpretation and projection, linked to the greater involvement of the analogical level, thus abstaining from attributing meanings which concern yourself and your prejudices and/or desires and your unidentified emotions towards the other’s gesture signals or behaviours (Mignosi 2008)

It is necessary to emphasize that in order to learn how to observe and know your own and the other’s non-verbal behaviour and how to use gestures and voice in the relation, experience cannot be overlooked<sup>3</sup>.

The experience, in any case, must be inserted into a clear context which gives methodological information about the training path and about the right analysis plans.

In this perspective a DMT training is crucial

For improving abilities to use non-verbal modalities, it is necessary to develop, through work on the movement and the analysis of its characteristics, knowledge of yourself so that you can discover your own movement “affinities” and, without denying them, you can discover if they are a choice or a decrease of possibilities in order to be able to change crystallized motor schemes and to find new expressive ways.

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<sup>3</sup> Experiencing it is not just doing, but rather it takes shape when it becomes a matter of reflection and the subject is able to own it and to understand its significance. Experience is thinking about what you are doing; it uses practice to improve knowledge (Mortari, 2003; Mignosi 2012).

It is a deep training path because it allows one to experience that we are never the same (over time and in the contexts) and that life's beauty is to discover that we have "different colours", to react to internal and external incentives in different ways. For Laban (1948), this is the key to mutual adjustment, to non-repetition and to flexibility. Of course all of us have some movement patterns that belong to us and characterise us, but it is necessary to make them open and richer. Movement, in the broad sense, is always the basis of change. Coming into contact with physical sensations and movement can help us recognise our own psycho-emotional states and it offers a way to come into contact with them, so that one can make them more transparent and flexible.

In this sense, both the synchronic dimension (to be able to be in the present moment) and the diachronic one (to be able to learn over time to know one's own gesture styles and movement) help the relationship with others.

Learning to observe non-verbal behaviour and to be aware of it requires a new way of thinking that comes from feeling your own movement: where it is born in the body, with which qualities, where it goes or where it brings in space, which emotional, mind and physical states it is linked to.

A chance to experience training related to the psycho bodily dimension and to movement in a larger and deeper perspective, is useful, within every educational and intercultural relation, to make the relation itself and communication more effective. It is also useful to achieve objectives that refer to the subject in his/her "somatic-psychic unit" (Mignosi 2015; 2017).

Training by DMT can be fundamental, because involving the subject in his/her entirety, it activates deep and significant learning in a very short time (Mignosi 2008). The Italian Professional DMT Association describes DMT as a "specific discipline which promotes the physical, cognitive, emotional and relational integration, the psychosocial sentimental maturity, the quality of life and the development of creative potentialities".

An essential aspect of DMT is its artistic dimension (therefore creative and aesthetic) and this differentiates it from other body practices, like psychomotricity. Being an Art Therapy, it enriches and amplifies the existential sphere, allowing people to express emotions through an artistic language, which uses the body. It allows people to create "artworks" through their own body enhancing their self-image, and making them confident in their agency in the world. This must not be confused with an idea of dance which refers to established aesthetic rules, requiring the perfection of the body, but, being in a non-judging context, it offers the possibility of finding 'their own gesture' as an expression of their authenticity. Movement springs out in a way that is fluid, yet expressively, from a state of concentration and self-listening. By virtue of this fact, people feel themselves represented by their own movement and gesture. What happens is at the same time artistic and therapeutic: it allows "the creation of oneself through the artistic creation" (Schott-Billman, 1994). Besides, thanks to the body movement in space and time DMT refers to what Lapierre and Aucoutrier (1978) defined as "the impulse of movement", that is the pleasure of moving (intrinsic both in humans and animals), allowing the possibility of experimenting with the release of the impulses linked to the deep need for movement. DMT allows the body to connect with its archaic purpose, as it interacts with the environment. The goal is not only to keep the body in good condition and experience the pleasure of well-coordinated movement, but also to promote awareness of motor skills (reflexes, coordination, speed, performance...). This ple-

asure consolidates and develops the whole body. People become enabled through movement, recovering the spontaneity and the fluidity of their bodies. It is a functional pleasure at a biological level and, furthermore, it is the pleasure of moving in connection with the others.

According to Lesage (1996, p. 98) the subject doesn't move in a pre-existing space, but unfolds and inhabits the space where he/she is. In fact our first representation of the space is linked to the opposition of 'inside' and 'outside' organized by the skin, which is experienced as mediator (Anzieu, 1985). Other oppositions derive from it: tall/short, ahead/back, right/left. The identity organizes itself through space, rhythm, weight and flow that are the qualities of the movement according to Rudolf Laban's theory (Laban, 1950); the space is also a relational space where significant exchanges with others have a structuring function. So DMT promotes "the communion of the internal states" through processes of reciprocal attunement, activated by the form, intensity, and time characteristics of the actions.

DMT combines exploration and development of one's own creative abilities (seen as openness, curiosity, flexibility, ability to get involved in the interpersonal relation and to encourage significant exchanges with the others inside the transitional area) by the growth of awareness of oneself and of one own peculiarity in psycho bodily terms and with the integration of every part of oneself. So these exchanges allow us to understand and perceive an "incorporated mind" which is a fundamental reference in the relationship and, in the same time, allow to imagine and plan possible worlds.

If we refer to an intercultural perspective, in any case, we need to go beyond the subjective level and we have to consider a wider *sociocultural dimension*. In an intercultural perspective, indeed, "self-knowledge about, and intimacy with one's own sociocultural identity, increase the ability to work with clients, colleagues and community members who are from different backgrounds" (Chang, 2016). So it is important that socio-cultural awareness be together with the subjective one and the development of a critical point of view at a meta-level.

Significant from an intercultural point of view is also the *group dimension*. For trainees, the experience of being in a group is fundamental: it supports their creativity, and the possibility of being aware of oneself and of others. In a group aesthetic pleasure comes from the emotional-affective intensity involved in the creative process (relating to you, to others, and to the group as a whole). A DMT group has some specific features related to the psycho-bodily process, which expresses itself with movement in the space, with the creation of forms through one's own body, connected with others' bodies; changes happen suddenly and quickly, enabled by the complex processes of mirroring and the emotional resonances developing in a common experience of DMT (Mignosi 2008).

So the observation of the components concerning the body and movement of others cannot be separated from the observation of oneself, of the consciousness of one's body, one's movement and the nonverbal exchange.

In this sense we refer to a training that starts from listening, welcoming and recognition of the trainees and that can offer the instruments to make visible and to recognize belonging and diversity, stereotypes and images. It also has to allow the transformation of those for whom this training is devised.

I believe that in this perspective, the experience through a DMT training can facilitate the processes of mediation and can become a social action, encouraging cultural, ethical and political change.

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