

The effect of a “visual toward verbal” training in narrative confidence for children in a multicultural context

L'effetto di un laboratorio “dal visivo al verbale” sulla autoefficacia narrativa dei bambini in un contesto multiculturale

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ABSTRACT

Narrative skills are very important in children's lives: they represent the basis for academic, cognitive, social and identity development. Improving narrative ability can be very hard for children who live in a context where the common language is not their first language. Lexical and syntactical difficulties can lead children to give up trying to express themselves, preventing them from continuing to practice.

For this reason, we tried to proposed a workshop for a 3rd grade class in a multicultural context, in order to develop at the same time narrative skills and engagement in storytelling. A series of activities gradually brought pupils from imagining, through action, to speech, while allowing everyone to find their favorite communication channel. The results were encouraging, as the activities structured in this way allowed even those who started from a disadvantaged situation to strengthen their self-efficacy and to participate in the same way as the others. Peer collaboration and the active role of the children were essential characteristics for the success of the project.

Le abilità narrative sono molto importanti nella vita dei bambini: rappresentano la base per lo sviluppo accademico, cognitivo, sociale e identitario. Migliorare le capacità narrative può essere molto difficile per i bambini che vivono in un contesto in cui la lingua comunemente utilizzata non è la loro lingua madre. Le difficoltà lessicali e sintattiche possono portare i bambini a rinunciare di cercare di esprimersi, impedendo loro di continuare ad esercitarsi.

Per questo motivo, abbiamo cercato di proporre un laboratorio per una classe di terza primaria con un contesto multiculturale, al fine di sviluppare allo stesso tempo le capacità narrative e l'impegno nella narrazione. Una serie di attività ha portato gradualmente gli alunni dall'immagine, attraverso l'azione, alla parola, permettendo a tutti di trovare il proprio canale di comunicazione preferito. I risultati sono stati incoraggianti, poiché le attività strutturate in questo modo hanno permesso, anche a chi è partito da una situazione di svantaggio, di rafforzare la propria autoefficacia e di partecipare come gli altri. La collaborazione tra pari e il ruolo attivo dei bambini sono state caratteristiche essenziali per il successo del progetto.

KEYWORDS

Narration, speech confidence, multiculturalism, primary school, self-efficacy. Narrazione, autoefficacia del discorso, multiculturalità, scuola primaria, self-efficacy.

1. Theoretical framework¹

1.1 The importance of narrative in children's development

Narrative is a general term and it is hard to find a satisfying definition. Some scholars portray it according to its goal: Stein (1982) speaks of a goal-directed episodic structure, Labov and Waletzky (1967) describe a narrative structure surrounding a basic complicating section that serves two functions: reference and evaluation, whereas Bruner (1986) defines personal narrative as discourse that asserts information about self (cit. in Sperry & Sperry, 1996). Klerfert (2007) approaches a socio-narratological view, in which narration is created in interaction between people and represents a tool for interaction (Wedin, 2010).

More widely, Sperry & Sperry (1996) define a minimal narrative episode as *“any topic-centered discourse containing at least one asserted verb about a displaced action and one other asserted utterance relevant to the topic”* (p.446). The most important aspect is that, regardless of the point of view from which it is considered, narrative plays an essential role in the development of children.

Narrative is a vital human activity (McCabe & Peterson, 1991), it is one of the basic forms of organized discourse and a universal form of thinking (Bonifacio & Hvastja Stefani, 2010).

It has strong implications in the cognitive, linguistic and social aspects of children's lives. As Nicolopoulou (1997) explains, narrative activity is a form of symbolic action linking the construction of reality and individual and collective identity. Applebee (1978) describes narratives as related to a child's development of concepts. In fact, in order to tell a good story, children must have knowledge of some concepts: temporal and cause-effect relationships and a theory of the mind. Westby (1991) observes that narrative facilitates the use of language to monitor and reflect on experiences and reason about, plan, and predict experiences (cit. in Stadler & Ward, 2006). Furthermore, narrative discourse development is related to emergent literacy skills and predicts successful adaptation to school literacy (Rollins et al., 2000).

To conclude: narrative begins from the development of oral language (Morrow, 1985), goes through literacy (Hedberg & Westby, 1993), and then predicts academic and social success (Bishop & Edmundson, 1987) (cit. in Stadler & Ward, 2006).

1 Attribuzione delle parti. Sections 1 and 3 are by Francesca Coin. Sections 2 and 4 are by Monica Banzato. Our thanks to Matthew Hoffman.

1.2 The development of narrative skills

Most researchers assume that children's narrative skills improve with age, albeit it is not always clear when the verbal behaviors of a young child blend into narrative (Sperry & Sperry, 1996).

Some renowned enquiries observed children who are about 2 years old (Sperry & Sperry, 1996; Dowker 1986 in Spinillo & Pinto, 1994). There is agreement in pointing out the age from 3 to 4 years as the establishment of real narrative, when children begin adding a storytelling format to their use of language (Stadler & Ward, 2006).

In their earliest years children do not produce the complete structure of a tale: Peterson & McCabe called it "leap-frog", because the stories were characterized by jumps from one event to another (Peterson & McCabe, 1983). In the same way, Spinillo & Pinto (1994) defined the first step as "non-stories", which consisted of simple descriptions of actions without any characteristic of narrative style; Applebee and Staler & Ward describe it as "*unrelated statements that label or describe*" (p. 80, Stadler & Ward, 2006)

The second phase (from about 5 years) shows narratives including introduction of the setting and of the main character, conventionalized story openings and above all a central event, but a real resolution of the drama is not present.

Then, the storytelling structure gradually upgrades, from an elementary form to a complete one. At the age of 6 children can tell a story following the structure proposed by Brewer: containing conventional openings and closings, exhaustive introduction, main events and resolution explicitly stated (Peterson & McCabe, 1983; Spinillo & Pinto, 1994). These features represent what Labov considered a well-formed story, one that orients the listener to who, what, and where something happened (Rollins et al., 2000). At the age of 6-7 they also can produce stories contextually dependent on visual stimuli (Spinillo & Pinto, 1994).

Stein & Glenn observed children at primary school age, from 6 to 10 years, understand typical mistakes that occur when they recall a story. The researchers found out that the internal representation of a story is based, for the most part, on semantic relations occurring within the stories. The researchers outlined 7 categories of sentences that compose a "good-story": major setting statements, minor setting statements, initiating events, internal responses, attempts, direct consequences, and reactions. Older children can recall more completely, citing a largest number of categories. Younger children refer less frequently to internal responses and minor settings. They recognize early the importance of major settings, initiating events and direct consequences and recall them very well, even after a week. Attempts and reaction categories show a higher degree of variation of recall than all other categories (Stein & Glenn, 1979).

1.3 Narrative development in a multicultural contest

Unfortunately, the evidence about what makes a "good story" varies in differing cultures (McCabe & Peterson, 1984). Narrative content and structure are greatly influenced by culture (Stadler & Ward, 2006), indeed narratives from different cultural groups show distinct organization (Rollins et al., 2000).

For example, African-American children produce more classic narratives than do European North American children. Chinese children tend to end their narratives at the high-point and Japanese and Latino children may not provide as much narrative detail as European North American and African-American children (Rollins et al., 2000).

Storytelling requires more complex language than daily conversations to describe an event to a listener who did not share in that event. Explicit vocabulary, extreme clarity with pronouns and command of temporal connectives are required (Stadler & Ward, 2006). The thematic structure of a narrative is usually marked linguistically: the listener uses the thematic markers to organize his comprehension of the discourse. For these reasons, storytelling can be quite complex for children who live in a multicultural context. At the age of 4 they correctly manage their first language in order to tell an understandable tale, while the second language gradually enters into their lives and they progressively acquire command of the discourse.

It is clear that narrative structure is influenced by cultural style, as well as language development. Nonetheless, children from other cultures do use the same components of personal narratives, described by Labov and other authors. Hence, it is important not to mistake impaired narration for cultural variation. Confusing narrative difficulties with cultural variation could be dangerous, especially for educators, who aim to implement children's discourse structures in order to provide pupils better access to learning.

2. The project

2.1 Aim of the work

The role of narrative in children's development, in particular for children who live in a multicultural context, is at this point affirmed. It arises as essential in order for them to express themselves in personal and academic tasks. However, in multicultural classes, it is hard to devise training to improve pupils' narrative skills, due to the language obstacles.

To reinforce their narrative confidence, despite the linguistic level, we initiated a workshop based on a series of activities that gradually shift pupils from a visual form of narrative to a verbal one.

The aim was to promote cognitive and emotional dimensions in a balanced way. In the emotional sphere, we aimed at strengthening in particular two sources of self-efficacy, in the various phases of the workshop: vicarious observation and verbal persuasion among the children, diminishing the verbal persuasion of the teacher who instead played above all a role of *director*, intervening in the activities to guide the children. Cooperation between children was, for these reasons, strongly encouraged.

In the cognitive sphere, the workshop's activities were built on the story's internal representation schema, as proposed by Stein & Glenn (1979). The authors described this schema in terms of a network of categories and the logical relations between these categories. The researchers outlined seven categories of sentences that compose a "good-story": major setting statements, minor setting statements, initiating events, internal responses, attempts, direct consequences, and reactions. Nine-year-old children can recall most of these completely, employing the largest number of categories.

The aim of the research project was to answer the following questions:

1. How are children's narrative skills developed in multicultural contexts?
2. Is it possible to design educational activities that increase children's narrative skills while keeping their engagement high?

3. What attributes should such activities have in order to be effective and inclusive?
4. Are there differences in their approach to storytelling between Italian and foreign students?

Our workshop was included in the European project SHABEGH (Shakespeare in and Beyond the Ghetto), realized for the 400th anniversary of William Shakespeare's death and the 500th anniversary of the establishment of the Jewish Ghetto of Venice. Because of this framework, we based it on Shakespeare's play *The Merchant of Venice*.

2.2 Participant

The workshop was carried out with a 3rd grade class at a Venetian primary school. Eighteen nine-year-old pupils and their teachers participated.

Among them, seven were of Italian parentage and eleven came from international migrant families that did not have Italian citizenship, although six of these were born in Italy. The other five arrived in Italy before the age of three, so the majority of the children had attended three years of preschool in Italy. Foreign children come from seven different country: Albania, Bangladesh, China, Egypt, Macedonia, Moldova, Philippines. They usually practiced their native language and culture at home and spoke Italian at school. All of the foreign pupils spoke Italian at a level sufficient for daily communication. Three of them showed poor lexicon and syntax. Seven of them could read with the same fluency as their Italian classmates, whereas four read slower and make more mistakes. Only four children had a written production comparable with Italian peers. Seven used shorter sentences, poorer lexicon and make a greater number of orthographical mistakes.

Before starting the activities, the consent of parents, teachers and the head teacher was obtained.

2.3 The workshop

The entire project took place from March to June, with an average cadence of one meeting every two weeks. The workshop consisted of three main steps.

First, a preparatory step, in which children listened the story of the *The Merchant of Venice*, suitably adapted for 8 and 9 year-olds (L. Tosi, 2015) and told by a professional storyteller.

The second step was composed of a series of activities realized through shadow theatre and sessions of brainstorming and drawings. The first activity concerned shadow theatre: children were split into small groups, each group playing a scene of the story. A photographer took pictures of them, while other classmates guessed what scene it was. Afterwards, in the second activity, regarding brainstorming and drawings, they worked on their shadow shapes: thinking over their scene, especially about the actions, emotions and goals of the characters and the way they communicated these through gesture and mime. At the ending of this brainstorming, all the children together chose one or two colors for each character, based on his or her temperament and emotions. They then colored their shadow shapes, which were printed on paper.

The last step required producing a short digital storytelling that collected all the products made by the children. This step served two functions: to practice an-

other form of storytelling, which reprised all precedent phases, like a sort of *de-liberate analysis* (Brown & Coles, 2012), and to realize a final product to show it to parents and schoolmates. We also asked the children to imagine a different ending of the story to add to their storytelling.

Stein & Glenn suggest: “*the unit most widely used to date has been the proposition (Fillmore, 1968; Kintsch, 1974). A proposition is defined by a relational word (the most common type of relational word is the verb) and one or more arguments, which stand in some specifiable relation to the relational word. [...] A proposition roughly corresponds to a simple sentence*” (p. 4, Stein & Glenn, 1979). Following this hint, we divided the simplified plot into the main action units that corresponded to the scenes played by the children. In each scene, the characters played a unique action, in order to help pupils to recognize the main episodes and the other categories proposed by Stein & Glenn.

As usually, this sequence is a causal chain of events, beginning with an initiating event and ending with a resolution. Each scene was described on a sheet of paper through an image and a short simple sentence. Playing the character’s action with their own bodies helped children to focus on the actions and emotions of the story. Guessing which scene is being played helps the children to express themselves verbally. We started from some simple clues to evocate some sort of answer, and then we helped them to formulate a complete sentence.

Peterson, Jesso, & McCabe (1999) found that children improved their narrative skills when the intervention focused on encouraging talking about experiences, asking more open and contextual questions and answering regularly using backchannel signals such as nods and non-verbal recognition. For this reason, we organized the activity as a guessing game in which schoolmates guessed which scene was being played. This gave important feedback to the actors about the rightness of their gesturing and miming and reinforced their confidence.

2.4 The research

The research project was focused on the second and third steps, from shadow theater to the final digital storytelling.

Narrative language skills and involvement were measured through indicators: engagement, self-efficacy and cooperation for involvement; vocabulary, syntax and narrative structure for narrative skills.

The measurement tools used were: self-assessment questionnaires to assess the level of engagement and self-efficacy; video-recorded observations for engagement and cooperation; analysis of transcribed dialogues and analysis of texts produced to evaluate vocabulary, syntax and narrative structure.

We followed a complementary parallel mixed method: each research topic had its own type of analysis.

Quantitative analysis self-efficacy and engagement questionnaires were administered before and after the activities: to measure the number and the order of interventions, which revealed engagement and cooperation, and for analysis of the written text.

Qualitative analysis focused on the children’s recognition and use of the Stein & Glenn’s categories. Some short significant examples of dialogues are given below for demonstration purposes.

To answer to the third question, about which attribute should have an educational activity, to be effective and inclusive, we used the features of action research project.

3. Results

How are children's narrative skills developed in multicultural contexts?

With regard to the development of narrative skills in multicultural contexts, the stages of development were found to be similar for all children, regardless of their cultural background, as argued in the literature (Rollins et al., 2000). Every child could recognize the importance of major settings, initiating events and direct consequences and recall them very well. Pupils with poor linguistic skills (four foreign and one Italian child) expressed themselves by shorter and syntactically simpler sentences. The only glaring difference is that language difficulties can slow progress and make children more insecure and less likely to engage in spontaneous narratives; this happened to the three foreign children who had shown low initial levels of self-efficacy and consequently made fewer attempts.

1. Is it possible to design educational activities that increase children's narrative skills while keeping their engagement high?

Regarding the possibility of designing training activities that allow implementing children's narrative skills while maintaining a high level of involvement, our conclusion is yes.

The children demonstrated their involvement verbally and through participation: they often raised their hands to respond, made sure everyone recited the right number of actions, gave a large number of positive judgements ("Great!", "Oooh!", "Wonderful!", "Amusing!" and "Look at this!"), spent a lot of time recognizing themselves in the images ("That girl was me! I was scared, because he wanted to kill me and take a piece of my flesh. He was scolding me.") and often used the first person in the narrative, which indicated that they were involved in the scene-playing and that they reflected on and participated in the character's feelings. They also demonstrated a certain linguistic commitment: from short exchanges of sentences, we can understand how they cooperated to produce a more complete response. The teacher's question gives a hint to describe the scene ("What is happening?"), then the first pupil, the most self-confident, according to the results of the questionnaires, starts the answer by proposing some content ("He is dying."). Little by little, the classmates supplement this with more appropriate words ("No, he is killing him,") and other details ("Ah, he wants to take a piece of his flesh.") or by a more syntactically elaborate sentence ("He would to hurt him but he would lose his goods,"), usually produced by the Italian pupils.

Stein & Glenn's eight categories proved to be very useful in facilitating the understanding of the story, especially if the children were guided along a specific path. Children were able to recognize these categories and use them in production as well. For example, *Major setting* introduces the main character(s) and describes the social, physical or temporal context in which the story occurs. We helped children to focus on those details through questions about scenarios and costumes. E.g.²:

2 E is for Educator and C is for Child.

- E: "Where are our characters?"
 C: "Uhm...in the background there is a terrace, maybe they are in Portia's manor!" E: "Good job, can you tell me who are they?"
 C: "Portia and Bassanio"
 E: "How do you recognize them?"
 C: "The person on the right has a long skirt, so she is a lady. The person on the left is a young man, because he hasn't a walking stick. He has got a hat with some feathers, so he is Bassanio.")

Wearing the stage clothes and watching the projected background helped the children to recognize the most important elements, while the questions helped them to express these concepts verbally, in a reasoned sequence.

As in Stein & Glenn's opinion, *internal responses* is the category in which children encounter most difficulties. It refers to the psychological state of a character after an event. It contains affective responses, goals and cognitions (character's thoughts) and often is hard to explain to the children; hence, we evidenced the psychological condition of the characters in every step. Once again, the passage from visual to verbal is at the heart of our activity. E.g.:

- C₁: "Portia reads the letter Antonio send to Bassanio."
 E: "What is she feeling? Look at her hand."
 C₂: "She is happy." (Other children laugh.)
 C₃: "No, she is astonished."
 C₄: "Maybe she is sad."
 C₅: "Worried?"
 E: "Yes, worried is the right word."
 C₃: "She is astonished too."
 E: "Maybe a little.")

In order to observe the ability to use Stein & Glenn's categories in production activities and not only in comprehension tasks, we asked the pupils to write an alternative ending to the plot.

Thirteen out of the eighteen children completed the task. Three of them simply repeated the real ending of the passage, without adding anything (E.g.: "When Shylock returns home, he sees that his money is not there." and "Shylock discovers he lost all the money and goes to them to get a part back.") employing sentences very similar to the instruction. One of the children just used a conventional ending, "And they lived happily ever after". Two of these children were foreigners and one was Italian.

One foreign pupil expressed a desire: "I'd like Antonio to give Shylock his money as soon as he becomes rich again." Nine children actually invented an original ending. Six endings were relatively long and were produced by two foreign children and four native Italian ones; three were shorter (produced by two foreign children and one Italian one). They used a mean of five sentences to tell their mini-story (range from 4 to 14 sentences). Each sentence contained on average six words (range from 4 to 8.6 words), for a mean total of 33 words. More linguistically skilled children used a mean of four conjunctions, whereas less skilled used an average of two conjunctions.

Following the Stein & Glenn's schema, we can recognize five simplex tree charts (see Fig. 1).

This example of a tree chart is very simple: it has a singular Initiating Event, given by the instruction.

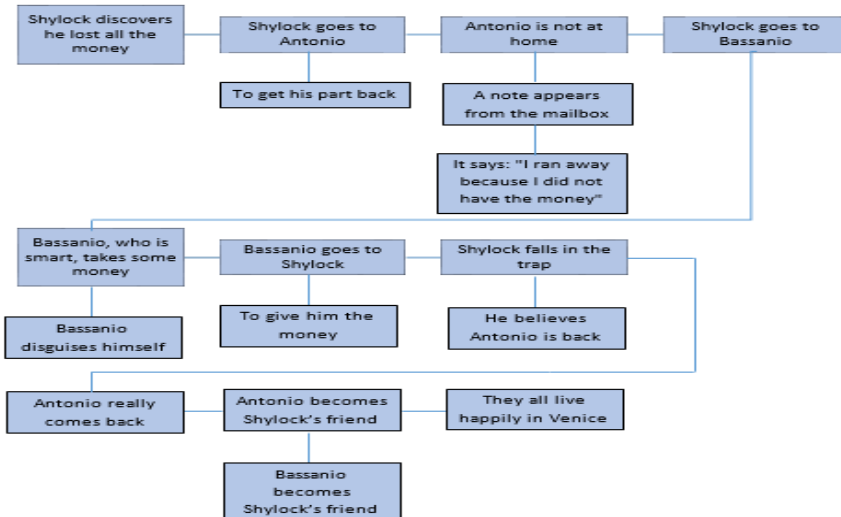
Figure 1 Example of a simplex tree chart



An Episode System, composed of three actions, in which the three actions are not linked to each other, follows. The described actions are at the same time consequences and resolutions. There is no Plan Sequence or Internal Response. A typical chunk makes up the ending.

Four other children created a more complex chart (see Fig. 2). In this complex chart, for example, we can see three principal lines of action (numbered from one to three). Each of them has an Initiating Event, an Episode System and a kind of Resolution. The conclusive action of a line becomes the start of the following line. There also are many secondary actions, which follow from a primary action and specify something about it, often the Attempts or sometimes an Internal Response. The conclusion recalls a conventional ending but is in some way adjusted to the specific context.

Figure 2 Example of a complex tree chart



Speaking generally about categories, no one described major or minor settings; because they were required only to invent an alternative ending and not a whole story, they probably thought it was not necessary.

Ten pupils developed an Episode System composed of three sentences or more. Nine of them identified one or more Initiating Events and five described a Plan Sequence, pointing to goals and actions. Eight found out a new solution, connected with goals and actions.

No one cited an Internal Response, describing emotions or feelings. An exception is in the example (Fig. 2) in which some sentences referring to thoughts are mentioned (e.g. "He believes Antonio is back.").

Five children used a conventional ending to close their story.

3. *What characteristics must such activities have in order to be effective and inclusive?*

To answer to this question, we analyzed the video-recorded moment in order to outline which educational strategy obtained best outcomes. We collected a series of useful pieces of advice:

Multimodality allows every child to find their own manner of expression, without dwelling too much on language issues. However, the route must be well set and guided: the use of the Stein & Glenn categories was very useful in this regard. Moreover, each concept (in this case the use of the categories) should be repeated several times and in various modes of expression, to be understood more clearly and recognized in its different forms.

With regard to the well-guided route, the *alternation of guiding questions and freedom in the answers* made the children feel safer and freer to express themselves and to participate.

The *corrections made by their classmates*, rather than by the teacher, was another aspect that helped to increase their confidence. They were a great encouragement for less confident and involved children, because it gave them a feeling not of having made a mistake but that the concept could be said better.

This leads to the fourth important factor: *cooperation*. It grew during the dialogue and improved their social skills, making them able to find solutions to small conflict situations. In the following short dialogue, for example, some children did not agree about the feeling felt by the protagonist, but in the end, they found a solution:

E: "How do you think they feel now?"

C₁: "Happy."

C₂: "No, they feel a bit sad, because they made an agreement that he would never give somebody his ring."

E: "So, we how can we describe them?"

C₃: "We can say they are a bit happy because they revealed she helped them and so they feel relieved, but they are a bit sad too, because of the ring problem. Is it right?"

C₄: "Yes, great! So we are all agreed."

Another piece of advice that should be taken into account when planning educational narrative interventions is *patience*. Narrative skills take a long time to be learned, and the expectation of achieving clear results in a short time can affect children's self-esteem and motivation. We were linked to the timing of an international project and the curricular activities of the class, so the short duration of our intervention did not allow us to see evidence of improvements in the linguistic field.

Finally, involvement should always remain high to motivate participation despite the difficulties. It would therefore be appropriate to give priority to activities in which children, not the text, are the protagonists. When we worked on photographs and films where the children were portrayed, their attention and participation showed much higher levels than when working on text, dialogue or directly on the plot.

4. *Are there differences in the approach to storytelling between Italian and foreign students?*

Foreign pupils started out with an average narrative self-efficacy slightly lower than the Italians, especially for females (3.18 out of 4 for Italians, 3.06 for foreign females and 3.21 for two foreign males). At the end of the training they caught up with their Italian schoolmates (3.54 for Italian, 3.56 for foreign females and 3.63 for foreign males).

The children seemed to have a good awareness of their narrative skills: five Italians out of seven and five foreigners out of ten expressed a form of self-evaluation that corresponded to that given by their teachers. The only difference is that Italians tend to make overestimation errors, as did foreign males, while foreign females had a tendency to underestimate themselves. This codification did not affect their participation in the activities, except in a few anomalous cases mentioned above. In general, pupils with higher self-efficacy participated regardless of their skills by speaking out first and more often than children with low self-confidence. There were no differences in the number of interventions proposed by Italian and foreign pupils.

Therefore, it can be said that it is not so much the origin or the linguistic difficulty that favors or hinders participation as it is the personal self-confidence of each child.

4. Educational implications and conclusions

Narrative skills are very important in children's lives: they represent the basis for academic, cognitive, social and identity development. Improvements in narrative ability can be very hard for children who live in a context where the common language is not their first language. Lexical and syntactical difficulties can lead children to give up trying to express themselves, preventing them from continuing to practice and to improve.

For this reason, we proposed a workshop to develop at the same time narrative skills and involvement in storytelling. A series of activities gradually bring pupils from imagination, through action, to speech, allowing everyone to find their favorite communication channel. The multimodal narrative workshop was designed to overturn the widespread practice of thinking first of the "cognitive dimension" and then of the "emotional dimension". Instead, our workshop first created the conditions to maximize involvement and cooperation among children, and these conditions served as a lever in the cognitive sphere (i.e. to familiarize children with recognizing the patterns and manipulating the categories of narrative through the production of differing narrative expressions aimed at improving oral and written language skills).

Children love to observe other children and they love to observe those most

similar to themselves (identification). If the children observed, taken as models, show, despite the difficulties, that they are successful, this can instill a sense of confidence in their own ability to try or retry to perform similar tasks, even if they already have failures behind them (Bandura, 1997; Schunk, Hanson, & Cox, 1987).

This explains why foreign children had a greater drive to engage in their task, imitating the observed behavior of other pupils of the same age and with similar characteristics (taken as a model) engaged in the same task, compared to the observation of an adult (the teacher), even if charismatic, who showed how to do the same task.

Brown & Inouye research (1978) shows that individuals who have been exposed to confidence-building models persist despite repeated failures. In our multimodal storytelling workshop, we created opportunities for collaborative work in which children could participate in their own way (verbal, visual, cinematic, etc.). Children could express themselves, work on narrative categories and at the same time act as role models, and promote vicarious observation opportunities for other children. In order to activate peer modeling, the didactic activity should match the children's potential modes of expression and not just one mono-expressive mode or only verbal or only visual means, etc... In fact, the narrative categories can be managed through linguistic, visual, gestural, digital and other symbolic means.

The greatest advantage of imitative learning over other forms of learning is that it provides a complete behavioral sequence for the learner (Bandura, 1997). This type of workshop focusing on vicarious observation, has triggered another source of self-efficacy, which is the verbal peer persuasion that has been crucial in triggering and maintaining the involvement and motivation of children, as each child has received feedback and consents or suggestions or questions about specific tasks from other children.

Children were very engaged: everyone wanted to participate, playing the scenes, guessing the answers and proposing the colors. Their confidence gradually increased: more self-assured pupils started an interaction by answering the teacher's question, the others joined in little by little to add, correct or make something more precise. At the end of the discussion, everybody had given spontaneously his or her contribution.

Obviously, the development of narrative skills cannot be concluded in a few weeks. However, the children learned how to help each other to express themselves. They learned that there is always a better way to relate something, especially if you pay attention to the categories and continue to try and try. This is the best way to improve their own ability and feel ever more confident. There were no differences between the attitude of Italian and foreign pupils, rather the different behaviors depended on their personal self-efficacy level. The workshop demonstrated that it is important to search for alternative ways to tell and express yourself until you have the right words. The corrections made by the classmates, rather than the teacher, are a great encouragement for the less self-confident children. The cooperation that arose during their dialogue improved their social skills and made them able to use problem solving in order to find a remedy in conflictual situations. Working together, collaborating among peers, creates a more relaxed environment and less fear of judgment.

Bandura (1986) wrote: "Educational practices should be evaluated not only according to the skills and knowledge they impart for current use [cognitive dimension], but also according to what they do to children's beliefs about their abilities, which affects how they approach the future [emotional dimension]." (p. 417).

The aim of the Shabegh project was broad; this workshop covered just a small part and the research describes just a narrow aspect of that. The activities were realized with the participation of only one class and a small number of pupils. It could be interesting to replicate the workshop with a larger number of children belonging to various contexts, such as other ages, other language levels, other cultures, other class compositions.

To conclude, the workshop was a positive experience for children and teachers. It showed that the balance between cognitive and emotional dimensions is a valid starting point from which teachers can begin to rethink their didactic and educational planning methods. Focusing on proximal goals, peer modeling and social and constructive feedback helps to reduce children's stress and is more effective than simply words of encouragement.

Through a variety of educational strategies, of which the multimodality used in this workshop is an example, students can gain independence and greater determination as they learn to work more effectively and with confidence in their ability to achieve certain goals. Teachers can benefit from investing time and energy in developing pedagogical strategies that incorporate cognitive, emotional and psychophysical dimensions in tune with the class group they are working with (for there is no "one recipe" for all) in order to encourage self-efficacy in their students, but also in themselves as teachers.

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