

The Creative Movement Garcia-Plevin method® in children's early education

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The focus of the presentation is on the application of the Creative Movement Garcia-Plevin method® (CM®) discipline in early education and in a more specific way for children between three and seven years old. CM® is a discipline that aims to recover deep listening to the body and to develop its expressive and creative potential. In teaching to children Creative Movement aims to prevent the gradual distancing from the body by maintaining the freshness of the individual's original and direct relationship with his body. The body, which is the source and vehicle of our affective life, is seen as the central axis of every creative process, whatever the language through which it manifests itself. For Winnicott, the first source of creativity is the child's play with his own body. The methodology relates the phases of the creative process, the principles of learning by doing and the stages of psychomotor development. Creativity through the body and its movement has a fundamental role in the development of the child because it helps him stimulate thinking and enriches language and the ability to solve problems in an autonomous and innovative way. All this contributes to increasing self-confidence, affect regulation, a sense of well-being and a positive perception of life.

The Creative Movement Garcia-Plevin Method Association¹ has been holding training courses on the discipline in Rome, Italy since 1998. The courses are attended by teachers, therapists, dancers, artists and others who wish to explore and develop their creativity through the body, both for personal growth and in order to have the opportunity to apply it in their field of work. Since 2014 the Association has been carrying out training activities in courses organized by the Inspirees Institute², an international training institute specializing in creative arts education and therapy

1 The Creative Movement Garcia-Plevin method® Association was set up in 1998 by Maria Elena Garcia and Marcia Plevin, who are dancers, dance movement therapists and psychologists, with the aim of making known the methodology they had created. www.movimentocreativo.it

2 Inspirees Institute is an international training institute specializing in creative arts education and therapy, founded by Dr. Tony Zhou, a biomedical scientist and dance movement therapist trained in the west. Based in Europe and China, it runs various certification training programs in China since 2006: the Laban movement studies Certification Program, The Dance Movement Therapy certification program (recognized by ADTA), Creative Movement (Garcia-Plevin Method®) and Dance for Parkinson's Disease (DfPD®) Certification program. www.inspirees.com/institute

Creativity

It is necessary to set out what we mean by creativity and to clarify the meaning that the term assumes when it is used as an attribute of the word movement.

Creativity is commonly associated with the production of artists but, in reality, the deeper meaning of the term is to be sought in the vital impulse that leads human expression to manifest itself in different ways.

It is certainly easy to recognize creativity when it is embodied in music, dance or poetry that touch our feelings, but surely it is also to be found in the way a vase of flowers is arranged, a lunch is prepared, or in the teacher who finds new ways to stimulate students. And it is this form of creativity that we are most interested in.

We recognize an action as creative because it goes beyond our usual ways of behaving and implies a different form of relating to the environment.

Our habitual styles of behavior are largely due to cultural conditioning, but also to the need to use known and almost automatic action patterns which, as such, imply significant energy savings in everyday life. However, they can sometimes become too rigid tracks, precluding new expressive choices or new solutions to life's problems.

According to Winnicott (1974), creativity is the ability to see situations from multiple points of view and to imagine alternative solutions. We add that when a solution is creative, it reflects our own inner world, favoring a life of personal fulfillment.

Creativity is a natural impulse of the human being, an expression of vitality and a sign of mental health, which evolves from the first moments of childhood, provided that the environment offers some basic conditions. When these conditions do not occur we see schematic behaviors, fear of expressing oneself or exaggerated demands for confirmation already appear at an early age.

Our body is predisposed, even before birth, to enter into a dynamic relationship with the world. We therefore find the root of the creative drive in the vitality of the body and in its natural tendency to manifest itself when entering into relationship with the environment.

“Each of our inner changes manifests itself in a movement, although perhaps it would be more correct to say: it is a movement. Emotions, like fear, anger, joy, and so on change our body: we have a lump in our throats, we feel a flutter in our chest, arms, fists and shoulders contract. In other cases, our breath expands and our steps become lighter.

Even the stimuli of the world transform us: sudden thunder makes us jump, the splash of a fountain relaxes us, observing the hovering of the seagulls can calm our breath, while certain types of light can irritate us, and the contact or the simple proximity of the others certainly do not leave us unchanged

This permanent variation of the bodily state is the foundation of our sense of identity, it organizes the substratum of perception and consciousness. We can recognize for example strength and lightness, speed and slowness because, in some way in our body, there is a similar experience. The flow of these subtle movements is the basis of our moods, feelings and thoughts” (Garcia, Monteleone 2002, p 168)

Creative Movement Garcia-Plevin method®

The experience of movement is the presupposition on which both physical and mental development are based. Without this experience, brain structures and functions would not evolve. Creative Movement's task is to promote this natural process, to increase self-awareness, foster relationships with others and enrich communicative and expressive skills.

CM® considers the movement as the most authentic aspect of the child as an immediate manifestation of his need for personal growth and discovery of every kind in terms of the environment and the people around him. It is an activity that does not propose exercises or techniques to be imitated, but respects the natural expression of each individual and reconciles motor development with the expressive and communicative counterparts. It involves the whole person in the simultaneous act of moving, thinking and feeling. Since the development of creativity is one of the most important goals of CM®, exploration processes, play and invention are more likely to achieve creative results than teaching a technique. The creative experiences we have during childhood shape much of what we will do later as adults, from work to family life. The vitality of our society depends on its ability to educate young people who can solve problems in an innovative way.

Stages of the creative process

Understanding the different phases through which the creative process unfolds is essential to understanding our teaching methodology. In fact, the different teaching methods used during each CM® session were designed with these phases and to the psycho-emotional and cognitive disposition of each of them in mind.

Several attempts have been made to classify these phases. CM® uses the one based on the classification of the psychoanalyst Arieti (1979):

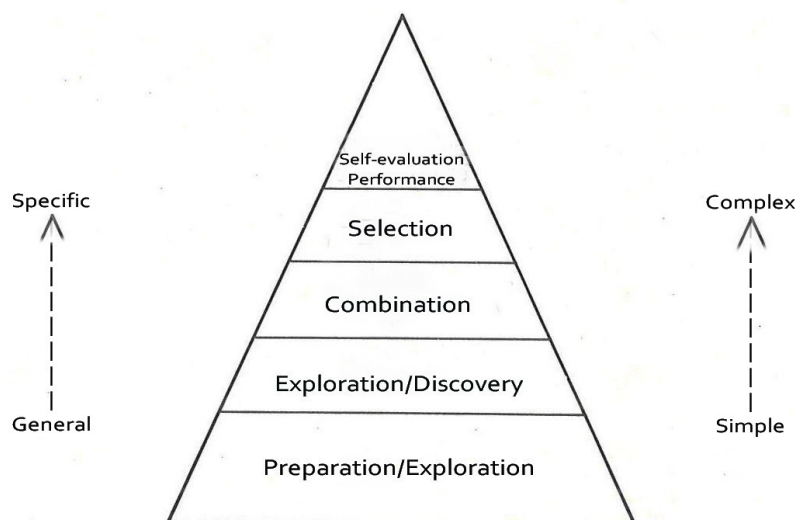
- Preparation / exploration
- Incubation
- Illumination
- Self-evaluation

In **exploration** play prevails, and the 'letting oneself go' with an open mind, without any concern for the end result.

In **incubation** the attitude of exploration is maintained but moments of discovery may occur. This discovery happens when certain movements or solutions for some reason acquire a prominent place in the consciousness of those who move (for example, they are the most pleasant, the most surprising, they seem the "most correct" or for some other reason).

Illumination is something that cannot be taught. It is in moments in which we experience a particular awareness of unity between intentions and movement itself. Illumination comes when one feels that the movements harmonize with the sensations that generated them.

In **self-evaluation** we include the combination, selection, execution and performance of the material generated throughout the process; it implies more observation of what is being produced. This phase is only suitable from ages 8-9. For Creative Movement, the expressive product can be evaluated only because it is, or is not, an expression of something inside. It is on this form of creativity that we intend to focus our reflection.

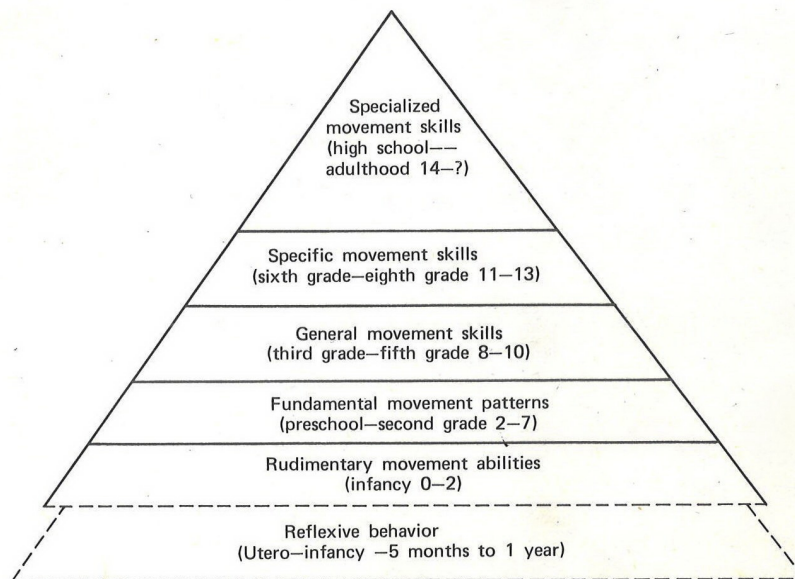


Phases of creative process

These phases do not exist in pure form. However, thinking in terms of phases can still be useful and is something to keep in mind when planning activities to promote creativity

We believe that the teaching of CM® for children from approaching four to seven years of age must focus on the exploration and discovery phase with a few moments - in five to seven year-olds - of simple combinations of movements.

Creating the conditions for children to have multiple experiences of exploration can be a prevention of body-mind dissociation, can maintain the relationship with the “felt body”, enrich the cognitive processes and encourage the development of a language associated with body experience.

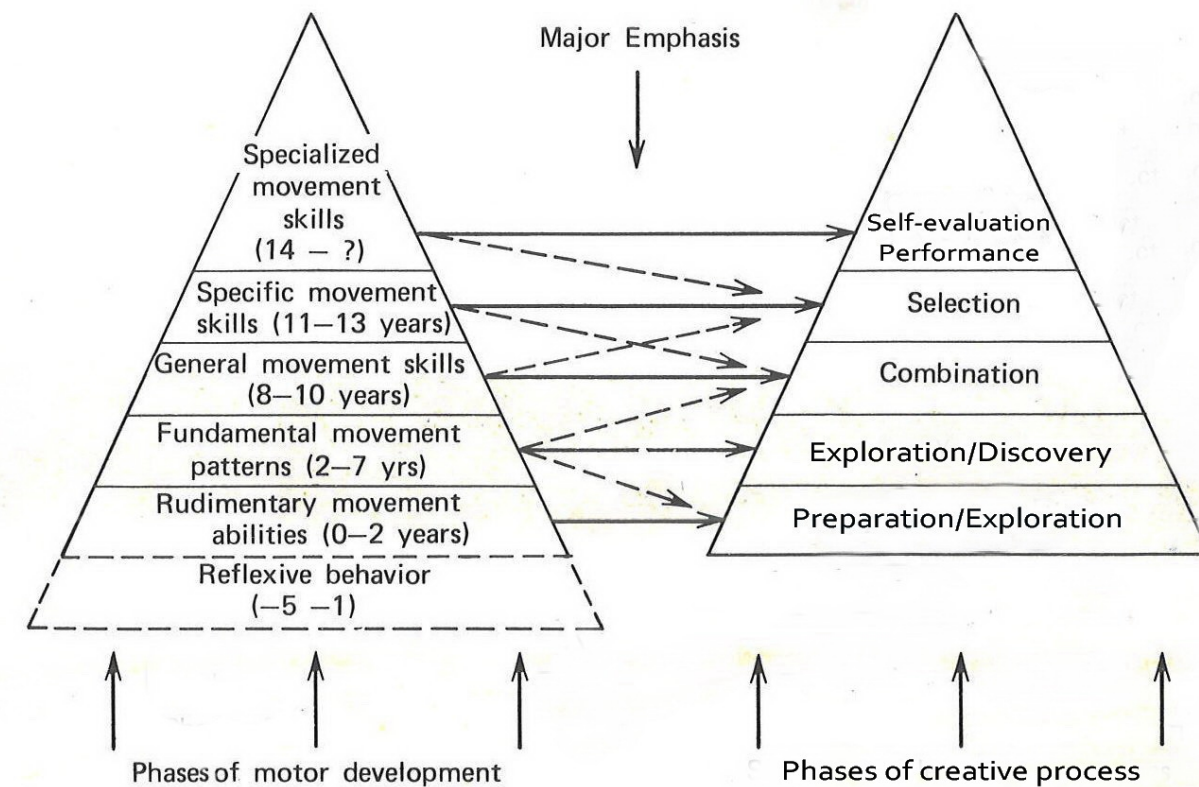


Creative Movement from approaching four to seven years of age

To understand why CM® teaching for children aged three to seven must be centered on exploration, it is necessary to ask what children are like at this age. We need to ask ourselves about the state of psychophysical maturity reached and consequently the type of proposals that can favor and contribute to the consolidation of the secure basis on which to build a creative life.

We start from the assumption that promoting children's creative process must go hand in hand with their psychophysical development. In the development of their ability to move, distinct phases or stages can be distinguished, even if they sometimes overlap. In the period we are considering - from approaching four to seven years of age - which in Europe coincides with the pre-school period and with the first grades of primary school, children are involved in exploration of and experimentation with the potential offered by movement patterns. These patterns are the bases on which all forms of movement can be subsequently consolidated, even those with another degree of specialization and precision.

The “fundamental movement patterns” that are reached in the third year of life establish themselves starting from “rudimentary abilities” typical of the first two years of life, but their exploration continues up to seven years. These are the years in which children explore their bodies' movement potential by running, jumping, throwing or picking up objects, and by experiencing the balance of their bodies. This is the period during which they enjoy the potential, familiarity and freedom gained. One aspect to keep in mind when teaching is that at this age children need adults to reinforce their self-confidence.” Look at me” and “look at what I am doing” are requests frequently made to parents and teachers.



Interaction between the phases of motor development and the phases of creative process

The child naturally tends to put his skills to the test in a very wide variety of movements. It is the global movement and not the specific one that matters. This constant exploration is what allows children to adapt flexibly to different situations and what also favors brain plasticity. It is to be remembered that the brain amplifies its plasticity when a given learning brings a change in behavior.

For all of the above, in CM® it is evident that care and precision will not be decisive and will not be encouraged. It is also equally evident that, to promote exploration, the environment must be structured in such a way that success and inclusion are maximized to foster trust and self-esteem. Otherwise, the criticisms and failures resulting from the expectations of adults can block the process.

The child and expressiveness

Although it is worthwhile to differentiate the characteristics of the child between the ages of approaching four and five years from those of whom, at six and seven years, have already commenced school, we can in both cases recognize spontaneity as a preponderant element. This

characteristic, which can also be observed in the earlier period, is accompanied in the older child by an underlying confidence in his practical means to reach his goals. In this phase "the explorations of the child are directed by an intentionality, he is conscious of the end to be achieved" (Le Boulch 1984, p.181). Through a teaching centered on exploration, CM® aims to maintain and develop this spontaneity, in order to nourish, as far as possible, other structuring capacities which, like language, consolidate and improve in this period.

The harmony and the rhythm of the movement reach a certain perfection between 4 and 5 years of age, a period in which lateral dominance will stabilize and become final, and this will serve as the basis for a better orientation in space. The stimuli for exploration continue to be first and foremost the experiences of everyday life with which they constantly test themselves but children also develop a lot of interest in symbolic games and the possibility of identifying themselves with social characters, or with the heroes of television and specific literature.

The teacher must elaborate proposals that orient the child's attention and define a clear field of exploration. To do this he has two fundamental resources: his own experience in the field of movement and creativity, and the Laban Movement Analysis (LMA). The Laban analysis is a system that allows us to describe, observe and represent the different forms of movement, from the simple gesture of a hand during a conversation to the more complex sequence of a dancer or an athlete. LMA is fundamentally interested in the process of movement, its dynamics and relationship with motivations, intentions, and the flow of the psycho-affective experience.

The Laban Movement Analysis, conceived by Rudolf Laban ³, is a complex and very articulate model that analyzes the qualitative patterns and spatial organization patterns that characterize motor activity. In addition, the model has been studied in depth by Irmgard Bartenieff⁴, a student of Laban who has studied the connections within our bodies which occur through patterns or plans which our neuromuscular system develops for executing movement sequences. These two tools are fundamental in CM® and in particular in teaching children because they allow on the one hand to focus on expressive qualities, but also to promote a harmonious and efficient development of bodily potential. The knowledge offered by these models therefore complete what we have already said about "fundamental movement patterns" and allow us to discriminate:

-What part of my body moves?

-How does it move?

3 **Rudolph Laban** (1879-1958), born in Austria, dancer, choreographer, composer and architect, traveled throughout Europe practicing artistic activities innovative in his time, especially for the birth of modern dance. His revolutionary ideas lay the foundations for what was later known as "Laban Movement Analysis". He was considered "the classic Renaissance man" for the main body of his research.

4 **Irmgard Bartenieff** (1900 -1981), one of the founders of the American Dance Therapy Association, was a student of Laban. Physical therapist and a notable figure in the world of research on Laban Movement, in her studies she began to define and describe the importance of the inner connection to the body. See *I. Bartenieff e D. Lewis. Body Movement Coping with the Environment*, Gordon Breach (1980).

-Where does it move?

-What relationship does the body have with itself, with others and with the environment?

The description of the elements of these models and their interrelation is completely beyond the scope of this work; we will therefore focus on some aspects that we consider of particular relevance to the age group that interests us.

Knowledge and awareness of one's body

The first task of CM® in this age group will be to develop and consolidate knowledge and awareness of the body. This is a knowledge that must start from the kinesthetic experience and motor sense. The child learns through insight and loves to explore and test his abilities, which allow him to acquire information and act in an increasingly precise manner on the environment, thus materializing his intentions. The adult will therefore have to avoid intervening too often and to leave space and time for discoveries that can emerge independently.

The experience of the body is not only important because it constitutes the basis of our Self but also because we know that the primary role that action has in the development of the cognitive processes is in line with the theories of embodied cognition and the research on mirror neurons.

It will therefore be useful to propose activities and games that direct attention towards the body, towards the movements it can do and towards what it is like to do them. These proposals must completely exclude the competitive dimension in order to allow everyone to find their own way of responding to solicitations.

Through the discrimination of the parts of the child's body, the perception of spatial relationships and the experimentation of dynamic connections between them, the sense of having a global form begins to develop and an image of his own body emerges. Stimulating attention towards the body will allow this image to always be connected to what is perceived of oneself. The role of the educator will therefore be to guide the child to pay attention not only to the purpose, to the intentionality that he pursues with his action, but also to what he feels in doing it.

Verbalization. It is important that the aforementioned perceptive experiences of the body and its movement are associated with verbalization, but this must go hand in hand with the acquisitions made on the kinesthetic level (Le Boulch 1984, p.126). In this way, language will be enriched and the progressive dissociation of the body that is frequently experienced in adulthood will be avoided. To consolidate the image of the body and also to maintain the "amodal"⁵ connection between the various senses, it is useful to propose the drawing of the child's body that also allows us to see the

⁵ Amodal (meaning "without" modality) perception is perception of information that is common or redundant across multiple senses (e.g., auditory, visual, tactile). Amodal information includes changes along three basic parameters of stimulation—time, space, and intensity. Properties of objects and events such as temporal synchrony, rhythm, tempo, duration, intensity, and co-location are common across auditory, visual, and proprioceptive stimulation.

evolution of the body image. In addition to this, CM® also uses what we have called Transformational Body Tracing (TBT), that is a life-size outline of the child's body on which children can add elements that sometimes correspond to what has been felt and at other times to projections, which are frequently related to characters with which he identifies himself. The outline of the perimeter of the body is drawn in the first instance by the teacher but after 5 years of age, and sometimes earlier, the children can draw each other.

We must also not forget the sensorial and tactile dimension that can be stimulated with various materials with different textures, weights and temperatures.

This circularity between experiences that use different sensory channels: the kinesthetic, tactile, visual, etc. makes it possible to keep alive the amodality or globality of the senses typical of the first period of life. This globality of the senses is what maintains the subjective experience of what Stern calls "vital forms". This ability to grasp the forms, movement, rhythms, intensity, space, intention / directionality (Stern 2011) of world events and of our somatic experience in a single immediate gestalt seems to be innate and is what constitutes the phenomenological substrate from which creative expression can spring. This ability permits being in attunement with others and the recognition of one's own and others' affective states. However, a development of thought and language that deviates too much from non-verbal experience can make us deaf to this original capacity; in contrast, the reciprocal nourishment of these two levels - verbal and non-verbal – can not only foster creativity but also make life and relationships richer

Tension Flow

The modulation of tone is a second aspect that although directly connected with the consciousness of the body requires particular consideration. For Laban flow is the first element that involves tonic modulation — which, even at rest — oscillates between two extremes, free flow and bound or blocked flow.

We say that the flow is free or fluent when the action is difficult to stop suddenly. Inversely, in an action capable of being stopped and held without difficulty, at any moment during the movement, the flow is bound. Obviously there is a continuum between free and bound flow and a harmonic combination of both to permit appropriate action is also required. However, from the expressive point of view in the personal style of the individual we can see the predominance of one or the other aspect.

The ability to modulate one's flow is what allows us to "maintain organized and flexible behavior" (Siegel p, 154) even in cases of the high activation (arousal) of emotions and feelings or in the presence of strong external stimuli. Children of the age that we are considering are pleased to experience letting go and containing their impulses. Doing it in an sudden or gradual way, being

immobile and then exploding and letting one's energy flow, are some of the examples. A traditional game like that of statues, which has names in many different cultures, testifies to this pleasure. The essence of this game that foresees a multiplicity of variations consists in moving when you are not looked at, by the teacher or by a companion, and stopping still when being looked at. Even children aged 8 and over can enjoy experiencing more complex variations of this game. The pleasure comes from the feeling of mastery of the body that derives from it. Modulating one's flow means managing one's own energy and also contributes to managing feelings and the expression of emotions. Furthermore, the modulation of the flow is the presupposition of the relationship with time and space.

Weight and strength

In these years the child actively experiences the use and measurement of his strength necessary to achieve ever greater efficiency in the many variations of fundamental movement patterns that they love to explore. The weight factor (as R. Laban called it) considers the strength necessary to overcome the pull of gravity, to move the body in space, to maintain the body shapes and to confront external resistances. This force can manifest itself in a spectrum between two opposite qualities: strong and light. Although as noted by Laban (1974, p 92) "the main problem is without doubt to keep alive the natural effort-richness which most healthy children possess", through a careful observation of spontaneous play the guide will have to find the moment in which to offer alternatives, by reinforcing or softening their actions verbally, or by proposing materials, objects, and actual games. In this way the child will be able to expand his expressive range without losing what characterizes his nature. It will be important not only to explore strength and lightness but also to induce moments of abandonment of one's weight. The moments of abandonment of weight, which are difficult for many children, are important because they will allow them to use their active force more efficiently. Such moments are also important for the dimension of feeling one's weight, that is the "physical sensation of the body itself (the skin, the muscles, the concrete material substance of the body, both on the surface and deep inside)" (Bloom 2007, p.37). By gradually becoming aware of this experience, children become masters of their intentions and of the intensity with which they want to express them, whether they are oriented towards a functional purpose or have an exclusively expressive and relational objective. Weight "gives us a sense of three-dimensional presence that provides us with a place from which to feel, see or think" (Bloom 2007, p. 37), which is an excellent basis for creativity.

Relationship with time

Every human being has his own tendencies in the use of time. Each child demonstrates personal rhythms developed by the interaction between his own genetic characteristics and maternal rhythms through processes of attunement and synchronization predominant in the early years. In pre-school years and in the early years of school it will be necessary to give space to these personal rhythms by presenting activities in which each child can show his personal style, a style that must be seen, recognized and given value by the teachers. But this will have to be balanced by stimulating games of synchronization including sound, musical or voiced rhythmic proposals.

The use we make of time has much to do with our way of making decisions and is closely connected with the management of flow and therefore also of our impulses. Initially it will be experienced simply with speed, with the contrast between sudden movements and sustained movements, and also with moments of acceleration and deceleration. This exploration can be supported by sound accompaniment but also suggested through evocative images. It is important that children experience their own "fastness" and "slowness" before adapting to defined rhythmic structures, but at the same time the accurate response to a series of beats is the primary source of conscious pleasure. The sense of order and integration derived from the pulsation or periodicity gives the child profound security in a world full of impulses and of stimuli.

The introduction of accents and differences in duration in an isochronous sequence configures rhythmic structures. According to Le Bouch the child between 3 and 7 years old is able to distinguish and reproduce rhythmic forms of 3 or 4 elements, but frequently starting from 6 years of age he is able to relate to more complex structures. The teacher must be very aware of the real possibilities of his students in order to find the right gradation in the games offered and in the music chosen to accompany them. Attention to students' responses and the teacher's attunement ability will be fundamental resources.

Body space relationship

In the early years of life and in particular once locomotion has been achieved, the spatial orientation of children is linked to the real objects on which they focus attention and exploratory intention. We have all seen children crawling quickly towards a toy or towards objects for some reason attractive, and it is familiar to everyone to see how finding an object of interest interrupts their wanderings in open spaces. Between the ages of three and six, these empirical spatial relationships begin to give way to the conscious relationship of their body with space. The notions of above and below, front and back are facilitated for the same somatic differences (the upper part of the body is different from the lower one) but the distinction between right and left is consolidated only at the end of this period since it is based only on kinesthetic and not on visual criteria. I. Bartenieff's system of body

connection analysis will be a fundamental guide for the teacher who must stimulate and accompany these children's acquisitions through individual games with their own body or through relationships that children can establish through the interaction of their bodies. The awareness of the spatial dimensions that will later lead to a more abstract perception of them, will begin to be delineated through following paths that initially will need visual spatial references. In any case, the body will be the true reference system. Giving a name to the aforementioned directions may reinforce the symbolic function that is emerging.

The expressive and intentional use of space - direct and indirect movements for example - can be stimulated more easily between 5 and 7 years of age, and it will be useful to make references to images and characters known to children or emotional states of mind whose expression arouses much interest in children of this age.

The CM Garcia Plevin® method teacher

Taking all these aspects into consideration, a CM Garcia-Plevin® method teacher will, in short, have to :

- offer global motor experiences
- offer a wide range of movements
- formulate instructions that direct attention to a specific range of movements but at the same time offer a margin of freedom that allows each individual to find his own way of exploring.
- reassure, wear an expression of acceptance and give value to everyone's discoveries.
- organize the group in such a way as to guarantee an inclusive experience.

In short, the attitude of the CM® teacher must be similar to that which according to Winnicott the "sufficiently good" mother assumes in order to create an environment favorable to play, that is to say being empathetic and receptive and avoiding too much intervention in order to leave room for the child's discoveries.

The skills of the CM Garcia Plevin® method teacher (or guide)

The teacher or guide, as it is preferable to call him, is a person who, through his CM® training, has experimented with his own creativity, knows it thoroughly⁶ and tests it in every encounter with his students. In fact, every encounter must be considered as a creative process in itself. The planning must be flexible and the guide must be ready to modify it and also to change it completely, depending on the stage of the group. This is why he must have refined his perception of his own personal sensations so that his body, after becoming receptive to itself and to the environment, can

⁶ The CM training courses in Rome and in China (in collaboration with Inspirees) sets out to guide in the development of these skills

capture the atmosphere of the group. He must understand when and how to give or change an instruction, thus finding the appropriate time and pace.

The guide also knows that the open, welcoming tone and his own bodily attitude, whether he is moving among the students or whether he is still at the side of the room, has an influence on the general atmosphere. He has also refined his ability not to judge when observing others. In this way he can offer children the presence and the type of expression that allows them to feel seen, accepted, recognized and safe, conditions which they can use to develop their creative potential.

"The teacher must be capable of seeing. I want to put those six letter in capitals. By SEEING I don't mean looking at something, as much as perceiving, looking inwards, a feeling with"

(Whitehouse 1956, p.48)

Conclusions

CM® responds to childhood cognitive modalities, which are characterized by a strong sensory and motor dominance, and favours the evolution into more complex creative forms that facilitate personal expression, and also interpersonal relationships. Its practice can therefore improve the physical, mental and emotional development of those who are building their own identity. Through CM® the child learns to know himself and his body and to use it as a means of communication with others. Experiences in CM® can help children respect the space of others and recognize, appreciate and respect differences in the people they come into contact with. Furthermore, as children learn more and develop new skills, their self-esteem increases.

CM® encourages socialization in an interactive environment where children share space while exploring movement together. They move in their own way and gradually learn to observe and accept different responses to movement ideas.

"I would suggest to you that the basic creativity of the human being consists in his working towards his own fullest development, the realizing of his own potentials, the allowing himself to grow. What we create first is ourselves and it is out of ourselves that the producing comes".

(Whitehouse 1956,p.52)

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