The colours of emotions: English as a communicative and social resource in the primary school

Relatore
Prof.ssa Alberta Novello

Laureando
Anna Boschin
n° matr.1237779 / LMLLA

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Abstract

The present thesis will focus on teaching English in the Italian primary school and using picture books as an educational tool. First, this work will outline the situation of teaching English since 1985, going through the significant reforms and regulations that shape the current scenario of English in primary school. The fil rouge of the paper will be the importance of teaching English to pupils since they are infants, analysing the advantages of early exposure to this foreign language and debunking the myth of bilingualism as dangerous for a child's growth. Therefore, it will analyse children's emotional development and use picture books as a valuable resource for teachers from a linguistic perspective and as an instrument to help children develop some social aspects of their life, such as the emotional sphere. Finally, the last part of the thesis will be represented by a Learning Unit focused on the expression of emotions thanks to the use of the picture book *The colour monster* by Anna Llenas and the development of activities based on different educational techniques.

Introduction

The current paper focuses on the child's linguistic and emotional development and the primary school's role in this growth period.

The first chapter presents the historical framework of the laws and reforms that have characterised foreign language teaching in Italy. Starting with the first educational advances derived from the period of the Enlightenment and the following Risorgimento, it then jumps back in time to fascism, which locked up the country's ideas and progress through suffocating nationalism. The timeline then shifts to the 1980s with significant reforms such as Falcucci's Reform and concludes with the latest laws: Moratti's Reform (2003) and Gelmini's Reform (2009). In analysing this entire historical period, it is possible to see how there has been a constant back-and-forth of steps forward and backwards concerning foreign language teaching, especially in primary school. This has happened not only in the programmes and methodologies to be used but also in the type of teacher in charge of transmitting notions (and a good dose of passion) to the youngest learners.

This first section continues with an in-depth look at language acquisition at an early age, highlighting its advantages and attempting to dispel those false myths about bilingualism. For years, it was believed that approaching a foreign language from an early age could be detrimental to children's growth, generating confusion and decreasing valuable resources for learning other subjects. Nevertheless, several studies have shown that this is not the case and that bilingualism has no adverse effects on cognitive development but leads to advantages. This is followed by a brief description of the human brain and its main characteristics. Among the latter, plasticity certainly stands out; the ability to form new neuronal connections leads the brain to adapt quickly and efficiently. Plasticity is essential talking about child development as it peaks during childhood while it loses its fruitfulness with growth. Language acquisition is then analysed, focusing on the first years of life and what are the crucial steps for this to take place in the best possible way.

In the last part of this chapter, the major achievements in the field of language teaching are outlined, first of all, those that have been realised thanks to projects such as ILSSE and Lingue 2000. It then dwells on the role of foreign language teachers and the endless diatribe of whether they should be a specialist or not, explaining the benefits of this expert figure who has now almost completely disappeared in primary schools.

After this first chapter, which lays the foundation for the entire work presented in this thesis, we enter the world of emotions first by giving a definition. However, attributing meaning to this word is only apparently simple when the numerous nuances of the word itself complicate this task.

Starting with Charles Darwin's hypotheses, the adaptive value of emotions concerning the context in which they develop is highlighted, and subsequent studies theorise that they are impulses to act, instinctive reactions in response to certain situations. Emotions are divided into primary and secondary. The former is common to all human beings, and they are expressed through the same facial expression, having an innate component. On the other hand, the latter is the result of the individual's growth and therefore requires time and effort to develop.

Regarding the manifestation of emotions, scholars agree that these are visible from the earliest years of age, in which primary emotions will predominate. The nervous system then produces different responses to emotions, such as physiological or behavioural changes, rather than psychological ones.

Human being possesses different types of intelligence, including emotional intelligence. The latter reacts instinctively and can be independent of rational intelligence, thus leading individuals to act without real awareness of their actions. Crucial is the balance between the two types of mindsets.

If emotions make their first appearance during childhood, it is, therefore, essential to recognise and manage one's feelings from an early age. Obviously, at first, it requires the help of an adult, the parent, who patiently guides the child to recognise and accept different emotions, including negative ones, through open and constructive dialogue. However, this role is not only played by parents but also by teachers, who, in the most critical years of development, are expected to accompany their pupils in all educational aspects, including the emotional one. An excellent ally in this can be the picture book which, through its close relationship between pictures and text, makes it possible to address any subject with young readers. Far from being a simple book with pictures, the illustrated book has specific characteristics and functions responsible for the child's first approach to reading. It strengthens the bond between child and parent as it is necessary for the adult to read to the child, and it is precisely in this peculiarity that one of its educational values is hidden. The child's necessity to listen to the story and the reading

aloud performed by the adult represents a continuous exchange of experiences, in which the former learns about the world by developing language and growing cognitively and emotionally. The parent also learns something in this process: the ability to listen to their child or student as they express their thoughts or emotions, guiding them to understand them properly.

While the picture book represents a highly fruitful educational tool for the child's overall growth, its natural and primary function remains pleasure. Through pictures, whether or not accompanied by words, the child enters a fantasy world, travels, learns and dreams.

The third chapter presents the different teaching methodologies and techniques used during English lessons. It should not be forgotten that, especially with children, learning must be enjoyable; it must be free of barriers or any affective filter that might jeopardise the acquisition of a new language. English, being a novelty for the youngest students, fascinates them from the beginning. However, its opacity can make it just as hostile and hated. It is the teacher's job to ensure that this does not happen by employing a series of strategies to make each lesson as engaging as it is fruitful from a learning perspective. Through diversified activities, the teacher should be prepared to change and modulate themselves according to the pupils in front of them. In this way, they will be able to meet with the favour of each type of student, from those more inclined to kinaesthetic intelligence to those more tied to the linguistic and verbal dimension.

This section continues with a part on the objectives to be achieved at the end of primary school, which concern the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In this sense, there is a correspondence between what is stated in the *National Indication for the kindergarten curriculum and the first education cycle* and what is stipulated by the *Common European Framework Reference for Languages* for level A1.

Ultimately, a Learning Unit is presented that corresponds to a practical and personal project I carried out at the school where I work. Starting with reading the picture book *The colour monster* by the Spanish author and illustrator Anna Llenas, I developed a learning path with my 2nd-grade students. Together with the protagonist of this story, we explored five emotions: happiness, sadness, anger, fear, and calm. Through different activities with a playful-laboratory angle, the children could learn not only the specific vocabulary of the topic in English, but also explore their inner selves, making themselves

a little more aware of their emotions and importance. It was a space dedicated to listening to oneself and others, in which English was the main communicative tool.

Chapter I

English in Primary School: a story of reforms, false beliefs, and small achievements

1.1 Reforms and regulations: the history of teaching English

The age of Enlightenment gave Europe a solid incentive to reform and improve the educational system in most of the countries of the Old Continent, including Italy. The house of Savoy quickly understood that to achieve the right of knowledge for everyone, people had to be able to read and write; to do that, schools should not be a Church's monopoly, but they should be completely laic. In 1788 the first public laic school dedicated to the education of teachers was born in Milan. Moreover, in this new idea of school, another step away from the clerical influence was made in the linguistic area. Indeed, before the significant changes that characterised France and then Europe during the XVIII century, Latin was the principal and prominent language taught in Italy. Following the French reformations, Italian became the cultural tongue of our country, strong of the support of the Accademia della Crusca and the flourishing of Italian Literature. Latin was also dismissed for its role as the international lingua franca that the French now occupied, used by the aristocracy and the upper class and merchants. This asset of the Italian school remained nearly untouched during the century, especially with Napoleon's empire.

Only in 1861, with the newborn Kingdom of Italy, our country promulgated a reform named Legge Casati. With this document, the Minister of Public Education Casati underlined the State's will to replace the role of the Catholic Church in education. Then, it introduced compulsory and free schooling for the elementary school years. Regarding teaching foreign languages, the Legge Casati stated that French was the only foreign language for schools with a classic preparation, the ones that would form the ruling class; English and German were taught only during the last three years of the technical schools. However, how those languages were imparted was not so effective. The textbooks were divided into two sections: one dedicated to rules and paradigms, and the second focused on translating minimal and disjointed phrases. The result of this was programs constituted by "[…] mere lists of phonological, morphological and syntactic topics […][1]".

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[1] "[…] mere liste di argomenti fonologici, morfologici e sintattici […]" from Balboni P. E., *Storia dell'educazione linguistica in Italia*, Novara, UTET Università, 2009, p. 25.

On paper, this reform had all the good intentions to be a real innovation on the educational subject, but its implementation was insufficient and too sporadic to mark a significant change.

Another step towards the education system as we know it now was made during Giolitti's government, in which the elementary school teachers increased their awareness about their fundamental role in the literacy policy. Their salary was raised, and more attention was paid to their educational background because, for the first time, they needed to graduate from normal public school to teach.

Furthermore, Giolitti's age marked an improvement in the matter of foreign languages. After World War I, the previous distinction between classical and modern languages gave space to a more familiar separation: the national language and the *straniera* one – from Latin *extraneus,* which means from outside, foreign. This subject acquired slightly more importance in secondary schools, where it was taught using a very different approach from the one described previously in the Legge Casati. Thus, the written material used to learn a different language from Italian – they could be French, English or German – was made of whole texts and not minimal phrases. The aim was not the mere translation but the global comprehension of what was read to explain it in Italian.

All these small steps were erased in the following years with the so-called "bonifica della scuola" in 1934. To understand this act of total decontamination in the educational system, drawing the Italian historical scenario of that period is essential.
The peace that the European States had conquered with much sorrow at the end of the Great World in 1918 was too brief. Right after the Treaty of Versailles, one of the leading figures of the following years in Germany started to create his path to power: Adolf Hitler. Leader of the Nazi Party, he increasingly gained popularity until he obtained complete control of his country, becoming the Führer. The rest is a well-known and sad story. In the same period, another key person of the Second World War was the Italian dictator, Benito Mussolini. The *Duce*, allied with Hitler not only on the battlefield but also in the shared ideology regarding anti-Semitism and race, started to create a country where he had control over everything, from the economic and social policy to the educational area. Thus, in 1923, a year after the March on Rome, the Gentile Reform was promulgated by the homonymous Minister of Education in Mussolini's first cabinet. The main changes of this document were made concerning elementary school since the compulsory age of

schooling was raised to 10 years, and more specific programs were designed. Though the change mentioned above could lead to a positive evaluation of the Gentile Reform, it constituted a considerable setback in the matter of the foreign languages: they completely disappeared. Nothing different from Italian and Latin was taught at school following Mussolini's policy of autarchy in which the focus was on the national tongue and culture. As Balboni stated in his work (2009), "[…] the idea behind [this move] is that Italian is the Latin of the XIX century; likewise, the Fascist empire is the Roman empire of the XIX century[2]".

The post-Fascism brought a glimmer of light to the matter of teaching foreign languages. During the next two decades, the number of hours dedicated to this subject increased considerably, starting from the now-called secondary school of first grade to the primary one. At that moment, one issue of the reforms plan in the educational area was the inadequate competence of the teachers, especially regarding a second language. Keeping this in mind, the Minister of Public Education Aldo Moro and his successor Giuseppe Medici started a renewal and an update of foreign language teachers. Alongside these changes, the aftermath witnessed a revived interest in England and the United States so much that English courses could be found in some secondary schools. In addition, Moro and Medici's work also focused on the methodology used to teach a second language. It was clear that on this matter, Italy was dreadfully underdeveloped. Once again, the re-opening toward internationality helped the country to evolve on this, and as a result, the country moved from a formalistic approach to a communicative one, in which the oral dimension acted as a master.

In those years, there was a great impetus in the glottodidactics area. Many studies were published in which the guideline was the learning based on the natural sequence: listen, speak, read, and write. The idea was that the second language should be strictly linked to an instrumental purpose, the communicative one, and not be just a school subject. In 1975 a group of linguistic experts and teachers, known by the acronymous GISCEL (*Gruppo di Intervento e Studio nel Campo dell'Educazione Linguistica*), wrote and promoted a collective text entitled *Dieci tesi per l'educazione lingusitica democratica*

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[2] "[…] l'idea sottesa è che l'italiano è il latino del Novecento, così come l'impero fascista è l'impero romano del Novecento". Ibid. p. 55.

in which they defined ten fundamental assumptions and guidelines about the linguistic education. This document, in addition to the central role of the verbal language, clearly affirmed the necessity to improve the quality and quantity of the linguistic and educational competencies of future teachers and the duty of the Ministry of Public Education to fill these gaps. From this perspective, it was realised that the heart of the matter was not only the possibility for students to learn a second language at school but also the formation of the teachers in the science of language.

In this period of deep awareness of the need for changes, the Modern Language Project was born in 1967 by the Council of Europe, which explicated the Threshold Levels, starting from the English ones. It was the antecedent of the current *Common European Framework Reference for Languages* (henceforward CEFR), and it set, through a list of communicative functions and notions, the level of mastery that an adult should have to live in a foreign country. Due to this stream of innovations, Italy developed its way to improve the second language teaching status based on a situational method. This is the period of the publications of linguistic experts' studies and the birth of movements aimed at enriching the professional development of language teachers. For the first time, in the 70s, the chair of foreign languages was given to students who graduated from this area and not to people from the economic, law or political science department. The result was an undeniable enhancement in the quality of the teaching of this subject also due to the introduction of the *Progetto Speciale Lingue Straniere (PSLS),* which included sending Italian teachers to the USA, France, and Germany to attend intensive training courses about glottodidactics and methodology. These changes concerned the secondary school majorly but were the foundations for future actions that would also involve the first education cycle, as explained further in this section.

At the beginning of the 80s, it started a period of reforms that directly or indirectly modified the principles of linguistic education and how to apply them to students; the school's history became "turbulent[3]". For this study's aim, only the primary school interventions will be considered and illustrated in detail.

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[3] Adjective translated from the book *Tu riformi…io riformo. La travagliata storia della scuola italiana dall'Unificazione all'ingresso nell'Unione Europea* by Ernesto Bosna (2005)

One of the significant and innovative changes regarding the first education cycle is represented by Falcucci's Reform in 1985, promoted by the Minister of Public Education Franca Falcucci. She was already known for another document she published ten years before about the importance of inclusiveness of students with disability, especially at school. This document was the milestone of all future projects and movements on disability and integration and laid the foundations for the complete abolition of the differential classes. Regarding the 1985 Reform, the ministry introduced the teaching of a second language from the third class of primary school. The subject should be conducted by one of the principal teachers with competence in it or by an expert figure dedicated only to foreign language teaching. In addition, she issued the programs for the primary school, avoiding lists of contents divided for years. The aim was to suggest what a teacher should do, which topics should be faced, and, at the same time, it gave the freedom to choose a unique teaching method. It is interesting to mention some of the main points of these new programs regarding the second language:

- the approach should be based on the "[…] sequence comprehension-assimilation-production […][4]";
- the importance of starting the didactic activity focusing on the oral dimension and only later dealing with the writing skill, "[…] activating [in the students] the awareness of the diversity between the oral code and the written one[5]";
- the use of a playful methodology to learn naturally phonological, lexical and morphosyntactic structures.

With these premises, the pupil would learn another language by studying its use as a communicative instrument, overcoming the old stereotypes that had made grammar and mere translation the centre of the teaching.

After the revolution brought by Falcucci's Programs, the Italian school witnessed two significant reforms that affected especially the first education cycle: Moratti's Reform (2003) and Gelmini's Reform.

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[4]"[…] la sequenza comprensione-assimilazione-produzione […]" from Law n. 104, February 12th, 1985.

[5] "[…] attivando in lui [lo studente] la consapevolezza delle diversità esistenti tra il codice orale e quello scritto." Ibid.

The former was redacted by the Minister of Public Education Letizia Moratti and, regarding the teaching of a second language, it established the learning of English as the only foreign language (henceforward EFL) for a paltry number of hours and conducted by a specialised teacher and not by an expert one. On this matter, it seems essential to quote the *Project of English Education for elementary teachers*[6] (2004), which declared that each class should have its own English teachers instead of one linguistic expert for the entire school. For this reason, many agreements with the University Linguistic Centre were born in order to certificate the achievement of the B1 level by future teachers. Moreover, another setback of Moratti's Reform was the reintroduction of specific indications about the program that the English teachers should follow. These suggestions completely ignored the progress made by the national and international glottodidactics, the content of the CEFR and the opinion of experienced teachers who, in turn, deliberately decided to disregard the new programs. In writing them, it appears clear that they mixed lexical goals with others, not always relevant to the linguistic area such as "accomplish simple calculations[7]".

The latter reform is Gelmini's one promulgated in 2009. It imposed the single teacher again for each class, erasing the figure of the linguistic expert and, regarding secondary school, it abolished the study of a second foreign language besides English became the only non-native tongue learnt at school as it was with French during the XX century.

The primary school, together with the kindergarten and the secondary school of first grade, went through one last renovation about the final goals and competencies to achieve at the end of each of the three cycles. In 2012, the Minister of Public Education Francesco Profumo signed the *National Indication for the kindergarten curriculum and the first cycle of education* in which the aims and skills a student should possess about each school subject are explained. It is not a list of contents that pupils should know at the end of primary school, but its focus is on what they should be able to do and understand in English, on the quality of the learning rather than the quantity. Concerning

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[6] Translation for "Progetto di formazione in inglese per i maestri elementari"

[7] "Eseguire semplici calcoli", from the Law n. 53 March 28th, 2003.

the EFL, the targets are divided into the four macro abilities of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and they refer to the CEFR.

In his work, Balboni (2009) entitled the last chapter *La riforma senza fine*[8]*,* which can be translated as "The endless reform", and in which he described the latest changes, projects and reformations that characterised the Italian school from the 80s to the days of the publication (2009). The title in Italian has a dual significance that is lost in the English translation. The word *fine* can mean "end" and "aim, goal". With this phrase, the author, as he explained in his work, wants to underline the continuous succession of reforms that influenced the school system and the fact that the very same changes seem to lack a general and wider purpose. In this scenario in which the educational aim of the reforms appears to be lost in exchange for a more transparent political target, teachers and students have to navigate through an endless sea without the certainty of a destination.

1.2 Bilingualism: between false beliefs and real advantages

"Since the beginning of the last century, bilingualism has been surrounded by prejudices and lacking information. It was thought that the impact on people's life, led by talking and being exposed to more than one language, would be negative[9]".

For several years, there was the general belief that a child's early exposure to a foreign language could negatively affect its growth; these myths and falseness were and unfortunately still are the bases for theories that aimed to demolish the validity and the advantages of bilingualism.

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[8] Balboni P.E., 2009, op. cit.

[9] "Fin dagli inizi del secolo scorso il bilinguismo è stato circondato da preconcetti e scarsa informazione. Si pensava che l'impatto sulla vita delle persone portato dall'esperienza di parlare ed essere esposti a più di una lingua sarebbe stato decisamente negativo." from Crescentini C. *et al., Competenza e disturbi di linguaggio nel plurilinguismo* in *EL.LE*, Vol. 1, n.3, 2012, p. 540.

Focusing on the Italian situation, it is important to remember that until the 70s, some pedagogies, especially those related to the catholic area, were firmly against teaching a foreign language before the age of 11 (before that age, the learning was considered "early"). The reasons behind this conviction are found in some papers published at the beginning of the XX century that described the psychological discomfort and lack in the linguistic area of children who spoke a different language from their mother tongue from the very beginning of their life. This was considered a threat to the balanced development of the child's personality. Furthermore, there was also the tendency to believe that the early learning of a foreign language was not worth it because it would lead to a superficial proficiency achieved in both languages compared to the monolingual one. Moreover, for years, there was the conviction that "[…] learning two languages could cause a cognitive effort for the infant's brain, or that it might steal space and resources for general cognitive development[10]".

In addition, there were studies and experts in this field that supported this theory. One of them was the German teacher F. Jahn who asserted that learning two languages would not bring a good knowledge of both but would cause mental confusion in the pupils because every language offers a different point of view of the world.

Another prominent voice who expressed his thoughts on this subject was the Danish linguist Otto Jespersen. He affirmed, apart from what was described previously, that the mental effort to learn and speak two different tongues would diminish the resources usable for studying the other school's subjects.

Later in the XX century, much research was conducted to compare monolingual and bilingual children's intellectual and cognitive development. Since those studies aimed to prove the negative effects of early bilingual education, the results sustained and confirmed all the theories described in this section. Nevertheless, a further investigation showed some significant methodological mistakes made during the examination process.

Approximately at the same time, the Canadian neurosurgeon Wilder Graves Penfield had sided in favour of bilingual education. He experienced in his personal life the differences between the learning of a non-native tongue during childhood and

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[10] "Imparare due lingue richieda uno sforzo cognitivo per il cervello del bambino piccolo, o che due lingue tolgano spazio e risorse allo sviluppo cognitivo generale." from Burelli A. *et al.*, *Crescere con più lingue*, ARLEF, 2013, p. 13.

adulthood. Indeed, in high school, he studied three languages, but he could speak just one of them, with some difficulties and a foreign accent. On the contrary, his children, who had studied German and French in addition to their mother tongue, English, could speak fluently in all of them from an early age. He questioned himself to understand the reasons behind this disparity and concluded that the explanation was based on the different brain plasticity. As will be described thoroughly in this chapter, this characteristic of the human cerebrum is, according to Penfield, higher during childhood; therefore, it is the best period to learn a second language.

To withstand this theory scientifically, psychologist Wallace Lambert conducted some studies to verify if a bilingual education caused actual adverse effects. The result was that bilingualism does not significantly impact children's intellectual development. Bilingual kids, under similar conditions, are not more or less intelligent than monolingual fellows[11] and "they will be less affected by the cognitive decline connected to aging[12]". At the same time, two Italian linguists, Renzo Titone and Giuseppe Francescato, concluded that an early immersion into two languages would encourage the acquisition of other populations' traditions, cultures, and mindsets.

As Fabbro (2004) stated in his work "[…] All these studies allowed to definitely expose the negative prejudices against the children's early bilingual education[13]".

At this point, it seems appropriate to investigate further the main responsible for learning the language: the brain. The following paragraph will describe this organ and its most important functions in the linguistic area.

1.2.1 The brain and its main characteristics concerning language

From a very neurobiological point of view,

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[11] Fabbro F., *Neuropedagogia delle lingue*, Roma, Astrolabio – Ubaldini Editore, 2004, p. 113.

[12] Fabbro F., Cargnelutti E., *Neuroscienze del bilinguismo. Il farsi e disfarsi delle lingue*, Roma, Astrolabio – Ubaldini Editore, 2018, p.28.

[13] "[…] l'insieme di queste ricerche ha quindi permesso di smascherare definitivamente i pregiudizi negativi contrari all'educazione bilingue precoce dei bambini." Fabbro F., op. cit., p. 114.

"The brain is the most complex organ in the human body. It is responsible for thoughts, language, memory, emotions, and perception of the world through the senses of hearing, vision, touch, taste, and smell. Knowledge of the brain and neurological processes is vital to understanding cognition, communication, and language for speech-language pathologists, special education teachers, and professionals concerned with language and learning[14]".

Humans can express themselves and learn languages thanks to the nervous system responsible for these functions. Therefore, at this point of the present section, it is essential to give a general presentation of the brain, its constituents and development.

In the nervous system, there are neurons which are cells linked to each other through the synapses; they are also the main component of the nervous tissue, which in turn is one of the components of the nervous system. The nerve cells are able to receive, elaborate and then transmit signals. This system is divided into two main parts, the central nervous system (henceforward CNS) and peripheral nervous system (PNS). The former is responsible for mobility and sensibility and influences the different metabolic activities; it is formed by the spinal cord, the centre of the motion's activities, and the encephalon, which resigns the brain itself and other components responsible for the sensations and coordination of movements.

Important for the aim of this paper is the thalamus, one of the constituents of the brain; it can be represented as a station and the different rails are the sensory signals that have to be processed. In particular, it influences the cycle of sleep-alertness, and it controls the emotions that are produced by other parts of the brain (what is called the limbic system). Concerning the brain specifically, it is divided into two main parts, called hemispheres: the right one and the left one. Both are similar in shape, but what differentiates the two sides is the distribution of the functions processed by each. Though it is not entirely correct to talk about a net division of assignments between the two sides, studies have proved that the left hemisphere is responsible for the comprehension and

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[14] Brice A. E., Brice R. G., *Language Development: Monolingual and Bilingual Acquisition,* Boston, Allyn & Bacon, 2009, p. 3.

production of speech and some of the language functions such as grammar, vocabulary and meaning. However, the right hemisphere is important for the emotional and pragmatic aspects of language; it is also specialised in processing everything regarding vision and elaboration of images. It is crucial to underline that, even if the brain is divided into two hemispheres, these work in a very tight "collaboration", and most cognitive processes are distributed across both sides.

One of the most significant characteristics of the brain is its plasticity and its fundamental role in the issue of acquisition of a language, both for the mother tongue and the foreign one. This brain ability consists of forming new neural connections throughout life and changing the existing connection to respond to a new sensory stimulation; this leads the brain to adapt itself very quickly and effectively. Of course, plasticity has a direct implication in acquiring a new language and the issue of the advantages of early bilingualism since this ability has its zenith during the first years of life.

Another important brain function is memory, and it also regards the acquisition of a language. There are two main types of memory: long-term memory and short-term memory. The former, in turn, is divided into the implicit memory, responsible for the casual acquisition of cognitive, phonological, and morphosyntactic procedures that are used intuitively. The other type is the explicit one, formed by the information that the person has consciously learnt. The last memory, as its name suggests, is a storage of pieces of information that remain there for a relatively short time, about 30 seconds. As for the long-term, this memory can be divided into several parts. The so-called working memory is the most approved model by the scientific community. Three different components constitute it:

- The central executive is responsible for the control and regulation of the processes present in the short-term memory. It also has the function of recovering and organising the explicit part of the long-term memory, making the two different memories work together;
- the phonological loop that stores the auditory information which needs to be repeated internally in order to stay memorised;
- the episodic buffer in which the multisensorial inputs are gathered for a few minutes, waiting to be embedded into the long-term memory.

Knowing this model and its functions are important because several research studies have shown a link between working memory and bilingualism. The studies conducted with a group of bilingual children and a group of monolingual children have proven that former members have a more effective memory due to the constant need to control two different language systems. Some experts added that the working memory of a bilingual child is more extended than the monolingual's one, which leads to the conclusion that the early exposition to two languages "may not enhance working memory at large, but it may improve certain aspects of it[15]".

1.2.2 The acquisition of language

In addition to the description of the brain, its functions and its role in language, it appears fundamental to analyse how a tongue, especially a non-native one, is acquired.

From the very beginning of life, children begin to learn the mother tongue by absorbing the auditive inputs from the context in which they live. Then they start to repeat what they hear. The process of acquisition of the language follows these steps:

- The prelinguistic stage (the first year of life): consists of eye contact with the parents, smiles and the orientation toward interesting sounds; eventually, by the end of this period, the newborn says the first words.
- The word-phrase stage (12-18 months): in this phase, the child starts to build its vocabulary, comprehending and saying new words.

During these two steps, it has been shown that "bilingual children develop language skills just as other children do[16]" and that "there is no evidence that an infant who is exposed to

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[15] Noelia Calvo, Agustín Ibáñez, Adolfo M. García, *The impact of bilingualism on working memory: a null effect on the whole may not be so on the parts*, 2016, in *Frontiers in Psychology* n.7, p. 3.

[16] Gauthier C., *Language Development in Bilingual Children,* Illinois, in *Research Papers,* 2012, n. 210, p. 8.

two languages in the home will, in comparison with children living in a monolingual environment, be delayed in any way concerning the production of his or her first word[17]".

Nevertheless, there are some differences during the process of acquisition of the language in a bilingual context, as it is presented hereinafter:

- Stage 1: it lasts from birth to the second year, in which the children express themselves with sentences of one or two elements. During this first period, the lexical system is one for both languages; thus, the terms are used indiscriminately.
- Stage 2: children begin to be aware that there are two languages, two words for everything, but they still do not understand when it is appropriate to use one particular tongue rather than the other, and for this reason, they resort to both. "As the child's awareness of the distinction between the two systems increases, the number of these double-barrelled terms will decrease[18]".
- Stage 3: children speak the two languages with a reasonable awareness of the different vocabulary and syntax.

The basis for developing this acquisition process is the quantity and quality of the children's exposure to these languages. If one of the two tongues is significantly less used, the child will not have the same vocabulary for both. Therefore, the child will build a barrier, called the affective filter, that will not allow him or her to effectively acquire that specific tongue. The same could happen if the relationship with the parent who speaks that language is damaged or not positive.[19]

In addition to the subject of linguistic acquisition, it seems vital to describe the critical period hypothesis:

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[17] Saunders G., *Bilingual children: from birth to teens,* Philadelphia, Multilingual Matters Ltd, 1988, p. 51.

[18] Ibid. p. 55.

[19] Fabbro F., Cargnelutti E., 2018, op. cit.

"This represents a specific age after which the learning process becomes challenging and the achieved performance in the second language hardly equals that one of the native or first language[20]".

This theory is now well-established and accepted by the expert in this field, and it presents three specific critical periods:

- First period (from 0 to 3 years): with consistent and continuous exposure, it is the best moment for the correct learning of pronunciation and linguistic skills of a foreign language[21];
- Second period (4-8 years): a non-native tongue could still be acquired with high results in terms of fluency, but it will require more mental effort[22];
- Third period or sensitive period (9-22 years): there are still solid neurological potentials to develop good linguistic competence but the morphosyntactic and accent interferences of the mother tongue increase even more[23].

Given what has been described so far, it appears clear that early learning of a second language is possible and advantageous for good linguistic acquisition.

"Up to this age [0-3 years], in fact, children acquire skills through implicit memory, therefore in an almost unconscious way. These skills are easily internalised and automatically applied[24]".

In order to properly use the excellent resource that is the human brain regarding learning a foreign language, there should be a turnaround in how a non-native tongue is perceived and taught in every educational environment, from the family to the school.

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[20] Cargnelutti E. *et al*., *Language Brain Representation in Bilinguals with Different Age of Appropriation and Proficiency of the Second Language: A Meta-Analysis of Functional Imaging Studies*, in *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 2019, Vol.13, n.154, p. 2.

[21] Balboni P. E., *Le sfide di babele*, Novara, UTET Università, 2015, p. 89.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Cargnelutti *et al*., op. cit., p.2.

Regarding bilingual education, Fabbro (2018) describes some language acquisition modes that may interest those who wonder when and how best to introduce a child to a non-native language. The author identifies four modes[25]:

1. language acquired in the family environment: it is the parents themselves who use both languages indiscriminately;

2. one-person-one-language: "each parent talks to the child in their mother tongue[26]";

3. use one language until the age of 6 and introduce the second later;

4. using the mother tongue in the family while the second is learnt at school.

A fundamental principle unites these different methods: "the child must use both languages in everyday life[27]". Indeed, the sporadic use of the second language or its teaching through rules does not allow its proper and effective development. The following section will depict the already reached goals and future projects and aims that should be achieved on this subject.

1.3 Reached goals and future achievements

The current situation of ELT has significantly improved compared to the last century. If some goals have been reached, it is also due to the realisation of some linguistic projects.

The first one that deserves mention in this paper is the ILSSE project created in 1977. Renzo Titone, a pioneer of Applied Psycholinguistics, was the promoter and national director of this experimentation that introduced second language teaching at primary school. He expressed the necessity of strengthening the learning of foreign languages due to the inadequate Italian results regarding the linguistic abilities that were

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[25] Fabbro F., Cargnelutti E., 2018, op. cit.

[26] "[…] ogni genitore parla col figlio la propria madrelingua" Ibid., p. 30.

[27] "[…] il bambino deve utilizzare entrambe le lingue nella vita di ogni giorno" Ibid, p.31.

"far below the standards of the other developed countries[28]". The consequence of those insufficient findings was the inability of new generations to move, work and compete with other European young adults.

The project involved children from the first grade to the fifth of elementary school and teachers who willingly decided to participate. Regarding this latter group, a discussion was started about which one should be part of the experimentation. The heart of the matter was whether to admit all the volunteer teachers or just those who could ensure sufficient mastery of the foreign language. Eventually, not to dismay the educator's enthusiasm and desire for innovation, the former part won. Nevertheless, these teachers' lack of knowledge could not be ignored anymore, especially in the project's third year. The difference between a well-trained professor and someone with a basic linguistic education was striking also on the children's results. Those who had a teacher expert on this subject had a wider vocabulary and quick comprehension.

Despite everything, the ILSSE project was a success, and the direct consequence was the introduction of the teaching of a second language in the years of primary school through Falcucci's Reform in 1985.

In 1997, the Minister of Public Education, Luigi Berlinguer, approved and supported a new activity to enhance foreign language learning: the project *Lingue 2000*. The government detected the reason for making this proposal in the fact that

"[…]it is not furtherly tolerable for the Italian society that our pupils are so severely penalised with respect to their European peers[29]".

Therefore, the aim of the project was for students to develop communicative skills both in oral production and written one through the continuous learning of a second language from kindergarten to high school. The addressees were small groups of students with a shared linguistic level. The professional resources were found in schoolteachers,

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[28] "[…] al di sotto delle medie dei Paesi più sviluppati" from Titone R., *Un progetto speciale per l'introduzione dell'insegnamento delle lingue straniere nelle scuole elementari*, in Annali della Pubblica Istruzione, n. 1, 1978, p. 4.

[29] "Non è ulteriormente sopportabile per la società italiana che i nostri allievi siano così fortemente penalizzati rispetto ai propri pari europei" from Law n. 440, December 12th, 1997.

for whom a refresher plan was scheduled, and in external educators for extra activities regarding the foreign language. As Fabbro (2004) pointed out in his work, the time spent practising, listening, and using this language is fundamental for accurate and effective learning. He suggested that the goal should be a complete immersion in the language and that the focus should not be on teaching it but on using it as a communicative tool. Regarding this, the solution could be its application not only during the classes dedicated to the foreign language but also during lessons of other subjects, such as History, Science, and Art. This particular second language use is an actual methodology called CLIL (*Content and Language Integrated Learning*). A deeper explanation will be reserved in the third chapter of this work.

One of the most interesting points of the project is the focus on starting the experience from the beginning of schooling, the kindergarten. Accordingly to what has been asserted and described in this work, the government sustained and promoted the belief that early education in a foreign language was the key to better and more effective learning. Thereby, it made some proposals for teaching programs divided into the different cycles of studies keeping in mind the levels set by the CEFR. Regarding preschool and primary school, the emphasis should be on the oral dimension with an increasing awareness of the English[30] phonological aspect, which is the first hurdle students meet in their linguistic education.

Another central point was the idea that expert teachers should fulfil the role of educators in this project and at school and not specialised ones. This is a talking point also in the current situation. Maria Cecilia Luise (2012), professor at the Florence University, has made an important question:

> "Is it possible to force a teacher to be educated in English both on the linguistic and methodological aspects and at the same time have a reasonable certainty that he or she would become a high-quality English professor?[31]"

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[30] The project *Lingue 200* indicated English as the priority language to teach due to its predominant role in the ordinary life and in the field of innovation and new technologies.

[31] "Si può obbligare un insegnate a formarsi in inglese dal punto di vista linguistico e metodologico e avere nello stesso tempo la ragionevole certezza che questo diventi un insegnate

One of the results of the combined action of Moratti's Reform first and then Gelmini's was the disappearance of the English expert in the primary school. This figure was a person who chose to dedicate their entire professional career teaching only this subject, having a strong motivation and a specific preparation. This is a very different background from the other teachers who view English as an additional subject in the timetable. During the years, the government tried to fill the gaps of the new graduates from Primary Education Science by including in their curriculum some English exams, but, as Professor Luise pointed out, these are not enough and cannot be comparable to the competencies acquired from a foreign language bachelor's degree. Additionally, the specialist teacher, having to organise only the English lessons, can spend more time in refresher courses about the specific methodologies of teaching this second language. Moreover, they can constantly "[…] dedicate themselves to maintain their linguistic and communicative skills in ETL[32]".

Although these considerations, in primary school, the linguistic expert has almost wholly disappeared, and the government is forcing schools to do it. At this point, a question springs to mind: why is the specialist teacher requested in the secondary schools and not in the lower levels of education? Whoever wants to become an English – or another second language – professor in high schools must have a specific degree in foreign languages. It is unclear why there is this difference between the two cycles of studies. Research have corroborated the idea, also sustained in this thesis, that it is fundamental to start a non-native tongue from a very early age, and it is equally important to teach it at a high level. It has been thoroughly proven that a correct linguistic learning is essential from the very beginning, especially regarding the oral dimension that includes an almost flawless pronunciation and absence of a national accent. Is it possible for a non-specialist teacher to teach English at this level? Or should this subject be handled by someone who has, for example, extensively learnt the phonological aspect of the

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di lingua di alta qualità?" from Luise M.C., *Insegnamento delle lingue straniere nella scuola primaria: i riferimenti normativi e gli aspetti organizzativi*, in *Educare i bambini alla lingua inglese* (a cura di Santipolo M.), Novara, Pensa MultiMedia Editore, 2012, p. 61.

[32] "[…] possono dedicarsi al mantenimento delle competenze linguistiche e comunicative in LS" Ibid. p. 62.

language? To a person who can teach a child the correct pronunciation of the simple word *birthday* (with the unvoiced 'th' /θ/) to not mispronounce it (*birthday* with the voiced 'th' the /ð/) for its entire life? Experts, researchers, even teachers and professors know the answer, but the power of decision does not belong to them. The government should recognise the vital relevance of fine quality of ETL from the kindergarten because "[…] teachers not linguistically perfect can teach, among joy and amusement, mistakes difficult to eradicate[33]". The politicians who had ruled in one of the latest decree-laws regarding education that specialists should teach P.E. in primary schools with a bachelor's in this field should do the same for English.

It is important to remember that Italy is part of a wider community, and the learning of one or more foreign languages makes Italians part of this entity, as was beautifully declared in the project *Lingue 2000*:

"The construction of European citizenship goes through the comprehension of the difference of lifestyles, cultural traditions, values, and attitudes that characterise the States of the European Union. Familiarising with the cultures that constitute Europe is one of the most worthwhile contributions the school can and must give to form European citizens[34]".

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[33] "[…] gli insegnanti non perfetti linguisticamente possono insegnare, tra gioia e gioco, errori difficilmente sradicabili." from Fabbro F., 2004, *op. cit.* p. 123.

[34] "La costruzione di una cittadinanza europea passa attraverso la comprensione della varietà di modi di vita, tradizioni culturali, valori, atteggiamenti che connotano i paesi dell'Unione europea. Una familiarizzazione con le culture che compongono il quadro dell'Europa dei popoli è uno dei contributi più produttivi che la scuola può e deve dare per la formazione dei cittadini europei." Law 440, 1997, *op. cit.*

Chapter II

The picture book and its role in the emotional development of a child

2.1 Emotion: definition, development, and intelligence

All people, every day, are confronted with emotions. However, if they were to define them, they would find themselves in difficulty. 'Emotion' has many nuances and encompasses all the feelings and moods with their variations. A dictionary search yields this definition:

> "A conscious mental reaction (such as anger or fear) subjectively experienced as a strong feeling usually directed toward a specific object and typically accompanied by physiological and behavioural changes in the body[35]".

Furthermore, the same dictionary shows that the word derives from the Latin *emovēre*, which means 'to move towards'.

Some important aspects emerge from this definition to give meaning to the term emotion:

- Emotions as something that trigger a physiological response.
- Emotion as a reaction.

Therefore, emotions are a reaction to a stimulus, a responding behaviour, which generates a response involving a change in the organism.

One of the first researchers to examine emotions based on animal biological studies was Charles Darwin in *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872). In this book, he formulated the hypothesis that many facial expressions of emotions had an adaptive meaning from an evolutionary point of view. With this perspective, he emphasises the adaptive value of emotions regarding the activation of the organism to perform in respect to the context, to emit an immediate behavioural response for survival. After his biological studies, he concludes by stating that the facial expression[36] of emotions is an adaptive function, the result of evolution, biologically

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[35] Merriam-Webster online dictionary.

[36] He was the first to study facial expressions from real faces and no longer from paintings.

innate and universal, and an essential communicative tool. Thus, for Darwin, emotions are essential for the adaptation and survival of the species.

Many studies have been conducted so far regarding this topic, and almost a century after Darwin's results, Goleman (1996) states that emotions are impulses to act, action plans to handle the many situations in life[37]. Indeed, many studies have shown that emotions are a response to an unexpected event that facilitates or hinders the realisation of personal goals.

As many studies have done so far, describing the division between the so-called primary and secondary emotions appears fundamental. The psychologist Paul Ekman, who based his study on Darwin's theory, made this partition.

The primary emotions are also labelled as simple and shared by all individuals of the human species, such as fear, anger, happiness, sadness, surprise, and disgust. They manifest themselves through the same facial expressions known as mimic patterns[38] worldwide. Therefore, they have an innate component. Ekman developed an encyclopaedia of emotions called the *Facial Actions Coding System* (FACS), which describes and classifies facial expressions by combining 44 units of facial movements. According to this FACS, Ekman identifies nine criteria to establish which emotion can be defined as primary.

On the other hand, secondary emotions are also defined as complex emotions resulting from evolution, such as pride, guilt, shame, envy, jealousy, or embarrassment. These emotions require experience and cognitive, communicative, and social development. Thus, secondary emotions originate in self-consciousness, they need reflection on oneself, and therefore they only appear from 18 months onwards.

Regarding the appearance of emotions, there are two opposing theories, namely the differential theory, which states that emotions are influenced by growth factors, and the differentiation theory, which affirms that emotions develop from an undifferentiated state. The first theory abovementioned declares that emotions are independent of other development: they appear following a predefined, innate programme in each person.

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[37] Goleman D., *Emotional Intelligence*, New York, Bantam Books, 2006 (first edition in 1995).

[38] Patterns are the set of muscles involved in facial expression, their position and movement.

On the contrary, the differentiation theory argues that emotions originate from a state of activation in which infants find themselves, from which, progressively, emotions differentiate. They emerge when cognitive and social development enables the child to assess a situation and understand the consequences. So, this progress is influenced by social and cognitive skills that the individual possesses and from the child's experience too.

In addition to what has been described hereinbefore, there are two different mindsets regarding the connection between emotions and cognitive evaluation. The first one states that it is the evaluation of the situation that triggers an emotional response, whereas the second one affirms that a stimulus triggers an emotional reaction without cognitive evaluation. These two different ways of thinking indicate the two pathways underlying the emotional response: a more rapid and immediate pathway and a slower one[39].

On the one hand, the faster process involves the subcortical circuit, a region of the brain that includes the thalamus and the amygdala. The latter organ, located above the brain stem, is the seat of emotional matters and does the work of memorising and learning. Thus, it functions as an emotional memory store. This circuit recognises and evaluates the stimulus received rapidly and unconsciously, triggering an immediate reaction. There is no cognitive processing of the stimulus, but the organism is alerted, and the individual is prepared to act.

On the other hand, the slower pathway activates the cortical circuit, which involves the cerebral cortex starting cognitive processes. Consequently, there is a processing of the stimulus. Depending on the cognitive evaluation, there will be an emotional response.

As said previously, emotions are reactions to inputs that prompt people to act. Human beings perceive emotions as they realise that their body is in a state of alteration. The nervous system can produce distinct answers:

- Physiological responses: they change the functioning of some organs, such as altering the heartbeat, and the respiratory rate, changing the conductance of the skin, hence redness or pallor.

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[39] Schaffer R. H., *Psicologia dello sviluppo,* Milano, Raffaello Cortina Editore, 2005.

- Behavioural responses: they modify behaviour, and they are differentiated into two types:
    o Tonic-postural responses: changes in posture and tone of voice are produced.
    o Motor responses: emotion induces a motor response, i.e. it prepares for attack, flight or absence of bodily movement, hence immobility. It also activates facial muscles causing facial expressions.
- Psychological response: the nervous system activates the experiential component through an emotional answer. The amygdala will remember 'what to respond to' if a similar stimulus arrives.

It seems clear that the responses triggered by a stimulus are observable since it is possible to interpret the signals and understand what someone else is feeling. For example, it can be easily noticed if there is a change in the individual's tone of voice, posture, or sweating. Though, it will not always be simple to gather all the signs, as the other person may try to mask the reactions of the various emotions and thus cover up the different responses.

It must be said that the human body's reactions also depend on the individual's emotional experience. People with many negative experiences will be more sensitive to dangerous stimuli. Consequently, a fear reaction will be triggered more easily. Although there is a personal component in an individual's emotional response, it is interesting to describe some common traits that could appear in every person who deals with a specific emotion.

One of the primary emotions is happiness, which is the state of general well-being, a pleasant feeling. Goleman describes that when people are happy, their body activates a brain centre which inhibits negative feelings and increases their available energy. Happiness allows the body to relax, making it receptive, willing, and enthusiastic toward any task or work required.

In contrast, fear is the emotion that prepares a person for attack or escape. When an individual finds themselves in a situation of potential danger, a signal is sent to the amygdala, which alarms the rest of the body by triggering a flow of stress hormones such as adrenalin and noradrenalin, and cortisol. This process puts the body in a state of

alertness that allows the person to react faster, preparing them for action by mobilising the movement centres and activating the cardiovascular system. Furthermore, there are some changes in the body, such as the increase in sweating, the acceleration of the heart and respiratory rate, the redness or pallor caused by a difference in blood circulation, and muscle contraction. Some of these biological changes also occur when the human being experiences anger, which results in an energy rise.

Although it is essential to know what an emotion is and what are the mental and physical consequences of experiencing a particular feeling, it is also fundamental to describe a crucial concept for emotional development: emotional intelligence.

2.1.1 The emotional intelligence

Many studies have stated that human beings have multiple types of intelligence; one of the pioneers on this subject is Howard Gardner.

The American psychologist disagreed with the classification made until then by IQ tests that divided people into intelligent and unintelligent. In 1983, Gardner published his work *Formae mentis*, which theorised that there were more than two categories and, consequently, more than one type of intelligence. He identified and described seven of them:

1. verbal-linguistic: it is the propensity for listening and verbal and written production, the reflection on language and its structures and the ability to vary the linguistic register as required;

2. mathematica-logical: it is the ability to analyse problems logically and investigate issues scientifically;

3. visual-spatial: it is the ability to recognise and use space and related areas, it involves a high memory for the details of the environment, and it is mainly manifested in the creation of figurative arts;

4. bodily-kinesthetic: it is the ability to use one's own body or parts thereof to know and learn about the world around;

5. musical: it is the ability to recognise and compose melodies, play one or more instruments and modulate one's voice from a singing point of view. This

intelligence, due to the tendency to recognise structures in general, also flows into the domain of mathematics;

6. interpersonal: it is the ability to understand the intentions, motivations and desires of other people; group work is practical for this type of intelligence;

7. intrapersonal: it is the ability to reflect on one's individuality, to be aware of one's feelings and to be able to express them correctly, using them to achieve particular aims.[40]

If the first two types of intelligence are the more classic and are found mainly in the school context, the following five are new but equally fundamental. However, the key word is 'multiple', which Gardner accompanies his theory on intelligence. Indeed, the psychologist argues that an individual is not necessarily limited to one type of intelligence but can also develop more than one. Furthermore, mentioning 'only' seven kinds of intelligence was an arbitrary choice since, according to Gardner and colleagues, the list of types of intelligence can reach up to twenty entries.

Accordingly to this theory, it appears that the word 'intelligence' should be detached from its canonical definition and broaden its horizons towards different types. One of the types of intelligence not examined by Gardner - probably due to the fact that his work was heavily based on cognitive science - but which equals them in importance and credit is emotional intelligence.

Human beings have two minds one that thinks and one that feels. The former is the rational mind, the one that reasons and reflects, whereas the latter is the impulsive one, which acts on instinct. Together they interact and construct the mental life. Moreover, as described earlier, the emotional mind can act independently by the neocortex. So, it can make people sometimes act without being conscious of their actions. The relationship between the two minds, the rational and the emotional, varies continuously, although usually, a state of equilibrium exists. If this balance is disturbed, the emotional mind may take over, resulting in the individual's unawareness regarding

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[40] Gardner H., *Multiple Intelligences: New Horizons in Theory and Practice*, Basic Book, New York, 2006.

his or her actions and inability to think clearly. However, it can also happen that the rational mind controls the response of a person who, in this case, cannot take the best and most thoughtful decision[41].

"[…] Emotional intelligence […] is the ability to motivate oneself […] to control impulses and postpone gratification; to modulate one's moods by preventing suffering that makes us unable to think; and again, the ability to be empathetic and hopeful[42]".

In his work, Goleman also explains that this type of intelligence has various nuances that are classified into five main characteristics:

- Self-awareness: the ability to recognise emotions when they arise and to know how to express them.
- Self-mastery: the ability to control and manage one's emotional manifestations.
- Self-motivation: the ability to delay gratification and suppress impulses in such a way as to achieve goals.
- Empathy: the recognition and understanding of other's feelings; it is fundamental to build healthy social relationships.
- Social skills: the ability to know what behaviour and emotions are appropriate for specific situations.

With the definition and description made by Goleman, it can be deduced that emotional intelligence is a concept that includes several abilities. In the end, it can be explained as the capacity to recognise, understand, and manage personal emotions and those of others.

It appears clear that learning about its own emotions and understanding others is fundamental for human beings, and it is a process that starts at a very early age. Nevertheless, it is not an easy and unhindered development, and in order to accomplish

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[41] Goleman, 2006, op. cit.

[42] Ibid. p. 65

this process, the child needs to be capable of naming their own emotions. About this matter, Cavalli (2012), psychologist and researcher, states:

"If it is true that for a child to understand moods is difficult, it is also true that 'calling emotions' becomes indispensable in order to be able to deal with them but also to share them through multiple channels (storytelling, music, or drawing), which each of us uses in our relational lives[43]".

2.1.2 Children's emotions and their management

A child feels and expresses emotions from birth, along with the development of cognition and the first relationships established with the parents. In this period of growth, the mental capacities are still in their infancy and emotions, at this stage, originate from the body, from the internal state of activation and are manifested through behaviours that indicate the child's state of joy, anger, or fear[44]. Feelings are necessary to establish a secure relationship with the parents, with whom the child enters complete harmony. They learn to recognise their son's needs and requirements by acting as a 'secure base', providing protection and support to the child.

Furthermore, several studies show that it is within the first relationships that the infant learns and develops not only relational but also linguistic, motor, cognitive and emotional skills. Cavalli states that from the second month of life, intersubjective exchanges become increasingly relevant, both in bringing out and regulating emotional states: a smile appears in response to the human voice, and in the third month, the smile is specifically directed to the mother. Thus, at three months, the baby is able to feel anger, sadness, and joy, and later on, with the exploration of the environment, fear appears. During the first years, the child shows the ability to anticipate events or understand

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[43] "Se è vero che per un bambino capire gli stati d'animo è difficile, è anche vero che 'chiamare le emozioni' diventa indispensabile, per poterle affrontare ma anche condividere attraverso molteplici canali (la narrazione, musica, o disegno), che ognuno di noi utilizza nella sua vita di relazione" from Cavalli G., Liverta Sempio O., Marchetti A., *Teoria della mente, metacognizione e emozioni/affetti: quali legami*, Ricerca Psicoanalitica (rivista), n. 3, 2007, pp. 347 -370.

[44] Ibid.

intentions, which shows a relationship between understanding emotion and mental states. Several studies have proved that within the first years of life, the infant can use almost all the facial muscles to manifest emotions and recognise the emotional expressions of adults. This recognition is made by experiencing emotions with caregivers or peers. Whenever the child encounters a new feeling, it is essential that the adult helps him or her to assign a "name" to this unknown state by talking about it and offering a clear and straightforward explanation. The same happens in the relationship with peers, and, once again, the modulation of an adult is fundamental because sometimes it is difficult for a child to understand others' emotions. When these skills are acquired in a basic stage, the baby can start developing empathy; however, this process of recognition of emotions needs time and experience to be assimilated completely.

Regarding how a child manages their own emotions, it has been described previously that the presence of an adult is fundamental. The child is a great observer, so learning to control their emotions is obtained by watching the emotional behaviour of others, understanding the cause of the reaction, and recognising the action as correct if the adult indicates it. If there is a lack of guidance by the grown-up, it could happen that the child shows some behavioural problems, along with social and cognitive issues. Thus, it is necessary to start from the early years to provide education on emotions, their recognition and management.

Therefore, it appears fundamental to mention some techniques that might be helpful for the parents and every person with an educational role in the children's life. These strategies include storytelling, drawings, specific readings on emotions for children, and games on this topic for educational purposes because this process should involve the children, the parents, and the school for a better result. It is possible to use these techniques from childhood onward since they are based on the primary emotions, the specific expressions for each emotion and the adaptive behaviour in response to them. In this way, children are encouraged to reflect on emotions, explain them, use appropriate and specific language, and think about appropriate reactions. So, it is possible to educate and provide the tools necessary to support the development of emotional intelligence with all the abilities it includes.

2.2 Picture book: an all-round treasure

"A picture book is text, illustrations, total design; an item of manufacture and a commercial product; a social, cultural, historical document; and, foremost, an experience for a child. As an art form, it hinges on the interdependence of pictures and words, on the simultaneous display of two facing pages, and on the drama of turning the page. On its own terms, its possibilities are limitless[45]".

From this definition made by the American scholar of picture books Barbara Bader, the complexity and richness of this apparently simple art form seem clear. The composite nature of this type of book might also be deduced as they are both editorial products and are connected to the child's educational dimension. As part of children's literature, picture books have been considered less valuable than other genres. However, the researcher Marcella Terrusi underlines its actual sophistication with a complete and more recent definition:

"The illustrated book is a device endowed with its own specific morphological and functional characteristics, where the languages of writing and illustration, design skills, metaphors and worldviews converge, energies that together contribute to the production of a physical object. The album's story develops mainly thanks to the dialectical relationship between words and images […][46]".

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[45] Bader B., *American Picturebooks from Noah's Ark to the Beast within*, New York, Macmillan Publishing, 1976, p. 1.

[46] "L'albo illustrato è un dispositivo dotato di sue specifiche caratteristiche morfologiche e funzionali, dove confluiscono i linguaggi della scrittura e dell'illustrazione, competenze progettuali, metafore e visioni de mondo, energie insieme concorrono alla produzione di un oggetto fisico. Il racconto si sviluppa negli albi principalmente grazie al rapporto dialettico fra parole e immagini […]" from Terrusi M., *Albi illustrati. Leggere, guardare, nominare il mondo nei libri per l'infanzia*, Roma, Carrocci, 2012, p. 94

The illustrated book, now internationally recognised under the English term 'picture book', is a highly original and evolving form of children's literature. Initially intended for infants who had not acquired the reading technique or had only learnt the first rudiments of it, it is now widely used as an amusement moment in the baby's everyday life and as an educational tool.

First, the picture book initiates the children into the knowledge of the world and themselves. Indeed, from zero to six years of age, they are in a prosperous and rapid development phase, as has been extensively described in the previous chapter. During this period, the child is remarkably sensitive to external stimuli that can accelerate growth in many ways. Therefore, the illustrated book and its reading become a pleasant and entertaining source of multisensory inputs with a particular initiatory function towards storytelling and the fulfilment of reading.

There are three essential categories of illustrated books or books with pictures that distinguish, in their turn, three different book-product and modes of interaction between text and image:

1. illustrated book: images are accessories and not indispensable for understanding the text;
2. picture books: the narrative is created and conveyed through the coordinated and harmonised interaction of text and images that became inseparable;
3. wordless picture books: the narrative is entrusted exclusively to the images; the only textual component, which is not always present, is the title[47].

The relationship of interdependence between text and images, verbal codes and iconographic code is the first noticeable characteristic that emerges when this type of book is studied. Several researchers have described this interaction with the musical lexicon as 'duet' or 'counterpoint', underlining that the harmonic and complementary union between these two codes can be compared to music. Even though the previous explanation seems to lean toward defining this genre in 'classical' terms, picture books

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[47] Salisbury M., Morag S., *Children's Picturebooks. The art of visual storytelling,* London, Laurence king Publishing Ltd, 2012.

are also characterised by the elements of surprise and amazement. They often combine the possible with the impossible, break boundaries and ignore literary norms.

Regarding the relationship between words and images, the issue of the name 'picture book' itself divided the researchers. The question is if the picture book is to be considered in its fundamentally narrative nature, and so it is the image that follows the text, at the service of the story, or from an opposite point of view. This second option proposes to consider this type of book primarily as an outcome of experimentation and design that belongs to the sphere of visual art. In this case, the text would be considered a subordinate and auxiliary narration with the function of facilitating and explicating a narrative that is perfectly understandable by the sole illustrations.

A further fundamental feature of the illustrated book lies in its target group: those future readers who approach the book to read before they know how to read. To them, the illustrated book offers paths to meaning, to understanding the world and possible worlds. Therefore, creators of picture books must take into high and proper account their explicit audience and, consequently, their unique characteristics, their innate curiosity, their desire for play and fun, their lesser knowledge of things in the world and at the same time, their strong desire to explore it, their simple and lively language. Nevertheless, the editorial design should also identify its core in a story to be told, involved in, a world to be immersed in which the child will recognise and learn to name experience and emotions, enriching their life[48].

Finally, another feature is the fact that the picture book has to be read to the child by an adult, who lends their voice to unfold a world that thus becomes sound, not just visual. In its role as a guide into the world of the illustrated book, the adult should not forget that precisely the dimension of listening is a crucial part of the whole experience. Indeed, the grown-up reader has to know how to listen to the child that, stimulated by the story, allowed their inner world to emerge. It seems clear that there is a double role of activator: the adult activates the book, but the text is also an activator of the relationship between reader and listener, a link that is at first of affection and then educational. The illustrated book is destined to live in an educational relationship, not only because it is read by an adult and a child together, but because it is chosen and created by adults for

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[48] Ibid.

children. Its pedagogical, aesthetic, and ethical responsibility offer is inscribed in its very act of birth.

In conclusion, the picture book essentially sees the meeting of images, narration, and childhood. It mediates the relationship between these elements through the connection established between the adult reader and the child, who becomes an active spectator of the many worlds conveyed by the illustrated book and the voice of the reader/narrator. The picture book is a refined art form that combines and integrates different codes and languages.

2.2.1 A brief history of picture books

Historically, the first books intended for children were, in Italian culture, modest alphabet primer, didactic works telling the stories of the Bible and the saints. In contrast, in the British Isles, there were tales and poems about the myths of the Celtic or Anglo-Saxon tradition. The existence of the illustrated book was previous to the print invention by Gutenberg (1455), so the image reproduction was made using wood and the engraving technique.

In the 15th century, several texts for children had great fortunes, such as the *Book of courtesies* (1477) and Aesop's *Fables* and *Renard's Fables*.

The following century viewed the publishing of the *Orbis Sensualium Pictus* (The Pictorial World of Sensible Things, 1658) by the Bohemian master Joannes Amos Comenius. The text divides the world of children into 150 topics, accompanied by many engravings that are dominant over the written text.

When Comenius had the idea of representing the whole world in images and words in a book, he simultaneously produced a text that is not only informative but also inescapably fictional and imaginative. Comenius was aware of the fascination that figures have with children's attention, their curiosity and the pleasure they take in learning, so he created the first example of a handout intended to be used in primary school. He considered the picture book a fundamental 'ally' in the child's education, useful and effective for children's learning not only with respect to the conquest of reading as literacy, but first and foremost as a process of attribution of meaning to world. The text opens with an introduction in which the master invites the disciple to venture into the

exploration of the world. The topics covered are the most varied and uneven; there are chapters devoted to human activities, such as writing and reading, playing or military activities, natural events but there are also sections regarding the soul, religion, or human virtues.

The history of children's book illustration, being a history of books, is also closely linked to the evolution of image reproduction techniques, from medieval miniatures through engraving and lithography to the most recent procedures. In England, at the end of the 18th century, William Blake's illustrated poetic work *Songs of Innocence and of Experience: Shewing the Teo Contrary States of the Human Soul* was published. The poet dedicated his work to children and composed a poetic masterpiece of words and images. This example, in which the themes of imagination and childhood are central, anticipates and lays the foundations of a new relationship between word and image in literature.

Subsequently, the 19th century marked the appearance of artistic experiences of absolute excellence, where childhood and the illustrated book took on a role and form destined to evolve and innovate rapidly. The theme of contrast and paradox characterised the Victorian era because there was discontent beneath the surface of peace. Behind the values of rectitude, discipline and industriousness, there were temptations, sentimental exaggerations and an insinuating perception of the fragility of reality. While industrial progress caused the population to grow, a new class was also born, a wealthy middle class hungry for books and novelty. In this context, books designed, written, and illustrated specifically for children were born. Indeed, this period saw the conquest of the modern notion of childhood, which is the perception that it is a 'golden age', an extraordinary time to preserve concerning its privileged access to joy. Due to the diversity of child-reader, there are examples of nursery rhymes and fairy tales for the youngers and poetry books, nonsense, limericks, and novels for the older children. This flourishing travelled from England towards Europe and across the ocean.

Another author that deserves to be mentioned is Edward Lear and his work *The book of nonsense*. Born as a painter, Lear wrote this revolutionary text with the sole intention of entertaining children. Thus, he broke with the tradition of making children better and moralising them due to the mixture of puns, melancholic irony and a taste for

laughter, paradox, and absurdity[49]. Later in the century, continuing the fil rouge of nonsense, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland was published by the Reverend Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, better known as Lewis Carroll. His work definitively emancipated children's literature from the previous moralising and didactic tradition, thanks also to the illustration of the absurd world where the little girl's journey takes place.

The 20th century is also remembered for the presence of great children's books, whether illustrated or not. *The Tale of Peter Rabbit,* written and illustrated by Beatrix Potter, was born as a simple booklet, designed for small children, in a small format with one or two short sentences accompanying an illustration on each page. What was considered a minor work had enormous success, along with other similar books by the same author. The story of Peter, a rabbit who disobeys its parents, is an example of rupture with the more classical tradition that tends to educate children to high values always to be good sons and daughters[50].

2.2.2 Picture book as an educational device

As has been extensively discussed in the previous section of this paper, picture books, due to their necessity to be read by an adult, represent a place where there is a constant presence of exchanges and experiences. Given these premises, it is almost automatic that disciplines such as child psychology, pedagogy, and didactics are involved in analysing illustrated books as instrument activators of relationships. The interaction between narration-adult-child is a mode of communication with the infant that involves communicative exchanges and the circulation of information that is fundamental for the development of oral language, cognitive and emotional growth of the child, as well as for the development of imagination and creative capacity. By learning to name the world or their emotions, children acquire the knowledge to control them. In general, the importance of reading aloud picture books is fundamental for the development of the pre-school child in the cognitive, emotional, and relational spheres.

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[49] Ibid.

[50] Tosi L., Petrina A., *Dall'ABC a Harry Potter. Storia della letteratura inglese per l'infanzia e la gioventù*, Bologna, Bononia University Press, 2011.

Of course, learning to listen carefully is not only the child's responsibility. While reading to an infant, based on the images in the book, he or she may develop associations of ideas and formulate this or that question. Therefore, the adult, whether a parent or a teacher, must also listen carefully to children as they express their thoughts. When this happens, one should not be anxious to assess if it is right or wrong but rather understand why the child had that thought. Listening deeply and mindfully to the child's expression of reflections not only means knowing the effective channels for the development of their psyche but also provides a psychological basis for the child to patiently and carefully listen to others.

Thus, the illustrated book represents a medium of high artistic stature that, through storytelling, activates interaction with the child. It is similar to an 'encyclopaedia of life'; it positively influences the construction of the infant's cognitive rudiments, emotions, attitudes, habits and personality.

Storytelling plays an essential role in expressing imagination and systematising knowledge with its patterns and structures. Regarding the intellectual sphere, a child listening to the narration of a picture book establishes a close link to the understanding of the world. In the processes of comprehending or producing texts, the skills and functions involved are various: language, memory, information management, metacognition, and many others. Consequently, children's gradual and repeated exposure to reading books and storytelling might facilitate the progressive acquisition of these abilities[51].

First among all the functions performed by reading illustrated books to infants is foresting the acquisition and development of language. Indeed, in the early phase of a child's language advancement, some picture books support the acquisition of vocabulary to name the world around them with its parts, actions, and objective or subjective characteristics.

On the other hand, the communicative exchanges of adult-child narration are also crucial for the child's emotional growth. Storytelling plays an important role in expressing interpersonal relationships, and the picture book, as a narrative, assumes a prominent position in this respect. Since 1990, studies on child development have also dealt with the

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[51] Fedeli D., *Pedagogia delle emozioni. Lo sviluppo dell'autoregolazione emozionale da 0 a 10 anni*, Roma, Editoriale Anicia, 2013.

intense involvement and substantial hedonic value that reading aloud from the illustrated book gives the child. Some of them are the pleasure of recognising familiar situations or narrative structures, experiencing serene and reassuring situations, escaping into fantastic and adventurous realities, empathic identification, acquiring knowledge, and the pleasure of repetition and re-reading. The majority of authors and researchers have emphasised the enormous importance that reading an illustrated book has for the emotional and inner development of the child as well as for the ability to listen and relate. As mentioned before, children learn, through icon-text narration, to name and thus recognise their emotions and subsequently relate them to situations and people. In doing so, they acquire the ability to read and express their inner world. Good picture books, regarding the visual field and storyline, imperceptibly influence the child, who refines and enriches his or her emotions more and more.

In the world of contemporary picture books, there are no taboo topics, and so there are not also for children. Of course, it was not always like this, as has been described before. However, in recent times this type of book has begun to cover almost all subjects according to the cultures of every country. With true delicacy, they face themes such as violence, sadness, love, sex, war, and racism, knowing that children will encounter and experience, whether directly or not, these contents. The visual part plays a key role in these picture books. For example, the Norwegian author Nyhus of *Sinna Mann* (Angry Man, 2003) "uses sharp objects perched precariously on the edge of surfaces to give a heightened sense of impending violence[52]".

Death is one of the most controversial topics that started to be seen in picture books. Initially, it would be presented with the death of a beloved pet or the description of heaven, a place where everyone is happy. Among these types of plots, some books stand out for their unconventional way of facing this theme, and one of them is *Duck, Death and the Tulip* by Wolf Erlbruch (2007). The narration describes Duck's last moment of life when he now realises that he has been followed by Death. The colours used on the page are very feeble, and light since Death is depicted as a clothed skeleton. The only scene with a warm nuance is the last one, where a tulip is placed over a lifeless Duck by Death itself. It is an untypical way of presenting this topic to children, less

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[52] Salisbury, Styles, 2012, op. cit., p. 116.

evanescent and more vivid, and this would probably initiate an educational dialogue between parents and children, "a thing which has become rare nowadays in a more or less speechless society[53]".

By dealing with various topics, illustrated books can precisely fulfil the vital function of assisting the child in learning about any subject and expanding their life experience. The infant can gain self-identification with the characters and collect the same courage as the protagonist to live new adventures and discover the world.

As explained in the first part of this chapter, emotions in children manifest themselves already in the first months of life. Consequently, their recognition and the self-regulating process are set in motion from a very early age. This implies that proper emotional education is not only done in the home environment but is also addressed in school, as the place par excellence of education. Teachers have several tools at their disposal to fulfil this task; one is undoubtedly the picture book. Its use, together with the storytelling technique, allows the child to explore the external world and its inner one. The illustrated book allows the pupils to compare themselves with their peers and establish trust with their teacher. In understanding the emotions of classmates, new cooperation strategies might be discovered if there is an 'incorrect' reaction to a specific emotion, such as anger or fear.

Fundamental to this moment of growth is the possibility for the learner to see what is happening in the story through the images the illustrated books' authors have chosen for their tales. This is also useful for maintaining high concentration during the reading and for allowing the child to occupy their brain to comprehend the story, feel all the emotions and try to express them rather than to image the features of the places and characters described.

Nevertheless, parents and teachers should not lose sight of the primary purpose with which a book, whether for children or adults, is created: pleasure. The desire to discover the secrets imprinted in those pages is what moves a person, young or old, to pick up a book and open it. The more intense this pleasure from an early age, the 'hungrier' the little reader will be. As it is applied in the world of adult readers, reading is not a duty, as Pennac also emphasises when he says, "The verb 'to read' cannot stand

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[53] Salisbury, Styles, 2012, op. cit., p. 124.

the imperative, an aversion it shares with some other verbs: the verb 'to love '…the verb 'to dream'[54]".

[54] Pennac D., *Come un romanzo*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 1999, p. 11

Chapter III

Teaching English: techniques and challenges for an incisive learning

3.1 "I do, and I understand": some didactic techniques

"Being a teacher implies […] caring, listening, sharing; it means wanting to increase children's self-esteem, instil confidence, and help them grow into serene individuals, unique men, and women and, fundamentally, righteous citizens[55]".

The teacher's job is far from simple, and it should not be taken lightly. There is a continuous update that must be implemented and a daily metamorphosis. Indeed, those who choose this profession know that they have to become a chameleon to adapt themselves to different classes formed by equally different pupils. The latter is then, especially in the first years of schooling, moved by a constant fickleness that changes from lesson to lesson, and this is also what the teacher has to deal with. Teaching is a verb full of underlying and unspoken meanings that those who approach this job must know and realise in their daily lives. In the specific case of the primary school teacher, an unwritten obligation of the teacher is to have fun with children because only through their own motivation can the pupils be motivated as well. It is necessary to build a welcoming, friendly, and safe classroom environment in which the child feels encouraged to try and experiment with the foreign language. Teachers need to plan their work, which has to be supported by the possibility of using many different teaching techniques to maintain a high level of attention and motivation in the classroom. Some of them will be described below. The strategies explained in this chapter do not reflect a hierarchy of importance or effectiveness. It has been chosen to represent some of them rather than others based only on their relevance to what has been illustrated so far and to the Learning Unit project that will be presented in the fourth chapter of this thesis.

    a. *Total Physical Response* (*TPR*)

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[55] "[…] essere insegnante implica […] prendersi cura, ascoltare, condividere; significa voler aumentare l'autostima dei bambini, infondere sicurezza, aiutarli a crescere per diventare individui sereni, uomini e donne unici e, fondamentalmente, cittadini integri" from Drago S., *Divertendosi insegnando e imparando l'inglese*, in *Educare i bambini alla lingua inglese* (a cura di Santipolo M.), Novara, Pensa MultiMedia Editore, 2012, p. 200.

It is a methodology in which the student is called to use their whole body to prove that they have fully understood what has been said or read by the teacher. It is particularly suitable for those who lean towards kinaesthetic intelligence. A variation of this strategy is *Total Physical Response Storytelling* (*TPRS*), in which

> "The teacher tells a story by immersing themselves in character: they say the lines and emphasise the gestures. The children repeat the script in chorus and perform the gestures[56]".

b. *Storytelling*

It is one of the oldest and most used methodologies in several cultures. It consists of telling a story aloud from a children's book. In doing so, some extralinguistic strategies are utilised, such as gestures and visual aids to facilitate comprehension. Throughout this technique, the gradual acquisition of a foreign language is fundamental. This can also occur thanks to the necessary presence of what has been called the 'grammar of stories'. Thus, the evolution of the story must proceed according to a pre-established order starting from the environment in which the story is set, moving on to the initial event that triggered an unforeseen event, continuing with the internal response given by the protagonist and with their attempt to solve the problem, ending with the psychological reaction of the character. This pattern makes the story well-organised and comprehensible for younger readers.

Students, however, do not play a passive role but are active in the storytelling through activities before, in between or after the narration. This technique can potentially improve and support different skills, such as listening and speaking. The activities proposed to the class during the story are at the teacher's discretion. However, it is always advisable to diversify them to stimulate each type of student better. For example, it could

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[56] "[…] L'insegnante racconta una storia immedesimandosi in un personaggio: dice le battute ed enfatizza i gesti. Gli studenti ripetono in coro le battute ed eseguono i gesti" from Torresan P., *Lingua e linguaggi: didattica dell'inglese al plurale*, in *Educare i bambini alla lingua inglese* (a cura di Santipolo M.), Novara, Pensa MultiMedia Editore, 2012, p. 115.

be engaging for the pupils to create some *flashcards* to be used to retell the story or for more playful activity. Depending on the class grade in which this methodology is suggested, there could be pure lexical exercises or moments dedicated to linguistic reflection on a given topic.

c. *Roleplay*

From the word itself, it can be understood that this methodology refers to the dimension of play in which two or more pupils interact orally following the instructions given by the teacher or the textbook. However, if this technique might have a high potential for effectiveness in the mother tongue, in the foreign language, it is very complex and not very productive despite recurring in textbooks. Indeed, in the latter, it is common to find pages in which a dialogue is inserted that requires students to produce the lines already pre-set (i.e. "greet" – "reply to greeting" – "ask where the school is"). Its variations are far more effective and stimulating, such as role-taking and role-making.

In the first case, learners are asked to assume the roles already envisaged in the dialogue and to introduce changes to the previously addressed situation. In this way, children are reassured by the presence of structures already explicated in the foreign language, and so, they are stimulated by the modifications introduced by the teacher.

On the other hand, in the second variant, the learner constructs their own character enjoying complete freedom in conducting the dialogue and choosing its elements. Role-making allows each student to use the foreign language according to their level of acquisition, thus lowering the affective filters that might be present in an arduous task.

d. *Dramatization*

Like roleplay, this strategy lacks freedom as it consists of simply repeating an already-written dialogue. Its advantages are that it is feasible even in the early stages of learning and is accepted even by students who are less extroverted and thus less inclined to make a personal contribution to the dialogue. Although apparently, it might seem an unhelpful learning strategy, it is an excellent way of fixing specific linguistic expressions. It is also a starting point for developing the individual learner's creativity.

e. *Language-image coupling*

This methodology is used in its most straightforward stages, especially in the first years of learning a foreign language. Children associate the visual representation with the corresponding word in the non-native language without passing through the mother tongue. As the years of study increase, it is possible to increment the difficulty of matching by using a short description of the image rather than a word or adding elements to a representation already made.

f. *Cloze*

This procedure consists of inserting missing words in a text, in which the first lines are usually left intact to facilitate an initial contextualisation. It is a practical evaluation and recovery technique as it allows linguistic competencies, especially textual competence, to be activated to their maximum.

Nevertheless, it can also be used for listening: the teacher (or recording support) presents an oral text interrupting themselves at previously fixed points. The learner will have a few seconds to make a hypothesis about the word that follows based, as with reading, on their *expectancy grammar*[57].

It is essential, however, to underline that this technique differs from the gap-filling in which the words elicited are not chosen randomly but according to a precise didactic purpose - lexical, morphosyntactic, and grammatical topics.

g. *Jigsaw*

Also called interlocking, it is a particular set of activities that ask the learner to restore order to a sequence that has been disrupted. It is a technique well accepted by learners who want to win a challenge with the text, doing it as if they were playing with a jigsaw puzzle. There are numerous ways to implement the jigsaw methodology, including:

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[57] *Expectancy grammar* is the ability to predict what can be said in a given context.

- the interlocking of words: words in a sentence must be rearranged;
- the interlocking of sentences and paragraphs: the aim is to put them in the correct sequence to compose a period or a text;
- the interlocking of lines of a comic strip: the comic strip is reproduced in the correct sequence while the lines placed outside the drawings are in disorder and must be associated with the corresponding scene;
- the interlocking of comic strips: these, complete with lines, are presented in random order, and the pupil's task is to re-establish the correct narrative sequence.

h. *Games*

It is possible to change a game, even a traditional one, from a simple recreational activity into a didactic tool that can intensively foster the motivation for learning a foreign language. Only a few will be mentioned below:
- game of the goose: this can be customised according to the topic that needs to be covered, and it helps memorise its vocabulary;
- bingo: the focus is on numbers or some vocabulary represented by the figures;
- battleship: for spelling practice;
- grammatical bingo: the development of the game follows the traditional rules, but, in this case, the 'folders' are customised by inserting not numbers but specific verb forms. Similarly, the numbers are not drawn but the corresponding grammatical items. The technique aims to allow a non-boring acquisition of grammatical structures.

i. *Constellation*

This methodology consists of the teacher writing a word in the centre of the blackboard to which the pupils freely associate words they think are inherent to the starting term, forming a spider gram. Furthermore, words can be associated with the words that emerge from the students, creating new constellations or *clusters*. In foreign languages, especially at the beginning of learning, it can be helpful to work on vocabulary as an exercise game or team competition.

j. *Crossword*

Widely known, crosswords can be a teaching technique used at any stage of language acquisition, having the shrewdness that their difficulty is correctly calibrated. Pupils can be challenged with crossword puzzles in which words are crossed in only one or two letters, or only one word is crossed - usually written in a highlighted column. Similar to crossword, 'scrabble' can also be used: a box is filled with letters, and the student has to find the required words.

In all the cases described above, it can create a thematic work on a specific lexical or grammatical topic or one that encompasses several issues.

k. *Songs*

They are used for listening and language production. In the first case, listening is disturbed by noises such as the melody, and its understanding is more complex due to the presence of profound phonological variations. In the second case, the use of songs allows a faster language production than a learner would not normally do. Therefore, they represent a challenge for the student, who is, however, stimulated to try and reproduce faithfully what has been heard. Songs are also useful for fixing certain linguistic expressions thanks to the presence of refrains and repetitions.

l. *Posters*

They do not constitute an actual methodology, but they are aiding that worth mentioning for their wide use and effectiveness. They can support comprehension or linguistic reflection, as in the case of lexical posters describing a precise situation and on which the names of the objects in the teaching unit are written. Posters in a foreign language are exceptionally motivating as they allow the learner to focus on the depicted topic several times during stressful and relaxing moments. Thus, they are suited for different modes of fixation.

m. *CLIL*

Acronym for *Content and Language Integrated Learning*, CLIL is a methodology whereby a discipline is explained in a foreign language. In this case, the language is not used purely for linguistic purposes but to convey the content of the chosen subject. It is an innovative method that allows a greater quantity and quality of exposure to the foreign language, increasing pupils' motivation to learn and making the activities presented more authentic. Since this methodology aims to discover the contents of a discipline, the necessity to use a foreign language is no longer simulated but actual. Despite some critical aspects, this methodology, if well designed and implemented, can lead to a considerable increase in both language learning and motivation with respect to foreign language acquisition.

3.2 English skills at the end of the Primary School

As explained in Chapter I, in 2012, the Minister of Education Profumo signed the text *National Indication for the kindergarten curriculum and the first education cycle*. This text specifies the competencies each pupil should achieve at the end of the different school cycles in each discipline.

In the specific case of primary schools, these competencies are divided between the end of the first three-year period and the end of the fifth year. They are indications that every school in the first cycle is called to implement, constituting a constant reference for the planning of teaching interventions.

Going back to what has already been mentioned in the previous chapters, according to what is stated in the *National Indications*, learning English enables the pupil to develop multilingual and multicultural competence and to become aware of what it means to be a European citizen.

However, in order to achieve these linguistic-cognitive results, it is necessary to realise both a "horizontal" and "vertical" transversality concerning the learning of this subject. Specifically, the joint intervention of the entire teaching staff in dealing with a given subject allows for a so-called "horizontal" continuity. At the same time, the

"progression of objectives relating to the various competencies and the development of strategies for learning languages[58]" ensures vertical continuity throughout the first school cycle.

In addition, it is necessary to focus on the communicative aspect that English inevitably possesses and, consequently, the attention that the teacher must pay to the phonological and pronunciation differences between it and the mother tongue. This must be done since using the spoken word is predominant in primary school and must be emphasised through numerous and diversified methodologies. On the other hand, writing competence is presented slowly, first through the writing of keywords up to the composition of short personal essays.

These skills are acquired gradually, and the text of the *National Indications* specifies general objectives for each of them. Hereafter there is an example taken from the section regarding the learning goals at the end of the third grade of primary school:

- Listening (listening comprehension)
    o Understand everyday words, instructions, expressions and phrases, pronounced clearly and slowly, relating to oneself, classmates, and the family.
- Speaking (production and oral interaction)
    o Produce meaningful sentences referring to known objects, places, people, and situations.
    o Interacting with a classmate to introduce oneself and play, using memorised expressions and phrases appropriate to the situation.
- Reading (reading comprehension)
    o Understand postcards, cards, and short messages, preferably accompanied by visual or sound supports, and understand words and phrases already acquired orally.

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[58] "[…] progressione degli obiettivi relativi alle diverse competenze e lo sviluppo delle strategie per imparare le lingue […]" from *National Indication for the kindergarten curriculum and the first cycle of education*, 2012.

- Writing (written production)
  o Write words and simple everyday sentences related to classroom activities and personal and group interests[59].

It seems to be easily deduced from the example above that there is no mention of specific topics to be covered as was the case in the pre-2012 syllabus (see chapter 1.1), but rather, it describes the milestones that each child should reach at the end of the first three years of primary school.

Concerning the end of the first five years of schooling, the targets for the development of competencies are traced back to Level A1 of the *Common European Framework Reference for Languages* and stipulates that:

The learner understands short oral and written messages related to familiar areas. Describes orally and in writing, in a simple way, aspects of one's own experience, environment, and elements that relate to immediate needs.

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[59] "[…] Ascolto (comprensione orale)
  o Comprendere vocaboli, istruzioni, espressioni e frasi di uso quotidiano, pronunciati chiaramente e lentamente relativo a sé stesso, ai compagni, alla famiglia.
Parlato (produzione e interazione orale)
  o Produrre frasi significative riferite ad oggetti, luoghi, persone, situazioni note.
  o Interagire con un compagno per presentarsi e/o giocare, utilizzando espressioni e frasi memorizzate adatte alla situazione.
Lettura (comprensione scritta)
  o Comprendere cartoline, biglietti e brevi messaggi, accompagnati preferibilmente da supporti visivi o sonori, cogliendo parole e frasi già acquisite a livello orale.
Scrittura (produzione scritta)
  o Scrivere parole e semplici frasi di uso quotidiano attinenti alle attività svolte in classe e ad interessi personali e del gruppo."
From ibid.

Interacts during playtime; communicates comprehensibly, also with memorised expressions and phrases, in simple and routine information exchanges.

Carries out tasks according to the teacher's instructions given in the foreign language, asking for explanations if necessary.

It identifies certain cultural elements and grasps relationships between linguistic forms and uses of the foreign language[60].

Keeping these final goals in mind, each English teacher constructs their didactic program by reinforcing the student's motivation to learn the subject since it is the driving force behind the effective development of the above-mentioned basic skills. The child's attention and curiosity must be constantly nurtured through a variety of activities that must make them active protagonists of the teaching scene.

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[60] "[…] L'alunno comprende brevi messaggi orali e scritti relativi ad ambiti familiari.

Descrive oralmente e per iscritto, in modo semplice, aspetti del proprio vissuto e del proprio ambiente ed elementi che si riferiscono a bisogni immediati.

Interagisce nel gioco; comunica in modo comprensibile, anche con espressioni e frasi memorizzate, in scambi di informazioni semplici e di routine.

Svolge i compiti secondo le indicazioni date in lingua straniera dall'insegnante, chiedendo eventualmente spiegazioni.

Individua alcuni elementi culturali e coglie rapporti tra forme linguistiche e usi della lingua straniera." from ibid.

Chapter IV

Learning Unit: "The colours of emotions"

As explained in previous chapters, the emotional sphere is a fundamental aspect of being human and must be nurtured and trained continuously. It must begin in childhood, first with reinforcing primary emotions and then continuing with exploring secondary ones. This is a work that should be combined between family and educational environments, spaces where the child has the opportunity to express himself in his totality with the certainty of being listened to and understood. The use of the conditional in the previous sentence is not accidental because, in recent times, unfortunately, the right weight and time have not been given to the development and support of this topic. The reference figures, the parents, are often bustling, and the moments dedicated to listening to their children have been significantly reduced. It is also true that cases of separated parents are increasingly frequent and, in the understandable concern to get through this change of family structure as peacefully as possible, the tendency is not to talk about one's own emotions. Big ones, and little ones, by reflex, hide, behind an aura of tranquillity and ephemeral calm, the equally essential feelings that are felt in these moments of separation: pain, fear, uncertainty, and sadness.

These familiar aspects must be added to the fact that schools do not always have the opportunity (or the interest) to spend precious minutes or hours on these topics. The anxiety of getting to the end of the textbook, and the external and internal pressure of inculcating as much knowledge as possible into the young minds sitting at the school desks, make talking about emotions almost a waste of time.

In recent years, the COVID-19 pandemic has been added to all this. The lockdown periods, the constant worry and the constant negative news that has circulated have only exacerbated this already fragile situation. All children, in one way or another, have been touched and changed by the period they experienced. While on the one hand, there has been a worsening in children with pre-existing disorders, on the other hand, the Authority for Childhood and Adolescence[61] , in collaboration with the Istituto Superiore di Sanità have found "the onset of new disorders in subjects with no diagnosis[62]". The

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[61] Autorità Garante per l'Infanzia e l'Adolescenza, *Pandemia, neurosviluppo e salute mentale di bambini e ragazzi. Documento di studio e di proposta*, Istituto Superiore di Sanità, maggio 2022.

[62] Talignani E., Astori L., *Gli effetti a lungo termine della pandemia sulla salute psicofisica dei bambini*, Chieti, Edizioni Didattiche Gulliver, n° settembre, 2022.

research conducted mentions, for example, new subjects with eating disorders, suicidal ideation, episodes of self-harm, social withdrawal and loneliness. Increased irritability, anger, persistent sadness, boredom, anxiety, panic attacks, and stress due to social isolation are also reported. All this is in subjects between 6 and 18 years old. So even childhood, which has always been considered a time when innocence and light-heartedness reign supreme, has turned into a time charged with 'negative' emotions and attitudes. In school, a decline in the ability to concentrate, memorise and maintain attention was observed, which made resuming regular daily lessons even more difficult. A downgrading of skills and autonomy already acquired in previous years, the onset of school phobias and a refusal to return to face-to-face teaching were also observed.

After the 2019-2020 school year, the school was able to count on a gradual return to normality, albeit with rules and precautions necessary to safeguard everyone's health, but that inevitably put a strain on teachers and pupils. The need to bridge the social deficit that particularly affected the younger generations, from preschool to high school students, was clear from the outset. Work had to be done on knowing how to relate to the peer group, which includes a series of non-trivial skills that require constant training and support, especially in younger subjects. It was perceived the necessity to listen to difficult emotions, "teaching children to find the words to give voice to their emotions"[63], whatever they may be.

It is precisely in this context and with these requirements that my project finds itself, which will be presented in this chapter.

Working in a primary school as an English language specialist for a few years, I have had the opportunity, although with my little experience, to see the before and after the pandemic and the subsequent aggravation of the situations described above. I have seen the pressing need to recover those moments dedicated to emotionality, to be together and to listen to each other. The management of my school has always been very attentive to this more social but fundamental and educational aspect of our young pupils' lives. Consequently, motivated by this mutual conviction, I have developed a Learning Unit focusing on emotions, starting with reading the picture book *The colour monster* by Anna Llenas and developing activities related to this matter. I chose to work in the

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[63] Ibid.

second grade because the pupils had already got to know me. I got to know them and knew that both the topic and the related activities could give a good result. The didactic and linguistic aim was to acquire the vocabulary related to this topic and the grammatical structures to support the expression of these concepts. This is a lively and exciting class where new things are welcomed with great enthusiasm and where, for various reasons, including the pandemic, it was necessary to work on one's own emotions and those of others and re-establish good group dynamics of listening and mutual respect. It should be emphasised that this is not a work with purely psychological and pedagogical aims but that it inevitably also affected these educational fields due to the subject matter.

The Learning Unit is presented below in all its phases. At the end of it, there are two summary tables.

Target group: 16 pupils of the 2nd grade in the primary school Santa Dorotea.

Language level: pre-A1.

Prerequisites: to know the vocabulary learned in the first year (colours, numbers, some animals, family, food, some objects) and some everyday expressions used within the classroom.

Linguistic goals: emotion vocabulary; acquisition of specific language structures such as *I'm* or *I'm not*.

Functional goals: understand vocabulary and simple expressions relating to emotions.

Cultural objectives: recognise one's own emotions and those of others and express them in English, using simple sentences.

Time: 10 hours, divided into several meetings of approximately 50 minutes.

TITLE	The colours of emotions
DISCIPLINES INVOLVED	English, History, Citizenship, Art
MOTIVATION OF THE PROPOSAL AND ITS EDUCATIONAL VALUE	The English language competencies emphasise how it can be used to express not only the student's surroundings but also, above all, oneself. This makes it a tool that can be applied in any didactic-educational context while keeping in mind the age and linguistic background of the pupils. Therefore, the project aims to stimulate the student through educational, playful and workshop activities to increase self-awareness, particularly concerning the emotional sphere. By offering moments of reflection and sharing, pupils will be motivated to express their emotions.
EXPECTED COMPETENCE	Through simple language exchanges in English, it is expected to develop more social skills and abilities related to awareness in the area of emotions, recognising them in oneself and others.

| KEY COMPETENCIES AND INDICATORS FOR ASSESSING THE COMPETENCE TARGET | COMMUNICATION IN THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE
Mastering the English language for communicative purposes, using terms related to the course (i.e., happy, sad...)

LEARNING TO LEARN
Actively participate in activities by making a personal contribution. Finding, organising, and using information from different sources to perform a given task.

SOCIAL AND CIVIC COMPETENCES
Collaborate and participate; interact in groups; show a willingness to confront. Actively participate in activities by making a personal contribution. Finding, organising, and using information from different sources to perform a given task. |

COMMON STRATEGIES AND METHODS	The centrality of the pupil will be fostered, supporting: • Motivation • Reflection • Communication • Being well in one's context • Learning to learn • The search for values - Creating situations that lead to greater self-awareness and awareness of others in the emotional-social sphere - Supporting opportunities for communication in English within the class or workgroups - Soliciting discussion on behaviour, opinions and choices
TIMES	The project will be implemented in approximately 10 hours in the first four months.

ENGLISH				
Competence Goal(s)			**Aims/conceptual nodes**	
• The learner understands short oral messages • Describes orally, in a simple way, aspects of one's being • Communicates in a simple but comprehensible manner, including through memorised expressions and phrases • Carries out tasks according to the instructions given in the foreign language by the teacher, asking for explanations if necessary			**Listening**: Understand short sentences, instructions and everyday expressions. **Spoken word**: Interact in a comprehensible manner with a companion or adult, using short and simple expressions, including memorised ones. **Writing**: Copy some words correctly, paying particular attention to the spelling of foreign letters.	
PREREQUISITES	**KNOWLEDGE**	**ABILITIES**	**VERIFICATIONS/OBSERVATIONS/ TASKS OF REALITY**	**INDICATORS OF EVALUATION**

Knowledge of colour-related vocabulary and some everyday terms used in the class.	Use the English language to express one's emotions in simple sentences.	Understanding vocabulary and simple expressions related to emotions	Through didactic, playful and workshop activities, students will be asked to express their emotions and verbally recognise those of their peers. Specifically, strategies will be adopted, such as mime, the construction of collective brainstorms, and the manual construction of objects to help and stimulate the student in sharing their moods with their classmates	Understanding one's own emotions and those of others. Express one's emotional state orally in a simple manner. Use basic but appropriate vocabulary.

Lesson (title and aim)	Materials	Proposed activity
Title: The colour monster Aim: Know and reflect individually on emotions.	Picture book *The colour monster* by Anna Llenas. Black and white cartoon of the monster. Tempera colours: red, yellow, green, blue and black. Brushes/sponges.	Reading of the illustrated book *The colour monster*. An individual reflection is then proposed on the emotion that each pupil rehearses. Based on this, they will colour the cartoon of the character in the story since each emotion is associated with a colour.
Title: The colours of emotions (pt.1) Aim: Recognise one's emotions and express them.	Rolls of paper, small decorations, coloured crayons, wooden clothes pegs. Tempera colours: red, yellow, green, blue and black. Brushes/sponges. Sheets of paper.	Each pupil will paint five rolls of paper with the colours of the respective monsters representing the emotions read in the picture book (happiness, sadness, calm, fear, anger). A second part of the lesson, which will continue in the next meeting, involves each child drawing a situation for each emotion presented by the picture book on a blank piece of paper. A short

		description of the drawing is then written on the back of the piece of paper realised.
Title: The colours of emotions (pt.2) Aim: Recognise one's emotions and express them.	Rolls of paper, small decorations, coloured crayons, wooden clothes pegs. Cartoon of the *Emotionmetre*.	Pupils will have to complete the creation of the little emotion monsters through additional decorations. They will finish the drawing activity of each emotion started in the previous meeting. Introduction of the *Emotionmetre,* where pupils will mark the emotion they feel on that day in each lesson.

Title: Yellow as happiness Aim: Analyse the characteristics of the emotion of happiness.	Picture book *The colour monster* by Anna Llenas. English notebook.	Re-reading of the happiness part of the picture book. Construction of a collective brainstorming session in which pupils will be asked to associate words or situations with the emotion under examination. Starting from this reflection, the pupils are asked to mime sketches of specific situations in which the emotion of happiness is present. *Possibility of carrying out the activity in the gym.
Title: Black as fear! Aim: Analyse the characteristics of the emotion of fear.	Picture book *The colour monster* by Anna Llenas. Reading of a short story. Worksheets. English notebook and colours.	Re-reading of the fear part of the picture book. Reading a short story in which an open ending is left. Each pupil should

		invent, through a drawing, the story's ending. This will be followed by a moment of sharing of all compositions.
Title: The Anger Cauldron Aim: Analyse the characteristics of the emotion of anger and reflect on possible strategies that can be adopted to resolve moments characterised by this feeling.	Picture book *The colour monster* by Anna Llenas. Poster board and coloured sheets.	Re-reading of the anger part of the picture book. A poster depicting a cauldron is presented to the class. Pupils will be asked to associate the emotion of anger with words or situations; these will be written in a simple form on coloured sheets of paper and pasted inside the cauldron. Next, the children will be asked to think about strategies to solve the previously seen moments of anger. Again, they will be written on the sheets and finally pasted on the board surrounding those already present.

|		
Title: Feeling blue Aim: Analyse the characteristics of the emotion of sadness.	Picture book *The colour monster* by Anna Llenas. English notebook. Music.	Re-reading of the sadness part of the illustrated album. Construction of a collective brainstorming session in which pupils will be asked to associate words or situations with the emotion under examination. An activity will then be proposed in which the children, listening to music, will be free to walk or dance around the classroom; each time the music is stopped, the teacher will propose a situation in which the element of sadness may be present. Each pupil will choose whether or not what they are listening causes them sadness and will make this clear by expressing their state of mind with their face or body.

		*Possibility of carrying out the activity in the gym.
Title: Green as Calm Aim: Analyse the characteristics of the emotion of calm.	Picture book *The colour monster* by Anna Llenas. Music. Games: Jenga and Shangai.	Re-reading of the calm part of the illustrated album. Afterwards, the pupils will listen to music characterised by alternating contrasting rhythms (fast, adagio, allegro, slow) and have to adapt their way of moving in space according to the music they hear. Finally, some traditional games (Jenga and Shangai) will be proposed. Maintaining a calm and peaceful attitude is essential for the game's success. *Possibility of carrying out the activity in the gym.

Title: The Jars of Emotions Aim: Reflect and produce emotional situations through drawings and sentences.	Glass jars. Coloured paper sheets: yellow, red, blue, green and black. Coloured crayons.	Pupils should write or draw a situation reminiscent of each emotion on the corresponding-coloured sheets. A moment of sharing will be proposed, and the sheets will be placed into the corresponding emotion jars.
Title: The emotional goose game Aim: Experience and recognise one's and other's emotions through playful activity.	Goose game previously constructed in large format. Pawns. Dice.	Pupils will be invited to play the goose game. Some boxes contain challenges related to emotions that the child must complete in order to advance in the game. *Possibility of carrying out the activity in the gym.

MOTIVATION
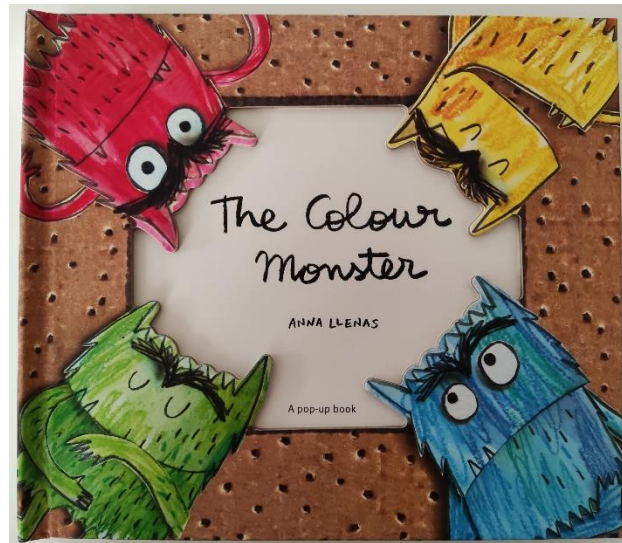
The colour monster by Anna Llenas

In this first phase, I presented the picture book *The colour monster* by Anna Llenas. Through the observation of the cover, the children made assumptions about the story's content, immediately noticing not only the different colours with which the monsters were presented but also the different facial expressions, thus suggesting different moods. Afterwards, I started the storytelling activity, accompanied by the popup images from the book that immediately caught the attention of the young listeners. By miming some unfamiliar words (i.e., "stirred", "blazes") and pointing to some objects to make them understand their meaning (i.e., "leaves", "jar"), the pupils could understand the content of the story in its entirety. I made sure that the comprehension was clear to everyone by asking them to retell the story and reintroducing some keywords in English, such as the name of emotions or some objects they were associated with in the book.

Starting from the story's beginning, we observed how the monster was confused, and all its emotions were mixed. We then made our own confused class monster. Presenting them a blank drawing of the story's protagonist previously made in A1 format, each child took it in turn to paint a small piece of the picture with the emotion they felt at that moment. The emotion-colour combinations were:

- yellow - happiness;

- blue - sadness;

- red - anger;

- black - fear;

- green - calm.

The confused monster

It was allowed to use more colours, thus expressing more emotions. This moment was accompanied by the repetition of the sentence "How are you?" "What are your emotions right now?" and the subsequent response in English of the name of the emotion and the corresponding colour. Those who wanted could also take a moment to explain why they felt that way; given the novelty of the topic and the lesson mode, just a few children wanted to expose themselves, telling the reasons behind the choice of colour-emotion. Below there are some reasons shared by some children with their peers:

B. and A.: chose red because a classmate often annoys them.

M.: chose blue because some things happened at home that made her sad.

A.: chose black because a friend is coming home.

I also took part in this activity, choosing specifically all the colours and expressing the motivation for each one.

GLOBALITY

In this second phase, I decided to propose two more workshops and creative activities, again with the aim of learning vocabulary relating to the subject of emotions. At the same time, it was possible to go over and repeat some simple instructions that had already been heard and used in previous lessons, which were instrumental to the performance and success of the activity (i.e., *use the colour red, cut along the dotted line, fold your yellow roll here*). This moment took two lessons to complete.

The first meeting was devoted to painting some finished rolls of toilet paper, five for each child. In agreement with the art teacher, the technique used was tempera, as its correct use is one of the teaching goals of this discipline. The colours used were yellow, blue, red, green and black, corresponding to the individual emotions introduced by the picture book *The colour monster*. This activity was proposed because this class always shows a particular enthusiasm for 'artistic' moments such as this. It allowed the children to work in small groups, albeit with the needed caution due to the ongoing pandemic. To a small extent, they rediscovered being together, helping each other (i.e., a classmate promptly helped a child who was having more difficulty in carrying out the task) and the patience in waiting their turn to get the desired colour. Once the coloured rolls were dry, following the instructions given in English with visual support, they built the five emotion monsters encountered in the book. They added the eyes and drew the mouth expressions, making the emotion correspond to the particular monster.

The little monsters

Following this creative moment, they were presented with the workshop's purpose: to realise the class *emotionmetre*.

The second activity was then proposed. Each pupil was given five sheets of white paper with instructions to draw a situation for each emotion analysed: happiness, anger, sadness, fear and calm. On the back of each sheet, they copied sentences in English from the blackboard (*I'm happy/sad/angry/calm/scared when...*) and then completed them in Italian. I preferred to give them the opportunity, at least in this first phase, to also use their mother tongue as the task of describing the situation in English would have been too difficult and consequently demoralising.

It was important for me to see how each student related to these emotions and how they perceived and expressed them. Far from wanting to be a psychologist, it is interesting to see some examples:

"I am calm when I stay in the open air"

"I'm calm when I listen to music"

"I'm afraid of the dark"

"I'm afraid of losing my family"

"I'm happy when I stay with my family"

"I'm happy when something bad happens to someone else"

"I'm sad when someone laugh at me"

"I'm sad I think about my dead grandpa"

"I'm angry when someone makes fun of me"

*"I'm angry when my sister pinches me"*

Another interesting fact is that one student refused to draw anything on the fear paper claiming that "*I'm not afraid of anything*"; I tried to talk with him and to make him reflect on this, but it was in vain. Thus, I decided to let him free and not complete the task of a scary situation, respecting his will.

ANALYSIS

The following five lessons were devoted to the emotions presented by *The colour monster*, tackling them one at a time.

The first meeting was dedicated to happiness.

As a first step, I re-read the part of the story related to this feeling, again with the support of flashcards and mime for those words that were more difficult to intuit. Following this, a collective brainstorming activity was proposed: I wrote the word 'happiness' on the blackboard and asked the children to close their eyes for a couple of seconds while thinking intensely about it. Once they had opened them, they could share what they had imagined. This sharing was done by saying the phrase *I'm happy when* followed by a word or a simple phrase that the individual related to the emotion of happiness. I could see that there was a variety of word concepts and that only in a few cases did the answers repeat themselves. When this happened, it was, however, the wish of the child to think and share an equally valid alternative. The 'depth' of the thoughts expressed was in accordance with the age of these pupils. Nevertheless, it was interesting to note that most of them shared words concerning certain persons or groups of persons (i.e., *mum, family, dad, teacher, friends*) or activities involving both themselves and other figures. It might be supposed that this is also the result of the desire and need to regain a sociality and sense of togetherness that has been lost in recent years due to the health situation.
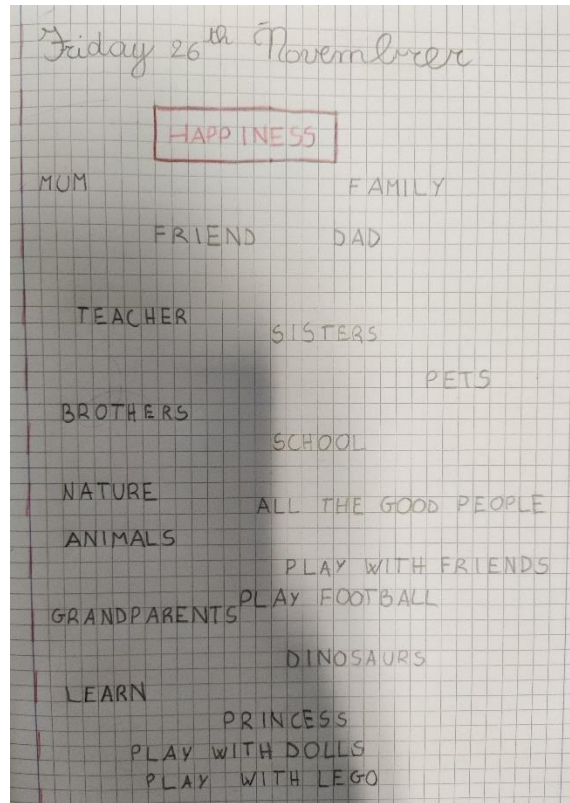
Happiness collective brainstorming

I proposed a mime activity to liven up the lesson's last part. Freely, those who wanted to participate thought of a situation they felt happy about and mimed it to their classmates, who had to try to guess it. For this second part, the individual's personality came into play as not everyone wanted to participate in the mime activity, so some preferred to play the role of the guesser. Again, the choices fell on activities to be done together with other people, such as playing football with friends and cooking with mum.

"I'm happy when I play football with my friends"

The second meeting focused on fear. Once again, there was the reading and observation of what is told in the picture book that accompanies this project. Next, I read a short story entitled "Tommy and the bushfire"[64], which tells the story of Tommy, a kangaroo, who meets his friends Kelly, a koala, and Perry, a parrot, every day. The three animals used to play together by the river; one day, however, Kelly does not arrive, and Perry discovers a fire has broken out in the forest where the koala lives. Tommy is too scared to go looking for her while his parrot friend, although frightened, flies to the forest and finds her terrified and surrounded by flames. Here the story interrupts, leaving the ending open. The children were handed the story sequences, consisting of the drawing and the corresponding descriptive sentence, in disarray. Through a second listening, they were asked to reorder them and finally to think of an ending for the narrative and to draw it. Most of them concluded the story with the rescue of Kelly by her friends, who thus

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[64] Story taken from a school textbook that I adapted for the purpose of the lesson and whose ending I elicited.

overcame their fear. However, there are a few cases where the pupil preferred a tragic ending with the death of the trapped koala by fire or even by a hunter specially introduced by the child in the finale. While the perhaps stereotypical idea of the optimistic child, who always looks for the positive in different situations, is grounded, this image has been partly disproved. We are not trying to give more importance to those who have chosen a sad ending to their story but to emphasise that children too, just like adults, if not more so, are also affected by moments of sadness or fear and that it is necessary to let them express these emotions too. In addition to listening, the reason behind what is expressed, verbally or otherwise, must be sought together with the child.

After drawing the story's ending, each shared their work explaining what was represented. Each pupil was greeted with a round of applause at the end of the exhibition, emphasising the acceptance of any conclusion and, in total, any emotion.
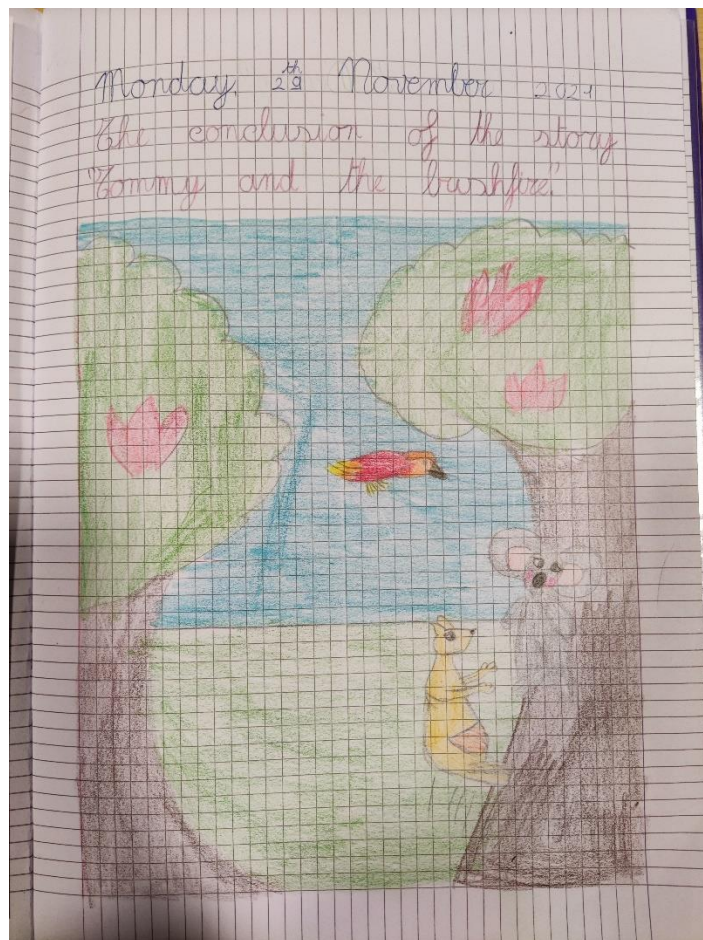
"Kelly is saved by Tommy who overcomes his fear"
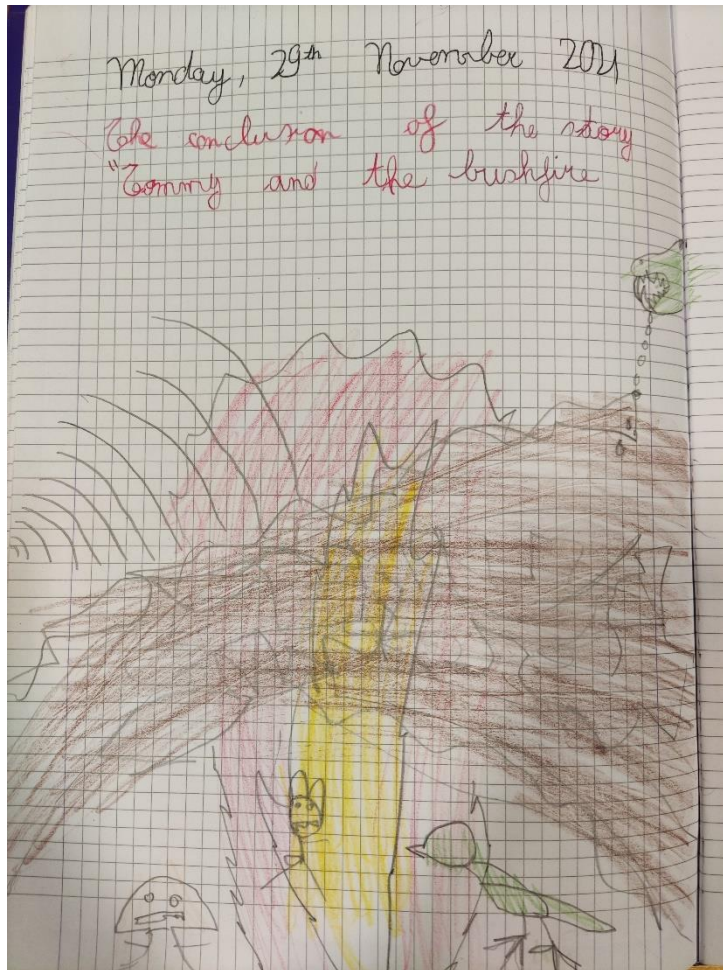
"Kelly died because the fire is not extinguished"

For the third meeting, we focused on anger. After re-reading the part of the picture book concerning this emotion, the class was presented with a poster depicting the 'cauldron of anger', a drawing of a seething cauldron resting on a lit fire. The children were asked to think of a situation that makes them angry; after an initial moment of sharing, each child wrote down the identified scenario on a red paper disc. This moment was supported by the translation of unfamiliar words for the children, who were thus able to expand their vocabulary related to this topic. Each of them then stuck 'their anger" onto the cauldron, where its content became bright red, precisely the same colour as the angry monster. After this moment, the children were asked to think of a strategy to eliminate the anger, and like what they had done previously, they wrote their solution on a pink paper disc. They were again invited to glue their 'anti-rage antidote' to the poster, thus surrounding the anger motifs.

Here are some examples of what emerged during this lesson:

A.: "I get angry when someone makes fun of me" – "I blow off my anger when I play with friends".

B.: "I get angry when my dog steals my toys" – "I blow off my anger when my mum hugs me".

G.: "I get angry when my sister pinches me" – "I blow off anger when I am with my family".

E.: "I get angry when mum wakes me up early" – "I blow off my anger when I play with friends".

A.: "'I get angry when they tease me" – "I blow off my anger when I take revenge".

Detail of the cauldron of anger

The focus of this activity, in addition to the linguistic one, was to initiate a simple reflection on what even a child can do to resolve conflictual situations. These are normal at their age and in the school environment. At the same time, children are less and less used to stopping for a few seconds and thinking about a solution that can bring serenity back to a given situation. Too often, it is possible to hear children offend or even raise their hands in moments of anger without asking whether there might be a different response. This is an educational work that the school is constantly striving to do even if,

unfortunately, it cannot always count on the support of the family or the external stimuli that surround the children daily (i.e., videos, news, video games, stories).
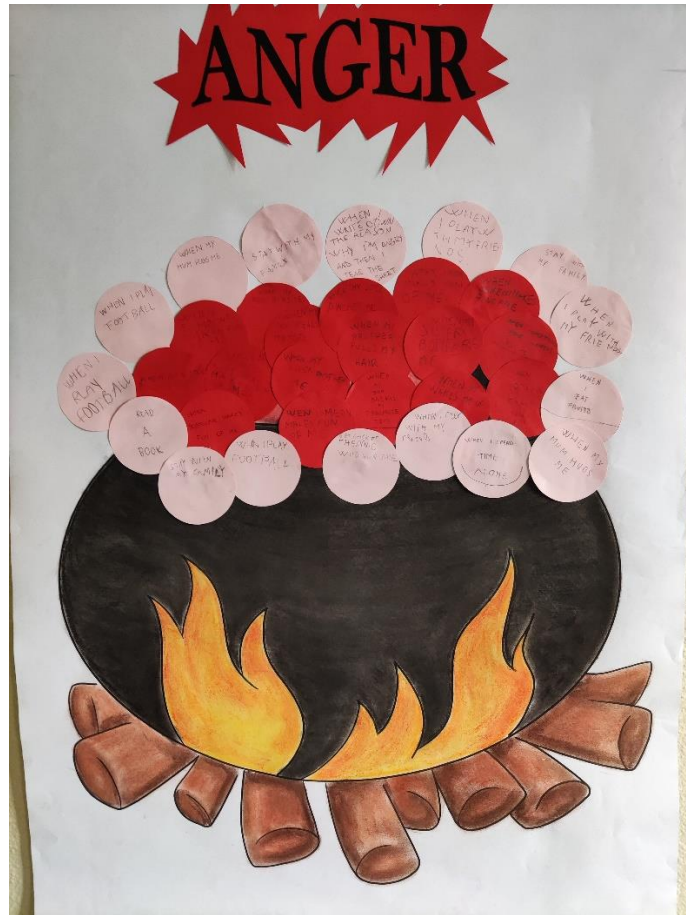
The cauldron of anger

In the fourth meeting, we focused on sadness. The reasons that sad the children of this class are different from what one would expect from children of their age but similar to each other. After re-presenting the story piece from *The colour monster* relating to this emotion, a collective brainstorming session was carried out in the same way as for happiness, repeating the phrase *I'm sad when* each time.
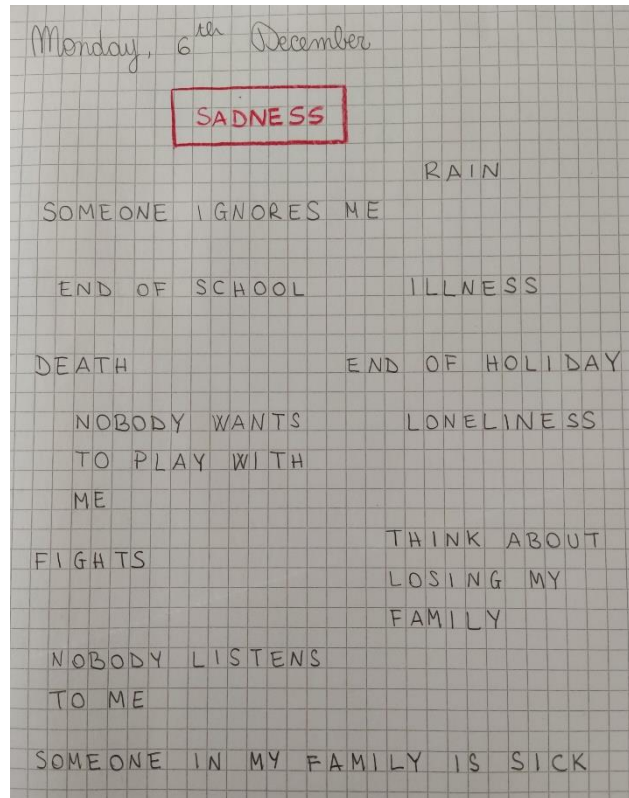
A.: illness;

M.: when someone in the family is sick;

N.: when I am alone;

E. and A.: the death of a loved one;

C.: when I think of losing my family;

S.: when I am alone because nobody plays with me.

Sadness collective brainstorming

The answers above reveal a preponderance of deep-rooted motivations beyond the classic reasons one would expect from second graders - such as rain, the end of the holidays or quarrels. The theme of loneliness and death, which were undoubtedly part of these pupils' lives in the previous year, can be found again. The constant barrage of news about the pandemic and the need to remain isolated from others has meant that these children have known and experienced in first person the loneliness and the lack of contact with other peers who would certainly have helped them develop all those relational skills that they are now patiently trying to recover. Moreover, some have unfortunately experienced the loss of loved ones precisely because of COVID-19. The suffering has also marked them since it happened detachedly, far away from them due to the impossibility of visiting the sick people.

As expressed in the previous chapters, these issues are not taboo for children, they must be addressed and explored with them, but this must be done with the proper means and the right timing that the family or school decides to adopt. In this specific case, there was a lack of free will on the issue, which instead entered *ex abrupto* and

with overbearing force into the lives of adults and children alike, inevitably leaving indelible marks.

In addition to brainstorming, an activity was carried out that allowed the children to move and express their emotions through facial expressions using the TPR strategy. Setting a musical background that could create the right atmosphere, the children had to move freely in space and, when listening to the description of a situation, stop and mime a sad expression or not. Each of them then had to try to identify with that context and consider whether it made them sad. The sentences were spoken by me in English and some also in Italian to facilitate understanding:

1. *I see a child alone while others play;*
2. *I have to spend time away from my parents;*
3. *the rain;*
4. *one of my classmates is absent;*
5. *there are many games in the garden, but not the ball;*
6. *quarrel with a partner;*
7. *I see someone sad;*
8. *school ends;*
9. *holidays end.*

In general, most of the children responded to several situations with an expression of sadness. At the same time, some, which were assumed to be an obvious response, were not perceived as contexts in which they felt this emotion. For example, less than half mimicked sadness in situations 1, 5 and 7 above. In contrast, numbers 2, 4 and 8 almost all showed a downward smile. Again, I want to underline my almost complete foreignness to the discipline of psychological analysis; however, I found it interesting to see how personal loneliness was involved in the children's faces becoming sad in unison. Furthermore, equally significant was how it was not expressed in those situations where sadness was expected to emerge. Perhaps a habit has developed of playing alone and with objects that allow one to do so (the ball may not be one of them) or of seeing sadness on the faces of the people surrounding the children in this case. These are considerations that I personally could not answer but which could, in the future, be the basis for further studies.

For the last meeting in this series, we explored the emotion of calm, perhaps the most difficult one for children to understand. We re-read the part of the related story and then devoted the lesson to two main activities.

The first again involved music and the TPR strategy. Pupils had to move freely in space, trying to adapt their movements to the musical rhythm[65] they were listening to; I alternated slow music, such as the *Moonlight Sonata* by Beethoven, to more cheerful ones, such as Vivaldi's classic *Spring*. Emphasis was placed on the words *slow* and *fast* that characterised the music and its movements.

After this first moment, the children were divided into four groups and presented with two games: Jenga and Shangai.
In the first, there is a tower made up of several floors, each consisting of three wooden blocks facing opposite to the previous one. The game consists of subtracting a block from a floor each time and placing it on top of the tower without making it falls. As the turns pass, the structure becomes more and more unstable. The second game, Shangai, is made up of several sticks that are dropped on the table; players must take one at a time without moving the adjacent ones. In the original version, the sticks are divided by colour with which a different score is associated. In this case, I decided to simplify and thus eliminate this rule.

These two games were chosen because of the need for calmness and concentration that they require in order to perform at their best.

After giving instructions in English, helping me by miming the different actions and simulating my action with the games, the four groups of children took turns playing these games, first using one and then the other so they could try both. They were asked to be quiet and to focus solely on the success of their moves, characterised by calm and decisive movements. In the background, music was left to help maintain a relaxed and calm atmosphere. When a mistake was made in Jenga or Shangai, the children were urged not to give up and to start again through the phrases "keep calm and try again". Obviously, several matches were played due to the tower's collapse or the incorrect

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[65] The recognition of different musical rhythms also associated with one's own body movement was part of the skills the music colleague intended to develop and deepen during this school year.

movement of the sticks, but, to my pleasure, they almost always maintained a relaxed and serene atmosphere without quarrelling and cooperating.

Through this activity, the pupils could experience the emotion of calm, feeling and manifesting it in first person. They then, to my great joy, rediscovered these two games that they called 'old' but which allowed them to have fun, to be together (while maintaining the necessary hygiene and safety standards for the period) in the simplicity that these 'obsolete' wooden blocks and sticks can provide.
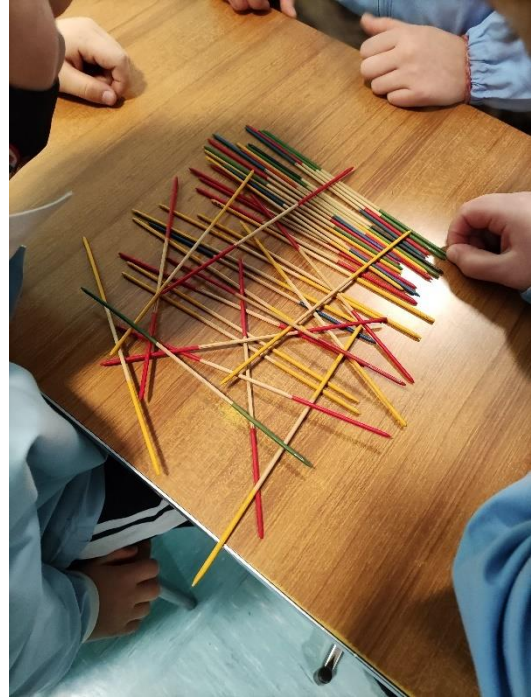

Playing at Jenga

Losing and starting over at Jenga
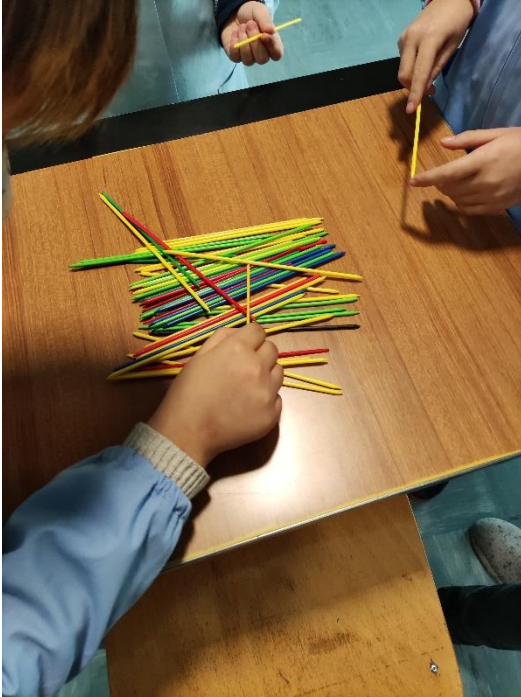
Playing at Shangai

Playing at Shangai

SUMMARY

In this phase, the children were presented with five jars, each labelled with one of the emotions seen so far, similar to what they had seen in the narration of the illustrated book *The colour monster*. The children were given coloured slips of paper corresponding to those seen in the book. They were asked to write a word or simple expression in each piece associated with the corresponding emotion. All this was done in English, and if the word they chose was unfamiliar, they were supported by my translations.

After this first moment, we moved on to sharing what had been worked out. One student at a time brought their emotion cards, said what they had written and, if they wanted, also the reason, and finally put each item in the corresponding jar. All the expressions seen during the different lessons were used, such as *I'm happy when, I'm angry when, my birthday, play with friends* or simple words such as *sun, family, sleep, or loneliness*.

Below are some examples of what the pupils shared:

*B.: happiness: sun, fear: monster, anger: pinch, calm: mum, sadness: rain.*

G.: happiness: ball (because I like playing with my friends), fear: dark, anger: wake up, calm: sleep, sadness: death.

B.: happiness: spring (there are flowers, colours), fear: lose my family, anger: illness, calm: holiday, sadness: death.

A.: happiness: yatch (a possible gift on the way), fear: nothing, anger: be bothered, calm: piano, sadness: death.

C.: happiness: play football with friends, fear: nightmares (where I lose somebody), anger: be bothered by my sister, calm: video games, sadness: death.

E.: happiness: mum, fear: dark, anger: rain, calm: wind, sadness: loneliness.
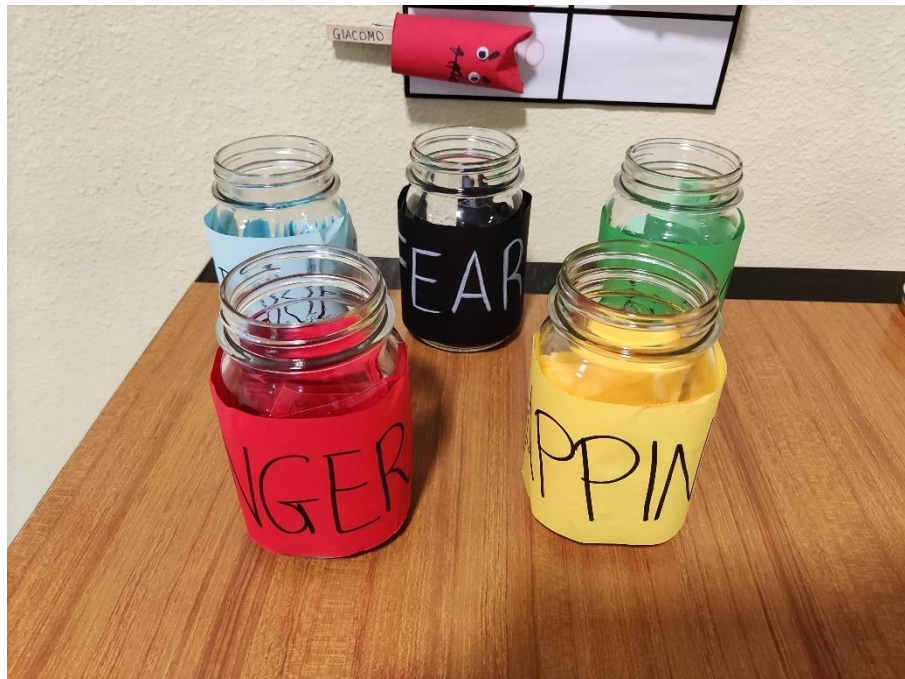

Jars of emotions

In a second moment, we emptied each jar together and pasted the various emotion-related words on the board where, in the first lesson, it had been coloured the confused monster. Now, by placing the sheets of the same colour next to each other, a certain order results and reflects the emotional order found by the story's protagonist.

This activity takes up all the themes seen in the previous lessons and allows me to reinforce those linguistic expressions that are the goal of this Learning Unit. It also gives me a complete and general picture of each child's emotional sphere, observing how in some cases, the responses given concerning different emotions have remained the

same throughout the project and how, for others, they have changed. This latter aspect does not have a negative or positive connotation but reflects the volubility of the children and their constant state of development that characterises their age.
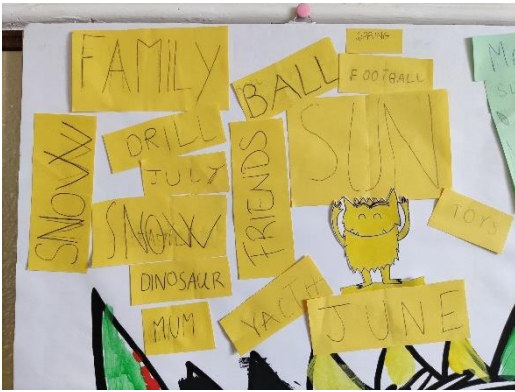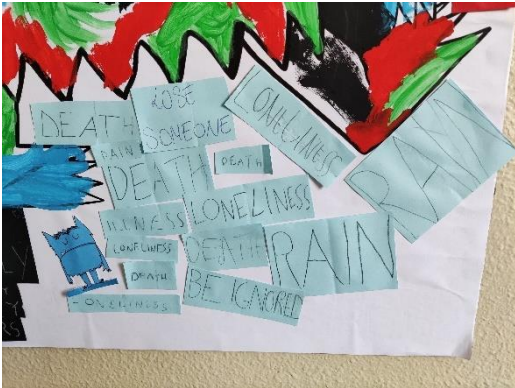

Happiness

Calm

Fear

Anger

Sadness

Our colour monster

FIXATION

The fixation phase lasted throughout the project, and each lesson's specific moment was dedicated to it.

Beforehand, I prepared the *emotionmetre*, a kind of thermometer of our emotions, in which there were boxes with the children's names and mine. At the beginning or end of each lesson, each pupil was asked the question "how are you today?" to which they had to answer in words (i.e., "I'm happy" "I'm angry"). Then they hang the little monster (described in the globality phase) of the corresponding emotion in the place reserved for their name with a nominal clothes peg. Again, if they wanted, it was given the opportunity to share the reasons for the chosen sentiment. As the lessons went on, I could see that more and more pupils felt comfortable expressing why they were happy rather than angry or afraid. On a few occasions, some preferred to tell me why they felt that way and only shared the name of the chosen emotion with their classmates.

Below are some examples that I consider significant:

L.: fear because she has to make a journey she has never made before;

A.: happy because she has made peace with a friend;

M.: sad because she read something sad in a book;

I.: fear because she had a bad dream in which her parents were no longer there;

C.: happy because a classmate is not at school and because it is his mother's birthday;

B.: fear because she thinks she did not study enough for the piano lesson;

M. and G.: angry because they did not want to come to school;

A.: angry because a classmate bothers him and wishes he was not there;

N.: sad because he did not want to come to school;

E.: calm because she is going to make the Christmas tree, and this thought gives her peace of mind.

Two examples of emontionmetre

It appears that in this phase, the pupils had, as the lessons went on, well-acquired the linguistic structures aimed at in this Learning Unit, responding correctly to the question asked without needing the teacher's support. From the point of view more related to 'psychological' aspects, it was observed how infrequently the emotion of calmness was expressed by the children, thus hypothesising that it may be an emotion that the pupils themselves are not very familiar with.

CHECK

I decided to devote the last lesson to a game for the check phase. The chosen activity was the goose game, made and customised according to the topic of this project. Having no other environment besides the classroom, I arranged the different boxes on the pupils' desks. Each of them, made of coloured, plastic-coated paper, was decorated with elements recalling emotions. Some of them had challenges or accidents, as in the original game. Again, the challenges the children underwent followed the theme of the various feelings analysed: *Oh no, your fear freezes you...you miss a turn! Make a happy face and... go to number 5!*, *You are lost and angry...go back to number 9*!

As pawns, everyone had the little monster used in the emotionmetre corresponding to the emotion felt in that lesson, which also attached the clothes peg with one's name to avoid mix-ups and misunderstandings. The game was played as in its original version, i.e., by rolling the dice in turn and advancing through the various squares, taking the different challenges and accepting the accidents.

The children were asked to use the different English expressions they learnt throughout the project. I could see how these were internalised correctly. They all understood what was written in the different boxes, and in the various tests they solved using the skills they had acquired in the foreign language; it was pleasant to see how, in the boxes where there were only decorations, some pupils enjoyed miming them.

All this took place in a cheerful and calm atmosphere, where children did not feel under observation, and their emotional filter was not raised, allowing them to perform to the best of their abilities.
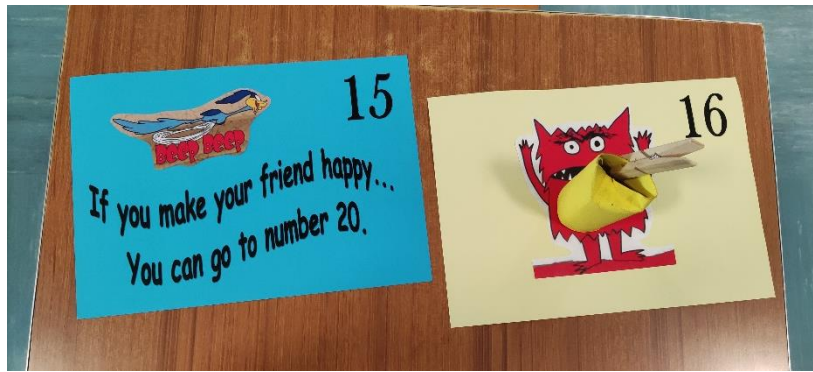
Challenge at number 15

Challenge at number 2

Goose game in action

Conclusion

This paper is the result of the combination of theory and practice, which has allowed firstly to analyse the foundations on which this thesis rests and secondly to give concrete form to what has been expressed in the first three chapters.

Beginning from an initial historical study, the paper has shown how the Italian situation regarding foreign language teaching has been a pendulum swinging between evolution and involution. Indeed, compared to the starting point given in the first chapter, the Enlightenment, many steps have been taken, leading the country to be the centre of innovative projects and studies in foreign language learning and glottodidactics. However, while research in this area has been fruitful, in the practical act of teaching in schools, there have been reforms, especially in recent decades, that have weakened previous steps forward. The references are to Moratti and Gelmini's reforms, due to which the specialist teacher disappeared, detailed syllabuses of the content to be learned returned, and the chairs of a second foreign language in secondary school disappeared.

With the promulgation of the *National Indication for the kindergarten curriculum and the first cycle of education in which the aims and skills* (2012), the school made a change of course whereby the focus was not so much on the list of single contents as on the competencies each pupil should have at the end of the first school cycle. More emphasis was placed on quality than quantity, and an attempt was made to conform Italy to the European standard given by the CEFR. There are still gaps and points that need to be worked on, first and foremost, the training of language teachers in primary and kindergarten schools, where the position is assigned to a teacher who is not a specialist in this subject. As important as it is for the secondary school to have a specialist teacher in the language (as for other subjects), it should also be so for the kindergarten and primary schools where students are going through their best period in terms of learning. Attempts have been made to train Primary Education graduates to teach English, but, as some scholars have pointed out, it is unthinkable, through a course of a few hours, to bring these students up to the same level as those who have dedicated their university careers solely to the study of this subject.

Therefore, the theoretical part of this study went into the area of bilingualism and language acquisition, focusing precisely on the youngest age groups. It has seen how, throughout history, many myths and false beliefs have arisen around the word 'bilingualism'. There have been accusations of confusion, of learning being slowed

down, of space being stolen from acquiring other disciplines. All this has been disproved by countless studies that, in addition to emphasising the falsity of the aforementioned beliefs, have highlighted the importance of language education from an early age. Indeed, it has been observed that the best results in linguistic performance and correctness are obtained in those subjects who have approached the foreign language as children rather than in adults who have acquired the language at a later age. All this is supported by studies on the brain, its characteristics and functions; such research was analysed in the first chapter.

These have led to the conclusion that children's brains, although still developing, show peculiarities, first of all, the plasticity, which make them extraordinarily ductile and prone to learning new disciplines, including foreign language. In addition, around language acquisition, it has been theorised that there are three critical periods in which the learning processes become progressively more complex, and the final results also decrease over the years. It has been seen that the best period would be the one up to the age of 3, followed by the one ending with the age of 8, which then passes to the last useful age between 9 and 22. Unfortunately, it is precisely in what is the rosiest and most fruitful period for learning a foreign language that there is a tremendous shortage of teacher training and actual hours devoted to the foreign language.

In light of these studies, an impulse for the future could be to invest precisely in the youngest age groups, reformulating teaching in kindergarten and primary schools and trying to make English hours really effective. In order to do this, it would undoubtedly be necessary to have teachers who are trained and genuinely passionate about the subject, who can transmit not only notions but also love for this language. It is vital to create a comfortable and fun environment in which students can learn to communicate with a new idiom, where they can feel free to express themselves and give voice to their being and emotions.

This last topic is the focus of the second chapter of this dissertation: emotions. Cognitive development is fundamental, but so is emotional one. Children begin to show their emotions from a very early age, first developing primary ones and then secondary ones as they grow up. Crucial in this period is adult support in understanding and expressing their moods. Therefore, parents, or whoever has the role of guiding towards the correct development of what is called 'emotional intelligence', that is, the ability to

recognise, understand, and manage one's own emotions and those of others. Children are skilled observers and imitators, so they look to adults as role models, especially in difficult moments for them to understand. It is essential to be with them in this early period, listen to them, give them explanations, and help them to name the new emotions that arise.

If this might be a daunting task for a parent or educator, a tool may help, which, as explained in this thesis, is an all-around treasure: the picture book.

Of ancient origin, this type of book allows the opportunity to explore new worlds and tackle any subject by making it accessible to the young reader. It does so with respect and delicacy due to the tender age of its readers, who are, nevertheless, captivated by the visual elements that, in most cases, explain much more than the words themselves. Paradoxically, in a world where questionable educational external inputs barrage these young pupils, the tendency is to protect them from topics considered uncomfortable or unsuitable for their age. Little by little, the creation of these taboos is dismantled by picture books that, through the combination of images and a few words, make even the most difficult subjects, such as death and violence, comprehensible. The use of this literature presupposes the presence of an adult who acts as a spokesperson for the adventures described, thus creating a space for a constant exchange of thoughts and experiences. Listening in these moments is essential, not only on the part of the child who listens attentively to the story but also on the part of the adult who listens to the thoughts and emotions of the young reader. Listening deeply and mindfully to the child's expression of reflections not only means knowing the effective channels for the development of their psyche but also provides a psychological basis for the child to patiently and carefully listen to others. This happens not only in the family environment but also in schools where strategies such as storytelling make it possible to learn English in a comfortable, fun atmosphere that also leaves room for the pupil's emotional development.

Based on storytelling and other teaching methods and techniques described in chapter three, I developed a Learning Unit dedicated to emotions. By reading the picture book *The colour monster* by Anna Llenas and creating related activities, I could translate into practice those notions expressed in the first three sections of this thesis. My work carried out at the school where I am an English specialist involved 16 2nd-grade students

who approached games, workshops and activities on emotions with interest and confidence.

One of the core elements of this project was learning the vocabulary and structures related to this topic. However, precisely because of the chosen theme's peculiarity, I could work on expressing one's moods and knowing how to manage and recognise them. From a linguistic point of view, the learning unit produced an excellent result, leading all the children to learn the vocabulary and communicative structures relating to emotions and their expression. The work done has left a small mark, so much so that even today, these students ask me to share what colour their little monster would be on that day.

Far from imparting a psychological or pedagogical approach, I have also tried to guide them through what is an intricate tangle of colours and feelings that, with effort, they try to tidy up. Everyone got involved, expressed their emotions and listened to their peers with delicacy and respect. In this climate of cooperation, of listening to each other, the children rediscovered the beauty of being together and regained sociality among peers that the pandemic period had denied them.

Thus, it was seen how English could be used as the communicative tool that it is and not only as a school subject. It does not necessarily have to be relegated to the sole dimension of language learning, but it can, indeed must, open to the dimension of the social and of relationships "[...] because it is the only language that makes equals. Equal is who knows how to express themselves and understands the expression of others[66]".

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[66] "[…] perché è solo la lingua che fa eguali. Eguale è chi sa esprimersi e intende l'espressione altrui" from Don Milani L., *Lettera ad una professoressAa*, Barbiana, 1967.

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Summary

Il presente lavoro vuole focalizzarsi sullo sviluppo linguistico prima ed emotivo poi del bambino e del ruolo che ricopre la scuola primaria in questo periodo di crescita.

Nel primo capitolo, infatti, viene presentato un quadro storico delle leggi e riforme che hanno caratterizzato l'insegnamento della lingua inglese in Italia.

La prima grande riforma è stata la Legge Casati del 1861 con la conseguente introduzione dell'obbligatorietà e gratuità dell'educazione elementare. Nello stesso testo, si afferma inoltre che il francese sia l'unica lingua straniera insegnata negli indirizzi classici mentre l'inglese e il tedesco per quelli tecnici. Questo è stato un primo passo verso quello che è il mondo plurilinguista che conosciamo oggi. Tuttavia, nonostante un'impronta innovativa sotto questo punto di vista, queste lingue non furono impartite con metodologie efficaci in quanto i libri di testo utilizzati furono divisi in due sezioni: la prima dedicata alle regole grammaticali e la seconda alla traduzione di frasi minime e decontestualizzate.

Dagli anni '80 in poi ci furono diverse riforme che portarono dei significativi cambiamenti alla scuola, soprattutto quella elementare. Prima fra tutti, fu la Riforma Falcucci del 1985, in cui venne introdotto l'insegnamento della lingua straniera a partire dal terzo anno di scuola elementare e vennero aboliti quei programmi formati da lunghe liste di contenuti dalla discutibile efficacia. Si preferì quindi dare delle indicazioni su come l'insegnante avrebbe dovuto approcciare l'insegnamento affinché questo risultasse positivo e naturale.

Nel 2003 ci fu la seconda riforma che prese il nome dalla ministra dell'istruzione in carica in quel periodo, Moratti. In questa venne affermata l'unicità dell'inglese come lingua straniera presente nelle scuole e, tra l'indignazione e la contrarietà degli insegnanti, vennero reintrodotti gli stessi programmi che erano stati dismessi nel 1985.

Nel 2009 ci fu la riforma Gelmini che prevedeva il ritorno all'insegnate unico. Per tanto l'insegnamento della lingua inglese veniva impartito dal docente di classe, eliminando di fatto la figura dello specialista.

Un ultimo cambiamento, per quanto riguarda la scuola dell'infanzia e primaria, avvenne nel 2012 con l'allora ministro dell'istruzione Francesco Profumo. Con il mandato nacquero e vennero attuate le *Indicazioni Nazionali per il curricolo della scuola dell'infanzia e del primo ciclo d'istruzione* in cui vengono descritte le competenze che ogni studente dovrebbe avere in ogni disciplina alla conclusione di questi primi anni di

scolarizzazione. Scomparvero quindi le lunghe liste di contenuti da affrontare durante i diversi anni poiché ora ci si concentra sulla qualità dell'apprendimento piuttosto che sulla quantità.

Nell'analizzare tutto questo periodo storico, si nota come ci sia stato un continuo andirivieni di passi in avanti e indietro rispetto all'insegnamento della lingua straniera, specialmente nella scuola primaria. Questo non è accaduto solo nei programmi e nelle metodologie da utilizzare ma anche sul tipo di docente incaricato di trasmettere nozioni (e una buona dose di passione) ai discenti più piccoli.

Questa prima sezione continua con un approfondimento sull'acquisizione linguistica in età infantile, sottolineandone i vantaggi e cercando di sfatare quei falsi miti sul bilinguismo. Per anni, infatti, si è creduto che l'approccio ad una lingua straniera fin dalla tenera età potesse provocare danni alla crescita dei bambini, generando confusione e portando alla diminuzione delle risorse utili per l'apprendimento di altre materie. Con numerosi studi, si è potuto invece constatare come tutto ciò non fosse vero ma che anzi il bilinguismo non avesse effetti negativi sullo sviluppo cognitivo e che portasse a dei vantaggi. Si dimostrò che con un approccio precoce alla lingua straniera portasse a dei risultati largamente migliori rispetto a chi si cimentava in età adulta allo studio di un linguaggio non nativo. Il primo caso, infatti, portava a delle prestazioni più proficue rispetto al camuffamento dell'accento straniero e ad un'oralità decisamente più fluente. Si verificò inoltre come il bilinguismo possa portare ad un rallentamento del declino cognitivo dovuto all'invecchiamento.

Si prosegue quindi con una breve descrizione del cervello umano e delle sue principali caratteristiche. Ai fini di questa tesi, viene prestata particolare attenzione al talamo, uno dei componenti del cervello che può essere rappresentato come una stazione in cui i differenti binari sono i segnali sensoriali che vengono processati. Attraverso esso avviene il controllo delle emozioni prodotte dal sistema limbico.

Tra le caratteristiche del cervello spicca sicuramente la plasticità, ovvero la capacità di formare nuove connessioni neuronali che porta il cervello ad adattarsi velocemente e con efficacia. La plasticità è molto importante quando si parla di sviluppo infantile poiché ha il suo apice proprio durante l'infanzia mentre con la crescita perde di fruttuosità. Sia questa caratteristica che la memoria sono fondamentali quando si parla di acquisizione del linguaggio. Il magazzino di informazioni, presente nel cervello di

ciascun essere umano, è infatti responsabile di ricordare le nozioni apprese o per un breve periodo (memoria a breve termine) o per un lasso di tempo più lungo (memoria a lungo termine). La connessione tra memoria e bilinguismo è molto importante in quanto, secondo gli studi di alcuni esperti, si è visto che bambini bilingue hanno una memoria più efficace dovuta alla necessità di dover gestire continuamente due sistemi di linguaggio. Questo è sicuramente un altro punto a supporto di tutte le teorie atte a sfatare i miti sul bilinguismo

Successivamente nel presente elaborato, viene poi analizzata l'acquisizione del linguaggio, soffermandosi sui primi anni di vita e su quali siano i passaggi cruciali affinché questa avvenga nel migliore dei modi. Oltre ai passaggi fondamentali attraverso cui un infante acquisisce la lingua materna, ci si è soffermati su quelli che vengono definiti periodi critici per l'apprendimento di un idioma straniero. Si contano tre principali momenti così suddivisi:

1. da 0 a 3 anni: con una esposizione continua e consistente, è il periodo migliore per un apprendimento corretto della pronuncia e delle abilità linguistiche di una lingua straniera;

2. da 4 a 8 anni: una lingua non nativa può essere ancora imparata dando buoni risultati ma richiedendo un maggiore sforzo mentale;

3. da 9 a 22: il potenziale neurologico è ancora alto tanto da poter sviluppare delle buone competenze linguistiche ma le inferenze della lingua madre sono più marcate e difficili da eliminare.

Alla luce di quanto detto, risulta quindi opportuno avvicinare il bambino ad una lingua straniera fin dalla tenera età. Inoltre, l'acquisizione di un nuovo linguaggio può avvenire attraverso quattro modalità: all'interno dell'ambiente familiare, parlando con uno dei genitori in lingua, introducendo il secondo idioma dopo i 6 anni o lasciando che questa venga usata solo a scuola. Il principio cardine di ciascuna di queste modalità, è che il bambino deve utilizzare entrambe le lingue nella quotidianità.

Ultima sezione del primo capitolo di questa tesi viene dedicata ai maggiori traguardi raggiunti nel campo dell'insegnamento delle lingue, primi fra tutti quelli avvenuti grazie a progetti come ILSSE e Lingue 2000. Ci si sofferma poi sul ruolo dell'insegnante di lingua straniera e sull'eterna diatriba se questo debba essere uno

specialista o meno, esplicitando quali siano i benefici di quella figura esperta che ormai è quasi del tutto scomparsa nella scuola primaria.

Dopo questo primo capitolo che pone le basi dell'intero lavoro presentato in questa tesi, si entra nel mondo delle emozioni, dandone innanzitutto una definizione. Tuttavia, attribuire un significato a questa parola risulta solo in apparenza semplice quando in realtà le numerose sfumature della stessa rendono questo compito complicato. Partendo dalle ipotesi di Charles Darwin, si evidenzia il valore adattivo delle emozioni rispetto al contesto in cui si sviluppano e con gli studi successivi si teorizza il fatto che sono degli impulsi ad agire, delle reazioni istintive in risposta a determinate situazioni. Le emozioni vengono divise in primarie e secondarie. Le prime sono comuni a tutti gli esseri umani e sono espresse attraverso la stessa espressione facciale, avendo una componente innata. Le seconde invece sono il risultato della crescita del singolo individuo e richiedono quindi tempo e sforzo per svilupparsi.

Riguardo alla manifestazione delle emozioni, gli studiosi sono concordi nell'affermare che queste siano visibili fin dai primi anni di età in cui, ovviamente, saranno predominanti le emozioni primarie. Il sistema nervoso poi, produce di conseguenza diverse risposte al presentarsi di differenti emozioni come, ad esempio, dei cambiamenti fisiologici o comportamentali piuttosto che psicologici. Sicuramente queste risposte sono influenzate dal contesto in cui l'individuo è cresciuto; persone con esperienze negative saranno più sensibili agli stimoli di pericolo e di conseguenza scatta più facilmente una reazione alla paura.

L'uomo possiede diversi tipi di intelligenza e Howard Gardner, psicologo statunitense, ne individua e descrive sette. Questo porta alla teoria delle intelligenze multiple per cui un individuo non è limitato necessariamente ad un solo tipo di intelligenza ma può svilupparne anche più di una. Risulta, quindi, evidente come la parola "intelligenza" si debba staccare dalla sua canonica definizione e allargare gli orizzonti verso tipologie differenti.

Tra le diverse tipologie di intelligenza c'è anche quella emotiva. Quest'ultima reagisce d'istinto e può essere indipendente dall'intelligenza razionale, portando quindi gli individui ad agire senza avere la reale coscienza delle proprie azioni. Fondamentale in questo senso è l'equilibrio tra le due tipologie di mind-set poiché nel caso in cui

prevalesse la parte emotiva, si agirebbe senza cognizione di causa e non si riuscirebbe a pensare in maniera chiara.

Se le emozioni fanno la loro prima apparizione quando si è piccoli, risulta essenziale quindi saper riconoscere e gestire i propri sentimenti fin dalla tenera età. Ovviamente in un primo momento occorre l'aiuto di un adulto, il genitore, che con pazienza guida il bambino al riconoscimento e all'accettazione delle diverse emozioni, anche quelle negative, tramite un dialogo aperto e costruttivo. Tuttavia, questo ruolo non è ricoperto solo dai genitori ma anche dagli insegnanti che negli anni più importanti dello sviluppo sono tenuti ad accompagnare i propri alunni su tutti gli aspetti educativi, compreso quello emotivo.

Un ottimo alleato in questo può essere l'albo illustrato che, attraverso la sua stretta relazione tra immagini e testo, rende possibile affrontare qualsiasi argomento con i lettori più piccoli. Di origine antica, questa tipologia di libro dà la possibilità di esplorare nuovi mondi, di affrontare qualsiasi tematica rendendola a portata di piccolo lettore. In un mondo dove sono presenti innumerevoli tabù, tematiche che secondo alcuni non dovrebbero essere affrontate dai bambini, gli albi illustrati smantellano, pian piano, queste credenze e, attraverso l'unione di immagini e poche parole, riescono a rendere comprensibile anche la tematica più ostica come quella della morte e della violenza. Lo fanno con il rispetto e la delicatezza dovute alla tenera età dei suoi lettori che tuttavia sono catturati dagli elementi visivi che, nella maggior parte dei casi, spiegano molto di più che le parole stesse.

Lungi dall'essere un semplice libro con immagini, l'albo illustrato racchiude in sé delle caratteristiche e funzioni ben precise, responsabile del primo approccio del bambino alla lettura. Rafforza il legame tra figlio e genitore in quanto è necessario che l'adulto legga al piccolo ed è proprio in questa sua peculiarità che si nasconde uno dei suoi valori educativi. Il necessario ascolto della storia da parte del bambino e la lettura ad alta voce dell'adulto, rappresentano uno scambio continuo di esperienze, in cui il primo impara a conoscere il mondo sviluppando il linguaggio e crescendo dal punto di vista cognitivo ed emotivo. Anche il genitore apprende qualcosa in questo processo, ovvero la capacità di ascoltare il proprio figlio o studente, mentre esprime i suoi pensieri o emozioni, guidandolo nella giusta comprensione degli stessi. L'albo illustrato rappresenta dunque

una sorta di "enciclopedia della vita" che influenza positivamente la crescita del bambino da un punto di vista cognitivo, emotivo e personale.

Se da un lato il libro illustrato rappresenta uno strumento educativo estremamente proficuo per la crescita a tutto tondo del bambino, dall'altro rimane la sua naturale e principale funzione: il piacere. Attraverso le immagini, accompagnate o meno da parole, il bambino entra in un mondo fantastico, viaggia, impara e sogna.

Proseguendo con l'elaborato, il terzo capitolo presenta le diverse metodologie e tecniche didattiche che si possono utilizzare durante le lezioni di lingua. Non bisogna dimenticare che, soprattutto con i bambini, l'apprendimento deve essere piacevole e divertente, deve essere privo di barriere o di un qualsiasi filtro affettivo che possa mettere a repentaglio l'acquisizione di un nuovo linguaggio. L'inglese, essendo una novità per gli alunni più piccoli, tende ad affascinare fin da subito ma la sua opacità può renderlo altrettanto ostico e odiato. Compito del docente è far sì che non accada questo, ricorrendo ad una serie di strategie che possano rendere ogni singola lezione tanto accattivante quando proficua dal punto di vista dell'apprendimento didattico. L'insegnante deve essere pronto a cambiare e a modularsi in base agli alunni che si trova davanti, attraverso attività diversificate. In tal modo potrà incontrare di volta in volta il favore di ogni tipo di alunno, da quello più incline all'intelligenza cinestetica a quello più legato alla dimensione linguistica e verbale.

Questa sezione continua con un paragrafo dedicato agli obiettivi da raggiungere alla fine della scuola primaria che interessano le quattro abilità linguistiche: ascolto, parlato, lettura e scrittura. In questo senso, ci può trovare una corrispondenza tra quanto affermato dalle *Indicazioni Nazionali per il curricolo della scuola dell'infanzia e del primo ciclo d'istruzione* e quanto stipulato dal *Common European Framework Reference for Languages* per il livello A1.

Proprio partendo dalle diverse metodologie e tecniche didattiche descritte nel capitolo sopracitato, ho sviluppato un'unità di apprendimento didattica dedicata alle emozioni. Con la lettura dell'albo illustrato *The colour monster* dell'autrice e illustratrice spagnola Anna Llenas e le attività ad esso collegate ho avuto modo di mettere in pratica quelle nozioni espresse nelle prime tre sezioni di questa tesi. Il mio lavoro, svolto presso la scuola dove sono insegnante specialista di lingua inglese, ha coinvolto i 16 alunni di classe seconda che con interesse e fiducia si sono approcciati a giochi, laboratori e attività

sul tema delle emozioni. Certamente uno dei nuclei centrali di questo progetto era l'apprendimento del lessico e delle strutture relative a questo argomento ma, proprio per la peculiarità del tema scelto, ho avuto modo di lavorare sull'esprimere i propri stati d'animo, sul saperli gestire e riconoscere. Ho cercato di guidarli in quello che per loro è un groviglio intricato di colori e sentimenti che con fatica cercano di riordinare. In un clima di collaborazione, di ascolto reciproco, i bambini hanno riscoperto la bellezza dello stare insieme, hanno ripreso ad avere una socialità tra pari che il periodo di pandemia li aveva negato. Attraverso le diverse attività proposte, i bambini hanno avuto modo di apprendere non solo il lessico specifico del tema in lingua inglese, ma anche di esplorare il proprio io interiore, rendendosi un po' più consapevoli delle loro emozioni e della loro importanza. È stato uno spazio dedicato all'ascolto di sé e degli altri, in cui l'inglese è stato lo strumento comunicativo principale.

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