

Skating in the dark



The blind and the learning of skateboarding
by way of the physical assistance method

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WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE DO

Full Time S.n.c. was born in 1999 after Paolo Pica and Roberto Verbigrazia, two passionate teachers of various sports, met for the first time. It became Full Time S.r.l. in 2014, and is a multifaceted company that avails itself of qualified staff and has a 360° outlook in the organization and management of workshops for nursing homes, and courses in graffiti writing and skateboarding. The activities we offer are addressed to nursing homes as well as gyms and sport centers. Regarding nursing homes, Full Time avails itself of psychologists, professional instructors, teachers of motor sciences, and social workers, and operates in Rome and its surrounding area with the aim of bettering the individual qualitative standard both through psychomotricity, with an adaptation of motor patterns to age-related changes, as well as through praxis-expressive and recreational activities.

Graffiti writing is addressed to young people, and through graffiti workshops we aim to increase the sense of civic mindedness in youngsters by transforming that which is illegal into a legalized art form, and transferring the works of graffiti from walls to removable surfaces.

The skateboard courses we offer are addressed both to beginners as well as expert skaters, are held by qualified teachers, and are characterized both by the use of a fall-proof teaching method based on physical assistance operated directly by the teacher on the pupil, as well as by the use of height-adjustable didactic obstacles.

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SKATING IN THE DARK

FOREWORD AND PROJECT AIMS

If we interpret the disciplines born in the streets as the necessity of human beings to express themselves freely and creatively by transforming the suffocating, savage overbuilding of urban realities into material supports and functional elements through which to express themselves, then we can consider the practice of skateboarding as an element of spontaneous aggregation where various aspects such as age, social extraction, technical expertise, and physical abilities, freely coexist without any conflict. Seen under this light, the aforementioned discipline can be equated to a dynamic educational system where each practitioner can:

- live together with others and in an original manner, one's personal experiences and express them according to patterns that are representative of one's own individuality, broadening and enriching them with other individuals' experience.
- enhance one's existence both as an element on its own and as an element that is part of a larger reality and thus correlated to the experience of others, so as to lead one to experiment through relationships and interpersonal exchanges: self-awareness; the respect of other people's traits; conflict utilization; the constructive transformation of tensions and negative frames of mind through the channeling of feelings into activity.

For this to really be effective, the practice of skateboarding intended as an educational system where “anyone can,” must be considered in its broadest meaning so as to address both the world of the able-bodied and that of the disabled, and integrate them. In order for this to happen in an optimal manner, a teaching method is strongly needed that is suitable to learners' needs, based on the principle of accessibility and that allows a step-by-step learning process and the solving of problems arising relative to the acquisition of the technical gesture being learned. Starting precisely from this principle of accessibility, the aim of the project **Skating in the Dark** is to bring the blind closer to the practice of skateboarding through:

- a teaching method that proceeds from the easiest to the hardest element, allowing each pupil to experience the teaching in an optimal manner, and that modulates the difficulties both through the splitting into succeeding steps of the maneuver to be taught as well as by way of the physical assistance carried out by the instructors on the pupil throughout the whole learning process of the maneuver.
- The use of special training boards and height-adjustable didactic obstacles.

The experimentation of the teaching method for the learning of skateboarding by way of physical assistance on the blind, or more correctly, the Full Time Method described in the book, *Skate. Metodologia tecnica e propedeutica degli elementi base dello skateboard*, and attached to this document, is set up like an actual research project and entails a comparative study on the learning curve and learning styles involving one or more sample groups of sighted people.

THE METHOD OF PHYSICAL ASSISTANCE IN THE TEACHING OF SKATEBOARDING

The physical assistance method or Full Time method, conceived and described by Paolo Pica in the book *Skate. Metodologia Tecnica e Propedeutica degli Elementi Base dello Skateboard*, is based both on the modulating of the difficulties by splitting the maneuver being taught into successive steps, as well as on the physical assistance carried out on the pupil by the instructor during the whole learning process of the trick. By assistance we mean the physical support and guiding of the movements that the teacher carries out on the pupil performing an action in order to safeguard his safety and facilitate the execution of that action. The physical support that the teacher gives the pupil and that represents his security, is composed of a whole series of successive holds carried out for the whole duration of the action or only a part of it. These holds can be carried out by the instructor on the pupil, by both, or by the pupil on the instructor. Generally, we begin the study of a maneuver that entails the constant positioning of the instructor in front of the pupil during its execution so as to allow both to perform the holds. The results obtained during this first stage will determine the trust the pupil places in the teacher regarding the chances of falling and of falling without getting hurt during the execution of the exercise. The less chances there are of falling, or of falling without getting hurt, and the greater the trust placed in the teacher will be. On the other hand, the higher the chances are of falling and getting hurt or scared, the lesser the trust placed by the pupil in his own ability and in the teacher will be.

Once trust is established, the next step will involve a series of holds by the instructor on the student that, depending on the progress made, will gradually diminish both in duration and intensity. Therefore during this second stage, considerable and prolonged support will be provided for the whole duration of the exercise, which at times may seem excessive with respect to the difficulties that arise during the execution of the maneuver: the purpose is to reinforce the previously earned trust and help the student to develop a relaxed state necessary to optimally guide his movements. Subsequently, both the intensity and duration of the support will be lessened, and will be given only during critical parts of the exercise. This second stage of the assistance ends when the teacher helps the pupil realize that the support he received was more psychological than physical, from the moment that the holds were minimal and thus not essential for the correct execution of the maneuver. This awareness on the part of the student that he executed the maneuver by himself and not with the help of the instructor, projects him towards the third stage of the assistance in which the teacher follows the student step by step during the execution of the trick by physically supporting him or allowing the student to hold on to the teacher only when necessary.

During this stage the instructor's support is mainly psychological, even though he still represents a physical support in the case of a mistake. The third stage of the assistance may be considered a focal point in the learning process in that it allows the pupil to reinforce confidence in his own capacities, such that after a certain number of correctly executed attempts he requests to try the exercise on his own. Once this stage has been mastered, the next stage begins where the instructor's verbal directions guide the student in the execution of the trick completely on his own. The instructor is at a distance that allows the student to perform the trick completely on his own, but still close enough to provide physical support if needed.

In the experimentation with the blind, the assistance procedure calls for the first instructor to be assisted by a second instructor positioned behind the student, holding his hips. Taking the above into consideration, below is an outline showing the gradual decrease of the assistance:

during the first stage, the instructor positioned behind the student always provides assistance by holding him by the hips, while the instructor standing in front holds him by the arms.

During the second stage, the instructor behind the student keeps holding him by the hips, while the instructor in front reduces the assistance, holding him only with one hand.

During the third stage, both instructors take turns with the assistance:

- the instructor standing behind the student does not hold him but follows him closely, ready to sustain him in case of a mistake, while the instructor standing in front holds his forearms;
- the instructor standing in front of the student does not provide any physical assistance but follows him closely, ready to support him should he make a mistake, while the instructor standing behind provides physical assistance by holding his hips.
- only one instructor standing in front of the student provides the assistance by holding him by the forearms.

PROJECT STRUCTURE AND EXECUTION

The project has a length of approximately 40 hours and is divided into 20 weekly 2-hour lessons, and will take place at a blind center in Rome equipped with an indoor gym. The 20 lessons, held by qualified CONI-FIHP skateboard instructors, call for the teaching of the fundamentals of the street discipline by way of special training boards and height-adjustable didactic obstacles, and are organized as follows:

TRICKS	LESSON DURATION
STANCES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic positions and stances: forward; fakie; on the nose; switch; 	6 HOURS
TURNING AND REVERSING OF DIRECTION <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turning fs. • Turning bs. • Tic tac or tip tap. • Turning fs and bs by lifting up the nose. • Fs. revert on the nose. (180° reversal of direction) 	6 HOURS
TRICKS DONE WHILE ROLLING <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manual. • Braking with one foot on the ground. 	6 HOURS

TRICKS	LESSON DURATION
AERIAL TRICKS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drop from a manual pad. • Ollie. • Fakie ollie. 	22 HOURS

Unlike the helmets, the equipment described below is not in relation to the number of participants but to the number of instructors, since the progression of each lesson will demand successive workstations where every element being taught will be experimented by the students, and is outlined below:

- exercises performed on the ground with no teaching aid and composed by a whole series of movements reproducing in whole or in part the technique of the trick being learned;
- a series of movements reproducing in whole or in part the technique of the trick being learned and executed on special training boards without trucks, and then on special training boards with blocked wheels;
- the maneuver or trick performed on a special training board with no trucks;
- the maneuver or trick performed on a special training board with blocked wheels;
- the maneuver or trick performed on a regular skateboard.

Depending on the maneuver being taught, the progression of the teaching process can call for a gradual reduction of the assistance offered by the instructor, with free experimentation on the part of the student only as regards the use of the training boards with no trucks or with blocked wheels, while for the same to happen with a regular skateboard, the assistance can diminish down to that provided by just one teacher.

If the acquisition of the street tricks mentioned above takes place in less than 40 hours as expected by the project, it will be possible for the students to learn additional tricks such as nose manuals, nollies, and pop-shovits, or a progression of the ollie executed from and onto a manual pad.

SPACE REQUIREMENTS AND EQUIPMENT UTILIZED

The space required for the execution of the project is a minimum of 100 square meters. In order to allow the learning of the different maneuvers, the project involves the use of specific obstacles and equipment such as:

Helmets for all participants involved in the project



4 Special training boards without trucks



4 Special training boards with blocked wheels



4 Regular skateboards



2 Manual pads



WHO IS BEHIND THE PROJECT

The project is carried out by a group of at least four qualified (CONI-FIHP) skateboard teachers that know and regularly apply the Full Time method in their classes. The project may call for the presence of a psychologist to monitor the psychological, cognitive, and relational aspects of the group of pupils, and work together both with the teachers for an effective organization of the lessons, as well as with the students' personal assistants.

RESEARCH CONNECTED WITH THE PROJECT

For an experiment to be valid it must bring about a result that is not random, but constant and repeatable over time. On these grounds, the **Skating in the Dark** project was executed in Rome as an experimental project, but in order for it to be exported to other cities and developed, it will be necessary to adapt the Full Time Method to the reality of the blind with the eventual creation of new teaching aids that are compatible with it, as well as conduct a comparative study on learning patterns and rates to be compared with those of one or more sample groups of able-bodied students exhibiting the same age and previous motor experience as the group of blind students.

With the intention of developing a teaching method that is accessible to the blind, the implementation of the project is preceded by an experimentation of the program on the researchers themselves to put them in a position of learning similar to that of the blind, that is, blindfolded. In order to compensate for both a visual perception of the world and an experiential factor relative to the practice of skateboarding, this preliminary experimentation requires:

- a learning environment composed of a public skatepark, or any other place where the acoustic interference created by its normal users causes the greatest difficulty for the teachers' learning process;
- that all teachers learn the tricks previously listed in the switch position, that is, positioned on the skateboard in their opposite stance.

This last point originates from observation of what occurs during the CONI-FIHP Training Course for Skateboard Teachers, where the trainees, even if they are expert skaters used to executing very difficult switch tricks during competitions, make the same mistakes beginners make during the execution of basic maneuvers such as: pushing, turning on flat-ground with or without lifting up the nose; tic tac; etc.,. In short, the significance of this experiment that precedes the actual project, but that is an integral part of it, has multiple goals, that are:

- to create a learning environment similar to that which the blind will experience, such that the teachers can identify with them, experience their difficulties, and establish an empathy with them that is functional to the development of the project.
- accustom the teachers to the verbal-descriptive aspects of the maneuver to be taught, since in skateboarding these are mainly conveyed visually.
- while teaching a trick, to integrate the verbal aspects with the sensory and kinesthetic aspects through the use of passive and active assistive movements of the various parts of the body involved in the trick.

- evaluate how much the experiential factors affect the learning curve of the teachers placed under conditions similar to those of the blind.

Having said this, the project is not limited to the 40-hour time frame, but takes place in skateparks beforehand and subsequently, it continues both inside the host facility, through regular meetings with its key figures, as well as in other skateboard schools, for a comparison with a sample group or groups. To facilitate the advancement of the project and avoid a constant presence of the psychologists at the disability center during the lessons, the video recordings made during the whole duration of the project will constitute a valuable aid for an overall assessment of the situation that can be carried out at a later time.