



Lo sport come pratica educativa Sport as an educational practice

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ABSTRACT

By promoting positive values through physical activity, sport acts as a fundamental educational tool. The analysis of pedagogical theories and educational experimentations show the way sport can promote effective and constructive qualities, thanks to conscious student-centered projects and a careful use of active learning strategies for the promotion of life skills. The purpose of this paper is to highlight the practices and strategies that can determine the art of "sport" in an educational perspective. Nowadays, sport can overcome cultural and social barriers thanks to more performing methodologies that are close to the new generations. The innovative and educational development of sports activities is effective, and can facilitate and support the educational growth of the community, especially that of the youth.

Lo sport, conduttore di valori positivi, attraverso l'attività fisica occupa un ruolo fondamentale come strumento educativo. L'analisi delle teorie pedagogiche e delle sperimentazioni educative, evidenziano come lo sport possa promuovere pregi concreti e costruttivi, grazie a progettazioni consapevoli basati sull'allievo-centrico, ed un uso attento di strategie di apprendimento attive per la promozione di life skills. Lo scopo di questo paper è quello di dimostrare le prassi e le strategie capaci di determinare l'arte "sport" nella finalità educativa. Oggi lo sport, può oltrepassare le barriere culturali e sociali grazie a metodologie più performanti e prossime alle nuove generazioni. Lo sviluppo innovativo ed educativo delle attività sportiva è efficace ed è in grado di agevolare e sostenere la crescita formativa della collettività, soprattutto dei giovani.

KEYWORDS

Pedagogy, life skills, education, sports, movement, health, well-being, learning, values.

Pedagogia, life skills, educazione, sport, movimento, salute, benessere, apprendimento, valori

Introduction

Sport, and its implicit educational potential, is undeniably a powerful tool for promoting and spreading values, beliefs and behaviors too. Nelson Mandela, during his time as President of South Africa, claimed that: "Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire, a power to unite people that few other things have [...]" (Mandela, 2000). That speech had the foresight to use sport to unify a nation divided by racial issues, and to break down racial barriers. The educational potential of sport lies in its means, being an effective tool, and is due to the creative and interpretative strategic possibilities that the methodological action allows for. Sport, understood as a means, is applicable in different contexts for it can integrate knowledge and skills derived from different socio-cultural environments. Therefore, organizational behaviors and organic and integrated interventions can be beneficial to the development of the athlete's resources. Instead, sport understood as an end is likely to be poor, adaptable to only a few who are subsequently considered talented, but following only the objective rules of sports goals. These considerations led De Coubertin, at the end of the nineteenth century, to consider the dual character of sport: "Its effects can be charitable or harmful according to the aspects that we hold onto and can put into play the most noble of passions, but also the most vile: it can develop an attitude of disinterestedness or a preoccupation, or love, for material gain; it can be chivalrous or corrupt; we can use it to promote peace as well as to prepare for war." Therefore, the mere participation in sports activities is not enough; in order to reach the educational objectives, it is necessary to consider carefully the pedagogical proposals and strategies (Carraro, 2004a, 2004b; Koh & Camiré, 2015). Sport is educational when there is freedom to apply the multiple heterogeneous approaches of the experimental method, when the observed variables are taken into account, when the educational components on which the interventions impact are identified, and finally, when the interventions are characterized to fill the gaps in the sports values education. Therefore, if the educational didactic planning takes into consideration and uses sport efficiently, for the values we have introduced, it would be possible to enhance the experimental pedagogical potential, able to return to young people (as well as to adults) the potential longevity of life-long education, suitable for everything and especially for everyone. Therefore, such an educational action of sports, in an ecumenical formula, would push the new generations to be protagonists and not submissive, proactive and not quitters, confident and willing to make new communicative researches and develop new relationships. The idea of sports activity as an end in itself, aimed only at achieving results, is now obsolete. The importance of applying a didactic motor and educational strategy, which aims to sports culture by enhancing the educational and social well-being at both individual and collective level, as well as to new prospects of success, opportunities for health and psychophysical well-being, and finally to economic development too, is now clear.

1. Education and Sport

The educational systems of a society and the related development tools and processes have their foundation in its heritage of knowledge, values, beliefs and behaviors. In fact, the word "education", in its double meaning of *édere* (to feed) and *ex-dúcere* (to take out), is composed of terms intended to enhance the indi-

vidual's heritage of values. Educating the individual and his/her virtues is possible by means of behaviors that are shared and accepted by the social context of reference. In fact, as Bruner states: "*Education is a complex pursuit of fitting a culture to the needs of its members and of fitting its members and their ways of knowing to the needs of the culture*" (Bruner, 1996). Therefore, education equips the individual with the tools to make the best use of his/her personal skills, thus reproducing the culture from which it is supported. Likewise, as an essential set of many and different social systems of reference, sport can convey rules and values fundamental to social life and to reproduce personal behavioral patterns. The presence of multiple subcultures in the sports environment makes the cultural structure always sensitive and multifaceted, which segments of society embrace particular and distinctive cultural elements of their own (Donnelly, 1981). Subcultures are characterized by shared beliefs, values, meanings and behaviors, represented in sport by a remarkably visible, open and meaningful background, ideal for the formation of subcultural values (Green, 2001). The disciplines and the various sports groups within them all have different characteristics and all lead to the formation of different subcultures. The interactions with the sports environment, not limited only to the practical activity, are useful to the different educational contexts that are already rich in communications of shared values and beliefs. Each type of social interaction contributes to the formation of shared pedagogical models. Therefore, it is useful to think of education through sport as a practice that tends to convey positive behaviors and values, and it is for this reason that sport uses a system in which the environment and societies identify themselves. By assimilating and adopting the athletes' actions, qualities, values and skills, individuals nourish themselves through sports gestures. The champion's movement is seen as a diversified educational reference in the cultural and subcultural panorama. Consequently, sport understood as a model in which the transmission of values takes place, becomes a place for acquiring soft skills too. In fact, the Olympic Values Education Program (OVEP), promoted by the Olympic Movement, uses the context of Olympic sports and the principles of Olympism to learn and disseminate the values related to it (excellence, respect and friendship), and then evolve into becoming responsible citizens. OVEP is based on the philosophy of Olympism, according to which learning is achieved through a balanced development of body and mind (International Olympic Committee, 2016). This project is necessary as its global spread is useful for the sustainability of the host country of the Olympic Games, in order to promote the Olympic Education development plan in its programs. To this end, for the development and spread of the olympic objectives, the publication of the Olympic Values Education Toolkit (2007) was proposed; the latter, being mainly a theoretical resource but with some aspects favoring practical experiences, supports practitioners such as teachers and educators in order to promote the values of Olympism. The main methodologies proposed by the Toolkit focus on some learning strategies, such as group discussion, the use of dilemmas, role-playing and work in small groups. It is hard to detect the effectiveness and impact of the program and the Toolkit on the educational aspects since, according to Binder D. (2012), the approaches have different interpretations: (a) is predominantly oriented towards theoretical and notional knowledge about the Olympic Games; (b) is oriented towards participation in student Olympic games, with an emphasis on understanding fair play and cultural differences; (c) is focused on improving motor skills, with the idea that personal and social growth is achieved by striving to improve oneself through physical effort and competition; and (d) interprets Olympic ideals as goals of learning in all as-

pects of life integrated with active participation in sport. They lead us into the models that use sport as a tool for learning soft skills. The most popular methodology, both in terms of research and practice, has its focus in the development of life skills. In the literature, the topic of education and sport is identified with three key perspectives to characterize life skills education: first, the acquisition of personal resources and cognitive, emotional and physical skills; then, the relevance of these resources to improve coping skills and allow the individual to deal effectively with real life situations; the last one arises from the concept that people, and particularly children and adolescents, learn life skills better through active participation in movement, play, game and sport experiences (Koh & Camiré, 2015). In conclusion, however, there is a critical aspect because the efforts made to identify the variables to be observed have often neglected the details on the models and the content of the programs implemented (Camiré, Trudel, Forneris, 2014). Certainly, these project experiences provide us with very positive data regarding the effectiveness of the interventions related to the variables searched for, such as: empathy, social responsibility, ability to set goals, pro-social and fair-play behaviors (respect for opponents and teammates, respect for rules, respect for social conventions, refusal to cheat), and life skills.

2. Motor education and sport pedagogy

The scientific knowledge of the exercise and sport pedagogy is academically placed among the education, motor and sport activities sciences, the main characteristics of which make this research area a multi and interdisciplinary scientific field. Hence, the scientific context is heterogeneous and the operational research scenario ranges from the school environment to the wide sports frontier. A wide frame, composed of many actors whose content-related knowledge, skills and abilities concern all operators in the field, whether they are instructors, coaches or teachers. All of them must know how to respond professionally to the specific and characterizing demands of the various contexts, the needs of which correspond to the places where movement is practiced: first of all the school, and then the various environments and educational contexts - from professional to amateur sports, from fitness to the countless amateur sports educational associations. Obviously, we are speaking of different contexts and objectives within which the movement to promote health and psychophysical well-being is spread and expressed for the benefit of participants (Armour, 2011). Historically, in ancient Greece, the “pedagogue” was a slave with the function of accompanying the child to school or gym; subsequently, with the conquest of Greece by the Romans, they were called “paedagogus”, the same figures of the Greek slaves with the function of teaching their language. Over time, the meaning of “paedagogus” became that of teacher, regardless of his social status and, in the imperial age, the “paedagogum” turned into the school of the pages of the court (Micheli, 1876, p. 16). Today, the figure of the pedagogue is responsible for the education of the person throughout his or her life, and his or her science, i. e. pedagogy, also deals with school education and its related learning (Agazzi, 1975; Frabboni, 1992). Modern Education Sciences direct their field of action towards operational goals that invest the role of the pedagogue in knowledge (theoretical knowledge), know-how (practical skills or abilities) and self-management (the way in which an individual combines know-how and self-management). The one who educates (the person who relates to the other from himself/herself) and trains (the person who relates

to himself/herself) must consider the necessary interdisciplinary learning of the contents of school subjects, from mathematics to Italian, from physical-motor education to music and arts. Currently, the organization of our society makes us poorly active, and the sedentary lifestyle seems to take over the regular practice of physical exercise. A study by Thompson W. R. (2015) showed that the current fitness proposals involve all age groups, and represent a practical solution to the problem of teaching modern forms of movement that catch the attention and interest of millions of people in Italy and around the world, who turn to facilities that offer services related to motor activity and sports. Particular attention should be paid to public and mostly private facilities that provide physical activity services, from the most traditional to the most modern ones. Places where the work is no longer just promotion and animation but a real work of training and education, involving children, adults in various age groups, the elderly and, for several years now, people with stabilized chronic diseases who, with physical exercise, can maintain and improve their health state.

3. Sports culture and educational strategies

Educational opportunities through sport cannot fail to consider the cultural question that flows through sport and the way it goes beyond it. The way in which we think of sport must concern society and the economic world, but above all, it cannot ignore the authoritativeness of the “golden rule” made up of elements such as education, training through movement, and younger generations. One of the cultural approaches to sport that necessarily influences the management approach is that of making sport a business activity, intended only for adults, thus totally losing the focus on young people. In this way, sport is characterized only by the results, the show, the affirmation of those who are strong and talented and can boost this business (Westerbeek, 2013; Garner, Humphrey & Simkins, 2016). However, a different criterion is based on the idea that sport must be functional to the person, his/her well-being and his/her human value growth. It is needed to improve and put oneself to the test, in harmony with the community, by achieving positive results for individual well-being and for the ethical development of society. This model, based on moral and civil solidarity, is often silent, practiced in many humble realities but almost with no voice or words. This archetype is consistent with the idea of educating to sport and, by means of it, the whole surrounding context (Isidori, 2012). Therefore, the game strengthens the educational approach of sport only by applying the planning that enhances the game dimension, which is linked to the sports activity and the aspect of gratuitousness that lies in sport itself. The challenge of sport for all and of all is based on the educational values of movement that improves life. A mindset to understand sport at the center of the person addressed to everyone, and that accepts the challenge of being able to involve everyone, from the unmotivated to people considered weaker from an economic and social point of view, up to those who are conditioned by a more sedentary lifestyle – not for work reasons, but for health problems. This sports culture and the related project modality, in order to have much formative success, must be supported by a media interest, especially by the new communication channels such as social networks, in order to “be heard by everyone” (Riva, 2016). Possible actions for the development of this sports culture must embrace the dialogue with those who have a different vision of sport. Through a dialectics of sport, it needs to reach the promotion of common interests, as well

as the growth of both the culture and the educational potential of sport not only in our country. Therefore, sport can improve through educational processes, enhancing the value of the sports practice resources that encompasses young people's growth. Sport has always cooperated in young people's education and individual growth, from the most popular sports, such as football, to the less famous ones; for several generations, all of them have supported families and schools in the construction of the "people's community" (Sibilio, 2005). In addition, other educational agencies are to be taken into account, i.e. the endless sports associations and the gyms. Through their many and multifaceted fitness activities, they improve motivation for movement. The cultural and managerial approach mentioned above, namely that of sport as a business, is certainly more appealing but it is only for a few: among these few, the selection is ruthless. This is due to the expectation, or the dream to become famous and rich champions one day, like the football legends of our time, but in the face of ruthlessness where only one can become a champion, the pleasure of playing, having fun and putting oneself to the test must "win over anything and everything". To date, all sports - especially the popular ones - have an unconscious attractive and propulsive force, to the point of conditioning the emotions of millions of people and especially of all ages. For this reason too, sport is a great opportunity for education; a training that can help build champions in life (Farinelli, 2005). Therefore, it is important that the reasons leading young people to approach a gym or a sports group become projects, and that sports operators are qualified people able to carry on the educational and training process started in the family, by means of sport. These choices could also be useful to improve communication with the new generations, improve their acceptance of the changes that are always so rapid and deep such as to invest our society to the point of overwhelming it. The educational model is an expression of a society, and many things are learned while living our lives in it (Palmieri, 2012). It follows that even before evaluating the design phase, it needs to strengthen the idea of the renewed confidence of education in activity as the main tool for conveying culture, values and beliefs, so that this condition can improve its *raison d'être* and make them more credible and fascinating to achieve.

Educating through sport to loyalty, respect for rules, cooperation, and the tension to always improve (Costantini, 2008), although taken for granted, hides some pitfalls such as episodes of violence in youth sports, doping, and unlawful conduct. (2008) Educating through sport requires a basic culture, specific training, motivation and passion. The evaluation of the educational potential and the related management approach, able to use it effectively and efficiently, is a next step. The freedom and creativity of learners and teachers must be sovereign in the mutual participation in the game, in the movement, and in sport. The latter, in order to be free from economic and profit laws, must start from the assumption that the values it teaches through the movement or the artistic representation will then be a phenomenon of imitation and reality construction. As Cereda F. (2015) explained, "Teaching how to play a sport is a complex and dynamic activity that extends beyond where the activity takes place, and is not simply accomplished by the transfer of knowledge and skills from the coach to the student. Essentially, coaches must be prepared to understand, interact, and relate to the environment in which they work. They perform a variety of tasks that require different skills. Among these, the main ones are: needs analysis, defining an overview, developing a strategy, creating an action plan, organizing and managing people, defining progress indicators, leading the education process, managing relationships, running technical classes, teaching adults and children appropriately, interpreting

and reacting in situations, self-evaluating and innovating. Developing educational skills in coaches means giving them the opportunity to operate by mobilizing, orchestrating and harmonizing the technical and tactical knowledge of the sports discipline, as well as the relational skills and educational strategies appropriate to the context. This helps the athlete to “transfer out of the gym” (Hellison D. 2003) and of the playing field the life skills learned, encouraging that educational and critical-reflective process aimed at the person’s improvement, growth and holistic development through sport.

Conclusions

In a social environment characterized by a strong difficulty in educating, the responsibility of showing all the educational value of sport is strongly felt. It is necessary to fully develop the awareness that, in our hands, we hold a privileged instrument for involving and educating young people. It is no longer enough to claim, almost rhetorically, that sport is a great resource for education; it needs to go further and make a series of concrete management choices showing its value. First and foremost, it is a question of improving sport itself by adopting an approach geared towards expressing the social values of this sector, overcoming the barriers imposed by business rules that greatly limit its educational potential. Making sport an educational resource by effectively managing it, is the first step towards making it the tool for educational development. Thanks to an effective cooperation with the school environment and the families, the sports world can concretely pursue an educational, cultural and social benefit, as well as an economic one too. It is possible to educate every day thanks to a long-term perspective and a synergy with the various stakeholders in the field. In this regard, the fundamental elements to make sport educational can be summarized through the following focal points:

- The centrality of the individual and his/her values, rather than of his/her economic interests;
- Educational intentionality;
- An educative method capable of welcoming, orienting, coaching, accompanying and giving real developmental perspectives;
- An associative experience;
- Investing in educational places (sports field, stadium, gym, locker room, streets, squares, schools, and so on);
- Lifelong learning for educators: trainers, animators, coaches, sports managers, referees, and operators;
- A collaborative approach with the school and family context.

Sports practice is part of a broad educational process. Those involved in conducting training sessions (teachers, coaches, instructors, athletic trainers, and so on) must not only apply the rules of common sense and spontaneity but, above all, should be able to adapt the educational training methodology, aimed at integrating pedagogical principles and educational strategies with the development processes of motor skills and techniques of the sports discipline. This highlights the responsibility of the whole sports world, all technical operators and their trainers, who need to promote the development of educational skills. These skills will allow not only to be trainers responsible for physical and tactical preparation, but

also - and above all - conscious educators, able to use sport to convey values, encourage the learning of life and soft skills and promote empowerment processes (Benetton, 2015; Isidori, 2009; Maulini, 2019, 2014, 2006; Jones et al., 2004). Therefore, as argued by Davi M. (2008), it needs "to redesign the role of the coach by thinking of him/her also as a director of cognitive/affective scenarios, a creator of learning contexts, a processor of globally training situations, and especially a mediator (in educational contexts) between the analytical and the global, between motor specialization and human qualities, between sports mastery and emotional intelligence" (Davi, 2008, p. 186). Within the technical-sports curriculum, the sports model must develop intra and interpersonal skills and educational strategies that will allow the coach to create a training environment capable of promoting participation, dialogue and confrontation, in which to develop a genuinely educational relationship with his/her athletes. Only if the training mission will go beyond the mere performance approach, sport will be able to express its educational power. Moreover, it can become a tool capable of developing, in an integrated way, the person's motor, psychosocial and physical dimensions, and can influence the development of active and healthy lifestyles (Maulini, 2019, 2014, 2006) by facilitating the achievement of a harmonious functional, physical and psychic balance, dynamically integrated into the natural and social environment (WHO, 1998, 1986).

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