

Psico-Pedagogia della Corporeità: risorsa di salute e socio-educativa nella ri-educabilità dei detenuti

Psycho-Pedagogy of Corporeality: a health and socio-educational resource in the re-educability of prisoners

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Abstract

Physical activity in sports contributes predominantly to people's health, favoring the development of a person's Overall Well-being, understood as a multidimensional construct in which several dimensions interact simultaneously (of cognitive, emotional, physical-motor, socio-relational, spiritual nature), by also returning a community well-being.

The aim of the paper is to highlight the importance of the inclusion of motor-sports interventions within the prison world. Not only it is seen as a "right" of a person with restricted freedom to benefit from the positive effects at psychological, motor, emotional and relational level, but also as a tool by which the psycho-pedagogical value of corporeality contributes in those educational processes capable of triggering an existential personal change. In addition, it underpins the rehabilitation and re-educability of the prisoner for a new life project and his/her future social reintegration.

Keywords

Corporeità, Apprendimento, Salute, Benessere, Carcere, Re-Integrazione Sociale
Corporeality, Learning, Health, Well-being, Prison, Social Reintegration

Introduction

According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 1948), “*Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity*”. Therefore, in order to be healthy, it is not enough to have no illness but it needs a certain life quality that brings benefits at physical, psychological and relational level, so as to contribute to the person’s overall well-being. So this definition goes beyond the medical approach and implies the responsibility of the person in taking care of his/her own health condition as a whole. In fact, health education is mainly aimed at modifying voluntary actions, changing behaviors, and improving lifestyles to achieve good individual and community well-being. In accordance with the bio-psycho-social model, the orientation towards the promotion of global health takes place through the development of self-realization and the full knowledge in realizing “*health behaviors*”, i.e. all those actions that must be implemented to optimize one’s own health and well-being, and that contribute to the spread of healthy and social personal lifestyles. Thanks to a long process of change in Western society, a new way of understanding prison confinement has been achieved (Devís-Devís, Martos-García, Valencia-Peris and Peiró-Velert, 2017), thus allowing physical and sports activity to increasingly becoming an integral part of the prison world, as a fundamental right of all prisoners (Meek, 2014). Prisons have therefore turned from mere centers of punishment and revenge into centers aimed at the rehabilitation of detainees and their social reintegration (Foucault 1978: 16), thus expressing the new official ideology of the prison system which, in a democratic society, reserves a prominent place for sports in prison life (Caplan, 1996). In Italy, cultural, recreational and sports activities were introduced by Law 354/1975 (Official Gazette of the Italian Republic, 1975) into the Penitentiary System, among the necessary elements of the re-educational treatment (art.15) in addition to education, work, religion, contacts with the outside world and with family members (De Vita, Donini, Iovino, 2019). The constant practice of motor and sports activities is an effective means for both prevention and for health development; especially in prisons, it allows prisoners enjoying the benefits it brings to all dimensions of the human being (at physical, psychological, emotional, relational, and spiritual level) to which the World Health Organization refers (WHO, 1948); it therefore improves the quality of life (albeit under conditions of freedom restriction) with a possible influence on the re-educational and social re-integration processes. If we consider sport in all its aspects (the health, social, preventive-educational ones, and so on) it represents a need of the whole population; therefore, *it is a right of all*.

The motor sphere has enormous potential: in addition to improving health, it plays an educational, social, cultural and recreational role. Strengthening human capital contributes to the preservation of the psycho-physical well-being and to the development of inclusive social relationships, together with a sustainable balance with the environment and nature.

In European society, the important role of sport and its specific nature were recognized by the European Council (2000), which, through the Nice Declaration, reaffirmed the importance of sport as “a factor for inclusion, participation in social life, tolerance, acceptance of differences and respect for the rules”. Motor and sports activities should not be used to fill up the time that, in prison, goes by and never changes; instead, they should be included in re-educational treatment protocols as they promote empowerment, change, opportunities, learning, orientation, problem-solving, sharing, participation, dialogue, exchange, confrontation, self-rediscovery, and life project.

1. Psycho-pedagogy of corporeality

Mutual importance and close correlation should be recognized to sport and education (Isidori, 2016), since both areas can be considered as privileged places in which to implement educational practices and contribute to the shaping of human capital, and are useful human *bildung*

tools for the development of life-long learning (Migliorati, Maulini, Isidori, 2016). Motor and sports activities are among the active and activating methodologies and are strongly involved in the evolution, training and personal growth process of each individual. The set of activation processes, the development of personal skills/ resources and of human relationship systems entails the body and its corporeality, its values and languages.

The “lived body”, the “*leib*” (not a body-object) involves and stimulates all the dimensions of the person (i.e. those psychological, motor, emotional, relational, and spiritual ones), leading to changes that are useful for orienting people towards health behaviors; the latter allow them changing their lifestyle and improving their personal, socio-relational, and professional quality of life.

Learning therefore means capturing, acquiring, fixing and enhancing the information stored in our long-term memory. Our memory is influenced considerably by those particular experiences: the more particular and fresher they are, the more they give us emotions; the more varied they are, the easier it will be to remember them. The quality of the experiences is also linked to the length of the memories: this means that what remains in our mind (learning) is closely linked to the type of experience we have lived.

In any field of knowledge, the ability to learn something easily is linked to *the way we acquire it*. According to the scientific scheme “The cone of learning”, if our ability to learn is active, then the acquired information remains in our memory for a longer time and proves more accurate (Dale, 1969). By participating more actively in something, one learns better and with less effort. Learning through conscious practice also gives greater imprinting at emotional level too, since it uses the body as a means of communication. The best means through which to learn is our body, which enables the experiential knowledge of ourselves.

Motor experience is of great importance at physical, psychological, emotional and cooperative (relational) level.

The methodological approach based on cooperative lessons seeks to emphasize and accentuate the common purpose that shared by the members of the group who work together interdependently. Cooperative didactics is part of the methodological approach called *Learning Together* (Johnson, Jhonson, Holubeck, 1996), a model that examines different aspects of work while trying to create individual and group responsibilities, promote and enhance personal skills and competences (life skills), and re-examine the activities carried out.

At the same time, it was demonstrated that *enjoyment*, i.e. the pleasantness given by carrying out the activity, represents a key factor for the group’s motivation towards the activity to be carried out; a factor that is certainly useful for maintaining positive levels during the performance of the activities. It is closely connected with the generation of effects of pleasure, satisfaction and amusement towards the activity carried out, due to outcomes experienced in a constructive and uncompetitive atmosphere.

Scanlan and Simons (1992) defined enjoyment in sport as “*a positive emotional response to the sports experience, which reflects generalized feelings such as pleasure, sympathy and fun*”.

A Finnish study group found that a task-oriented motivational atmosphere is strongly linked to the perception of pleasantness during motor activity, as well as to the perception of one’s own competence in carrying out the activity.

In particular, enjoyment in physical activity was identified as a key factor in encouraging students to perform physical activity, carry out their lessons with commitment and maintain a general level of positive commitment (Gråstén, Jaakkola, Liukkonen, Watt, Yli-Piipari, 2012).

Enjoyment, self-perception of competence and task-orientation are the interrelated factors that, if properly stimulated, can help maintain a high level of intensity and commitment during sports activities and during daily life activities too.

Starting from the assumption of the centrality of the emotional-corporeal dimension as the foundation of the cognitive processes involved in the individual’s development, the paradigm of Embodied Cognitive Science takes shape; it recognizes in corporeality the primary dimension for the success of processes that influence and lead changes in human behavior, and by means of

it, the related actions and relationships are implemented. The theory of the embodied cognition (Shapiro, 2019; Varela, Thompson, Rosch, 1992) is part of the Neuroscientific studies concerning the enhancement of the extended corporeality (mind-body-emotions), and considers every form of embodied human cognition as rooted in the corporeal experience.

There is no cognitive experience without the implication of the corporeal-emotional experience. The experimentation of the environment is conveyed and mediated by the body, a fundamental step both to discover the sense of identity and to encourage a perspective of observation of oneself, others and the environment (De Vita, Rosa, 2018). From a biological point of view, experiences are translated into a set of new memorizations, elaborations and sensations associated with a given field. Typically, sensory enrichment leads the individual to change and update his/her perceptions of the external world. Our deprivation (like, for example, for the person in prison) leads the mind towards perceptual rigidity (Cerasa, 2017).

Our mental processes develop and are modulated by corporeality. It is the body that, already from prenatal age, allows us encountering the world (Gallese, 2016) to embody the experience which will be more pleasant if it will facilitate learning (Lucangeli, 2011).

Recreational and sports activity is of great importance in the implementation of a re-educational program, since the practice of motor activities is a source of psycho-physical-emotional well-being, a basic tool for personal realization, and is the privileged space for facilitating social inclusion (Rosa and De Vita, 2018a).

The body becomes an instrument through which to build one's own identity, and increase skills to act in the world. "Recovering the sense of identity, the ability to empathize, to be protagonists of one's own life while respecting the value and dignity of others, become primary objectives and key elements on which to focus an educational intervention" (Rosa and De Vita, 2018b). Starting from the development and restoration of individual resources, bodily-mediated experiences encourage people to respond more consciously to individual needs and to the demands of the environment. Recovering one's own resources means fostering empowerment (Laverack, 2004, 2007) to re-establish a new balance, a new order, which can offer a new interpretation and redefinition of the problem and a new awareness. "We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them", as A. Einstein said. One of the fundamental objectives of motor and sports activities is to generate a change in those who practice them. Inmates try to stimulate a change of attitude and approach to life that leads to questioning prejudices, distorted and stigmatized visions of being "convicts", by facilitating the rediscovery of themselves and acquiring new awareness of their own and others' value / talent. Through motor experience it is possible to generate changes in the inmates, useful to lead them to have positive attitudes and leave aside, as much as possible, the stereotype of the prison. It needs to motivate them to orient their personal (and possibly also professional) future towards self-realization and social reintegration.

Sports activity, whether carried out individually or in groups, educates the subjects who practice it to the constructive management of their own growth process, by promoting the improvement of social interaction, self-esteem and psychophysical health (Di Palma, Tafuri, 2017), in addition to training to share emotions, learning to tolerate stress, being able to manage aggression and anger, and strengthening the ability to have self-control (Di Palma, Masala, Learn, Tafuri, 2016).

In the prison context, through the experiences carried out in groups, it is possible to learn to recognize the other, one's own limits and those of others, find solutions to difficulties, strengthen bonds with the community "... by creating a sense of belonging and acceptance, developing positive attitudes and social behavior, and uniting people with different cultural, social and economic backgrounds in the pursuit of shared objectives and interests" (UNESCO, 2015).

Corporeality involves physical-motor, cognitive, affective-emotional, psychosocial, behavioral, relational and cultural factors that are at the root of the health state people, according to the principle of *salutogenesis* (Antonovsky, 1996; WHO, 1986a, 1986b), responding to the promotion and preservation of health from a bio-psycho-social perspective by contributing to

the development of health policies in favor of the community.

“The primary objective of a ‘movement culture’ is to exploit the skills of each individual by combining physical activity, education, environment, well-being and citizenship rights” (WHO, 2016).

Through the experience lived in prison, the individual has the opportunity to rediscover, reassess and train his skills as a citizen. (De Vita, Donini, Iovino, (2019).

2. Psycho-pedagogical and socio-educational effects of corporeality in the re-educability of prisoners

Both in society and among those who work in prisons (Devís-Devís, Peiró-Velert and Martos-García, 2012), there are deeply rooted assumptions thanks to which sports practice is considered capable of instilling also universal values in people.

It should be borne in mind, however, that the educational values may be effectively conveyed or not (Ortega, Giménez, Jiménez, Franco, Durán, Jiménez, 2012), depending on the nature of the physical or sports activities practiced. Therefore, just like we speak of education in life outside of the prison, in the field of penitentiaries it will be possible to talk about (re) education (Martos-García, Devís-Devís, Sparkes, 2009) and re-educability of the person only through programs that entail objectives, contents and methodologies specifically designed and implemented in order to induce changes, improve lifestyles and encourage universal values.

Many studies have focused on the practice of motor and sports activities in prison by analyzing and highlighting a range of knowledge about their educational and re-educational, health, and social role.

We can find studies that have analyzed the use of sport as a tool for youth rehabilitation in England (Parker, Meek, Lewis, 2014), and the effect of the practice of physical exercise in the psychological well-being of Italian prisoners (Battaglia, Di Cagno, Fiorilli, Giombini, Borrione, Baralla, Pigozzi, 2015). Other studies have focused on the promotion of health and well-being through sports into English and Welsh prisons (Meek, Lewis, 2012, 2014b), the effectiveness of the use of exercises as a health promotion intervention for male Irish prisoners with mental health symptoms (O’Toole, Maguire, Murphy, 2018), the positive impact of sports programs on the reintegration of British prisoners (Meek and Lewis, 2014a), the possibilities offered by sport in the rehabilitation of Australian prisoners (Gallant, Sherry, Nicholson, 2015), the relationship between physical activity and youth delinquency in Iran (Behjati, Ghanbarpoor, 2015), the importance of sports in the prisoners’ life in jail and in their training as individuals. Other ones have focused on the extent to which, despite its potential, physical exercise and sports practice in prisons is still not sufficiently promoted (Ortega, Abad, Giménez, Durán, Franco, Jiménez, Robles, 2017), limiting those possible positive effects resulting from the motor activity practice, and very sought after in treatment protocols (Martos-García, Devís-Devís, Sparkes, 2009).

From a study on the evaluation of a socio-sports basketball program implemented in the Penitentiary Centers of Spain, starting from the degree of satisfaction of inmates and the resulting perceptions of the influence of this program on their life in prison and on their social reintegration, it was positively found that not only the participants learned about the democratic values they had worked on, but also that the program had had a favorable influence both on their personal development and on their life in prison (Vila, Robles, González, Fuentes-Guerra, Martín, Sánchez, Rodríguez, 2019).

A 10-week yoga practice intervention among male prisoners in Swedish prisons increased prisoners’ behavioral maturity, improving their ability to take responsibility, feel more proactive and be more self-acceptant; not only these characteristics were previously not developed, but they were also associated with anti-social and aggressive behavior (Kerekes, Brändström, Nilsson, 2019).

In Italy, a study highlighted the Pedagogical value of Corporeality through the Innovative Methodological Approach of *Biodanza SRT*, aimed at the Re-educability of Young Prisoners in

order to promote new personal skills (at emotional, cognitive and relational level) and to raise awareness of the Perception of One's own Well-Being assessed through the Optimal Experience Questionnaire (Goldwurm, 2015a).

Through a metacognitive learning process, Biodanza SRT interventions were aimed at preventing the health of the detained person, learning individual strategies (*life skills*) and acquiring permanent behaviors in line with the main studies on re-education, in the field of coercion and consistently with the reference *policy*, with the aim of consolidating a training model to be included in the treatment protocols of the Justice systems Existential Reprogramming (Rosa, Madonna, 2019).

Biodanza SRT (Rolando Toro System) finds its educational and rehabilitative value through a *metacognitive* learning process, as a body mediation-based pedagogy capable of promoting the person's global health and well-being, and of encouraging the learning of individual strategies (life skills) useful for orienting oneself in life by adopting positive attitudes and contributing to collective well-being. (Rosa, Madonna, 2019)

Optimal experience is characterized by a series of emotional, relational and cognitive factors that, experienced by the person, lead him/her to seek them in other situations, by activating a process of growth and promotion of subjective well-being.

Well-being as assessment is a dimension that includes global assessments, such as the level of general satisfaction and within the different daily contexts, the attribution of importance and meaning to existence, the perceived quality of life and the perception of autonomy and control of one's own actions and decisions (Goldwurm, 2015b).

The *Optimal Experience Questionnaire* was therefore an important tool to qualitatively estimate the cognitive-behavioral, emotional, motivational and relational aspects of the experience lived by the children under restriction into the "Fornelli" YDC in Bari, Italy, and who were involved in the SRT Biodanza laboratories. Through the administration of the Questionnaire we wanted to investigate which emotions, thoughts and motivations characterized the experience lived in the Biodanza SRT laboratory, and, at the same time, we aimed at analyzing: Perceived commitment, Perceived abilities, Emotional well-being, and Motivation. (Rosa, Madonna, 2019)

The outcomes coincided with those we expected, and thanks to the positive effects of the Pedagogical-Educational intervention of Biodanza SRT, they facilitated the adoption of socially-accepted behaviors (which are the basis of reintegration into civil society).

Like also Ríos (2004) pointed out, it should be stressed that the motor and sports activities experience proposed in prison breaks the daily routine, offering the inmates the benefit of being in contact with people outside the prison, and of indirectly dealing with what is outside the reality they are living in.

Therefore, although bound in their freedom, physical exercise and sport for prisoners also play the symbolic role of "escape" and "personal liberation".

Motor and sports activities practice in prison facilitates the development of the corporeal dimension and plays a fundamental social role, as it is an educational tool and an extraordinary promoter of positive universal values: it is a vehicle for inclusion, participation, aggregation, civil and social coexistence and support, also in the light of a reintegration process.

Conclusions

Sport has always been used as a way through which to develop and involve the community, as it enshrines values linked to the overcoming of antisocial behavior and to crime reduction. Although there is an established research body on sport, including programs to reduce antisocial behavior and criminal activities (Coalter, 2007; Crabbe, 2000; Morris, Sallybanks, Willis e Makkai, 2003; Nichols, 2004; Sandford, Armor, & Warmington, 2006; Smith & Waddington, 2004), there is still little research carried out on sports programs and motor activities within penitentiary facilities, intended to highlight the socio-educational and psycho-pedagogical val-

ue of corporeality.

Motor activity cannot and must not be considered only as a moment of leisure, but it should be understood and used as a social change tool that radically contributes to the eradication of social inequalities by promoting inclusion, since it bets on the certainty that sport for all can contribute to the shaping of an empathic and ecological society.

Prison therefore becomes a possible *educational learning environment*, considered a place in which to set up a real life-school, providing for motor laboratories in order for prisoners to experience themselves firsthand by bringing into play their resources, strategies and emotional, cognitive and relational skills (Rosa, Madonna, 2019).

A space through which to find and rebuild oneself in the prison is the place dedicated to the person's Re-Programming. Support, educational relationship, treatment path, and positive outcomes aim at helping the person Re-building a life project, creating useful links and discovering his/her own talents. (Rosa, 2019)

In a prison, it is necessary to face differently the implementation of sports and motor activities (Chamarro, Blasco, Palenzuela, 1998) by leveraging on the awareness that corporeal mediation-based experiences not only promote the maintenance of the detainee's psycho-physical-emotional well-being, but they become learning and education opportunities for a future life and social reintegration project.

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