HEALTH PROMOTING SCHOOLS: MODEL-BASED PRACTICES IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

SCUOLE CHE PROMUOVONO SALUTE: PRATICHE BASATE SUI MODELLI IN EDUCAZIONE FISICA E ATTIVITÀ FISICA

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ABSTRACT
The practice based on pedagogical-didactic models overcomes the limits of the traditional approach to physical education, promoting learning and educational values. Recent studies propose an epistemological and formative redefinition, analysing models, motor tasks, and methodologies. The aim is to identify recurring models to guide planning and assessment, enhancing interdisciplinary scientific references.

La pratica basata su modelli pedagogico-didattici supera i limiti dell'approccio tradizionale all'educazione fisica, favorendo l'apprendimento e i valori educativi. Studi recenti propongono una ri-definizione epistemologica e formativa, analizzando modelli, compiti motori e metodologie. L'obiettivo è individuare modelli ricorrenti per guidare progettazione e valutazione, valorizzando riferimenti scientifici interdisciplinari.

KEYWORDS
Pedagogical-didactic models; Quality physical education; Teaching-learning processes.
Modelli pedagogico-didattici; Educazione fisica di qualità; Processi di insegnamento-apprendimento;

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Introduction

In recent years, numerous and diverse projects related to physical and sports activities—external to the school curriculum and promoted by national, regional, and local institutions—have been implemented in schools across Italy. These initiatives have led to a wide range of organizational and didactic responses and, not infrequently, have caused disorientation among teachers. The objectives of these projects include expanding the educational offer in terms of physical education and sports initiation, increasing daily opportunities for physical activity to counteract sedentary behaviors, promoting academic success and inclusion, and fostering the adoption of healthy lifestyles.

Health promotion in the school context is an educational process. It can be understood as a set of integrated educational proposals aimed at safeguarding the health and well-being of the school community. This is a multifaceted process that includes educational activities aimed at promoting healthy behaviors among students, interventions targeting the physical and social school environment, and strengthening relationships with local partners (IUHPE, 2011).

Various pedagogical and didactic models support school-based planning focused on health promotion, influencing the curriculum, teaching-learning processes, and the environments in which these are implemented, as well as their interrelations (Dyson et al., 2016; Arufe-Giráldez, 2023). In particular, the Health Promoting Schools (HPS) model is based on three fundamental pillars: the school curriculum, the daily management of educational activities (including space, relationships, and internal organization), and links with the community (families, local authorities, associations) (IUHPE, 2011).

Health-promoting schools are not merely a collection of parallel projects; rather, they represent an integrated system of experiences in which the educational environment, interpersonal relationships, school organization, and collaboration with the local community work synergistically to foster well-being.

To promote health at all ages, it is crucial to offer structured and methodologically supported physical activity opportunities from early childhood (Ramires et al., 2023). It is well established that healthy habits formed during developmental stages are likely to persist into adulthood. Therefore, it is essential to integrate motor and physical experiences not only within curricular physical education but also through activities offered before and after school, during recess, and between lessons (Hills et al., 2014; Porter et al., 2024).

Schools represent a privileged setting to encourage regular physical activity among children and adolescents. Considering the amount of time students spend at school each day, it is essential to implement educational strategies that provide opportunities to meet international recommendations of at least 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity daily, with a focus on varied and diverse forms of practice (Hills et al., 2014; WHO, 2020; Pesce et al., 2019).

Across European countries, there is broad consensus on the principles guiding the Health Promoting Schools approach. Values such as equity, sustainability, inclusion, empowerment, and democracy are considered essential in creating a school context oriented toward health promotion. These principles must be translated into concrete actions that ensure equitable access to education and health services for all, value diversity, and encourage active participation from every member of the school community (IUHPE, 2011).

In this framework, the educational approach of Health Promoting Schools is seen as a broad strategy aimed not only at improving health but also at enhancing the academic performance of children and adolescents by integrating motor and physical experiences into everyday school practice (IUHPE, 2010). A coherent integration between school policies and inclusive, participatory practices is essential to promote academic success, enhance well-being, and reduce health-risk behaviors (IUHPE, 2010; Italian Ministry of Health, 2019).

The teaching of physical and sports education based on pedagogical-didactic models—or Evidence-Based Education (EBE)—overcomes the limitations of a teaching approach focused predominantly on disciplinary content detached from the actual needs of students. EBE draws on methodologically sound studies and research aimed at fostering diverse learning styles, personalizing teaching interventions, and promoting inclusion. The curricular teaching and the presence of a broad educational offer in schools—designed to counter sedentary lifestyles, encourage sports participation, promote the use of technology in teaching, and strengthen school–community relationships—require physical education teachers to possess well-structured didactic competencies.

Multi-component didactic interventions for school-based health promotion, particularly through physical and sports activities, necessitate in-depth analysis of the underlying educational and didactic models, motor task structures, organizational formats, selected communication methods across different spaces and environments, and the measurement and evaluation methodologies employed.

1. What Foundations for Didactic Planning?

The design, implementation, and evaluation of high-quality educational interventions in the field of physical activity for children and youth require a thorough analysis of scientific evidence and best practices. In this perspective, the integration of multicomponent programs into school educational plans—namely, various integrated, inclusive, and sustainable educational activities, structured and feasible within curricular or extracurricular contexts—represents a proven and effective strategy.

These programs combine different motor experiences and organizational approaches and require specific methodological choices aligned with educational objectives to ensure students are provided with broad and varied movement opportunities. This is essential to meet guidelines recommending at least 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity per day (Hills et al., 2014; WHO, 2020; Porter et al., 2024).

It is crucial that the planning of multicomponent interventions be grounded in theoretical frameworks and organizational models that are shared and generalizable, such as the socio-ecological approach and self-determination theory (Raposo et al., 2020), the methodological principles promoted by Physical Literacy (Martins et al., 2020; Rudd et al., 2020; Cairney et al., 2019; Edwards et al., 2018), or the Spectrum of Teaching Styles (Mosston & Ashworth, 2008). This methodological framework analyzes teacher and student behaviors and their mutual relationships to develop motor skills and foster the growth of motor, cognitive, emotional, and social functions and their interconnections.

Didactic interventions focused on education in and through movement are embedded within the Model-Based Practice (MBP) framework. This model is mainly applicable within the curriculum and formal education. At the curricular level, MBP proposes a structured program articulated through educational objectives and specific content, with the aim of supporting the achievement of long-term learning outcomes across a broad student population.

From a didactic perspective, MBP seeks to achieve short- to medium-term results by guiding teachers in classroom management, learning activity organization, inclusion and social interaction, pedagogical decision-making, and evaluation processes, in close alignment with the learning goals of individual lessons (Dayson et al., 2016).

The various domains of physical education (e.g., body expression, outdoor education, game-based learning, skill acquisition, etc.) can be addressed through different, yet complementary, didactic models suitable for curricular

implementation. These include: Teaching for Personal and Social Responsibility, Cooperative Learning, Adventure Education, Outdoor Education, Teaching Games for Understanding/Tactical Games, Sport Education, Cultural Studies, and Fitness Education (Dayson et al., 2016).

An essential reference is the concept of Physical Literacy (PL), which supports the development of motor competencies as an integral part of the educational journey, providing the foundation for an active lifestyle and serving as a powerful tool against sedentary behaviors and related health issues (Grauduszus et al., 2024). PL can be considered both an organizational and methodological framework, forming the connective tissue across various educational actions and learning environments.

Despite differing interpretations of PL depending on national and contextual variations, the most widely accepted definition is that of Whitehead (2010), who describes it as a multidimensional construct encompassing affective, social, physical, and cognitive domains (Fortnum et al., 2025). It includes motor competence, motivation, self-confidence, and the knowledge required to engage in physical activity consciously across all stages of life.

The concept of PL inevitably corresponds with that of motor competence—widely used in Italian educational discourse—which encompasses diverse and complementary factors (Colella, 2019; Pellerey, 2000): motor functions (motor skills and underlying abilities), psychological and emotional factors (motivation, self-perception, enjoyment, knowledge), behavioral and social factors (interpersonal interaction and communication), and their interrelations across different contexts and activities.

In this context, the analysis of scientific evidence and best practices related to didactic and organizational models is essential for designing sustainable, accessible, and context-sensitive educational interventions. These interventions must aim to promote students' educational development through meaningful physical and sports experiences.

2. Didactic and Organizational Models in Physical and Sports Education

In recent years, physical education has undergone significant evolution in teaching methods, shifting from traditional, reproductive, and standardized approaches to more complex ones based on different didactic and organizational models. These models are adapted to contexts and differentiated according to the needs of the recipients. This transformation has been driven by the need to respond to social,

cultural, and educational changes, requiring teachers to adapt their strategies to the varied needs of students (Gurvitch, Lund & Metzler, 2008).

This change points to the analysis of the psycho-pedagogical and social models of reference.

The various fields of Physical Education, in fact, require the use of different intervention models that, drawing from and feeding into scientific evidence from various fields, introduce the existence of a multi-model curriculum to be studied and applied (Kirk, 2013; Lund & Tannehill, 2015). Moreover, the convergence of school-based projects and teaching interventions promoted by institutions and organizations highlights the need for clarity and methodological rigor.

In particular, multicomponent, health-oriented interventions carried out in schools and various educational settings require a thorough preliminary analysis of the reference educational-didactic models, as well as the motor tasks, organizational modes, and processes for assessing both progress and outcomes.

In pedagogy and didactics, the term "model" has taken on several meanings in relation to influences from different fields of knowledge. According to Damiano (1996, p. 6), in pedagogy, a model is understood as: a. the representation of a practical theory, i.e., recommended procedures that are effective and consistent for implementing educational projects; b. procedures concerning the management of educational projects that can be empirically tested to verify their efficiency, effectiveness, and consistency.

In didactics, the model is conceptualized as the representation of the interdependent relationships between various factors that characterize the educational experience, such as the teacher, the student, the subject matter, and the socio-cultural context (Tornar, 2001).

A didactic model is defined as a plan or framework used to structure curricula, design teaching materials, and guide instruction (Joyce & Weil, 1973). It represents a coherent structure that integrates theory, planning, classroom management, learning activities, and evaluation systems into a unified design aimed at achieving long-term learning outcomes (Metzler, 2011). In particular, the "model-based" perspective contrasts with sporadic or fragmented practices, proposing instead systematically designed and integrated educational paths.

The identification of an intervention model, as highlighted by Casey and MacPhail (2018), represents an essential preliminary step in the study of teaching practices. This operation allows for: a. clarifying the implicit educational meanings, b. evaluating the feasibility of the intervention, c. defining operational procedures, d. outlining the expected behavior of the teacher, e. analyzing the variables that affect the teaching-learning-assessment process.

A didactic intervention model can be defined as a conceptual framework that integrates consolidated scientific evidence with successful teaching practices, connecting theoretical frameworks to concrete methodological aspects. The analysis and selection of a model thus become indispensable operations for conscious educational design, aimed at defining objectives, selecting content, and choosing the most suitable methodological strategies for developing students' motor competencies, both in their collective and individual dimensions, as well as identifying appropriate assessment criteria and tools.

It is a cultural and methodological necessity to address the complexity present in today's schools.

The general didactic approach, known as Model-Based Practice (MBP), is based on the integration of theoretical foundations, teaching variables, and improvement needs. It also aims to renew pre-existing models considered outdated or ineffective in addressing the emerging needs of students and school contexts (Metzler, 2011; Hulteen et al., 2018).

In this framework, a model-based physical education relies on a thorough analysis of existing variables, referring to specific pedagogical-didactic orientations. Each of these orientations produces distinct educational and learning outcomes in relation to the organizational modes of activities, the teaching styles adopted, and the strategies applied. Every model, in fact, presents its own non-negotiable characteristics, which define the expected behaviors from both teachers and students.

In fact, while numerous studies, particularly in the fields of Physical Education and sports initiation, have examined the proposal of a single model to derive communication methods between teacher-student-students (motor task - effect - teacher), some have explored hybrid models, and only a few have attempted to meaningfully and purposefully link multiple models in the school curriculum.

The pedagogical shift in the form of MBP, in schools and other educational agencies, is a process that must be supported by a community of practice committed to improving teaching and learning across multiple areas of physical education and sports education.

A didactic process based on models (MBP) thus focuses on theoretical foundations, teaching-learning variables, improvement needs, and modifications of other teaching models deemed outdated or ineffective in relation to the needs of students and reference contexts (Metzler, 2011; Hulteen et al., 2018).

For example, physical education teaching initially relied on teacher-defined, direct methodologies. Starting in the 1960s, with the contribution of M. Mosston and S. Ashworth, the interaction between teacher-student-task-environment was

expanded through the Spectrum of Teaching Styles (1966), redefining the communication process and the degree of decision-making in the motor and sports education setting. This development was followed in the 1970s by the publication of Models of Teaching by Joyce and Weil (1973), which laid the theoretical foundations for considering teaching as a set of "logical, coherent structures systematically described" to promote learning (Joyce & Weil, 1973). This approach allowed the concept of "one best method" to be surpassed, asserting that instruction should be tailored to learning objectives, context, and student characteristics (Metzler, 2011).

In the field of physical education, specific models have been adapted and developed to meet the needs of various educational contexts (Table 1).

- **Direct Instruction**, where the teacher maintains direct control over the teaching activity;
- **Personalized System of Instruction (PSI)**, which allows students to progress at their own learning pace;
- **Cooperative Learning**, which emphasizes learning through peer collaboration;
- **Sport Education**, aimed at developing competence, literacy, and enthusiasm for sport;
- **Peer Teaching**, which promotes mutual teaching among students;
- **Inquiry Teaching**, based on problem-solving carried out by students;
- **Tactical Games**, which encourages tactical understanding in sports games;
- **Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility (TPSR)**, focused on developing personal and social responsibility through movement.

Table 1. (Main Models Proposed by Metzler, 2011)

According to Metzler (2011), each didactic model is characterized by its own structure, which includes:

1. Clear theoretical foundations;
2. Definition of learning objectives;
3. Competencies required from the teacher;
4. Sequence of activities based on student development;
5. Strategies for managing, communicating, and assessing learning.

The correct alignment between the didactic model, the subject area, the motor task, organizational modes, and methodologies is crucial for the quality of the learning process. Each model uses a repertoire of motor tasks and organizational modes that must be selected and adapted based on the specific learning objectives and pre-established educational goals (Gurvitch & Metzler, 2013).

In light of these considerations, it is clear that didactic and organizational models precede the methods themselves and today represent the foundation for effective and scientifically oriented educational planning in the field of physical education.

Conclusions

The process of teaching motor skills requires reference to different models and a variable methodological approach.
It is essential to promote connections between the various factors that make up the teaching process, in order to facilitate meaningful learning. Physical education teaching should be oriented in interdisciplinary directions, where the motor domain interacts with the content of other subject areas and educational contexts.
A quality physical education, centered on young people and offering experiences of qualitative motor learning, is indispensable. It represents the foundation on which to build broader educational initiatives, involving both the school and the community in promoting active lifestyles. Promoting physical activity at school not only contributes to the physical well-being of students, but also serves as a fundamental vehicle in the fight against non-communicable diseases, creating healthy habits that can last a lifetime.
The approach of Physical Literacy (PL) in schools is essential to promote an active and healthy lifestyle, not only at the school level but also for the prevention of chronic diseases. Lessons incorporating physical activity are particularly effective, as they integrate and enrich subject content, offering an accessible, sustainable, and inclusive approach. Moreover, this approach does not entail the additional burden of taking time away from other subjects or extending the school day, and it is easily implementable by all teachers.
In recent years, studies and best practices regarding the teaching of motor activities have highlighted significant developments in terms of the quantity of content and organizational modes, adaptations, and the use of equipment, across different contexts and educational environments.
The pedagogical models of reference are not always clear. It is important to note that, complementarily, there is a need to acquire not only a quantitative expansion

of content but also a greater and different methodological orientation, regarding teaching methods and the subsequent learning modes of students' motor skills, as well as the effects of mediating the teaching process in relation to contexts, based on studies from various scientific fields and their methodological implications.
Analyzing teaching as the mediation of relationships between the subject and the object of learning means conceiving a complex didactic competence that draws on disciplinary, psychological, and communicative knowledge. In order to act as a mediator, the teacher must understand and master the relationships between the object of motor learning, the subject of learning, the conditions, and the mediation strategies of learning, i.e., the ways in which disciplinary, interdisciplinary, and transversal content is proposed through didactic strategies, learning episodes, operational situations, and educational scenarios.
On a didactic level, educational implications do not concern (only) the selection of tasks but also the modes of interaction with students and the ways in which the teacher arranges and offers the scenario in which to carry out the experience and develop didactic mediation. This requires clear cultural and scientific references.

Author contributions

The article is the result of the study jointly designed and developed by the Authors, with the following contributions: Sara Ladiana is the author of the following sections; Introduction and 1. Dario Colella contributed to section 2; Domenico Monacis also contributed to section 2. Conclusions are shared among all the Authors.

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