

## **TEACHING PHYSICAL EDUCATION DURING CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC (COVID-19). EDUCATIONAL REFLECTIONS & PROPOSAL**

### **INSEGNAMENTO DELL'EDUCAZIONE FISICA DURANTE LA PANDEMIA DI CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19). RIFLESSIONI E PROPOSTE EDUCATIVE**

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#### **Abstract**

The coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) forced the Italian population, and beyond, to live about a hundred days of confinement, where subjects were forced to live a suspended time that marked a decisive slowdown in individual and community lives. Every area of human existence has been overwhelmed by considerable changes, including school and Physical Education. As is well known, Physical Education has an essentially practical connotation and that, therefore, needs to be carried out in presence and in suitable spaces, although it has tried to intervene remotely to allow the educational continuity that every curricular teaching has necessarily had to carry on. It was a unique critical situation that needs to be interpreted on the educational side, so as to better understand this curricular didactics, what possible future scenarios arise, such as any drifts that could be met. The aim of this paper is to reflect from an educational perspective, proposing indications that allow teachers to continue to operate safely, while not distorting the fundamentally practical connotation that distinguishes this teaching.

La pandemia da coronavirus (COVID-19) ha forzato la popolazione italiana, e non solo, a vivere circa cento giorni di confinamento, nella quale i soggetti sono stati costretti a vivere un “tempo sospeso” che ha impresso un decisivo rallentamento alle vite individuali e comunitarie. Ogni ambito dell’esistenza umana è stato travolto da notevoli cambiamenti, tra cui anche la scuola e, in essa, l’Educazione Fisica. Come ben noto, l’Educazione Fisica ha una connotazione essenzialmente pratica e che, pertanto, pur con il necessario distanziamento, abbisogna di essere svolta in presenza e in spazi idonei, seppur si sia cercato di intervenire a distanza per consentire quella continuità didattica che ogni insegnamento curricolare ha dovuto necessariamente portare avanti. Si è trattato di una situazione critica unica nel suo genere che necessita ora di essere interpretata sul versante educativo, in modo da meglio comprendere gli orizzonti di questa didattica curricolare, quali possibili scenari futuri si profilino, quali le eventuali derive alle quali si potrebbe andare incontro. Lo scopo del presente contributo è quello di riflettere secondo una prospettiva educativa, proponendo indicazioni che consentano agli insegnanti di continuare ad operare in sicurezza, pur senza snaturare la connotazione fondamentalmente pratica che contraddistingue tale insegnamento.

#### **Keywords**

COVID-19, Physical Activity, Physical Education, Distance Teaching, School  
COVID-19, Attività Fisica, Educazione Fisica, Didattica a Distanza, Scuola

## **Physical Activity During the Coronavirus Pandemic (COVID-19)**

The coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) can make very hard and difficult to maintain a physically active lifestyle. The aim of this article is to reflect about the Italian situation, also proposing strategies that allow to continue to operate safely even for the near future, in light of the fact that a second pandemic wave is not to be underestimated (Shunqing, Yuanyuan, 2020). Based on what we know so far about COVID-19, this virus seems to have a very high transmission potential. For this reason, the Ministerial Provisions and Recommendations all over the world are all based on avoiding contact with each other as much as possible and, if necessary, to keep us a social distance of at least 1 meter from each other (Leung, Wu, Liu & Leung, 2020). These measures obviously have contraindications and one of them is the difficulty of carrying out sports and physical activity in the places where they used to be practiced: closed schools of every order and grade, gyms and fitness centers, as well as city parks. Traditional jogging is also forbidden, unless it takes place in the immediate vicinity of our home. In this period of generalized quarantine it is therefore almost inevitable to remain many hours sitting and inactive.

To better understand the urgency of intervening in such a complex historical period, it seems appropriate to start from the indications of the World Health Organization (WHO, 2010), which even in normal times recommends at least 20 minutes per day of physical activity. International guidelines identify in fact in 150-300 minutes per week the optimal amount of physical activity to maintain a healthy and correct lifestyle (Kahn et al, 2002).

### **What about Physical Activity in Italy?**

Around the world, 1 adult out of 4 and 3 adolescents out of 4 (aged 11 to 17) do not engage in physical activity according to WHO recommendations. The situation seems to be not different in Italy: about children, only 18% play sports for no more than 1 hour per week (Nardone et al, 2018); about adults, 33.6% of people aged 18 to 69 are classified as sedentary, that is to say that they do not exercise during free time; about over 65, instead, the most practiced activity is walking outside the home, domestic activities represent the main interest, too little time dedicated to training muscle strength (Contoli et al, 2016). Within the WHO European Region, physical inactivity is responsible for one million deaths each year (about 10% of the total) and 8.3 million years lost net of disability. It is estimated that 5% of coronary heart disease, 7% of cases of type 2 diabetes, 9% of breast cancers and 10% of colon cancers are attributable to physical inactivity. In addition, many countries in the region have seen an increase in the number of overweight and obese people in recent decades. In 46 countries (87% of the Region), in fact, more than half of adults are overweight or obese (Guthold et al, 2018). The guidelines provide elements of system policy and guidance on the actions needed to encourage physical activity, aiming at the fairness and inclusion of vulnerable individuals, with the aim of overcoming the sectoral and fragmentary character, which have had many of the prevention and promotion actions taken so far, also aiming to promote greater homogeneity of intervention at national level. The document, consistent with the goals of the “Global Action Plan on Physical Activity 2018-2030: More Active People for a Healthier World”, recently approved by the WHO (2018) to reduce the overall prevalence of physical inactivity in adults and adolescents by 15% by 2030, recognizes the validity of our country’s strategic approach, which takes into account all the determinants that influence the lifestyle and aims to carry out effective actions to promote health in a cross-sector and integrated approach.

In Italy, as happens worldwide, the promotion of physical activity requires a cross-sector approach, with strong leadership of the health sector, but with great interaction with other sectors, such as education, sport and culture, transport, urban planning and the economy (Colella, 2018). The document (WHO, 2018) therefore defines in detail the role and different responsibilities of the various sectors involved, with particular reference to public health and the health service in

general, the education sector, the sports system, the environment and infrastructure sector, the workplaces, all areas in which it is possible to develop interventions consistent to facilitate an active lifestyle. The guidelines also describe the benefits of physical activity for each age group and in relation to physiological and physiological situations and specific population subgroups, thus illustrating, starting from the WHO recommendations (2018), the recommended levels of physical activity and the systems and ways to achieve them (Nardone et al., 2018).

### **The Italian Physical Activity Situation During COVID-19**

In light of this, therefore, once the ideal need for physical activity for the different age groups has been established, it's interesting to understand how we can pursue this aim with all the limitations to which we may still be subject. Let's get a point straight away: jogging close to home was a formally allowed activity. After several controversies and objective difficulties in interpreting the previous rules, the circular of 31 March were very clear about this (Ministero dell'Interno, 2020). But despite this note, the argument remains unclear and the applicability of the rule not entirely obvious, also due to the fact that in Italy we are experiencing different situations regarding the spread and concentration of the virus (Chinazzi et al, 2020); in fact, we have seen different reactions from local authorities, dictated more than anything by the different situations that are found in the various territories.

The possibility of physical activity outside our homes is therefore a very sensitive topic. While, simply sticking to ministerial guidelines, we could consider it absolutely legitimate, from another point of view we do not feel compelled or encouraged at such a critical and sensitive time. To give sensible and detailed advice one should know the specific conditions of each subject, in which neighborhood he lives, if there are adequate spaces to run or walk and at what distance these are from home. With common sense there are also other solutions to meet our daily needs of movement, that is to carry out physical activity within our homes, without any risk of contact with others other than relatives.

The Italian College of Health has prepared and disseminated a special guide to exercise to be practiced at home, dedicated to children from 12 to 17 years old. In particular, the guide highlights that exercise, in addition to increasing overall well-being, improving sleep quality and self-esteem, also helps the children to manage stress and react positively to the sense of compulsion that a situation like the current one can generate. In addition, the physical activity carried out remotely in community chat, allows children to maintain social relationships with friends and to experience a conscious and correct use of technological devices (Ministero della Salute, 2020).

At this particular juncture marked by the COVID-19 pandemic, the school, albeit at a distance, continues its work of education and training but also of health promotion with proposals to accompany its students in the maintenance of physical activity even at home with a virtual collection of proposals. The school, therefore, supports a comprehensive approach to promoting health aimed at the school community as a whole. A remote proposal that takes advantage of the countless possibilities provided by new technologies. For example, between video lessons, so-called "active breaks" are practiced, i.e. short "explosions" of physical activity carried out in the classroom as a break from the learning phase. Teachers encourage children to exercise and play active games with parental supervision and after checking suitable home spaces (Daly-Smith et al, 2018).

During Coronavirus Pandemic (Covid-19) the teachers of Physical Education and Motor Sciences through distance teaching therefore contribute significantly to incentivize the opportunities for motor activities and the spread of correct lifestyles in a prolonged condition of social isolation. In addition to the Inail compulsory policy, the educational institutions benefit from supplementary insurance policies for civil liability and student injuries, and it is unclear whether the policies can also cover any injuries that occurred during the course of practical

exercises in motor sciences at a distance, i.e. if in the case of an accident and in the absence of insurance coverage, compensation claims or liability profiles may instead fall on the teacher. In other words, with regard to the teacher's responsibility to the pupils, being closely linked to the student's "vigilance and control" obligations, in the case of distance learning, the manner of the best exercise of surveillance on the safety and safety of the pupil, despite the objective peculiarity of e-learning, has not been clarified. On the other hand, the application of smart working involves the extension of compulsory insurance against accidents and occupational diseases, but no rule published to date expressly includes this possibility for teachers, limiting themselves, as far as the school sector is concerned, to certain profiles of Ata staff. In the face of a regulatory discipline that is obviously "opaque" and indeed worrying for teachers, both as workers and student leaders, disciplinary clarifications are needed in order to increase work and teaching serenity.

### **Physical Education at School during COVID-19: Reflections and Proposals**

Physical Education is a key subject in the compulsory school curriculum of every secondary school in Italy. Discipline to which the task and the burden of protecting and strengthening the psychophysical development of students. This task is fulfilled primarily through the practice of playful, motor and sports activities, in which the student learns through his own body by putting himself and others into play, moments in which frontal teaching leaves room for a very different and more articulated interaction between teachers and learners. The discovery of one's own body, the awareness of one's self in relation to the world and others, the formation of one's personality are fundamental stages in the growth of each student (Bellantonio, Colella, 2019).

In a social context in which opportunities for motor and sport expression become increasingly rare and limited within the competitive and competitive sphere, Physical Education at school remains an absolutely precious moment of inclusion, discovery and application. For these reasons, Physical Education acquires an essential character for harmonious and truly conscious psychophysical development, a precondition necessary for true protection and education in public health (Casolo, 2011). The UNESCO International Charter for Physical Education, Motor Activity and Sport (2015) states that the practice of Physical Education, Motor Activity and Sport are a fundamental right for all human beings, therefore, Physical Education must be guaranteed in particular to school-age children and young people and every educational system must ensure that this matter is taught as an extension of the Charter of Human Rights.

The current serious pandemic situation has put a strain on the right to education for students in many nations. In an attempt to protect this right, the model of distance learning has been applied in more than 150 countries, this has certainly made it possible to deal with the emergency, but there is also no doubt that Physical Education and Motor Sciences have been the most sacrificed disciplines especially with regard to practical activity, fundamental to fulfilling the educational and training tasks of the subject.

In view of the resumption of educational activities in the next school year, feels obliged to point out that as follow. Physical Education and Curricular Motor Sciences have a connotation of practical discipline and that, therefore, even with the necessary spacing, must be carried out in presence, at school, in the gym and in suitable spaces. The practical characterization of Physical Education implies the availability of educational spaces in schools: covered gyms and outdoor spaces prepared for the use of students also for the motor field. It is therefore essential that these spaces are made available and that the original use destination for the conduct of practical activities is confirmed. The quality of the teaching of Physical Education is guaranteed by qualified and graduated staff in Motor Sciences, able to design, plan, manage, train and evaluate according to precise methodological principles and able to implement and apply any protocols and/or guidelines adapting them to the specific work context, thus allowing students to carry out practical activities in full safety and compliance with the rules by declining the

scope of intervention according to standards, spaces and context. Physical education lessons at school help to achieve the minimum levels of physical activity recommended for health by the WHO; are indispensable for basic prevention for chronic non-communicable, cardiorespiratorial, metabolic, musculoskeletal, cancer and depressive disorders; strengthens the pupil's immune system and mental well-being. This concept is even more important when one considers the level of sedentary and forced physical inactivity during the period of social space and home quarantine imposed by health emergency and restrictions due to COVID-19. Physical Education and Motor Sciences works in areas that can be developed in accordance with ministerial health guidelines during this period of COVID-19. In fact, the guidelines place as a minimum standard level 300 minutes of physical activity per week for the age group 5-17 years and identify in the school the natural location where future citizens can acquire knowledge, skills and skills related to movement that lay the foundations for active lifestyles throughout life, gaining skills in various specific and transversal areas. , contributing significantly to the development of key European skills, citizenship skills and soft skills. Physical Education proposes useful contexts for educational and social inclusion, promoting moments of sharing spaces and times, stimulating the motivation to the collaborative relationship with peers and adults, autonomy in space-time perception, autonomy of displacement and interaction with the natural environment, the elaboration of body expression as a form of communication.

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