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PEDAGOGY OF INCLUSION: EDUCATIONAL-SPORTS PERSPECTIVE IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

PEDAGOGIA DELL'INCLUSIONE: PROSPETTIVE DIDATTICO-SPORTIVE AI TEMPI DEL COVID-19

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Abstract

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has inevitably led to the modification of traditional educational paradigms, stimulating a rapid evolution of the tools used by educators and learners. This is a real educational challenge, all the more important if we consider that the situation is likely to accentuate differences and consequently exclude even greater sections of the population from the educational processes.
Also in this scenario Sport, for its universal nature, can be an important means for the inclusion of "weak" groups, and constitutes an educational tool of great value.

La pandemia da COVID-19 attualmente in corso ha inevitabilmente portato alla modifica dei tradizionali paradigmi educativi, stimolando una rapida evoluzione degli strumenti utilizzati dagli educatori e dai discenti. Si tratta di una vera e propria sfida educativa, tanto più importante se si pensa che la situazione rischia di accentuare le differenze e di conseguenza escludere dai processi educativi fette sempre più grandi di popolazione.
Anche in questo scenario lo Sport, per la sua natura universale, può rappresentare un mezzo importante per l'inclusione delle fasce "deboli", e costituire uno strumento educativo di grande valore.

Keywords

Sport; Inclusion; Didactics; Lifewide Learning; COVID-19.

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Introduction

Among the most important challenges of pedagogical research, one of the most difficult and at the same time stimulating and recent is to adapt the educational and training model to the historical moment in which we live, assuming, at the same time, what its future evolutions could be: a model that, quoting Franco Cambi, is «descriptive and prescriptive together» (Cambi F., 2009).

Every age brings along with it an evolution of educational paradigms, and in every historical epoch the task of Pedagogy is to solve the problem related to the educational model, adapting it to the needs of the time and setting appropriate training standards.

The current global health emergency linked to the Covid-19 pandemic represents a new challenge for the adaptation of educational processes, already constantly evolving due to an increasingly complex and contradictory society. The risk is that of accentuating differences and excluding large sections of the population from educational processes. In this scenario it is necessary to experiment new educational paradigms, going beyond the «depositary conception of education» (Freire P., 1970) and using new tools: Sport can, in this sense, be a powerful tool for the inclusion of certain "weak" categories, and becomes more and more a versatile teaching medium in a Lifewide Learning perspective.

1. The educational/training model at the time of the pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic and the worldwide emergency that this event brought with it forced traditional educational institutions to review their educational practices on the fly. The abnormal emergency situation has in fact accelerated a process that would otherwise have occurred with quite different timing. In such a complex and unpredictable situation, the real risk is that of excluding or even abandoning entire categories of recipients of educational processes: there is a danger of adding new categories to those already considered at risk of exclusion before the pandemic, cut off from the scarcity of technological means - for example - or from the lack of specific skills that allow them to follow educational processes.

Against this background, the need for effective inclusive teaching is all the more urgent, and requires appropriate benchmarks, but also openings to alternative forms of action.

In 2020, the International Commission on the Futures of Education of UNESCO published the document "Education in a post-COVID world: Nine ideas for public action": the document highlights how «The global health pandemic has provided a clear picture of existing inequalities-and a clearer picture of what steps forward we need to take, chief among them addressing the education of more than 1.5 billion students whose learning has been hampered due to school closures». It is emphasized as «COVID-19 presents us with a real challenge and a real responsibility». The nine points on which the Commission emphasizes are:

1. Commit to strengthen education as a common good. Education is a bulwark against inequalities. In education as in health, we are safe when everybody is safe; we flourish when everybody flourishes.
2. Expand the definition of the right to education so that it addresses the importance of connectivity and access to knowledge and information. The Commission calls for a global public discussion -that includes, among others, learners of all ages - on ways the right to education needs to be expanded.
3. Value the teaching profession and teacher collaboration. There has been remarkable innovation in the responses of educators to the COVID-19 crisis, with those systems most engaged with families and communities showing the most resilience. We must encourage conditions that give frontline educators autonomy and flexibility to act collaboratively

4. Promote student, youth and children's participation and rights. Intergenerational justice and democratic principles should compel us to prioritize the participation of students and young people broadly in the co-construction of desirable change.
5. Protect the social spaces provided by schools as we transform education. The school as a physical space is indispensable. Traditional classroom organization must give way to a variety of ways of 'doing school' but the school as a separate space-time of collective living, specific and different from other spaces of learning must be preserved.
6. Make free and open source technologies available to teachers and students. Open educational resources and open access digital tools must be supported. Education cannot thrive with ready-made content built outside of the pedagogical space and outside of human relationships between teachers and students. Nor can education be dependent on digital platforms controlled by private companies.
7. Ensure scientific literacy within the curriculum. This is the right time for deep reflection on curriculum, particularly as we struggle against the denial of scientific knowledge and actively fight misinformation.
8. Protect domestic and international financing of public education. The pandemic has the power to undermine several decades of advances. National governments, international organizations, and all education and development partners must recognize the need to strengthen public health and social services but simultaneously mobilize around the protection of public education and its financing.
9. Advance global solidarity to end current levels of inequality. COVID-19 has shown us the extent to which our societies exploit power imbalances and our global system exploits inequalities. The Commission calls for renewed commitments to international cooperation and multilateralism, together with a revitalized global solidarity that has empathy and an appreciation of our common humanity at its core.

The "Guidelines on the return to school of pupils and students with disabilities of all levels in the school-year 2020-2021", described by SIPES (Italian Society of Special Pedagogy), reiterate some of the recommendations that an inclusive educational action must possess and other specific operational indications. Among these we find:

- promote a differentiated and universal teaching even when it is at a distance or mixed: a teaching that is attentive to the *how,* the *why*, and the *what* of the learning process, according to the principles of Universal Design for Learning and offering multiple forms of involvement, action and expression, and reflection;
- make real and virtual spaces and places accessible in order to enhance and cultivate the well-being of all those who live there. Space must be able to offer positive and resilient opportunities to be seized in freedom despite any limitations imposed by a distance necessary to protect from the health point of view;
- promote reception methods aimed at regenerating dynamics and relational skills inhibited by lockdown;
- provide narrative spaces that allow to attribute meanings to the lived experience and the contingent situation;
- recover, where possible, the pre-health emergency routine and/or establish new routines in accordance with current prevention and safety measures..

In addition to the indications mentioned, it should be noted that the educational/training model has seen a sudden acceleration of the technological transformation already proposed by several authors at the beginning of the 2000s: The changing and multiplication of spaces and times of learning and training naturally also involves the way in which knowledge is disseminated (Sarrracino F., 2007). As a result of the development and spread of the Internet and related technologies, the resources used in training processes also need to be reviewed.

2. Sport as a tool to experiment with alternative educational paradigms

If we are talking about remodulating the tools with which educational strategies are designed and put into practice, it may be useful to evaluate the Sport tool as a laboratory to experiment with new and more inclusive educational paradigms. When we speak of Motor Activity we refer to a discipline that has among its characteristics a universal language, and therefore is particularly recommended in contexts where there is need to overcome linguistic and cultural barriers. And that is why sport is increasingly used in situations of social hardship to improve the Inclusion and Integration of those who would otherwise be excluded because of their conditions of linguistic cultural, economic or social difficulties. Sport is "the most characteristic social phenomenon of today's societies" (Garcia, Ferrando, Puig, Lagardera, 1998). According to Isidori (2019), behind its apparent simple form, sports practice hides a learning process that, despite its complexity, can be learned by anyone, regardless of social and cultural level. This "passepartout" in the learning of sport has meant that in the course of history the recreational activities have been linked to the cultures of different peoples, facilitating intercultural communication. Seen from this point of view, Sport is in effect a universal phenomenon, connected to the true human nature and which has the great advantage of being able to be transmitted and taught in ways that transcend cultural barriers.

It is interesting to analyse the inclusive and educational value of Sport in order to experiment with new educational paradigms that transcend what Paulo Freire defines as the «depositary conception of education». In this conception, in fact, a series of "vertical" relationships develop between the educator and the educating; these relationships, the result of an excessive use of the narrative as the only educational tool, leads to consider the learners as vases to be filled. In Freire's «problematizing» conception, on the other hand, the intentionality of the learner is fundamental: the learner then performs an act of consciousness in the learning process. This overcomes the contradiction of the educator/educatee, and creates a dialogical relationship that favors learning processes. In this way, educators and learners become active subjects of the process. This type of approach is well suited to sports activity: in motor practice, the conscious component of the learning process of the learner is obvious, and the learning environment is often pleasant: optimising this experience in a way that is as inclusive as possible, therefore, can be an important tool in the hands of the trainer.

3 - Between digital divide and alternative solutions

The Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the need to review and reinvent the didactic approach to motor activity. Suddenly millions of people all over the world have seen the possibility of practicing sport diminish, with consequences on psychophysical health and serious repercussions on life and social relationships.

This situation has made possible a race to use technology to bridge the gap and try to continue to carry out motor activity even outside the usual environments.

"Sports technology has certainly changed the way of the sports experience, with the advent of clothing with wearable technology and fitness trackers, especially in the very popular variant of the fitness watch, through which athletic trainers, professionals and amateur sportsmen and women can monitor their health and physical performance under constant stress" (Di Palma, Cusano, 2020).

However, this does not always increase inclusion, on the contrary, it risks worsening it. Access to the necessary technological means is not in fact the same for the whole population and the result is that not everyone has the same opportunities to use technology. Often the segment of the population that does not have access to technology coincides with that which has problems of inclusion and social integration. In this way, the digital divide prevents social inclusion and integration.

According to Casolo, Coco, Sopranzi & Supital (2020), in a scenario in which life habits and the various stages of teaching need to be reviewed, sporting activities must also seek new paradigms: outdoor education can be a valid model to follow

Conclusions

The Covid-19 pandemic is triggering more than a reflection on what the most appropriate educational tools for the changing needs of trainers and learners could be. In this perspective, it is therefore essential to rethink the educational paradigms, especially to avoid exacerbating disparities and further exclude people who are already in difficult situations. Sport and motor activity, by their nature of universally recognized languages, are privileged inclusive tools. For this reason, in this historical phase they can be considered as laboratories to experiment educational paradigms alternative to the traditional ones, in the light of Lifewide Learning.

The use of technological means for teaching and sports practice, although of great potential, could have the opposite effect, that is, to increase differences and favor exclusion instead of inclusion. It would therefore be advisable, on the one hand, to support students' access to technological means to reduce the digital divide; on the other hand, experimenting with new methods of practicing sport through outdoor education.

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