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DIDATTICA A DISTANZA E ATTIVITÀ LUDICO-MOTORIA: UN PROGETTO SPERIMENTALE PER STIMOLARE IL BENESSERE EDUCATIVO E MIGLIORARE I RAPPORTI GENITORI-FIGLIO DURANTE LA PANDEMIA COVID-19

DISTANCE PLAYFUL-MOTOR DIDACTICS: AN EXPERIMENTAL PROJECT TO STIMULATE EDUCATIONAL WELL-BEING AND IMPROVE PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS AT THE TIME OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Davide Di Palma
University of Naples "Parthenope"
davide.dipalma@uniparthenope.it

Abstract

In the developmental age, the playful-motor activity, understood as a movement game, plays a fundamental role in the child's educational training and psycho-physical health, and is therefore functional to the development of a healthy growth. In this period of emergency, linked to the spread of COVID-19 which unfortunately forces everyone to spend a lot of time at home, it is consequently necessary to propose some movement activities and games to children, through experimental initiatives that differ from the traditional ones, in order not to slow down this fundamental process of personal development. The playful moment is to be considered important for both children, in terms of educational well-being, and for their parents too; through the game, parents can build up a relationship with their children capable of supporting an effective educational and training process. Based on these premises, this study proposes a protocol of didactic activities in the playful-motor sphere that can be delivered remotely, and are aimed at stimulating the educational importance of corporeal games in the parent-child relationships too, providing an effective educational alternative in a period characterized by prohibitions, constraints and critical issues in this sense.

Nell'età evolutiva l'attività ludico-motoria, intesa come gioco di movimento, agisce un ruolo fondamentale nella formazione educativa e nella salute psico-fisica del bambino, ed è quindi funzionale allo sviluppo di una sana crescita. In questo periodo di emergenza, legato alla diffusione del COVID-19, che purtroppo costringe tutti a trascorrere molto tempo in casa, è quindi necessario proporre ai bambini alcune attività di movimento e giochi, attraverso iniziative sperimentali diverse da quelle tradizionali , per non rallentare questo fondamentale processo di sviluppo personale. Il momento ludico è da considerare importante sia per i bambini, in termini di benessere educativo, sia per i loro genitori; attraverso il gioco i genitori possono costruire un rapporto con i propri figli capace di supportare un efficace processo educativo e formativo. Sulla base di queste premesse, questo studio propone un protocollo di attività didattiche in ambito ludico-motorio erogabili a distanza, finalizzate a stimolare l'importanza educativa dei giochi corporei anche nelle relazioni genitore-figlio, fornendo un'efficace alternativa educativa in un periodo caratterizzato da divieti, vincoli e criticità in tal senso.

Keywords

Distance Playful-Motor Didactics, Parental Relationship, Covid-19, Educational Well-Being, Educational Action.
Didattica Ludico-Motoria A Distanza, Relazione Genitoriale, Covid-19, Benessere Educativo, Azione Educativa.

Introduction

Children are naturally inclined to play, and through the playful-motor experience, can experience themselves, discover the world, grow and acquire new skills, learn to coordinate gestures, improve balance, relate to others and stimulate autonomy (Ascione & Di Palma, 2019; Ceciliani, 2018; Di palma & Ascione, 2020; Isidori, 2019; Tortella, Generosa & Fumagalli, 2020). In this phase a further need for children emerges, which must be satisfied for their proper educational growth: that of playing with significant figures from the emotional point of view, thus sharing playful-motor activities with his/her parents (Attinà, 2018; Catarsi, 2006; D'Antone, 2020; Perillo, 2018). It is no coincidence that the newborn's first "playful environment" is his/her mother's body, which he/she can touch, look at, listen to and by which he/she can be welcomed, nourished and reassured. During growth, playing with parents is an important opportunity for building a bond of intimacy: children react enthusiastically to their mother's and father's willingness to play, feel happy about it, and this strengthens their sense of safety and protection. Therefore, we speak of competent parenting when the body dimension and the movement related to it play a fundamental role in the educational relationship between parents and children (Benetton, 2018; Coco, 2015; Federici, 2014; Magnanini, Cioni, & Bolzan, 2018).

In this period, profoundly marked by the Covid-19 health and social crisis, in which children attend online school lessons, the places where they can practice motor and sports activities are closed; the possibilities to move, go outdoors and play are more and more restricted and circumscribed, there is an increase in sedentariness and a real pedagogical crisis observable in the quantitative and qualitative lack of human relationships (Arduini & Chiusaroli, 2020; Buccolo, Allodola & Mongili, 2020; Corsi, 2020; Rizzo, 2020). In this situation, corporeity loses its value in the relational, pedagogical, playful and motor dynamics. To cope with this dangerous situation of emergency, for the child's educational well-being, it is absolutely necessary to develop a series of playful-motor activities at home, involving parents' support for the pedagogical training of their children. In this regard, the purpose of this work is to provide an experimental didactic protocol of playful-motor activities that, thanks also to technological support, aim at fighting sedentariness, stimulating the children's educational growth through fun, teaching them the main motor schemes, and improving the relationship with their parents for pedagogical purposes.

1. Structure of the Distance Playful-Motor Activities Learning Project

This project foresees an experimental didactic approach based on a series of distance lessons delivered by means of technological supports, and which, in a period of health, social and educational criticality like the current one, aims principally at promoting the playful-motor activity as an element of utmost importance for the children's corporeal and pedagogical development, and at strengthening the parent-child relationship in the educational development process. Below are the specific focal points of the project.

Sample: 15 children (belonging to the 5-7 years age group) with one parent respectively

Tools: Sportswear, small tools for motor activity (easily findable at home), electronic devices (PC, tablet, mobile phone, and so on) with Internet connection.

Teachers: N. 4 Motor and Sport Sciences Experts.

Teaching delivery method: Distance teaching method, available in synchronous mode through videos on an electronic device connected to the Internet.

Duration and Organization: 16 video lessons were delivered in 8 weeks, with 2 meetings per week.

Experimental Didactic Activities: A series of "boredom-breaking" exercises were proposed, consisting of more or less structured movement games presented through video-materials, to be played by the children at home together with their parents. These can be very useful to strengthen the parent-child relationship and fight inactivity, suffering and frustration caused by the lockdown, as well as to develop some educational values essential for the child's growth. Specifically, the following table describes all the activities proposed through a first explanation phase, a simulation of the activity by the teachers and a final phase for checking, monitoring and correcting any imperfections.

Table 1: The Playful-Motor activities of the Protocol of Experimental Distance Didactics

Name of the Playful-Motor Activity	**Description of the Playful-Motor Activity**	**Potential Motor and Educational Benefits**
The game of the alligator	Scatter some "islands" or "boats" on the floor (using pillows, stuffed animals, books, and so on) and have the children jump from one object to another. The goal is to not fall "into the water", and risk being eaten by the hungry alligator which id personified by the parent.	· Learning of basic motor schemes · Orientation in Space · Respect for Rules · Stimulation of Autonomy
The game of the mirror	Stand in front of the child, about a foot away from him/her, and invite him/her to copy all of your movements. Raise your arms to the sky, forward and sideways, run in place, imitate a monkey, a frog or any other animal. Afterwards, change roles: the adult has to imitate the child's movements.	· Learning of basic motor schemes · Stimulation of Child-Parent Cooperation · Respect for the Parental Figure · Respect for the Rules · Stimulation of Autonomy
Treasure hunt	Organize a home treasure hunt trying to cover all the rooms in the house	· Orientation in Space · Stimulation of Child-Parent Cooperation · Respect for the Rules · Stimulation of Autonomy · Stimulation of Problem Solving · Stimulation of Creativity
Find the shape!	Create shapes (squares, circles, and so on), letters or numbers on the floor with some tape. The parent and the child sit on their favorite shape. Give imaginative instructions for reaching the other shapes (e.g., "crawl like a snake to the letter b," "jump like a kangaroo on the circle," "run to number 3", and so on).	· Learning of basic motor schemes · Orientation in Space · Respect for the Rules · Stimulation of Autonomy · Stimulation of Creativity · Stimulation of Child-Parent Cooperation

The pillow dance	Place a pillow on the floor, put on some rhythmic music and start dancing; then one of the players (parent/child alternately) says "pillow", and the one who can sit on it first, gets the win.	· Learning of basic motor schemes · Acquisition of the sense of rhythm in respect of corporeity · Orientation in Space · Respect for the Rules · Stimulation of Autonomy · Stimulation of Child-Parent Cooperation · Stimulation of a "Healthy Competition"
A balloon flying high	After inflating a colored balloon, the players will have to hit it by throwing it in the air, as if they were playing tennis, but without dropping it to the ground. They can count out loud the number of times the balloon gets hit and try to break the record.	· Learning of basic motor schemes · Stimulation of Autonomy · Stimulation of Child-Parent Cooperation · Stimulation of a "Healthy Competition"
The obstacle course	Create a funny obstacle course that includes different movements (jumping, crawling, walking on a line with one foot, zigzagging, and so on). Examples that can be used to create the course include: - Hula hoops for jumping; - Adhesive tape to form lines of various shapes to walk on in different ways; - Pillows to jump on; - Wire stretched between two objects (e.g., chairs) for crawling; - Blankets or mats to roll on; - Plastic cups or bottles as obstacles to create a zig-zag course.	· Learning of basic motor schemes · Orientation in Space · Respect for the Rules · Stimulation of Autonomy · Stimulation of Creativity · Stimulation of Child-Parent Cooperation
Basketball at home	A homemade basketball hoop can be created, and a soft ball can be used to play the game. Laundry baskets, wastebaskets, or hard cases can be used and placed on the floor, or can be hung on the door handle. Use sheets of newspaper, stuffed animals or rolled-up pair of socks to replace the balls. To make the game more exciting, set a time, such as two minutes, in which to shoot as many baskets as possible.	· Learning of basic motor schemes · Orientation in Space · Respect for the Rules · Stimulation of Autonomy · Stimulation of Creativity · Stimulation of Child-Parent Cooperation · Stimulation of a "Healthy Competition"

2. Evaluation Process of the Playful-Motor Distance Learning Project

The sample was analyzed both by observing the children's behavior during the course of the activities, with clear reference to the educational aspects and to the child-parent cooperation,

and without considering the children's ability to carry out the proposed activities in the best possible way, and by administering a questionnaire to the children and another to their parents, in order to evaluate both the educational quality and the degree of satisfaction with the project. For both questionnaires, a simple and immediate multiple-choice test was chosen. Both tests were administered after the intervention.

Questionnaire administered to the Children

1. How old are you?	A. 5 B. 6 C. 7
2. You are…	A. A boy B. A girl
3. Before Covid-19 pandemic, did you play any sports? **4. If yes, which one/s?**	A. YES B. NO Sport/s: ……
5. How many times a week?	A. 1 B. between 2 and 4 times C. 5 times or more
6. Before this project, and during the lockdown, did you engage in sports/ motor activities?	A. YES B. NO
7. Before this project, had you ever used technology (videos, online live streams, and so on) to perform playful-motor activities?	A. YES B. NO
8. Before this project, how was your relationship with your parent?	A. Bad B. Neither bad nor good C. Good D. Very good
9. After this project, how is your relationship with your parent?	A. Bad B. Neither bad nor good C. Good D. Very good
10. Did you have fun playing with your parent during this Project?	A. Not at all B. Not much C. Quite a lot D. Very much
11. After this experience, will you enjoy spending more time playing and training with your parent in the future?	A. YES B. NO

Questionnaire administered to the Parents

1. Are you the child's mother or father?	A. Mother B. Father

2. Have you ever engaged in any sports/motor activities in your life? **(You can provide more than one answer)**	A. Yes, at a competitive level when I was young B. Yes, at an amateur level when I was young C. Yes, still now at a competitive level D. Yes, still now at an amateur level E. No
3. What were or are your motivations for playing sports? **(You can provide more than one answer)**	A. Having fun and socializing B. Improving my physical fitness and health C. Improving my technical skills and personal outcomes D. For competitiveness and spirit of competition
4. Before this project, how was your relationship with your child?	A. Bad B. Neither bad nor good C. Good D. Very good
5. Before this project, were you engaged in sports/motor activities with your child?	A. YES B. NO
6. Before this project, how many times a week would you play with your child?	A. 1 B. 2/3 C. 4/5 D. 6/7 E. Never
7. Before this project, had you ever used technology (videos, online live streams, and so on) to perform playful-motor activities?	A. Yes, but without my child B. Yes, with my child C. No
8. Through the game and motor activity, did you feel happier about spending time with your child?	A. I would prefer performing another activity to have fun with my child B. Not much C. Quite a lot D. Very much
9. Did your child experience difficulties when performing the exercises suggested in the protocol?	A. YES B. NO
10. Do you find this new "smart training" modality effective for you?	A. No B. I encountered difficulties C. Quite a lot D. Very much
11. Would you recommend this experience to other parents?	A. YES B. NO

Outcomes of the questionnaire administered to the children

The main outcomes of the questionnaire administered to the children are summarized below:

- The children involved in the project were aged 6 years (46,7%), 7 years (33,3%), and 5 years (20%), including 6 boys (40%) and 9 girls (60%);
- Before Covid-19, two-thirds of the children surveyed were engaged in sports (66,7%);

most were involved in swimming, artistic gymnastics and ballet (22,2%), followed by football, volleyball, and basketball (11,1%), with participation rates ranging from once a week (11,1%) to 3 times a week (88,9%);
- During the lockdown, only one-third of the children was engaged in physical activity (33,3%), mostly performing dance and gymnastics exercises/lessons;
- Before the project, the majority of children had never used technology for playful-motor activities (66,7%);
- The project strengthened the child-parent relationship, with almost all of the children reporting an excellent relationship after the project (93,3%), compared to the percentage reported before the project (33,3%);
- All of the children (100%) responded positively about their willingness to play and train more often with their respective parent.

Outcomes of the questionnaire administered to the parents

The main outcomes of the questionnaire administered to the parents are summarized below:
- 9 mothers and 6 fathers were involved in the project;
- Parents who would perform or had previously performed sports/motor activities (the most practiced were yoga, pilates and exercise room) were 63,3%; The motivations behind this choice were mainly: improvement of their health state, physical fitness and technical skills (61,6%);
- Before this project, two-thirds of the subjects had never carried out playful-motor activities with their children (73,3%), while, despite this, 60% had never used technology to carry out motor and sports activities of any kind.
- While playing the videos, only 13,3% of parents stated that their children had met difficulties in performing certain exercises.
- The distance playful-motor activities project satisfied all the involved parents (100%), significantly improving their relationship with their children and making them feel happier than before about their parental relationship, after sharing this experience. As proof of this, 100% of them would recommend this experience to other parents.

3. Final remarks and conclusions

The current period and its measures for containing the spread of Covid-19 are, unfortunately, closely linked to sedentariness and the onset of social and educational issues (Arduini & Chiusaroli, 2020; Bonini, 2020; Buccolo, Allodola & Mongili, 2020; Casolo et al, 2020; Corsi, 2020; Ferrara, 2020; Rizzo, 2020; Tortella, Schembri & Fumagalli, 2020); in this regard, it seems necessary to seek experimental proposals that can remedy these problems, while fully respecting all the constraints imposed by the Government. The proposed experimental project was designed with this objective in mind, and through the active use of technology, it impacted both on the stimulus to movement, as a key to educational development, and on the parent-child relationship. Specifically, from the outcomes of the two evaluation questionnaires administered to children and parents, and through a steady monitoring of the educational activities carried out with a careful observation of their social-relational dynamics, a series of relevant considerations in the field of didactic-pedagogical sciences were drawn up:
- thanks to the playful-motor nature of the didactic activities carried out, both children and parents had the opportunity to fight sedentariness and stimulate the learning of motor schemes and skills, essential both for the child's psycho-physical development, and for the parent's re-education to movement; moreover, for both children and parents, it represented an effective occasion for the discovery or re-discovery of the concept of corporeity;
- both children and parents had the opportunity to appreciate the importance of their role in their relationship, learning to co-create and act in order to pursue a common goal;
- in a synergic way, both collaborated to turn the domestic environment into a train-

ing-type one, ready to welcome didactic experiences aimed at a qualitative growth in educational terms for both;
- technology and the internet were employed for educational purposes and for the creation of a state of well-being, promoting it as a bridge of communication and contact in the family and not as a cause of alienation, addiction and isolation;
- the didactic activities proposed allowed to stimulate the educational values of autonomy, respect for rules and problem-solving for children, favored by the constructive guidance of the parent;
- both children and their parents involved in the experimental didactic project showed clear improvements in the affective, empathic and relational spheres, proving to be more supportive and cooperative with each other; this aspect will have a strong educational potential also in the long term.

In addition, it is fundamental to emphasize how much both the parents and the children showed a strong inclination towards playful-motor activities in a didactic and educational key, judging positively a hypothetical acknowledgement of motor and sports education as a school subject to be included in the context of infancy and primary school.

All of the above expresses the educational and training quality of the innovative distance didactic proposal, especially in a period full of constraints and critical issues such as the current one; furthermore, it provides a stimulus for the research of new learning proposals to be experimented, able to overcome these limitations and turn them into training opportunities.

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