

AN OPEN LOOK AT DIVERSITY: THE ROLE OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND ADAPTED MOTOR ACTIVITY

UNO SGUARDO APERTO ALLA DIVERSITÀ: IL RUOLO DELL'EDUCAZIONE FISICA E DELL'ATTIVITÀ MOTORIA ADATTATA

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Abstract

This article focuses on the role that Physical Education and Motor Activity play in promoting individual growth and enhancement in the teaching and learning processes. This is a complex issue that needs to be framed within a broad system framework that concerns the adequacy of the school system with respect to the needs posed by the knowledge and information society. Attention is focused, in particular, on two issues: the first, what it means to adapt physical and sports education to promote the full development of the person, while the second, whether it is possible to consider motor activity a tool to encourage paths of inclusion. This reflection leads us to analyze the thesis according to which Physical Education and Motor Activity, and therefore the teaching methodologies suggested by the Adapted Physical Education (APE), that is the educational field of the school system, constitute valid tools for the purpose of promotion of integration processes and the successful educational outcome of the student. The inclusive perspective leads us to reflect and consider new methods, aspects and models to "understand" the differences and diversities of each and every one in their uniqueness and favor the belongingness and active participation of all people, including those with disabilities, to contain possible forms of discrimination and exclusion and overcome the disabling barriers that characterize daily life.

Il presente articolo si concentra sul ruolo che l'Educazione Fisica e l'Attività motoria svolgono nel promuovere la crescita e la valorizzazione individuale nei processi di insegnamento e apprendimento. Si tratta di una questione articolata che necessita di essere inquadrata entro una cornice di sistema ampia che riguarda l'adeguatezza del sistema scolastico rispetto alle esigenze poste dalla società della conoscenza e dell'informazione.

L'attenzione è focalizzata, in modo particolare, su due questioni: la prima, che cosa significhi adattare l'educazione fisica e sportiva per promuovere il pieno sviluppo della persona, mentre la seconda, se sia possibile considerare l'attività motoria uno strumento idoneo per favorire percorsi di inclusione. Tale riflessione induce ad analizzare la tesi secondo cui l'Educazione Fisica e l'Attività motoria, e quindi le metodologie didattiche suggerite dall'*Adapted Physical Education* (APE), ossia l'ambito educativo del sistema scolastico, costituiscano dei validi strumenti ai fini della promozione di processi di integrazione e del buon esito formativo dell'alunno.

La prospettiva inclusiva induce a riflettere e a considerare nuovi metodi, aspetti, modelli per “comprendere” le differenze e le diversità di tutti e di ciascuno nella loro unicità e favorire l’appartenenza e la partecipazione attiva di tutte le persone, anche di quelle con disabilità, per contenere le possibili forme di discriminazione ed esclusione e superare le barriere invalidanti che caratterizzano la vita quotidiana.

Keywords

Disabilità; Inclusione; Attività motoria
Disability; Inclusion; Motor activity

Introduction

The theme of physical and sporting activity for people with disabilities refers to multiple aspects of a pedagogical, educational, social nature, which contribute to outline the education and training system of a country. To this end, it is necessary to identify the most suitable teaching methodologies to favor inclusion paths aimed at the adoption of a physical and motor practice that is "for all" and "for each" (Bertagna 2008), a mission that involves the entire organization of the education and training, aimed at protecting a training dimension capable of enhancing individual diversity / originality and guaranteeing accessibility to all.

The concept of disability, which involves a large part of the population (Altavilla, 2020), must be able to represent an educational-didactic perspective to carry out training in respect of the other and culture oriented towards the enhancement of inclusive pathways (Caldin, 2013), aimed at to all students without distinction. It is an essential duty of the training system to pay attention to the different by removing all those obstacles and barriers that prevent the individual from accessing each training level. Disabled people (from a physical, intellectual or psychological point of view) need to be stimulated and guided so that they can learn to use their body both for enabling purposes and to learn how to use their cognitive abilities, to learn about their emotions and to learn how to relate to the outside world.

In this sense, educational actions by educators, family members and teachers play a strategic role; the learning inherent in motor activity must be as relevant as the other theoretical disciplines such as mathematics, science and consequently stimulating for the person (Altavilla, 2020), which must be placed at the center of its activities. Therefore, in order to allow students to achieve the learning objectives, the teaching methods and teaching strategies must be rearticulated in relation to the transmission and processing of knowledge, providing environments dedicated to learning that are safe, non-violent and inclusive for all. To overcome situations of difficulty, disadvantage, inconvenience, the commitment of everyone, teachers and students is necessary to create the organizational and planning conditions and support the path of inclusion for all students who experience serious situations of exclusion.

Motor activity, although not competitive, has the great advantage of combining, it represents a real school of life, a path towards self-knowledge (Coco, 2016) and one's emotions¹ in

¹ For further information on emotional processes see: Hanin, Y.L. (2003). Performance Related Emotional States in Sport: A Qualitative Analysis – Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 4(1), 5, <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs030151>.

relation to others. It favors the realization of man in all his totality, in order to make him able to face the challenges that life will present him, and is able to improve the ability to feel part of a social group within which it is possible to confront (Altavilla, 2020). It helps to recognize, and to overcome, one's own limits and those of the opponent not only limited to the sporting environment but also to the interpersonal sphere. Not all disabled people are always in a position to be able to play team sports, but despite this, motor activities allow them to fit naturally into a social context and to create positive relationships with others and to conform to the behavior of their teammates.

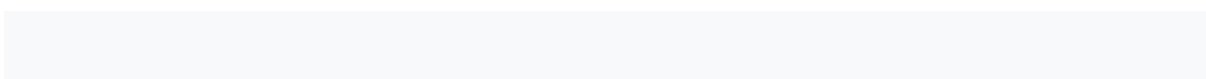
In this sense, motor and sports activities favor moments of peer learning, developing relational and communicative dynamics and the role of the class group is strategic for inclusive teaching (Ianes D., Cramerotti S., 2003). According to this perspective, the school is conceived as a place of hospitality and training where the teaching staff must focus on the educational value of collaboration and cooperation between students, enhancing the moments and activities that facilitate interpersonal relationships and contribute to creating a favorable welcoming climate. Learning is never a solitary path, but the combination of elements such as relationships, mutual stimuli and harmony between peers. Physical activity and sporting practice must be guaranteed for life as a primary element of lifelong education, a form of learning that starts from school up to one's own free time, both for leisure, for necessity, and for physical rehabilitation.

In addition to the fundamental awareness that adapted physical activity and sport, without any doubt, contribute to the harmonious development of the individual, to improve individual well-being (Kohl et al., 2012; World Health Organization [WHO], 2017) recognizing this, the benefits on the physical level but also on the psycho-social one, represent a strategic tool to overcome the discomfort of people with disabilities and intervene to improve the paths of integration and social inclusion (Eid, 2005). Given the premises, it is possible to consider the School as a privileged place of learning of the interaction between pupils with and without disabilities that allows the access and performance of physical and motor activity to all those who for certain reasons had (always) been excluded from it, or on the contrary, in certain situations, can become a place of discrimination?

In this sense, contemporary pedagogy plays an important role in the construction of educational models aimed at grasping the processes of formation of the individual as well as the demands for change and transformation imposed by contemporary society.

1. Adaptation and individualization of motor activities

The enhancement and use of the body, as well as the perceptions connected to it, cannot overlook the issue of disability. The didactic use of the body, which has represented an object of scientific investigation, considers the adaptation of the body to different situations of both physical and mental disability and is influenced by didactic-educational experiences. An adequate adapted motor practice can become a valid means for the disabled person that allows the development of the individual's personality by influencing his physical, mental and socio-affective development.



The operating model of the APA, from the English acronym Adapted Physical Activity or French *Activité Physique Adaptée*, which allows for the adaptation of physical activity and sports practice, i.e. which provides for changes in relation to the characteristics of the disability and the abilities of the individual subject, is based on the idea that it is not people with disabilities who have to conform to motor practice but that it must be the latter that must be accessible to all through personal and different adaptations. The APA represents an interdisciplinary body of knowledge that includes various practices such as physical education, sports disciplines, functional rehabilitation and motor sciences at the service of people in difficulty; its central focus is to identify and successfully address the “Obstacles” in sporting practice, evaluating the potential of individual subjects in order to build an individualized path that, at the same time, allows the disabled person to enhance their abilities and the desire to improve themselves.

Adapted physical activity can be put into practice both for mere leisure time, both for therapeutic and rehabilitative purposes, both in integrated environments, with able-bodied individuals, and in special environments, therefore exclusively with disabled individuals. In fact, adapted physical activity programs, both in school and out of school, have a purely educational purpose. At the basis of this practice was the idea that what can be done must correspond to the real abilities of the subject and that we must start from him and the potential of the disabled person. The population to which it is addressed has also expanded and considers, in addition to the category of disabled people, also the elderly, the organic sick up to those with situations of discomfort and social exclusion. This discipline has the task of adapting, then modifying, the program, the tasks and / or the environment, so that everyone can participate in physical activity. Adapted motor activity refers to a modified or shaped motor practice to favor the needs of people with disabilities (Altavilla, Furino & Raiola, 2015) and can be carried out in integrated environments, in which people with disabilities interact with non-disabled peers.

Unfortunately, it was only in 1946 that guidelines were established for the practice of adapted physical activity in school programs and in 1952, there was the transition from corrective gymnastics to Adapted Physical Education. One of the constitutive areas of the APA concerns the educational one, reserved specifically for physical activity practiced by pupils with disabilities within the school context, generally defined as Adapted Physical Education. (APE), which provides for the inclusion and support of disabled people in the exercise of Physical Education, to be practiced with differentiated activities and according to individual needs. This new concept gave rise to a difficult combination between two perspectives: the bio-medical one and the pedagogical-educational one, which led to a new way of thinking about motor activity (re-educational and educational at the same time), and to the creation of programs diversified development, games, sports activities suitable to the ability of athletes or pupils.

It is from these concepts that the discipline of Adapted Physical Activity passed beyond that of Adapted Physical Education, as it is based on all ways of practicing physical activity throughout the life at the service of people with special needs. Both APE and APA supporters were in favor of the assumption of modification and adjustment of activities, programs and physical exercises based on the physical and biological functioning of the person with disabilities. These changes had to be functional to activate adaptations on the posture, on the kinesthetic control and on the motor behavior of the person himself. Over time, this practice has been associated with any form of physical and sporting, recreational and rehabilitative

activity practiced by subjects with physical, mental-cognitive, psychological deficits or alterations in some functions² (Sherill, 1993).

However, this concept of physical activity adapted over time has acquired various meanings (Hutzler & Sherrill, 2007) that are increasingly complex, in order to promote a modified physical and sports education, aimed at enhancing individual abilities, and in particular, of those who find themselves in disadvantaged physical conditions, such as disabled, sick or elderly people; the importance of sporting activity for the purposes of social inclusion and improving the quality of life was highlighted, so much so that it was recognized in the International Education Charter Physics and Sports, approved by UNESCO, which states in art. 1: "The practice of physical activity and sport is a fundamental right for all and special opportunities must be made available for young populations, including preschool children, for the elderly, for the handicapped for full development of their personality through physical activity and sport, with programs adapted to their requirements". The APA aims to assess any psychomotor problems and to give relevance to sports for everyone with the aim of promoting not only the activity itself but also social interaction by proposing targeted interventions. The ultimate goal is to respect everyone's differences and the importance of the practice of physical activity is evident and, consequently, also the methodological strategies in order to reduce any psychomotor problems to meet pre-established personal goals. Approaching the world of sports for a person with disabilities is not always easy, as a mountain of obstacles and barriers prevent access, undermining, time after time, the desire and the possibility of engaging in a sporting activity, but also and above all that of fighting negative stereotypes related to their abilities.

Sporting activity, in particular, makes it possible to adequately satisfy certain needs of the person related to the experience of play, movement, competition and group life. It is a fundamental tool for improving skills in all cases of disability. Performing regular physical activity (group or individual sports, outdoor games, physical-motor activity), involves greater confidence in one's own possibilities, acts on a psychological level to increase self-esteem, favors social relationships, produces beneficial effects on learning, and academic performance. No less important, especially for the current young generations, are the effects that are produced in maintaining mental health and in the prevention of cardiovascular, diabetic, hypertensive diseases, often related to overweight / obesity that afflict childhood. The sporting practice is not just a leisure but a moment of socialization and relationship with others, as well as an influence of the motor element on the development of cognitive functions, positively influencing the psychological performance.

2. Full participation as a measure of inclusion

The educational nature at the basis of Adapted Physical Education makes it necessary to create an inclusive environment that eliminates or limits as much as possible the barriers to learning in which diversity is accepted, respected and valued in order to allow the widest participation in respect of the peculiarities of each one. Carraro (2004), in fact, states that «"orienting towards inclusiveness means allowing all those who approach motor and sports practice to reach a basic level of technical skills, to feel pleasure in the commitment and effort produced and not be excluded as "less adapted"».

² At the basis of this practice, when the first real definition of APA was given in Berlin in 1986, there was the idea that it was necessary to start from the difficulties and potential of the disabled person and direct one's actions with a delicate operation of adaptation of the programs in the contents and in the methodologies

In summary, many scholars read the issue of the EPA from a pedagogical perspective of inclusion and integration. Starting from this new specialization in physical education, teachers have the opportunity to adapt, differentiate and personalize, in relation to different needs, the needs analysis, context, task, physical or sporting activity. Within the school discipline of physical education / motor science of the compulsory curriculum, some authors consider it as a specialization of physical education for students with disabilities (Block 2000) or it can be considered as an appendix³ to education that allows the experiences of personal safety, satisfaction and success for students with different abilities "(Winnick, 2000).

In order for inclusion to be such, it must ensure accessibility for all and in the absence of conditions for changes or adaptations, the essential prerequisites for participation and learning would not be created (Altavilla, Manna & Perrotta, 2013). Participation, as a measure of inclusion, can therefore add valuable information to the academic, social and emotional achievements of students in need of special support (Maxwell & al., 2018). Quality physical activity implies the belief that every student can learn and succeed, that diversity enriches everyone, that students can learn better through everyone's involvement, that each student has strengths and weaknesses, and that learning effective results from the collaborative efforts of all (Bertills, Granlund & Augustine, 2019). This perspective requires a change that starts from overcoming standardized and linear didactic and organizational models, in favor of flexible methods adapted to the special training needs of individual pupils.

Diversity at school, the latter understood as an educating community, must be transformed into an opportunity for everyone and above all starting from the class group where the different individual conditions are identified and valued, avoiding that the difference turns into inequality. "Differences can create inequalities if institutional subjects are indifferent to differences. For this reason, the choices of didactic models must be examined so that they do not create indifference to differences, taking them into consideration only when problems arise "(Canevaro, 2013). In order for each pupil to feel accepted and, at the same time, stimulated in the learning processes and actively participate in school life, the school must be the promoter of adequate paths inclusive of diversity and able to guarantee the training opportunities functional to the development of basic skills of all students to facilitate their inclusion process. Participation and belongingness, which is related to social inclusion, as manifestations of active citizenship, need to increase in democratically valid and adequate school contexts, based on shared educational opportunities, accessible to all, which respond to the right to diversity and undertake to eliminate barriers and obstacles to learning and cultural, social and educational participation (Moliterni, 2006).

The vision of inclusion intends to change perspective with respect to cultural models of the past to build new ones, highlighting the most critical aspects of integration itself, especially in the school environment. Furthermore, in contributing to the implementation of initiatives to promote educational environments that guarantee the educational success (Lisimberti & Montalbetti, 2015; Domenici, 2017) of all and each student considered in their singularity and difficulty, inclusive school is oriented towards plurality and differentiation. training courses, the enhancement of all students, the promotion of a culture of respect, which is the starting

³ Claudine Sherrill is among the university professors who, while supporting the concept of Adapted Physical Education, did not consider it an appendix to the general Physical Education program but rather the practice for good Physical Education to be put into practice every day.

point for a significant change, the enhancement of opportunities, resources and the different abilities of each student (Scarpa, 2011).

3. Conclusion

Physical Education and Motor Activity, and therefore the didactic-educational indications proposed by Adapted Physical Education, are strategic tools for inclusion when examined in a pedagogical key and in the perspective of an educational process that promotes the integration of the different. With this approach, the APA methodologies represent an essential reference for the integration of disability in the educational field; initially used as a tool capable of improving physical conditions, only later were the benefits in terms of inclusion evaluated. social and personal well-being. The inclusive educational process within the school system "reinterprets" past experiences with an open eye to diversity, proactive in promoting innovative methodologies, contents and strategies that recognize the needs of "different" and "different" pupils and for each of them it is necessary to adopt specific and personalized paths. The APAs play a leading role also from the psycho-social point of view, in the disabled person's ability to learn the use of a new communication system, in the sociality that gradually leaves room for the growth of self-esteem, relational autonomy, to the recognition of one's potential which leads from a condition of passivity and closure to active participation. There is a clear need to bring the basic needs of the disabled person to the center of attention, to overcome discomfort, and ensure accessibility for all.

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