

## **THE SKILLS OF THE SPORTS EDUCATOR: A “FREIREAN” READING**

## **LE COMPETENZE DELL’EDUCATORE SPORTIVO: UNA RILETTURA “FREIREANA”**

**Giuseppe Madonna<sup>1</sup>**

University of Napoli “Parthenope”  
giuseppe.madonna1984@gmail.com

**Francesco Tafuri<sup>2</sup>**

University “Niccolò Cusano”  
francescotafuri1994@libero.it

### **Abstract**

The purpose of this work is to outline, starting from the role of the sports educator and his functions and characteristics, a "Freirean" profile of this figure, declining on the ideas of the Brazilian pedagogist Paulo Freire the qualities and skills that the educator who operates in the sports field should use in its educational mission. This type of dialogic approach, which at first reading is difficult to adapt to the motor and sports environment, where the instructor is the repository of the knowledge to be transmitted to the learner, could instead be useful for the development of the personality of children, especially those in childhood and adolescence, and to trigger, also through sport, that process of "conscientização" typical of Freire's thought.

Lo scopo di questo lavoro è di delineare, a partire dal ruolo dell’educatore sportivo e dalle sue funzioni e caratteristiche, un profilo “freireano” di questa figura, declinando sulle idee del pedagogista brasiliano Paulo Freire le qualità e le doti che l’educatore che opera in campo sportivo dovrebbe utilizzare nella sua missione educativa. Questo tipo di approccio dialogico, che ad una prima lettura si adatta difficilmente all’ambito motorio e sportivo, dove l’istruttore è il depositario del sapere da trasmettere al discente, potrebbe invece essere utile per lo sviluppo della personalità dei ragazzi, soprattutto quelli in età infantile e adolescenziale, e per innescare, anche attraverso lo sport, quel processo di “*conscientização*” tipico del pensiero di Freire.

### **Key-words**

Sports Educator, Education, Sport Pedagogy  
Educatore Sportivo, Educazione, Pedagogia dello Sport

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<sup>1</sup> Author of Paragraph 2 and Conclusions.

<sup>2</sup> Author of Introduction and Paragraph 1.

## **Introduction**

Today's society needs more than ever that there is a connection between sports and educational institutions: the reason for this need lies in the fact that the positive contamination between sports values and education improves learning processes, favoring both technical and athletic component, both the training of the person. In this global perspective of education, sporting activity can be a very effective means of conveying educational messages through physical exercise. Sport and physical activities are in fact bearers of an extraordinary educational and training potential, if they are guided by a true pedagogical and sporting culture at the same time. Sport is also an ideal place where you can build skills that can be transferred to other contexts of life: the intellectual skills related to play and motor practice can in fact be transferred to any work context.

Sport is a social phenomenon that directly and indirectly involves people and institutions, spreading interest, determining trends and affirming values that become the elements that characterize our social model (Sibilio M., 2003). Furthermore, sport is the synthesis of a complex system that reflects the evolution of contemporary society. By placing itself from various points of view, economic, social, cultural, political, as a planetary category, sport also becomes the only expression of universality that today is able to express our world with its international organizations (Bonetta G., 2000).

### **1. The Sports Educator**

Sports activities constantly engage the intelligence of the body, which is an autonomous cognitive engine that has the ability to "turn on" other human intelligences, as demonstrated by the studies of Gardner and Bruner, for which the secret of course is that the mind is an extension of the hands and tools that are used and of the activities to which it applies (Bruner J., 2001).

In this perspective, the role of the sports educator is of fundamental importance: it is not proposed as a substitute for the teacher of physical education, but as a sports technician with a particular culture and educational sensitivity typical of pedagogy. The sports educator must be able to dialogue with the educational contexts in which the children are already included and from these, through motor and sports practice, propose training and educational-sports courses that integrate harmoniously with the other educational agencies that participate to the training of children. In short, the simple technical and competitive result is not sought, but the educational value that lies behind participation in sports activities is interpreted, respecting the subjectivity of children, who in this way can find in sport a means of self-expression. , as well as a simple space in which to compete with others.

It often happens that the sports clubs where youth activities take place see sporting activity exclusively as selective, discriminating, aimed at competition and therefore not inclusive. It is known that the interruption of physical activity during any age group does not involve any benefit, especially if this occurs during a fundamental phase of an individual's life such as adolescence, causing damage not only from a physical point of view but also and above all from the psychological, relational and social one.

There are still few sports technicians and instructors who do not possess pedagogical and educational skills. The sports educator must be able to bring out and enhance the potential of

everyone, but at the same time must be demanding, ask and educate to responsibility and commitment. For this to happen it is necessary that sports notions are administered gradually, and that those who are learning are an active part of this phase, so they must understand and be aware of what they are doing.

The task of the sports educator is to give knowledge of the educational values of sport but also of any problems in order to allow a perfect combination of the two. So sport must teach to:

- know and manage their limits;
- to make a mistake and then recover and start over;
- to manage defeats;
- to be independent;
- to give value to every single gesture.

It has been studied that those who carry out regular physical activity, be it group or individual, demonstrate greater confidence in their own possibilities, greater self-esteem, ease in social relationships and better stress tolerance, and it is for this reason that, probably, it will be difficult for these same people to show disorders such as anxiety and depression. The role of the sports educator is to make known the values of sport in order to extend them in all contexts of life, he must make people understand that sport is a means capable of carrying a lot of useful information: creativity, courage, solidarity, enthusiasm, strength, respect for the rules and for others, social activity, teamwork, the search for quality, celebration, friendship, joie de vivre; all necessary so that a close connection is created between the mind and body of the individual who plays sports, to then extend this relationship between the individual and the outside world. This demonstrates that the educator's task is very important, as he must not only think about the diffusion of the values of sport with and thanks to the simple practice of motor activity, but must also consider every single subject he is dealing with with his own peculiarities, and consequently it is also up to the person himself to decide whether or not to accept the principles deriving from sport, which will inevitably upset his life in a positive sense (Di Palma D. et al., 2018).

The skills of an effective sports instructor can be defined by grouping them into three categories:

- analytical skills;
- programming skills;
- ability to do.

As for the first, the instructor must be able to recognize the effort and performance that give positive feedback, as well as periodically repeat the key points of the technique, encouraging the group of athletes to do the same. He must also be able, in the event of differences between the hypothesized performance and that actually observed, to review the setting of his educational act, re-planning the work in a different way.

With reference to programming skills, the instructor must have training programs already made in a phase prior to that of the training itself: he must therefore prepare all the material necessary for the session in advance and organize it in relation to the space and tools he has. actually available.

With reference to the ability to do, the instructor must be able to explain the characteristics, the purpose and the result expected from the individual exercise, possibly demonstrating its performance in a practical way.

As regards the method with which the work is carried out, that is the didactic tool with which the educator organizes and conducts the learning situations, with the aim of making changes or in any case significant changes in the behavior of their athletes, it is possible to identify two approaches (Hylor, Briggs, 1963):

- global method;
- analytical method.

The first is preferable when the exercise has characteristics of high organization and low complexity; the second when it presents characteristics of low organization and high complexity.

Obviously, the use of the two methods, although alternative, can be taken into consideration depending on the type of intervention and put into practice several times within the same session.

## **2. Paulo Freire and the “coscientização”**

In the pedagogical thought of Paulo Freire, a Brazilian active since the 1960s, there is a strong criticism of what is defined as the "banking concept of education" (Freire P., 1970). Freire strongly criticizes this approach in which the educator, custodian of knowledge, simply "pours" the knowledge into his students, who cannot in this way be aware of the learning process that concerns them. Students are therefore only "spectators", and cannot develop critical thinking skills and autonomy in the educational process, resulting in fact dependent on the intervention of others. For Freire, on the other hand, students must develop a critical conscience in educational practice, in a process that the Brazilian pedagogist calls "coscientização", a Portuguese term that is difficult to translate, but which refers precisely to the critical reflection on reality and on the ongoing educational process that it allows students to change their approach to knowledge and therefore also to understand their condition and to work to change and improve it.

To put this process into practice, obviously, work must be done on the type of approach that the educator has towards his students. He must no longer consider himself as the sole repository of knowledge, but use a "dialogic" process in which the instructor and student investigate the problems together, becoming the protagonists of a mutual education, in which everyone learns something in a positive balance process. (Freire P., 1987).

The application of Freire's pedagogical principles to the sporting context has been investigated in recent studies (Spaaji & Jeanes, 2013; Whright et al., 2016, Quarmby & Luguetti, 2021), especially with reference to educational programs put into practice in countries in way of development. The conclusion they have reached is that these initiatives are not always successful in satisfying the educational needs of the pupils. However, these studies have identified some principles on which to base the "Freirean" practice of motor activity (Spaaji & Jeanes, 2013):

- - the educational program is shared on themes and living conditions of the young students;
- - consider the most effective methods to increase the awareness of young people and develop autonomy of thought and free will;
- - the educational intervention must not be authoritarian and manipulative, despite being directive.

- Further studies (Luguetti et al., 2017, 2021) used Freire's pedagogical thinking to hypothesize an approach to sporting activity with young people, working on those from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. The intervention involves using sport as a tool to develop a critical sense of their condition and lead them to initiatives that can develop strategies to develop their communities. The characteristics of this approach are:
  - the educational intervention focuses on the student and the instructor's ability to listen;
  - the students are involved in the research of the topics covered by the intervention, to help them understand their own needs and any difficulties;
  - the sports instructor respects and has an interest in the life of the students even outside the sports context;
  - the instructor is aware of the situation of the community in which he works;
  - the instructor tries to create moments in which students can interact with the community.

## Conclusions

In the light of the foregoing, it is clear that the characteristics of the sports educator who works with the "freirean" methodology must complement and not replace those of the "traditional" instructor and technician, especially when working in educational contexts defined as difficult or disadvantaged. . This type of approach can be a good way to create the development of the students' personalities by overcoming the traditional purely technical-tactical training, and giving the possibility to use a natural and engaging tool such as sport to create awareness and self-awareness, in a process that starts from the "conscientização" and arrives at that "liberation" hoped for by Freire.

Subsequent developments to these theories could come from the application of "freirean" principles to sports contexts on the Italian territory, in a research project that may also include the analysis of results related to sports performance and the development of skills related to other educational areas.

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