

## **MOTOR AND SPORTS EDUCATION: A PROPOSAL FOR A "FREIREAN" PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH**

## **EDUCAZIONE MOTORIA E SPORTIVA: UNA PROPOSTA DI APPROCCIO PEDAGOGICO "FREIREANO"**

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this work is to hypothesize a "Freirean" approach to motor and sports education. Physical activity can become a winning card in the hands of educators, provided that the values transmitted through the teaching of sports are framed in a context of promotion and enhancement of the human person seen in its entirety and not only in the mere aspect of physical performance. Using the theories of the Brazilian pedagogist Paulo Freire, and therefore a dialogic approach also to motor and sports activity, it could be possible to make improvements both in the development of motor potential and in that of personality.

Lo scopo di questo lavoro è di ipotizzare un approccio "freireano" all'educazione motoria e sportiva. L'Attività Motoria può diventare una carta vincente nelle mani degli educatori, a patto che i valori trasmessi attraverso l'insegnamento della pratica sportiva siano inquadrati in un contesto di promozione e valorizzazione della persona umana vista nella sua interezza e non soltanto nel mero aspetto della performance fisica. Utilizzando le teorie del pedagogista brasiliano Paulo Freire, e quindi un approccio dialogico anche all'attività motoria e sportiva, potrebbe essere possibile trarre miglioramenti sia nello sviluppo del potenziale motorio sia in quello della personalità.

### **Key-words**

Sports Education, Freire, Sport Pedagogy  
Educazione Motoria, Freire, Pedagogia dello Sport

### **Introduction**

Sport and physical activities can be considered as an educational and training tool, if they are practiced with pedagogical and sporting awareness at the same time. Today's society needs collaboration between sports and educational institutions: the positive contamination between sporting values and education improves learning processes, favoring both the technical and athletic component and the training of the person. In this global perspective of education, sporting activity can be a very effective means of conveying educational messages through

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physical exercise. 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).

With a view to reconfiguring educational contexts, but above all a reinterpretation of them, an approach to be adopted that could prove to be profitable is to observe educational phenomena and issues through a plural, transdisciplinary and multi-perspective view (Lo Presti, 2009), that is, capable of attempting to decipher the complexity of educational issues.

The relationship between the various disciplines therefore assumes priority importance in the modern pedagogical process: all scientific fields can contribute to the educational process, and the transdisciplinary approach can prove to be the most consistent with the changing nature of contemporary society.

In such a perspective, Motor Activity can play an important role, as if used in the right way it can be the privileged vehicle of many positive values and prevent situations of discomfort.

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. Motor and Sports Education**

Everything that concerns the educational problems connected to Motor Activity falls within the field of study of Sports Pedagogy. According to Isidori (2009), it is from the need to "... renew and update the discourse on the pedagogical implications linked to motor and sports activities in contemporary society and to give greater scientific credibility to Pedagogy applied to the field of Sport ..." that Sport Pedagogy has seen in recent years an important development both in terms of attention to the subject and in practical application in educational contexts.

Among the most meaningful contents and fields of study of the subject, that linked to the value aspects of motor practice is of particular importance. Although in fact in the common opinion the practice of sport brings with it a series of essentially positive values, such as cooperation, healthy life, solidarity, socialization, self-control, and although it is common ground that in the vast majority of cases practicing sports can be a solution to limit some typical criticalities of young people such as drug use and falling into situations of mental, physical and emotional distress, it is true that there are several aspects for which sporting practice can become the most uneducative one can imagine.

In addition to being a universal phenomenon, Sport also has intrinsic characteristics of multiculturalism and transculturality which Isidori summarizes in the following points:

- through sports, the human being reveals himself and develops communication skills that allow him to connect with others;
- its nature, based on competition through rules, has historically allowed different groups of people and communities to deal with the diversity of others through body language;
- representing to all effects an expression of human creativity, it allows to enrich the cultural baggage of those who practice it, increasing their communication and relationship skills.

At the same time, however, precisely because through Sport man comes into contact with cultures that are often different from his own, some authors affirm that the sporting phenomenon, underlining at times the differences in performance in certain disciplines by different human types, can underline the concept of "race" and increase stereotyped views of society (Barbujani, 2006).

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.

## **2. The “coscientização” of Freire**

Paulo Freire was a Brazilian pedagogist active since the 1960s. In his theories on education there is a strong criticism of what is defined as the “banking conception of education” (Freire P., 1970). Freire is critical of this approach in which the educator, custodian of knowledge, “pours” 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 “conscientização”, 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 this analysis, it is the educational context and the quality and adequate training of educators that play the main role. In a pedagogical, and therefore educational, vision of Motor Activity, respect and care for the human person cannot be ignored. When this aspect is neglected or not adequately valued, even sports practice can become a tool that in the best of cases does not bring educational benefits to young people; at worst it can even become very uneducating. 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 disadvantageous. 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 of using 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.

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