

THE SCHOOL-FAMILY ALLIANCE TO CREATE INCLUSIVE PRESCRIPTIONS: PHYSICAL EDUCATION AS A MEANS OF EMPOWERMENT FOR EDUCATIONAL AND TRAINING STRATEGIES

L'ALLEANZA SCUOLA-FAMIGLIA PER LA REALIZZAZIONE DI PROGETTAZIONI INCLUSIVE: L'EDUCAZIONE FISICA COME MEZZO DI MIGLIORAMENTO DELLE STRATEGIE EDUCATIVE E FORMATIVE

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Abstract

The co-responsibility between school and parents to improve the educational design gives the physical education a key role as means for empowerment of educational strategies shared both by scholastic institutions and by families to establish a curricular and extracurricular continuum. Physical education is involved in the process of full inclusion process and is seen as a strategy to improve the educational development of the youngest. Considering the evidence available in the literature, we concluded that the educational values of physical education could offer a decisive contribution to the education and formation of young people. Thus, the purpose of this report is to suggest that physical education provides multiple routes to enhance lifelong habits for learning and for positive behaviors, in order to respond to multiple educational needs of the youngest.

La corresponsabilità tra Scuola e genitori per il miglioramento della progettualità educativa riconosce un ruolo di fondamentale importanza alla disciplina dell'educazione fisica quale mezzo di miglioramento di strategie educative condivise tra istituzioni scolastiche e famiglia, al fine di stabilire un continuum curricolare ed extracurricolare. L'educazione fisica è coinvolta nel processo di piena inclusione ed è vista come una strategia per migliorare lo sviluppo educativo dei più giovani.

Considerando le evidenze disponibili in letteratura, abbiamo concluso che i valori educativi dell'educazione fisica potrebbero offrire un contributo decisivo all'educazione e alla formazione dei giovani. Pertanto, scopo di questo lavoro è quello di evidenziare come attraverso l'educazione fisica si possano realizzare molteplici percorsi per migliorare le abitudini di apprendimento e i comportamenti positivi, al fine di rispondere ai molteplici bisogni educativi dei più giovani.

Keywords: educational alliance, inclusiveness, physical education.

Parole chiave: alleanza educativa, inclusività, educazione fisica.

Introduction

To grow is an individual event rooted in the relationship with the others and we cannot talk about the grow of the development of human potential or the centrality of the person considering him as detached from a system of relationship whose quality and richness is the fundamental asset of one's growth (MIUR, 2009). The collaboration of an entire educational society, prominently school and family, is needed to educate a child. In the last decades, education research has drawn up various proposals to describe the educational continuum between the process of

skill acquisition at school and the activities carried out at home and in the family (Epstein, 1990; Pallisera, 2018). An example is the ecological model by Bronfenbrenner (1986), based on promoting the intersections between the two education ecosystems. Working from those baselines, Epstein (2018) introduced terms such as school-like families and family-like schools to represent the educational integrated and cooperative approach, in which families are a support for strengthening school skills and schools are a support for offering an affective and caring relationship. To build participative contexts it is necessary to establish and to plan with clarity the moments of discussion, of confrontation, of collaboration and of cooperation, each in its own role. A school open to the families and as inclusive as possible must carefully take care of the fragile relationship among parents and relatives, pupils, school and out-of-school staff with a view to building tangible and meaningful alliances (Martínez Agut, Angeles Ull, & Aznar Minguet, 2014). The link between participation and inclusion is very close: including also means break down barriers and encourage the growth and the active participation of all.

The plurality of educational interventions, the multiplicity of the professional components at stake and the affective and emotional charge gravitating to the pupils with disabilities needs some explicit understanding of the method, of the objectives, of the expected outcome, leaning on a series of educational alliances, based on codes of trust and responsibility (Zappella, & Li, 2019). Only an educational alliance investing all the main figures gravitating around people with disability allow them to grow through relationship (Sanders, & Epstein, 2005). That approach requires availability to comprehension of different ways to interact, to communicate and to be. It requires to accept the weaknesses and fragility the encounter with the disability can bring out. It is structured in a shared environment overcoming the gap between self and the other. It requires availability to 'put yourself in the shoes of others', seeking an access to his inner self to feel his moods from within so as to encourage empathetic listening (Rule, & Kyle, 2008). Consequently, the relationship between school and family must be based on collaboration, through a solid educational alliance in order to support the pupil's development process. The family, indeed, is an essential reference point for correct inclusion: source of valuable information and, actually, it is the place where the continuity between school and out-of-school is achieved (Cosmin Blândul, 2012).

In this light, Physical Education (PE) is considered bearers of an outstanding educational potential, if it is moved by a real pedagogical approach. The educational values of PE are fundamental, and they could offer a decisive contribution to the education and formation of young people. In fact, PE: (i) supports the processes of development of motor, cognitive, emotive, and relational skills conveying values such as respect of oneself and others, equal opportunities and solidarity; (ii) helps to enhance their own potential, admitting limitations; (iii) encourages the confrontation with oneself and the others (Janssen, & LeBlanc, 2010).

Several studies show how skills acquired in sport are successfully transferable to other cultural contexts, from very early childhood. In addition to spreading the values of solidarity, of loyalty, of respect for the person and the rules, funding principles of a healthy society, sport and play are extraordinary tools to build skills transferable in other life contexts (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 2004). The organization of a competition, the definition of the roles, the determination of the times, the playing strategies are all intellectual skills

transferable in any context of life and represent abilities that everyone should be able to put into practice to make decisions or prepare a program of action (Gould e Carson, 2008; Gould, Collins, Lauer, & Chung, 2007). The activities of movement are occasions to favour creativity and emotional investment because the educative perspective is to support the processes leading to autonomy, to the grow in self-esteem, to the capacity for initiative and to self-awareness at various levels, both physical and emotional (Colella, 2011).

Today more than ever, the activation of inclusive designs through the contribution offered by physical education is essential to implement a strong alliance between School and family to activate a positive contamination of universal and timeless values of motor activities as the structuring of society requires a cultural and social pact that guarantees in all formal and informal environments the acquisition of skills that could transform the lives of children: movement is life, movement educates and builds the character, defines our choices and the collective future, the first step to success (Vaquero-Solís, Tapia-Serrano, Hortigüela-Alcalá, Sierra-Díaz, & Sánchez-Miguel, 2021). It is for this reason that the educational movement cannot be to the advantage of a few, as the aggregative moments it can express often become a lifeline for many young people. Moreover, it is widely acknowledged that PE during childhood may be important for cognitive and brain health (Singh et al., 2019). A great deal of scientific research published during the last decade has confirmed that PE is positively associated with academic achievement among school-aged youth (Castelli et al., 2014; Donnelly et al., 2016; Sibley & Etnier, 2003; Singh et al., 2019; Vazou, Pesce, Lakes, & Smiley-Oyen, 2016).

In this context, acting through an inclusive teaching allows to enhance and capitalize the individual differences present in all pupils, with particular attention to those situations where such differences create substantial barriers to learning and to social participation. In fact, it has long ceased to be considered an access line only for students with disabilities or with special educational needs, qualifying itself as a quality teaching for all. We can increasingly consider it as a style of teaching, a daily didactic and educational orientation (Casolo, 2011). Therefore, to promote the improvement of the quality of teaching-learning processes is of paramount importance in order to respond to multiple educational needs.

1. Physical education as educative and formative strategy

Physical education is involved in the process of full inclusion process and is seen as a strategy to improve the educational development of the youngest. To establish an educational continuum between the process of acquiring the school skills and activities that take place at home and in the family plays a key role in the implementation of a common and shared educational pact (Gurlui, 2014). PE is able to build a cooperative learning environment and develop virtuous peer learning processes. Several research have shown that participation in the physical activity practice induces the pupils to: (i) achieve better learning outcomes; (ii) promote greater self-regulation and general well-being; (iii) have more positive attitude towards the school and cultivate more ambition regarding their own growth and learning (Monacis, Colella, & Scarinci, 2020). In a perspective of an inclusive physical education is of fundamental importance to realize a methodological orientation aimed to organize the learning process with mixed teams, which include pupils with and without deficiencies (Wilkinson, & Penney, 2021).

Exploiting a model of psychoeducational intervention that integrates the educational aspect with the psychological and relational ones, through motor activities, it is possible to create the conditions for the person with disability to benefit from a learning context seen as growth and structuring of personality (search for autonomy). That primarily means to value the diversity of the pupil: the diversity is to be considered a resource and a wealth, in this sense collaboration and teamwork are essential for the growth of all (Hodge, Lieberman, & Murata, 2012). The deep and indissoluble relationships that bind corporeity to the formation of one's own individual and social identity and to the learning support a new holistic vision of motricity which cannot be reduced exclusively to a mere resultant of strictly biological processes, but it must be considered an expression of intelligence, affectivity and conscious self-determination. In a dynamic exchange with social behaviours and communication systems, the related to learning cognitive processes can be considered all cognitive mechanisms based on motricity (Weiss, 2011).

On the basis of that consideration, the didactic setting developed in the field of PE, especially in the first cycle, represents an excellent inclusive framework for the overall growth of pupils with and without disabilities. Besides, peers represent a resource of significant potential to facilitate the process of real inclusion of the pupil with disabilities both in the community and in the school. It is necessary a series of actions, both direct and indirect, that help to create an inclusive climate within the classroom where acceptance of diversity is taught as a value, in whatever form it appears (Young, & Sternod, 2011).

But there is more: disability is a condition that inevitably involves the family. The parents are carriers of a decisive knowledge for the planning of a truly inclusive teaching; for this reason, it is necessary to look at the educational relationship in a system perspective. Disability is not an individual condition, but the result of the relationship between the individual and the context. For the success of a path of inclusion is essential to recognize that all parties have a decisive weight (Penney, Jeanes, O'Connor, & Alfrey, 2018).

The National Guidelines 2012 confirm this vision of physical education that: *“promotes the knowledge of self and its potential in the constant relationship with the environment, the others and the objects. [...] therefore, it is an occasion to promote cognitive, social, cultural and emotional experiences [...], promotes the value and respect of agreed and shared rules and the ethical values that are the basis of civil coexistence [...]. To participate in sports and motor activities means sharing group experiences with other people promoting the inclusion of pupils with various forms of diversity and enhancing the value of cooperation [...] through the motor dimension the pupil is facilitated in the expression of communicative requests and discomforts of various kinds that cannot always communicate with the verbal language”* (MIUR, 2012).

Physical education has, therefore, an essential value in the inclusive design process because it is the most favourable environment not only to explore and try experiences related to body and motor action, complete expression of the person, but above all because it allows to involve the entire existential field of the pupil, creating strong bonds with all dimensions of personality, acting as *a trait de union* between school and family environment. The executive aspect of the motor action integrates itself with the value, semantic and relational aspects and motor behaviour becomes an expression of one's 'being' (Gomez Paloma, 2009).

2. Inclusive educational design for physical education

Inclusive teaching is the teaching of all that is based on customization and individualization through active, participative, constructive, and affective methodologies. The quality of inclusive teaching is determined by reflectivity and educational intentionality, by the search for motivations and alternative hypotheses, by the ability to change perspectives of meaning and to create transformative learning (Grenier, Patey, & Grenier-Burtis, 2022).

As claimed by Pennac (2008) *“every student plays his instrument, there’s nothing to do. The hard thing is to know our musicians well and find harmony. A good class is not a regiment that marches in step it is an orchestra that plays the same symphony”*. An inclusive teaching is therefore a didactic thought, planned and designed, from the beginning, on the basis of individual variables, able to be accessible to all students not only for some with special educational needs. To design in an inclusive way means thinking about forms of multimodal and multilevel personalised teaching, whatever the contents to convey, because each student faces learning at different levels and ways avoiding, thus, “route emergencies” that force a posteriori to modify what designed for an “ideal class”, thus avoiding loss of effectiveness of the teaching action itself (Tanure Alves, van Munster, dos Santos Alves, & de Souza, 2022). A poorly designed and conducted didactics may run the risk of creating barriers to learning. Inclusive teaching is therefore intended as an innovative and flexible teaching style which facilitates the participation, the enhancement, and the educational success of all students. Inclusive teaching challenges teachers to develop a wide repertoire of teaching strategies considered effective not only for students with special needs but for all. That means every teacher can improve its effectiveness, first of all knowing and then using, monitoring and evaluating the best strategy in order to help students to become more effective students (Lundvall, & Fröberg, 2022). Numerous surveys show how essential are the meta cognitive and cooperative strategies, the development of social and emotional skills as well as the creation of a positive atmosphere in class to an inclusive type of teaching. Developing a broad repertoire of effective strategies is indispensable, provided that these reflect the knowledge of the characteristics and needs of the students and of environmental circumstances, as well as the professional and personal knowledge and skills of teachers (Meir, 2022).

In addition to the dimension of effectiveness in relation to choices and methodological-didactic actions to make, an inclusive teacher cannot forget the importance of relational and emotional skills. Numerous studies show how the appropriate mental attitude of the teachers, the emotional proximity and the ability to give appropriate and positive feedback to students are decisive elements for their academic success and for the creation of a good classroom climate (Makopoulou, Penney, Neville, & Thomas, 2022; van Doodewaard, & Knoppers, 2021). In an inclusive school context, the training of teachers in relation to their social and emotional skills can certainly not be underestimated. The quality of the class climate (made of relationships and emotional experiences) is crucial for the success of the students who learn best when they are in an emotionally safe and predictable environment, that motivates and stimulates them towards positive and inclusive goals.

3. The influence of Physical Education on Academic Performance: an inclusive perspective of development of individual potential.

Motor and sports activities unquestionably assume an educational value for all, able and disabled, for the latest the game, the movement, the sport assume an added value, giving visibility to their physical and cognitive abilities (Fletcher, & Chróinín, 2022). Every form of educational intervention is born from the ability of the teacher to remove obstacles, focusing on functional capabilities and suggesting educational proposals suitable not adapted. It becomes necessary to identify the abilities of “the most fragile” to enhance his abilities within the class group; the consequent educational proposal will have to respond to the needs of pupils, taking into account the conditions of extreme heterogeneity of the classes aiming at the discovery of their body and their motor and communication skills to increase esteem and self-confidence (Vargas-Hernández, & Tovar Vergara, 2022). Starting from the premise that every student needs, indifferently, appropriate educational proposals and that, whatever the difficulty, the educator will have to create the conditions for reception and cooperation, that allow adequate participation in the activity, Physical education could act as a facilitator of school learning in subjects with special educational needs.

The most recent scientific research indicates that cognitive development occurs together with motor development (Pluck, Bravo Mancero, Ortiz Encalada, Urquizo Alcivar, Maldonado Gavilanez, & Chacon, 2020). For example, it has been shown that higher levels of motor coordination in students are related to better performance in academic competence (Guillamón, Cantó, & García, 2020). This growing body of literature suggests that PE may have a significant influence on academic performance through a variety of direct and indirect physiological, cognitive, emotional, and learning mechanisms (Santana, Azevedo, Cattuzzo, Hill, Andrade, & Prado, 2017; Sibley et al., 2003). Furthermore, evidence accrued over the past decade proposed that qualitative exercise interventions that are mentally challenging, lead to procedural and declarative skill development. Engaging in high amounts of PE constitutes an advantageous leisure activity for children, not only to improve their educational growth but also to build their self-concept and, finally, facilitate their academic performance. (Dapp, & Roebbers, 2019).

Scientific findings indicate that a higher level of PA provides children opportunities to improve scholastic performance, and at the same time to promote a better physical and mental health (Alvarez-Bueno, Pesce, Cavero-Redondo, Sanchez-Lopez, Martinez-Hortelano, Martinez-Vizcaino, 2017). Moreover, in a recent review, Tomporowski, McCullick, Pendleton, and Pesce (2014), evaluated the effects of acute and chronic exercise training differentiating between those that adhere to a quantitative approach and based upon considerations of intensity and duration, and those that adhere to a qualitative approach and based on type and mental engagement. They concluded that both types of exercise, quantitative and qualitative, enhance the cognitive processing, highlighting the role of metacognitive processes and their regulation on children's behavior and academic performance.

Therefore, given data from reviews and reports, the investigation of the relationship between an active lifestyle and cognition in school-aged children have a key role in scholastic achievement.

Conclusions

The expansive and ever-growing literature provided by the present overview does support the view that physical education is beneficial for cognitive health and performance among school-aged youth. This could be achieved through various

forms of physical activity performed in the school context and with different characteristics.

Students should be given opportunities to engage in a wide variety of physical activities, also through the idea that physical and mental well-being can be achieved using different strategies from those to which we are accustomed. Accordingly, school-based interventions that provide increased physical activity may increase the odds of children and adolescents forming lifelong habits for learning and for positive behaviors. Thereby, it is desirable, in this respect, that schools offer the ideal opportunity for youth to meet the physical activity practice as an evidence-based strategy to improve the educational development and academic performance of the youngest.

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