

Pedagogical Reflections about the value of contemporary Sport. Some educability conditions

Riflessioni pedagogiche sul valore dello Sport contemporaneo. Alcune condizioni di educabilità

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Abstract

Tra gli ambiti di riflessione pedagogica che negli ultimi decenni hanno assunto un considerevole spazio nel dibattito contemporaneo, quelli inerenti il corpo, il movimento e lo sport rappresentano uno spaccato decisamente importante quali dispositivi specifici di formazione, di cui vanno evidenziate le condizioni di educabilità necessarie affinché lo sport possa rappresentare un contesto di vita declinato in direzione emancipativa per i soggetti. Nell'attualità lo sport veicola spesso idee e valori che si allontanano da buone pratiche educative, facendo posto a forme narcisistiche di eccessiva spettacolarizzazione del gesto e che sottendono la costruzione di una certa identità corporea nell'immaginario sociale. L'intento del presente articolo, allora, è quello di riflettere su tali componenti, in modo da proporre possibili strumenti educativi in ambito sportivo che siano forieri di benessere individuale e sociale per i soggetti coinvolti.

Among the areas of pedagogical reflection that in recent decades have taken a considerable space in contemporary debates, those concerning body, movement and sport represent a very important field as specific educational dispositive, of which needs to be highlighted the educability conditions in order that sport can represent a life context declined towards subjects' emancipation. Nowadays sport often conveys ideas and values that stray from best educational practices, emphasizing narcissistic forms of sport performance that underlines the construction of a certain bodily identity in the social imagery. The aim of the paper is to reflect about these components, in order to propose possible educational tools in sport contexts that are harbingers of individual and social wellbeing for all involved subjects.

Keywords

Education; Pedagogy; Educability Conditions; Identity; Sport

Educazione; Pedagogia; Condizioni di Educabilità; Identità; Sport

1. Introduction¹

How it was already widely deepened from the pedagogical literature, sport, as all the educational settings, is a context in which the methodological and relational choices direct the daily educational action (Isidori, Fraile, 2008). For these reasons, sport can be a useful tool of promotion, autonomy and emancipation of the subjects, but it primarily depends from the way in which it is educationally managed (Bellantonio, 2014). The reflection about sport can really “educational” be requires a critical reflection on a set of issues that characterize body, sport and physical activities in postmodernity, preventing a proper development in the desired direction. On a political, religious and social level, but not only, it is widely shared the idea that sport and physical activities can play an important role in prevention of forms of social discomfort, transmitting social and desirable positive values, discouraging the use of harmful substances, promoting social inclusion. Educational ideals desirable by society remain very often as intentions or even propaganda forms, therefore, there is the need of a pedagogical reflection on these themes, in order to really recover a series of dimensions that give to the sport a deep and intentional educational value. In this regard, it is necessary to emphasize some aspects of socio-cultural nature that significantly influence the ways of thinking and intend the contemporary sport phenomenon, which look at the sport as a narcissistic way to celebrate the Self, of mass-media success, of achieving stereotyped ideals in which is central a certain idea of body.

2. Critical Aspects of the Body in Postmodernity

Postmodern society inhabits the disenchantment (Cambi, 2006), it lives in a complex reality – wide, plural and global – and it tries to make sense of it often using precarious paradigms, most of the time very limited. In this context the Ego is bewildered (Cambi, 2010), it constantly lives with the feeling not having handles, burdened by always new responsibility rather than grow, develop, improve and enhance itself, in other words it is forced to survive (Galimberti, 2002). The body is the first dimension that is affected, often unwittingly, by this process. Although gradually increasing, the attention that today is addressed to the body can be described in terms of more “quantity” and less “quality” and that is the reason why we find again a body rescinded and emptied in its meanings and potentials (Giddens, 1991).

The body has undoubtedly acquired a dignity in contemporary culture, thanks also to neurosciences, which have shown that subjects learn first and better through the body, as well as through the experience and intentionality that guide the learning itself (Gallese, 2007; Rizzolatti, Sinigaglia, 2005). Despite this, it continues to hover in some rather prevalent cultural tendencies a certain dichotomy. From this perspective, it is no longer an antinomy between body and mind. The question rather concerns the relationship that is established between having a body and being a body, where the former point of view prevails on the latter (Mariani, 2004). The problematic nature of this dichotomy is well reflected in the Edmund Husserl’s (1950) phenomenological expressions having a body (Körper) and being a body (Leib) mentioned before. Nowadays, in fact, seems to prevail the expression “I am what I got and if I have nothing I am nothing”. From this perspective, the postmodern paradigm of having, sponsored by the mass media, but not only, gives to the body the role of mask, shield and frame, it enhances the shape, the aesthetics and the appearance. Obviously, this dimension cannot certainly not to be considered, indeed, is the first component that finds space in the social dimension and creates the social relationship. Unfortunately, the disjunctive perspective resurfaces, highlighting an absolutism that makes the appearance the only important dimension.

1 The manuscript is the result of a joint work of the Authors to attribute to Sergio Bellantonio for the paragraphs 3 and 4 and to Domenico Tafuri for the paragraphs 1 and 2.

Peoples pay attention to the body-image as well for how it looks and not for what it really is, they care about presentation, embellishment and exhibition of themselves without worrying about the deep communicative and identification meanings to which the corporeality is tied. Postmodern body lives in a sort of post-adolescent state of uncertain, scared by the passing of the time, unable to give meaning to the aging, to the experiences that touch and stroke it, it tries to hide the life that passes (Le Breton, 2007).

Nowadays the body is become a space to reshape, a space of continuous interventions through which fall into line, a place to be changed at all costs, to which are not granted weaknesses and to which are not accept complexities. We switched from a Cartesian paradigm of underestimated body, voiceless because without the ability to provide knowledges, to a postmodern paradigm which literally “exalt the body”, transformed and disguised, neither understood nor perceived authentically (La Cecla, 2009). Conforming the body according to the new selling values like beauty, eternal youth, power and efficiency, it certainly comes out as a new one but sterile more than ever, losing in uniqueness, expressiveness and authenticity (Cambi, 2010).

According to Anthony Giddens (1991), in postmodernity the body does not only represent the place in which the subject occupies a social context, but it especially becomes the founding element of his/her being, his/her character, his/her Self. For these reasons, the peculiarities of the postmodern existential condition would be to invite subjects to “reflexively” adopt some projects on the body, in order to support personal identities. Some significant representations of this phenomenon are given from the development of a large variety of sports and non-competitive physical activities involving subjects of all kinds and ages, as well as by the increasing number of practices and services related to the care and aesthetics of body.

This idea of body, as well as its relationship with the mind, have had some important influences on educational practices related to it, thus sport too (Ravaglioli, 1990; Sarsini, 2005, 2010). Because of this sport developed over time different characteristics compared to the past (Heinemann, 1992), where technological progress, as well as the proliferation of media communication, have fostered a so rapid growth to direct it towards horizons very far from those that, instead, characterized the roots of real sport.

3. Characteristics and Critical Aspect of Contemporary Sport

Nowadays sport differs from its older forms for seven key points. Allen Guttmann (1978) established seven characteristics of modern sports in contrast with the primitive sporting manifestations.

- The first characteristic is secularism, due to the wider process of secularization (Giddens, 1991), namely the gradual loss of faith in traditional religious reference models that can be also transferred to the field of sport. If sport in the past was strongly tied to cultural and religious aspects, over time it has gradually assumed so pervasive characters to go far beyond its primary religious significance, thereby affecting all other areas of human life.

- The second characteristic is equality, understood both as in terms of possibilities and conditions. From this perspective if once sport was strictly linked to the membership in a caste, in modern sport it takes on liberal and democratic aspects, transcending differences of race, gender and social class.

- The third characteristic is specialization, or rather the complexification of the modern sports system, differently from the past. In this sense, if once the roles and specializations of the athletes were not well defined, with the passing of time there was an opposite trend. In modern sport, in fact, the level of specialization of the athletes is becoming more and more structured, multiplying the number of sport categories and specialties, as well as of coaches, trainers and managers.

- The fourth characteristic is rationalization, which is the increasingly scientific training programs deepening. If on the one hand it leads to a raising of standards and athletic performance,

on the other hand it produces drifts that often can be found in forms of exasperated technicality, which demean individual and global aspects of psychological and physical adaptation through the complex process of training.

- The fifth characteristic is bureaucratization, namely, the process of hierarchical structure through which sport is regulated. A valid example of this characteristic are the different roles that are held within the various sports organizations, which have quite the task to establish, modify and enforce the sport rules, as well as to whom is entrusted the assignment to compile and validate technical programs or to define the characteristics and modalities of the sport competitions.

- The sixth characteristic is quantification, which is the tendency to calculate and measure every athletic movement to reach an incontrovertible record. If in the past the victory was enough to acquire athlete's fame and social esteem, nowadays it is still important to win, but even more if the athlete crashes the human limits.

- The seventh characteristic is spectacularization, which is the increasingly pervasive tendency to consider sport as a form of mass-media spectacle, a phenomenon worthy of discussion and propaganda because it well highlights physical abilities uncommon in the most.

Among those seven characteristics only quantification and the spectacularization were genuinely modern since they had never appeared in any earlier stage of evolution, while others were partly present in Greek, Roman or Medieval sports. From this perspective, modern sports embarked upon a numerical rush, in an attempt to measure and quantify immeasurable realities. Because of this, sport is always in the seek for more precise techniques, that is, new ways of certifying who is the best by means of measuring who is the fastest, the strongest and so forth, a purpose clearly declared in the Olympic motto *citius, altius, fortius* (Lopez-Gonzalez, 2014).

From a pedagogical perspective, it is interesting to note that these components if, on the one hand, give to the sport higher performance standards than in the past, on the other hand they creates the fertile ground to feed tensions and conflicts that seem to go opposite to an educational kind of sport pedagogically oriented.

4. A Pedagogical Proposal to Foster Some Sport Educability Conditions

Sport Pedagogy need to put at the core of the contemporary educational process the corporeality (Bellantonio, 2014; Cunti, 2015; Isidori, 2009) urging relational, communicative, social and identity dimensions that represent the uniqueness of subjects and therefore their historicity. It may be appropriate to foster a range of aspects that can give sport a positive educational value that, as mentioned above, too often remains in the intent because there is a lack of a widespread pedagogical reflective theory that daily support it. For this reason, the pedagogy is summoned to critically reflect on sport to direct actions toward educational horizons. The literature review allows us to identify some educability dimensions that simultaneously represent both the pedagogical perspective and the educational characteristics able to actively involve individuals in sports, in order to leverage a series of emotional, relational and affective components that allows the individuals to live sport as an important opportunity for personal and social growth. It will list below briefly some.

- Friendly dimension: developing friendship relations in sport is crucial to accompany the processes of shaping and consolidation of identity (Petter, 2007). The research of friendship is particularly significant in adolescence, for example, because the subjects begin to distance by parents, seeking in the relationship with peers acceptance, sharing and containment (Palmonari, 2001). In sports, this dimension can represent a space of informality that stimulates the processes of identification/differentiation, sharing emotions, anxieties, fears and feelings among peers, as well as the opportunity to learn to establish authentic human relations.

- Entertainment dimension: in the sport context acquiring an entertainment point of view means to project a co-constructed and organized educational plan, in order to foster the individ-

ual life meaning, increasing vitality and expression, participation in groups and organizations through a series of cultural, recreational, ludic and expressive character, in a logic of increasing involvement (Pollo, 2002).

- Democratic dimension: it is a widespread opinion that sport is opposite to democratic ideals, because it is not guaranteed to everyone the possibility to practice it. Some examples are all those contemporary selective sport activities that does not make it accessible to everyone (Farnè, 2010). If in the past sport acquired a democratic connotation essentially from a social perspective, today the democratic dimension should move in terms of opportunities through the themes of comparison and diversity.

- Emotional dimension: take into account the emotional dimension in sports means to give it a double meaning: on the one hand it opens to an educational practice aimed at eliciting and expressing positive emotions and to sublimate negative ones, to the other hand it becomes the fundamental condition to reach meaningful learnings (Bellantonio, 2014). For the first aspect, sport is a great way to give expression to the positive emotions and to contain and sustain negative emotions related to failures, translating the aggressiveness in sports achievement. For the second aspect emotions become a fundamental content of sport itself, fostering learning and motivation.

- Inclusive dimension: this is one of the possible desirable educational dimension in the sport context from a pedagogical point of view. This dimension has the aim to foster educational practices that support diversity and difference, in order to develop in individuals the abilities of recognition and acceptance of otherness. An inclusive sport should necessarily act on three levels: involving individuals, acting contexts and reflecting on the relationship, through a systemic perspective (Sibilio, 2005). Inclusive actions aimed at changing sport become representative of an inclusive society, a model of education for inclusion which has a fundamental social value.

- Intercultural dimension: from an educational point of view, sport can be considered as a valid instrument able to transmit social values, in a perspective of conviviality of differences, appreciation, respect and promotion of differences. In this regard, promoting universal values means designing peace, solidarity and respect educational paths. Support an intercultural sport pedagogy means creating new possibilities of dialogue among cultures, avoiding reductionist forms of different cultural identities (Isidori, 2009).

- Formal and non-formal dimension: to acquire an educational value in social sense, sport have to take account of aspects which enable individuals to learn to respect other-directed rules (formal dimension) but also knowing how to autonomously manage them (informal dimension). In this way it will also be possible to support and to foster the motivation and affection to sport activities (Cunti, 2006).

- Ludic dimension: understanding sport in a ludic dimension means to give it an educational value linked to the pleasantness of its practice, preventing increasing disaffection and drop-out. Including ludic in sports is not a natural phenomenon but is an intentional practice that needs to be educational directed. From a pedagogical perspective it becomes necessary emphasize ludic components that link sports to topics subjective emotional-affective sphere (Cunti, 2010; Farnè, 2010). It means to return to learn with pleasure with and through the body, regardless of achieving sports result. For this reason put at the core the corporeality can be a useful way to balance the sport and the ludic dimensions.

The educability conditions of sport here presented should be necessarily considered through a systemic perspective, not intended as separate variables in watertight compartments, but strictly interrelated, generating different kind of educational sport.

Sport pedagogy must be understood in a circular and generative way, where the educational dimensions affect each other generating other new ones. Understanding sport as an educational dispositive means put at the core of the educational process the educational relationship through competent actions that “reflective” manages and develops the educational work in sports contexts.

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