


LEARNING FOR LIFE: INNOVATIVE STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPING SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL SKILLS IN EDUCATION THROUGH SPORTS ACTIVITY

IMPARARE PER LA VITA: STRATEGIE INNOVATIVE PER LO SVIUPPO DELLE COMPETENZE SOCIO-EMOTIVE NELL'EDUCAZIONE ATTRAVERSO L'ATTIVITA' SPORTIVA

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the connection between physical activity, innovative teaching methods and the development of social-emotional skills during the developmental phase. By investigating their positive impact on social-emotional aspects, it highlights the crucial role of teachers in promoting the healthy growth of young minds. Therefore, investing in these educational practices can significantly benefit the overall well-being of children during their developmental stages.

Questo studio esplora il legame tra l'attività fisica, i metodi di insegnamento innovativi e lo sviluppo delle competenze socio-emotive durante la fase dello sviluppo. Analizzando il loro impatto positivo sugli aspetti socio-emotivi, evidenzia il ruolo cruciale degli insegnanti nel promuovere la crescita sana delle giovani menti. Pertanto, investire in queste pratiche educative può giovare in modo significativo al benessere generale dei bambini durante le loro fasi di sviluppo.

KEYWORDS

Socio-emotional Skills, Innovative Didactics, Physical Activity
Competenze Socio-emotive, Didattica Innovativa, Attività Fisica

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Introduction

Education, in all its forms, plays a crucial role in shaping the future of the next generation. Beyond merely imparting academic knowledge and skills, it also holds the key to developing social-emotional competences, which are a set of transversal skills that extend far beyond traditional subjects of study (Weare e Gray 2003). These competences are essential for the holistic growth and development of individuals, as they directly influence how people relate to others, cope with daily challenges, and adapt to changes throughout life. Education, therefore, must be viewed as a dynamic and comprehensive process, dedicated to nurturing the unique and specific potential of each individual, fostering harmonious growth on multiple levels.

Within the educational context, educational action stands as a central and fundamental force in shaping the future of young individuals. Rooted in the recognition of the significance of inclusivity, it strives to ensure equal learning opportunities for all students, irrespective of their cultural, social, or ability backgrounds. This commitment to inclusivity goes hand in hand with personalised support for students with special needs, creating an environment that fosters active and conscious participation of each individual. At the heart of this transformative process are educators, the driving force behind the teaching-learning experience. Their constant stimulation and support in professional development are crucial in keeping them at the forefront of teaching methodologies and new approaches, leveraging technology to create a learning experience that is both effective and engaging.

Educational action, with its emphasis on inclusivity and equal learning opportunities, provides a nurturing environment that cultivates the growth of socio-emotional competences among young individuals. When educators adopt an approach that cherishes the uniqueness and diverse backgrounds of each student, they foster a supportive atmosphere that encourages the development of essential skills such as self-awareness, empathy, and interpersonal abilities (Durlak e Wells 1997).

In one of her renowned quotes, Maria Montessori eloquently stated, "It is necessary for the teacher to guide the child, without letting him feel his presence too much, so that he can always be ready to provide the desired help, but without ever being the obstacle between the child and his experience." This profound quote profoundly captures the essence of the educator's role, no longer confined to

merely imparting knowledge, but evolving into a pivotal figure in shaping and promoting life skills.

By nurturing socio-emotional competences, educators help students not only to succeed academically, but also to flourish as well-rounded individuals, capable of navigating life's challenges with resilience and empathy. Therefore, investing in the development of socio-emotional competences within the educational framework ensures that the future generation is equipped not only with knowledge but with the essential tools needed to thrive in an ever-changing world (Elias, Zins, e Weissberg 2000).

One of the most effective strategies in promoting social-emotional skills in educational action is physical activity. Besides being an opportunity to keep the body healthy, physical activity plays a key role in improving the emotional balance and social skills of young people.

This article aims to explore the importance of innovative educational strategies and technologies in the school context, focusing on the integration of physical activity as a tool for the development of social-emotional skills in young children. Through a review of existing literature, evidence demonstrating the positive link between physical activity and the growth of social-emotional skills in typically developing children will be explored. The long-term benefits of the synergy between physical activity and social-emotional skills will be considered, focusing on how this combination can positively influence the mental and physical well-being and social adjustment of young people. In addition, innovative educational strategies and the use of interactive technologies to encourage physical activity and facilitate the development of social-emotional skills will be presented. The goal is to provide concrete guidance on how to effectively integrate physical activity into the teaching-learning process to maximise benefits for students.

In conclusion, this article aims to provide a concise and informative analysis of the importance of physical activity in educational action, emphasizing how this synergy can contribute to the formation of more knowledgeable, resilient, and socially competent individuals.

1. Socio-emotional skills

Socio-Emotional skills represent a crucial set of skills that relate to the way individuals interact with themselves and others, manage emotions, communicate

effectively and build positive relationships. These skills are fundamental to the psychological and emotional well-being, and to the personal and professional success of individuals, positively influencing their behaviour, decisions and the way they relate to their environment(Sergeeva et al. 2020).

Self-awareness is one of the fundamental components of social-emotional competence(Steiner 2014). It refers to the ability to recognise and understand one's emotions, thoughts, strengths and weaknesses. Self-awareness enables people to develop a better understanding of who they are and what they want, contributing to healthy self-esteem and a positive sense of identity(Ickes, Wicklund, e Ferris 1973). This awareness is the basis for personal growth and the ability to adapt to life's changes and challenges.

Another essential component of social-emotional competence is awareness of others. It involves the ability to recognise and understand the emotions, perspectives and needs of others. Empathy, an integral part of this competence, enables people to put themselves in the shoes of others, understand their feelings and react compassionately and sensitively to their needs. Awareness of others has the task of fostering healthy and meaningful relationships, facilitating open and authentic communication(Oceja et al. 2014).

Managing emotions constitutes another key aspect of social-emotional competence. It involves the ability to recognise and regulate one's emotions effectively. People who are able to manage their emotions tend to deal with stress and difficulties more resiliently, avoiding impulsive and harmful reactions(Pond Jr et al. 2012). Managing emotions plays a key role in maintaining emotional balance and promoting mental and physical well-being.

Relational skills are another key component of social-emotional competence. These skills include effective communication, active listening, the ability to cooperate, work in a team and resolve conflicts constructively(Lines, Grant, e Hutton 2020). People with strong interpersonal skills tend to build positive and meaningful relationships, both personally and professionally. These skills are particularly important in fostering a collaborative and harmonious working environment, and in building bonds of trust and mutual support.

Responsible decision-making is another crucial skill that falls under social-emotional competence. It refers to the ability to make well-considered decisions, considering personal well-being and the well-being of others, and carefully weighing the implications of choices made(Dotsenko et al. 2020). Responsible

decision-making helps people make wise and informed choices, reducing the risk of negative short- and long-term consequences.

Finally, resilience is a key competence for coping with life's challenges and adversities (Jackson, Firtko, e Edenborough 2007). It indicates the ability to recover from difficult situations, adapt to change and return to a functional level of well-being. Resilience helps people overcome obstacles and face difficulties with determination and optimism, enabling them to learn from mistakes and grow despite the difficulties they encounter.

In sum, social-emotional skills play an essential role in shaping people's lives, influencing their emotional well-being and the way they relate to others. These skills provide a solid basis for balanced growth and success both personally and professionally. Investing in the development of social-emotional skills, both at the individual level and in the educational and work context, is crucial to creating a more harmonious, empathetic and collaborative society.

1.1 Socio-Emotional Skills in the school context

Traditionally, the education system has focused mainly on teaching academic content, often neglecting the importance of students' emotions and inner world. Education has placed more emphasis on external knowledge, such as the history and culture of other times or places, rather than adequately addressing the emotional experiences of pupils. This attitude has led to a lack of preparation on the part of society with regard to understanding and communicating emotions. One reason for this underestimation of emotions in Western education has been the fear that emotions can distort knowledge and act as a source of falsehood or danger. Consequently, emotions have often been ignored or avoided in educational processes. This lack of proper education on emotions can leave young people unprepared to face the emotional and interpersonal challenges of life (Aviles, Anderson, e Davila 2006).

This phenomenon is particularly worrying because schools, focusing mainly on the cognitive dimensions, have often neglected the emotional and social aspect of learning. As a result, behavioural and interpersonal problems can emerge that negatively affect the classroom climate and teaching effectiveness.

Addressing this challenge is now essential: it is necessary to integrate social-emotional literacy and education within the education system to make individuals

more aware of their emotions and able to adopt appropriate behaviour in social situations. This approach will provide students with useful tools to manage their emotions in a healthy and constructive way, creating a more positive school environment conducive to both teaching and learning. Indeed, studies and research have shown that enhancing these skills has a significant impact on students' personal and professional lives. When individuals develop emotional awareness, the ability to manage stress and emotions, empathy and effective communication, they become more adaptable and resilient, which results in better success both at school and in adult life. It is crucial to recognise that many children and adolescents may have deficiencies or difficulties in social-emotional skills. These difficulties may be the result of multiple factors, such as conflicting family backgrounds, experiences of childhood trauma, and growing up in difficult and dangerous neighbourhoods(Aviles, Anderson, e Davila 2006; Huth-Bocks, Levendosky, e Semel 2001). It is important to understand that these factors can intersect and influence each other, contributing to the complexity of the challenges that individuals face as they grow up.

And this is where the school has the task and the opportunity to intervene in a meaningful way, providing valuable support for children with social-emotional problems, even in difficult family or social contexts(Farmer et al. 2003). Creating an inclusive and welcoming environment is one of the first steps the school can take. When every child feels accepted and respected, regardless of their family situation, an environment of trust and openness is created that allows children to express their emotions and the challenges they face. It is therefore of paramount importance that educators are trained, and that they themselves have well-developed social-emotional skills(Chen e Guo 2020; Pozo-Rico, Gilar-Corbí, e Castejón 2020).

2. Innovative Educational Approaches for Socio-Emotional Skills Development

As mentioned above, within formal and non-formal educational settings, it has become increasingly evident how important social-emotional competencies are in order to achieve the full development of individuals. To promote emotional and social learning, educators have embraced numerous innovative teaching approaches and new technologies, transforming classes into inclusive and stimulating contexts.

One of the most direct ways to cultivate social-emotional skills is through structured social-emotional education programmes. These programmes include targeted and engaging lessons focused on knowledge and self-awareness, empathy, emotion management and interpersonal skills. Thus, educators use non-traditional approaches to promote the active involvement of students. Through role-playing activities, group discussions and creative challenges, they create an environment where students can explore and understand emotions in a meaningful way. These are just a few examples of alternative teaching methodologies to traditional education. The literature is very extensive, given the multitude of valid methods for promoting the healthy and complete growth of children.

A recent study by Italian researchers, from the University of Novara, investigated the effect of an alternative methodology to the traditional one that might be able to promote social-emotional skills. In particular, they selected a sample of 7-8 year-old children, and subjected them to laboratory activities, mainly of a conversational type, focused on knowledge and regulation of emotions, and through the use of specific tests, administered to both groups before and after the protocol, they compared the results with a control group. Their results showed that the children in the experimental group performed significantly better on tests of understanding, emotion regulation and empathy (Cherubin et al. 2013).

In their study, Panciroli et al. (2018) conducted a thorough examination of various innovative teaching methods, such as Cooperative Learning, Flipped Classroom, and Project Based Learning (Panciroli et al. 2018). These methodologies emphasise the active participation of students, encouraging them to be protagonists of their own learning and to develop practical and critical skills, fostering knowledge and self-awareness, promoting group collaboration and students' self-esteem (Awidi e Paynter 2019; Kokotsaki, Menzies, e Wiggins 2016; Slavin 2012). The research sheds light on the merits and drawbacks of each approach, the teacher's role, and offers recommendations to mitigate potential risks that may arise during implementation.

The Peer Support is another didactic approach that promotes collaboration and support between classmates to enhance the learning process and the development of social-emotional skills (Cushing e Kennedy 1997). The involvement of students as mentors and peer support help create an environment of emotional peer support. Students have the opportunity to share their experiences and strategies for dealing with emotional challenges, building a support network within the school community (Carter et al. 2017).

In another study, researchers developed and employed the Didactics of Emotion®, a set of teaching strategies, interventions and techniques, whose primary objective is to foster the development of emotional competences in students. This method has been used with European primary school children, and their results show that this programme not only increases the emotional and relational skills of the young students, but also shows significant improvements in academic performance (Bottaccioli et al. 2023).

In recent years, new approaches have also been integrated that make use of digital tools, which are useful for the learning and growth of young pupils. Minino et al. evaluated the effect of Digital Storytelling during drama lessons on psychophysical well-being and self-esteem (Minino e Liparoti 2023). In fact, it has been widely demonstrated that performing arts, such as theatre, dance and music, promote psychophysical well-being and foster the development of social-emotional skills (Blasco-Magraner et al. 2021; Chivandikwa e Makumbirofa 2008; San-Juan-Ferrer e Hípola 2020).

In addition, many studies have shown the effectiveness of innovative teaching approaches for improving social-emotional skills even in children with special educational needs (BES), fostering inclusion and collaboration with the group, empathy and management of emotions (Carter et al. 2017; Damiani, Santaniello, e Paloma 2015).

3. Impact of Physical Activity and innovative teaching approaches on the development of social-emotional skills in educational settings

It is now well known that physical activity offers a wide range of benefits that go far beyond just the physical aspect. First of all, physical activity is a powerful ally for improving physical health. It helps maintain a healthy body weight, strengthen the cardiovascular system, and improve muscular endurance and strength. Exercise is also known to stimulate the immune system, reduce the risk of chronic diseases such as diabetes, and improve bone and joint health. In addition to its physical effects, physical activity has a positive impact on our emotional well-being. During exercise, the body releases endorphins, which are known as 'happy hormones'. These neurotransmitters can improve mood, reduce stress and relieve mental tension. Doing physical activity regularly can help combat anxiety and depression, improving mental well-being overall.

Physical activity, an often underestimated element in the educational context, plays a key role in improving students' social-emotional skills. In addition to strictly physical aspects, physical activity has been shown to have a significant impact on the emotional well-being and social interaction of individuals. Therefore, integrating physical activity into innovative teaching methodologies can open up new opportunities for the full and complete development of students.

Physical activity during the developmental age is extremely important for children and adolescents (Minino 2022). During this stage of life, the body and mind are growing and developing rapidly, and physical activity offers a wide range of benefits that contribute to healthy development. develop crucial motor skills. Play and exercise enable them to hone their coordination, balance and flexibility (Donahoe-Fillmore e Grant 2019; Han et al. 2018). These motor skills are crucial for coping with everyday challenges and participating in various sporting activities, providing opportunities for personal growth and fulfilment. In addition, it also has a significant impact on the mental health and emotional well-being of children and adolescents (Liparoti e Minino 2021). Another important benefit of physical activity is the promotion of social relationships (Haugen, Ommundsen, e Seiler 2013). By participating in team sports or other group physical activities, young people have the opportunity to interact with their peers, creating bonds of friendship and developing social skills such as cooperation and mutual respect (Liparoti 2022).

Scientific literature confirms that physical activity also has a very positive effect on children with special educational needs. Participating in physical activity programmes, it has demonstrated both physical and socio-emotional benefits, improving empathy, emotion regulation and social integration (Pan 2007; Tse 2020). Thus, physical activity provides them with an inclusive opportunity to express themselves and develop with confidence.

In addition, it should be emphasised that the social-emotional aspect is further promoted when physical activity is provided through innovative teaching approaches. Furthermore, it should be emphasised that the socio-emotional aspect is further promoted when physical activity is provided through innovative teaching approaches. There are numerous studies in the literature that have investigated the effect on socio-emotional competence of physical activity taught through non-traditional teaching methodologies. Indeed, Sotos-Martínez et al., demonstrated that a training protocol using gamification has statistically significant effects on the improvement of psychophysical well-being, motivation and basic psychological needs (Sotos-Martínez et al. 2022). The study by Rivera-Pérez et al., examined the association between cooperative learning and emotional intelligence in physical

education, involving 1332 students, and showed that there was a positive link between cooperative learning and emotional intelligence at all school stages. They also showed that classes with higher levels of cooperation showed higher levels of emotional intelligence(Rivera-Pérez et al. 2020).

Furthermore, the integration of physical activity with innovative teaching approaches further promotes the development of social-emotional skills in students. By combining physical activity with these methodologies, students acquire essential skills in collaboration, communication and emotional management. This synergy promotes emotional well-being and creates an inclusive and engaging learning environment. Investing in these practices not only promotes physical and emotional health, but also provides students with resilience and confidence to face life's challenges, contributing to an overall more satisfying and fulfilling life.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the findings of this study underscore the crucial importance of physical activity and innovative educational approaches in promoting the development of socio-emotional skills in young students. Physical activity proves to be a powerful tool in enhancing emotional well-being, empathy, and social abilities. Teachers and educators play a fundamental role in fostering an educational environment that nurtures the healthy growth of young minds. Through targeted and sensitive educational practices, it is possible to encourage students to express and understand their emotions, promoting self-awareness and emotional intelligence. Simultaneously, the use of innovative educational approaches enriches the learning process, providing new opportunities to develop positive relationships, cooperation, and resilience.

Promoting the socio-emotional well-being of the youth is essential for their overall growth and success. Investing in the power of physical activity and innovative educational methodologies can contribute to shaping balanced, empathetic individuals capable of facing life's challenges constructively. The present study provides an important knowledge base to guide future educational efforts aimed at cultivating a welcoming and stimulating environment where young individuals can develop in a healthy, happy, and mindful manner.

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