

Educational Path for Pedagogical Skills: A Football School Experience

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Abstract—The current pedagogical culture recognizes an educational scope within the sports practices. It is widely accepted, in the pedagogical culture, that thanks to the acquisition and development of motor skills, it is also possible to exercise abilities that concern the way of facing and managing the difficulties of everyday life. Sport is a peculiar educational environment: the children have the opportunity to discover the possibilities of their body, to correlate with their peers, and to learn how to manage the rules and the relationship with authorities, such as coaches. Educational aspects of the sport concern both non-formal and formal educational environments. Coaches play a critical role in an agonistic sphere: exactly like the competencies developed by the children, coaches have to work on their skills to properly set up the educational scene. Facing these new educational tasks - which are not new per se, but new because they are brought back to awareness - a few questions arise: does the coach have adequate preparation? Is the training of the coach in this specific area appropriate? This contribution aims to explore the issue in depth by focusing on the reality of the Football School. Starting from a possible sense of pedagogical inadequacy detected during a series of meetings with several football clubs in Piedmont (Italy), there have been highlighted some important educational needs within the professional training of sports coaches. It is indeed necessary for the coach to know the processes underlying the educational relationship in order to better understand the centrality of the assessment during the educational intervention and to be able to manage the asymmetry in the coach-athlete relationship. In order to provide a response to these pedagogical needs, a formative plan has been designed to allow both an in-depth study of educational issues and a correct self-evaluation of certain pedagogical skills' control levels, led by the coach. This plan has been based on particular practices, the Educational Practices of Pre-test (EPP), a specific version of community practices designed for the extracurricular activities. The above-mentioned practices realized through the use of texts meant as pre-tests, promoted a reflection within the group of coaches: they set up real and plausible sports experiences - in particular football, triggering a reflection about the relationship's object, spaces, and methods. The characteristic aspect of pre-tests is that it is impossible to anticipate the reflection as it is necessarily connected to the personal experience and sensitivity, requiring a strong interest and involvement by participants: situations must be considered by the coaches as possible settings in which they could be found on the field.

Keywords—Relational needs, responsibility, self-evaluation, values.

I. INTRODUCTION

It is now fully acknowledged that sport, in addition to promoting a healthy and wholesome lifestyle, has important implications in someone's personality formation. As a matter

of fact, sport can be a key element in children's growth, especially in the most delicate growth phases in which the body is discovered thanks to movement [6].

Not only that, studies show that practicing sport helps the child in learning cognitive skills [5], [12], in order to directly influence his curiosity, attention and school results. Although intense physical activity can favor the child in his academic results [10], the acquisition of an integrated model suggests a greater attention on the quality of sports activity rather than the quantity [17]. This model allows combining the physical aspect with the cognitive one: thanks to physical activities that fall under the so-called Open Skills, children are required to integrate motor patterns with thinking, memory and attention skills. If it is therefore true that sport can promote the child's development, it is evident how much pedagogical culture attributes considerable importance to sports activities within the individual's growth process. On the other hand, it is fundamental that those pedagogical elements capable of highlighting educational needs, critical issues and possible questions are rediscovered within sport [15]. Coaches play the role of modern pedagogues, and coaching must be able to learn from the concepts of pedagogy [13]. The resulting sport pedagogy is a fluid subject, able to connect with different disciplines [14], analyzing and defining the sport path within the educational environment.

Research and studies in this field have made considerable progress in methodological terms. It is enough to analyze last century's forms of motor education to notice the great steps forward that have been made in the progressive change of teaching towards ways which are increasingly attentive to the educational needs of children.

The research has shown that at the center of the proposal should be introduced player-centered pedagogical aspects, and several authors have advanced methodological ideas capable of responding to this need.

II. METHODOLOGICAL EXAMPLES

The interest of pedagogy in the educational aspects of sport is on two sides, both in non-formal and in formal educational environments. Among the many methodological proposals, indeed, three examples of research on the pedagogy of the movement have been chosen in this paper. The first two are concerned with interventions on two different sports and two different contexts. The third example refers instead to a proposal linked to a school institution.

A. Cremonini

Maurizio Cremonini, coach and trainer of the Italian

Basketball Federation, during the course of his career developed a new methodological proposal designed to meet the educational needs of participants in a mini-basketball course. The big difference when compared to traditional didactics is the shift from a perspective “by objectives” to a vision “by competences” [4]: the educational horizon to which the Cremonini method looks at is indeed projected towards children who are competent at a motor and cognitive level. It is therefore not so important to learn how to correctly perform a series of fundamental techniques in increasing progression of difficulty, always recognized as the objectives of every single training. Fundamentals, instead, are interpreted as abilities to train cognitive skills, the real key to get to motor skills. Each training session is therefore not designed according to a general expectation of results based on objectives; however, it is proposed by customizing the teaching on each different individuality, enhancing individual skills and promoting a correct emotional approach.

B. Evans

In Australia, John Evans' team studied new forms of teaching methods to be used in sports, rugby in particular: the object of their research is the role that pedagogical aspects can play within the sports environment. The reference sport pedagogy is the so-called Game Sense (GS), while the methodology chosen for its promotion is the Collaborative Action Research (CAR) [7].

GS is a pedagogical approach that wants to put the player at the center of learning. Detaching from direct teaching, in which the coach programs the development of the player, the player is called in GS to question himself, to understand and ask questions about his development, the processes that guide him and the resulting relationships. It is possible to bring out thoughts and ideas related to his moment of growth or his needs through the dialogue between him and his teammates or the coach.

CAR looks at the position of the coach as a “sport pedagogue” that puts itself at the same level with its group of athletes, highlighting when both sides of the educational relationship should be able to grow and learn through the sporting experience. The pedagogical background allows the coach to contextualize and explain to the participants of the sport activity the different elements that make up their development. In this way, it can emphasize their relationship, which is recognized as fundamental for the growth of both positions, the athletes and the coach.

C. Schulebewegt of Macolin

The two previous methodological approaches have attempted to highlight non-formal aspects of education. This attention to the methodology addressed to the path of children has gone as far as the formal education of the school institution. Sport can in fact be at the center of a change of perspective from a school point of view: an example could be the “schulebewegt” of Macolin.

The Federal Training Center of the Swiss National Olympic team is located in a small town in the German-speaking part of

Switzerland, in Bern's Canton. In this context the professional sport is not only practiced, but also studied. The University of Sport has launched a research program called “School in Motion” through the promotion of a healthy, active and dynamic lifestyle, movement is the element, thanks to which children, especially in the primary years, have the opportunity to build their own identity: children are encouraged to walk to school, recesses are carried out in a dynamic way, lessons are led through movement, often with dual-tasking exercises.

Thanks to physical activity, children express themselves, build relationships and study the school subjects that are commonly studied in depth with lessons that traditionally happen statically at a desk. The results seem to confirm how much this kind of teaching actually helps the children's learning and curiosity, encouraging their concentration even when they are asked to sit at their own desk.

III. QUESTION

Above mentioned researches, inserted in a wider context of studies, have highlighted how central are the pedagogical elements within the sports context. However, the perspective of sports pedagogy tends to prioritize within the educational relationship the needs of the group of athletes or children, more precisely. Instead, it seems significant to try to bring out what the educational needs of a coach may be, in his training as an educator as well. Within the research activities, the narrative interviews conducted on the position of the coach-master [22], on the different roles of the reference adults [24], as well as on the relevance of fatigue and patience within the motor and sports activities [18], [9] have brought to light a suffering on the part of coaches in the face of situations that require an educational intervention. In fact, the coach is required to understand and master the main elements that characterize the educational relationship. This suffering has been explained with a sense of “pedagogical inadequacy” that can be traced back to needs that concern those educational issues - which will inevitably emerge during the training - such as identity, evaluation or educational asymmetry.

Through the deepening of the particular nature of the athlete/coach relationship, any eventual educational needs of the coach justify the design and verification of a methodological intervention.

Starting precisely from the recognition of these needs, it is important to establish and highlight which training path could be carefully structured in order to strengthen the educational relationship. The project presented in this article aims to propose a formation path that started from the detection of needs, which took place thanks to the comparison with managers, coaches and athletes through different channels of communication.

IV. PROJECT SOCCER

The project SOCCER is conducted by a research group of the Department of Philosophy and Educational Sciences of the University of Turin (Sara Nosari - principal investigator, Graziano Lingua, Federico Zamengo, Emanuela Guarcello,

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A. Background

The reality of soccer school constitutes a relevant and fruitful training space [1], [21], and offers children the opportunity to have experiences that allow them to discover their own abilities, to compare themselves with others, to measure themselves against the rules. These are educational experiences that, through football practice, can significantly affect the citizenship (present and future) of children [2], [11].

The studies carried out by the research group on the culture of corporeity and movement in the evolutionary age [3] have allowed the research group to relate with some football realities of the Turin city area.

The project SOCCER has as its objective the design and implementation of a research-action path for soccer school coaches, aimed at exercising and strengthening the skills of reflection and evaluation necessary for the conscious and competent management of the educational relationship between coach and children [16].

The project was addressed in particular to the dimension of soccer, since, in the Italian area, it is the sport that reaches the most different realities, directly and indirectly. This characteristic is combined with the specific nature of the sport and its great socio-relational component. Both parts made it become the ideal sports environment in which to start studying a new training proposal.

The project finds its basis in all those dialogical methodologies such as community practices [25], reinforced by the experience matured in narrative practices of pretext in the formation of professional identity [19], focused on the principles and techniques of life histories [23] and life-based methods [8].

The project intends to decline the results achieved (both theoretical and methodological) in the “non-formal” field of sports education, formulating a training proposal that offers specific paradigms and methods. Starting from this methodological background the proposal is structured on EPP.

B. Educational Practices of Pre-test (EPP)

EPP are a specific version of community practices designed for the extracurricular environments. They are developed through a textual narrative able to reconstruct a possible situation of daily life from which to derive ideas for thinking and problematization. They are in fact an indirect opportunity to identify with the emotions experienced by the protagonists of the text: the proposed text is not only intended to describe the details of the story in specific, but rather to bring out those questions interpreted as opportunities to exercise their sensitivity [20]. This particular nature of the text, i.e. it being a pretext-for, introduces a new form of textual typology: the “pretest” is therefore a dialogical form that allows highlighting different points of view. The research work that allows a pretext is possible in a group dimension, in which the comparison between different interpretations problematizes an educational scene that is part of everyday experience. It is

precisely this condition - in which each member of the group can identify with or relieve feelings already lived in the experience - that is a characteristic of EPP. Moreover, EPP have the character of the indeterminateness of the narrative, not going so far as to return definitive answers, but rather favoring the discussion and empathy aimed at the research, at the questioning.

EPP are able to emotionally involve the participants in the activity, making the scene true, lived entirely because recognized, tried or experienced. The educational effectiveness of these practices requires a new pedagogical figure that is able to correctly moderate the activity. Logically, the professional profile that guides the experience must try not to determine the evolution of the confrontation, nor impose its own specific vision on the topics of the debate. Instead, it must demonstrate a pedagogical competence in proving to be a mediator, bringing out a thought as “thought of the thinkable” [20].

C. The Original Project

The project, initially, was studied and planned without dealing with the pandemic emergency that involved our society in 2020, foreseeing, in the different project phases, a normal, simpler and previously tested execution of the activities. Acknowledging the difficulties of any kind of proposal made during this period, the research team had to remodel the methodology, tools and type of intervention taking into account the restrictions related to COVID-19.

The intervention was originally studied to be divided into four phases of work: a design phase, a realization phase, an evaluation phase and a dissemination phase.

During the first period, the aim of the research group would have been to design an “educational profile” that would give back the tasks and educational roles of the coach, specifically for the Football School. Therefore, the texts-pretests would have been drafted on the basis of that figure, which would recall the field experience lived by soccer coaches.

In the next phase, the realization phase, the research group would have conducted a cycle of five meetings, through the modalities of EPP, encouraging dialogue and discussion on situations actually lived by coaches.

In the third phase, the evaluation would have been foreseen in two directions: the coaches would have to self-evaluate their own path, while the research group would have to meditate on the effectiveness of the intervention proposal.

The last phase, the dissemination, refers to the fact that the Project SOCCER is a pilot project, able to be re-proposed to other realities of the Italian territory. It would have been the intention of the research group to propose the results to the Italian Federation of reference, the Italian Football Federation.

D. The Project Today

Unfortunately, due to the worsening of the pandemic emergency and the uncertainty regarding the measures taken to counter the spread of COVID-19, the project had to undergo a change from the original idea. It was therefore remodeled and converted to telematic mode, in order to allow the

research group to meet, even if virtually, and all participants to attend the meetings.

Considering that EPP can achieve their best result if based on dialogue, confrontation and physical presence, the research group had to slightly modify the methodological path. During the planning phase, in order to deal with a possible difficulty in maintaining high interest in a telematic mode, it was planned to add an asynchronous moment to the synchronous time of the interventions, in which the participants outside the meetings had the opportunity to work on the project issues.

The project, objectively delayed from the forecasts, is not yet concluded, and therefore complete results of the experience cannot be reported. However, observations on the first phases of the intervention can be proposed.

On a voluntary basis, there have been formed five groups of coaches from different ages and backgrounds but all belonging to the soccer schools in the Turin area. The project was in fact intended for those coaches (at least 18 years old) who were interested in deepening pedagogical issues within their field, without placing restrictions on qualifications, licenses or age limits.

To date, the first two pretests have been proposed, leaving in the asynchronous workspace a window for ideas, questions and reflections exchange useful for the next meeting.

Since it is not possible to report the results of the project in this text, the confirmation of the need for this type of training proposal is obtained by the research group in ascertaining the enthusiasm and participation in these first meetings by all participants. Obviously, enthusiasm, participation or passion cannot be expected to be elevated to epistemological criteria; however, they can be significant in the analysis of how much this type of activity based on the pretest can and should be further investigated and deepened.

V.CONCLUSION

The conclusions of this contribution may not have the character of the analysis of a result, but they can offer an epistemological consideration of the use of technologies and methods of intervention traditionally extraneous to these types of proposals.

It is indeed possible for a greater use of whatever the telematic modality allows in group activities, in particular in the combination between synchronous and asynchronous intervention. The use of the technological resource allows enriching the possibilities of the operation also outside the meetings. The advantages and difficulties of such a particular moment leave the research group with, if not complete results and feedback, important indications from an epistemological point of view.

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