

Physical activity and social inclusion at school: a paradigm change

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to highlight the value of education of sports activity in relation to special educational needs, according to International Classification Functioning, Disability and Health.

In fact, recent years have seen a paradigm shift from school integration to social inclusion, a new vision where the context helps through physical activity all people, included those with disadvantage. Today, people with special educational needs, included disabled one, requires adequate services to achieve goals for adequate participation. The work addresses the crucial role assumed from the physical activity and its value on socio-affective realization for everyone, compatible with disability or the disadvantage, and highlights the needs to promote physical-inclusive activity in order to provide the opportunity to learn through body experience in movement, experiencing an educational approach that goes far beyond pure performance and competitive environment.

Keywords: inclusion, participation, learning, scholastic integration, disabled people.

Introduction

Since a few years ago people with special needs were not prevised in Italian social system. In the school, for example, people with specific developmental disorders, or learning disabilities, or coming from economically or culturally disadvantaged backgrounds, were not entitled to personalized educational pathways, as was the case for those who were in possession of a certificate of disability issued from health organizations. Physical activity has an educational-formative value for all people independently of social class and any health condition.

The evolution of lifestyles, along with the possibility of access to physical education from the social groups such as the elderly and children, have initiated a modification of perception and social meaning of the movement and physical activity, emphasizing the educational and social value and decreasing the competitive component. In this perspective, physical activity, sport and ludic expression starting from what a person is able to do, stimulates the consideration of himself and of the his existence (Altavilla, et al., 2015ab, Raiola, 2015abc). It is necessary to find a different culture of movement and sport that be inclusive with respect to the different characteristics and mode of operation of all the people (Raiola, 2015bc): disabled, older men and women, kids. Rethinking physical activities in this perspective means to recover and strengthen the formative and educational value, highlighting the social and cultural aspects (Selis, Stocchino, 2006). Today there are people with special needs for which are not needed assistance with the execution of daily activities and other people, called disabled, that for a specified period or for life manifest a disadvantage or difficulty in school life, social, relational, behavioral and learning and not due to physical disability, mental and sensory (Altavilla et al. 2014ab, Altavilla, Raiola 2015).

The progress in Italy was made with the Law 104/92 because it has made people with disabilities more autonomous, helping to break the prejudices and social barriers; these acquisitions have made it possible, greater participation in the physical activities and leisure, contributing to follow an active lifestyle to maintain a state of optimal health. Unfortunately, there are still many people who have difficulties in everyday life, in addition to the disabled, that is, all those people with socio-cultural, economic, linguistic disadvantage. For this people are needed interventions on the organization and on social context and education, in order to guarantee to everyone widest participation in the educational and formative process (Altavilla, Raiola 2014).

Inclusive education must have the aim of well-being and quality of life of the person, taking care of instruction but also of education, safeguarding both physical and psycho-social development (Altavilla et al., 2013, Raiola, 2011ab). The paradigm of normalization, understood not as repression of forms of deviance from a static rule, is based on the idea of normality. It produces a sense of closeness between people and generates shared meanings compared to the experience that develop mutual recognition between people, sustaining therefore the processes of structuring personal identity in relation to processes of development the thinking and learning

Moreover, the psychological benefits generated from normality promote well-being and quality of life of the people, because the increase of shared meanings enhances resilience, namely the ability of the person to face at adverse situations both of a personal nature that social (Gaetano, 2012ab). In order to achieve what is

necessary to implement good inclusive practices, both in school that in society, so that all people with special educational needs can establish an active lifestyle, people with Special Educational Needs must have access not only to infrastructure but also to activity.

We need a "integrator background" that organize our actions and makes them easily identifiable in a model (Gaetano et al., 2015). In practice, inclusive consists in the modification and in the changing of environment, of systems and processes, in order to create equal opportunities development for those who live particular situations of difficulty or disadvantage. These principles intervening both on the environment and on the person, thus constituting an effective inclusive education system, having as a primary goal the removal of barriers to learning and participation (Booth, Ainscow, 2008).

In absence of specific responses, such situations become limitations to activities restrictions in the social participation. The care system interacts with the educative system, forming a single system. The promotion and development of physical and sportive activities and the importance of emphasizing their true educational value is definitely one of the signs of innovation in our society. This issue could be introduced in many different context - social, cultural and educational ones - for extending education in a general system that will be better able to meet the needs of our society.

The motor activities are the basis of all learning and accompany the individual development in all its phases (Altavilla, 2014). The importance of educational system in this activity is evident. In fact, it offers people with special educational needs an opportunity to compensate formative gaps and development problems due to certain difficulties, disadvantages and disabilities. In addition, the physical activity can meet in a productive way some typically human needs related to the experience gameplay, movement, competition and life of group (Altavilla, et al., 2015a). In fact, in those activities the individual experiences his own personality, he lives his own body in relation with others and with the environment, satisfies the need for sociability (through interaction), but also that of autonomy (through the free initiative and mastery of the activity), refines skills and competences. All these dimensions flow together in the development of a strong sense of self-efficacy and improvement self-esteem. The physical activity represent an event associated to the context, is based on the mutual relations between the individual, the environment and the tasks to be performed with a given goal (Gaetano, Rago 2014); often the environment sets limits that induce the individual to develop behavior patterns in order to make possible the execution of the task. Direct connection between physical exercise and mental abilities is proven (Raiola, et al., 2016): a physical activity practiced consistently seem to affect, in fact, cognitive performance of people with mental retardation. Everybody recognizes the validity and the essential role played by physical and sportive development which becomes a tool for socio-affective integration. The same activity can promote in the person with disability the learning of skills able to improve the cognitive and relational aspects, promoting an active role consistent with the degree of development permitted by disability. In fact, as any intentional activity, this is integrated in a context of relationships in an evolutionary vision.

The aim is to highlight the value of education of sports activity related to the diversification of special educational needs, which requires a participation context at school according to International Classification Functioning, Disability and Health ICF (WHO, 2001). Today, people with special educational needs, included disabled one, require adequate service measures in delivery models for achieving goals for adequate participation and development rights. Today the crucial role assumed from the physical activity and its value on socio-affective realization for everyone compatible with disability or disadvantage is commonly recognized. Promoting physical-inclusive activity gives the opportunity to learn through body experience in movement, according to educational aims that go far beyond pure performance and competitive environment. The aim is to highlight the value of education of sports activity related to the diversification of special educational needs, which requires a participation at school according to International Classification Functioning, Disability and Health. With this in mind, the work traces the pathway that starts from school integration theory to social inclusion one, describing a new vision where the context helps through physical activity all people, included those with disadvantage. Furthermore, this paper aims to provide pedagogical-social considerations to promote the increase of quality life through social practices in physical activities for people with special educational needs.

Methods

Theoretical and argumentative approach to support and enhance the literature review on special needs, school and physical activity. To linearly deduct the data to obtain the main results to eventually apply at preschool in order to make a scientific paradigm.

Results and Discussions

School autonomy offers opportunities for greater individualization of teaching and learning processes, which can bring remedy to one of the main limitations of the last season of Italian school reforms: the almost exclusive interest in the pupils' performance and their evaluation, the poor consideration for the introduction of new methodologies. Teaching to pupils with different types of needs is an aspect of knowing how to teach. What we need are good educational practices, knowing how to use different didactic tools, different ways of working and organizing the classroom.

The "differences" between the physical and sportive activities for "able-bodied" and the ones for people with special educational needs can be seen through the lens of adaptability principle. Referring to the adaptation theory, every physical and sporting activities can be modified or adapted. Starting from these methodological and organizational considerations, physical and sportive practice can take place and perform the function of promoting inclusion-oriented education and training and the inclusion, as well as playing a key role in facilitating the conquest of the autonomy and the development of the personality. The goal is to promote a physical and sportive activity of inclusive type among mentally disabled children and non-disabled, disadvantaged culturally and with learning disabilities, who have the opportunity to learn through bodily experience. Assuming this perspective, the person with a disability can not be reduced to its deficit. This certainly affect significantly growth path, but does not exhaust the complex identity. As regards the motor dimension this leads to consider the necessity and the importance of physical rehabilitation as a possible response to special educational needs, but also of physical activity that is inscribed in normality dynamics (Raiola et al., 2013ab). In general, such a proposal implies the following educational and formative purposes:

- to enable pupils with SEN to come into closer contact with their body
- to gain a better body coordination and a more effective ability to move in an adapted context
- to promote socialization in order to build an interacting group.

The physical activity stimulates growth through relationship in the group, and also the educational value and the learning opportunities that occur within it (Di Tore, et al., 2013).

To belong to a group, to deal with others and to share the excitement during the activity, are experiences necessary for personal growth in its relational dimension (Altavilla, Di Tore, 2016). This socializing function makes the practice even more important for the disabled, which realizes in group substantial opportunities for development and, at the same time, acquires behavioral patterns more suitable for social life. The physical activities is, therefore, not only a tool for an effective physical and mental growth, but, also, an important aggregative and formative factor; therefore, it is appropriate and necessary that his practice be freed from the exasperated competitiveness, putting the needs of the protagonists in the foreground. These needs differ not only in relation to age, but also in relation to physical condition, context and expectations of the person. In the scholastic practice, for example, subjects with impaired vision experience consistent problems of integration and inclusion. The task of educators is to pander their compensatory processes through educational and technological tools, enhancing the emerging skills, sometimes unspoken in the habitual didactic (Raiola, 2014).

Only in a respectful context, the sportive practice can be configured for everyone as a moment of participation and of growth of personality. When teachers predispose an interactive environment for learning, children are stimulated to be curious, to formulate questions, to think and to find solutions, thus expressing their ideas through always different communicative codes (Raiola et al., 2015ab, Pizzuto et al., 2016, Rago et al., 2016). From above considerations two important implications descend: first, we need a deepen preparation of professionals who deal with physical and sportive activities (teachers, coaches, trainers, teammates, etc.), in order to promote understanding of the educational needs and, secondly, it is essential to give life to environmental adaptations of the activities (rules, equipment, etc.), which allow all students to be protagonist in the competitions or in the scholastic practices. The careful consideration of these factors makes possible physical and sportive activities as an inclusion instrument. Many authors positively consider the physical and sporting activities during the process of maturation and development of the person. Playing a sport means to acquire general and specific motor skills, because any simple act is always the result of a thought and a corresponding nerve activity (Di Tore, 2016, Gaetano et al., 2016). The execution improves with increasing of control of the body in motion and requires competences on the ability of use it in relation to a determinate purpose (Di Tore, 2015, Raiola, Tafuri, 2015ab). We can define, from a psychological point of view, the sports training as a type of cognitive learning (Raiola, 2014). Also for the disabled person, therefore, it is important to give life, through dramatization activities, ludic activities and physical-sportive activities, to a own style of life and to an original way of being and living the body (Di Tore, et al., 2014).

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