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Sport and Education

Tribute to Martin Lee

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SOCIO-PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF SPORT

The sport system should have a decisive role in personal and social development and in moral and character education. This implies that the philosophy and practices that promote personal and social education need to be aligned in developing the potentials of youth. The Sport system should assume its position as an instrument serving this dimension of human development. The personal development of youth should be facilitated at the different stages and spaces of the developmental processes. This theme has been historically linked with the objectives of Physical Education and Sport. The philosophy and values which are present in Physical Education and Sport, although only generally expressed through the "**occult curriculum**", **underlie the** domains of sport skill acquisition, physical development, and an integrated education including civic and ethical education and the development of life competencies, with applications outside of sport and physical activity.

Personal and social education involves historic, cultural, aesthetic, social, political, moral, economic and philosophical dimensions. This can be achieved through disciplinary or interdisciplinary means, but also through trans-disciplinary approaches. In fact, education is always an integrative process. This responsibility should also be shared by the sport system.

Among the educational values which are important in the sport environment, the pan-human objectives, such as freedom, honesty, friendship, peace, self-knowledge, discipline, tolerance, fraternity and cooperation should be highlighted. More than physical improvement and the adoption of a healthy lifestyle, sport education involves social, civic and intercultural education against discrimination based on nationality, ethnicity and gender. On the other hand, sport education emphasizes the development of fundamental life competencies and skills: self-knowledge, self-control, respect of effort, perseverance, self-improvement and personal harmony. Sport education also emphasizes the transfer of these values to other spheres of life, forming not only the Sportsman/woman, but also, the Man/Woman.

The professional practice of physical education teachers, fitness instructors, coaches and other professionals are the focus of the formative and educational goals. Sport Education, involving its trans-disciplinary objectives and contents and broad applicability, comprises not only Physical and Sport Education, but also all other educational areas and spaces where this can be materialized.

It is important to highlight that this is not an educational objective exclusively for adolescents, students or athletes. It is a project for people of all ages no matter their status or condition. It should take place in schools, with visible presence in the Physical Education and School Sport programs; it should also have an important place in clubs, associations, federations and in the governmental structures of sport management. It should likewise affect sport management and administrative criteria, sport and event organization, rules of competition, professional ethical codes, and the behaviors of directors, coaches, sportsman and other individuals involved.

Sport education is not characterized, in essence, by a body of content or subject matter that is more or less codified, by a didactic or concrete methodology and by the existence of professionals or spaces exclusively devoted to the development of sport. It is, to some extent, a "de-schooling" education project, which demands the active cooperation of the family, school, media and various sport and social organizations. It is a project which is also directed at spectators and sport consumers and, generically, to all people regardless of age. Its objective is to create the basis for the implementation of a lifetime project, which not only materializes individual socialization, but also develops critical and responsible citizens, aware of the faults and limitations of the present, promotes a more civilized world.

The didactics, strategies, methods and procedures of sport education need to be studied in detail in order to permit implementation of the personal and social educational objectives that a sport program can produce.

Over the past two decades many studies have illustrated the contributions of sport to the psychosocial development of children and adolescents (e.g., Danish et al., 1990, 1993; Blair & Morrow, 1998; Sallis & Owen, 1998; Shields & Bredemeier, 2001; Culos-Red et al., 2001; Hausenblas et al., 2004). Shields & Bredemeier (2001), for example, have noted that from the writings of Plato through contemporary times, many important thinkers - educators, theologians, politicians, among others - have referred to sport as a factor in building character. And, a good deal of scientific evidence has been produced in this domain (Gauvin, Lévesque & Richard, 2001; Hausenblas et al., 2004; Sanmartim, 1995).

The relevance given to the role of sport in child and adolescent development seems to be consensual among authors who study this theme, even though many studies have difficulty in isolating and quantifying the unique contribution of sport to psychosocial development (Biddle & Chatzisarantis (1999); Petitpas, Cornelius, Van Raalte & Jones (2005).

Character is determined by a number of factors and their interactions, including heredity, childhood experiences, modeling by significant adults, peer influences, physical and social environments, media, a variety of organizations (family, school, church, and others), and the specific situations and roles that the individual assumes in life (Campbell & Bond, 1982). Nevertheless, professional intervention may be a necessity in character education and in the moral quality of decisions and individual behaviors.

Many programs have been recently designed in the perspective of influencing the development of moral values. Many have highlighted the potential contributions of sport in character education (Shields & Bredemeier, 1995). Although there is some

empirical support on the value of sport in character development, there is also evidence that contrary effects might occur (Danish, Petipas & Hale, 1990, 1993).

It appears that the effect of sport on the personal and social development of the athlete is not so much related to the practice of sport itself as it is to the philosophy of the sport organizations, the quality and orientation of the training processes, the nature of parental involvement, and the personal experiences and resources of the participants (Smith & Smoll, 2002).

Several strategies appear to have significant impact on character development. Activities should be structured and directed by adults who carry out their authority in a firm, sensitive and imaginative manner, revealing themselves as committed not only with the development of sport specific competencies but, also, with the development of character. Adults need to be demanding in all these domains, not only with the participants but also with themselves. This direction of activity should be accomplished in a context which maintains discipline through codes that are clear and accepted as legitimate (Wynne, 1989). On the other hand, the environment should be structured so that the participants have opportunities to practice pro-social behaviors. The suggested practices should involve the creation of situations where participants experience a variety of roles in a supportive group and in environments where there is acceptance by the peers and a feeling of belonging (Petipas & Champagne, 2000). The perception of the emotional climate perception and its effective management represent the structural basis for the potential to affect the development of positive values.

Another fundamental element is involvement in voluntary activities which assume objectives and incentives of an important intrinsic nature. The motivational strategy to support this development should integrate the athletes in activities that are challenging and are perceived as sufficiently important to deserve considerable levels of time and effort.

There is also evidence for a learning environment that promotes self-confidence and persistence and development of life competencies (Duda, 1992). This evidence suggests that parents and coaches who place the emphasis on external motivations such as winning, comparisons with others or public recognition, can contribute to an ego orientation or an environment focused on performance which is less propitious for psychosocial development. On the other hand, parents and coaches who place emphasis on effort, self-improvement and intrinsic motivation, create a task orientation environment and a mastery climate which presents better conditions for work ethics, persistence, and commitment as well as the development of positive life competencies (Larson, 2000). Moreover, secure environments are more predisposed to incentive participants for taking risks and learn from their mistakes (Danish et al., 1993).

Overall, psychosocial development appears to be facilitated if participants are involved in a desired activity; are guided by caring adults and belong to a group or positive community that is not afraid of challenge, demands excellence and has high positive expectations. A system of symbols, ceremonies and activities which favors the development of collective identities is an additional and perhaps fundamental factor in personal and social development.

Values education is only possible in an environment that provides opportunities for the athletes to gain confidence in their capacities to use them in other contexts than sport. It is essential that sportsmen and sportswomen are helped to identify

the competencies demanded in the world of sport that can be transferred to other environments. Opportunities to use these competencies in different contexts should be provided along with support and encouragement. Personal and social education demands the creation of a moral environment. The strength of this moral environment results from the quality of relationships, behaviors and expectations of adults and mentors, in particular parents and coaches. Parental involvement has clear benefits in psychosocial and moral development through sport (Perkins, 1997). To guarantee the strength of this contribution, parents should demonstrate an active interest in the activities of adolescents.

Interpersonal relationships are an important support in learning situations for moral education demanding exposition to social values, interaction between peers, reflections and discussions of moral topics, understanding of others, empathy, and an interest to improve continuously until excellence is reached.

The moral education of the young sportsman/woman cannot be founded exclusively on declarative moral knowledge and on other ethical rules. Rather, moral education results from the creation of a familiar environment, a secure affective climate and a shared ethical environment. Character involves knowledge, affection and action (Ryan & Lickona, 1987). Accordingly, moral knowledge involves the knowledge of moral values, moral reasoning (promoting the criticism of the values), decisional strategies, moral imagination and judicious judgment. On the other hand, the affective dimensions of morality are determined by personal identification with these values, by attraction for these values, and by compromise, loyalty and existence of feelings of guilt for infidelity to them.

Moral development demands moral reasoning, behavior control, affection and care for others (Cunha, 1996). Habits and tradition should also be considered as essential factors in the formation of conscience. In actuality, moral education includes the knowledge of consensual values of the sport community (e.g., the Olympic values), personal identification with these values and acceptance of habits and socially relevant attitudes. In relation to moral education, it is important for educators to develop the following specific competencies: (1) acceptance of himself/herself as a model, (2) compromise with the moral domain, (3) knowledge of how to morally argue and assist the participants in that process, (4) knowledge of how to express their moral vision, (5) knowledge of how to promote empathy, (6) knowledge of how to promote a moral climate in the group, and (7) knowledge of how to involve participants in moral actions (Ryan, 1987, as cited by Cunha, 1996).

The development of these competencies should always be based on personal autonomy, accepting the fact that in many areas there is no moral consensus and that people live in cultural and intercultural environments of moral relativism. It is important to contradict indoctrination practices and unique thoughts, accepting that some ideological relativism and some neutrality of the coach might be necessary to facilitate not only the clarification of values, but also the discussion of moral dilemmas. This didactic position seems to be decisive in the clarification of personal values to the extent that it will help the development of a critical, autonomous spirit.

However, this neutrality should not be a decisive foundation for the intervention in values education. The coach cannot be a simple facilitator in this process. Moral education also demands clear and direct value transmission, and the proclamation of

values and ideas that are based on rationality and emphasize not only the reasoning process but also the content (Cunha, 1996). Explanation and rational demonstrations, use of examples, dialogue, and rational and free environments are decisive factors in the formative strategies.

However, the clarification of personal values cannot overcome the fact that some values are more just and balanced than others. If it is difficult to defend the thesis of the universality of values, it is also true that there is reasonable consensus throughout civilization about a significant group of these values.

Stages of moral development (Kohlberg, 1971) highlight educational processes that support the development of reasoning appropriate for the stage of moral development.

Education of Sport Agents

The knowledge already available in this area should be quickly exported to the world of sport and, in particular, to the education of sport agents. Teachers, coaches and other agents of sport education are involved in the development of moral competencies and in the personal and social development of athletes. It is not enough for teachers to have high levels of technical proficiency and for coaches to have high levels of technical expertise in their respective sports without reflection on basic concepts of teaching and training, and without consideration of ethical values in sport. These are significant dimensions of their professional responsibility and should also be significant dimensions of their life. Understanding of the processes of moral development and education must be emphasized in the preparation of teachers and coaches.

It is thus important that coach and teacher education be directed not only to competencies linked to knowledge of technical, tactical or methodological aspects, which are more related to the sport results, but also to professional competencies related to moral education and development of life competencies. This will demand a personal education centered on their attitudes, values and beliefs, as well as on their own conceptions of Man, life and mission. The same imperative should extend to the formation of other professionals connected to the world of sport: sport directors, judges and referees, doctors and paramedics, reporters, sport psychologists, etc.

Final Words

Sport is a practice in the service of Man and as such, it demands from its different agents much more than a technical intervention. It demands an intervention founded simultaneously on philosophy and science, which clarify and make more effective intervention at the ethical level and the potential formative effects on moral development, character education, and personal and social education.

In fact, what can be learned can be taught and in the context of moral education, such evidence cannot be forgotten. The intervention of sport professionals is defined in a conceptual framework, which not only permits but also demands, an intervention on the personal identity, the development of life competencies (independence, autonomy,

self-confidence, perceived competence, self-achievement, self-challenge, personal and social responsibility). These will be achieved in many environments of sport as well as in enlarged context and circumstances. Attempts to affect value development demand a deep knowledge of developmental and educational processes related to motivation, setting objectives, desire and ambition, affecting values appropriate to the demands of competition, learning respect for the rules and fair-play, ethical behaviors, relationships with others and respect for individual differences, learning to win and lose. Several basic questions need further research. How to promote integrity and commitment? How to promote respect for other's rights? How to promote the sense of justice and the care for others?

In many ways, practicing sport is a moral experience. Hopefully, as a result of involvement in sport, there will be cooperation, friendship, generosity, magnanimity, compassion, a sense of justice, authenticity, transcendence and, ultimately, Humanity.

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