

Integrated school-community projects to promote motor activity through possible alignment with professionals

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In the context of primary school motor activities, it is not uncommon for educational relationships to be at least trialectic (Eichberg, 2010), that is to say, they respond to a plurality of educators whose interaction and synergy entail significant repercussions on the teaching efficacy, and, ultimately, on the quality of education. The plurality of the persons involved can become a resource, if the organization of the participation is truly integrated, thought and handled with reference to the children's educational needs.

Even though the regulatory framework has changed, a hybrid status, with a strong territorial connotation, has characterized motor education in primary school since the '70s and after after its name has been changed from elementary school to primary school, and national indications, rather than national programs, have been applied.

At least for a certain period, and especially in certain regions, the most significant experiences referred to the idea of an integrated education system (Frabboni, 1988; Frabboni and Guerra, 1991).

Since the end of last century, territorial hybridisation has allowed the development of significant and long-lasting experiences, often funded by local bodies and public schools, while sometimes co-funded by families, and, to a lesser extent, by private individuals. Without aiming to give an exhaustive list, we will cite only the most relevant pilot projects of Prato, Casalecchio di

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Reno, Turin, and, finally, the projects of Rimini and Trento. These projects were developed directly with trainers and external teachers, or, in other cases, fostered in cooperation with sports promotion institutions. They all took inspiration from the inadequacy expressed by female teachers, about motor/body education and they aimed to shed light on integrated territory-school projects in which qualified external educators would hold motor education classes along with the teaching staff.

The meaning, or rather, the educational purpose of those projects was dual: to offer quality motor activities to the children and train the female teachers. Training was articulated in two phases: in the first instance, its aim was to develop the competences of the female teaching staff, so that they could best perform the second weekly hour of activities; in the second instance, this training attempted to supply them with a certain educational independence, so that the motor educational activity could continue after the project had come to its conclusion.

All these projects involved, in a cogenerative logic, a participatory planning for external and staff teachers; some of them also included a common theoretical and practical training. In some cases, practical training was meant only for female staff teachers, while in others to both types of teachers at the same time, through training courses which became co-planning workshops, facilitating planning based on shared body experiences. Often, these projects directly referred to or were supervised by the teachers of the Faculties of Pedagogy and Human Movement Sciences. Some of these have become case or research subjects for Faculties of Primary Education, and, at a later time, for Faculties of Motor Sciences.

Planning was defined together before the start of the school year, when also motor education and teachers' training, or self-training, program was carried out. In some cases, with the aid of local education authorities, the training experiences became on-going courses.

Over the past decade, many of these local projects have continued their course by including the new Motor Science graduates as external teachers.

Some of these projects witnessed an extensive participation by private entities; we mention here the project funded by Barilla, currently called "Giocampus", which, for several years, has been extended from Parma to the other provinces of the Emilia-Romagna region. Other projects, fostered by sports promotion institutions, received state funding; we mention here the project, and information campaign, "Diamoci una Mossa", by UISP, focused on an active lifestyle and on a healthy nutrition.

In several areas, there structured and integrated projects were accompanied by detailed actions, not included in this article, where local sports associations, governing bodies and institutions, often sponsored by private entities that

supplied gadgets and materials, were involved with schools to promote their activities. Unfortunately, due to the lack of school resources and specific competences, many of these actions were only episodic, and only partially educational, and, ultimately, even though they were often welcomed, they were not co-planned, as an alternative, by staff teachers.

The circulation of Memoranda of Understanding between the Miur and Coni, aimed at promoting and improving the diffusion of motor activities in schools, so as to allow a gradual acquisition of skills and competences in the various stages of childhood development, has urged the Ministry to wonder anew about the importance of an ever-growing active involvement of the schools in planning recreational/motor/sports activities meant to spread at spreading a movement culture in the didactic-educational world.

These elements were then implemented in the 2007 National Curricula Instructions for kindergartens and primary schools, whose guidelines instructed teachers on how to plan curricula and extracurricular activities focused on the centrality of the child and of its development phases, in terms of their psychological and physical well-being, which highlights a strong interest in the body-movement relationship. Thus, it is now asked to the teachers, starting from kindergarten, to prepare recreational/motion courses for young students, capable of guaranteeing the “functionality of movement articulated in its various forms” (Sibilio, 2001) to foster a construction of their identity, in view of psychological and physical well-being.

In line with these, the latests National Curricula Instructions for kindergartens and primary schools of 2012 required additional competences from the respective teachers, serving as didactic/operative guidelines for the students and for the new teacher training needs. Over the years, the call of the Ministry for the educational responsibility of kindergarten and primary school teachers has embodied the need to rethink the teachers’ essential knowledge; in kindergartens and primary school, the teacher is first and foremost an experimenter who knows “how to guide the child effectively and accurately” (Sibilio, 2001) through a constant and active involvement of various didactic/heuristic skills.

In particular, the MIUR highlights the involvement of the students, starting in kindergarten, in recreational/motion/sports activities, which require kindergarten and primary school teachers to possess knowledge and skills relating to the sports/motor field, additionally highlighting the need for the Italian education system to guarantee a rigorous theoretical and didactical/practical preparation on the matter to kindergarten and primary school teachers.

The “Motor Literacy” National Project

At the end of the last decade, thanks to a Memorandum of Understanding between the MIUR and CONI, the “Motor Literacy” National Project was implemented, as a shared experimentation phase «within the respective institutional competences [aimed at creating] a motor literacy program to be implemented in primary schools, as a response to the growing alarms by the scientific community and by international institutions on the consequences of a sedentary lifestyle and improper eating and life habits among the youth».

The original project idea then revisited during the project, included two interconnected work programmes:

- a feasibility assessment and project start programme (A.S. 2009/2010), to be carried out in a selected number of sample schools;
- a three-year operative project, aimed, among other things, to experiment the feasibility of the inclusion of motor activities (and motor activity teachers) in the curricula (2010/2011; 2011/2012; 2012/2013).

The project conclusion included a transition from the four-year project period to the permanent inclusion of a motor activity teacher in primary schools. The external teacher, referred to as “expert”, selected by the schools involved from a list approved by the organizers, was required to perform the function of an educational/political (according to the definition below) design of wide scope, shared by the national institutional actors – MIUR and CONI – within a primary school reorganization strategy.

In the first year, the educational activity included two hours per week for each class, for part of the school year (for a total of 30 hours per class), during which the expert was asked to «support the [tenured] teacher – sole person responsible for the class activities [...]» in order to promote «motor activity [as an] occasion to foster cognitive, social, cultural and affective experiences» (Coni, 2010).

A strong emphasis was given to promoting active lifestyles, with a contingent plan similar to a positive social engineering idea, through which to induce changes in daily habits, aimed at achieving higher well-being for every citizen (in this case, for the student involved in the project) and for the community in general.

The experts, apart from implementing the educational guidelines set forth by the project, were also required, as stated above, to verify/create the conditions to include the motor activities in the primary school curricula.

Relationships within the project and the expert's role

The relationship between the expert and the student is part of a much wider relationship network, which, in basic terms, intertwines with the entities

promoting a project/event (MIUR and CONI, in the case of the Motor Literacy and related projects), the school, the teacher tenants, the students and the parents.

Besides these actors, in the project in question, there is also the figure of the supervisor in charge of administratively coordinating the project and of guaranteeing the local educational quality of the schools involved.

The existing interconnections influence the relationship between the expert and the student, affecting it in a significant way. The relationship network includes several and various variation factors, difficult to summarize; however, some of them seem to affect the relationship in a more profound way:

- the nature of the Motor Literacy project, whose specifications have changed over time;
- the relationship between teacher tenant and expert;
- the relationship between teacher tenant, project expert and tutor, in charge of coordinating the project;
- the relationship between the school and the expert (many of the experts involved had already cooperated with the schools where they led the ML project).

While performing their roles, the experts held a triple function:

- *street-level* agent, according to the meaning suggested by Lipsky (1969), appointed to implement, at least in the project initial intentions, a medium-term political strategy (4 years), mainly aimed at experimenting and then implementing a scholastic reorganization, and, at the same time, at mediating between the School and CONI;
- supporting educator for the teaching staff involved in the MIUR primary school guidelines implementation process;
- promoter/operator of promotion policies for an active lifestyle (especially in the first years of the project).

In the definition developed by Lipsky (1969), *street-level* agents are those individuals supplying a public service by interacting directly with the citizens (and with intermediate organizations), and operating mostly in context characterized by scarce resources and by a “typical” tension between the pressure binding them “from above” and the needs of the citizens “from below”.

In the fulfillment of the first function as (*street-level*) agent, the expert, aided by the supervisor, was asked to solve organizational conflicts and to make decisions, while taking into account the different requests and influence exerted by the actors involved in the project: MIUR and CONI, from above, the school, the teachers and the students, from below. In some instances, the figure of the expert, and thus the role he/she was asked to perform within the school, came under some pressure: interpretation of project specifications, scarcity of resources combined with the school’s requests, political indications set

forth by CONI/MIUR, organizational needs (e.g. schedule) and the assessment of the educational needs to be met have induced the experts to assume contextual operative strategies which significantly affected the project and their relationship with the students involved in the project (the citizens).

The second (educator) and third (promoter/operator) function significantly affected the relationship with the students. In the first instance, a markedly educational dimension was established, which tended to enrich the motor skills of the students whose bodies, in many cases, became a subject/object of a multidimensional educational practice: cognitive, affective, social, etc. In the second instance, even though not everywhere, some of the experts included in the activities moments to reflect on habits and lifestyles, contributing to creating, rather than a simple educational cause for reflection, a space focused on sociality, health, well-being, etc. This second approach can be associated to a *lifestyle-orientation* trainer/trainee relationship, characteristics of many European companies which see the school (and the teachers) as actors capable of preventing deviant behaviors and fostering healthier lifestyles (Simovska e McNamara, 2015).

As detailed in the next paragraph, the project was most effectively applied where it was possible to create a shared sphere of action between teacher-expert-student; within these contexts, the expert expert's intervention and the way in which the student growth has been affected, have been more effective and long-lasting.

In a broader view, it may be argued that, in educational relationships, there is always a variance between the *action intention* – the project's objectives, for example – and its implementation. This variance is due to a series of variables truly difficult to summarize. However, among these variables, the context in which an educational operation is carried out, and the limiting ratio accompanying the actions of the educator (*see* Digennaro and Borgogni, 2015) seem to have a significant weight.

In the case in question, a further widening of the variance was due to the misalignment levels which were often detected in the Public School/Coni and Tenant Teacher/Expert relationships, and to the conflicts between the (hierarchical and didactic) authorities involved in the process.

In order to establish a fruitful cooperation between the teacher and the experts, it is essential to establish training courses for both figures, capable of bridging the professional gaps, and aimed at establishing a specific skill portfolio to be implemented in the educational context.

It would be necessary to supply school teachers with a suitable education, in order to make them better of “understand and acknowledge exactly how a movement is carried out (...) so as to adapt its methodological procedures to the instantaneous level of mastery of movement” (Meinel, 1991).

In addition, sports figures would need to be involved in specific sports/motor activity educational courses, in order to make them better understand “those typical qualities related to the majority of sports/motor activities”(Meinel,1991) in a school environment

The ideal situation of a shared sphere of action has often been impossible to implement, due to the relationship difficulties between the project actors, which have enormously affected the implementation of the activities, thus limiting the expert’s grip on the students.

Thus, it would not be a matter of equating figures with different roles and professions, but rather to highlight the need of more professionalized paths for all the figures involved in the educational processes, aiming at a possible alignment between professional roles, not to undermine the specific professionalism of each actor, but rather to highlight their strengths in childhood and preadolescence education and training field; since these figures are present and operating in schools, it would be desirable to revisit both training programs. To this end, Meinel (1991) mentions the alignment between the teacher figure and the coach/educator figure, by defining the combination of the two figures as two “educational possibilities useful to illustrate those motor sensations connected to a correct execution of the movement to be learned by the student” so that each actor “must not be limited to his/her own subject” (Meinel, 1991)

In this respect, training programs for all teachers and for all educational/sports operators should be based mainly on the didactic/educational skills deriving from training programs capable of fostering the educational capacity through motor and sports experiences (D’Elia, Sibilio, 2015).

In formal and informal teacher and tutor training contexts, this would require the establishment of specific programs capable of making the didactic/educational and social/psychological orientation apparent, and to establish curricula where the specific didactic/motor training is enhanced.

“The analysis of the motor/sports professions entails specific complexity and specificity levels:

- the “dynamic plurality” of meaning that the activities related to each profession assume in the different contexts, creating multiple profiles which, in turn, require specific training capable of adequately meeting the ever-changing needs of society, which questions the choices regarding the competences and qualification procedures of the professionals operating in the amateur and/or professional motor/sports sector;
- the self-referentialism of many organizations which, in a rather common way in the Italian context, impose themselves as training agents capable of building the professional competences associated to the different profiles;
- the simplification, related to the diffusion of commonplaces according to which from the athlete’s or sportsman’s competences can derive those of

motor and sports activity professionals in different fields. This reductive vision of the construction of motor/sports skills at different levels translates into the attribution of a sophisticated expertise – generalizable in many other contexts – to sportsmen, while overlooking the specific competences and the harmonized integration of knowledge, skills and resources needed to guarantee adequate competences and to plan work projects and specific intervention frameworks in motor activities” (Sibilio e Aiello, 2010).

A possible reflection on the weaknesses and criticality of the teacher, the tutor and/or of other figures pertaining to the scholastic/sports world would make the cooperation between these figures more functional, given the fact that “when teachers educate their students through movement, they do not only care about the physical aspects, but also about the entirety of the individual” (Sibilio e D’Elia, 2015).

In defining the recreational/motor and sports/motor national projects, the Ministry has underlined that the primary scope of their experimentation and diffusion in national primary schools is “to spread the physical and sports education since childhood, to foster educational and training processes in younger generations” (MIUR, 2014).

It is not a matter of supplying complete motor competences to the students, but rather transmitting, through the recreational/motor and motor/sports activity, educational messages related to the construction of a personal and social identity, in view of a psychological and physical well-being.

Educational Relationships: Results of a Qualitative Research

On the occasion of the launch of the Motor Literacy project 2012/13, we conducted a research based on semi-structured questionnaires submitted to some of the project supervisors (n=8). The results were summarized during the training course held for the supervisors coming from the entire national territory, in Ostia, in December 2012 (Borgogni, 2012).

The supervisors, selected based on their significant experience in this and other projects, were specifically interrogated about the relationship between experts and teaching staff. A wide range of behaviors and attitudes came to light, in which the gradient between alignment and misalignment allowed to speculate, with a sufficient degree of plausibility, the educational repercussions on the children.

From the teacher tenant’s perspective, the behaviors were classified in three categories. The first category is characterized by the teachers’ to a joint construction of new knowledge, aimed at a shared planning to improve their work and putting themselves on the line, by directly participating to

the practical part of the lessons. The second category refers to a cautious yet positive position, where the relationship with the expert is envisaged as capable of extending teachers' professionalism and educational intervention. The third category must be interpreted in a negative fashion, and it involves the desire to avoid work, the lack of willingness to plan the lessons, and the delegation of these tasks to the expert.

The classifications emerging from the expert's behavior analysis are even more interesting. The categories are similar, albeit some differences, and they include a fourth category. A cross-cutting aspect to be considered is that the expert was motivated to participate also for economic reasons. The first category includes the experts who, knowing that they are "stepping into someone else's home", are willing to cooperate. The second category includes the experts who are committed and "plan too many activities", also in reference to the project curricula, and who apply it by the book, running the risk of losing important information and educational opportunities. The third category includes those experts who do not wish to plan with the teachers, because they only "want to practice sports" and are not interested in relating their activities to the curricula. The fourth category includes those experts who think that "they [the teachers] don't understand", and who hope they would leave everything in their hands.

The relationship between the expert and the teacher tenants, from the expert's standpoint, is highlighted by certain sentences, directly quoted from interviews of supervisors, who deem the teachers to be available to integrate and cooperate "when they see in us not the expert who can suggest "spectacular" exercises, but rather when, in our activities, even when simple, they see the intention of working on all the aspects of the individual and of the class group", and when they notice that through the motor activity, we can supply them with an additional key to understand both the positive and negative class aspects, thus tackling, through our activities, the issues that they have observed in the class.

Furthermore, certain supervisors highlighted the possibility of interaction that the project did not take into account, such as programs or actions to foster the active home-school movement, the aspects related to food education, necessary to foster healthy and active lifestyles, or the significance of motor education in an intercultural perspective, which were often crushed by strict curricula.

Many of the supervisors had held the role of expert in the previous years, in this or other projects, and thus they aimed at a relationship in which the motor activity scope went beyond the hours assigned, and, although asymmetrical, aimed at a shared program with the teachers.

It is clear how, by reading these relationships thoroughly, it is highly probable that the common educational projects and the students' experience

run the risk of being fragile, maybe valid as a sum of episodic experiences, and, thus, not inferable in view of a sustainable educational and training practice (Borgogni *et al.*, 2010). Where the two actors were aligned, and the environmental conditions favourable, the supervisors nonetheless highlighted the willingness and integration of skills on the part of the teachers, which can lead to presume a future continuity.

However, the project did not include any assessment on the processes or on the educational repercussions on children, with particular reference to their lifestyles; it only included a final test aimed at establishing the skills acquired based on the period of time employed to carry out a standardized motor course.

Projects subsequent to Motor Literacy

At the end of the fourth year of the Motor Literacy Project, after stating the impossibility of implementing and completing the project by including a motor activity teacher, MIUR and CONI agreed to an extension of the cooperation for a bridge project called “Primary School Project” (2013/2014), which preceded, in the two following academic years (2014/2015 and 2015/2016), the “Class Sport” project. Apart from the changed name, a careful analysis of the specifications of the three projects allows the identification of also a substantial cultural change, which significantly affected the role of the expert, and, consequently, the relationship established with the students involved in the project.

Namely, the Primary School Project recalls some of the objectives of the previous project, with the declared intent of “promoting the motor and sports activities at school” (Coni, 2013). It was expressly defined as a «transition toward the definition of a new intervention model³». It preceded the “Class Sports” project, and a change in direction of the expert function. The expert is now considered “a specialized figure included within the school” (CONI, 2013), appointed to support the school principal and the teachers in motor and sports activities, through an active cooperation in planning the educational activities, along with practical activities during the school hours.

To this end, the broaden perspective suggested by the SBAM (Sport Benessere Alimentazione e Mobilità) project, funded by the Puglia Region and implemented from 2012/2013 to 2014/2015, thanks to the cooperation of the University of Foggia and of the Coni-Puglia, is highly significant. These institutions were in charge of the project planning, teacher training, project monitoring and recruiting of the experts working with the children. With respect to the cited national projects, SBAM included two additional actions: healthy food habit education and active transport/sustainable mobility education

(safe house-school-house paths), implemented through the presence of expert graduates in motor sciences, nutritionists and dieticians, who held integrated lessons and supported the teacher tenants. The national and SBAM programs were carried out in many schools of the Puglia region at the same time, so one school could host both programs (the national and the regional one). The substantial differences with the cited national projects are: a more thorough initial training and current training of the expert graduates; motor activity monitoring for three years, concerning the motor capacity, motor ability, psychological constructs (*enjoyment*) and self-efficacy perceived in children from 8 to 10 years of age (Colella, 2014).

In the emerging perspective, the expert becomes the operator of a (national or regional) policy, and of a cultural change not anymore oriented towards including a motor activity teacher within the school, but rather toward stimulating a reinforcement of the existing school and student competences/resources. Furthermore, the expert is required to be, from a co-planning standpoint, the bridge between school and territory, in a wider cooperative view between all the subjects involved in the student educational and growth processes.

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