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CURRICULUM & TEACHING STUDIES | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Sports as education: Is this a stereotype too? A national research on the relationship between sports practice, bullying, racism and stereotypes among Italian students

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Abstract: This article is based on scientific evidence from a national survey carried out in Italy in 2017 on a sample of 4011 students. The results of the statistical analysis show that the potential educational role of sports is not an explicit value embedded in its practice. In these terms, today the causal link between sports and education appears to be a stereotype. The study shows that teenagers who play sports outside of school have an increase in their levels of tolerance of bullying and racism. In addition, respondents who play sports have highly stereotyped opinions about gender roles and ethnic diversity. The neutrality of sports practice in Italy, with regard to social inclusion and the dissemination of positive values, has been demonstrated. Although sport can be a useful educational tool to mitigate limits arising from disadvantaged social conditions, a direct relation between sports and education has not been observed. In order to spread positive social values and

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

When social inclusion and the dissemination of positive values are entrusted to the sporting practice, in particular in Italy, the neutrality of sport will become evident. This is the demonstration that there are two limits to be overcome to offer everyone the same opportunities to practice sports and to strengthen sports pedagogy in order to spread positive social values and promote social inclusion. In this way, the sporting practice will be correctly used as an educational tool that can effectively help to mitigate conflicts and social disadvantage in different contests, including schools and all other situation not easily dealt with other methods.

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promote social inclusion through sport, we hypothesise that it is necessary to overcome two limits: the inequality in sports opportunities among students and the weakness of the relation between sports and pedagogy. This article finally proposes a pedagogical approach aimed at sports teaching oriented towards social inclusion.

Subjects: Education; Sport education; Inclusion; Teacher Education

Keywords: Bullying; racism; stereotypes; prejudices; sports; teenagers; education; pedagogy; sports sociology; sports psychology

1. Introduction

The personality development during adolescence and the internalisation of positive values, such as respect and cooperation, depend on various factors like personal recognition, self-affirmation and comparison with the "other". These aspects define an idea of diversity which often delineates a theoretical and physical distance between people and groups, in economic, cultural and social terms. Personality evolves and undergoes considerable changes throughout adolescence. These changes are due to the influence of primary and secondary socialisation, which includes also all the conditioning coming from family, school and socio-cultural environment. In other words, personality comes out as a product of shared experiences and values within the groups to which a subject belongs (Tajfel et al., 1971). The process leading to the development of an individual's personality contributes to the shape of beliefs and opinions, influencing behaviours as a result of the exposure to social models and peers (Bandura, 1997; Tintori, 2010). One of the most important environments in which networks of friends can expand and where young people can get in touch with social diversity and experiment attitudes and behavioural models is certainly the world of sports.

In the social sciences we need to analyse the environmental influence on patterns of youth opinions and thoughts that lead to the identification of behavioural models that adolescents can reflect in the present and in the future. At the same time, we also need to assess how teenagers will position themselves in relation to social diversity (Manzi & Gozzoli, 2009). Ideas can have significant consequences for relationships and personal choices, leading adolescents to measure individual differences in terms of the anthropogenic environment. Therefore, the scientific knowledge of youth opinions is useful for building and modulating educational activities that can be crucial for social cohesion, relational well-being and for addressing specific discomforts, such as bullying and social deviance.

School, which is relevant in the transition from childhood to adulthood, is the meeting place between different worlds and cultures, today even more than in the past. At school the concept of diversity matures and is confronted with social reality. (Marramao, 2013); this reality is often different from that perceived on the basis of stereotypes and social prejudices (Tintori, Palomba, 2017). For this reason, educational intervention, even in sport, must be considered a critical and conscious assumption of knowledge.

The subjective evaluation of diversity is not just about ethnic or geographical factors, nor can it be attributed to skin colour or religious beliefs. Diversity is experienced daily in all societies, mainly in gender relations. In particular, the relationships between men and women are often unbalanced, as they are acquired culturally in relation to specific social contexts and experienced in a distorted and prejudicial way. The absence of values that stimulate dialogue, understanding and sharing, but also the absence of an effective educational guide, as well as the lack of positive references are often the basis of the fear that generates the "prejudicial drift", and hence intolerance, bullying and racism. Studying youth phenomena within school and sport environments is therefore fundamental to establish educational gaps. This assessment is fundamental to achieve greater training effectiveness, which today also concerns the ability to access knowledge, to decode information, weight its reliability and to avoid the development simple and reductive

opinions (Laughlin, 2009) and the perception of differences as potentially dangerous (Tintori & Cerbara, 2017).

Today school gains primary importance in the growth process of young people as it is not only a meeting place but also an intercultural environment. In particular, this is true in relation to its socialisation activities, such as those experienced and built through sport. A very important challenge that teaching has to face when dealing with new generations concerns "background interpretations". The family, in fact, is also the place where social inequalities are reproduced (Breen, 2004; Schizzerotto, 2002). The parental socio-cultural status of an adolescent influence his symbolic and cognitive processes; it produces social advantages or disadvantages, future expectations and life choices; it also determines attitudes and behaviours in human relationships (Tintori & Cerbara, 2016). Family conditioning also has strong repercussions on sports practice and its drop-out, especially with restrictive cultural or religious conditions for pupils, and in particular for girls (Dagkas et al., 2011). It should also be noted that the reasons for the sport dropout of young people in many cases depend on problems related to learning environments provided. This is a problem related to need for a more flexible and holistic pedagogy (Kirk, 2000). It may therefore be necessary to reconsider school and sports teaching to prevent or curb the deviant phenomena that characterise the world of youth and are reflected on the axis of social inclusion/exclusion.

This study aims to analyse the relation between sports practice and the education of adolescents. In particular, the article verifies the hypothesis that sports practice is always an educational factor. According to this hypothesis, sport is a facilitator of social inclusion, reducing the presence of deviant social phenomena, such as bullying, racism and the internalisation of social conditioning that determine gender and ethnic stereotypes and prejudices.

2. The social impact of sport and the Italian context

Sport can certainly be a catalyst for socially positive values. Through sport it is possible to support the values of social, gender, generational, cultural and ethnic inclusion. Furthermore, interpersonal respect can develop along with the value of rules. Social inclusion, therefore, should be a prevalent aspect in sport. However, sport can often be the bearer of stereotypes and social prejudices. Similarly, sports competition can turn into deviant and violent responses (Chicchi & Simone, 2017). As previous studies suggest, gender is still seen as a carrier of specific performance (Butler, 1993) and still subject to forms of horizontal segregation (Roberts et al., 2019). The need for equal participation in physical activities is still neglected and the sport is characterised by a predominance of male players (Cohen et al., 2013). The problem can be seen from different point of view. Even a change in the hierarchies of power between students and sport coaches could favour better communication in sport, the promotion of collaborative learning in a more relaxed and empowering environment, with particular advantage of female participation (Brunton, 2003). Probably, as several authors suggest, a more flexible pedagogical approach towards sports teaching would certainly generate a more inclusive environment capable of overcoming gender, cultural and religious differences and resistances (Dagkas et al., 2011; Kirk, 2013). We should think on how social exclusion is reproduced and countered in a sporting context (Spaaij et al., 2014), and also on how the world of sports should strategically organise events in order to produce social cohesion (Schulenkorf, 2010). As recent research states, for the sporting environment to be an agent of social change, it is necessary to organize sporting events with a specific educational intent (Peachey et al., 2014).

The role of sport coaches thus emerges as fundamental. Sensitivity in teaching and training and the behaviour of coaches influence the opinions of students and athletes regarding those accepted differences in terms of masculinity and femininity, abilities and disabilities, and the relation with social diversity. However, stereotypes within the world of sport are often unconsciously reproduced by coaches and become an educational fact (Penney, 2002; Wright, 2002). The rhetoric of equal opportunities lives on in sport. There is often a racialization of bodies, hierarchical also in relation to gender and class (Hylton, 2008), with the complicity or the explicit support of sports coaches

(Flintoff & Dowling, 2017). Also mass media and the world of sports journalists are often bearers of ethnic and gender stereotypes (Eastman, 2001). Therefore, if on the one hand the influence of mass media on the construction of the meanings of sport should be emphasized, on the other hand the great importance of the sport curriculum in the process of socialization and social inclusion is highlighted by Coakley (2009). In this regard, based on a large meta-analysis study, Wallhead and O'sullivan (2005) argued that only a curriculum based on sports education and therefore an emphasis on team membership can promote personal development and social responsibility, cooperation and trust. Conversely, the development of the student leadership is a potentially problematic factor for inclusion and equal participation. For this reason, sports pedagogy should become explicitly inclusive, encourage participation and avoid discriminatory attitudes and languages (Kugelmann et al., 2006). The importance of teaching personal and social responsibility must also be emphasized (Casey & MacPhail, 2018), validating pedagogical models based on the educational value of sport (Kirk, 2013).

In the Italian educational system, social inclusion goals should be achieved from the beginning of the school career. According to the Curriculum of Physical Education and Sport (PES) decreed by the Ministry of Education, University and Research (MIUR), since primary school young people must develop the ability to use the communicative and relational factors of motor language for social interaction and the practice of fair play. These are aspects that must be chosen as a "daily relationship modality" (MIUR, 2012, p. 78). The values of inclusion within a group, cooperation and solidarity, but also the assumption of responsibility and the commitment to the common good are therefore skills that should mature through sport, by the end of lower secondary school (MIUR, 2012; Cerbara, 2019). The social values of sport, those to which we all tend to refer when we think of well-being and social inclusion, should therefore be rooted during childhood, and then strengthen during the phase preceding the starting of secondary school—which in Italy corresponds to the years of greater sports participation (Istat, 2017b).

These values are strongly connected to the dual role that sport plays in society, which concerns on the one hand the transmission of neuromotor and athletic skills, and on the other one mental, individual and collective well-being. The latter concept, in line with the definition that the World Health Organization has provided, is useful in giving the right place to the wide potential of sport. This idea starts from the assumption that, at the same time, sport recalls relational aspects and social expectation, understood as the fulfilment of the human role within a social context (Tintori & Cerbara, 2017). In this regard, Isidori argued that well-being is not a stable status whose meanings are given once and for all. Therefore, sports pedagogy, as a human science, needs to be revisited in a more phenomenological and existential way linked to the pursuit of well-being through sport. If sport is a fundamental component of interaction and social well-being, in order to transform it into a source of well-being a new pedagogy is needed. With this aim PES helps us to understand the social value of sport. It concern, for example, how to deal with others, but also how to participate to a team activity with a positive attitude. This means respecting shared and self-established rules, also pushing to strengthen the prevention of racism and violence (Valente et al., 2018), problems that are present in sport (Flintoff & Dowling, 2017). Therefore, participation, rules, values, respect for social diversity are key words that recall not only the concept of inclusion, but also the practice of sport.

Following the PES objectives, sport can be considered a "relational asset" (Donati, 2009), potentially endowed with a strong cultural component that makes it functional to the pursuit of objectives such as well-being and social cohesion. Therefore, a further step in this direction could be the re-evaluation of sports teaching in terms of welfare, as an element of inclusion in social policies (Tintori, 2012). The relationship between sport and welfare should also look at the practice of sport as a cultural practice (De Knop, 1999). This perspective supports the idea of sport as a cultural right to develop and enhance social capital on the one hand (Coalter, 2010; Seippel, 2008; Spaaij, 2012), and on the other to foster dynamic relations of inclusion, innovative social policy interventions (Hartmann, 2003; Kelly, 2011, Tintori, 2012, 2019).

A recent research that we conducted in Italy has verified the link between sport practice and social inclusion. In accordance with what is expressed in the context of social interventions on a sports basis (Kelly, 2011), the hypothesis was that sport is still too tied to the mythology of competitive sport. This could be a dimension from which sport still needs to emancipate itself to be fully recognized as a cultural practice (Coalter, 2007). On this interpretative direction, the EU, starting from the "White Paper on sport" and opposing the highly competitive approach of national sports systems, has tried to enhance the amateur nature of sport, understood as a human activity with great potential for reaching every individuals, regardless of age and social condition (European Commission, 2008).

Our study verified the hypothesis of inconsistency in the sport/education binomial. We hypothesised an ambivalent nature of sport, which questions sport as a place of inclusion and practice of positive social values. Indeed, participation in sport could lead to both support and violation of social rules. Sport, in other words, could be both a positive and a negative element from the point of view of social values; it could therefore have an "ambivalent nature" closely linked to its pedagogy. From this point of view, sport could generate cohesion and good academic and work results, or be associated with prejudice, social deviance and risky consumption (Eccles et al., 2003). As will be seen, unlike other structured activities (voluntary work, artistic and cultural activities, etc.), sport produces social positive results only if it is oriented towards this goal (Eccles, ibid.). As noted by some authors, the orientation towards positive values depends on sports operators and coaches. For this reason, the limits of kinesiology and sport have also been highlighted (Andrews, 2008; Ingham, 1997; Uehara et al., 2016). Within Cultural Studies the sociological critique of kinesiology has been developed, with the perspective of endowing sport with progressive and democratic languages (Andrews et al., 2013).

It has been noted that especially during adolescence, a phase during which individuals tend to identify themselves with a group with defined characteristics, sport can feed the contrast between the internal and external groups. This is caused by the constant search for confirmation and confidence in personal abilities (Tajfel, 2010). In fact, when dealing with diversity, the internal group plays a complex and crucial role. The group always enjoys a positive evaluation by its members because it is preserved by stereotypes about diversity, which simplify relationships and generate socio-cultural "barriers". The members of a group recognise each other in mutual similarities that are intra-category and which, supported by a sense of belonging, emphasise the inter-categorial differences. In this way, an assessment asymmetry can be produced, which results in favouritism for the internal group and discrimination for the external group (Tajfel et al., 1971). For this reason, sport, which is often also characterized by the establishment of different social groups and identities, can become a practice of exclusion.

3. Methods and purpose of the research

During the last few years, we have conducted several surveys on young people. These surveys were all related to the conditions and behaviour of young people. Two of these surveys were conducted nationally and focused on the relationship between sport and socio-cultural inclusion. Specifically for this work, in 2017 a questionnaire was submitted to a selection of young students of the first two years of the upper secondary school. The questionnaire contained a list of items related to socio-demographic characteristics, life experiences, interpersonal relationships and behaviours, adherence to stereotypes and prejudices.

The sampling design was proportional and divided into two phases (Lohr, 2019): in the first phase Italy was divided into three macro areas (North, Center, South) and the number of schools with at least 15% of foreigners students (in order to ensure the presence of a consistent number of foreigners for each school involved) was used to establish the number of cities which had to be selected, respecting the proportion of schools in each macro area. For this reason, a list of 10 cities was selected (4 in the north, 3 in the centre and 3 in the south). In each city, 3 high schools, one

vocational, one technical and one high school, were randomly selected from the ministerial list. Finally, for each school a class was selected for each year without further forcing the demographic characteristics of the interviewees, in order to obtain a representative sample of the characteristics of Italian high school students. More than 4011 interviews were collected. The sample obtained is a probabilistic sample representative of the Italian population attending high schools in the main Italian cities. The database obtained can be useful for investigating a multiplicity of aspects relating to different themes included in the research. Most of the information gathered was included as a continuation of a long-term research activity using tested and validated schemes and questions found in the reference literature.

First of all, a mono and bivariate data analysis was carried out in order to understand, for every question, the differences between the type of respondents (Peng et al., 2010). Secondary, a multivariate analysis was performed to better understand the influence of some variables in the selection of different responses. The aim of this latter analysis was to establish if the practice of sport could be relevant in influencing the students' behaviour. Otherwise, the other flip of the coin was supposing its neutrality, then taking under consideration other characteristics to explain some differences in the considered answers. For this purpose, a binary logistic regression (Freedman, 2009) was carried out to model the probability of tolerance and acceptance of behaviours, which are obtained using indirect questions. They are useful for avoiding bias of answers due to social desirability (Corbetta, 2014; Statera, 1997) and linked to bullyism and racism (dependent variables) in relation to some socio-demographic characteristics of the interviews and their sports practice (independent variables or predictors).

4. Can the practice of sport really influence the attitude of bullying or racism?

Relational deviance is strongly present within the educational institutions included in our research: during their lives, about 6 out of 10 students experimented some type of exclusion from a group and were offended through insults, nicknames etc. Many students have instead been mocked because of their family origins, specifically referring to those with a migrant background (47% foreigners against 14% of Italians). Compared to all the various kinds of discrimination and violence examined, the victims of bullying are mainly young people with foreign origins. This consideration applies also to gender offenses (that is, offenses as being a man or a woman) and other generic offenses like theft of objects, the compulsion to do actions against one's will, threats and even unwanted sexual acts. Aside from expectations, often these young people who, between friends and classmates, have sometimes suffered exclusion, abuse and violence, show a tendency to express judgments on bullying that underlies attitudes of acquiescence. For example, bullying is defined as intolerable by 76% of foreigners against 81% of Italians, sexism is intolerable for 86% of foreigners against 92% of Italians. Racism is defined as intolerable by 84% of foreigners against 74% of Italians. The recorded opinions show a slight prevalence of judgments that exonerate these acts, which are considered *ways of being worthy of respect*, or seem *difficult to judge if not contextualised*. The students seem generally conditioned from the presence of social influences on the judgments expressed. In particular, both stereotypes about sport and ethnic origins are relevant among males and those who practice sports. Half of the students believe that it is actually better to have a male trainer (but the majority of those agreeing on this statement are the same males: 27% against 10% of the females). About a third of the students think that some sports are not suitable for females (23% females and 41% male agree with that affirmation). A similar share claims that in order to be able to play sports there is a need of showing extraordinary physical skills (28% female and 46% male); about one in ten young people admits that violence in cheering their team is to be considered an acceptable fact (7% female and 17% male). A similar discussion can be made for ethnic stereotypes, with respect to which it is noted that about a third of students feel threatened in their own safety by the presence of immigrants (32% female and 39% male). For a similar proportion of young people, the foreigners are considered criminals (25% female and 35% male); finally, students usually tend to think that immigrants are people who actually steal jobs from Italians (26% female and 38% male).

How can we make sure that the practice of sport has or not an influence on the attitude of bullying or racism?

The multivariate statistical analysis can help to investigate in this direction. As illustrated in the methodological note, due to the nature of our data we had the possibility to choose among different way of reading it but the binary logistic regression is the best way for this kind of data also because in this way we can investigate on the data structure using different kind of variables in the same model. As dependent variable, we picked the question about the attitude against people that assume a typical behaviour of a bully or of a racist. These questions had three ways of being answered: two of them were related to tolerance, such as the actions related to bullying or racism "have to be considered ways of being worthy of respect", or they "seem difficult to judge if not contextualized". These answers have been reduced to just two modalities: tolerance vs intolerance. In this way we obtained a binary variable that was useful for our purpose (Cleary & Angel, 1984) because our aim was to investigate if the practice of sport can induce more intolerance, with respect to deviant behaviours. As independent variables, we chose the same for both the models: the practice of sport, but also other demographic characteristics. These characteristics were gender (2 modalities, female or male), practice of sport (2 modalities, yes or not), citizenship (2 modalities, Italian and foreign), and cultural status of the family of origin (5 modalities, from low to high level, low level, medium-low level, medium level, medium-high level, high level).

According to the output of the software used,[1] the obtained model correctly classified 80% of the observations and the Hosmer and Lemeshow Test (Hosmer & Lemeshow, 1980) indicates that the model fits well our data. The table shows the final composition of the model, including all the relevant statistics. For this model we can claim that being a girl is more likely to be intolerant towards bullying because, as indicated by the odds ratios shown in the last column of the Table 1 (that are calculated as Exp(B)), the ratio between the probability of being intolerant over being a woman is greater than the simple probability to be intolerant. In other terms, just the fact to be a woman is linked to a major frequency of intolerance. On the contrary, being an Italian—and not a foreigner—is linked to a higher probability to be more tolerant. Regarding the topic of bullying, the practice of sport and the cultural status are not included in the model because their contribution is not statistically relevant (the statistical significance shown in the table is greater than the limit level of 0.05).

In the case of the racism, the obtained model correctly classifies 77% of the observations and the Hosmer and Lemeshow Test indicates that the model fits very well our data. One important thing to be noted in this model (Table 2) is that the direction of the relationship between both gender and cultural status of the family versus tolerance of racism is opposite to that presented by the other variables. This means that being a girl or having a low cultural status is more likely to be intolerant of racism because, as the odds ratios shown in the last column of the table indicate (that are calculated as Exp(B)), the ratio between the probability of being racist being a woman or having a low cultural level status is greater than the simple probability to be intolerant. We can say the opposite for the condition of being an Italian: about racism, the probability to be more tolerant

Table 1. Parameters of binary logistic regression model for bullying			
BULLIYING	**T**	**Sign.**	**Exp(B)**
Gender	,917	,000	2,503
Practice of sport	,094	,296	1,099
Citizenship	,357	,000	1,429
Cultural status	,015	,826	1,015
Constant	,917	,000	2,503

Table 2. Parameters of binary logistic regression model for racism			
RACISM	T	Sign.	Exp(B)
Gender	.497	.000	1.644
Practice of sport	.078	.367	1.081
Citizenship	−.621	.000	.538
Cultural status	.192	.004	1.212
Constant	1.005	.000	2.731

being an Italian is higher than the one to be intolerant. As in the previous model, the practice of sport is not included in the model because of his reliability.

So, in conclusion, in both models the practice of sport can't be considered as influent more than other demographic variables. Sports practice is therefore not an inhibitor of bullying and racism.

5. A pedagogical model to support the educational role of sport

In light of the previous research results, among the possible actions to be taken at school level, we proposed the pedagogical model of adaptability (Fellini & Vismara, 2019), with the aim of supporting the educational role of sport. The pursuit of this proposal was reorienting both school life and sports practice, in order to fulfil the objectives set by national curricula.

This model must be considered an interesting case study due to its international success. It has been applied for over 10 years in the context of Dai Nippon Butoku Kai association. This association had the main purpose of promoting peace and harmony at international level, supporting the progress of humanity through the study and the practice of traditional martial disciplines.

Therefore, the pedagogical model of adaptability proposes possible solutions to problems, difficulties and failures of the school/sport system within the educational field. In particular, the pedagogy of adaptability is a concept borrowed from the judo discipline and represents an educational model that should be applied starting from primary school. The model was recently applied in Milan by Dr. Riccardo Caldarelli, a sport sciences professor at the Italo Calvino High School. The experimentation involved a total of around 250 children, belonging to 9 different classes. According to the directives set by dr. Caldarelli, the teachers shared the goal of supporting their students to grow physically, morally and intellectually, with the aim of being able to help others. After a few months carrying out the experimentation, the teachers noticed increasing benefits related to the relationships among students, a greater inclusion in diversity (including differences related to ethnicity, gender, disability) and a growing participation of students in school activities.

Although borrowed from judo, the pedagogy of adaptability must be understood as a universal value and included in the context of general sport teaching. His aim is therefore not to build the best athlete, but a "better" person. This model is based on the critique of frontal pedagogical approach, which is based on the idea of standard learning. In this case, we should find a teacher's desk, pupil desks and an educational program decided by a Ministry that must be thoroughly followed, but often without operational references in relation to feasibility over time. Within this approach, we expect the teacher (sports teacher or other subjects) to explain, provide tasks, carry out the assessments, identifying who has understood the lesson from who has not understood it, and targeting those who will need support lessons. This approach, therefore, is mainly aimed at identifying the first and last of the class. Otherwise, the model of pedagogy of adaptability teaches how to best use the physical and spiritual energy of students to achieve greater harmony within the classes and thus grow and progress altogether: students, teachers and school activities as well. The aforementioned experimentation, although of purely qualitative nature and showing not yet

widespread results, can be considered as a first test of the method's effectiveness. Certainly, before confirming the objective effectiveness of this approach, other experiments will be necessary. Furthermore, those experiments will be connected to a careful measurement and evaluation of the relational climate that occurs in the school environment ex ante and ex post the application of the model. However, we can hypothesise that the goodness of this practice may affect in the medium term the reduction of youth discomfort and school dropout.

At an operational level, the model envisages the deconstruction, at the beginning of the school year, of the traditional concept of school teaching. This is a fundamental step to promote education by bringing out positive and yet unknown social values for many. Specifically, you will have to:

(1) Mitigate the tensions that can naturally arise between teacher and pupils. Young people who find themselves in this situation for the first time should not "face it", but be "welcomed" as in a family, among relatives. The teacher must behave like a parent, with the same sweetness, indeed with more sensitivity, complicity and understanding. Being a friend and teacher at the same time, and being an example of the world that pupils will have to live into;

(2) Quickly evaluate the pupils, their character, their liveliness and intelligence, any cognitive or motor problems;

(3) Share with students the idea of mutual help for everyone to learn better and faster.

Above all, this pedagogical method teaches that the first or the last of the class do not exist. Moving from that breakthrough, each pupil can help another in overcoming a difficulty, pushing the liveliest intelligences to maintain order in the class without arriving to punishments through the empowerment of the pupils. Nevertheless, everyone must ultimately feel equal (including the teacher) and proud belonging to the class. This method at school level is therefore implemented in the following way:

(1) gradually support students who have learned faster others who are cognitively or physically slow in carrying out physical exercises and tasks. For this reason, it is necessary to pay attention to the work with everyone. Each of the pupils in the class must touch the value of each of their classmates with their hands;

(2) increase the concept of utility towards classmates within the classroom;

(3) reduce the stereotype of the first and last of the class and promote the idea that "the first" is someone who is useful to others, regardless of their ability and learning speed;

(4) create a classroom environment in which learning stimulates harmony among students;

(5) spread the idea that the classroom is a familiar place, like a room in your home dedicated to studying with classmates;

(6) experience that, if everyone helps each other, you will learn first and better, with the result of having more free time;

(7) use the didactic time that the model allows to spare in order to carry out other tasks that would otherwise be due for home.

As in the aforementioned case of the national PES curriculum, these general objectives can only be achieved if supported by teaching oriented towards social inclusion. The main factor of effectiveness concerns the specific competence of the teacher, and therefore the strengthening of the training of students who play sports. In particular, it appears important to develop psychosocial and relational skills, oriented to the management of groups, but also of the relationships between teachers and the families of students. The development of these skills still appears to be strongly neglected today, to the point that the same objectives of the national curriculum cannot be fully achieved precisely due to the absence of a specific pedagogical approach capable of resolving conflicts and putting everyone on the same level, favouring collaboration and sharing of intentions.

However, one of the main problems to be solved is the time dedicated to sport, which in Italy does not exceed 2 hours per week. This factor prevents the application of an educational model itself from being transmitted through sport, and today it relegates sport to subsidiary school activities. Based on an explicit educational approach, the results of the pedagogical model of adaptability, at the end of the first school application of this model produced:

(1) reduction of aversion towards school and its attendance; consequent reduction of tensions between pupils, teachers and parents;

(2) reduction of the sense of responsibility that parents have towards the school results of their children;

(3) reduction of family apprehension in relation to the first two points listed;

(4) increase in inclusion towards non-EU students;

(5) strengthening of assistance for disabled pupils;

(6) reduction of bullying;

(7) reduction of pupils' indifference towards their duties towards society;

(8) reduction of problems deriving from having to live together with one's own intellectual and physical limits (awareness and overcoming of limits);

(9) promotion of the importance of usefulness connected to education;

(10) awareness of the usefulness of learning both for oneself and to help others;

(11) understanding and sharing the difficulties of pupils who need different learning times;

(12) understanding the importance of the school model as a way of life;

(13) understanding of one's role and social responsibility (individual behavior affects the family, peer group and society).

Although there has only been a single experiment so far in the Italian school environment, we assume that the application of the pedagogical model of adaptability can be envisaged starting from primary school up to secondary school. Its application over time could in fact guarantee not only better school results, but also better sports performances. Above all, it could raise young people and citizens who are more conscientious and endowed with civil values, such as non-violence, inclusion and therefore non-abuse of others. This model, moreover, could contribute to stem the school and sports dropping out. An experimentation of this model in sample schools is desirable as soon as possible to verify its effectiveness.

6. Conclusion

Sport is an opportunity to educate young people, leading them to improve their civic sense. Conversely, the expectation of solving any relational issue among young people through sport is not necessarily correct. Starting from data acquired by a national survey on young people aged 14 to 16, we have shown that belonging to a particular category of population can be a risk factor in terms of difficulties in integration and access to opportunities. The practice of sport could be a good solution to mitigate these social effects, but there are at least two important constraints that we should consider: people do not have the same opportunities to play sports and practicing sports does not guarantee education and social inclusion. This latter aspect was demonstrated by the analysis of scientific data relating to a national sample of the Italian student population. A multivariate statistical analysis was carried out using binary logistic regression to discover the link between racism, bullying and sports practice. The fact that practice of sport alone cannot ensure social acceptance is presented as a result of the model above described. Therefore, this study represents an advance in the field of social studies on sport (Eccles et al., 2003), demonstrating, on the basis of statistical data representative of the Italian youth population, the ambivalent nature of sport from an educational point of view.

Our research hypothesis was therefore confirmed: those who attend extracurricular sports courses have levels of tolerance equal to or even higher than those of sedentary students towards racism, bullying and social stereotypes. Therefore, as stated by Kirk (2000), more holistic and flexible teaching may be needed. For this reason, we can assume that only a real change in sports education, sport teaching and pedagogy can truly be a benefit for young people and the whole society as well. Therefore, the consideration of sport as a vector of education is also conceivable as a stereotype. Sport is a push factor for social inclusion only if practiced with a focus on this specific goal. In fact, to be effective social inclusion must overcome the barriers of stereotypes and prejudices, as well as any form of violence. Further research is necessary in order to verify the effectiveness of sports education through a pedagogy explicitly oriented towards social inclusion. A possible methodology could include the analysis of the attitudes and behaviours of two social groups, only one of which would be exposed to educational sport. A similar study could be replicated on groups with different ages and socio-cultural backgrounds, to make the educational role of sport more effective by strengthening and orienting its teaching towards this goal.

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Note
1. The binary logistic regression analysis has been made using the SPSS software. (https://www.spss.it/). The specific method is the Entry one that considers the best configuration of the model considering all the predictive variables.

Notes on research
The research results of this article refer to the meanings of sport and the effects of sporting practice on the education of adolescents. These results are part of a line of studies of the Social Changes, Valuations and Methods (MUSA) of the CNR which concerns the analysis of social conditioning on interaction, inclusion and well-being.

Authors' contributions
CL and TA conceived and designed the study and wrote the paper. More specifically, TA consulted the literature, wrote the first paragraphs and provided a sociological interpretation of the phenomenon, CL did the statistical data analysis and commented the research results, CG contributed to the introduction and the contextualisation of the research and also to the interpretation of results, VA wrote the proposals to support the educational role of sport, CL and TA wrote the conclusion and CL, TA and CG revised the manuscript. All authors have read and approved the manuscript.

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