

## Sports Pedagogy at the Time of COVID-19

### Pedagogía deportiva en la época de COVID-19

In recent times, due to the unexpected pandemic that humanity is experiencing, sports education has been forced to face difficult challenges, which, however, underlined its importance for humanity. The restricted confinement of people has brought to light the need of human beings for movement and sport as a playful and recreational activity, holistic practice of the body, and physical exercise for the psychophysical well-being of the person. Humankind, confined in the narrow spaces of their homes in all nations of the world in the months of the most aggressive attacks of the planetary pandemic, has cried out its desperate need for sport and exercise. Sports pedagogy, as the normative science of sports education, has been called upon to rethink the new scenarios of physical and sports education from the ground. These complex scenarios have recalled what, at the beginning of our century, the sports anthropologist Ronald Renson (2001), with prophetic insight and foresight, evoked as challenges for the sport and physical education of the future. A future where, in a world increasingly permeated by the culture of sport, the advent of virtual reality, ICTs, and machine technologies profoundly reshapes the scenario for the intervention and sense of sports pedagogy as an educational science of the human body.

According to Renson's prophecy, virtual reality does not seem to respond, at present, to the full demand for movement and requests for outdoor playful physical activity by the human body. In essence, physical exercise that is done indoors at home in a virtual sports environment, even though under the supervision of a remote-connected personal trainer, does not yet appear to replace the living experience of the human body playing sport and doing physical exercise.

It is no coincidence that, in the last months of confinement, the activities most carried out and of broader participation by people have been the sports-type ones. These activities have always had little consideration and low recognition both in primary and secondary school. Instead, these emergencies have revealed their importance for human well-being. The COVID-19 has made people experience first-hand the real benefit of sport and physical activity for their health. With that, the sports pedagogy, as science always committed to the promotion of sport as a means for human health education, can only be satisfied.

In this time of crisis, sport, in all the forms people have practiced it, has revealed its extraordinary regenerative and transformative potential. As a means for developing resilience, hardening the person's immune defenses, fighting depression, the sport has shown all the benefits it can produce for humanity. Sport has been the real protagonist of the COVID-19 crisis, to the point that its practice has raised problems dealing with the bans rightly imposed by governments for the limitation of people's movement. Those who suffered the most from these restrictions were undoubtedly professional and Olympic athletes. They not only had to watch the Olympic Games' postponement in Tokyo 2020 but also had to give up their training for several months, with all the damage and disadvantages that this entailed. Professional athletes have been required a commitment to respect the limits of movement imposed by governments. This commitment reminds us that, after all, the athlete always represents a social and educational model for society. Moreover, it reminds us that sport always means "respect" to the community's rules and values. Even when this respect limits or prevents the practice of sport and training.

The COVID-19 has shown the intrinsic and extrinsic value of sport and proved that one could not live without sport; if by sport, we mean a fundamental aspect of culture that concerns the human being as a cultural being (López Frías, Torres, 2020). That is to say, as *homo movens* and *homo ludens*, as the animal who finds in the two primary activities of moving and playing the very essence of their species (Blanchard, Cheska, 1985). The cancellation of all sporting activities has created an environment conducive to reflect upon the role that sport has and should have in our lives and within a capitalistic society where the market is one of the primary regulating elements of social and individual life. There is no doubt that sport is a vital sector of the contemporary global economy, but this does not mean that everything should be measured economically. The pandemic has also forced us to reflect on this crucial issue. All countries of the world have been forced to slow down their economies to save as many lives as possible. All this has

shown that sport is not always a means for economic profit, as shown by the crucial social role of the growing number of sports activities in which people are engaged in during the planetary pandemic.

The pandemic has required sports education to rethink its methods and aims, both in school and university. How to teach the contents of physical education? What materials (structured, alternative, reused, newly created) to utilize to teach in virtual classrooms? How to teach sports techniques to secondary school and university students? What methodology should be used to assess student's and athletes' performance? Undoubtedly, the pandemic crisis has made the education of the body compare with what until a few months ago seemed to be the most distant thing that could exist from its founding concepts, that is, distance education, e-learning, and virtual education. However, we must not forget that the body in contemporary culture can be studied and understood through interactive 3D digital application through a virtual body. Physical and sports education must reflect upon the new forms of virtual body education the new technologies of distance education allow.

Undoubtedly, traditional face-to-face education has an uncertain future in these times, and distance education and virtual reality will gain more and more space. Whether one likes it or not, in the coming months, our habits, behaviors, and routines will change, and we will have to adapt to the new reality. This fact implies both positive and negative aspects, and it will require a psychological, physical, and emotional preparation.

In this regard, it is of primary importance to start thinking critically and answering from now on about the concept of sport and its related physical education, its real contents and how to combine distance education with the dimension of concreteness, practice and physicality that one of the several human educations –the body's one– so crucial for human development involves. Another critical question to answer will regard how to utilize digital and ICTs, social networks, and new media's contribution so as to strengthen and improve the condition of our bodies and our physical and mental health. These are questions that require a profound reflection and the use of critical rethinking. The challenge will be defining the fundamental dimensions of sport and its very essence (economic, educational, ludic-recreational, oriented to health, inclusive).

The questions mentioned above are not easy to answer. Each question implies a challenge at a cultural, social, educational, political, and economic level. Teachers, politicians, athletes, economists, experts in the various disciplines will be called to respond to these challenges posed by these times of deep uncertainty and crisis. However, all "crises" (from verb "krino" which means "I judge and reflect on something to find a solution to a problem"), as the ancient Greek physicians taught us, always refer to situations that lead to a profound reflection on a problem (a disease, for example). The concept "crisis" always refers to something positive in terms of feedback and information that can be obtained from experiencing that situation. This valuable information, if carefully considered, can be valuable in helping to improve processes and interventions and to save the lives –if not the lives of that patient– of those to come.

Despite the dramatic and tragic situation that humanity is experiencing in these pandemic times, the crisis is shaping new educational challenges and horizons for humankind. Within these horizons, in the distance, we can already glimpse the future education: a new "education for the future," in which definitely sport and physical education will play an increasingly relevant and essential role for human life and well-being.

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## References

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