

## State of art and didactics opportunities of Physical Education teaching in Primary School

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### Abstract:

Physical education in primary school is one of the eight curriculum teaching disciplines of primary school and is a compulsory teaching as the others disciplines in compliance with the current legal framework. Specifically, the assignment of the disciplines takes place at the end of a process that starts from the class planning and ends with the assignment of disciplines to individual teachers by the head teacher.

The planning activities concern the choice of contents and methods to achieve the objectives set by the Academic plan (POF) with the aim of harmonizing the physical education teaching with all the other disciplines. Actually, there is a limited contribution of physical education, like other education (Music, Technology, art and image), due to the limits of the educational system that amplifies the presence of the Italian and mathematics disciplines, followed by English, Science and History. This situation could soon be resolved because, on the basis of the past government actions, physical education has been promoted with specific measures.

The Parliament discussion of the consolidated Law, which entrusts teaching to specialists in place of the current teachers and requires 2 hours of teaching per week, is of crucial importance. If it passed, we should make the appropriate modifications to the didactic model and then to the developing of the Academic plan. The goal is to analyse the actual situation and suggest changing in the future. The method is the archive search with analysis of normative documents explaining the application methods, to foresee possible problems and indicate the solutions. The usefulness of knowing through simulations is of fundamental importance for the scientific community to, possibly, suggest co practicable solutions. If the bill approves in the version analysed in this study, it will open a very advanced system compared to the average of the European ones; therefore, a full involvement of the scientific community is essential to help the changing process at the highest levels.

**Key words:** motor education, school management, teaching method, law proposal.

### Introduction

#### State of art of the legal framework

The focus on teaching physical education in primary school is growing. Physical education in primary school is one of the eight curriculum teaching disciplines of primary school and is subjected to the compulsory teaching as the others in compliance with the current legal framework. Specifically, the assignment of the disciplines takes place at the end of a process that starts from the class planning and ends with the assignment of disciplines to individual teachers by the head teacher (D'Elia, 2019). The planning activities concern the choice of contents and methods to achieve the objectives set by the Academic plan (POF) with the aim of harmonizing the physical education teaching with all the other disciplines. Actually, there is a limited contribution of physical education, like other education (music, technology, art and image), due to the limits of the educational system that amplifies the presence of the Italian and mathematics disciplines, followed by English, sciences and history (Raiola, 2011ab).

This situation could soon be resolved because, on the basis of the actions of the past governments, physical education has been promoted with specific measures. Freedom of teaching leads the generalist teacher to choose the contents of the disciplines without distinction of method and specificity between them. Physical education for its own scientific identity and its own teaching methods, sometimes opposed to all other knowledge, has a unique characterization that requires a different approach related to the body and movement (Invernizzi et al., 2019, Altavilla et al., 2013, 2015).

Although there are scientific lines persuaded about the uniqueness of the generalist teaching function in the primary school, a large part of the scientific community, composed of scholars of the motor functions and sports, medical and pedagogical, sees the specialization of the teacher of physical education in the primary school an unavoidable need.

Over the years, the CONI (Italian Olympic Committee) and the MIUR (Italian Ministry of Education) together have developed a specific curricular plan, culminated with the programme "Class Sports". Actually we are waiting for the application of the law n. 107 of 13 July 2015 (so-called "Good School" ,4 years are passed)

and which should go into effect during the current school year, because in paragraph 20 it provides: "For teaching [...] physical education in primary schools can be used, within the available staff resources, teachers qualified to teach in primary school with certified skills, as well as teachers qualified to teach also in other level of school as specialists, to which it is provided a specific training inside the National Plan referred to paragraph 124" (Raiola et al. 2018). They are part of the staff according to the same law and article in paragraph 7, lett. g), "to the development of motor activity and growth of behaviour inspired by a healthy lifestyle, in particular referred to nutrition, physical education and sport, and attention to the protection of the right to study of students practicing competitive sports;".

Furthermore, the 2018 budget law (in art.1, paragraph 616, of Law 205 of 27 December 2017), prescribes that "In order to pursue the educational goal of reinforcing motor disciplines and the development of behaviour inspired by a healthy lifestyle, (art.1, paragraph 7, letter g of the law of 13 July 2015, n. 107), part of the composition of the group teacher (as referred to the article 1, paragraph 68, of the same) at the extent of 5 percent of the quota of places destined to the extra teachers who reinforce the educational offer, is intended for the promotion of physical education in primary school, if it doesn't create excess staff or needs of additional places".

The National Curricular Guidelines for primary school contextualize the specific knowledge to the school segment with reference to the goals to aim for and to the objectives to be achieved. This specific knowledge also appears to be detached from the contents and methods of the discipline because it is uniformed to all the others disciplines in consideration of the assignment to the generalist teacher.

The complex framework of law that assumes to allocate the teaching of P.E. to the specialist teacher produces effects that must be simulated to prevent distortions and suggest resolutive perspectives. In the current situation, there is another normative component that, although provisional, feeds the debate on the subject. It provides only a minimum level of control because the researcher does not have the possibility to manipulate the events of which he only takes the effects, not having direct contact with the observed data; he is only an objective interpreter. Furthermore, it provides that the data collected for other purposes are used, also responding to a reductive hypothesis, as in the specific case, respect to the complex number of archived data. The usefulness of knowing through simulations is of fundamental importance for the scientific community to, possibly, suggest practicable solutions. If the bill approves in the version analysed in this study, it will open a very advanced system compared to the average of the European ones; therefore, a full involvement of the scientific community is essential to help the changing process at the highest levels.

### **Scientific characterization about motor and sports sciences and educational model**

The academic debate is centred on the new form that the Italian system should assume to meet the request of the European Research Council Executive Agency (ERCEA) and, for that request, the academic system must assume a new form.

It needs the reorganization of the entire scientific cultural knowledge and the flexibility of the courses of degree aimed to the qualifying objectives. Motor and sports sciences are particularly involved because, since the law of reorganization of the university n. 210 of 30 December 2010 (the so-called Gelmini law) until today, they live in a state of uncertainty of their scientific identity. For recruitment needs, the methods and didactics of physical activities and methods and didactics of sports activities are included in human science and in the experimental fields.

This kind of system has no effect on the practical side but feeds the discussion on the greater or lesser educational and health value, depending on the different cultural settings. It means that, motor and sports sciences have the same scientific cultural profile: education, health, well-being and performance

It satisfies the pedagogical and biomedical part and gives a scientific reason to confirm the importance of the physical education in primary school. The National directions for the syllabus of the nursery school and the first cycle, for what concern the primary school provide an overall view because "physical education promotes the knowledge of oneself and one's potential in the constant relationship with the environment, the others, the objects". It also contributes to the formation of the student's personality through the knowledge and the awareness of one's own body identity, as well as the continuous need for movement as constant care of one's own person and well-being (Valentini et al, 2018). Specifically, «feeling good about oneself» means that the syllabus of physical education includes experiences aimed to build correct and healthy lifestyles, as a prerequisite for a personal culture that indicates the motor and sports experiences, including extracurricular ones, as prevention of hypokinesia, overweight and bad eating habits, involution of motor skills, early abandonment of the practice sports and use of addictive substances. " It helps also to achieve important "goals for the development of skills in the primary school in fact the pupil acquires self-awareness through the perception of his own body and the mastery of motor and postural patterns in continuous adaptation to spatial and temporal variables (Raiola, 2017, 2013).

Child uses body language and motor language to communicate and express his own moods, also through dramatization and rhythmic-musical and dance experiences. He makes many different experiences that allow him to develop sports game skills also as a guide to future sporting practice (Di Tore et al. 2016). He experiments, in a simplified and progressively increasingly complex way, different technical gestures. The pupil

therefore understands, through game and sport, the value of the rules and the importance of respecting them” and he transfers them into his current life with a special value that cannot be generalized with competency certifications as assumed by law 107/2015 (so-called Good School) (D’Isanto, 2016).

In essence, the acquisitions of knowledge, skills building and skills development are facilitated by a specialist teacher who connotes the wise knowledge so declaimed by scholars belonging to a holistic vision of teaching in the 5 - 11 year period.

The transversal, interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary value of motor and sports knowledge in primary school continues in secondary school with greater simplicity than the other disciplines of the curriculum due to a framework, which establishes teaching specialization for all disciplines.

The division of the objectives: “The body and its relationship with space and time, the language of the body as a communicative-expressive modality, play, sport, rules and fair play, health and well-being, prevention and safety “ characterize an operative action of the body in movement and of the sport in different profiles: pedagogical, biomedical and recreational. It has no equal in comparison with the other disciplines.

### **Current educational organization frameworks**

Finally, to achieve the goal, we should consider the new model of educational organization, starting from the evidence that teaching PE in primary school is different from teaching the same discipline in secondary school for two interconnected aspects: a) the weekly number of school hours varies between 24, 27 or 30 hours in primary school while it is always 30 hours in secondary school,

b) The assignment, autonomously determined by the school, of the number of hours for each discipline (Italian, mathematics, English, sciences, technology, music, physical education, art and image) compared to the fixed number of all disciplines assumed by the norm.

Therefore, the use of a specialized teacher, who would be employed for only two hours a week in each class, reduces the organizational and didactic flexibility of primary school; it becomes similar to the organization of secondary school.

It means that the teacher of physical education has the connotation of specialist but maintains a partially generalist root that serves to dialogue with other disciplines. Therefore, the presence of a specialized generalist teacher, as now exist, and the specialist teacher makes the educational activity more complex for the single school due to the simultaneous presence of the two profiles in the transitional phase. The teaching of physical education in primary school by a specialized teacher is the way for Government and Parliament to align with some European countries, as underlined by the Eurydice Report 2013

Based on this understanding, has been approved the draft law n. 992 unified with other distinct bills (A.C. 523, 784, 914, 1221 and 1222) at the Chamber of Deputies which gives to the Government the power to legislate with specific principles and directive criteria. The passage to the Senate of Republic sees a reformulation that remove the experimentation and also includes a degree in sports management among those that allow access to teaching. The present situation of the change of Government and its parliamentary majority has given a forced halt to the procedural process that was in the final straight. Furthermore, the further postponement of the entry into force of the Good School rules concerning to physical education determines de facto a misapplication of the law; therefore, it is completely evident that the situation could have a sudden acceleration.

### **New educational organization**

The compulsory 2 hours per week, generates a transitory phase in itself with a double methodology in planning and application to the system. In the same school, at the same time there will be 2 opposing models to be applied with the double presence of generalist teachers, specialist teachers and specialized teachers, (those provided by the Good school law). A teacher specialized in a single discipline in primary school is an absolute cultural novelty. The specialist teacher will have his space respecting the educational teaching model of primary school and cannot be forced without the appropriate phases of experimentation. The results of this organization brings to a double figure of specialized teacher in physical education:

1 - Master's degree in motor and sports sciences with the possession of the 24 CFU in the antro-psycho-pedagogical disciplines and in the didactic methodologies and technologies.

2- The master's degree in sciences of primary education with the title of triennial degree in sciences of the motor and sporting activities.

They both are specialists. This double formation does not create educational homogeneity for different qualifications of specialists with consequent methodological differences. We must also analyse the anomaly of the flexibility of the weekly timetable of 24, 27 and 30 hours with the rigidity of the two compulsory hours per week. It will be difficult to apply the legislative decree, after the approval of the delegating law, since it must specify how to organize the two compulsory hours into the different weekly timetable. Two hours a week of physical education will have a greater weight in the 24-hour weekly organizational model, a lower weight in the 27 hours and even less in the 30 hours. These differences may occur inside the same school and therefore have different impact in the ordinary activities of the school. It is important to plan different educational

organizational models Furthermore, the planification should provide a flexible model depending on the weight of physical education in the weekly timetable.

### Conclusions

This study allows a reflection in order to require changes to the law text or, as is desirable, to the ministerial offices, which have to legislate at second level. The study is useful if it is subject to the attention of scientific society and, also the pedagogical ones, to verify if the evidenced difficulties can be resolved with the current legislative proposal or needs changes. Finally, it is useful to start a n scientific reflection on physical education to give it greater dignity in relation to the different consideration that Parliament attributes to some disciplines compared to others.

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