

# Remedial activities for social integration through sport. Sport Educational Partnership Project

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## Abstract

In this paper we would like to share the results of the first edition of this educational partnership project, which was implemented in two different stages, with the participation of students from five schools from Cluj County. Based on remedial sport activities, this educational project aims to involve pupils from primary/junior high school who are often the target of isolation and lack of communication due to the mistrust of others in their abilities.

Through the individual skills sports competitions organized for this group of beneficiaries, we wanted to demonstrate to families and members of close communities that these people can and want to do sports, even if they are not capable of performing, and that through these remedial sports activities self-esteem and confidence in their own strengths increases considerably. Among students with special education needs who have higher physical abilities and who come from foster homes, special schools, or are integrated into mainstream schools, there are athletes who have a higher degree of independence and social skills, who can do team sports and interact with those around them more easily, but who need movement to maintain a healthy lifestyle and interaction with members of their communities to demonstrate the qualities and skills acquired through regular training and participation in sports competitions. Social integration, belonging to a group, collegiality, team spirit, increased self-esteem, the pleasure of moving in an organized environment and taking part in a sport competition are among the major effects that this project had on the students.

**Keywords:** sport, remedial activities, special education needs.

## Introduction

### *Sport effects*

Sport is considered important in the formation of individuals. It helps an individual much more than in the physical aspects alone. It builds character, teaches and develops strategic thinking, analytical thinking, leadership skills, goal setting and risk taking (Ghildiyal, 2015), and is seen as an increasingly important socializing factor in modern society. Both the biological development and the psychological traits shaped by the socialization process continue throughout life as new social roles are added and exercised and new experiences assimilated. If the acquisition of one or other of these developmental tasks fails, a number of negative effects result, including social maladjustment, increased anxiety, social disapproval and inability to perform other tasks.

### *Effects of socialization through sport and physical*

### *activity*

Socialization through sport is equally about the individual and the group. Individual socialization is achieved when the individual assimilates attitudes, values, concepts or behavior patterns specific to the sport group or community in order to adapt and integrate. Socialization of the group, by increasing the number of individuals practicing sport, contributes to the development of the branches of sport and thus of the system. Socialization through sport means the extent to which attitudes, values, skills and rules learned in sport are transferred and manifested in other social spheres.

Children and young people are the main beneficiaries of physical education and sport. Early childhood is the period when motor activity is of vital importance for socialization. In the early stage of life, the child is sensitive to cognitive and moral development, he assumes different roles, learns

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that he is different from others and, above all, learns to build relationships with others. Sport proves to be an excellent tool to foster the social integration of vulnerable target groups. However, there is an under-representation of children from these groups in sports clubs and sports activities in general. Due to their living conditions, the main point of contact of these target groups with the mainstream community is schools. For this reason, there is a need to increase contacts and cooperation between schools and local communities (including sports clubs) through the use of sport and to increase the capacity of intermediary bodies to promote these contacts in a sustainable way.

Sport and physical activity influences on man and society are complex, especially because they produce effects on health maintenance, training and personality development. Time has validated the positive effects of physical activity and sport on self-concept, self-esteem, anxiety, depression, tension and stress, self-confidence, energy, mood, efficiency and wellness (Turcu & Todor, 2010).

#### *Sports competitions*

Sports competition has been considered positive leisure involvement because of its contribution to developmental outcomes for a healthy lifestyle. Through exposure to sports early in life, sports participation can bring sound behavioral development. In addition to the physical domain, psychosocial benefits can result from sports participation. For example, youth sports provide an arena for the development of moral attitudes and social behaviors, including cooperation and healthy competition (Branta et al., 1996; Holt, 2011).

Sports competition is analyzed in terms of applying behavioral, psychological, social, and physiological capacities and its consequences. It also included positive, negative, or neutral feedback for future use (Baker et al., 2009; Scanlan, 2005; Watson, 1984; White & McTeer, 2012).

Sports competition can play an important role for children because it contributes to developmental outcomes for a healthy lifestyle. Through sports competition, children can learn about physical, social, and cognitive skills. Sports competition can be either positive or negative in terms of development, depending on how experiences are perceived by children and how competitions is designed (Choi et al., 2014).

When children engage in associative play during Piaget's preoperational stage, they participate in games with rules (Piaget, 1963). They organize themselves collectively for play activities in the concrete operational stage. Games and sports are the primary context for children to learn organizational skills such as the ability to manage and cope with a diversity of perspectives, adjudicate disputes, and work for collective goals (James, 2001; Light, 2010). Through trial and error in play and the constant repetition of practice for sports competition, children can increase their self-esteem and self-confidence (Schumacher Dimech & Seiler, 2011; Singer & Gerson, 1980; Weiss, 2008). Thus, sports competition provides excellent opportunities to strengthen children's character. In the concrete operational stage, adolescents further develop the ability to use propositional, inductive, and deductive logic (Piaget, 1963).

Interaction with others while playing can be beneficial for the development of normal social behavior. One of the most important social functions of sports competition is enabling the children to learn proper social communication (Light, 2010). During competitive sports, children can learn patterns of social cooperation without exceeding certain limits of aggression (Russell, 2007). Playing with other children is perhaps the major context for learning social skills, and it is regarded as an important factor in social integration.

#### *Adjusted development through sport*

Adjusted development maintains that sports competition allows for a respite from the developmental pressures and stresses of life (Kleiber, 1999). Kleiber believed that people can learn valuable lessons through negative life events. Since individuals likely perceive various constraints (intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural components) differently, they adopt distinctive patterns of negotiation to continue participation in sports (Crawford et al., 1991; Hwang & Choi, 2012). To be engaged in sports competition, children must successfully utilize negotiating strategies to overcome the effects of constraints by acquiring information, altering the scheduling of games, and developing specific sport skills (Scott, 1991; Jackson & Rucks, 1995; James, 2001). The role of cognitive development and socialization in the initial empirically examined various approaches of negotiation strategies in sports participation among high school students. When adolescents confronted constraints, they used various negotiation strategies such as cognitive resources (e.g., ignore problems, be positive, and have fun) and behavioral resources (e.g., modifying time and commitments, acquiring skills, changing interpersonal relations, improving finances, undergoing physical therapy, and changing leisure aspirations). Because constraints are connected to sports competition, adolescents often negotiate a specific constraint by implementing negotiation strategies related to that particular constraint (e.g., engaging in sports with people of similar age to overcome interpersonal constraints). Different populations with chronic disabling conditions also experience constraints when they participate in physical activities (Henderson et al., 1995; Lyu et al., 2013). Individuals who participate in any given sport repeatedly implement various strategies to alleviate the effects of constraints, either by altering their sport or modifying other aspects of their lives (Hwang et al., 2009).

Sport-recreational activity has broadened its scope of participation from young to old, from men to women, from school to leisure, from hobby to profession, succeeding through physical exercise to shape human physiognomy and behavior. Its wide representation proves that it is a mass phenomenon capable of producing fundamental changes in the global social landscape. This evolutionary process has been due to the attention that sport has paid to the individual human being regardless of his or her social position, regardless of age or gender, regardless of ethnicity or religion, leaving aside all discrimination and drawing into its sphere all social categories, some as practitioners, others as spectators. This protagonist/spectator dualism has allowed the shaping of character and provided new

motivations, some idealistic, others material. Even if the reasons for taking part in sport are diverse, sport also makes room for those who want to perform and those who want to win, and is an ideal means of expressing concerns and desires. Sport as a recreational activity creates relaxation, is an ideal means of making contact with other people and establishing new relationships, a means of using up energy, but can also lead to a different aesthetic sense. Through its great integrative character it becomes an ideal medium for manifestation and expression, for self-discovery (Brândescu, 2010).

Social benefits included positive relationships with coaches, making new friends, and developing teamwork and social skills. Personal benefits included children being emotionally controlled, enjoying exploration, having confidence and discipline, performing well academically, managing their weight and being 'kept busy' (Holt et al., 2011).

### Remedial education

The aim of remedial education: preventing school drop-out and improving school success rates for children from disadvantaged groups.

Through such activities the aim is to change the attitude of teachers, parents, pupils (Abdul Ghani Kanesan Abdullah et al., 2011) and representatives of local and county public institutions towards the communities and disadvantaged groups. Due to low attendance and other difficulties, pupils find it difficult to achieve the framework objectives in various subjects. Children have poor imaginations and a mechanical memory, become passive and wait to be asked, have limited communication skills and sometimes find it difficult to integrate into the group. Because of the difficult conditions at home they are irritable, unable to concentrate for a longer period of time, tending to run away from classes or find other interests (Sörqvist, 2015). Motivation for learning is very low. Self-image is poor; children are insecure, and even when they perform acceptably in one area, they are not aware and convinced of their success (Doom et al., 2020); they have difficulty being honest and fair with others and are often aggressive when relating to others. They have a poor personal experience due to their background.

Education is, for any society, the vector for sustainable development and a healthy society. Remedial education is part of a child's education which aims to encourage the completion of statutory education and improving school success rates for children in disadvantaged groups. Organizing a remedial program has an impact school life, with the aim of making a difference in attitudes towards each pupil who may have at some point learning difficulties. In remedial education classes, children are supported in doing their homework, in remedial activities and improvement of learning difficulties (Al-Sheikhly, 2020). For remedial education activities to be several aspects are addressed: diversity, accessibility and aesthetics of the teaching material presented; the framework environment personalized to the pupils' work or changing the work location; the application of learning strategies through as methods to promote social harmony; perception and feedback from parents during the course of

the remedial activities. Remedial education is necessary to applied at both group and individual level. Individualized intervention involves: identifying the points strengths and weaknesses; setting learning priorities; choosing the most appropriate methods and strategies; recording evaluating the intervention. Organizing a remedial program has an impact on school life, with the aim of making a difference in the attitude towards each pupil who may have at some point learning difficulties.

#### *Project objectives*

The project aims to provide access to remedial social integration activities through sport to a large number of children with intellectual/physical disabilities or ESCs in the county and people from their close communities and facilitate their integration into society.

Objective 1: Organization of sports events for pupils (local, county).

Objective 2: Exchange of experience/examples of good practice between teachers from rural and urban schools on personal ways of approaching and adapting to working with pupils in physical education classes and counselling and guidance, training of parents, volunteers and members of close communities on the benefits of such activities.

Objective 3: To increase public awareness of the importance of social inclusion for these pupils.

#### *Target group*

Pupils in primary, secondary education of partner schools- pupils from disadvantaged categories (pupils with special educational needs in special education, integrated in mainstream education, children from single-parent families, children in foster care, children brought up by relatives, children from poor communities, isolated communities, parents abroad).

### Results

Our team, composed of school inspectors of sport and special education, head teachers of the partner schools, physiotherapy and physical education and sport teachers from the six partner schools in urban and rural areas, initiated and implemented this sports education partnership project for a period of two years, with the possibility of extension. The first edition was carried out in two stages, each ending with a sports competition: "Relay of Colors" in the first stage and "Sports Relay" in the second. These competitions took place in the last month of school activity for pupils in the school years 2020-2021 and 2021-2022.

In order to achieve the objectives proposed in the project, the first stage was organized by the initiating school of this project - Transilvania Baciú Special Secondary School - a school for children with severe neuromotor disabilities and associated disorders, located in rural areas. The competition was implemented as an extracurricular activity as follows: each partner school participated with five pupils. Four mixed teams were created, with different color names, consisting of one pupil from each partner school. The participants participated in turns running through an applicative trail consisting of challenges in athletics, gymnastics, basketball, football elements, designed to develop motor skills and abilities such as endurance, speed, balance, reaction speed and manual dexterity (Table I).

**Table I**  
First edition June 2021. First stage of the 1<sup>st</sup> Edition.



Teams establishment



Competition route



Crossing under obstacles



Speed development



Dribbling between obstacles



Challenge of skills



Climbing



Student rewards



Student rewards

**Table II**  
Second edition-June 2022. Second stage of 1<sup>st</sup> edition.



Teams establishment



Competition route



Challenge of skills



Dezvoltarea vitezei



Running between obstacles



Passing under obstacles



Climbing



Carrying objects



Student rewards

The second stage was organized by the “Ion Agârbiceanu” Gymnasium School in Cluj-Napoca - an urban school, where the activity took place in its sports hall. This time, the four pupils from each partner school were divided into two mixed teams, which, along the length of a basketball court, crossed the obstacles of a route, consisting of elements taken from basketball, gymnastics and handball elements through which skills, mobility, accuracy, attention, and spatial orientation can be developed. Being the last stage of the first edition, the degree of difficulty has been slightly increased (Table II).

During the two competitions, the students from each team supported their teammates, encouraged each other and enjoyed their individual and group successes. Each of the participating students went beyond their physical disabilities, giving their best. The smiles, the bonds of friendship, the collegial support, the team spirit and the increased self-esteem of each participant made us, the coordinators, willing to disseminate the results of this project in many ways and to become a source of inspiration for other schools that will take up and implement this project in the years to come.

## Conclusions

1. In order for remedial education physical activities to be effective, several aspects are considered: diversity, accessibility and aesthetics of teaching material.
2. Personalized environmental setting with students' work or change of work location.
3. Application of cooperative learning strategies as methods to promote social harmony.
4. Parents' perception and feedback during the course of remedial activities.
5. Involvement of the school mediator in the smooth running of the remedial education activity.
6. Sport remedial activities change the way of thinking and perception of trainers/teachers involved in such programs, related to the educational act inside and outside the school.

## Conflict of interests

No conflicts of interests to declare.

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All authors designed the study, contributed to data collection, analyzed, accessed and verified the data. All authors drafted the initial manuscript, interpreted the data, and critically reviewed the final manuscript and approved the decision to submit the manuscript.

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