

The leisure context. A forgotten topic of sport pedagogy?

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Abstract

According to the changes of the society that occurred during the last decades of the 20th century, new sport operators grew in an answer to the modified expectations of the people. In parallel to sport clubs, many other structures began to invite people to move in agreement with different values: independent non market associations, private companies, non organized free sport.

While analyzing themes of Sport pedagogy research, it seems that physical education is the major focus (55.6 %) of the papers presented in the ARIS's conferences while studies focused on coaching represented only 18.7 %. On the other hand, researches that are analyzing the teaching-learning process in leisure sport are surprisingly seldom even there are more and more studies aiming to better understand how physical activity can be increased in communities, for example.

After a short description of the evolution of the sport structures and the development of the current array of operators, a second section focuses on the motives of participants. The next part underlines the specific competences of the physical educators involved in the leisure sport sector. The final and main part proposes an overview of some studies that has been achieved in this area at the University of Liege. The conclusion provides some recommendations for researchers.

Key words: Sport pedagogy; Leisure; Analysis of the literature; Recommendations for researchers

Introduction

According to the European Sport Charter (Council of Europe, 1992 modified 2001), *“sport means all forms of physical activity which, through casual or organized participation, aim at expressing or improving physical fitness and mental well-being, forming social relationships or obtaining results in competition at all levels.”* (Art. 2). This definition is really “open” but it underlines the central place of competition in the usual representation of sport.

The latter is linked to the history of the sport context. During the 19th and 20th centuries, sport was characterized by an important development based on internationalization, media, improvement of transportation and life quality. Its initial model was based on the hierarchy of the industrial society. One of the main consequences was its growing economic weight.

However, in the 70', some phenomenon happened: certain lost of public support (less money after the oil crises), changes of the people's characteristics (consumer society, fad effect), growing sedentariness of the society, and "peoplerisation" of the top level athletes (in parallel with the growing importance of the media). As a consequence, during the last 25 years of the 20th century, traditional sport organized by clubs under the umbrella of federations lost its dominant status as the private sector took more importance. It lost also its privilege to be the sole provider of sports activities. This major change has been linked to the development of the "fun culture" and the birth of the "gliding generation" in the nineties (Loret, 1995). Parallel to this evolution, Diegel (1995) proposed a new sport model based on the switch from the pyramidal model to a compartmented one. He identified five strata (professional sport; traditional competitive sport; spontaneous sport; alternative sport; functional or instrumental sport) with their own values, requirements and ... "clients".

Following these changes of the society, new sport operators grew in the last decades in an answer to the modified expectations of the people and the increase of the people's interest on active leisure. In parallel to sport clubs, many other structures began to invite people to move in agreement with different values: independent non market associations (running programs designed to increase the physical activity level, sport for kids, family ski holidays, wellbeing courses ...), public services (city courses for adults and/or seniors, community sport summer camps ...), private companies (fitness centers, incentive or leisure business, personal trainers, physical activity on work places ...), non organized free sport (family, friends, colleagues).

Even if these structures are supposed to attract specific participants according to their motives of activity, a fragile balance has been developed between all operators even some concurrence can be pointed out considering facilities and educators. "Clients" are also sometimes involved in several "worlds", in function of their momentary interests. This evolution had consequences on the organization of

the physical educators' education. Recently, most of higher education programs initially focused on physical education teacher education began to implement additional degrees designed to answer to the new leisure market and the place offered to professionals in the new landscape of sports' activities.

It is logical to consider that these new specialists need to develop specific "teaching" competences in order to meet the expectations of participants so different of the students taught by their colleagues in the school context. If the fundamental principles of the "teaching-learning process" should be the same in any contexts, it seems that the specificity of the characteristics of the goals, organization, and places of activity as well as of the "clients" themselves would be determinant in the development of typical didactic strategies.

Despite of this, it seems that sport pedagogy research remains more focused on the school context and gives a clear priority to physical education rather than to launch studies in the other contexts. For example, some authors consider that teaching physical education and coaching (competitive sport context) presents strong similarities (Drewe, 2000) while others perceive differences sufficient to propose separate literature reviews and analysis of published research in sport pedagogy (Silverman & Skonie, 1997; Ward & Barrett, 2002). It motivated some authors to develop the concept of specific research domain that is named "science of coaching" (Haag, 1994) and gather scientists who want to affirm their specificity. The number of papers focusing on behaviors and/or thinking process of the actors involved in the leisure sport seems also very limited. For people attending to congresses organized by major international associations renowned for their involvement in sport pedagogy, it is noteworthy that few papers are proposing data coming from other domains than physical education.

To illustrate this assumption, we found some support in a recent analysis conducted by Musard, Robin & Poggi (2010). These authors analyzed the papers presented during the first five ARIS¹'s congresses. It appears that physical education was the major focus (55.6 %) of the "corpus" (Figure 1). Studies focused on coaching

¹ ARIS : Association pour la Recherche sur l'Intervention en Sport (see <http://aris-intervention-sport.org/>) is mainly a French speaking association of researchers working in the Sport pedagogy domain.

represented 18.7 % of the papers even if it seems that science of coaching is slowly growing as well in English language journals (Gilbert and Trudel, 2004) as in French literature (Cloes, Lenzen & Trudel, 2010). On the other hand, researches that are analyzing the teaching-learning process in leisure sport/physical activity are surprisingly seldom even there are more and more studies aiming to better understand how physical activity can be increased in communities, for example.

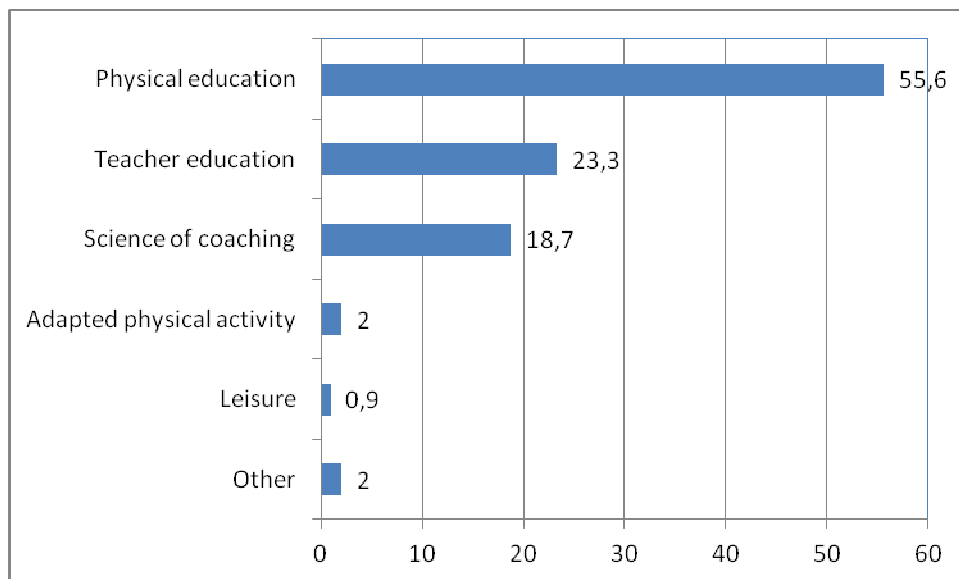


Figure 1 – Major focus of the studies presented during the ARIS's congresses - % (Musard et al, 2010)

Whether this observation can be made in the French speaking world, the same would be the same in other contexts. For example, last AIESEP congresses proposed very few communications on themes that were not focused on physical education. On the other hand, leisure sport seems more represented in some activities connected to sport management! It is so strange as, in fine, coaches, instructors, personal trainers, can be considered as teachers and should motivate sport pedagogy researchers to cover also their professional activities!

Goals of the paper

Books could be written on each of these topics. In this paper, our goal is to underline that leisure is one interesting topic for sport pedagogy researchers. Moreover, in order to point out the potential interest of this sector as well as to

provide some illustrations of what that could be done, some studies that have been conducted at the University of Liege will be briefly described.

Framework

Using the Integrative model of teaching-learning process developed by Carreiro da Costa (2008), Cloes & Roy (2010) proposed one full overview of the analysis of the intervention in sport, emphasizing the application of the original model in all physical activity and sport settings as well as the existing links with educators' preparation (Figure 2). This complex model underlines the diversity of the research designs used according to the variables selected in order to answer to the research questions. It indicates also that leading research in physical education can be replicate in other contexts as these are attracting more and more participants. These new "territories" can be considered as a mean to guarantee the originality of the studies, further than the simple replication of studies already done in the school domain. Characteristics of the actors and context are so different that human research could find interesting questions to develop knowledge.

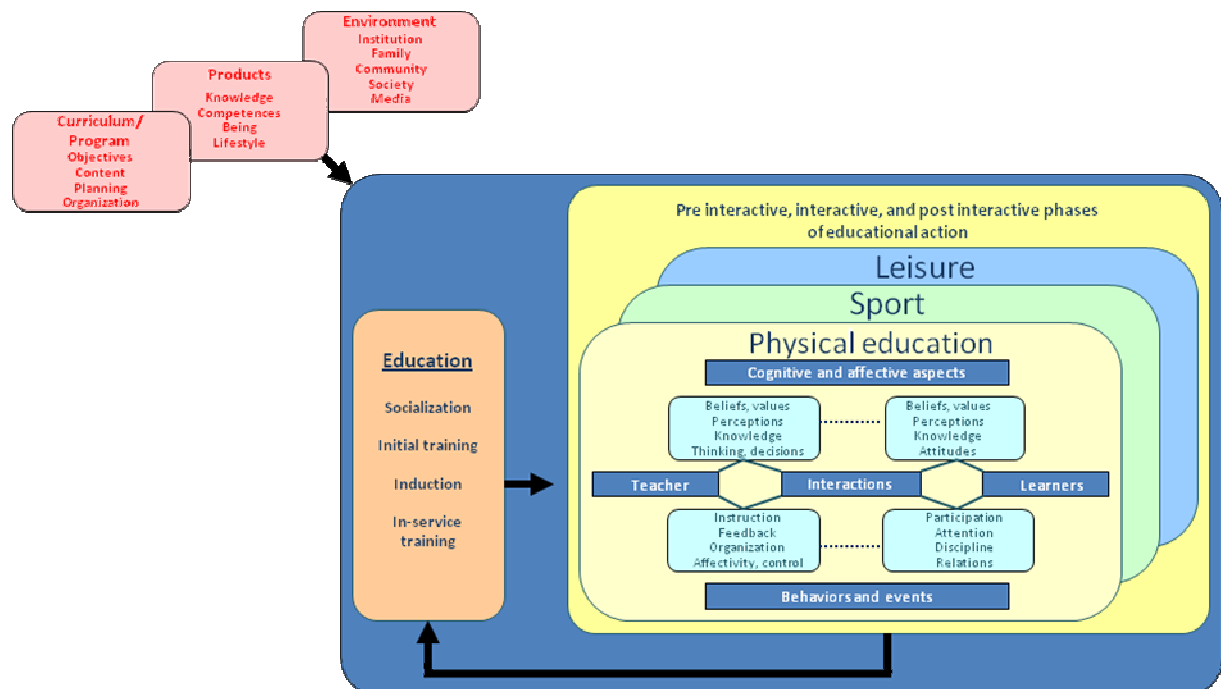


Figure 2 – Integrative model of the teaching-learning process (adapted from Cloes & Roy, 2010)

As it was stated above, it is surprising to notice that, nowadays, most studies focusing on the sport context are performance oriented while these conducted in the leisure domain are mainly centered on management's questions. When considering the growing importance of kinesiology, sport pedagogy researchers need to become aware about the interest of developing knowledge on intervention in other contexts than school. Human movement is taking more and more importance and it is necessary to keep in mind the key role of the human relationships in order to maintain the fundamental status of the professionals who are still considered as "physical educators".

Four examples

Among the studies that were conducted in the field of leisure sport at the Department of Sport Sciences of the University of Liege, we decided to focus on studies involving actors coming from different contexts of intervention: (1) Fitness centers; (2) Social sport; (3) Non competitive martial arts' school, and; (4) Program for people who want to resume physical activity.

Identification of the criterion linked to the quality of aerobics instructors

The first study that we proposed in the leisure domain was designed to identify the variables related to the perception of the quality of aerobics instructors and to compare the opinions of clients and instructors (Cloes, Laraki, Zatta & Piéron, 2001). A characteristic of the research design is that it already took into account the complexity of the teaching-learning process. In fact, we decided to investigate clients' points of view as well as those of the instructors. Moreover, a second level of integration of the data was based on the analysis of the actors' perceptions as well as on their behaviours. This strategy was not so usual at that time but it provided a very good overview of the whole process.

Research design

- ❖ 116 clients (24 fitness centers) and 30 instructors (19 fitness centers) were integrated into the study.

- ❖ Clients were 92.4% of women; 83.2% under 40 years-old; 67.3% single; 46.7% doing no sports activities outside a fitness center; 30.8% participating to aerobics courses since at least 3 years.
- ❖ 56,7% of the instructors were female ; 60% had a degree in physical education ; 73,3% had more than 2 years of experience; and 29.9% worked at least 10 h/week.
- ❖ The study was focused on clients' motives of attendance and instructors' qualities.
- ❖ We used a questionnaire collected directly in the fitness centers and designed to be very short (Lickert scales; 5 words illustrating the instructors' qualities, and; one critical incident illustrating a recent situation in which the subject felt that the instructor was a good one).
- ❖ The initial study combined also the observation of one Hilo lesson provided by one expert and another one taught by a beginner.
- ❖ A multidimensional category system was used to collect these data about participants' activity as well as instructor's location, cueing, feedback, information, and displacement.

Selected findings

- ❖ For the qualities of the aerobics instructors, data were extracted from 473 proposals in clients (4.5 / person) and 148 proposals in instructors (4.9 / person).
- ❖ 8 categories have been created: Dynamism, Motivation of the group, Human qualities, Professional approach, Pedagogical competences, Technical level, Level of specific education, Image.
- ❖ If "Human qualities" was the main category in both groups but more represented in the clients' answers (36.8 Vs 26.3%; $z = 2.247$, $p = .024$). "Dynamism" was the second category with the same importance in both groups (19 Vs 16.9%) while "Pedagogical competences" and "Professional approach" were more frequent in instructors' answers (respectively 17.6 Vs 7.2% and 14.2 Vs 10.9%; $z \geq 3.183$, $p \leq .001$). Instructors seemed to emphasize their role of "transmitters" while their clients gave more interest in the contact as they are expecting to attend in a warm atmosphere

designed to bring some satisfaction. The other categories were below 10%. It is surprisingly that “Image” was so low (9.5 Vs 5.9%, respectively in instructors and clients). Fitness, however, is often seen as a hedonistic activity.

- ❖ Through the observation, it appeared that the expert was showing a more effective way of teaching (more cueing, more direct visual contact, more information while demonstrating).
- ❖ On the other hand, few verbal feedbacks were recorded in both sessions, underlining that aerobics instructors need to develop specific strategies to inform the participants about their task.

Analysis of the structures implementing social sport

In Belgium, the King Baudouin Foundation (<http://www.kbs-frb.be>) is a leading institution in the promotion of a better life for all citizens. It was active in the promotion of the development of sports activities designed to people who do not have access to traditional competitive sports because they are different (socioeconomic status, culture, immigrants ...) in a way to develop integration within the society.

Vandermeulen & Cloes (2009) described a research supported by this institution in order to identify the current needs of field workers involved in « social sport » and to propose original actions aiming to promote and stimulate the development of specific actions in this domain. Again, the research was based on the utilization of several approaches to collect the data. The challenge of this study was that no list of the social sports' organizations was available. It means that the first step of the research was to find them. The second step dealt to the production of recommendations to the research sponsor on the basis of scientific evidences. This two-steps study is an interesting example that can be done in this specific domain where practitioners are expecting applied answers to their field questions. In this case, as for research on coaching (Gilbert & Trudel, 2004), research needs to provide content that could help social sport coaches/administrators to access and realize its potential, and social sport' coach educators to integrate the full scope of this research into specific education programs or strategic plans.

Research design

- ❖ As stated above, this study was divided in two phases, specific to each research question.
- ❖ During the first phase, we collected data following a snowball sampling in order to contact actors involved in the field (Giannelloni & Vernet, 2001). It means that we send a questionnaire to identified subjects, asking them to forward it to other potential contacts.
- ❖ After one month, we gathered 53 questionnaires comprising open ended questions focusing first on the description of the activities organized by the structure and, secondly, on their opinions about the opportunities to develop social sports.
- ❖ Treatment of the answer was based on a content analysis and we developed a system of categories for each question.
- ❖ A provisional report was sent to the subjects for validation.
- ❖ The second phase used the nominal group technique (Brunelle, Drouin, Godbout, & Tousignant, 1988) with a group of 14 subjects selected among those who fulfilled the questionnaire.
- ❖ The goal of this step was to identify actions to be planned, to elect the most interesting of them, and to propose/imagine practical solutions to implement in order to see the changes. At the end of the process, a report was sent to the participant, for validation.

Selected findings

- ❖ The main characteristics of the associations involved in “social sport” are: Specific association (37.7%) and sport clubs (18.9%); Non specifically oriented (52.8%), handicapped (13.2%), low socioeconomic people (9.4%) and women (7.5%); Leisure sport and wellness (38.3%), competition (23.4%).
- ❖ Leisure sport and well-being activities were mainly proposed (38.3 %) while traditional competitive sport represented 23.4% of the associations.
- ❖ The objectives of the project managers were classified in nine categories. It is interesting to note that the priority number one is the well-being – physical

and mental – of the participants (26.8%). Although it could be a bias to the effect of social desirability on the part of respondents, we believe that people who are invested in social sport act spontaneously in order to provide benefits to participants.

- ❖ The main actions that should be implemented to develop social sport were: To improve the representation of « other » sports; to make a list of activities in order to underline the existence; to support original projects; to promote coordination of the initiatives.
- ❖ Specific recommendations were proposed (see Vandermeulen & Cloes, 2009) and were validated by the King Baudouin Foundation.

Analysis of a project bringing support for school reintegration

Theeboom, De Knop & Wylleman (2008) underlined that several “social workers” are using martial arts as support to their project of insertion. Moreover, even if positive socio-psychological effect were identified, there is a lack of empirical data about the structural characteristics of the projects, the approach proposed by the educators as well as the participant’s characteristics. In their study, Cloes, Maraite & Dijon (2010) tried to answer to the request of the “principal” of one martial art school working with youths rejecting school in order to identify the teaching strategies that are used by the physical educators with youths who have dropped out the school and to analyze other aspects as the specific context of the practice, the evolution of the students’ behaviour. This research respected the requirement of the case studies (Yin, 1990). This third example illustrates an approach considered as an opportunity that offers comprehensive descriptions involving as many variables as desired depending on the complexity the situation.

Research design

- ❖ This study respected a qualitative approach (Huberman & Miles, 1991).
- ❖ Data were collected between October 2008 and March 2009 in a martial art school located in the area of Liege and proposing kung fu courses to young people who have dropped out school and are integrated into a program designed to bring them some support to reach a more integrated life.

- ❖ Six adults (martial art school principal, kung fu educators, and “normal” educators) as well as 85 youths (12-18 year-old) participated into the study.
- ❖ A triangulation process was implemented (analysis of written material, participating observation, interviews with the educators, interview and questionnaire with the youth, analysis of the teaching process).
- ❖ A content analysis has been processed to identify any information and classify it according to its units of sense. The data obtained through the various sources were organized in parallel.
- ❖ The reliability of the analysis was based on the cross checking of a part of the available data by two researchers while the physical educators validated a written report summarizing the findings and their interpretation.

Selected findings

- ❖ In the interviews as well as during the teaching process, it was underlined that the priority of all educators was to increase fitness and motor level of the youth in order to make them aware that they are able to achieve something.
- ❖ Four specific teaching strategies have been detailed (Main values; Discipline management; Modes of communication; Improvement of student’s motivation).
- ❖ The educational staff developed a specific values system that brings youth to accept authority. It is based on the experience of courage, self-transcendence, team spirit and absolute respect of the rules. To reach this, three principles were applied: Obligation to experiment; Completion of tasks; Equity of the treatment.
- ❖ For discipline management, the principle was respect of physical educators’ authority. Any infraction was followed by an intervention, an explanation and a sanction as the aim was to restore personal rigor
- ❖ Communication was based on adapted verbal interaction. Using specific (and original) terminology seemed to enhance the usefulness of language learning. Questioning was frequent in order to check the assimilation of the aspects taught by the educators. The latter demonstrated all the time, contributing to impress the youth and bringing respect while dialogue was

bidirectional in order to underline that rigor did not mean absence of human contacts.

- ❖ To motivate the participants, educators emphasized the individualization of the requirements, the recognition of individual rate of progress and an exclusive use of positive interventions.
- ❖ The status of the activity (originality of Kung fu compared to traditional sports – new skills, new terminology...) and the expertise of the educators (who proposed impressive demonstrations) urged the youths to accept the context (another framework is acceptable).

Becoming (again) physically active through a program proposing to run

More and more people are aware that they should adopt a more active lifestyle. In this perspective, a growing number of initiatives are launched by several operators in the communities. ‘Start to run’ (StR) has been developed for those who want to come back to a regular physical activity (PA). It is a 10 weeks program during which people can learn to run 5 or 10 kilometres by following a standardized sequence. Coaches provide support to the participants to help them to reach their goal. StR is coordinated by the athletic federation but the purpose of this activity is definitely not competitive. Even if these courses are organized since years, no data seem to be available about the coaching process in this specific context of active leisure.

By analyzing the autumn session of a StR’s course organized in three communities of the Liege’s area (Wallonia, Belgium), we wanted to identify the characteristics of the context of this “volunteer practice” (Cloes & Dethioux, submitted). Moreover, this study aimed also to identify the role of the coaches and to determine the impact of the activities.

Research design

- ❖ This study respected also a qualitative approach as three separate sites were analyzed.

- ❖ One of its specific aspects is that data were collected before, during, at the end, and 12 weeks after the session, meaning that a follow up was organized during 22 weeks in all sites.
- ❖ A triangulation process was implemented meaning that participants, coaches and written traces were analyzed using interviews, questionnaires, participant observation, and content analysis. Participants' achievement and maintenance were also collected.

Selected findings

- ❖ 72% of the participants attended to the final test and all achieved. A limited proportion of participants dropped out (16%), underlining the effectiveness of the program.
- ❖ This opinion is reinforced by the high maintenance rate as 77% of the achievers continue to run at the end of the session.
- ❖ One of the best predictor of success is the presence of relatives and the participation for the pleasure.
- ❖ However, many injuries (Achilles tendinitis) were identified in the three sites, justifying that more emphasis should be set on the training design.
- ❖ The three coaches described a similar teaching model but only subject #2 pointed out technical drills. Only subject #3 respected the "official" program developed by the athletics federation. The two other adapted it according to their experience and purposes of their groups.
- ❖ All coaches considered that they were providing enough feedback and were active. On the other hand, they thought themselves as needing to encourage more and to be more effective in group management. Globally, participants confirmed the opinions of their respective coaches but they seemed more critical in group #3, showing a lower satisfaction about the motivational behaviors and feedback.
- ❖ The observation pointed out some problems in the clarity of the explanations (subject #1) and some divergences were reported by the actors.
- ❖ On the other hand, it clearly appeared that coaches adapted themselves to the expectations and needs of the participants.

- ❖ We pointed out that encouraged to speak about their own teaching process, all coaches modified spontaneously their interactive decisions during the study, underlining the interest of a systematic analysis process.

Conclusions

In this paper, we proposed a quick overview of studies focused on leisure sport, in order to highlight the need of a larger interest on the teaching-learning process in this context. It seems that leisure sport is a promising field for sport pedagogy researchers.

Quantitative and qualitative approaches should be combined in order to better understand the context of practice, guarantee quality of the intervention on the field as well as to improve the specific physical educators' preparation.

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