# Sports Psychology: Educational and Social Aspects

## Prof. Cinzia Di Dio; Prof. Flavio Nascimbene

First Module: M*otor education: developmental and educational aspects* (Prof. Cinzia Di Dio)

***COURSE AIMS AND INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES***

Sports Psychology is an area of study, research and application that is extremely multi-disciplinary in nature and which involves disciplines such as psychology, medicine, sociology, pedagogy, philosophy, etc.

The course aims to focus on the main psychological dynamics inherent in the formation of sports competence, the understanding of other people’s motor and affective behaviour, and the educational relationship between the professional caregiver (trainer, coach, personal trainer, etc.) and the individual in contexts of typical and atypical development in the life span, within a systemic theoretical framework.

***Intended learning outcomes***

*Knowledge and understanding*

The course will be divided into two macro-areas: one about the psycho-physiological aspects related to motor education, and one about its developmental and educational aspects.

At the end of the course, students will be able to appreciate the complexity of a number of psychophysical dynamics characterising sport abilities. Introducing the psychophysiological aspects at the beginning of the course, will enable students to consider and reflect on the theoretical topics linked to the evolutionary and educational processes that underlie the relationships and value structures within and without the sports sphere, in a critical and autonomous way.

*Ability to apply knowledge and understanding*

Students will be able to recognise the importance of the physical component in the development of skills, both athletic and those more generally associated with the maturation of cognitive and affective behaviour. Students will, therefore, be able to value the importance - in their future profession - of knowing the stages and processes of development, demonstrating a critical and analytical approach to the topics covered, as well as an ability to understand and independently examine complex situations that characterise the educative relationship between the professional caregiver and the individual.

***COURSE CONTENT***

*Motor education: psychophysiological foundations*

In-depth study of the motor system and of the discovery of the “mirror” neurons system. In these lectures, the functional neurophysiological principles associated with the motor system will be introduced. Particular attention will be paid to the processes associated with the "mirror" system, characterised by two main subdivisions:

* the “cold” motor circuit, that characterises the resonance processes and motor anticipation;
* the “hot” emotional circuit, which lies at the basis of empathic processes in the educational relationship and in the developmental field.

*Main psychological components in the relationship between sport and education: developmental aspects*

In these lectures, an introduction to developmental and educational psychology will be provided, focusing on the following constructs:

1. Attachment in the cycle of life. Given the dynamics of empathic and relational processes, the study of the mechanisms related to the construction of attachment bonds with the main reference figures, such as parents, teachers and professional caregivers, will be important to characterise the relational path of the individual from early childhood.
2. Theory of Mind. Empathic processes are central to building social relationships, such as those between parent and child, teacher and pupil, coach and athlete, and between peers. Empathic processes are characterised by a motor component as well as a cognitive component, the latter allowing us to evaluate our mental world and that of others so as to appropriately insert ourselves within the relational context. Studying the developmental stages of the Theory of Mind, allows us to place ourselves in the relationship between professional caregiver and student/athlete in the most appropriate way for the individual's level of maturity.
3. Moral and social development. We will introduce the concepts and theories related to the development of morality and the value structure that characterises our behaviours and choices in the areas of social and relational life, including sports, in which the concept of fair play implies the development of, and education in, moral norms and sentiments.
4. Coaching from an educational perspective. The role of the coach has undergone a major change over the years. It has moved from the classic role in which the coach is seen as a teacher and sports technician, to a systemic role in which the coach is now viewed as a real educator. The notions learned during the course will enable students to address the role of coach-educator in a more effective and functional way with respect to the individual's growth, both on and off the playing field.

***READING LIST***

In view of the exam, students must study the slides and materials examined during lectures (downloadable from the lecturer’s webpage) and the following textbooks:

S. Caravita-L. Milani-D. Traficante (eds), *Psicologia dello sviluppo e dell'educazione,* Il Mulino, 2018 (chapters 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 12*).*

G. Rizzolatti-C. Sinigaglia, *So quel che fai. Il cervello che agisce e i neuroni specchio,* Raffaello Cortina Editore, Milan, 2006 (chapters 1, 2, 5, 7).

F. Lucidi, *SportivaMente. Temi di psicologia dello sport*, LED Edizioni Universitarie di Lettere Economia Diritto, Milan, 2011 (chapter 2).

A textbook from the following ones at students’ choice:

A. Marchetti-I. Castelli, *Come decidono i bambini. Psicoeconomia evolutiva,* Raffaello Cortina, Milan, 2012.

M.H. Immordino-Yang, *Emozioni Apprendimento e Cervello. Implicazione educative delle neuroscienze affettive.* Raffaello Cortina, Milan (in press).

***TEACHING METHOD***

Frontal lectures supported by the projection of slides and videos that allow students to also learn the contents in a visual, synthetic and authentic way. Some videos will actually reproduce original situations from experiments and documentaries. Lectures will be interspersed with additional teaching methods, aimed at stimulating an active participation of students through focus groups and plenary discussions, as well as reflections and critical evaluation (individual and group) with respect to the issues addressed. In this way, the course aims to encourage students' motivation and participation in class, as well as, above all, their reflective and critical ability with respect to the topics covered.

Furthermore, possible interventions on topics by guest lecturers are planned.

***ASSESSMENT METHOD AND CRITERIA***

The oral exam will eventually be preceded by a single written exam consisting of two distinct parts:

– One covering the Module on physical education and developmental and educational aspects (Module I, Prof. Di Dio);

– The second covering the Module on the social aspects of sports activities, described below (Module II, Prof. Nascimbene).

The eventual written test on the first module consists of multiple-choice questions on the topics covered in class. The score for the written test will be calculated by adding the scores for correct answers to the questions, assessed with a score from 0 (if all answers are incorrect) to 31 (if all answers are correct).

A minimum mark of 18/30 for each of the two tests relating to Modules I and II is required to pass the exam. The final mark will be based on the average of the marks obtained for the two tests and the mark obtained in the oral exam for the possible improvement of the grade.

To prepare for the exam, students must study the topics included in the course reading list and indicated by the lecturer in class; the slides related to these can be downloaded from the lecturer's Blackboard page and used as a guide.

***NOTES AND PREREQUISITES***

There are no prerequisites for attending the course. However, a genuine curiosity and intellectual openness will help the student deal effectively with the topics covered in order to achieve the objectives set for the course.

Further information can be found on the lecturer's webpage at http://docenti.unicatt.it/web/searchByName.do?language=ENG, or on the Faculty notice board.

Second Module: *Module on the* *Social Aspects of Sports Activities* (Prof. Flavio Nascimbene)

***COURSE AIMS AND INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES***

The course aims to provide students with the basic notions underlying the main psychological variables of physical and sports activities, with particular reference to the social aspects. The aim of the course, therefore, is to present and study in depth the main sports-specific psychological dynamics at the motivational level, as well as the management of psycho-physiological activation, agonistic anxiety and attention whenever and wherever there is a relationship between trainer (coach; educator; technical staff), sportsman, and family (the athlete's emotionally meaningful relationships).

***Intended learning outcomes***

*Knowledge and understanding*

At the end of the course, students will be able to identify and describe different sports-specific models for analysing relational contexts, from the coach-sportsman-family 'sports triangle’ to the 'psycho-sports system', from a relational-hypertextual perspective (in particular the sports club). Particular attention will be paid to the current recipients of sports-motor interventions: the *millennial* sportsman. In this sense, the transverse psycho-social characteristics of the *millennial* sportsman will be explored in depth together with some specific problem areas (*hyperreality and dreams*; *demotivation and motivational instability; anxiety and emotional instability*; and *relationality and loneliness*). For each of these areas, *ad hoc* qualitative tools will be proposed. Students will also be able to explore in depth the communication dynamics between the various leadership styles and peer-to-peer within the sports team, as well as identify the main motivational variables, managing arousal, anxiety and the different attentional styles typical of the sports context.

*Ability to apply knowledge and understanding*

Students will be able to recognise the aforementioned psychological variables through qualitative observational methods, which will allow them to understand the opportunity or lack thereof to explore certain variables in depth. This ability facilitates an understanding of the potential and limits of one's role when collaborating with a professional psychologist in the implementation of techniques such as goal-setting, emotional profiling and relaxation techniques (mental training), with particular attention to the emotional, cognitive and socio-normative characteristics of young sportsmen from the new generations.

***COURSE CONTENT***

1. The centrality of the sportsman within its relational networks of reference. The current recipients of interventions by motor science and sports professionals: the *millennial* sportsman. The main psycho-social notes common to *Generations Y and Z* that have emerged from the last five years of research and study. The *millennial* sportsman and his specific problem areas: hyperreality and dreams; demotivation and motivational instability; anxiety and emotional instability; relationality and loneliness. From the study of important psychological skills in sport to the relational-hypertextual approach and psycho-social aspects of sport.

2. The pragmatics of human communication within the sports context: sport-specific aspects. Communication networks within the group and the sports team. The transition from the group to the team (*team-building*). The relationship between the trainer (coach, teacher, educator) and the work team: correlation between leadership styles and peer-to-peer relational dynamics. Methods of communication with the new generations of athletes: *settings*, methods and tools of intervention, the role of new technologies.

3. The trainer-sportsman-family sports triangle. Professional goals and personal expectations: from individual goal-setting to three-dimensional goal-setting (sports triangle). The motivations behind physical activity and sport: evolutionary bases and working methods in relation to the sportsman. From the *Dream Card/Self-Awareness Card* to *team goal-setting.*

4. Psychological preparation in sport: the evaluation/management of arousal, agonistic anxiety and concentration as variables associated with the sports experience (with particular reference to competitive activity). The emotional profiles and the state of flow in sport. The *Arousal-millennial link.*

***READING LIST***

F. Nascimbene, *Born to Surf 2.020. Psicologia dello Sport per Millennials,* Ed. Sport Coaching, Milano, 2020.

F. Nascimbene, *Guida alla Psicologia dello Sport 2011 Verso un approccio relazionale-ipertestuale,* Edizioni Libreria dello Sport, Milano, 2011.

F. Nascimbene, *Prospettive in Psicologia dello Sport,* EDUCatt, Milano, 2002.

C. Gozzoli-F. Nascimbene-C. Manzi, *Relazioni interpersonali nello sport,* in C. Gozzoli-C. Manzi (edited by), Sport: prospettive psicosociali, Carocci, Roma, 2009, pp. 51-65.

***TEACHING METHOD***

Lessons will involve the use of both didactic methods such as frontal lectures with the supporting projection of summary slides, and interactive methods that envisage the active participation of students through systematic individual projects, in small groups and in plenary. The lecturer, through the screening of audiovisual material and/or presentation of case studies in class, will stimulate students' participation in the discussion of the observed materials. As a final point, experienced professionals in the field of physical science and sport will be invited to discuss the conceptual and methodological approaches to their experiences applied in the field, with particular reference to psychological and social aspects in the sports field; on such occasions, students should be able to interact directly and actively with the professional involved.

***ASSESSMENT METHOD AND CRITERIA***

A written exam consisting of three open-ended questions, and a possible oral exam in order to finalise the mark. The three questions asked in the written exam will all carry the same mark, from 0 (in the case of no answer) to 20 (in the case of an exemplary answer). To prepare for the exam, students must study the topics included in the course Reading List and indicated by the lecturer in class, of which the audio-commented slides - available on the teacher's Blackboard platform - constitute a guide. The written exam aims to ascertain the student's knowledge of and ability to describe the sports-specific individual and relational psychological variables, and to choose the application methods for managing certain variables. The exam will also assess the student's ability to adequately and independently design certain knowledge.

***NOTES AND PREREQUISITES***

Being introductory in nature, there are no prerequisites for attending the course. To benefit more fully from the course, students are expected to possess an open and intellectually curious attitude towards the topics presented in lectures. To this end, a basic reading on the subject of psychology of physical activity and sport is suggested.

Further information can be found on the lecturer's webpage at http://docenti.unicatt.it/web/searchByName.do?language=ENG, or on the Faculty notice board.