

Children's sports as an educational environment

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1. INTRODUCTION

According to an old British tradition sport has always been regarded as an important socializing environment in society. The developments of sport during the past decades with its many problems and, on the other hand, the strong expansion of children's and young people's competitive sports has increased pedagogical interest towards children's sports. Ever larger number of children participate in regular training of sport at younger ages than before. Organized sports is usually begun before puberty, i.e. at an age which we are accustomed to call childhood. More than half of the 15 year-olds e.g. in Norway and Sweden participate in organized sport (Engström, 1990; Ommundsen, 1992). The interest in many other countries is also quite extensive. (Campbell 1986; Martens 1986; Robertson 1986; Valeriotte & Hansen 1986).

Interest in the educational aspects in children's sport has also been increased by the evident changes in modern society which can be seen most clearly in the set of values. The lessening importance of the ideals and clearly defined norms of traditional society as factors guiding the moral decisions and behaviour, privatisation, individualisation and the

increase of self-centeredness worry especially the older adult population because the change and differing viewpoints make the younger generation appear «immoral» in adult eyes.

The objectives of physical education have been defined as being education to sport and education through sport. In the same way I regard sport pedagogy as meaning the furthering of an athletes training, i.e. furthering of his performance by pedagogical means, as well as supporting the development and socialisation of an athlete's personality with the help of sport. I will not in in this context take up the subject of pedagogy of training, except to state that this pedagogical side of training has evidently been studied less than e.g. the physiology or psychology of training.

On one hand, supporting the development of an individual's personality can be thought of as the main task of education and, on the other, the furthering of an individuals socialisation, which approximately includes the social and ethical goals of education. The significance of sport has been studied from the viewpoint of both main tasks. Lately other educational objectives have been set for sport, health education among others.

The connections of sport with an individual's personality has been studied quite extensively among children and young people also in the sport psychology, and even more than the socio-ethical effects of sport. I will concentrate on examining children's sport as an environment for development mainly from the viewpoint of socio-ethical development. However, I would like to emphasize that many factors which are important from a socio-ethical point of view are also important for the development of the self-concept.

2. ON THE PROBLEM OF SOCIO-ETHICAL EDUCATION

There are problems in connection with the furthering of socio-ethical development which are not as easily noticeable in connection with other educational objectives. This is probably one of the reasons for there being so little scientific evidence of the effects of physical education or sport on socio-ethical development.

One of these problems is connected to the evident change of values in society. In traditional society each person belonged to a community

which clearly defined norms of conduct and which controlled moral decisions by giving the criteria of right and wrong. This meant that the task of an educator was easier, because he only had to pass on traditional opinions and to see that they were followed. A perceptible change in modern society is characterized by loosening of traditional social ties, privatisation and individualisation. At the same time, the force guiding the traditional set of values seems to be irrevocably disturbed (Ziehe 1991). Because the authority of tradition does not guide e.g. situations of moral conflict, these situations have to be solved in other ways. According to Habermas, a voluntary coordination of actions and a solving of conflicts based on rational communication between individuals will become important for the solving of new conflicts (Habermas 1984; 1987; Heikkala 1993).

When traditional norms do not give clear rules of conduct any more and when different generations may have differing criteria for moral assessments, it is increasingly difficult for an educator to give clear criteria for moral behaviour. What then can be done in ethical education? At least two things can be emphasized; first, everyone should consider the consequences of his actions and one's responsibility in relation to other people. Second, the communication and dialogue between individuals can be increased.

Another problem with socio-ethical education is connected with the fact that values and behaviour do not correlate strongly. In traditional society behaviour was regulated by social control and, at the same time, an individual was able, because he could lean on the norms of tradition and the society of his background, in a way give up when his own interests came in conflict with the interests of others when this was necessary in order to save the relations in the community. In modern society social relationships between individuals are more superficial and based on egoistic calculation (Heikkala, 1993). One reason for a gap between values and behaviour is probably the situational connection of moral decisions. In relation to sport, this is an especially interesting viewpoint for two reasons. First, there are different kinds of sport situations in which the moral decisions seem to vary systematically. Different levels of competition are examples of this. The second viewpoint is to a greater extent con-

nected with different kinds of situations in life. As Brenda Bredemeier's results show, it is possible that sport is a moral world of its own. This leads us to one of the crucial questions of sport education, i.e. is it possible for sport to have any significance to ethical education. I will return to this question later on. (Bredemeier & Shields 1984a; Bredemeier 1991).

The third problem in socio-ethical education is that nowadays in the power-structures of society, e.g. in the economic sphere, in relations to the above mentioned individualisation, a certain degree of selfish behaviour is generally acceptable. Acquiring personal property at the expense of others by playing the market is even deemed admirable. It is for this reason difficult to emphasize at school or in sport the importance of traditional educational objectives, e.g. to be considerate to others.

3. SPORTS AS GROWING ENVIRONMENT AND AS INSTRUMENT OF EDUCATION

3.1 The value of sport as such

The conception that sport as such develops character and is morally valuable, established in British public schools during the last century, has influenced the discussion about sport for a long time. Even if there is little scientific evidence of the value of sport as an educational factor in itself, sport can be shown to have certain characteristics which are significant as instruments of education. First, sport is the most popular active hobby of young people. This means that in sport it is possible to approach a very large number of young people. Second, the popularity of sport is linked with voluntariness and a strong intrinsic motivation. This is naturally, the case if the child participates in sport voluntarily and not because of parental pressure. Third, it is possible to create close social ties in sport both between young people as well as between a youth and an adult. The interaction is strengthened by a mutual objective. For this reason it is especially important that the interaction between young athletes is emphasized. Fourth, sport is active activity and, among others, such situations of conflict arise in it which are familiar, genuine and understandable to young people. This is important for ethical development because moral decisions depend on the context and because genuine situations of conflict

which concern «oneself» make it possible to accomplish an ethically developing dialogue. According to Arnold (1986) three hypotheses can be made on the meaning of sport as such.

The first hypothesis is based on the British tradition according to which sport in itself is morally developing. The second hypothesis expresses the opinion according to which sport is a world of its own and that it does not have a notable connection with real life. According to this hypothesis, sport is only a game, the moral problems of which are not comparable with such problems of real life as e.g. poverty, war and epidemics. The third hypothesis contains a negative statement about sport. According to it competitive sport is unethical in itself and that it rather debases morality than furthers it. These three hypotheses concern the meaning of sport as such and not a conscious moral education with the help of sport which I will return to later. The first hypothesis about the positive effects of sport as such has received almost no support from empirical research. The conception adopted in the education of the British upper classes during the last century has been transferred as such to different societies, social classes and sports without giving much thought to the difference between i.e. junior league ice hockey in Finland and Public school cricket in England. Traditional opinions on the socializing value of sport are largely based on such myths as i.e. team sports are socially developing. When it comes to the moral decisions made by athletes and their conceptions of fair play, the results of research tend to support the third hypothesis rather than the first one. Comparisons of athletes and non-athletes has shown that the moral decision-making of most athletes is on a lower level than the decision-making of non-athletes (Bredemeier, & Shields 1984b; Bredemeier, & Shields 1986; Bredemeier et al. 1986; Bredemeier et al. 1987; Gonçalves, 1990).

Arnold's second hypothesis according to which sport is a world of its own in a moral sense, has received a little more support from empirical research. Bredemeier & Shields (1984a) made students and pupils to estimate situations concerned both with sport and the real world. They noticed that in about the sixth or seventh year of school the estimations of the situations in real life and sport started to differ so that the situations in sport were estimated to be morally on a lower level than the situations in

real life. The researchers present the concept of «game reasoning» with which they explain the cotextuality of moral assessment in sport.

The idea of «game reasoning», i.e. that sport is only seen as a game with its own moral rules is also connected to the Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde phenomenon. It means a certain kind of personality change of the athlete while entering a competitive situation e.g. when a quiet family man becomes an aggressive fighter on the sports field (Bredemeier & Shields 1985). The same phenomenon has occurred among parents of competing children (Partington 1982).

Arnold's third hypothesis on the negative moral effect of sport has not either received much empirical support. On the other hand an analysis of the nature of competition compared to e.g. cooperation may bring forth such characteristics as self-centeredness and underestimating pro-social behaviour which cannot be thought of as positive from the viewpoint of socio-ethical education. It has been suggested, the suggestion being based on a similar analysis, that competitive sport is by nature unethical (Bailey, 1975). With reference to the above mentioned change of values in society and the many kinds of criteria for moral assessment it might not be quite correct to say that sport is unethical but rather that it has an ethic of its own. It might be based, among others, on the idea of game reasoning.

There is little proof of the transfer of unethical behaviour, like for example aggressive behaviour, to real life. On the other hand, children who play contact sports have been noted to be more aggressive outside the game than those who do not participate in these sports (Roos, 1986). The result may be a result of qualifications to the sport. On the other hand, Smith (1983) has shown that the violence in ice-hockey is not related to violence in the street. One explanation for the third hypothesis not proven valid might be found in another hypothesis. If sport really is an ethical world of its own, antisocial or immoral behaviour will not be transferred to real life.

3.2 The system

One important observation which should be taken into account when one is speaking about children's sport as an environment of education is that children's organized sport is organized expressly by adults. Because

of this one should pay attention to the adults that organize children's sport as well as children and their development. Therefore the ethics of children's sport is largely a matter of adult ethics. Even solitary adults who in their role as «significant others» are important agents of socialization from the child's point of view can not control the educational atmosphere of children's sport alone. The functioning of adults is also largely dependent on the conditions laid down by the system of sport and children's sport. It depends very much on the system to which extent the above mentioned educational possibilities of children's sport can be used. All this emphasizes the system-theoretical approach in the research of children's sport. In addition to the attitudes, values and behaviour of individuals, attention should be given to the whole system and to those factors on different levels which determine the conditions under which individuals act.

There is reason to describe children's sport as children's environment for growing as a system with many levels where sport and top-level sport can be seen as a part of society and its market mechanisms, the system of children's sport as a part of sport in general, the adults who organize children's sport as a part of sport in general as well as the system of children's sport and finally children as developing individuals and potential athletes. Important factors in the system of children's sport are, among others, the competitive system, official rules and the subcultures which exist among different sports with their unofficial rules and norms. As well as the interaction between individuals, the media has also a strong influence in sports from an educational aspect. Because of the lack of space, only two contributory factors in the system of children's sport will be analyzed in the following: competition and organization.

3.3 Competition - cooperation

Because there is not much evidence of the educational value of sport as such one should observe separately those characteristics of sport which seem to have something to do with the socio-ethical climate of sport. I will first take up the very heart of competitive sport, the competition. Competition as an instrument of education has been justified for instance with the argument that it develops the nerve controlling and - teaches the right attitude towards success and adversity. Competition and purposeful

- training connected to it may be significant in the second main field of education, the developing of an individual's personality. On the other hand, there are factors \leq connected with competing which are not good for a socio-ethical education. Because of this it must be emphasized that the character of competing and the attitude towards competitions and their results is more important than competition as such.

One difficult characteristic of competing from the viewpoint of social education is that competition especially as a zerosum-game is the opposite of social education. A classical example in socialpsychology is Sherif's (1978) study on the results of competing and cooperation on the behaviour of young people. Twelve-year-old boys were divided into two groups on a summercamp. Sport competitions were organized during several weeks between the two groups on a win-or-lose-principle. i.e. the zerosum-principle, and the winner were given good prizes. The competing begun in a spirit of fair play, but quickly turned into a mean fight for victory. The competition situation influenced the boys' behaviour also outside the competition situation. The inner cohesion of the group grew, but hostile behaviour against the rival team increased which manifested itself, among other things, by the throwing of mashed potatoes at the opponents during lunch breaks. While this hostility existed, cooperation where everyone had a mutual objective was tried. A camp waterpipe was broken on purpose and problems with food transportation were brought about. When the groups had to solve problems like this the hostility between the groups lessened. The change in attitudes was, however, only temporary at first, and the boys learned to act together voluntarily only after a longlasting cooperation.

Sherif's study describes the effects of two extreme social situations; on the one hand, a prolonged win-or-lose competition, and on the other hand, cooperation in order to accomplish an important objective. Three characteristics are emphasized in Sherif's study which might be difficult from the point of view of prosocial behaviour, namely the nature of competition on a win/lose principle, the importance of the competition and the duration of competition. The duration of the competition is an important factor in children's sport because a child sees a competition situation in a different way from an adult. For a child it is largely a question of acting here and now, while an adult sees e.g. one game as a part of a lon-

ger period of competition. Even if children think it is fun to win, they usually would like to play in the losing team than stay in reserve on the winning side.

One of the most important factors controlling the effects of competition is the importance of a competition and the importance given to winning. The importance of a competition can be emphasized with good prizes like in Sherif's study but the importance usually depends on the level of competition. It is easy to be fair in less important competitions but when the level of competition gets higher and its significance increases the pressure also increases for the trainers as well as for the athletes. Then the educational aspects tend to be forgotten, and there is a lot of empirical evidence of this (Grineski, 1989; Knoppers, Shuiteman, & Love, 1986; Lee, & Cook, 1990; McIntosh 1989; Smith, Smoll, & Curtis, 1979; Telama, 1991). The effects of competition may also be controlled by teaching a certain kind of attitude towards the end result of competition. For example Chandler (1989) separates winning as an end result and winning as an experience.

Competition can also be held to be a problem for social development because it is selfish and egocentric by nature. Egocentric morals can be permissible and even enjoyable within the framework of sport. An athlete might describe it like this: «It is so difficult to make decisions in life because one must think about so many people. In sport one is free to think of one self only» (Bredemeier, & Shields, 1985). As Sherif indicated, competition situation easily becomes the opposite of and an obstacle for cooperation. Studies on values have shown that achievement motivation and pro-social motivation correlate negatively very strongly (Schwartz, & Bilsky, 1987). Likewise achievement motivation and sportsmanship have been shown to correlate negatively (McIntosh, 1989).

Team sports seem to fill formally the requirements of socially developing acting; cooperation for a common objective. The problem is just that even in team sports the importance of competing and winning easily emphasizes competing against someone instead of with someone. This is important because e.g. situations of moral conflict arise between teams competing against each other, and not within the own team. In a tough - competition these situations are solved by a referee instead of the com-

munication and dialogue between individuals. Furthermore even in team sports individuality and the role of individuals has been increasingly emphasized especially at the top level. As examples of this can be mentioned personal rewarding, individual statistics and the showing of the individual's name on shirts. However, team sports offer a good opportunity to learn to act in cooperation with the rest of the team, which is valuable in itself. Even if there has been a great deal of talk about the socializing effect of team sports there is no evidence that team sports as such develop pro-social behaviour.

Sociotheoretical research as well as theories concerning the development of personality and empirical educational research emphasize an individual's spontaneous communication, dialogue and the significance of action which aims at achieving a common objective for the solving of ethical problems and as a prerequisite for pro-social development. As Habermas (1984, 1987) has stated, an agreement based on voluntary communication becomes more important when the authority of tradition breaks down. The problem with competitive sports is that because of the egocentric nature of competition, dialogue may stay on the level of calculations about the interests of individuals and not lead to arbitration aiming at consensus (Heikkala, 1993).

The meaning of dialogue and cooperation has been shown in empirical research as well. Norma Haan has developed a theory based on Rawls' and Habermas' notion that moral appraisals are based on the dialogue between human beings in which the concept of moral balance is central. From this basis she has developed grades of moral assessment which resemble Kohlberg's grades of development. Haan's grades, however, describe how images of self in moral interaction with others develop and how the sensitivity to understand the factors which influence the acquiring of moral balance develop (Haan, 1978). Brenda Bredemeier, among others, has applied this theory in empirical research. In carefully planned studies it has been shown that it is possible to rise the level of children's moral thinking with a program of physical education which has been planned with moral education in mind and in which dealing with conflict situations through conversation between children has been included (Bredemeier et al., 1986; Romance et al. 1986).

The value of interaction and cooperation has also been shown in connection with social education. Muska Mosston has, may be more than anyone else, emphasized the value of teaching method in reaching the objectives in teaching and the importance of the interaction between individuals in the acquiring of pro-social behaviour (Mosston, & Ashworth, 1986; Mosston, & Ashworth, 1990). Based on Mosston's concepts of the importance of situations of interaction it has been shown in physical education as well as in sport training that it has been possible to influence the social behaviour of young people especially with teaching methods which emphasize working together (Cox, 1986; Goldberger, Gerney, & Chamberlain, 1982; Kahila, 1986; Kahila, & Telama, 1988). It has been shown in Finnish research which has been exhibited in this conference that, besides cooperation itself, interaction with as many people as possible is important for pro-social development (Kahila, 1993).

3.4 Organization and rules

Learning to follow rules in sport has been seen as one of the most important educational objectives of sport. This is clearly useful in a certain phase of the child's development. Rules can be seen e.g. as mutual agreements and the following of a mutual agreement can lead one to take other people more into consideration. One can also learn to work with other individuals in organized activity. On the other hand, rules are not without problems from the viewpoint of moral development. It has been stated before that at least two things are important from the viewpoint of an individual's moral development: thinking about personal responsibility and the consequences of one's behaviour and through this the assessment of right and wrong and, on the other hand, the capability to communicate and to have a dialogue with another individual and the solving of conflicts through these.

The problem with activities organized by adults and rules made by adults is that instead of thinking about personal responsibility and instead of dialogue a referee may solve conflicts. The interpretation of conflict situations in sport and decision-making related to this is, in a way, delegated to the rules and the referee. As an example, a situation presented to young footballers in an interview can be presented: «During the game

there has been a hard tackle which leaves a player on the ground and the other team in possession of the ball. The player has not been able to get up for a minute and the ball is still in possession of the opponents. A mid-field player close to the injury gets the ball with chance of creating an opening» (Lee, 1990). Almost all of the people interviewed gave as their first alternative that they would use the situation to their benefit, instead of interrupting the game or informing the referee. The most common explanation given was that it was the referee's duty to notice what had happened and to stop the game (even if the referee could not see the situation) (Telama 1991). Both athletes and trainers have been shown to do this (Bredemeier, & Shields 1985; McIntosh 1989; Goodger, & Jackson, 1985). It has been stated that playing is like taking a moral holiday (Reddiford 1981).

It can be said that the evident functions of the rules of sport, e.g. distinguishing between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour and bringing forth the expectations in the punishments of unacceptable behaviour (Silva, 1981), rules however have hidden functions as well. The strength of hidden functions depends on the structural factors of sport, e.g. the level of competition.

Children's and young people's sport is expressly an activity organized by adults. Rules and other norms which guide behaviour are given by adults and adults also usually supervise that the rules are followed. When the transition from children's spontaneous games to organized sport happens the significance and hidden factors of rules change. Children's spontaneous games also has rules which are usually carefully followed. The games organized by children themselves are based on an agreement which maintains a greater degree of cooperation. Because of this, children while playing by themselves do not break the rules as much as in sport organized by adults. The rules are also broken in children's games but children must solve these situations through communication and dialogue. In games organized by adults, especially if success is emphasized, the rules easily become an obstacle for achieving victory. The rules and the referee replace communication. When making a decision the referee decides what is right and wrong and he also takes care that the game continues even if the rules get broken. The referee's influence can be seen i.e. in that the

children are better acquainted with the consequences of breaking rules than of the rules themselves (Jantz, 1975).

One of the special characteristics of modern sport is that the rules guiding the activity in practice may differ considerably from the real rules in some sports. There are, constitutive rules and normative rules in sport (Silva III, 1981; 1983). One acts according to normative rules and normative rules may legitimate offences which are prohibited by constitutive rules. The difference between constitutive and normative rules may be great. For example in the NHL there have been ice-hockey games in which only 8% of the faults which should have been penalized by the rule-book have been penalized (Terry & Jackson, 1985).

Normative rules and the violations of rules justified by them are explained by the concept of subculture. Subcultures are groups which as a part of a larger mother culture, e.g. sport, have also their own unique values, norms and models of behaviour. Values, beliefs, identities and lifestyles which exist in the unique social situations of each subculture are central to subcultures (McPherson, Curtis, & Loy 1989). Therefore a subculture maintains and reinforces «the spirit of the game». A subculture may also maintain such behavioural models which are usually thought of as desirable, e.g. traditional sportsmanship in tennis and the ideals of oriental sports.

Subcultures which condone the violation of rules have usually begun as so called professional subcultures in either professional or otherwise seriously practised top-level sport (Donnelly, 1985). At least two problems are connected with subcultures which condone the violation of rules from the viewpoint of ethical education. In the first place, a double set of rules and a difference between theory and practice creates a situation of a double standard of morality. The players are taught rules which are not followed in practice. Another doubtful aspect of subcultures is that with them behavioural models which e.g. emphasize violence may be transferred from professional sport to children's and young people's sport. This has been noted to have happened in several sports (Bredemeier, 1985; Mugno & Feltz, 1985; Silva, 1983; Smith, 1983).

The fact that the subculture of a certain sport permits that exceptions are made from rules and even violence of some degree, has been one of the reasons for the allegations of the unethical nature of sport. Like stated

previously, it creates a situation which emphasizes double standards of morality which is not a good starting point for ethical education. On the other hand, one can say that the actions are not unethical but that they have an ethic of their own even if the criteria of right and wrong are different from what we are used to in normal life.

From this point of view Rawls' theory on justice which also concerns the choice of moral principles is also of interest. According to Rawls, an agreement is needed on which the principles of common life in society will be based on. The agreement will have to be such that everyone can accept it. In this way people create their own moral rules with their own choices. Rawls sees justice as fair play. With fairness he means that rationally thinking individuals who are well aware of theory choose moral rules for themselves while taking into consideration that they will have to live with consequences of their choices (Rawls 1988). Among adult professional athletes Rawls' concept of fair play would seem to work well. They are well aware of what normative rules allow and when participating in competitions they are ready to live by their choice. From this viewpoint it can be said that professional competitions have a moral of their own which can not be judged by moralizing.

On the other hand, the situation is different in children's and young people's sport. Children and young people do not influence the contents of normative rules. They do not necessarily either approve of all the violations which normative rules allow. Because a beginner is also taught written rules before coming face to face with normative rules, the double standard of morality in this situation is worse than with adult professionals.

4. CONCLUSION

Sport as young people's favourite active hobby offers good possibilities for the development of a healthy personality and for socio-ethical development. Sport must, however, be seen only as an instrument the importance of which depends on how it is used and the kinds of social situations of interaction which are created with it. Because the activity is organized by adults they have a great responsibility. The system of sport as a whole, it's subcultures, official and unofficial rules and the systems

of competition affect children's and adults' activity. Because of this, attention should especially be paid to the analyzing and developing the system of children's sport. Several important - educational aspects of children's sport have not been dealt with in this paper because the purpose has been to concentrate on some significant things in this field.

5. PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

It should be remembered that even the most talented child athletes are children in the first place and not small adults.

A Subculture and rules of its own should be developed for children's sport. The system of competitions should be paid attention to. For example no national championships for children. The relationship between competition and training should be maintained sensible. More training than competing. Social and ethical education should be paid more attention to in the schooling and training of coaches by especially emphasizing the value of interaction between individuals. The taking of initiatives and thinking about one's own responsibility should be encouraged among children by letting them organize parts of the activity and leading them to solving conflicts through dialogue.

In conclusion it might be said that children's sport should be developed in the spirit of humanistic education and coaching which was especially important for the late president for AIESEP, Jose Maria Cagigal. Thinking and feeling human beings are involved and sport should serve as their development.

6. REFERENCES

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