

Research Article

Formal Education Valences in the Conflict Management within Competitive Sport

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***Corresponding author:** Beatrice Abalasei, Department of Physical Education and Sport, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University, Iasi, Romania**Received:** March 21, 2016; **Accepted:** April 14, 2016;**Published:** April 18, 2016**Abstract**

Education, as factor of personality formation and development, has always had a fundamental role in the growth and progress of the individual, the formal period being underlined through its decisive valences in the modelling process of the human being. This study aims to identify the correlation between the cognitive levels of the subjects (athletes in the senior high-school year and athletes in their first year of college) included in the study and the response style to conflict, when they are in tense, conflict situations, specific to the sports environment, through a questionnaire.

The conflict response style, operationalized on five dimensions: the abandonment style, the repression style, the win-lose style, the compromise style, and the win-win style.

The study outcomes underline that education has a very important role in the sports activity, with the two systems (educational and of high performance) collaborating to create a performance-centred athlete, eliminating the factors which could block high results.

Even though sport cannot be considered the “repair workshop” for (wrong) social actions, it does have the tools necessary for the elimination of destructive tensions (catharsis) and for integration, depending on the educational level.

Keywords: Formal education; Conflict response styles; Sport; Communication

Introduction

Formal education has as objective the formation of human being, its natural individuality, it updates virtues and it sets free the energies of the soul in order to develop the psychic faculties and functions. It must be well organized for a good functioning of the intellect, for a normal expression of feelings and for a constant manifestation of the will, in order to eliminate all aspects that could obstruct the natural individuality.

From the analogy of a simple parallelism, metaphorically speaking, getting the inspiration from Pastelozzi's thinking, the power of the soul enriches and fortifies through exercise, just as gymnastics develops the physical condition of the individual. In this context, formal education remains even after the knowledge is forgotten. The school setting considerably widens the universe of the social actor, answering to curiosity and to the need of mental clarification. All that is done in school is for the good of the society and of the individual, even though the syllabus is rigid; “school may be analyzed as a self-managing organization, focused on the socializing function, on transmitting the values promoted by the society” [1].

The formal education, forming the individual, also comprises physical education and sports, which determines us to analyze the way in which approaching conflict situations, group communication, and conflict solving influence the educational level. Sport training has become an instructive educative process, with physical formative valences, in order to make the individual surpass himself, to have

great results. Nevertheless, without an intellectual, moral, artistic, musical, sexual, and religious education, without an education for peace and co-operation, as well as one for nutrition, the individual cannot valorise his aptitudes, and the destructive energies appear.

The elements which define the sports phenomenon are illustrated though the demands of contemporary training, of competition, of motivation, and of the performance level. The coach or physical education teacher, besides the physical modelling of children and athletes, also ensures the education of the collective. Sports training is a disciplinarian process, of correcting wrong habits - those specific to the sport practiced and the social, behavioural ones. The problems related to sports training led to the necessity of creating systems for practical-methodical, organizational, and prospective aspects, with a great number of athlete-specific norms, principles, methods, and rules. All these require a good formal education, to ensure the functional support of the athlete and his communication mechanism, constituting the cognitive baggage based upon the plasticity of man's higher nervous activity. They represent “the conditioning (conditioned reflex) processes, to adapt, the processes of experience (information) storage, the organization of behaviours useful to the adaptation (including the social one), through the selection, transfer, and generalization, the imitation (spontaneous, but also voluntary), contamination, rationalization, and awareness of social, moral, ideological values, and the way they are seen (oriented learning)” [2].

From the specialists' perspective [3], conflict represents the interaction of interdependent people who perceive incompatible

goals and interference from each other in achieving those goals. The social character of conflict, focused on the interpersonal dimension, by omitting the intra and inter-group conflicts, is obvious. There are premises for a conflict to occur when it is perceived by one of the parties, but this mention does not represent the objective reasons to explain the cause of a conflictual situation which can escalate and turn into physical aggression. Sport is based on competition, contest, reason for which conflictual situations appear rapidly, given that, as J. Z. Rubin, Pruitt and Kim [4] state, “a perceived divergence of interests, or a belief that the parties’ current aspirations cannot be achieved simultaneously” may lead to destructive reactions.

A conflict cannot be eradicated or promoted, as every situation which causes controversies is natural and dependent on the experiences and expectations of an individual at a given moment. It is a continuous struggle between what it is and what it should be according to individuals’ temperament, an incongruence seizing the human activity, and it is essential to its functioning, motivating us to reach new objectives, revealing the conflict [5,6]. Communication has a very important role in both solving the conflict, and during the actual solving process, as it is easy to understand that the message transmitting skills are improved in school.

Because the world is very complex and the conflicts within the group (intra-group) the competition relationship with the adversaries (inter-group conflicts) and the athletes’ performance, we need an investigative project to identify the variables contributing to the rebalance of the atmosphere within a sports group. The conflict response styles will depend on these variables - in our case, on the formal education.

The research had as objective investigating the influence of formal education on the conflict response styles of the individuals included in the training program of competitive sport. Thus, we were interested in identifying a relationship between the educational level of competitive athletes and their behaviour in the tense, conflictual situations within the world of sports. We have focused upon this objective because, on the basis of the literature in the field and of our own experience, we have concluded that the educational factor plays an important role in reducing the importance of certain deviant conflict response styles [7] and even in developing new styles of optimally relating to and approaching conflictual situations.

Materials and Methods

Research hypotheses

General hypothesis: Formal education has positive valences on the conflict response styles in case of the competitive athletes.

Specific hypotheses

Specific hypothesis 1: We estimate that the conflict response styles, abandonment, repression, and win-lose will be more developed at competitive high-school athletes, in comparison to the competitive college athletes.

Specific hypothesis 2: We estimate that the conflict response styles, win-win, and compromise/collaboration will be less developed at competitive high-school athletes, in comparison to the competitive college athletes.

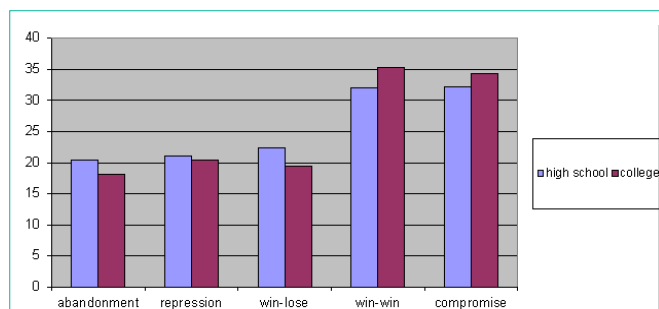


Figure 1: Comparative illustration of the five conflict response styles, depending on the studies variable.

The sample

The sample comprises 100 subjects, athletes randomly selected among the students within the Sports High-School, Iași, Romania and within the Faculty of Sports and Physical Education, city of Iași, Romania. Depending on the gender variable, the sample comprises 77 male subjects and 23 female subjects. In the same sense, depending on the studies variable, the sample comprises 51 high-school students and 49 college students. We present below a graphic illustration depending on the studies and gender variables.

Measurement

Variables

Independent variable: Formal education - 2 levels

- (1) High-school
- (2) College

Dependent variables: The conflict response style, operationalized on five dimensions: the abandonment style, the repression style, the win-lose style, the compromise style, and the win-win style (Figure 1).

The abandonment style represents the physical or emotional retreat from a conflict in order to avoid confrontation. This retreat may be useful if the course of events is not altered or disastrous because the situation may get complicated.

Repression is the refuse to acknowledge the existence of a conflict; it means the peace that you create for yourself, the decision to not speak about important aspects for your own protection.

Win-lose: the unconscious tendency to avoid the pain of failure; it is a confrontation where one of the main actors does everything to win.

Compromise or collaboration requires certain negotiation skills, giving the impression that all the parties have something to win, but one of them may over-evaluate its position, leading to a discrepancy in the relationship.

Win-win represents the possibility for each party to win; good solutions are discovered, relationships improve and are consolidated through this conflict response style.

Tool

In order to measure the conflict response style, we have elaborated the questionnaire of conflict response styles in sport, structured on five dimensions/styles of response to conflict: abandonment, repression, compromise/collaboration, win-lose, and win-win. The

Table 1: Means and results at the t test for means comparison in case of the abandonment style variable, depending on the studies variable.

Studies	Means to the abandonment style variable	Results at the t test for means comparison
High-school	20.47	t (98) = 2.140 (p = 0.035)
College	18.04	

questionnaire was pre-tested on 28 subjects. After analyzing the alfa Cronbach internal consistency coefficients, we have selected 37 items corresponding to the five conflict response styles, as follows: 7 items for the abandonment style; 7 items for the repression style; 8 items for the win-lose style; 8 items for the compromise style, and 7 items for the win-win style. The answers are on a Likert scale with six levels, from 1 = “it is not much like me” to 6 = “it is very much like me.”

The distribution of items for each conflict response style is the following:

1. The abandonment style groups the items 11, 18, 28, 33, 37, 45, and 52; 2.
2. The repression style groups the items 1, 2, 7, 23, 30, 35, and 42; 3.
3. The win-lose style groups the items 13, 14, 20, 26, 29, 34, 36, and 50;
4. The compromise style groups the items 9, 15, 21, 25, 32, 40, 46, and 54; 5.
5. The win-win style groups the items 5, 10, 16, 41, 44, 47, and 51.

The score for each conflict response style is obtained by adding the answers given by the subject for each of the items corresponding to that conflict response style. This way, for example, we registered high scores at the abandonment style in case of the subjects whose conflict response style is mainly the abandonment. Also, we obtained low scores at the abandonment style in case of the subjects who do not often adopt this conflict response style. The alfa Cronbach reliability index obtained is the following: $\alpha = 0.79$.

Procedure

The questionnaires were applied in 5-20 may 2015. The subjects were students within the Sports High-School and within the Faculty of Physical Education and Sports, “A.I. Cuza” University, Iasi, Romania. The application was collective. The subjects remained anonymous.

Results and Discussion

The results were analyzed and interpreted in SPSS for Windows. The following statistical analyses were done:

- (a) The analysis of frequencies for the sample description.
- (b) The t-test for the significance of the difference between the means for independent samples, when comparing the means of the conflict response variables through abandonment, repression, win-lose, compromise, and win-win, depending on the studies variable (specific hypotheses 1 and 2).

Table 2: Means and results at the t test for means comparison in case of the win-lose style variable, depending on the studies variable.

Studies	Means to the win-lose style variable	Results at the t test for means comparison
High-school	22.39	t (98) = 2.016 (p = 0.047)
College	19.41	

Interpretations

General hypothesis

Formal education has positive valences on the conflict response styles in case of the competitive athletes.

Specific hypothesis 1

We estimate that the conflict response styles, abandonment, repression, and win-lose will be more developed at competitive high-school athletes, in comparison to the competitive college athletes.

In order to assess this hypothesis we have applied the t test for independent samples. The hypothesis was confirmed only for the conflict response styles abandonment and win-lose. We present below the results obtained for each of the three conflict response styles.

The conflict response abandonment: On the basis of the statistical analyses obtained, we have found significant differences between the competitive high-school athletes and the competitive college athletes regarding the abandonment style [t (98) = 2.145, $p < 0.05$] (Table 1).

Thus, high-school athletes usually get higher scores at the abandonment style variable, in comparison to the college athletes (Table 1).

Thus, the competitive high-school athletes use far more often as technique to solve the conflicts the abandonment style, in comparison to the competitive college athletes, who use this style more rarely. This way, we underline the contribution of formal education to the reduction of the abandonment conflict response style, in the sense that the abandonment conflict response style is mainly present at lower education levels and that it weighs less when passing to higher education levels, meaning from high-school to college, regarding the competitive athletes.

The conflict response repression: On the basis of the statistical analyses obtained, we have found no significant statistic differences at the $p < 0.05$ threshold between the high-school athletes and the college athletes regarding the repression style.

The conflict response win-lose: On the basis of the statistical analyses obtained, we have found significant differences between the high-school athletes and the college athletes regarding the win-lose style [t (98) = 2.016, $p < 0.05$] (Table 2).

Thus, the high-school athletes usually get higher scores at the win-lose style variable, in comparison to the college athletes (Table 1).

Thus, the competitive high-school athletes use far more often as technique to solve the conflicts the win-lose style, in comparison to the competitive college athletes, who use the win-lose conflict response style more rarely. This way, we underline the positive contribution of formal education to the reduction of the win-lose

Table 3: Means and results at the t test for means comparison in case of the win-win style variable, depending on the studies variable.

Studies	Means for the win-win style variable	Results at the t test for means comparison
High-school	32.08	t (98) = 2.659 (p = 0.009)
College	35.27	

conflict response style, in the sense that the win-lose conflict response is mainly present at lower education levels and that it weighs less when passing to higher education levels, meaning from high-school to college, regarding the competitive athletes.

Specific hypothesis 2

We estimate that the conflict response styles win-win and compromise will be less developed at the competitive high-school athletes, in comparison to the competitive college athletes.

In order to assess this hypothesis we have applied the t test for independent samples. The hypothesis was confirmed only for the conflict response win-win. We present below the results obtained for each of the two conflict response styles.

The win-win conflict response style: On the basis of the statistical analyses obtained, we have found significant differences between the high-school athletes and the college athletes regarding the win-win style [t (98) = 2.659, p < 0.01] (Table 3).

Thus, the high-school athletes usually have lower scores at the win-win style, in comparison to the college athletes (Table 3).

Thus, the competitive high-school athletes use far more rarely as technique to solve the conflicts the win-win style, in comparison to the competitive college athletes, who use the win-win conflict response style more often. This way, we underline the positive contribution of formal education to the development of the win-win conflict response style, in the sense that the win-win conflict response style is more present at higher education levels, meaning from high-school to college, regarding the competitive athletes.

The compromise conflict response style: On the basis of the statistical analyses obtained, we have found no significant differences statistic at the p < 0.05 threshold between the high-school athletes and the college athletes regarding the compromise style of conflict response style.

Conclusion

The research on conflict suggests a correlation between an individual’s education, his personal needs, his temperament, and the setting where he carries on his activity.

This research has demonstrated that the educational level, in competitive sport, contributes to forming a personality focused on high results, collaboration, empathy, and understanding of the sports phenomenon.

The formal education and the physical activities have a positive influence upon the personality of an individual and, obviously, on the conflict response styles. In competitive sport, where competition dominates the whole activity, conflict solving through the win-win style represents a new improvement stage, a phase of sports growth and acknowledgment of the sports values. The means through which sports activity offers young people the possibility to evolve, to eliminate their spiritual tensions and to get them away from unconstructive deeds are amplified by the educational level, which completes the sports profile.

Sport, seen as microcosm, is a positive space, with favouring valences in maintaining social contacts and group cohesion, in improving the interaction between social actors, by preferring the constructive conflict solving techniques.

The competitive activity, where the competitive and fair-play spirits are the foundations of high sports results, trains individuals for a constructive social life. The formal education, lifelong personal development, and competition help build a society based on co-operation, collaboration, and evolution.

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