

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND SPORT IN INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENTS AS PROMOTERS OF POSITIVE ATTITUDES TOWARDS PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the stigma and discrimination faced by people with disabilities, despite them representing more than one billion individuals worldwide. This marginalization is often sustained by unconscious biases rooted in cultural norms and outdated deficit-centered models. The literature shows that negative societal attitudes constitute one of the greatest barriers to the full inclusion of these individuals. In this context, the practice of Physical Activity and Sport (PAS) emerges as a promising means to promote positive attitudes and facilitate social inclusion. Strategies such as structured direct contact, information dissemination, and mutual cooperation in inclusive environments prove effective in reducing stereotypes and prejudices. PAS, when well-planned, can generate significant social outcomes by fostering support networks, active participation, and social skills among people with and without disabilities.

Palavras-chave: Social Inclusion. People with Disabilities. Prejudice. Inclusive Physical Activity. Structured Contact.

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1 INTRODUCTION

According to the World Report on Disability, prepared by the World Health Organization and the World Bank, people with disabilities represent a population estimated at more than one billion people in the world (WHO, 2011). However, despite this high number, disability continues to be the target of discrimination based on a simple stigmatization process: the person has some characteristic that distinguishes him from what is considered "normal", and based on this attribute a set of particularities of negative bias are associated with him.

This connotation prevents the identification of other positive aspects, which hinders their integration into social relations, contributing to a discriminatory framework (GOFFMAN, 2004). In this way, the person with disabilities is transformed into an incapable being without rights, liable to be socially excluded and prevented from fully participating in the community (FRANÇA, 2020). It is true that this negative conception of disability has varied throughout history and between different cultures, but it has generally been characterized by discriminatory attitudes and acts, which in many cases have resulted in aggression and violence, and which unfortunately persist to this day (LOPES, 2013).

According to DEL ÁGUILA (2013), nowadays this discrimination against disability is not expressed consciously, but is based on a series of previous prejudices inherited from remote times and which have become a cultural substrate that makes them unconscious. Thus, subtlety is beyond the norms that prohibit prejudiced and discriminatory expressions, considered a "socially acceptable" way of expressing prejudice without being connoted in this way (FERNÁNDEZ *et al.*, 2020).

In this sense, although not explicitly expressed, subtle prejudices have a negative charge that can provoke emotions of rejection, contempt and fear; noticing a contradiction between the person's discourse and his practice. However, according to BISOL *et al.* (2017) some changes seem to be glimpsed in this regard, although the full well-being and performance of the rights of people with disabilities remain far from being a reality, with a preponderant image of people with disabilities (DA SILVA *et al.* 2010).

The origin of this prejudice could be linked to biological models of approach to disability, where these people were seen as objects of treatment and rehabilitation focused on the deficit and not on potentialities. Fortunately, these models are in disuse, and nowadays disability is analyzed from a bio-psycho-social perspective (WHO, 2001). However, there are limitations for people with disabilities to have real social inclusion, which are imposed by negative stereotypes, false beliefs about dependency, oppressive cultures and economic problems.

Among the various obstacles to effecting this change, the current literature points to the negative attitudes of people without disabilities as one of the main barriers to the practical — and not just theoretical — inclusion of people with disabilities (GAONA *et al.*, 2018; FRANÇA *et al.*, 2019; MELO, 2017; MOLERO *et al.*, 2016; OMOTE, 2018; PAREDES & PRADO, 2018; RELLO *et al.*, 2018; etc.). In this regard, we understand attitude from a multidimensional perspective as a "lasting organization of beliefs and cognitions in general, endowed with an affective charge for or against a defined social object, which predisposes to an action consistent with the cognitions and affections related to this object" (RODRIGUES *et al.*, 2009; p. 81).

Faced with this panorama of exclusion, a question of interest arises: how to contribute to the process of social inclusion of people with disabilities, considering that the literature points out as one of the main obstacles to negative attitudes towards this group?

A possible answer is found in the specific literature, which shows promising effects on the development of positive attitudes towards disability when using Physical Activity and Sport (AFD) as a means for social inclusion (ABELLÁN *et al.*, 2018a; ANACLETO, 2018; CABRAL, 2016; DE LA OSA & HERNANDEZ, 2018; McKAY *et al.*, 2019; PEREIRA, 2017; REINA *et al.*, 2019; VÍQUEZ *et al.*, 2020; et al.).

In fact, research mentions that interventions through AFD's inclusive practice must have an effective design that allows cooperation and help between groups of people with and without disabilities (RELLA, *et al.*, 2018; RELLO *et al.*, 2020; PÉREZ-TEJERO *et al.*, 2012). In this sense, some of the most effective strategies for reducing prejudice and promoting positive attitudes have been "direct contact" between groups and specific "information" about the collective that is expected to improve the perception (IGARTUA *et al.*, 2013; LEITÃO & DA SILVA, 2019; RELLO & PUERTA, 2014).

Thus, when in a situation of cooperative sports practice there is direct contact between people with and without disabilities, benefits are achieved for both groups that can foster a positive change in attitudes (ABELLÁN *et al.*, 2018a; ANACLETO, 2018; LUNDBERG *et al.*, 2008; McKAY *et al.*, 2019; PAPAIOANNOU *et al.*, 2014; VÍQUEZ *et al.*, 2020; etc.). Likewise, when we provide information about disability, Adapted Sport and its practice, people involved in AFD programs show a more positive attitude towards the inclusion of people with disabilities (KRAHÉ & ALTWASSER, 2006; LIU *et al.*, 2010; OCETE, 2016; RELLO *et al.*, 2020; and others).

In addition to direct contact and information, PÉREZ-TEJERO *et al.* (2012) state that in the area of AFD, there are other strategies used to develop positive attitudes, such as persuasion and vicarious experience. Although, RELLO *et al.* (2020) include simulation and

focus groups as equally effective strategies, there seems to be a consensus that direct contact and information — with emphasis on the former — continue to be the strategies that have the greatest effect on the positive development of attitudes (ABELLÁN *et al.*, 2018a; KRAHÉ & ALTWASSER, 2006; LINDSAY & EDWARDS, 2013; McKAY *et al.*, 2018; RELLO & PUERTA, 2014; OCETE *et al.*, 2017; etc.).

Part of these strategies is based on ALLPORT's *Contact Theory* (1954), which explains how attitudes are formed, indicating that stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination against a certain group can be reduced through direct contact with that group. In a simplified way, prejudice directed at this minority can be reduced when contact is structured based on four premises: i) sharing a *status of equality*; ii) the community must institutionally and legislatively support the change; iii) individuals must seek common goals; and iv) the joint work must be deep, genuine and intimate.

Therefore, the theory proposes that direct contact favors mutual experiences of getting to know its elements, discovering similarities and improving perception between group members. As a result, the perception of these similarities would generate a certain attraction between them that would foster the approximation of the groups, and the opposite effect would lead to a breakdown in communication and the possibility of increasing hostility (CALDERON-LÓPEZ, 2020; CALDERÓN-LÓPEZ & NAVAS, 2015; FRANÇA *et al.*, 2019).

Based on the theory presented, it would be appropriate to state that any intervention that aims to develop positive attitudes towards a given group through contact requires an adequate and intentional structuring of its components. This is due to the fact that in most cases, people interact with their peers with disabilities only when they are encouraged to do so (TAVARES, 2011). In addition, we must take into account that casual contact is not only not effective (BARR & BRACCHITTA, 2014; FRANÇA *et al.*, 2019; GOFFMAN, 2004; LINDSAY & EDWARDS, 2013; MAGALHÃES & CARDOSO, 2010), but it can still be harmful, functioning as an element that reinforces the existing negative attitude (DE BEER, 2015; SLININGER *et al.*, 2000).

In fact, the literature has maintained that AFD carried out from inclusive environments with structured contact — regardless of the activity/modality chosen — is an optimal means to obtain positive results in attitudes towards people with disabilities (ABELLÁN *et al.*, 2018a; CABRAL, 2016; LIU *et al.*, 2010; OCETE *et al.*, 2015; PAPAIOANNOU *et al.*, 2014; REINA *et al.*, 2011; VÍQUEZ *et al.*, 2020; etc.); It is also highlighted that cooperative activities have a greater effect than those of a competitive nature (DE LA OSA & HERNANDEZ, 2018; McKAY *et al.*, 2015; PEINADO, 2017; RELLO *et al.*, 2020; SANTANA & GAROZ, 2013; and others).

Thus, if the planning of the proposal is oriented to the construction and social inclusion of a certain group, it can contribute to the development of positive attitudes that produce social action in a context of equal opportunities (MEIZOSO & BLANCO, 2013). In this regard, we would like to emphasize that when AFD is used for this purpose, its main value is based on the achievement of social results and should be evaluated by the result on the basis of the quantity and quality of networks of relationships that originate, the possibilities of participation and inclusion that they allow, as well as the social skills that are installed in the community (MEIZOSO & BLANCO, 2013).

Being aware of the potential in this area, researchers have carried out several studies based on the perspectives of integration and inclusion through AFD, obtaining promising results that suggest positive changes in attitudes towards disability when there is contact between groups (ABELLÁN *et al.*, 2018a; ANACLETO, 2018; McKAY *et al.*, 2019; CALVO *et al.*, 2015; TEMBE & MACHAVA, 2012; VÍQUEZ *et al.*, 2020; and others).

We can conclude that although inclusion is still seen as an obstacle to be overcome, the bibliography points to AFD's areas as recognized as "key areas" to make society more inclusive (GORGATTI, 2005). In this regard, there are three strong arguments (RODRIGUES & LIMA-RODRIGUES, 2017):

- They have more flexible programs since both the curricular subject of Physical Education and sports and recreational activities are more receptive to differentiated and diversified programs;
- They contain a strong playful and social interaction component, which helps in the formation and development of the sense of belonging, solidarity and cooperation, fundamental for the generation of an inclusive environment;
- The activities developed can significantly mobilize the cognitive, social and affective area, in addition to motor development and performance.

2 PHYSICAL EDUCATION IN THE PROMOTION OF POSITIVE ATTITUDES THROUGH CONTACT BETWEEN GROUPS

Since the emergence of the idea of inclusive education in our daily lives (advocated by the World Declaration on Education for All – Thailand, 1990; and by the Declaration of Salamanca – Spain, 1994), most students with some type of Special Educational Need (SEN), derived from some disability, have been progressively schooled in regular centers with colleagues without disabilities (LEITÃO & DA SILVA, 2019). This situation has challenged education systems to create learning environments that can adapt to the new expectations of social development in the twenty-first century (also pointed out by DELORS, 1998).

However, despite the curricular and methodological changes necessary to make school inclusion effective, research in this field has been affirming that changing the attitudes of people without disabilities towards people with disabilities is a *sine qua non* success factor in this area (ALVES, 2015; FRANÇA *et al.*, 2019; MELO, 2017; OCETE, 2016; PEREZ-TEJERO *et al.*, 2012; VALENCIA-PERIS *et al.*, 2020; etc.). In this way, the current educational approach goes beyond the limits of integration, introducing programs that contribute to the development of positive attitudes towards this group.

Consequently, inclusion is no longer the placement of students with SEN with students without SEN, but the preparation of both for coexistence in diversity (RELLÓ & PUERTA, 2014). As indicated by OCETE *et al.* (2017) The fact that it recognizes attitude as one of the necessary success criteria for inclusive education has led many authors to focus their research on this aspect.

In this context, Physical Education has been presented as a school subject of the first order for the promotion of inclusion and the development of positive attitudes towards disability (BLOCK & OBRUSNIKOVA, 2007; LEITÃO & DA SILVA, 2019; McKAY, 2013; OCETE *et al.*, 2015; PARDO, 2008; REINA, 2014; REINA *et al.*, 2019; and others), due to its experiential and playful character, potentially cooperative, which leads to deep personal interactions which generate conflicts and opportunities for their resolution (PEINADO, 2017; RELLÓ & PUERTA, 2014; RODRÍGUEZ DE VERA *et al.*, 2019).

In fact, research has shown encouraging results that affirm that a structured contact between students without and with SEN in Physical Education classes promotes the development of positive attitudes in the former towards the inclusion of the latter (ABELLÁN *et al.*, 2018a; LIU *et al.*, 2010; McKAY *et al.*, 2019; PANAGIOTOU *et al.*, 2008; PEREIRA, 2017; TEIXEIRA, 2014; XAFOPOULOS *et al.*, 2009). According to McKAY (2015), studies on inclusion in the Physical Education scenario have highlighted the instrumental role that students without SEN play in the experiences of peers with SEN, since rejection by peers can limit opportunities for social learning and impair academic performance.

Accordingly, LEITÃO & DA SILVA (2019) highlight the importance of the support and collaborative work of colleagues without SEN for the academic success of students with SEN, and by extension inclusive education. Thus, we believe that it is necessary to establish specific methodologies that provide tools to help develop positive attitudes towards disability in students without SEN, while helping to create a truly inclusive environment (BLOCK & OBRUSNIKOVA, 2007; RODRÍGUEZ *et al.*, 2017).

In this context, part of the studies developed on inclusion in the school environment have been focused on teachers' attitudes towards students with SEN (MAHL, 2016;

MONTEIRO, 2011; PELT, 2020; etc.); however, the line of research focused on the attitudes of students towards their peers in Physical Education classes is increasingly frequent (ABELLÁN *et al.*, 2018a & 2018b; GARCIA, 2016; OCETE *et al.*, 2017; PARADA, 2014; PEREIRA, 2017; REINA *et al.*, 2019; etc.). According to GARCIA *et al.* (2009); RELLO & PUERTA (2014); ALVES (2015) and ABRANTES (2017); among others, regardless of whether it is focused on teachers or students, the theory with the greatest projection that has supported this type of research has been the Theory of Contact (ALLPORT, 1954).

However, RELLO *et al.* (2018) state that the number of intervention studies in the school population has been relatively scarce, despite the recognition of AFD as potential developers of positive attitudes towards disability (LEITÃO & DA SILVA, 2019; McKAY *et al.*, 2018; OCETE *et al.*, 2017; RODRIGUEZ *et al.*, 2017; VIQUEZ *et al.*, 2020; and others). Some examples of research carried out through Physical Education classes with the aim of positively influencing attitudes towards disability from blurred interventions in contact theory are ABELLÁN *et al.* (2018a); KRAHÉ & ALTWASSER (2006); OCETE *et al.* (2015) and RELLO *et al.* (2018).

In fact, many of the studies carried out in Physical Education refer to cross-sectional analyses in order to examine the attitudes of students towards their peers with SEN (GARCIA, 2016; PEREIRA, 2017; REIS, 2016; RODRIGUEZ *et al.*, 2017; etc.). These non-interventional studies usually highlight the importance of this discipline in the development of attitudes towards disability, using variables such as "previous contact with family members or friends with disabilities"; "previous contact with colleagues with disabilities in Physical Education classes"; "respondent's gender"; "educational level"; "type of disability of the colleague"; and so on.

Paradoxically, some research indicated that students who had had previous contact with family members or friends with disabilities, or even experience of direct contact in Physical Education classes with peers with SEN did not have a better attitude when compared to peers who did not have this contact (CABRAL, 2016; PEREIRA, 2017; REIS, 2016). In this sense, we focus on the fact that mere contact between people with and without disabilities — or students with and without SEN — alone is not enough to promote positive attitudes (BARR & BRACCHITTA, 2015). Therefore, we believe that the structuring of the contact, as well as its quantitative and qualitative aspects, are decisive for the success of positive change of attitudes and the abandonment of prejudices and stereotypes in relation to disability.

Regarding this structuring of contact, without detriment to what happened during the interaction in the school environment, the Physical Education class provides an adequate

formal means for the implementation of numerous forms and possibilities of action. In its favor, this discipline presupposes an equality of *status* between colleagues, which constitutes one of the favorable basic conditions of contact theory (ALLPORT, 1971).

However, we can ask ourselves whether the current misinformation about disability of the various members of the school educational community — sometimes based on the medical model of disability and limitation — allows us to understand diversity from equity and not in the mold of charity. In response, we stress that awareness and information about diversity must be stimulated and sustained by an inclusive and intentional school culture, that is, through conscious institutional support, which is another of the propitious conditions of Gordon Allport's theory.

Regarding the other two conditions for the success of contact-based proposals (cooperative work and intimate and deep experience that leads to better knowledge), we refer to the need for intentional pedagogical work that enhances an inclusive climate of sharing and collaboration, where success is experienced without necessarily going through competition. Thus, we perceive that, *a priori*, the context of Physical Education allows the construction of mutually significant interactions, both at the cognitive, affective and motor levels, where students can get to know each other better, having the opportunity to share feelings, a fact that can hardly occur in casual and sporadic contacts (BARR & BRACCHITTA, 2015; LEITÃO & DA SILVA, 2019).

According to the quantitative aspects, the studies by REINA *et al.* (2011) and RELLO *et al.* (2018) indicate that prolonged contact between pupils with and without SEN has a more positive and long-lasting effect over time than shorter interventions. In fact, proposals with a longer duration (CABRAL, 2016; OCETE *et al.*, 2015; and RELLO *et al.*, 2018; VÍQUEZ *et al.* 2020) had a greater effect on attitude than shorter studies (ABELLÁN *et al.*, 2018a; DE LA OSA & HERNANDEZ, 2018; KRAHÉ & ALTWASSER, 2006).

As stated by LEITÃO & DA SILVA (2019), without ignoring the importance of the duration of the contact, efforts should also be made on the qualitative factors (interdependence of objectives, methodology, selected contents, etc.) that govern this contact. As an example, the introduction of inclusive thematic units in Physical Education classes through recreational activities and adapted sports (e.g. football for the visually impaired, goalball, Paralympic bocce, adapted athletics, etc.), seem to positively influence the promotion of attitudes towards disability (ABELLÁN *et al.*, 2018a; CABRAL, 2016; DE LA OSA & HERNANDEZ, 2018; LUNDBERG *et al.*, 2008; OCETE, *et al.*, 2015; REINA *et al.*, 2011; SANTANA & GAROZ, 2013).

Following this idea, we believe that the use of conventional sports in the conventional molds, allowing the redundancy, stipulated in most of the current *curricula* of the discipline of Physical Education, do not contribute to the inclusion of students with disabilities. In this sense, we advise its reformulation and new content should be proposed (based on the inclusion of playful activities and adapted sports) that enrich Physical Education classes and foster diversity (similar reflections can be found in DE LA OSA & HERNANDEZ, 2018; LUNDBERG *et al.*, 2008; OCETE, 2016; RELLO *et al.*, 2020; RODRÍGUEZ *et al.*, 2017; and others).

For this to happen, it is necessary both institutional support and the training of teachers who must administer these contents; because, as we have already warned, the mere creation of contact situations at school between students with and without SEN — in other words "the integration of students with SEN in the classroom" — is not a sufficient condition for a positive change in the attitudes of students without disabilities towards their students. pairs (PARADA, 2014). On the contrary, when both elements are presented in structured contact environments — inclusive content and teachers trained and motivated for its implementation — the conditions are created for the development of positive attitudes of students without SEN towards disability.

Regarding the evolution of attitudes throughout the levels of education, KRAHÉ & ALTWASSER (2006) suggest that the change in attitudes responds to a developmental process that begins in childhood and evolves positively until the beginning of adolescence — a time when it presents a slight decline — which improves at the end of it and grows throughout life (also suggested by ALVES, 2015).

It is in this sense that research that aims at the positive growth of attitudes towards disability has carried out its interventions mainly with samples of students between 10-13 years old (CABRAL, 2016; DE LA OSA & HERNANDEZ, 2018; RELLO *et al.*, 2018) and 14-16 years old (ABELLÁN *et al.*, 2018a; KRAHÉ & ALTWASSER, 2006; OCETE *et al.*, 2015; REINA *et al.*, 2011).

In addition, LEITÃO & DA SILVA (2019) indicate that the type of disability seems to influence attitudes, with students showing a more positive disposition towards the inclusion of colleagues with physical, motor and sensory disabilities than for colleagues with intellectual disabilities (BARR & BRACCHITTA, 2015). However, the intervention studies presented have not analyzed this association specifically, focusing their interests on the positive development of attitudes based on physical-motor disabilities (DE LA OSA & HERNANDEZ, 2018; KRAHÉ & ALTWASSER, 2006), visual (REINA *et al.*, 2011; RELLO *et al.*, 2018), intellectual (ABELLÁN *et al.*, 2018a) or several simultaneously (CABRAL, 2016; OCETE *et al.*, 2015).

A possible explanation for this limitation may be related to the fact that all these studies use the simulation technique, which constitutes a difficulty for carrying out specific research on intellectual disability. In this sense, the use of this technique in recreational and sports activities based on the simulation of physical-motor and sensory disabilities seems to have a greater experiential effect on the participants.

Regarding the student's gender, the results seem to conclude that girls have more positive attitudes towards peers with disabilities than boys (CABRAL, 2016; REINA *et al.*, 2011; RELLO *et al.*, 2018). These results coincide with those found in VAN BIESEN *et al.* (2006); PARADA (2014); RODRÍGUEZ *et al.* (2017); and others; being pointed out as explanatory hypotheses the greater empathy of women in relation to men (RELLA *et al.*, 2018); or different socialization experiences, and culturally girls have been educated to be more attentive, affectionate and tolerant (ALVES, 2015).

In addition to the effect of Physical Education didactic units created *ex professo* for the development of positive attitudes of students without SEN towards their peers with SEN through direct contact, another program explored in this context is related to the implementation of the "*Paralympic School Day*" (ABELLÁN *et al.*, 2018a; LEITÃO & DA SILVA; 2019).

The "*School Paralympic Day*" is an educational program that was developed by the International Paralympic Committee in order to increase knowledge about the Paralympic Movement and its sports. Meanwhile, the programme also aims to improve the understanding of the practice of inclusion at school through physical activity, facilitating positive change in attitudes towards people with disabilities.

Thus, the program was designed by experts in Paralympic sports, pedagogy and disability who tried to achieve these goals through fun physical and sports activities for children from 6 to 15 years old (BORGMAN & GAVIÃO, 2015; IPC, 2006). According to MCKAY *et al.* (2015), the School Paralympic Day curriculum is based on four values: respect for sporting achievement, respect and acceptance of individual differences, sport as a human right, and training and social support in sport.

In general, the results of research carried out in the context of the implementation of the "*School Paralympic Day*" program have been imprecise, with positive changes in relation to the inclusion of colleagues with SEN (LIU *et al.*, 2010; MCKAY *et al.*, 2015; PANAGIOTOU *et al.*, 2008; XAFOPOULOS *et al.*, 2009), but not always with a significant level (VAN BIESEN *et al.*, 2006).

Thus, the effect of the program indicates relatively positive changes in attitude towards the inclusion of colleagues with SEN in the classroom, but at the same time students do not

wish to modify the rules of the sport or adapt the activities to accommodate these colleagues (JESINA *et al.*, 2006; LIU *et al.*, 2010; PANAGIOTOU *et al.*, 2008; VAN BIESEN *et al.*, 2006; XAFOPOULOS *et al.*, 2009). We can infer that students without SEN understand that peers with SEN can participate in PE classes (collaborative activities), but do not want them in their teams (competition activities).

As indicated by McKAY *et al.* (2015), it is speculated that this situation is due, on the one hand, to the students' desire to win — who play with a high level of competitiveness with powerful teammates (PANAGIOTOU *et al.*, 2008) — and on the other hand, to the students' little knowledge about the adaptation and modification of sports rules. Also, XAFOPOULOS *et al.* (2009) indicate that this fact could be related to the fact that adaptations in the rules would distract children from the high levels of competition and challenge.

Therefore, there seems to be a contrast between enthusiasm and motivation for the task, *versus* the result (winning or losing); which brings us closer to differentiating between performance objectives and task-focused objectives (LEITÃO & DA SILVA, 2019). However, the theory of contact (ALLPORT, 1971) highlights cooperative activities to the detriment of competitive activities for the development of positive attitudes for acceptance of difference. Therefore, competition-based activities could act as an impediment to the development of positive attitudes towards colleagues with SEN.

As a conclusion, we agree that the results of most studies carried out on the "School Paralympic Day" show an increase in the positive attitudes of students without SEN in relation to their peers with SEN, so its implementation seems to contribute to children becoming aware of their values and attitudes towards people with different abilities. As noted, research on changing attitudes through AFD indicates that interventions that combine structured activities of contact, simulation, knowledge acquisition and awareness-raising — as is the case with this program — are effective in achieving this goal (LIU *et al.*, 2010; McKAY *et al.*, 2015, 2019; PANAGIOTOU *et al.*, 2008; REINA *et al.*, 2011; RELLO & PUERTA, 2014; XAFOPOULOS *et al.*, 2009).

3 PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND SPORT IN THE PROMOTION OF POSITIVE ATTITUDES THROUGH CONTACT BETWEEN GROUPS

As stated by FRANÇA (2020), sport has been assuming a fundamental role in society, becoming one of its pillars and becoming the biggest social event of the millennium. In fact, this phenomenon is inevitably shaped by social changes and crises, which are deeply rooted in human life.

Therefore, sport is one of the experiences that participates and contributes to our socialization process, and there are numerous and diverse ways to approach it. Therefore, we can find it "in practice, but also in entertainment, in conversations with friends, at school and even in our dreams" (SOTO, 2009, p. 177).

From this we can infer that, as a social activity, sport refers to a vast repertoire of symbols, values, norms and behaviours that clearly recognise it and distinguish it from other social practices. In this regard, we must take into account that nowadays, sport is a tool for the massive communication of values and attitudes with enormous political, economic, social and cultural repercussions (MARQUES, 2016).

In addition to the relevance conferred on it, AFD has acquired a prominent place in the quality of life of its practitioners, and it is accepted that the acquisition of habits that include these practices are beneficial since they help prevent diseases, improve mood, raise self-esteem, contribute to the integral formation of the individual and promote interaction and social inclusion (BOFILL RÓDENAS, 2010; MOLERO *et al.*, 2016; MONTEIRO, 2020; SARAIVA *et al.*, 2013; VITORINO *et al.*, 2015).

Based on the last benefit indicated, we believe that AFDs that are carried out in inclusive environments can contribute to the promotion of positive attitudes towards people with disabilities. The concept of "inclusive sport" appears here, perceived as AFD that enables people with and without disabilities to practice together, adjusting to the particularities of the participants and maintaining the objective of the sports specialty in question (OCETE, 2016). This presupposes an adaptation of the regulation and the material in order to encourage the active and effective participation of all participants.

However, there are few interventions related to direct contact within the framework of AFD inclusive, due to the difficulty in obtaining a significant sample of people with and without disabilities coinciding in the same sports practice (PEREZ-TEJERO *et al.*, 2012). It is in this sense that most of the research has been produced in the educational context where the legislative obligation facilitates its organization.

However, some works such as those of REINA (2003) and TEIXEIRA (2014), have had positive results through the realization of massive recreational practical days on public roads. These authors implemented the work through recreational-sports activities, facilitation of information about adapted sport and disability, and direct contact with people with disabilities in inclusive environments. Outside the discussion about the greater or lesser control of the variables that influence attitudes, we believe that the determinant is in the interaction produced as a consequence of the practice of inclusive DFA, and not so much the context in which it occurs.

It is in this sense that most of the studies analyzed (ABELLÁN *et al.*, 2018a; DE LA OSA & HERNANDEZ, 2018; GARCIA *et al.*, 2009; OCETE, 2016; PEINADO, 2017; SANTANA & GAROZ, 2013; and others) adapted AFD as part of the Physical Education discipline. This has been done as specific thematic units within the dosage, or even using models of pedagogical action, for example, through the "Sports Education Model".⁴ This model has been proposed, within the inclusive context, as a facilitator of positive attitudes towards disability.

According to FOLEY *et al.* (2007), through direct contact, simulation and personal experience, the "Sports Education Model" can help to improve students' understanding of peers with SEN, increasing socialization among them, and providing a better perception of the challenges that peers with disabilities may face during games or in a sports competition.

In any case, outside the educational field — including the "School Paralympic Day" program — there are few proposals for changing attitudes through direct contact in the sports field (McKAY *et al.*, 2015). It should be noted that most of them have focused on physical-motor disabilities to carry out their program (BERGMAN & HANSON, 2000; LUNDBERG *et al.*, 2008; PAPAIOANNOU *et al.*, 2014; PÉREZ-TEJERO *et al.*, 2012) and other studies have served a wider range of groups, such as REINA (2003) and VÍQUEZ *et al.* (2020). According to GARCÍA *et al.* (2009), activities focused on physical-motor and visual disabilities have been the most recurrent, especially if simulation is foreseen among the strategies.

Regarding duration, some studies have been implemented for only one or two days, such as those carried out by REINA (2003) and BERGMAN & HANSON (2000) respectively; and others have lasted several days (PÉREZ-TEJERO *et al.*, 2012), and even several weeks (LUNDBERG *et al.*, 2008; PAPAIOANNOU *et al.*, 2014; VÍQUEZ *et al.*, 2020). In this sense, the surveys that have applied their actions for a longer period of time have had a greater effect on attitudes, compared to those that have had a shorter duration.

In fact, agreeing with McKAY *et al.* (2015), ABELLÁN *et al.* (2018a) and LEITÃO & DA SILVA (2019), although one-day implementations have had positive results, it seems that actions with a longer duration tend to improve attitude in the short and long term. Reinforcing this idea, RELLO *et al.* (2018) propose a minimum of eight sessions to ensure a significant and time-stable change in attitudes.

According to GARCÍA *et al.* (2009) and ALVES (2015) the most used technique in changing attitudes has been direct contact, followed by information, and most interventions have been interested in both simultaneously (LUNDBERG *et al.*, 2008; PAPAIOANNOU *et*

⁴Presented as a transforming agent of Thematic Units in sports experiences for students through their involvement in the organization of activities, providing them with pleasurable moments, and developing teamwork and spirit (MESQUITA *et al.*, 2016).

al., 2014; PÉREZ-TEJERO *et al.*, 2012; REINA, 2003; VÍQUEZ *et al.*, 2020). Regarding information, there seems to be a certain consensus that knowledge about disability — which can be acquired from reading a book, during a lecture, or even watching a movie — helps to improve sensitivity to people with disabilities, reverting in favor of positive attitudes (ALVES, 2015).

In fact, according to the multidimensional concept of attitude mentioned above (RODRIGUES *et al.*, 2009), the predisposition to an action would start from the coherence between the cognitions and the affections that the subject has over the social object. Therefore, it is necessary to act intentionally both on the ideas and beliefs of the person — through information and direct contact — and on the affective through direct contact.

Similarly, simulation has been used as a valid technique for positive attitudinal change in DFA, and is often used in conjunction with previous ones (REINA, 2003; LUNDBERG *et al.*, 2008; PAPAIOANNOU *et al.*, 2014; VÍQUEZ *et al.*, 2020). However, some people with disabilities have criticized the use of this technique alleging a potential harm, since it focuses on the challenges associated with limitations, losing the broader social framework, and may perpetuate negative stereotypes (French, 1996; as cited in LUNDBERG *et al.*, 2008).

Along the same lines, MAGALHÃES & CARDOSO (2010) warn that the experience of an artificial situation of disability (e.g., blindfolding or using wheelchairs to move around) can have a negative effect, since the simulation does not make it possible to understand how the person with disabilities experiences their relationship with the environment, leading to the conclusion of how bad the situation of the other (blind or wheelchair user) is, and, therefore, negatively valuing the situation of the person with disabilities. However, these assessments lack scientific support, and simulation is recognized as one of the appropriate techniques for positive change of attitudes at AFD (ALVES, 2015; BORGMAN & GAVIÃO, 2015; OCETE *et al.*, 2015; OCETE, 2016; RELLO *et al.*, 2018; and others).

Regardless of the techniques used, the results seem to show that programs that only use a single technique, such as the study by BERGMAN & HANSON (2000), have no significant (or less significant) effects on positive change in attitudes towards disability. However, proposals that employed different techniques, such as LUNDBERG *et al.* (2008); PÉREZ-TEJERO *et al.* (2012); PAPAIOANNOU *et al.* (2014) and VÍQUEZ *et al.* (2020); achieved more encouraging results. Similar effects were obtained by Krahé & Altwasser (2006) and Rello *et al.* (2018), who concluded that groups that received a greater number of stimuli, from different techniques, had a greater effect on attitudes.

From the above, we want to agree that interventions that promote an active experience of participants with the aim of improving attitudes — such as those proposed within the

framework of AFD — are more effective than those that present passive forms of mere exposure to information. Reinforcing this reflection, Yuker and Block (1979, p. 55; as cited in ALVES, 2015, p. 133) stated: "to change attitudes it is necessary to get people to do something. Attitudes are rarely changed through lectures or written materials. The only real way to change attitudes is to get people to participate actively."

4 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Although the Contact Theory proposed by ALLPORT (1954) was belatedly applied to research focused on changing attitudes towards disability, from the 70s onwards research directed at this field proliferated. Many of these studies have used AFD as an ideal means to change positive attitudes towards disability, obtaining promising results (ANACLETO, 2018; CABRAL, 2016; DE LA OSA & HERNANDEZ, 2018; McKAY *et al.*, 2015, 2019; PAPAIOANNOU *et al.*, 2014; VÍQUEZ *et al.*, 2020; among others) element.

In fact, we find contact with people with disabilities as one of the variables that lead to success both in school programs — through the subject of Physical Education — and through AFD (CAMPOS *et al.*, 2013; GARCIA, 2016; MACMILLAN *et al.*, 2013; REINA *et al.*, 2019; REIS, 2016; RELLO *et al.*, 2018; TEIXEIRA, 2014; VÍQUEZ *et al.*, 2020; etc.). In this way, studies continue to proliferate that demonstrate that these areas, when programmed under a paradigm of social inclusion, can be an extraordinary means to improve the attitudes of people without disabilities towards people with disabilities (ABELLÁN *et al.*, 2018a; CAMPOS *et al.*, 2013; MAHL, 2016; OCETE *et al.*, 2015; OCETE, 2016; OMOTE, 2018; RELLO *et al.*, 2020; SOO *et al.*, 2014; and others).

Thus, AFD proposals with an interest in the social inclusion of people with disabilities must necessarily be presented as a transversal tool aimed at the construction of skills and social spaces that generate values, and that promote human development from a holistic view of the being.

It is in this way that AFD presents itself as instruments that potentially facilitate the effective process of inclusion of people with disabilities (ANACLETO, 2018; DENARDIN, 2011; FREIRE, 2010; GORGATTI & COSTA, 2005; LEITÃO & DA SILVA, 2019; McKAY *et al.*, 2019; MONTEIRO, 2012; OCETE *et al.*, 2015; OCETE, 2016; REINA *et al.*, 2019; RELLO *et al.*, 2020; RODRIGUEZ de VERA, 2013; VÍQUEZ *et al.*, 2020; and others).

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