

## APPLICATIONS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE IN SPORT INITIATION

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*En este trabajo se analiza la aplicación de la psicología en la iniciación deportiva. Así, lo primero que se desarrolla es un apartado dedicado a analizar los diferentes factores que afectan a la práctica deportiva en estas edades de iniciación, destacando, a continuación, las diferentes intervenciones que, sobre éstos, se han ido realizando. Intervenciones que abarcan tanto a las personas que rodean a los niños como a los objetos deportivos, como a las propias normas. También se dedica un apartado especial a la iniciación deportiva de cara a la tecnificación de los deportistas, finalizando con un análisis de las competencias que debe tener el psicólogo que pretenda aplicar los conocimientos psicológicos en la iniciación deportiva.*

**Palabras clave:** *Iniciación, Psicología del deporte, Competencias del psicólogo*

*The application of psychology in the initiation to sport is analyzed in this paper. Thus, the first section is devoted to analyzing the various factors affecting the practice of sports at the initiation stage. It then highlights the different interventions that have been carried out in reference to them. These interventions encompass diverse factors ranging from the people in the children's environment to sporting goods, as well as the rules themselves. A special section is also dedicated to sport initiation with regard to the technification of the athletes and finishes with an analysis of the competencies required of the psychologist who intends to apply psychological knowledge to sports initiation.*

**Key Words:** *Initiation, Sport psychology, Psychologist's competencies.*

### 1. - INTRODUCTION

Before going into greater detail about the content of this article, we would like to clarify the concept of sport initiation to which we will herein make reference.

Thus, the word initiation makes reference to "the beginning of something", but it is not the same to begin to do a sport at an early age as to begin at an advanced age, although it is true that at both ages it is possible to begin to do some type of physical exercise and/or sport.

In our case, we will make a more general mention of the beginning of the sports practice of children who are "initiating" in physical/sport activity, understanding that there may be "older people" who are "initiating or beginning to" participate in some systematized physical activity.

It is also true that depending, among other things, on the type of sport, the initiation age may vary, beginning at a younger or older age in function of the specific sport to be practiced; although, as we have just indicated, we will attempt to give a "general overview" of sport initiation focusing on children, without a specific orientation in sports technification.

Finally, we must not forget that physical activity may be started for very different reasons, which we will now differentiate:

- ✓ the systematic physical activity carried out at school, known as "physical education", and which sometimes includes competition between educational centers;
- ✓ extra-curricular sport, generally organized by town halls and/or public sports entities, whose priority is usually competition (less often health, unfortunately).

We will not enter into detail at this point about whether or not competitiveness is convenient at these ages, nor about the excessive emphasis put on the result or on the task, questions we will address more broadly later, but we do wish to underline the fact that the different objectives set in one or the other type of physical activity can change the arguments and the activities that are carried out in one or the other, emphasizing more the obligatory nature of the former as in primary and secondary education - and of the voluntary nature of the latter, also understanding that "free choice" does not exist as long as it is "conditioned" or "affected" by different questions, mostly of a social nature, often obeying the interests of adults more than those of the children themselves.

Subsequently, we will elaborate on these aspects, but we emphasize, once more, that our viewpoint herein is

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“general”, addressing more the initiation of a sports practice with the aim of “creating healthy habits” than the aim of “creating high performance athletes”.

A second aspect that we would like to clarify in this introduction is what psychological knowledge can be applied in sports initiation.

Evidently, the answer could be so ample that we will be limited to saying that what we want to emphasize in this article is the application of psychological knowledge to sports initiation without making special reference to any of the areas in which psychology is usually divided, therefore the following would be applicable:

- ✓ Developmental and educational psychology, for obvious reasons;
- ✓ Social and organizational psychology, as they are behaviors observed in society and in organizations;
- ✓ Personality, assessment and treatment, understood not as therapeutic but as strengtheners of psychological skills, as in training or coaching;
- ✓ Basic psychology, emotions, motivation, learning, etc;
- ✓ Psychobiology, as we must not forget that those who practice sports are biological organisms; and,
- ✓ The methodology of behavior sciences, as it must be work that is applied in a methodic way.

Having clarified this, we will go on to analyze the factors that influence said behavior, the motives for the practice and abandonment of physical exercise and sport, and the functions that the psychologist must perform when applying his/her knowledge in these situations, but not before recommending some manuals where these aspects are addressed more widely to interested readers, for example: Williams (1991), Buceta (1996), Weinberg and Gould, (1996), Dosil, (2001), Olmedilla, Garcés and Nieto (2002), and González and Dosil (2003), among others.

## 2.- FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE SPORT INITIATION

As we have just said, we will focus on sport initiation at school ages, being aware that the factors that we will declare to be influential may affect other age groups in varying measures. A broader analysis of motivation in sport initiation can be found, for example, in Cruz, (1997).

With reference to the classification of these variables that affect behavior – in this case, sport – we will group said factors based on the interbehavioral model (Kantor, 1967; Ribes and López, 1985), in such a way that, on the one hand we will group factors that affect the here and

now – situational – and on the other, those that compose our personal experience – historical.

### 2.1. Situational factors

In this section, it is worth distinguishing the factors that affect the context from those that affect the organization, placing, among the first, the other organizations or people – who we will call social agents – and sports objects; and, among the second, the biological conditions of the organism.

The role of these social agents has been widely studied, and more specifically in the sports sphere, for example by Boixadós, Valiente, Mimbrero, Torregrosa and Cruz (1998), and Pallares (1998). Later, we will address the possible assessment of these agents, although it is obvious the influence that parents, trainers, managers, teammates, referees, etc, have in sport initiation.

We must not forget that, besides other organizations or people, the child who begins physical exercise or sport uses objects appropriate to sport, following specific norms, and that both the objects and the norms can and must be adapted. This is what happens with what is called 7-a-side football or mini-basketball, to cite two well-known examples.

In reference to biological conditions, we could say that their study concerns physical trainers and physicians and/or physiotherapists more, as they encompass what we know as “physical condition”, although we must not forget that these physiological aspects are in function, “or depend on” these children’s interactions at the same time, for which the psychologist must contribute his/her knowledge to the multi-discipline team in charge of the sports activity to be performed.

We will not enter into a discussion as to whether biological condition is the cause or consequence of sports practice, but we can affirm that our body is the “product” of our physical activity, and that at initiation, the biological age to which we are referring, has specific experiential and biological characteristics that we must take into account in our analysis when confronted with a possible intervention.

### 2.2. Historical factors

In this section, we refer to the history of these subjects related to sport – experience that, as we have just stated, shapes our biological or physical state and in some ways, favors or hinders - makes likely - our different ways of behaving here and now.



However, we should not forget that in this work we are referring to “initiation”, that is, with scarce or no history of physical activity, and we are referring especially to young ages, which implies very little experience in general.

At the same time, we must say that the way this “first” encounter with physical activity is produced may be relevant when “continuing” to carry out an activity, in such a way that the psychologist must attempt to achieve that the factors affecting it are “as favorable as possible” to said behavior.

Attempting to transfer knowledge acquired in the laboratory to sports initiation, and using an analogy, we can say that the fact that a pigeon executes a certain behavior – peck the operand or hit a ball, for example, depends on previous history and the circumstances in which it was produced, among which the consequences of said physical activity are found. In this regard, we could say that social agents act as if they were “dispensers of positive reinforcements” in a way consistent with the physical or sports activity.

It is essential to remember that reinforcements must be given according to a previously established “program” and at the appropriate times. The psychologist, who applies his/her knowledge in the initiation, needs the “social agents” to grant these reinforcements, mostly social, at the appropriate time and in an appropriate way, otherwise the “pigeon may stop doing its physical activity”.

It is also obvious to indicate that it is not only the extrinsic reinforcements that maintain said behavior, but that a behavior can also be maintained because it is an enjoyable activity in itself, for example, thanks to the norms or that doing it requires little effort by the subject (because of the adaptation of the objects and norms to the experience of the individual) and that, finally, all intervention must be programmed to be as individualized as possible. We will speak more about this in the following section on psychological intervention.

### 3. PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERVENTION IN SPORTS INITIATION

In this section, we will analyze the different elements that can be intervened by psychologists in sports initiation, indicating that in our work we are centered on what is known as “indirect intervention” given that the cases in which a direct intervention is needed with athletes are usually scarcer (at least at the initiation stage), or they are

usually those directed at optimizing results through technification; however, we will dedicate a small section to intervention in ages directed at performance enhancement.

We will attempt to review the types of indirect intervention carried out with different factors:

#### 3.1. Indirect intervention through coaches

As we stated above, at least for athletes of these ages, coaches become one of the key figures given that they are the ones who “teach” how to be “good athletes” and following the previous laboratory analogy, they are important because they become “dispensers of positive reinforcements” after the children’s actions, as well as being the “instructors” with “discriminating criteria” before the actions and a models to imitate “during” training sessions.

It is for this reason that it is “essential” to count on their adequate participation. Nevertheless, and contrary to the automatic “eaters”, coaches are more difficult to “program”.

It is precisely this difficulty that makes us work “directly” with them to modify, if it should be necessary, their own behavior with the children, taking into account that for all modification it is essential to start from the baseline, or in other words, start with the coach’s habitual behavior, adapting ourselves to his/her habits and knowing his/her objectives, worries, styles, etc.

This importance of the coach as “communicator”, “dispenser of reinforcements”, “source of stimulation and instruction”, and so on, is what led Smith, Smoll and Curtis (1979) to elaborate the CBAS as a measure for establishing the baseline of coaches’ behavior in relation to the behavior of the athletes, being followed, in the original study and in many consequent studies (Martin and Hrycaiko, 1983; Cruz, 1994; Alonso, Bóixados and Cruz, 1995; Smoll and Smith, 2002; Smoll and Smith, 2006) by an intervention stage through their assessment and training.

In this regard, coaches can be assessed on aspects such as motivation, communication, learning, and the establishment of objectives, leadership and many more.

Following Cantón (1999), the following recommendations must be made:

1. They should be centered on teaching, with a positive and fun focus.
2. They should be varied and adapted to the subject’s activity, not the opposite, and the difficulty should be



sequenced based on the subject's own abilities, not recommending competition too soon (or to place too much emphasis on it)..

3. Realistic expectations should be established for each minor in function of age and previous repertoire.
4. Brief and precise instructions and demonstrations should be given according to the ages of the subjects in this period of initiation. In this regard, it is convenient to use imitation – and not only instruction – as a means of learning.
5. Correct executions must be praised frequently, not only for the effectiveness of results, even though, as some say, "it is their obligation to do it well".
6. It is advisable to reward effort more than results, given that if a good process (of initiation and technification) is carried out, good results will be obtained in due time.
7. A positive focus must be used to correct mistakes, providing information in order to correct mistakes and do it well and not so much making special mention of the mistakes committed; this is what is known in the CBAS as "Mistake-contingent technical instruction".
8. Fear of making mistakes and being injured must be reduced, showing the child confidence regarding its good execution and its safety.
9. If necessary, the rules must be modified and adapted to the subject and/or group in order to increase action and participation.
10. Lastly, we must always be enthusiastic for it is contagious.

### 3.2. Indirect intervention through parents

In the case of parents, something similar to what happens with trainers occurs; although they do not interact as directly with the children during training sessions, they do usually interact with them during a good part of the rest of the day, being, among other things, those who take the children to these training sessions.

In this regard, parents are those who decide or help to decide about whether to do a physical activity or not, what type of activity to practice (competitive, recreational, etc.), where to do it (given its proximity, price, etc.), what to value in said activity, and so on.

It is for this reason that good communication must be established with them so that they can, in turn, know how to transmit the information in a suitable way to their children and so become new "dispensers of

reinforcements, instructions, etc." as well.

However, not all parents are the same and although we could say that each one is a world to explore, it is also true that following Smoll (1986), we can classify them in function of their behavior into five types of parents:

1. Auxiliary-coach parents: those who act as if they were coaches, often questioning the technical decisions made by these.
2. Hypercritical parents (with their children): those who center their attention more on their children's mistakes than on what they do right.
3. Vociferous parents: those who are constantly giving instructions from the sidelines.
4. Overprotective parents: those who try to prevent their children from receiving any pain, either physical or moral.
5. Disinterested parents: those who simply leave their children at these activities for a certain period of time without taking an interest in their progress, learning, etc.

Independent from the type of parents – at times, the interest of the psychologist should not lie so much in categorizing as in intervening – the intervention of the psychologist must be aimed at achieving that the parents, according to Gordillo (1992):

- a. Accept the coach's role as the person who makes decisions and knows and has his/her own criteria about: who to include in the starting lineup; that activities always teach something; what is suitable or not to the sports group under those circumstances, etc.
- b. Accept their children's successes and failures as not everyone will become elite athletes (for this reason they are elite, because there are very few...) and that, even though they are good, they will also make mistakes and fail in their activities, the most important thing being to learn to face these failures more than trying to avoid or eliminate them if they happen.
- c. Show sufficient dedication and interest, because excesses on one side or the other are bad.
- d. Help their children to make their own decisions because sooner or later they will have to do it and now is the time, in the initial phase of the process, to help them to make their own decisions without that meaning they have to remain at the opposite end of disinterest.
- e. Be a model of self-control for their son/daughter, be-



cause if they begin to question, for example, unfavorable decisions made by the referee during a match, the most normal thing is that the children imitate that behavior and stop focusing their attention on the play itself and become more focused on the referee's decisions than on the interactions with their teammates, their opponents and the sporting objectives.

Thus, it is in this regard that parents should be assessed and trained, without this becoming what is known as the "parenting school" which many parents are reluctant to attend; although, it is true that many parents like to be guided in what and how to do with respect to their children, at least in sport that is the activity we are concerned with in this paper, keeping in mind that if we modify the behavior of these parents, we will have been successful in favoring the change in the behavior of those who are beginning a sport. Some manuals that deal with this topic are, for example, Gimeno (2003), Peris (2003) and Ortín (2008).

It is obvious to indicate that this assessment/training must be produced throughout the entire process, as much before as during and after the competition, in such a way that for example:

- ✓ Beforehand, they can be helped to behave in an appropriate way during the competition, by informing them, for example, that if they do not encourage their children, their opponents certainly will not, it being their job as spectators and parents to encourage their children during the competition.
- ✓ During the competition, they can receive feedback about their own behavior during the match.
- ✓ Afterwards, the events can be revised, strategies can be created and behavioral objectives established for the competition itself.

In this regard, and hoping that our analogy is understood, we can say that parents can and must also "be trained" as "stimulation feeders or dispensers".

### 3.3. Indirect intervention through other variables

We do not wish to end this section about intervention without remembering that we can work both directly and indirectly with:

- ✓ Referees: they are the ones who must teach children to obey the regulations, as they are in charge of applying the rules along with their corresponding penalties, but always keeping in mind their educational undertaking at these ages.

- ✓ Managers: at the end of the day, they are the ones who give instructions to, praise and punish the coaches and have certain "competencies" to "be able" to change certain things, although, it is true that their collaboration is often very difficult, without having to disregard their collaboration for that reason, and thus, try to obtain it.
- ✓ Peers: at these ages, belonging to the group is very important; they also strengthen and create "norms" or have "beliefs" about reality, act as leaders, etc. (Escarti and Garcia Ferriol, 1994).
- ✓ The norms: although they are often "imposed", they can be adapted in and for some circumstances by the managers and even by the coaches themselves during the training sessions.
- ✓ The sports objectives: although they may be adapted by "norms", they can and should be adapted by "circumstances" as well.
- ✓ Any other variable that can intervene in behavior and about which we can exercise some type of control, within our possibilities.

It goes without saying that our interventions are often insufficient to produce an "immediate" change, but like any medication, various "ingestions" are necessary to obtain the behavior change. In addition, this change is slow and gradual, which should cause us to take into consideration the time that we have for the intervention and the necessity of reaching these objectives within a certain time period, given that, presumably, a "prescription" is not usually enough, but that "taking the adequate dose" becomes necessary, or in our case, "to practice" these new ways of behavior by parents.

In this regard, we must not forget that what has been heretofore mentioned is focused fundamentally on sports initiation in children with a view to creating an adequate motivational climate (Bóixados and Cruz, 2000) that favors the modification of their habits and achieving that these are adapted to a certain way of behavior without intending to reach any short or medium-term performance objectives, which would lead us to a somewhat different intervention.

### 3.4. Direct intervention with a view to optimizing performance in children

However, there is another reality in sports with children, which on multiple occasions leads to confusion when speaking about "base or initiation sports". We are referring to performance sports at early ages, especially





in certain sports modalities, and as Torregrosa and Cruz (2006) indicated, initiation sports can be used as a base by active adults and high-performance athletes for a sports career.

The sports demands of the club where the practice is carried out will, on many occasions, mark the sports demands made on the athlete, in this case, a child, and the psychologist cannot dissociate him/herself from this reality. It is not the same to play soccer, for example, in inferior categories of first or even second division leagues, that is to say professional clubs, as to play in regional reserve leagues. The first must be considered as High Performance Centers, and therefore, their project and objective is to train professional soccer players. Examples of these sports projects can be found in Llames (1994), Morilla, Pérez, Gamito, Gomez, Sánchez and Valiente (2003) or Vives and Garcés (2003).

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Likewise, in certain sports in which executions require specific physical conditions, the ages of High Performance take place well into the athlete's childhood, for example, in sports such as gymnastics or ice-skating.

Nevertheless, as we have stated, the psychologist cannot dissociate him/herself from this reality, and thus his/her work and its objectives must be aimed at obtaining the maximum sports performance possible from said athletes. This does not mean that training method ethics are violated or that the principals of protecting the athletes' mental health are forgotten.

In all athletes, whatever their age may be, the psychological skills that intervene in performance are the same. The variability of one or the others depends more on the sports modality than on the athlete's age. Therefore, it will be necessary to work the same as with adults: activation control, attentional skills, motivation, coping capacity, etc.

Thus, in these types of interventions, the work programs follow the same parameters as for adult athletes, with some exceptions that we would like to comment on, as a result of our experience in the last twenty years, Llames and Garcia (2003).

Perhaps an adequate starting point, although not the most important, would be to care for, attend to and redirect the motivational aspects in an appropriate way. As we will later see, the motives at initiation in sports practice are mostly focused on the task and to intrinsic

factors; in high-performance sports, they usually develop toward more extrinsic orientations, such as social recognition and/or material reward, which does not mean that it is the most fitting way to improve performance.

In sports initiation, even when it is directed at high performance, it is especially important to teach the athlete to assess his development in function of his/her own performance, of the execution of the task, and not the result itself (with the exception of those cases in which we find manifest competitive performance problems).

Therefore, we must pay special attention to their training executions and to development itself, more than to the results of competition. We would like to clarify that this does not at all mean that competition is less important, as it is the competitive results that give us the parameter for knowing whether the athlete is ready to continue advancing toward high-performance sports or on the contrary, he/she should abandon this line and follow the itinerary of "sport-enjoyment", "sport-physical activity" (Llames, 1999).

This leads us to believe, therefore, that adjusting the competitive expectations to the athlete's true performance level is the important thing and must be emphasized. In this regard, it is basic to center on the establishment of objectives (with all the necessary requirements: short, medium and long term, realistic, etc.) both with the athlete and the main agents involved in his/her performance (technicians and parents).

With reference to psychological skills, we should begin with a good assessment, as we will discuss later. Our experience leads us to value a good observation as determinant in the evaluation and collection of information about the agents involved in performance, as well as the athlete's own verbalizations, more than standardized paper-and-pencil tests.

Finally, when we initiate psychological training programs, what we would like to emphasize the most is the necessity of adapting these techniques and exercises to the age of each athlete. We cannot apply the same exercise to a 16 or 17 year-old athlete (which can be the same as for an adult) as to a 5 or 6 year-old child.

In this regard, the aims of our techniques and exercises must be very clearly differentiated as well. At the earliest ages of initiation (up to 12 or 14 years of age depending on the sport and especially on the maturity of the athlete), the application of mental training techniques will be more focused on the athlete learning the execution of the



technique and becoming familiar with the training methodology than on really obtaining the effect that said training will produce in the adult athlete.

For example, if we take a training task in activation control, it is almost impossible for children aged six to relax carrying out Jacobson's progressive muscular relaxation technique, and on many occasions that they can distinguish the tensing-relaxing of muscles that they do not yet control. It is even more difficult for them to obtain that state with Schultz's autogenic training in its original version. Thus, they must be carried out knowing that the desired effect will not be obtained, and we must adapt and modify the language by introducing examples in the form of mental images, which will facilitate the comprehension of the exercise and the "training" in such techniques.

To sum up, in this section, we can highlight two ideas that constitute the pillars of performance sports in inferior categories:

- ✓ When we work in elite sports, and especially in certain sports, we must understand that the athlete, although of a young age, must attain high performance levels, and as a consequence, objective results, and not only enjoyment or the practice of a physical activity. Therefore,
- ✓ The psychologist's work is very similar to that developed with adults, with the exception of having to adapt the exercises and techniques to be used. This task requires great imagination on the part of the professional; for this reason, good training in basic psychology as well as in the peculiarities of each sport is fundamental.

#### 4. MOTIVES FOR SPORTS PRACTICE AT INITIATION AGES

In addition to the factors that influence sports initiation, we do not want to leave out some of the most cited "motives" for sports practice at initiation ages and motives for the abandonment of said practice.

In this regard, it is first worth mentioning that almost all the surveys (e.g., Cantón, Mayor, and Pallares, 1995 and Guillén, Álvarez, García and Dieppa, 2007) indicate enjoyment as a main factor or motive for the practice of a sport. That is to say, often, the most important consideration is the task itself, which is usually fun, until it stops being so and abandonment of said practice is produced.

It can only be said that in order for this practice to be

enjoyable, it is necessary for it to be adequate to the subject's abilities, that it is "easy" to perform although it is a "challenge" for the children, that more emphasis is put on the activity than on the result itself and definitively, that it is an activity in itself motivating, in an intrinsic way.

In this regard, it could be said that it can be an activity where skills can be shown that cannot be shown in other obligatory academic activities at this age, although it is true that, in theory, children practice physical activities as a way of fun and not as a way of "standing out" as sport is an activity of great social importance.

This social emphasis on success causes the subjects to differentiate between mere physical activity and the results of said activity, producing abandonment, above all in those who do not perceive themselves as having sufficient capacity or efficacy to win, and beginning to feel bad for losing, especially when this begins to happen frequently (Cecchini, Méndez and Contreras, 2005).

Given that we cannot all win, in fact only one can, it is advisable to start to appreciate the activity in itself since we can begin to win in other things, such as health, for example.

All this should make us consider that perhaps the aim of the physical activity should be focused more on health than on performance, at least for most people, changing the objectives during the initiation process with a view to there being more subjects who continue practicing the activity than those who abandon it.

This objective seems to be clear in subjects with "special" characteristics, for those for whom the sports and physical activities are increasingly adapted (let us not forget the Paralympics or *Special Olympics*), physical activity for the elderly being a subject of current interest; people who have to be "brought back to" or even "initiated" in physical activity.

What happens is that we go from purely intrinsic motives (although with social consequences: making friends, acquiring social skills, etc.) to more social motives (demands made by coaches, management, society), forgetting to establish personal objectives of acquiring healthy habits.

Besides being personal, these objectives are also social, thus, obviously a healthy society, in all senses, must be the objective of a society that aspires to be in "the highest ranked" (at least in what refers to health, forgive the repetition).

We do not wish to expand on this subject further, it is enough to indicate places where these motives can be



reviewed more broadly (e.g., González, Tabernero and Márquez, 2000), but we do wish to point out that in addition to the variables that affect the here and the now, we must work with the objectives to be established, both personal and social, as they affect present behavior, at the same time we must work with the description of our own history since, in some way, our history – at least our version of it – influences the elaboration of our objectives.

## 5. FUNCTIONS OF THE PSYCHOLOGIST IN SPORTS INITIATION

Herein, our comments will be based on the competencies proposed for psychologists (in general) by Europsy (<http://www.europsy.cop.es/index.php?page=competencias>) and on the functions formulated by the Spanish Psychological Association (COP, 1998) and we will explain them focusing on their application to initiation.

In this regard, the following professional psychology competencies and their subsequent applications, in our case to sports initiation, are proposed:

- a. Definition of the service goals to be carried out.
- b. Psychological, psychodiagnostic and expert assessment.
- c. Development of products and services based on psychological theory and methods.
- d. Psychological intervention, prevention, treatment and rehabilitation.
- e. Evaluation of programs and interventions.
- f. Communication and ethical commitment.

### 5.1. Definition of the service goals to be carried out.

First, the psychologist should carry out a good study of needs before establishing the objectives of the intervention.

We have already mentioned that the psychologist's job can be done indirectly, through other people that are involved in the activity, or directly with the child, without forgetting that we can also work with sports objects and norms; therefore, before proposing any objectives, we should analyze the state of the relationship between these elements, and this is only possible if we address the situation itself, preferably in the field, observe it and ask questions of the subjects who form part of sports initiation.

Only with adequate baseline information can we establish the objectives of our intervention, taking into account that we should not only plan objectives but also possible intervention alternatives.

We cannot forget that in the field, which is more complex than the laboratory, frequently, expected objectives are not easily attained, for which we must be reasonably flexible without this meaning that we completely abandon our objectives.

This leads us to posit the necessity of the professional knowing how to program objectives, as an adequate establishment of objectives, adequate to the situation where they are going to be applied, can be essential in the success of our professional work (Pérez, 1997).

Thus, to be able to reach this competency, double knowledge becomes necessary: on the one hand, of the application itself of psychology to sports initiation, on the other, of the situation in which we will apply our knowledge.

### 5.2. Psychological, psychodiagnostic and expert assessment.

This assessment must be of both the individual and the group, and, if necessary, of the organization itself, taking into account that not only the subject has to be assessed but also, and especially, the person in that situation or context of sport initiation.

In this regard, it is pertinent to mention that it has been quite some time since sport psychology has been talked about, not a psychology of the athlete, making it necessary to analyze all the interactions that are produced in the complex world of sport initiation, and, all this with a methodological rigor, understanding that the measurement must be conducted within the context itself, which often hinders rigor.

However, it is worth mentioning that specific instruments for sport already exist, as well as questionnaires or general tests. Aside from these instruments, we also have the resources of observation or the interview as methods of gathering more information, without forgetting, of course, the psychophysiological registers, keeping in mind that perhaps these are not as useful at these ages (they would be useful, though, if initiation began at different ages or objectives).

This gathering of information is essential with a view to not only defining the objectives of the service, but also to developing the products and the intervention itself, understanding that it must be as consistent as possible, and that it should not be limited to the beginning, but that it should include the assessment of the entire intervention process and the final result.





### 5.3. Development of products and services based on psychological theories and methods

Once an adequate analysis and assessment has been performed, the service to provide must be designed, understanding this as an elaborate product in function of the context of the intervention (an example of this could be that presented by Sousa, Cruz, Torregrosa, Vilches and Viladrich (2006).

Said product or service can be implemented and assessed in a continuous manner with a view to checking its effectiveness, understanding that said effectiveness has been defined as a step of our intervention. .

In this regard, the use of techniques learned while at university is allowed as long as these are adapted to the person and the context, keeping in mind that in sports initiation, the main objective should be the training and development of the participants.

Thus, our intervention should be directed fundamentally at:

- ✓ the people who surround the subject who is initiating a sport, either by assessing them or by training them;
- ✓ the sports rules and objects, so that they can be adapted to the specific characteristics of these ages;
- ✓ the athletes themselves, with a view to promoting their development and learning, although it is true that this will be favored and/or made difficult by the rest of the factors previously described.

### 5.4. Psychological intervention, prevention, treatment and rehabilitation.

It has been mentioned above that intervention in sports initiation essentially takes place through indirect intervention with the athletes, or, what is the same thing, through direct intervention on the situation (including people, objects and norms), in the form of training and guidance, although it is true that a direct intervention is sometimes needed in very special cases.

It is for this reason that we can almost say that more than an intervention –in its therapeutic and healing sense - it is an intervention with a preventive aspect as its focus must be oriented toward the good development of children regarding their formation as individuals –apart from the aspect of technification that we have mentioned before - and, thus, more than a “treatment” for problems, our intervention must be directed at education as prevention.

Needless to say, too often the presence of the psychologist is required for solving problems that are already present, probably due to an inadequate interaction between the elements, although we should not

forget that our main function must be education and training, but without abandoning treatment and rehabilitation.

In fact, it is not the first time that sport is used as a means for the education of people in social contexts (Cruz, Boixadós, Torregrosa and Mimbrero, 1996).

Hence, in this area, a good dosis of research about the variables and their effects on the development and training of children who are beginning or initiating in physical activity and sport becomes necessary.

### 5.5. Evaluation of programs and interventions

We have already mentioned the importance of previous and continuous evaluation, thus, we will only mention that a final evaluation of the intervention program is necessary, understanding that the measures that will be used for said evaluation must be planned and the results must be analyzed with a view to making possible adjustments and modifications in posterior interventions.

It also has to be verified to what extent the proposed objectives have been met and if our intervention has been successful (or not), as we should not forget that the extent to which we are useful - and that we are capable of proving it with data- we will be newly hired.

An example of the evaluation of the impact of the physical activity programs is provided, for example, by Valiente, Boixados, Torregrosa, Figueroa, Rodríguez and Cruz (2001).

### 5.6. Communication and ethical commitment.

The objective of evaluation, as we have just mentioned, is not only to obtain information for ourselves, but to communicate it to the client, which can serve, in addition, as feedback, producing new changes in his/her behavior at the same time.

In this regard, the elaboration of final reports that meet this double objective becomes necessary: to inform the client of the achievement of the objectives (or not) and inform ourselves of our effectiveness, which will be useful to us especially in later interventions.

Needless to say, this process must be guided, at all times, by an ethical commitment, just as recommended by the professional associations and schools at both national and international levels.

### 5.7. Facilitating competencies

A last aspect is proposed in relation to the competencies that a psychologist must have when applying his/her knowledge



in sport initiation, and it is the fact that there are some competencies that can facilitate our job as professionals.

Among these we find:

- ✓ having an adequate professional strategy, not only adequate techniques - that we should apply with a minimum of sensitivity;
- ✓ continuing professional development, not ceasing to learn;
- ✓ professional relationships and especially with the multi-professional team;
- ✓ research and development, which must go hand in hand with the application;
- ✓ a minimum of marketing and sales competencies, one must not only be good but, one must also be known, and it is, in this sense, convenient - and necessary - to promote the quality of our work;
- ✓ some or a great deal of the management of our professional responsibility; it is needless to say that it is our profession and we intend to live from it;
- ✓ with management of practice, as one must not only know what or how to do it, but one must know how to do it at the appropriate time and place;
- ✓ with a guarantee of quality, as we must be responsible for our work and, if necessary, have liability insurance;
- ✓ lastly, although not less importantly, we cannot forget a good competency in self-reflection.

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