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ORIGINAL

PROFESSIONALIZATION OF SPORT EDUCATORS IN EUROPEAN PRISONS

LA PROFESIONALIZACIÓN DE LOS EDUCADORES DEPORTIVOS EN PRISIONES EUROPEAS

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ABSTRACT

Sport is nowadays part of the prison landscape and it receives a (re)educational role. Nevertheless, it is unknown how are they developed and the professionalization features of the staff in charge of these activities. Therefore, a sample of 341 professionals from prisons located in five European countries responded to a survey conducted to explore the role that specialized sportive training and instructional design play in the professionalization of sport educators. The results indicate that the specialized sports training is higher among professionals with less years of experience and, especially, among those with higher-university studies. Larger percentage of educators plan the main elements of design, however, half of them still kept in mind the objectives. They mainly use direct instruction methodological strategies and oral forms of assessment. The paper concludes that those educators with less years of experience and more level of education show higher degree of professionalization.

KEY WORDS: instructional design, professional training, prison, correctional education, sport, years of experience, level of studies.

RESUMEN

Actualmente, las actividades físicas y deportivas forman parte del paisaje de las prisiones y se les adjudica un papel (re)educativo. Sin embargo, se desconoce cómo se desarrollan dichas actividades y la profesionalización del personal encargado de las mismas. En este estudio se administró un cuestionario a 341 profesionales de prisiones, ubicadas en cinco países europeos, con el objetivo de indagar en el rol que juega la formación especializada en deportes y el diseño instruccional en la profesionalización de estos educadores. Los resultados indican que la formación deportiva especializada es mayor en los profesionales con menos años de experiencia y, especialmente, en aquellos con estudios superiores. Un gran porcentaje de los educadores planifican los principales elementos del diseño instruccional, aunque la mitad aún mantiene los objetivos en mente. Utilizan principalmente la estrategia metodológica de instrucción directa y formas verbales de evaluación. Se concluye que los educadores noveles con mayor nivel de estudios muestran mayor grado de profesionalización.

PALABRAS CLAVE: diseño instruccional, formación profesional, prisión, deporte, años de experiencia, nivel de estudios.

INTRODUCTION

Physical activities and sports, and the professionals in charge of organizing and developing these activities are part of the penitentiary system of many countries. This situation is the result of a long process of change regarding the role punishment and prisons play in the western society. As pointed out by Foucault (1978), jails are no longer places where people are just locked up, but rather have become a place for reeducation and social rehabilitation. The prisoners are no longer mere convicts but citizens with rights and needs. Therefore, institutions that protect them during their confinement must fulfill these rights and needs.

During the last century, government legislation in many western countries has ensured a more dignified confinement and the development of penitentiary activities consistent with human rights (Council of Europe, 2006; van Zyl & Snacken, 2009). Thus, psychologists, librarians, social workers, lawyers and sports educators have joined to more traditional professionals such as prison officers, correctional teachers, doctors, nurses and the clergy. The new needs and more complex social relationships within the prisons have demanded specialized knowledge and competencies, as well as additional tasks that required new workers. This situation was also accompanied by a broader awareness of inmates' relationships, a greater staff commitment to their rehabilitation roles, as well as an improvement in the (re)educational process (Grant, 2004).

Since the 1970s, a growing interest in increasing the professionalization of prison officers can be observed in the correctional field of North America and Europe (Grant, 2004). Studies developed since then have focused on the advantages of a strong professional identity in order to humanize its social service and demonstrate a positive attitude towards prisoners.

In this sense, previous studies indicated that the process of humanization of social services did not vary with regard to the gender of the officers. However, recent studies indicate that female officers usually prefer the role of care toward the inmates while men take on both a conflicting role and a punishment role (Tait, 2011). Inmates also perceive a fairer treatment and a more positive attitude in prisons with more female officers (Beijersbergen, Dirkzwager, Molleman, van der Laan & Nieuwbeerta, 2013). With respect to race, Black officers or officers from other minority backgrounds have a more positive attitude toward the prisoners and their rehabilitation and are less supportive of the harsh punishment administered by their White co-workers (Jackson & Ammen, 1996; Whitehead & Lindquist, 1989). Studies on age found that older officers have a more positive attitude towards the mission of rehabilitation or reeducation while the younger officers' attitudes were more punitive (Paboojian & Teske, 1997). However, other studies highlights that the number of years of work experience is a more significant variable showing that the officers with less experience have more punitive views while those with more experience have more positive attitudes towards the inmates and their rehabilitation (Antonio & Young, 2011; Kelly, 2014; Tait, 2011). Moreover, recent research indicates that officers with higher level of education have a more supportive attitude regarding

the care of the inmates and their efforts to rehabilitate and less positive views and attitudes towards confinement and retribution (Robinson, Porporino & Simourd, 1997; Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2008).

Previous research has been addressed to the professional group of prison officers and there are hardly any similar studies on other prison professionals. Sports educators, in particular, have not become a concern because professionalization has received until nowadays all attention on the school physical educators (Kirk, 1992; Kougioumtzis, Patriksson & Strahlman, 2011; Pastor, 1997). The differentiation and social complexity of modern developed societies have provoked the need for sports educators in other areas. With few exceptions, as the pioneer work done on school sport in Europe (Fraile, de Diego & Boada, 2011), there is a lack of knowledge on the professionalization of sports educators in other areas such as prisons. Most of the recent specialized articles investigate the potential benefits for health and rehabilitation (Meek & Lewis, 2012; Nichols, 1997). Nonetheless, there are no studies on the professionalization of sports educators, as a collective of workers, focused on the teaching-learning process as befits professions associated with (re)education. Precisely, instructional design is the term used in educational psychology to refer to different basic components of the teaching and learning process (Bruner, 1969; Reigeluth, 1983).

The importance of an appropriate instructional design lies in the manner the instructional process is delivered to consider the effectiveness of a reeducation program (Lewis, 2006). In fact, the correct programming of teaching activities for reeducation purposes is an indicator of a high degree of professionalization (Lawrence, Mears, Dubin & Travis, 2002). In this sense, the most influential study on instructional design in physical activity and sport, developed by Placek (1983), pointed out that the physical education teachers planned briefly and informally their classes. Likewise, she indicated that the factors that influenced this planning were previous experience, students' characteristics, security, weather conditions, sports equipment and facilities. Placek also highlighted that the main concerns of the teachers when designing their instruction were enjoyment, participation and misbehavior. As a conclusion, this author pointed out that the ultimate concern of the teachers in designing the different aspects of their teaching was to keep the students busy, happy and good. This shook the foundations of the profession to the point of encouraging a movement to consider the consequences of what is taught and how it is taught, as well as striving to make teaching more meaningful, purposeful, fair and enjoyable (e.g. Hellison & Templin, 1991; Tinning, Kirk & Evans, 1993).

Against this backdrop, the study of instructional design in the context of prisons becomes a key issue with consequences in the professionalization of sports educators. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to know the specialized training in sports (any kind) that European prison sports educators have and the use they make of instructional design when planning their sports activities, not only in overall terms, but also according to their years of work experience and level of education. This will allow us to consider the role specialized training and instructional design play with respect to the degree of professionalization of sports educators in European prisons.

METHODS

Participants

The sample of this study was composed by 341 sport educators, or personnel in charge of sports in prisons, originating from Denmark, Flanders (Belgium), Netherlands, Romania and Spain. The average age of the participants was 40.2 years old ($sd= 9.4$) and the participants came from 153 adults' prisons (69.54%) out of a total of 220 existing prisons, at the moment of fieldwork, from the countries mentioned. The sample descriptive distribution according to gender and the number of prisons in each country is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. *Participant sample according to gender and number of prisons in each country.*

	# of prisons (Total per country)	Percentage of participation	Women	Men	Total
Denmark	11 (13)	84.6%	31	30	61
Belgium	8 (17)	47.1%	5	18	23
Holland	27 (29)	93.1%	5	22	27
Romania	32 (40)	80%	10	50	60
Spain	75 (120)	62.5%	40	130	170
	153 (220)	69.5%	91	250	341

Instrument and Procedure

A survey was designed specifically for this study with the purpose of ascertaining information about different aspects of sports educators' job in the prisons and their work conditions, their professional training, as well as learning about the institutions themselves and the activities carried out there. The final version of the survey consisted of 48 multiple-choice questions. For the purpose of this study only the elements related to the instructional design of physical and sport activities adopted by the sports educators were used, as well as other sociodemographic variables.

The fieldwork began by requesting permission from the Ministry or department in charge of prisons in each country. Once permission was granted, the members of the research team sent the hard copy or digital questionnaires to the prisons in the respective countries to then be handed out to the personnel in charge of sports and physical activity. The fieldwork was carried out from the end of December 2011 through the middle of April 2012. Sixty-five percent of the surveys were returned, however 21 of them were eliminated because they were completed in poor condition or originated from juvenile detention centers and not from prisons for adults.

Variables and Data Analysis

The variables used in this study are associated with the instructional design of the sports activities and the specialized training of the sports educators. Specifically, the categorical variables under study were: a) specialized sports training; b) ways of objectives specification; c) elements of design; d) most offered activities; e) methodological strategies; and f) types of assessment.

A descriptive analysis based on the frequencies and percentages was carried out with the aforementioned variables. Also, Chi-square tests were performed in order to determine if significant differences ($p < .05$) existed among the different categorical variables as a function of sports educators' years of experience and level of education. The corrected standardized residuals were calculated to determine in which categories significant differences (corrected standardized residuals ± 1.96) emerged. Gender was not taken into consideration as independent variable because the sample was very unbalanced in favor of men and the analysis was not reliable enough to compare or establish differences based on this variable. The statistical software SPSS v. 19.0 was used to coding and analysis of the data.

RESULTS

SPECIALIZED SPORTS TRAINING

The results of our study showed that 138 participants (61.3%) received some type of specialized training in sports and physical activity during their pre-service or in-service years of training. Chi-square analysis showed significant differences on the specialized training of sports educators according to their years of experience ($\chi^2_{(3)} = 39.118, p < .001; V = .455$) and level of education ($\chi^2_{(3)} = 18.896, p < .001; V = .316$) (Figure 1 and 2, respectively).

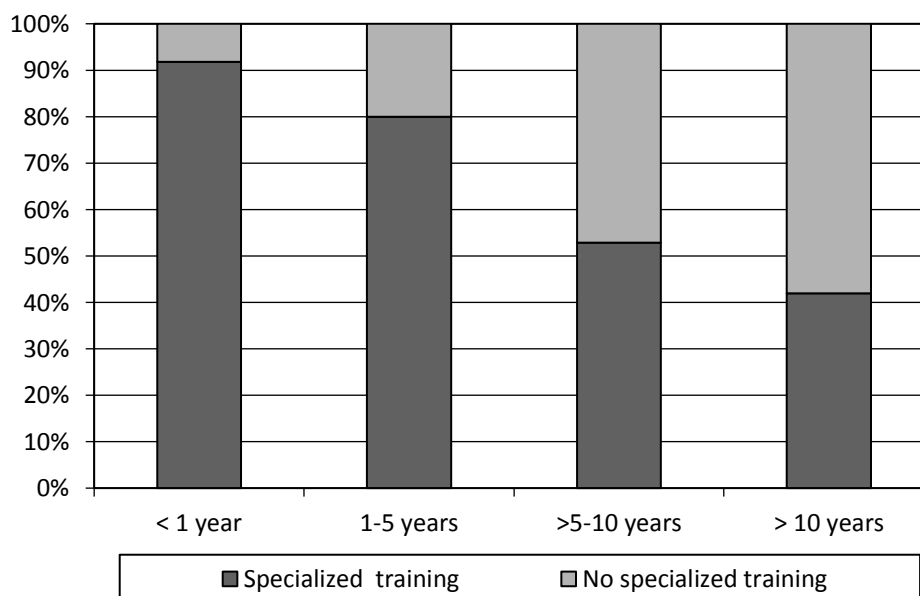


Figure 1. Specialized sports training according to the sports educators' years of work experience.

The study of the corrected standardized residuals revealed differences in the following categories: less than one year of experience, between 5-10 years of

experience and more than 10 years of experience; and between secondary education and college-university education. Thus, the data proved that sports educators with less than one year of experience received a more specialized education in the area of sports than those who have more than five years of experience. Moreover, as the level of education of these professionals increased so did their specialized sports training, although the larger differences appeared when comparing the educators who completed their secondary education to those who had studied college or university courses.

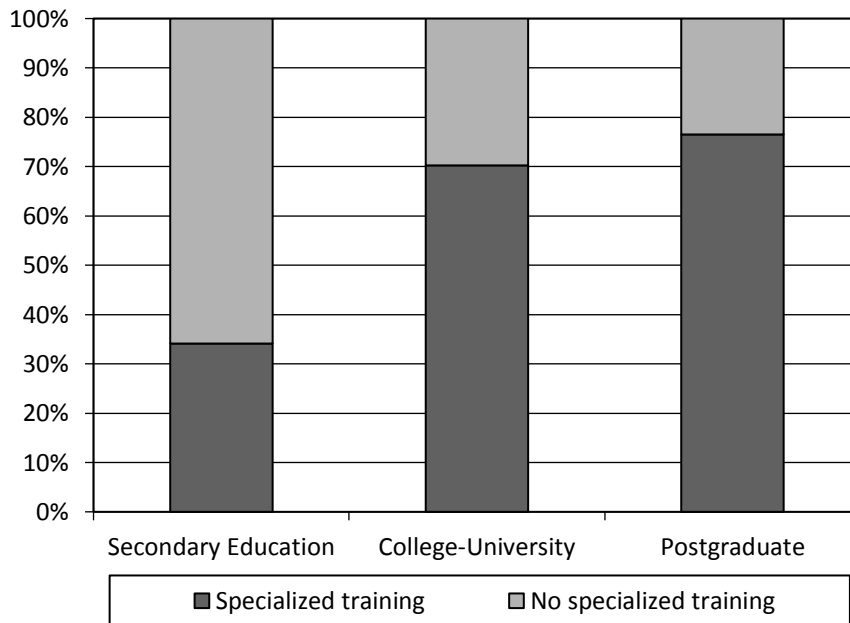


Figure 2. Specialized sports training according to the sports educators' level of education.

INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN

Overall Values

Tables 2 and 3 show a higher percentage of sports educators who wrote down their instructional objectives on 'prison documents' (64.7%) than those educators that just 'plan mentally' (52.5%). The 'objectives' was the element of instructional design that the majority of the educators (91.2%) considered when they programmed the physical and sport activities, followed by 'activities' (89.9%) and 'resources' (81.1%). 'Inmates' characteristics' was the last element to be considered (57.5%) by sports educators when they planned their educational activities.

Soccer and weight training were the physical activities most widely offered by sports educators in prisons, 73.3% and 67.7%, respectively, far from badminton which was only offered by 36.8% of educators.

The methodological strategies most widely used by these professionals were 'practice style' (65.7%) and 'activity by level' of skill or fitness (64.5%), while the least frequent strategy was 'guided discovery' (28%). 'Verbal feedback' was

found to be the assessment instrument most frequently employed by the sports educators (71.3%), followed at a distance by fitness tests (25.8%) and finally 'questionnaires' (11%) or 'none' assessment at all (11%).

According to years of experience

In accordance with Table 2, a large percentage (76.1%) of the sports educators with more than 10 years of experience expressed their educational objectives on 'prison documents' when compared to the percentage of educators with less than one year of experience (42.4%). The educators from the group with 5-10 years of work experience were less inclined to consider 'inmates' characteristics' (35.7%) while the educators from the rest of the groups did pay attention to this element around 60%. The educators with 5-10 years of experience were also the ones who less used the methodological strategy of 'practice style' (40%). The strategy of 'activity by level' of skill or fitness was less employed (40%) by the educators with the least amount of experience, while the sports educators who had one to five years of experience were the ones who used this strategy the most (80.6%). Finally, the educators with less than one year of experience chose 'guided discovery' as their preferred strategy (43.3%). The 'annual report' was the assessment instrument most used by the educators with one to five years of experience (38.1%) while the rest of the groups did not exceed 22%.

Table 2. Educational design according to the sports educators' years of work experience.

Educational Design	Total sample %	< 1 year (n=61)	1-5 years (n=66)	>5-10 years (n=47)	> 10 years (n=163)	χ^2	p
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	(n=328)						
Specific Objectives:							
Mental planning	52.5	66.1	45.2	58.7	48.4	7.481	.058
Professional notes	27.0	30.5	30.6	28.3	23.9	1.599	.660
Prison documents	64.7	42.4	62.9	56.5	76.1	23.368	.001
Design Elements:							
Objectives	91.2	90.9	91.5	95.2	90.1	1.109	.775
Ethics/values	61.4	68.5	71.2	47.6	58.9	7.292	.063
Inmate characteristics	57.5	61.8	62.7	35.7	60.0	9.617	.022
Activities	89.9	89.1	91.5	83.3	91.4	2.576	.462
Resources	81.1	81.8	83.1	71.4	82.8	3.007	.390
Methodology	76.2	74.5	83.1	69.0	76.2	2.796	.424
Assessment	80.1	78.2	86.4	69.0	81.5	5.014	.171
Most frequently offered activities:							
Soccer	73.3	77.0	77.3	66.0	72.4	2.333	.506
Weight training	67.7	73.8	63.6	55.3	70.6	5.423	.143
Table tennis	57.6	60.7	60.6	44.7	58.9	3.801	.284
Basketball	48.1	57.4	45.5	34.0	49.7	6.174	.103
Volleyball	47.8	47.5	60.6	44.7	43.6	5.698	.127
Badminton	36.8	29.5	37.9	36.2	39.3	5.423	.143
Methodological Strategies:							
Command style	44.9	41.7	46.8	48.9	44.2	0.665	.881
Practice style	65.7	75.0	64.5	40.0	70.1	16.879	.001
Activity by level	64.5	40.0	80.6	71.1	65.6	23.271	.001
Individual planning	39.3	30.0	50.0	40.0	38.3	5.225	.156
Problem solving	31.8	26.7	35.5	31.1	32.5	1.159	.763
Guided discovery	28.0	43.3	29.0	22.2	23.4	9.400	.024
Assessment:							
None	11.0	16.9	7.9	8.5	10.7	3.056	.383
Verbal feedback	71.3	69.5	68.3	70.2	73.6	.813	.846
Questionnaire	11.0	5.1	11.1	8.5	13.8	3.721	.293
Mail box	11.6	8.5	11.1	10.6	13.2	1.021	.796
Physical tests	25.6	20.3	27.0	25.5	27.0	1.095	.778
Report	24.1	16.9	38.1	21.3	22.0	8.983	.030

The groups where standardized residual show ± 1.96 are marked in bold lettering.

According to the level of education

The findings in Table 3 indicate that as the level of education increased, the percentage of educators who admitted a 'mental planning' decreased. Likewise, there were more educators with a College-University degree who expressed the objectives in 'prison documents' than educators with a Certificate of Secondary Education. The elements of the design that showed significant differences because of the level of education (objectives, inmate characteristics, resources, methodology and assessment) indicated a high percentage of programming by the sports educators. However, the number of educators who took into account these elements was higher among those with a College-University and

Postgraduate degrees than among educators with a Certificate of Secondary Education.

The sports educators who had a Certificate of Secondary Education offered weight training, table tennis and basketball in a lower percentage than the educators who had a College or University degree. Nevertheless, badminton was more offered by educators with a lower level of studies (48.9%) in comparison to the other groups (31.3% College-University and 18.5% Postgraduate).

The educators with a Secondary Education used the methodological strategy named 'command style' to a lesser degree (48.4%) than their peers with a College-University education (81%). Finally, the assessment instrument most widely selected by the educators with a Postgraduate Education was an 'annual report' (50%), although this was the least popular instrument chosen by the educators with a Secondary Education (13.3%).

Table 3. *Educational design according to the sports educators' level of education.*

Instructional Design	Total sample % (n=325)	Secondary Education (n=127)	College-University (n=169)	Postgraduate (n=27)	χ^2	p
Specific objectives:						
Mental planning	52.6	74.8	40.8	22.2	4.500	.001
Professional notes	27.2	27.6	27.8	22.2	0.377	.828
Prison documents	64.7	51.2	73.4	74.1	6.769	.001
Design Elements:						
Objectives	91.1	85.5	94.7	92.3	7.067	.029
Ethics/values	61.2	58.2	64.9	50.0	2.754	.252
Inmate characteristics	57.6	42.7	67.9	53.8	7.346	.001
Activities	89.8	85.5	92.9	88.5	4.103	.129
Resources	81.0	63.6	89.9	96.2	4.184	.001
Methodology	76.1	61.8	85.2	76.9	0.032	.001
Assessment	80.0	70.0	85.2	88.5	0.902	.004
Most frequently offered activities:						
Soccer	73.7	68.7	78.4	66.7	4.385	.112
Weight lifting	68.0	51.1	80.1	70.4	9.024	.001
Table tennis	57.8	43.5	67.0	66.7	8.001	.001
Basketball	48.5	28.2	63.1	51.9	6.595	.001
Volleyball	47.9	48.1	48.9	40.7	0.622	.733
Badminton	37.1	48.9	31.3	18.5	4.329	.001
Methodological Strategies:						
Command style	44.8	47.6	41.7	51.9	1.597	.450
Practice style	66.1	48.4	81.0	55.6	5.263	.001
Activity by level	64.6	70.2	60.7	63.0	2.817	.245
Individual planning	39.5	39.5	41.7	25.9	2.412	.299
Problem solving	31.7	33.1	30.4	33.3	0.280	.869
Guided discovery	28.2	25.0	32.1	18.5	3.166	.205
Assessment:						
None	10.8	14.8	9.4	0.0	5.704	.058
Verbal feedback	71.4	73.7	61.5	71.4	1.749	.417
Questionnaire	11.1	6.3	13.5	19.2	5.761	.056
Mail box	11.7	8.6	13.5	15.4	2.045	.360
Physical tests	25.8	18.8	30.4	30.8	5.550	.062
Report	24.0	13.3	28.1	50.0	9.252	.001

The groups where standardized residuals show ± 1.96 are marked in bold lettering.

DISCUSSION

Specialized Training

Only 61.3% of the staff in charge of the sports activities in European prisons has received some type of specialized training, which is similar to the 69% of European elementary school teachers who have specific training in physical education (Marshall & Hardman, 2000). However, this is far from the 98% of the

European secondary school physical education teachers who have received specialized training in sports and physical activities (Hardman, 2008).

This similarity in percentage between European elementary school teachers and prison sports educators is possibly due to the fact that in both of these settings a broad or generalist educator instead of a specialized one is preferred. Notwithstanding, these parallelisms need to be made with caution given the diversity found in the European penitentiary systems (van Kalmthout & Durnescu, 2008) and the particular ways each country has linked the prison labor needs and the professional degrees market.

Depending on the country, the personnel in charge of physical activity and sports currently gain access to these positions by an internal promotion and non-sport related labor or by external access when necessary because they have specialized training in sports. Both ways of access are found in several countries like Spain, but not in others such as Denmark. In the case of Spain, for instance, the access via internal promotion has been documented in a recent study (Devís-Devís, Martos-García y Sparkes, 2010) and the external access is observed by examining the prison contracts from 2007 to 2011 (Secretaría General de Instituciones Penitenciarias, 2011). On the contrary, access to sports educators' position in Denmark is gained through internal promotion of prison officers. It is probably due to the existence of a specialized prison and criminal college degree, in the Staff Training Centre of the Danish Prison and Probation Service, which is the preferred basic training to prison jobs (Jensen, 2010). Behind these differences between countries are also a different status and consideration of physical activities and sport in their prison systems norms and regulations. In Denmark, Flanders (Belgium) and The Netherlands, sport and physical activities are considered mainly as recreational activities for inmates' spare time, while in Romania and Spain are also considered (re)educative and part of the treatment.

The findings also reveal an increase in specialized training received by sports educators in the last few years, because the recently employed educators (<1 year of experience) have more specialized sports training than their peers who have worked five or more years. Furthermore, specialized training has increased among the prison staff with a College or University education. These results are consistent with literature of professionalization processes, because the level of training and specialized knowledge linked to the professional activity are factors that influence professional identity, prestige and the quality of social service offered (Kougioumtzis et al., 2011; Lawrence et al., 2002).

Instructional Design

The overall findings of the different elements of the instructional design used by sports educators in European prisons reveal an average degree of professionalization meaning that there is still a wide margin for improvement. Despite the fact that a large percentage of educators records the objectives on 'prison documents', still more than half of the sports educators rely the specification of objectives on their 'mental planning', which displays a limited degree of professionalization.

The percentage of educators that think seriously about the different elements of educational design while programming is high, with the exception of the 'principles/values' and 'inmate's characteristics' which may require a more sophisticated and accurate planning by professionals. However, we do not know how detailed the design and development of these elements are. As suggested by Lawrence et al. (2002), the challenge of correctional education is not so much the elaboration of several elements of design, but its development in an effective way. Therefore, the assessment part of the design is of special importance here, although this will be discussed at a further point in this article.

The activities most widely offered by the sports professionals are team sports and weight training, all of which are typically masculine sports indicating the predominance of male inmates in European prisons. In fact, only 4.9% of the European penitentiary population is female (Walmsley, 2012). These games and sports reveal that the prisons show the dominant male practices of European popular culture from which inmates come from. It is not surprising then that soccer appears as the most offered by sports educators since it is considered the most popular game in Europe (Gammelsaeter & Senaux, 2011). Although offering typically masculine sports might imply a lesser degree of professionalization, it may also be the ideal way to reeducate because these types of activities are well accepted by the male inmates, as already highlighted in several studies (Maza, 2006). Weight training, for example, is very popular among the inmates because of the symbolic advantages that are gained in the social context of a prison. As pointed out in previous studies, inmates used weight training to demonstrate certain masculine identities, gain status and improve their reputation in the prison (Hsu, 2005; Martos-García et al., 2009a, b).

Regarding methodological strategies, results emphasize the use of a variety of methodologies and this is in line with the findings of a cross-cultural research on the use of teaching styles in physical education (Cothran et al., 2005). It indicates that sports educators choose the strategies according to their needs and contents required for each situation. Moreover, this diversity strengthens the idea that there is not just one appropriate or better strategy or style for teaching-learning how to exercise or play sports (Tinning et al., 1993). Nevertheless, the strategies more used are direct or reproductive styles ('practice style' and 'activity by level') where the educator indicates the activity to be performed by all the students and they have to reproduce it afterwards (Mosston & Ashworth, 2008; Sicilia & Delgado, 2002). This suggests that the sports educators in this study prefer methodological strategies that facilitate participants' control during physical activities and sport practice, in a similar way to physical education teachers from different countries (Cothran et al., 2005; Jaakkola & Watt, 2011; Salvara & Bironé, 2002). In the context of prisons, the preference for using direct styles to facilitate sports participants' control is very much in line with the traditionally overbearing prisons professional culture of order and control (Garland, 2003; Martos-García et al., 2009b).

Concerning the assessment techniques, most educators chose to give 'verbal feedback', over written techniques, an assessment which is extemporized,

short-lived and not very systematic. This suggests that, regarding educational design, assessment is less important for sports educators than planning the activities and selecting strategies. It reveals that there is a stronger desire in solving the professional activity 'here and now' rather than analyze and question how to do it in the future. Therefore, the educational design of sports educators seems to be keeping inmates busy, happy and good, as Placek (1983) indicated when referring to physical education teachers. Also, it makes sense that during the era of mass incarceration, budget cut-backs and the lack of staff it is more important to carry out the activities than assess them. This is what has happened to school physical education teachers to whom assessment has historically been ignored in the educational design (López-Pastor, Kirk, Lorente-Catalán, MacPhail & MacDonald, 2013).

The results reveal very few significant differences regarding the years of work experience of the sports educators in European prisons, within the group of educational design elements. Also, having more years of experience does not appear to have any clear repercussions on the degree of professionalization of the sports educators. Only a few elements such as detailing the teaching objectives on 'prison documents' or using the 'practice style' strategy indicate the importance of having more work experience. However, this result seems to contradict other findings in the present study. For example, the uses of 'guided discovery' as the methodological strategy and 'annual report' as the method for assessment prevail among the educators with less experience. At least, this result is contradictory with the use of productive styles of teaching by the more experienced physical education teachers (Salvara & Bironé, 2002). This difference, in the case of sports educators, is probably due to the fact that the less experienced are recently employed educators with a higher level of education. That is to say, the higher the level of studies, the lower is the number of educators that try to keep the objectives mentally and the higher is the number that take into account educational design (objectives, internal characteristics, resources, methodology and assessment) by offering activities such as weight training, table tennis and basketball. In addition, more educators with higher level of studies chose writing an 'annual report' as their assessment instrument.

Conclusions

The findings from this study show that the sports educators in European prisons have an average degree of professionalization, referring to their specialized sports training and to their planning of educational design for physical activity and sports. The percentage of educators with some type of specialized training in sports is equivalent to the percentage of elementary or primary school teachers in Europe that are specialized in physical education. This study also reveals that specialized sports training is higher among professionals with less years of work experience, and particularly among those with College-University degrees.

Likewise, the findings show high percentages of sports educators that plan the main facets of educational design (objectives, activities, instructional strategies and evaluation), as well as a substantial variety of activities that they offer.

Nonetheless, half of them still tend to retain the objectives in their head (plan mentally), use direct style strategies and choose to evaluate by means of verbal communication. Finally, the educators with less years of experience and more level of education are the ones that show higher degree of professionalization.

Despite these findings, more studies are required about the professionalization of sports educators in European prisons, in order to better understand the situation of this group of educators and be able to identify gaps and deficiencies that can help to improve their profession. For example, we need to further study the different types of specialized training because in this study we have included all types of education, from one-year course for sports coaches to a degree in physical education or sports science. It is also important to investigate in more detail the process of instructional design, especially in relation to its development and understand how theory and practice of instruction are connected, for example, by means of qualitative studies. In other words, to delve deeply into the quality of the teaching-learning process with regard to the role that the consequences of what is taught and how it is taught regarding the planning and development of education may play.

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