

REPRESENTING PE'S VALUES IN PUBLIC EDUCATION - QUO VADIS PHYSICAL EDUCATION?

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Physical education and sports offer unrecognised, however, considerable potential for developing students' competence and for developing personality and reinforcing community spirit, which is the main objective in the schools' educational and pedagogical programme. The introduction of local planning raised schools' awareness and enabled them to select and accept these values, by which they were given the opportunity to apply them as basic principle. Such high level of awareness can change one's lifestyle. Still, we could not observe such growing awareness in most cases during the research we conducted in schools. When following traditions, schools' sporting activities seem more effective than what the school documents suggest reflecting value judgement about the subject. Maintenance of health in the broadest possible sense is achievable by close cooperation among teachers of different subjects. In order to achieve this, PE teachers should be able to represent the values and physical education's content and structure must be modernised.

Nowadays, when education's basic principle is developing competence, greater significance is attached to the subjects developing students' skills. Physical education is an obvious example – theoretically. Physical education and sport have highly beneficial effects on the developing personality: They offer a special and wide variety of physical activities, provide an excellent education in general and by this they enhance cognitive and social functions, as well as affective development (Rétsági, 2004). As such, they can strongly support the development of basic competences. Since a two-level system of regulation (central and local planning) was introduced in the educational management, a new role for teachers can be defined. In the future educators need to shoulder greater responsibility in encouraging innovations and new methods, and they should acquire new teaching/learning strategies.

The aim of the research

- to study the extent to which the values of physical education and sport are represented at the schools in Vas County, Hungary
- to mark the milestones of the development of physical education
- to build a sound theoretical basis of practical significance for PE teacher training

Sample

All the primary and secondary schools in Vas County (147) with marked differences in size, maintenance, level or type of settlement they are located at.

Hypotheses

1. We presume that in the pedagogical program of each school
 - a, the values of physical education and sport are represented;
 - b, but the policy or strategy of representing such values is formulated only theoretically
 - c, and it places value on improving physical health only in a quite narrow sense.
2. It is highly likely that
 - a, the representation of values in the pedagogical program will not be in harmony with the special conditions of each school;
 - b, however, in all probability schools will harmonize their expectations with personnel management. In other words, we investigate the correlation between value representation and the number and position of PE teachers.
3. Also, we must start from the general assumption that in certain schools there is no harmony between the value judgement about physical education and sport formulated on a theoretical level in the framework documents and PE in practice.

Method

Data collection

- a, *content analysis*: starting from the overt attempts at and latent forms of PE value representation we classified the pedagogical programmes into four categories:
 1. "There is a *lack of representation* of the values of physical education and sport", i.e. the part of the pedagogical program of the school we examined does not represent values of physical education and sport
 2. "There is *poor representation* of the values of physical education and sport", i.e. the values of physical education and sport are represented and included in the principal objectives *or* represented by a particular activity of the school.
 3. "There is *average representation* of the values of physical education and sport", i.e. these values are represented by the dominant values, *or* they are included in the principal objectives *and* particular activities – related to the subject – are defined in the pedagogical program.
 4. "There is *good representation* of the values of physical education and sport", i.e. these values are represented by the dominant values *and* included in the principal objectives, *moreover*, these values are encouraged by particular activities.
- b, *analysing documents: syllabus for in-class and extracurricular activities, annual program*. We have examined the proportion of

physical activities in the extracurricular activities and school programmes in general (%).

- *c, interview.* We conducted interviews with the head and the PE teachers of schools, which were about the number, the content, the structure and organisation of (free-time) sporting activities or annual programs.

Data Analysis:

- statistics
- cross tables
- correlations
- khi² test

Findings

Value representation of PE stated by framework documents

In the majority (39,90%) of the 147 schools the value representation of physical education is poor. The number of schools outlining an average pedagogical program is 37, the number of those developing a good pedagogical program is 38. 8,80%, i.e. 13 schools did not attach any value to PE in their pedagogical program while defining their basic principles, objectives and mission.

Good pedagogical programs can be characterised by their highlighting the importance of sport in the schools' basic principles and values. Correspondingly, they identify specific objectives, for which they offer facility and equipment. Moreover, they define the sufficient conditions, criteria and, in certain schools, the persons in charge.

Main values: physical and mental health, being fit, sport's highly beneficial effects on socialisation etc.

Objectives: to educate by sport as such, to cultivate the art of movement, to get familiar with free time sporting activities and techniques of self-correction.

In *average* pedagogical programs there is a lack of systematic description of basic principles, objectives and tasks. *Poor* programs consider the relevance of physical education on a very basic or general level.

Schools in towns ($p=0,046$) and the ones run by the church ($p=0,014$) represent the value of physical education more strongly. Likewise, schools specialised in physical education ($p=0,056$), as well as those employing more PE teachers ($p=0,055$), show a tendency for a greater representation of PE's values. Against reasonable expectation, representation is much worse in the pedagogical program of schools planning the PE syllabus locally ($p=0,020$).

PE value representation in everyday practice

The worst results come from schools with 7 or less groups of students ($p=0,007$). This obviously results from the lower number of PE lessons ($p=0,005$). It is not even compensated by the higher amount of free time sporting activities. As a tendency, town schools accord higher priority to sport ($p=0,076$), which is due to the PE syllabus planned locally. 45% of town schools have prepared such a syllabus for PE. Contrary to this, schools launching a single class every academic year show a much worse result in offering free time sporting activities ($p=0,000$). Considering the proportion

of school programs involving physical activity, village schools had a much better statistics ($p=0,043$) compared to schools in the county's seat.

The correlation between representation in planning and practice

If we compare representation in theory and practice, there is no significant difference between groups ($p=0,497$), but if at random. Gaining in-depth knowledge and developing an increased awareness of the values of physical education do not in itself guarantee the improvement of sport in schools' life. Likewise, the poor representation of sport values does not necessarily imply poor sporting activity.

The value of PE is represented in theory and practice to the same extent in 30,80% of the schools (45).

Everyday sports life is more significant than defined in the pedagogical program in 54,10% of schools and is worse than formulated in 15,10% of schools.

Conclusion

Values of physical education in pedagogical programs (Hypothesis 1)

We started from the general assumption that human's health must be given a high priority and as such must be present in school-life. Thus, we hypothesized that the pedagogical program of each school in the research attaches certain values to physical education and sport (*Hypothesis 1.a*). Contrary to expectations, 8,2% of schools in focus do not refer to such values.

In the pedagogical program of the majority of schools (40,10%) – in harmony with our expectations – values are only theoretical concepts (*Hypothesis 1.b*). Values related to physical education are defined in two ways as "maintaining health" and "adopting a healthy lifestyle" without any further specifications. The fact that sport and physical education do not solely maintain health in the strictest sense of the word but they also encourage the development of the personality and socialization, and that they are a part of our culture, is recognised and accepted by only 26,50% of the schools and therefore is represented in the pedagogical program. This result supported the assumption (*Hypothesis 1.c*) that the majority of pedagogical programs place value on improving physical health only in a quite narrow sense.

Factors influencing value representation of physical education (Hypothesis2)

Our research was based on the working hypothesis that schools' staff appreciate and set certain values while defining the school's main principles and objectives, which is not influenced by certain local conditions (*Hypothesis 2.a*). The result refuted this. The conditions, usually limitations, which influence the sporting activities directly and adversely affect the principles and objectives identified by the school.

This negative tendency is the strongest in schools with lower or decreasing numbers of students and maintained by local government. Such schools can usually be found in villages, their classes are often merged, and there is a small staff. Contrary, there is a tendency for town schools with more groups of learners a year to show better results in representing sport. It

seems unambiguous that town schools are more aware of the significance of offering a variety of great opportunities. Thus, when it comes to choosing school, these schools will in all probability be singled out as being better than the rest and will have more students.

The representation of the values of sport in the pedagogical program shows a strong positive correlation with the high proportion of PE teachers in the staff. However, this is normal in schools specialised in PE, furthermore, it is not the reason for but the result of stronger representation. This correlation is also reinforced by the fact that a PE teacher in the position of headmaster does not guarantee a stronger representation of sport in the school's framework document. Our assumption (*Hypothesis 2.b*) that there is a positive correlation between value representation and the number and position of PE teachers, who are the most aware of the immense value of PE, has been challenged in the research.

Theoretical representation influencing the school's physical education (Hypothesis3)

Our research confirms that the benefits of a strong pedagogical program do not guarantee that physical education will carry real weight with a corresponding relevance in the schools' educational and pedagogical programme and practice. This correspondence is merely incidental – in terms of PE. Thus, our third hypothesis is confirmed.

Reasons for this inconsistency are a) the novelty of *local planning*; b) the fact that the colleagues framing the local plan are inexperienced and untrained.

Beyond these a further reason can be set out: *inadequate representation*. Values are attached to PE in the pedagogical programs in a quite narrow sense of the word in most cases: improving physical health. This simplistic and loose interpretation proves that the real values of sport are unknown to most school staff. PE teachers, who are the most aware of these values, have not gained any practice in verbal representation of values. This is also confirmed by further results: schools framing their PE syllabus locally (20/146) have a much poorer representation of sport in the pedagogical program than schools adopting a model plan. This proportion shows that the task is arduous; these 20 schools represent the minority with PE teachers' demonstrating firm commitment and it also attests to their professional competence in this specialized field. In consequence, for PE teachers, who are in fact able and willing to do professional job, it is not at all normal to represent their subject, cultural domain, to enhance its prestige or to seek approval from the colleagues.

Recommendations

On the basis of our findings the following recommendations are presented:

- further issues raised during data analysis
- new questions for physical education
- new ideas for reconsidering the correlation between higher education and art of motion
- further concerns for teacher training
- and more issues for the decision-makers

should/can be addressed or tackled.

Further potential areas of investigation

a, In order to enhance the validity of our study and findings in Vas County, and to see whether they are applicable to the whole country's public education, further research would be advisable in further counties.

b, We have found that the majority of our experts think that increasing the number of obligatory PE lessons could be the only way to ensure an improving efficiency. To our estimate, this solution would not prove workable.

However, it would prove useful to familiarize ourselves with PE teachers' concepts, their reasons and their professional practice.

Potential tasks to perform at schools

Other members of the staff know relatively little about the values of PE. Because of their significant role in local planning, *educators' further training* is essential. Closer cooperation can be expected from colleagues in case they are well-aware of sport's considerable potential for developing competencies.

PE teachers are not used to presenting, representing PE's values and usefulness verbally. This competence is of growing importance and could possibly be acquired in a *postgraduate course designed for PE teachers*. New sports steadily gaining ground in physical education and modern methodology should be incorporated in the program.

It is the *head teacher's* task to encourage staff members and PE teachers to enrol in such courses for their professional development. They can be made responsible for coordination and for interviewing students and parents about their needs and wishes about sporting activities in school, for instance. They could also search for the ones – trainers, amateur sportsmen – who could closely cooperate with the school. It is the school management's task to recognize the value and attach significance to active sporting in a form which is appreciated by the whole community. Developing an innovative approach to physical education, PE teachers should first establish an effective partnership with the school management.

Further ideas for higher education

Every teacher could considerably benefit from being *educated and updated* about sport's values and by this they would achieve public recognition. Moreover, it would prove useful for every learned adult, since later they will become the parents of students. However, given the nature of sport, this knowledge should not be purely theoretical. In the value representation of sport we can enjoy the real support and encouragement of the colleagues and parents who are also inspired by some *good practical experience*. Again, this fact draws attention to the quality of PE and sport in public and higher education, and it also highlights the importance of its *being approved and supported*.

The ongoing reforms in higher education – the so-called Bologna process – provide a framework for such novel ideas. One of the BSc training's basic principles is to enhance general intellectual training, whose basic component is to maintain healthy lifestyle and to recognize all the values of an active, sporty daily life. It would not be reasonable at all to let higher education sport deteriorate – instead of making conscious use of it.

Further concerns for teacher training

a, Representation of values and interests. The key figure of representing sport's values is obviously *the PE teacher*. Indeed, other teachers cannot be expected to represent the values of physical education as a profession. Apparently, under optimal conditions PE teachers should be ready to and prepared for accepting this responsibility, which is a more concrete task to undertake – in marked contrast to their duties performed today. For this, teacher training must be consciously enhanced to improve basic and technical skills, which will provide a proper intellectual background. Referring back to *Subchapter 7.3*, it is essential that it should also provide training for verbal representation of the values of sport and physical education.

b, PE lesson and free time sporting activity. There is a tendency for *free time sporting activities* to increase in value. Attaching the same value to both obligatory and optional sporting activities has more advantages: following this method we can offer ample opportunity for exercise, and by this we attach great significance to voluntary activity that is motivated by the real need for exercise, which is vital for leading a healthy lifestyle later.

Considerable significance is given to free time sporting activities also because of free time management. Being involved in such activities children are under supervision, they spend their free time with something sensible and they are prevented from, for example, drug abuse. For many students it is the only possibility to get familiar with new sports without any undue financial burden.

The success of the combination of obligatory and optional sporting activities can be put down to two facts. One of the bases is the PE teacher who can hold colourful lessons – during which the activities do not exclude less talented students and which also provide mental exercise. Students will be attracted and automatically join the free time activities. The other basis is setting high value of sport and enhancing physical activity as such by the whole community of the school.

c, Content and method. Sport is managed effectively in schools where the *methods and content of physical education are modern* enough. As for current PE teacher training, beside traditional school sports, different free time sporting activities, dancing and martial arts are on the syllabus. However, it is important to increase their significance while teaching, to notice differences in competence and aptitude and tendencies of students, and to design courses tailor-made to students' needs.

d, Postgraduate teacher training. The results of the survey suggest that the following issues should be covered in postgraduate teacher training:

- competence for value representation
- basic level training of novel forms of sport
- developing modern methods and systems of teaching

Further concerns for decision makers

The research revealed that in order to pass down the real values and importance of physical exercise and the art of movement we need to have an acceptable level of special infrastructure and a budget for financing extracurricular activities.

Practically, more money is needed in order to establish, restore and maintain sports facilities, and to pay for the extra lessons from the budget, i.e. to approve of their significance similar to the curricular PE lessons.

The real importance of physical education should be appreciated, the approaches and methods must be continually updated so that physical education can successfully accomplish its mission.

Reference

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