

THE IMPORTANCE OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION CLASSES IN THE ACTUAL EUROPEAN CONTEXT

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Abstract

In the present paper we aim to address the issue of school physical education classes in the current European context in order to understand different perspectives that are explained by cultural, economic, social, as well as by tradition. Deeply human, physical education is a particularly complex activity that systematically capitalizes on all forms of physical exercise in order to increase mainly the biological potential of man in accordance with social requirements. The intended biological potential involves effects on multiple plans: optimizing physical development, demanding the great functions that support physical effort, and implicitly increased effort capability, improving motor skills, etc. It also influences the cognitive, volitional and emotional aspects of the cognitive, volitional and emotional plans, influencing the intellectual, moral, aesthetic and technical-professional education in an important way, being an integral part of the general education system.

At the same time, the paper includes a sociological survey based on a questionnaire, from which we have chosen some questions that we wanted to find out about the teachers' perception, on various specializations, on the importance of physical education in school, the place in the pupils' schedule gymnasiums, factors influencing the design and benefits of physical education lessons.

From the analysis of the specialty literature, there was an increasing awareness of the importance of school physical education classes in the European space, so some countries have increased the number of hours (Finland and Portugal), others have imposed diversification of contents (Hungary and Poland) and others teaching the subject and in the primary classes by specialists in the field, who have the ability to adapt to the changing needs of the computerized society. The interpretation of the questionnaire data highlighted the fact that the majority of teachers are aware of the role, place and importance of physical education in the curriculum.

Keywords: physical education, curriculum, biological potential, skills, healthy lifestyle

1. Introducere

In the context of a very complex socio-economic system, the opinions of the specialists, the scientific achievements, the experience and the practice reflected in the international normative acts, including the specialized bodies and subdivisions of the Council of Europe and the United Nations (CCPC, 1996; Coakley, Dunning, 2006; White Paper on Sport, 2007), converge to the belief that the field of physical culture and sport exerts in society a very important social function, related to all the age groups of the population. As a result, the social potential of physical culture and sport, through minimal means and maximum effects, can, in the short term, contribute to the harmonious ethical and physical development of all citizens. Physical education (PE) is a science, and specialists define it as "an activity that systematically exploits the whole of the physical exercises in order to increase mainly the biological potential of man in accordance with social requirements." (Cârstea 2000, p.19)

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Jean Le Boulch (1971) defines PE as "the science of human movement." Later, Pierre Parlebas (1981) introduced the concept of motor behavior (meaning a significant behavioral organization), which led to

the emergence and development of the science of motor action. The subject conducting a certain motor action reacts in its entirety through complex behavior including (Le Boulch 1995): physiological reactions, external manifestations (movements, words), mental responses (conceptualizations), effects on the external environment.

The complexity of the concepts with which specialists operate makes it impossible to establish a universally valid definition, due to interdependence with the social and educational aspects of human society. Edgar Morin (1996), for example, points out that "*the subject of physical education is not the movement itself, but the human movement, filled with cultural characters capable of activating the changeable and changeable character of the movement, by the need to take account of the anthropological context*" conditioned.

Jacques Ullmann (1989) is of the opinion that PE must make it possible to specify the place assigned to the body in society and culture. In this regard, all specialists agree that physical education and sport are very important areas in the process of forming the personality of contemporary man - the basic purpose of any educational system. It should not be omitted that PE classes are the only ones that physically compensate for the other activities provided by the curriculum.

In this context, the role of PE classes should be increased, with accent on their efficiency, which can be achieved by adapting curricular content, discipline, the possibility of physical and mental development of pupils and solving in a way that is most attractive for students of the tasks facing this discipline: ensuring and maintaining an optimal state of health, harmonious physical development, the formation of skills and motor skills, the development and improvement of basic and combined motor skills etc.

The Law of Physical Education and Sport, issued in 2000, stipulates in Article 2 that "*physical education and sport means all forms of physical activity intended, through an organized or independent participation, to express or improve physical condition and spiritual comfort, establish civilized social relationships and lead to results in competitions of any level.*" (Law on Physical Education and Sport No. 69/2000). In accordance with the provisions of the National Education Law no. 1/2011, as subsequently amended and supplemented, art. 68, paragraph (2), "*Physical education and sport in pre-university education are included in the common curriculum of educational plans*". In this context, the central principle of the European Association for Physical Education (EUPEA): „**No education without physical education**” (**Nici o educație fără educație fizică**).

Moreover, the Manifesto F.I.E.P. (International Federation of Physical Education) of 1970 and through the Madrid Declaration of the European Physical Education Association, (1991), argued through studies conducted on children and young people of different ages the need to systematically practice PE and sports for at least 1 hour a day until the age of 12, and at least 3 hours per week for children older than 12 years and for adolescents. EU provisions record the need for 3 hours of compulsory PE per week.

Consistent with this perspective, analyzing the concrete situation in Romania, the specialists introduced the *Strategy of School and University Sports. 2016 -2032* (2016, p. 21 and 22) the following proposals: introducing, instead of exemptions for PE, the category of "*pupils with special educational needs*" who, based on expertise and special recommendations, will participate in PE classes and will be marked accordingly by a system of criteria established by the departments of physical and sports education of those institutions; the implementation of the "sports portfolios" for the pupil, encompassing the individual sports history, content that will vary from one educational step to another; the reintroduction of physical education and sports, the list of subjects for the baccalaureate exam and the introduction of the scouting system both at the level of the educational units and at the level of the higher education institutions, to select the pupils with sporting results and to be included in the list of those who will receive the sports merit scholarship.

The social and legislative context is favorable, as it is not only an awareness of the importance of physical activity hours, but also the effort to find solutions, to enhance the value of physical education and sports activities.

Specialists, for example, raise the issue of forming theoretical knowledge in PE lessons, which are the support for the skills they form in a student-centered education system. The whole process involves several stages, from the perception and understanding of the essence of information and memory, to the "*creative and quick application in new situations*" that I do not know beforehand. (Docu, Carp 2007, pp. 36-37)

At the same time, the PE teacher must take into account in the teaching-learning-evaluation process the full spectrum of key competences and disciplinary skills. The behavior of the teacher towards the child must be tactful to counteract the crises of shyness, anxiety, fear of ridicule from colleagues, resulting from the incorrect execution of exercises. It is also good to promote socially positive behavior based on praise / appreciation for positive (useful) verbal expressions that have positive influences on them, as demonstrated by the study by Carla Vidoni and Jerome D. Ulman (2010, p. 127)

PE, by its specificity as a school discipline, has a pronounced formative character in the sense that it actually accomplishes the preparation of students for life. This discipline benefits from a very large number of exercises, differentiated and adapted to all subsystems and variables. It implies systematic practice and according to the scientific rules of some exercises, the necessity of practicing physical exercise systematically, as part of the life regime, has acquired an axiomatic character for the contemporary man. Instead, the implementation of

this concept has different solutions, in many cases, it does not meet the desideratum. PE addresses the three areas of learning: cognitively related to theoretical knowledge, affective (feelings or attitudes) and psychomotor (skills, motor skills).

In order to achieve the objectives set, in teaching PE, it is necessary to accent the accessibility and relevance of the subjects proposed to students, so that the PE activities become attractive and efficient. In the European space, specialists have determined differences not only in age particularities, the existence of multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983, pp. 41-43.), Differentiated biological development by gender but also in terms of focus on different goals by gender. Thus, Julie A. Derry (2002) notes that while boys are only interested in having fun while doing sports, while girls are more attracted to learning technically, based on strategic skills and games. Other authors, such as the Norwegians Anne Klomsten Torhild, Einor Melgren Skaalvik and Geir Arild Espnes (2004), indicate differences by gender in the motivational global physical, endurance, strength, appearance, and body fat scales in favour of boys. Other authors, like Weidong Li, Amelia A. Lee & Melinda A. Solmon (2006), indicate greater motivation in the male to the task performance.

It can be noticed that pupils' motivations are culturally conditioned because they are based on the values of the society in which they live and are educated, models promoted by the education system, and their knowledge is important because they can positively influence the adaptation of the school programs by enriching content (Liuşnea 2007), in order to increase the attractiveness of physical education and sports lessons. It should not be forgotten that pupils are always attracted to the playful aspect of life, so choosing the means agreed by pupils can achieve very good results in working with them.

We believe that for the achievement of the objectives of PE, an important role belongs to the personality of the teaching staff, which must have a high level of general culture (Tolmaciou 1996), which allows him to be creative (Carp 1999) in the management of didactic activity.

In the new concept of teaching, the exaggerated guardianship of executions was abandoned, students being encouraged to have an initiative, to be creative to design games or application paths, for example, after being familiar with the terminology of the movement and appropriately appropriating the instructions received from the didactic framework.

In fact, the specificity of the PE discipline is given by the students' knowledge of their own body, its physical, psychomotoric, moral-volitive modeling and the application of skills developed to maintain and strengthen health.

At the same time, PE has to promote educational principles and norms of social ethics, social responsibility, new behaviors such as self-sufficiency, adaptation and permanent education.

PE lesson remains the main "source" of regular and systematic practice of various forms of physical exercise at school, and increasing the effectiveness of the lesson is the issue that is most concerned by the specialists of our field and beyond.

We believe that a correct design of the content of the PE activity in school, taking into account the changes in all the fields of society, effective management of the didactic act, from setting the objectives to reaching them, can lead to the successful fulfillment of the role of education physical.

At the same time, we find that in almost all European countries the assessment of PE is done as in any other matter, except for France (PE is a compulsory discipline, but the evaluation is done only at exams at the end of the "college" at 15 years and high school at 18 years), Denmark, Iceland, Malta and Norway (at primary level) and Ireland (at both primary and lower secondary level). In Switzerland, in the early years of school, PE is not foreseen in the curriculum. Moreover, some European countries have established standards, evaluation criteria, less Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands Portugal, Switzerland Poland and Iceland, which left school institutions to establish them. (Pasquale Coccia, 2013) We have mentioned these realities, because the evaluation methods depend on the correctness of the feed-back that helps us intervene successfully in optimizing the activity. Also, let us not forget that the evaluation is also a means of motivating the pupils, of active participation in the didactic activity. .

The results of the evaluation may contribute to the knowledge of the level of physical training at national level and may influence the decision-makers to intervene, as happened in Portugal and Finland, where the number of hours in this discipline increased, while in countries such as Hungary and Poland wishes to diversify the content of the discipline by introducing new activities and increasing the professional level of the teaching staff in the field. In countries such as Greece, Cyprus and Finland, health education was introduced as compulsory, while in other countries such as the UK, Germany, Portugal, Sweden, Norway and Denmark, the approach to PE is interdisciplinary, appealing to information from natural science, for example, or social science. Only in Greece, the Czech Republic and Poland the content of the discipline includes the promotion of ideals and Olympic models. (Coccia, 2013)

In the context of finding a precarious health level of children in the UK, the importance of PE in the school curriculum and here, as well as the need for it to be taught by specialists with competence in the field, has been reassessed. (Harris 2018).

In the vast majority of European countries, the discipline has a manual that not only includes notions and concepts at the level of theory, but also promotes a culture of movement (Grössing 1993, p. 24) as a basis for choosing an active lifestyle, when today's pupils will mature. And in Romania there have been published manuals for the PE discipline, which only adds to the teacher's range of options.

In addition, PE in the understanding of modern didactics has not as goals only the knowledge, understanding and application, but also the discovery by students of their physical limits, self-awareness and self-acceptance, self-determination, development of reflective thinking and decision-making spirit. In this context, students discover themselves, through multiple experiences, understand their needs and expectations by setting their standards, motivating and acting according to their capacities and conscious values. Hence the great importance of school PE, a deeply human discipline. In Germany, Arn Krüger (2012) speaks of the multidisciplinary perspectives used in teaching PE at the university level, which will help future specialist teachers to act in any sporting context that will characterize the changing society.

All objectives of PE classes can also be achieved by diversifying extracurricular activities.

In recent years, outdoor activities have also been introduced in other European countries in alternative education programs as part of non-formal education, meaning free space activities, adventure learning, or interdisciplinary extra-curricular activities that until recently, were specific only to the Nordic countries (Norway, Sweden, Finland and Denmark). In fact, interdisciplinarity has become a condition in the context of the dynamics of change in the overcomputers. There is also much talk about implementing a free-time culture through loisir-like activities, another model that comes from areas with a high or very high standard of living. The idea is not bad, but it has to be adapted to the cultural specificity, to the economic and social conditions of our country.

The family is an indispensable partner in the didactic act, and lately there is a major lack of interest for the physical education and sports activity, many students having exemptions for this discipline. The situation is not specific for the Romanian society, as evidenced by the studies conducted in the Italian space for example (Isidori, Migliorati, Maulini, 2016).

Parents need to be informed about the benefits of PE, unanimously accepted by specialists, aimed at psychosocial health, functional ability, general quality of life, and can reduce the risk of coronary heart disease, cardiovascular disease or cancer. (Allender, Cowburn and Foster 2006 p. 826).

Next, we will present the results of a sociological survey based on a questionnaire, aiming to find out the perceptions of the teachers on various specializations regarding the importance of PE in school, the place in the gymnasium students' schedule, the factors influencing the design and the benefits of PE lessons. In order to carry out the survey, 100 teachers from schools from Galați County, who were specialized in various disciplines and who had at least 5 years of seniority at the chair, were interviewed.

The first question in the questionnaire was: *What do you understand through physical education?*

Reactions received were: 41% responded to physical exercise; 19% said maintaining health, and 40% responded to motor skills training

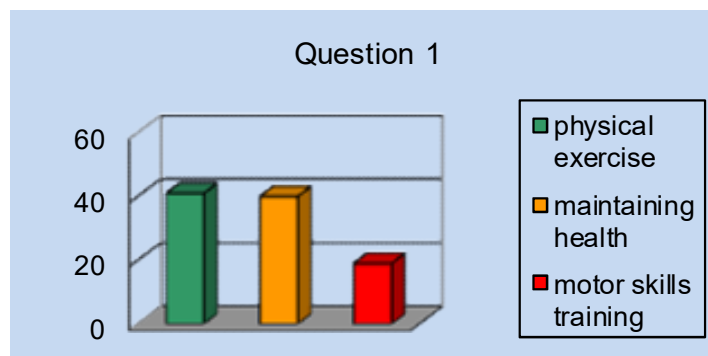


Fig. 1. Answers to the first question

To the second question: *How important do you think physical education has in the education system?*

The responses received were: 75% of respondents said: very much, 15% - large measure, 7% - small measure and 3% - negligible measure.

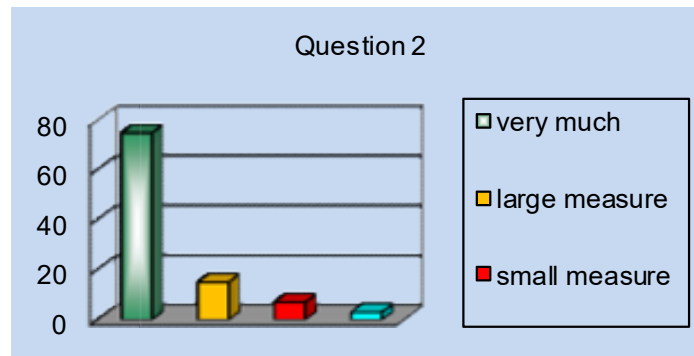


Fig. 2. Answers to the second question

The third question: *Do you think that the number of physical education classes in gymnasium is sufficient?* - 23% responded that YES, 72% said NO and 5% responded I DO NOT KNOW. Most consider these methods as a way to make work more efficient.

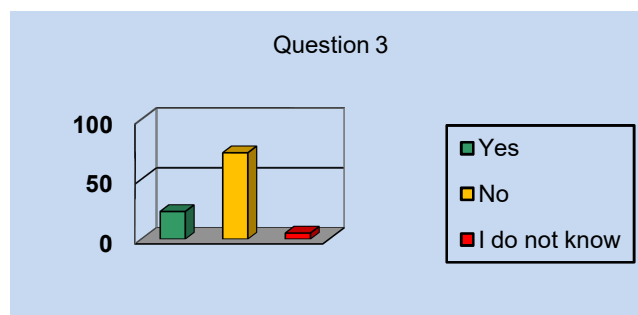


Fig. 3 Answers to the third question

The fourth question: *What do you think are the criteria according to which objectives and strategies used in the physical education lesson are set?* 67% responded that they use all the criteria, 17% indicated the pupils 'age particularities, 8% chose the pupils' training level, 5% indicated the objectives and content of the lesson, and 3% opted for the conditions in the school.

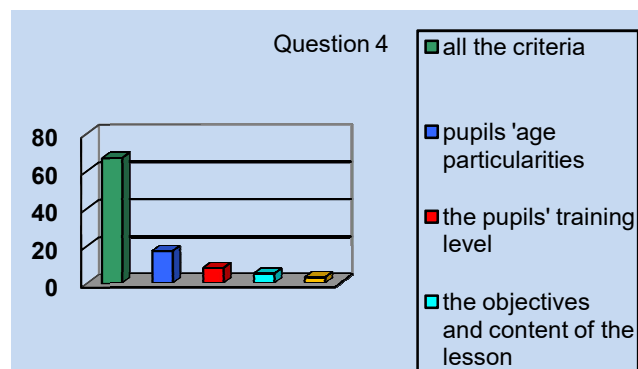


Fig. 4. Answers to the fourth question

The fifth question: *What do you think are the main immediate benefits of the school physical education lesson?* List! 60% of respondents said that this kind of lessons allow pupils to achieve better learning outcomes, with a pronounced formative character, 30% indicated the possibility of creative training, while 10% of those interviewed answered the playful character of relaxation

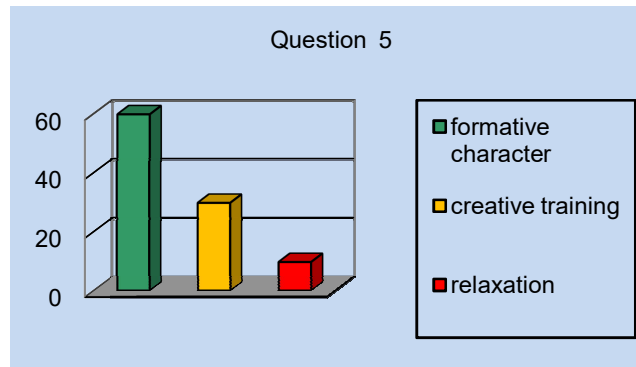


Fig. 5. Answers to the fifth question

The sixth question: *What do you think about using the textbooks at the physical education lesson at the gymnasium level?* 20% responded that they had a very good opinion regarding the use of textbooks, 50% had a good opinion of textbooks, and 30% had a bad opinion about textbooks.

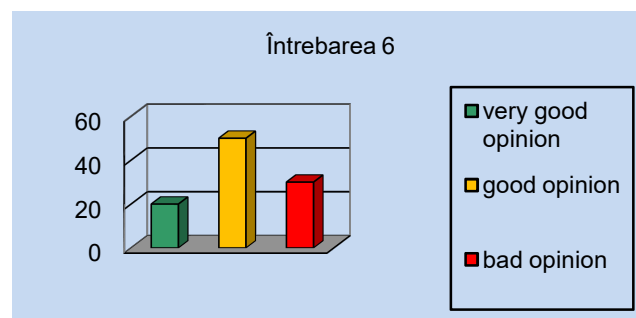


Fig. 6. Answers to the sixth question

2. Conclusions

From the analysis of the specialty literature, there was an increasing awareness of the importance of school PE classes in the European space, so some countries have increased the number of hours (Finland and Portugal), others have imposed diversification of contents (Hungary and Poland) and others teaching the subject and in small classes by specialists in the field who have the ability to adapt to the changing needs of the computerized society.

After applying the questionnaire and interpreting the data obtained on the questions, the conclusions are as follows: 81% defined PE as being related to skills training and physical exercise, while only 19% related discipline only to maintaining health; the majority of the interviewed teachers (75%) considered PE to be very important in the Romanian educational system, even if they were not specialized in this discipline; the majority (72%) of the question about the number of hours in the discipline responded that 2 hours are not enough, while 23% said they were sufficient and 5% responded that they did not know; in terms of the benefits of physical education and sport, 60% of respondents said that this kind of lessons allow pupils to achieve better learning outcomes, with a pronounced formative character, 30% mentioned the advantages of training creative, while 10% of those interviewed responded that they had only a playful character; Regarding the introduction and use of the textbooks in the PE discipline, 70% had a good and very good opinion, while only 30% have a bad opinion.

The results have shown that in Romanian school PE is perceived as an important discipline in the curriculum, its benefits being known to the development and evolution of students from all points of view.

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