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DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES IN CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION IN EASTERN EUROPEAN STATES

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Abstract

Objective. Physical education and sport have many objectives like getting a good health, a good physical development, a healthy lifestyle and not at least, pleasure to practice exercises independently or in the team. Most studies highlight the importance of physical education classes without making details about a wide range of activities which are included in the curriculum at primary and secondary level.

Methods. Therefore, at the basis of this study, we tried to realize the analysis of the activities contained in the physical education curriculum in South-East Europe.

Results Following the analysis of country specific documents we could see that physical education activities are different from one country to another and have a different weight in primary and secondary levels. Most of optional activities are at school's option and contents the same activities as those which are mandatory. Important differences are notice at the assessment process, each country having specific methods of evaluation for both levels studies, primary and secondary.

Conclusions. The difference seen in the objectives is also due to the social and economic development of each of the countries analysed, and to the infrastructure made available to schools. That is why it is our opinion that the central decision maker should first consider the school infrastructure and then propose the sport activities to take place.

Key Words: Curriculum, objectives physical education, physical education, assessment.

Introduction

Physical education is at the core of a comprehensive approach to promoting physical activity through schools (Pastorek, 2009). Defining the concept of curriculum and its analysis poses several problems in point of theory and methodology, which reflects the complexity of the issue, i.e. the feasible, organized and actually implemented education, with its numerous components, conditions, factors, perspectives, faces, etc. In most definitions, the essential defining notes of the curriculum converge towards the following: the entire system of learning experiences of the students under the auspices of a school; (Doll, 1988), any educational activity designed in school and aiming at a purpose taking place inside and outside school. (Homes, as per Ungureanu, 1999). The interpretation of the definitions describing the curriculum leads to the fact that the theory of the curriculum requires giving up the traditional pair teaching-learning, seen as a sequence of activities involving transmitting and receiving information. The curriculum means a path to cover, organizing and triggering learning, transforming the student in an adaptive manner.

Materials and Methods

An objective is the means used to archive a goal. Objective are the observable, measurable and quantifiable statements that guide the teacher in selecting appropriate educational strategies that help obtain the goal of the program. Quality physical education program establish clearly define objectives and the content of the program reflects constant effort

toward attainment of these objectives (Gallahue & Donnelly, 2003)

The complex situation, fast changes and various educational traditions make it difficult to systematise the curricular reform of present-day PE. The objective of the present paper is to describe the contents of the PE curriculum in the countries of South-East Europe, the differences and similarities of the subjects studied in the primary and secondary cycle, as well as those in the extracurricular activity, and to explain curricular dissimilarities in the selected countries. Another objective was also to study the assessment methods of the PE content in the primary and secondary cycle in the selected countries. Educational reform initiatives include aligning assessment to a program with a fully integrated teaching process which provides meaningful information about student learning and achievement. The transformation of assessment programs is moving toward performance-based assessments that focus on high-priority objectives and significant outcomes for students. The primary goal of assessment should be the enhancement of learning, rather than the documentation of learning for the purpose of determining a grade (Pastorek, 2009).

Purpose

The purpose of this analysis is to focus on basic information on the differentiated curriculum in the primary and secondary school, and the PE assessment and development in the selected countries, thus allowing further comparisons with the planned reforms in the field of physical education.

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Methods

The study of vast literature has led to a wide range of primary and secondary sources, governmental and non-governmental reports, international and national articles in academic and professional journals, secondary source texts, including qualitative studies of continental and regional PE.

Curricular objectives of physical education

The main objectives of physical education in school cannot be limited to improving physical skills, as it covers a wider range of abilities, some emotional and social in nature, some others cognitive processes, motivation and moral concepts. That is why all the countries considered in the study identify as the main objectives the youths' harmonious physical, personal and social development. Consider tracking your students' progress to help motivate them and to let them see the progress they are making. (Alberta, 2006). The modern curricular reform allows teachers and students to choose different ways of teaching process depending on goals, preferences, aspirations, desires and capacities of students, connected to the main objectives of physical education.

Harmonious body development

Due to the very nature of physical education, throughout the classes in this subject, major importance is given to physical and motor skills. The pupils are thus taught to develop their physical abilities, to acquire better coordination, faster reactions, higher speed, endurance, suppleness, balance and strength. Some countries refer to the opportunity of acquiring additional skills, such as the right posture and regular breathing. The physical education lessons aim at developing the motor skills related mainly to certain sport branches and movement games. Another concern of physical education is to compensate for the hours spent in a static position during the other classes, and generally to discourage a sedentary lifestyle. Physical development is closely linked to promoting a healthy lifestyle, including by means of developing the pleasure of exercising throughout the entire life. Almost all countries stress the importance of this type of activity to health, in order to increase life quality. In school pupils have to be offered the opportunity to learn more on the factors affecting their motor skills. Ultimately, physical education provides them with a framework to independently test their physical ability, experiment with certain activities and practice in their free time if they want.

Personal development

Physical education may contribute to the pupils' personal development by helping them improve their physical self-awareness and the confidence in their own physical skills, together with a general feeling of physical well-being, and thus, higher self-confidence and self-esteem. Also, physical education develops their moral and volitional skills such as will, the sense of responsibility, patience and courage. Thus they become more realistic in regard to their own

physical abilities, decisions and actions, learning to accept themselves as they are, as well as tolerate the differences in comparison to others. The health benefits of physical exercise also contribute to well-balanced mental skills. Physical education aims at developing a stable assertive behaviour, in a variety of situations, allowing pupils to discuss and discover means to successfully face negative emotions and stress.

Social development

Social development comprises a wide range of skills and abilities. Many countries stress the value of integrating pupils in society, cultivating and developing solidarity, social interaction, team work and team spirit, honesty, rule-observance and respect for others, as part of the maximum development of the pupils' personality. Certain countries also stress the importance of physical education to sport in society. Hungary emphasizes the fact that young people should follow and attend sporting events and also get informed about sport on a regular basis.

Process of globalization, increasing global communication systems, marketing and global sports phenomenon cannot equalize national standards therefore development of universal standards is of no help, as PE and sport always depend on interpretation a national and local level as well as the specific policies regarding this subject (Burger, Housner, Lee, 2008; Fisher, 2003; Pühse & Gerber, 2005).

Trends, issues and controversies of the curriculum physical education

All countries rely on the independent study of the mother language, mathematics, physical education, education through art, natural and social sciences. However, the name PE differs from a country to another. In Hungary and Romania, the name of the subject is Physical Education and Sport, in Slovenia it is Physical Education (i.e. Sport), in Croatia Physical education and culture for health. (Rodic, 2002) The goals of the subject vary from a country to another, but still they share certain characteristics, such as developing physical skills, acquiring moving competences and elementary theoretical knowledge.

The central authorities in many countries include in the curriculum of the initial years of primary school the main basic motor skills (acquired all throughout life), such as walking, running, jumping, catching, throwing. Little by little, the curriculum builds on these basic skills, extending the sphere of motor skills to include specific motor skills that children possess in practicing various sports. The most common are shown in Tables 1 and 2, with a clear-cut distinction between compulsory and optional activities, which are sometimes left at the decision of school in certain educational systems. Besides, there are no significant differences between primary and secondary education. In almost a third of the educational systems both types of schools are allowed to decide which activities are compulsory. Schools and teachers thus decide which physical activities are most likely to

result in desirable effects. Although in some countries schools are significantly autonomous, there are also compulsory activities which are prescribed, recommended or carried out frequently, thus being shown in Table 2. An issue that is becoming more and more relevant in many countries is the relevance to the outer world, the quality of school and the PE study programs. In the context of the educational reforms, associated to philosophical and pedagogical changes, and in response to the active lifestyle concepts in the process of learning throughout life, certain curricular changes have occurred in certain parts of the south-Eastern region. From this angle the curricular objectives in PE are redefined to the purpose of getting integrated in the larger concept of lifelong education, including in obtaining a state of well-being. Yet, there are still tendencies towards those activity programs related to sport performance (for each country) as apparent in the time span devoted to games, athletics

and gymnastics, which account for more than 70% of the PE curriculum for both levels, i.e. primary and secondary (Table 1). Such an orientation is against the social tendencies outside school, thus posing problems of meaning and relevance to the young people's lifestyle, as well as raising quality issues for the programs which are planned and implemented. Among the compulsory activities of school PE, games are the most common. Certain countries report that the games planned in the curriculum are ball games. Others prefer movement games which are specific to the skills necessary in daily life, such as jump, displacement with an object, throw, catch and throw. The next in order of frequency are gymnastics, athletics and dancing.

Other activities shown in Tables 1 and 2, as reported by certain countries, fall mainly in the area of martial arts and water sports. These activities are grouped under the heading „OTHERS”.

Table 1 Compulsory activities in the PE curriculum (source European Commission, 2013)

Activities in the PE	BG	EL	CY	HU	HR	RO	SI
Athletics		●	●	●	●	●	●
Dancing		●	●	●	●	●	●
Games	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Gymnastics	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Health and fitness							●
Leisure time activities			●				●
Swimming		●		●			●
Winter sports							●
Others						●	

primary education → ● ← secondary education

BG-Bulgaria, EL-Greece, CY-Cyprus, HU-Hungary, HR-Croatia, RO-Romania, SI-Slovenia

Table 2: Optional activities in the PE curriculum (European Commission, 2013:20)

Optional activities in the PE	BG	EL	CY	HU	HR	RO	SI
Athletics							●
Dancing			●				●
Games			●				●
Gymnastics							●
Health and fitness	●						●
Leisure time activities	●						●
Swimming	●		●				●
Winter sports							●
Curriculum decided by the school			●	●	●	●	●
Others	●						

primary education → ● ← secondary education

BG-Bulgaria, EL-Greece, CY-Cyprus, HU-Hungary, HR-Croatia, RO-Romania, SI-Slovenia

In Hungary compulsory activities are based on developing the children's psychosomatic state and their interest in games, improving their movement skills and developing the cult for physical activities. This involves developing basic motor skills suitable for activities of motor and sport learning, stressing the motor skills and solving motor skill issues specific to children. The content of the curriculum is divided into

four objectives as follows: harmonious corporal development (various life situations, breathing exercises ending on music, a system of movement-based activities and exercises for the well-being of the body), development of the interest in an active lifestyle (content related to acquiring various natural forms of movement in different circumstances), motor skill development (influencing the development of basic and



specific skills) maintenance of movement requirements (systematic interest in a hygienic lifestyle and physical exercise).

In Slovenia PE objectives include optimal physical and motor development, as well as functional development abilities, acquiring various natural forms of movement, play and sport, acquiring the pleasure of practicing sports, game education, together with the introduction of theoretical knowledge. In the first two grades, pupils learn and acquire natural forms of movement and games, athletics, gymnastics, swimming, dancing, ball games, picnics and trips. Moreover, the 4th, 5th, 6th grades continue the acquisition of natural movement forms, focused on general training and games. Pupils learn athletics, rhythmic gymnastics through dance, basketball, volleyball, handball, mini football, swimming and certain water-related activities, skiing and other winter activities. In addition, they go on picnics and mountain trips.

In Croatia the curriculum is meant to develop physical activity, sport and technical education by

connecting physical education to life and the workplace in general. The curriculum includes natural movement forms (walking, jumping, throwing and catching, pulling and pushing, balance, etc.), apparatus exercises, floor exercises, balance exercises, games, rhythmic exercises, and folk dances. The 4th grade curriculum also includes athletics and football, as well as the threshold educational requirements to be assessed.

In Romania the curriculum is based on the main PE objectives, gradually developing motor skills (walking, running, throwing and catching), applicative-utilitarian skills (weight carrying, climbing, jumping, escalade), and motor skills specific to sports (athletics, gymnastics and sport games). The content diversifies at secondary level, focusing on learning several sport games according to the logistics of each school. Optional programs provided alternatively, are formal in character, as their implementation requirements cannot be met cumulatively as stipulated in the very curriculum.

Table 3 PE curriculum activities areas in primary and secondary schools in Europa(%) (Hardman, 2008)

Activity Area	Primary Schools		Secondary Schools	
	Countries %	Curriculum %	Countries %	Curriculum %
Games	97	41	100	42
Gymnastics	97	17	100	13
Dance	80	78	74	5
Swimming	80	7	74	6
Outdoor adventure	71	4	69	7
Track & Field	94	14	100	17
Other	51	9	63	10

By comparison with the study of Hardman (2008) table 3, it may be seen that the areas of the PE field are not too differentiated from the ones shown in Table 1, the only one missing being athletics and health and fitness as compulsory activities for both educational levels. Thus, it may be concluded that within 2008-2012 the PE curriculum underwent changes to adapt to the social market.

Educational policy in selecting certain compulsory activities

Although East-European schools have included in the curriculum certain physical activities and sports in the past few decades, the reasons behind their choice are not very clear. The countries usually stress the value of long-term commitment in practicing physical exercise.

Physical education is seen as a means of inspiring young people and children to experiment with various activities, so that to be motivated to enjoy the independent practice of physical exercise throughout life. They should dispose of the infrastructure and the equipment necessary to teach these physical activities. The existence of an adequate sport infrastructure at the level of the local community may also increase the opportunity to practice organized physical activities

and improve their quality. The central authorities in some countries prescribe compulsory activities for the physical education classes, while other countries in the same region the schools are at liberty to choose these activities. There is also a third category of countries providing the possibility to adopt both versions of curricular proposals. Yet, all countries select compulsory activities according to a set of criteria considered significant. The arguments of educational policy or the reasons behind choosing activities are based on curricular objectives and the results of research. Irrespective of the decision level the systems of the countries under study select physical activities considered as the most adequate to reaching their goals. Certain countries mention specific reasons behind selecting certain compulsory physical activities, such as cultural, historical or performance traditions. These reasons are also reflected in teaching traditional dances and games, rooted in the society's culture, as well as traditional sports. The evolution of the new sport subjects or of the subjects considered fashionable may also motivate pupils in practicing physical activities.

Pupils' assessment

In all European countries, the pupils' involvement, progress and development through

physical education are monitored and assessed periodically, throughout the school year. However, the assessment methods may vary, according to the country and education level. This section deals with the formative and summative methods which are the most commonly used. Besides, the main assessment tools, especially designed for physical education, are described. Physical education is compulsory, both levels in the educational systems of all the countries included in the study. In most cases, the pupils' progress in the field of physical education is assessed

like in any other subject. Most countries issue clear recommendations on the assessment methods to be used in school-level physical education. According to the countries under study, the most common assessment methods in physical education are the formative and the summative one. Formative assessment is mainly qualitative and descriptive. It identifies the results of learning and the pupils' performance during a certain period, as well as anticipating the progress they may make.

Table 4 Assessment in PE (source European Commission, 2013)

Assessment methods	BG	EL	CY	HU	HR	RO	SI
Formative assessment							
Summative assessment							
Scales of central assessment							

primary education → ← secondary education
 BG-Bulgaria, EL- Greece, CY- Cyprus, HU- Hungary, HR- Croatia, RO – Romania, SI- Slovenia

In Cyprus, the formative assessment in lower secondary education relies on the following criteria: the progress made over a period of time; active and positive participation in the physical education classes; and the pupils' attitudes towards the physical education classes and during the exercises for sport and health.

In the lower primary and secondary educational system in Slovenia, during the school year and in all the stages of the learning process, teachers apply formative assessment monitoring the physical, motor and functional development of their pupils, and their command of various sporting skills. The involvement in the extracurricular activities and the results registered in other sports competitions contribute to the assessment of the pupils' activity. On the other hand, summative assessment is usually performed by grades, expressed by numbers or letters, aiming at performing activities or meeting requirements for a given period of time.

In the lower secondary education in Greece, physical education teachers assess pupils during the lesson or on the basis of short physical education tests they have to carry out. The time allotted to assessment should be as short as possible so that not to shorten the time devoted to teaching. The grade for the annual performance in physical education is the average of the grades on the three terms.

Although half of the countries use both formative and summative assessment methods in physical education at both educational levels under analysis, it seems that the summative assessment is the most common, according to Table 4. Some countries use summative assessment as unique method in primary education and lower secondary education, as it happens in Bulgaria. In other countries using summative assessment in primary education (see Table 4), grades are given in the first year of the level in question. This is the case in Greece, Hungary and Slovenia. During these years, formative assessment is used regularly, being later combined with summative

assessment. As previously shown, summative assessment tends to use grades applicable to all the other subjects in the curriculum. It is not unusual that schools develop specific assessment tools for physical education to assess the results of learning in this particular subject, as accurately as possible. Such tools are usually under the form of a scale made up of the list of sports activities, the description of the desired results of the learning process, and the expectations regarding performance, as well as the grades on which assessment relies.

Romania and Slovenia - secondary education, have created central assessment scales, in order to provide a standard assessment for the entire physical education system in the country, and also in order to allow the comparison of the results of the learning process on a national level.

Conclusions

From the analysis of the data it may be concluded that in Eastern Europe the curricular physical education activities differ at primary and secondary education level. The compulsory activities found in each curriculum include a common group, common to all countries, consisting of track and field, gymnastics, games, and a group only certain countries studying health and physical fitness, swimming, outdoor adventure/ leisure time activities, and winter sports. An additional reason why these activities differ from one country to another consists of the different PE objectives, some of them stressing the development of motor skills, and some other the achievement of a state of physical well-being throughout the entire life. The difference seen in the objectives is also due to the social and economic development of each of the countries analysed, and to the infrastructure made available to schools. That is why it is our opinion that the central decision maker should first consider the school infrastructure and then propose the sport activities to take place.



In all the countries included in the study the compulsory activities should be diversified, both at primary and secondary level, increasing the focus on obtaining a state of well-being by practicing physical exercise and lifelong learning, thus reaching a curriculum centred on an active lifestyle. The assessment of the physical education activities is also different from one country to another. Most countries employ the formative and summative assessment, but there are no assessment scales. The lack of assessment scales may lead to the pupils' losing interest in obtaining performance or acquiring a sport skill. The assessment scale allows pupils to compare their own performance with the best performance they can achieve, as well as the model of a sport skill. The assessment scale is also useful in comparing the level of the learning results on a national level and thus in re-thinking the PE curriculum.

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