

Physical education and quarantine

Wychowanie fizyczne i kwarantanna

Józef Węglarz

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Abstract

Scientific knowledge, supported by research intuition, is able to predict a lot but not everything. A worldwide epidemic has not been foreseen, and therefore it caused massive havoc and disturbance in the functioning of all areas of life. This affected education in a great degree, and physical education in particular, because it was unable to use its basic element – motion. This difficult period for physical education should be an opportunity for revising the views on the contents of the curriculum and to change the emphasis on the process of education and physical education respectively. Education should regain priority.

Keywords: epidemic, physical education, changes

Introduction

Not everything can be predicted, yet some events, like volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, or hurricanes, are possible to be forecast with precision. On the other hand, numerous other events remain unexpected. In 2019, just a year ago, no one had anticipated a major problem on a world scale – the coronavirus COVID-19, for which there is no cure to be found. That is why the virus has largely disturbed the mundane life of societies, with the disturbance enlarged by the fear of getting infected, and the normality of day-to-day life being caught in stagnation. Many extreme countermeasures were introduced in order to, according to the experts, shield citizens from the unknown disease. Those restrictions were dependent on a country's defensive strategy and thus the approach to the new danger differed between the countries (vide: USA, Sweden, Italy, Belarus, Germany), although at the early stages of the pandemic it was rather intuition than knowledge which guided the decision-making process.

As an effect of those tragic events, many aspects of reality, such as economy, business, and social life, have been frozen in hibernation. Even the politics slowed down to some extent, shifting its focus towards fighting off the pandemic. Education was the first to collapse.

The state of physical education

The obvious, yet terrible loss was the inability to continue hosting classes in school buildings, and the general lack of teacher-student contact in person. It has made education a wreckage,

as there was no possibility of a direct dialogue between the participants, which is best created in a school. The improvised, online substitutes were not even available for each student, and the quality of meetings organised that way varied greatly. Some teachers had trouble with adapting to the new and alien environment as well, as not every one of them had been sufficiently trained in the use of certain computer programs, and the access to the necessary hardware also varied from school to school.

Physical education has arguably suffered the most, as it is a special type of class. Its main feature is exercising, which means activities requiring movement. In a circumstance of physical activity being banned, and then largely limited, the whole process stopped. All that remained was a void, and nothing to fill it up with. The teachers tried to encourage students to do some simple exercising via online methods of communication, but due to technical restrictions, it was impossible to properly demonstrate how they should be done. The ability to teach students, improve their physical performance, and better their motor skills, simply ceased to exist. In this case, distance learning had failed. In this enforced quarantine only teaching theory was viable. And that is the bottom of the problem...

The teaching of theoretical knowledge at PE has always been a problem and even a nuisance for some, because they knew that it is a part of the methodology of how classes, in general, are designed but were also aware that the stereotypes which have accumulated over the years would preach the opposite. Many of them still think that transferring knowledge is a reason behind a decrease in effectiveness and intensity of the classes, and even a simple waste of time. These arguments are superficial. A fundamental problem lies in the lack of theoretical base for the subject. None of the existing curricula have specified the desired extent of intellectualisation and its sources. Despite various at-

* Adres do korespondencji/Address for correspondence:
weglarz.jozef@gmail.com

tempts (made by e.g. Mieczkowski, Frołowicz, and Przysiężna), compendiums for students aiming at conveying basic information about the essence of participation in the physical culture have never been written. Additionally, universities training their students for a career of a physical education teacher have never created a set of information concerning the methods of conveying sufficient knowledge and specifying its extent, because their main focus is on preparing graduates for teaching the technique of physical exercise. Thus, in reality the student has no access to any source of theoretical knowledge other than their teacher, who does not always pass it on to the student.

During the epidemic, students have remained in the confines of their houses, often helpless in their unfulfilled need to exercise their bodies, while their physiology unsuccessfully demanded its due dose of movement. If sport or recreational activities were a part of their families' lifestyles, then the expectations of the physical culture have been met and the pro-somatic stance has developed, allowing, in the circle of one's family, for a realisation of one's needs. But such households are rare in Poland.

However, in this difficult period something that we should take advantage of has emerged – the possibility of changing teachers' attitudes towards the process of physical education and that it is worth to make them aware of it. A reflection that intellectualisation is crucial and as important as improving the student's body and the teaching of movement should emerge. A conversation with a pupil cannot be considered a waste of time, on the contrary, the more often the exchange of thoughts occurs, the more we can expect that the pupil will make caring for their physical condition and health a part of their lives. If a student who achieved a certain level of education acquired an optimal amount of knowledge about caring for their body, the young generation would be in better physical shape. But it may only happen when the student knows how, and why they should care about their body, and what the effects of regular exercise or the lack of it are. This is the path to independence, or in other words-self-creation. Therefore, in the process of physical education, intellectualization should receive the status it deserves, so that everyone would be able to handle unusual situations. Hopefully, the current pandemic may help us accomplish this goal.

However, a systematised transfer of knowledge is not the only condition that needs to be fulfilled so that the pupil is ready for their independence. Creating a permanent conviction about the

need for caring for one's body, supported by the technology of its exercise, is a necessity. So first the axiological competences, then the methodology of physical exercise. It is hoped that the experiences of the recent months will initiate the need to revise the curricula as well as the contents and methods of knowledge transfer, with the use of modern IT techniques, in a unified system for all educational institutions.

Summary

Even in the most dramatic events, it is worth to search for premises which can breathe new, positive values. A fitting example is the world wars, which brought the demise of millions of people but hastened, for example, the development of new industrial technologies, advances in medicine and rehabilitation, the development of electronics, or the creation of pacifist movements. Now, after the trauma we have experienced, we will surely be more careful with direct interpersonal contacts, more humble when it comes to unforeseen dangers, more trustful to experts, more distanced to manufacturing material goods, and more appreciative of health as well as accepting of the benefits of electronic communication.

Physical education should reorient its process, enriching it with a theoretical background and its effective message, so that in similar situations we would not be left in forced quarantine with physical education having nothing to offer to us. Moreover, so that a student left all by himself would, after undertaking a basic propaedeutic course in physical education, take care of his health, well-being, physical condition, and fitness, and enjoy it. The success of these changes will be determined by a shaped pro-somatic stance, containing varied ways of caring for the body. Knowledge is one of the components of this attitude. The rest consists of beliefs and tendencies to appropriate behaviours supported by useful motor skills. And it is a methodical obviousness, which has to be included the overall work of a teacher with a student.

Idleness in physical education that was forced by those unexpected actions ought to also contribute to a revision of the process of training the cadre of physical educators, changes to the curriculum taking into greater account the substantive and methodical areas containing knowledge of shaping the expected attitudes of physical culture.

Streszczenie

Wiedza naukowa, wsparta intuicją badawczą, potrafi wiele przewidzieć, chociaż nie wszystko. Ogólnoświatowej epidemii nie przewidymano, i dlatego poczyniła ona ogromne spustoszenia oraz zakłócenia w funkcjonowaniu wszystkich sfer życia. Dotknęło to w wielkim stopniu edukację, a edukację fizyczną w szczególności, bo nie mogła korzystać z podstawowego czynnika, który stosuje, czyli z ruchu. Ten trudny okres dla niej powinien być okazją do zrewidowania poglądów na zasoby treści programowych oraz zmiany w akcentach przebiegu procesu kształcenia i wychowania fizycznego. Pierwszeństwo powinno odzyskać wychowanie.

Słowa kluczowe: epidemia, wychowanie fizyczne, zmiany
