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Sport as a privilege in Spain

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Abstract

The reduction of Physical Education hours in the Spanish curriculum originates from a false premise: families are already aware of the importance of physical activity, and attempt to compensate for the lack of it at school with an extra schedule. It seems then, that there is an assumption that classes that are available after school are only related to physical activity: this is not the case. Furthermore, only those families that are fully aware of the consequences of their children's inactivity, and who can (and want to) invest in those extra classes and engage in some kind of physical activity after school. But the reality is that Physical activity only is important for some families.

Key-Words

Sport – Physical Education – Spain – Curriculum – Lifestyle – Scale of values

Introduction

Spanish society is full of contradictions regarding physical activity. On the one hand, little consideration is given to practice or to motor skills, while on the other hand, physical, psychological and social health is emphasised as being of the utmost importance, especially when concerning child development. Take for example the strategy for Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity Prevention (NAOS) Plan, developed by the Spanish Department of Health. It suggests strategies in connection with nutrition, physical activity and overweight prevention and includes the “encouragement of citizen's exercising, with special emphasis on schools”, as one of its main objectives. In line with this, Penney (2008) states that opportunities to engage in physical activity, at school as well as in everyday life, must be made available to all. In addition, the World Health Organization (WHO) recommends half an hour of physical activity a day, highlighting that: “There is strong evidence to show that schools should include a diet and physical activity component in the curriculum taught by trained teachers; ensure parental involvement; provide a supportive environment; include a food service with healthy choices; and offer a physical activity programme” (WHO, 2009, 16).

Physical Education (PE) is more than just another area of study at school, and given its potential in complementing other subject areas and facilitating students' integral education, it should be provided as a universal option. This view is outlined in the 1st article of the European Physical Education Association (EUPEA, 2006, 1), where the recommendation is for schools to: “Ensure that all pupils, regardless of ability or disability, culture, religion, gender or social class have access to a high quality physical

education curriculum". This guideline is particularly important as it indicates that care must be taken to avoid discrimination in the provision of Physical Education based on differences in social class. Moreover, Azzarito and Solomon (2005, 35) report that "gender discourses in physical education and sports intertwined with discourses of race and social class, [are] channelling women into or constraining their participation in different sports over time" which reflects the need for equal opportunities in Physical Education.

The UNESCO International Charter of Physical Education and Sports in UNESCO (1978, 2) mentions that "the practice of physical education and sport is a fundamental right for all" that is, motor activity should be universally guaranteed with educational programs and appropriate provision of sports activities.

Yet, international guidelines are often ignored, with the practices of many educational centres meaning that participation in physical activity and sport has become a privilege for the few rather than an opportunity for all. There is no doubt that sedentary lifestyle and overweight has to be combatted by persuading society to make healthier choices (e.g., adopt exercise habits), but the truth of the matter is that the number of PE school hours is continually being reduced and there is even the risk of them disappearing. In Canada, the opposite seems to be occurring: "We are seeing tremendous new policies being implemented, such as the English New Brunswick School Boards new mandate for 150 minutes a week of physical education taught by Physical Education specialists as well as Manitoba's new mandate for a second high school physical education credit requirement. Clearly decision makers are listening and are doing their part to put the 'physical' back in education" Jones (2008, 2). The ideal approach would be dedicating four hours a week to PE in a school curriculum; two to three hours is the amount the European Parliament (2007) recommends to meet the basic requirements; two hours are a poor reminder of its importance; and one hour will definitely make lots of families live an unbalanced and unhealthy life, mainly as a result of lack of money, knowledge or a different scale of values. Bocarro, Kanters, Casper and Forrester (2008, 163) explicitly state that PE "represents a unique opportunity to present children with a greater array of sport experiences that will likely have a positive impact on lifelong physical activity and sport adherence".

Sport as a universal language

It is a change coin that permits all cultures take contact of the globe. Although we must avoid traditional sports and games disappear. It is important to spread and develop these minority sports to increase the range of possibilities of practice. Klein (2007, 887) considers that "for some, globalization means cultural 'homogenization', the spread of a uniform sport world and loss of local (national) sporting traditions. Others argue that local variation can hold its own in the face of globalizing interests; in short, these tendencies coexist in tension". Sport is a link that allows individuals to interact with all peoples and cultures around the globe. Houlihan (2008, 63) mentions that "all sports are linked to the contexts in which sports are played". The physical practice in general and the practice of specific sports can bring people together, since the promotion of sport generates positive and dynamic feelings (the game sport is associated with joy and fun). Although the sport is

not a panacea for education, it is a vehicle (catalyst) for facilitating learning. Sport should be linked to development and peace, but we must promote and guide sport and PE within the education field. Sport can be particularly useful since it can serve as an integrator vehicle. Specifically, it can act as an intercultural nexus, bringing together old and young as “an intergenerational activity” (Luis-Pascual and Diaz-Garcia, 2009, 36); it may facilitate the cooperation of social classes; or could improve the participation of people with different abilities (e.g., as an integrated social event used to aid rehabilitation or provide meaning to the lives of people who have suffered in some way). For Schinke and Hanrahan (2009, 46) “sport participants are diverse in many ways, but they do not reflect the diversity of the broader population”.

It is possible to use the potential of sport to develop positive values in the wider society. Sport thus emerges as a tool, not as an end in itself, and in this light is like a preparation for, or simulation of life, allowing the practice in similar and controlled situations. Alternatively, sport can be used as an introduction to real life. We can, therefore, say that sport is a good school of life; we can even say that sport can be a way of life. Sport is a phenomenon that draws people in, which has such magnetism that it becomes an indispensable element of motivation in education, besides being a rich source of information. It must be emphasized that the authors are not talking about sporting successes as such, but rather educational successes that may be facilitated through sport and PE. In addition, these views are compliant with the maxim: “the family that plays together stays together”. The practice of sport and physical education is conceived as a civil right because the child has the right to play. It is a tool for personal growth, not only for children but also for adults throughout their lives. This sport model should be closer to students than the students to the sport because sport must adapt to child.

It is accepted that not every physical activity or sporting activity is positive, but the absence of such practice is argued to be more detrimental. For example, in the fight against obesity, inactivity is a problem of many countries in the world. Bocarro, Kanters, Casper and Forrester (2008, 155) report that “sedentary living and obesity across all age, social, ethnic, and economic categories has reached epidemic proportions in the United States”. Moreover, this problem can have a social connotation which has been highlighted in a report stating that “adolescents from low socio-economic households are almost twice as likely to be overweight as are adolescents from upper middle class families” (Azzarito and Solomon, 2005, 26). In addition, sporting inactivity could, even, encourage consumerism.

Although there are positive values associated with sport, these are not always transmitted to participants automatically. Consequently, it is essential that these values are identified by activity leaders so that participants may be made aware of them. We must reflect on them, making that arise in students a critical way and then have to live by themselves and feel in first person and learn by self these values. PE teachers must create and maintain strict protocols of good sports practice at school age (e.g., discouraging verbal or physical violence). In particular, it's important to involve families, in sports because they are an important referent and model.

Sport is important to society, but it is also important to individuals as it can form part of a person's self-identity. One must believe in the potential value of sport. This potential is increased if implemented and endorsed by

credible others such as teachers and especially family members. In particular, a key role of the PE teacher must be to try to stem the rate at which students drop out of participating in sport during the transition from primary to secondary school.

The next step is to establish links between PE and extracurricular sport. Bocarro et al. (2008, 163) tell us that “a physical education curriculum that includes intramurals before, during, and after school can help children learn the skills to enjoy participation in a variety of sports designed to facilitate lifelong participation”. School sport should be promoted at school by the PE teacher. As a specialist in the field of education, the PE teacher is in a position to oversee and encourage the entire activities that young people in school participate in, with a view to establishing consistency between extracurricular sporting activity and physical activity as part of the educational curriculum. This can prevent a large difference in teaching methodological approaches and may also ensure greater participation by the entire target population, not only the best young athletes from each sporting discipline.

It is important that the teaching of PE and sport in school does not deter young people from engaging in other recreational physical and sporting activities that are offered by other institutions. We should try to better involve both civil society (British model) and administration (German model). Such action may facilitate the development of different models of self-management of young people. In addition, practices such as keeping small groups fairly stable and using a variety of different activities may be important to ensure that participants return to engage in these activities because of their relations with the group, not just because of the activity itself. An example of this proposal is the *Friday Night Project* which takes place in the city of Leeds (England) for young people over 12 years. One of the objectives of the project is to develop a sense of belonging to a group, an association or a club.

Although sport can be used to create learning communities where personal and social responsibilities for helping others are endorsed, it is crucial that the decision of people to adhere to and adopt such values is completely voluntary and not enforced. The importance of such self-determined engagement is highlighted by Luis-Pascual and Diaz-Garcia (2009, 35), who state “In the moment that [the sport] transforms into an obligation (situation that one can give in the learning) it loses great part of its attractiveness as motive activity”.

A third step may be to establish sporting learning communities, where young people are made aware of the objectives of participation. Besides increasing participants' awareness of their personal responsibility for maintaining engagement in physical activity, it is possible to foster a sense of responsibility in the type of activities participants engage in by involving them in the process of selecting specific games/tasks (e.g., competitive, cooperative). Klein (2007, 885) proposes “building a worldwide community of sports scholars who globalize the field, without concern for discipline or distance. Simplicity is essential in this enterprise”. It is important to establish a time of reflection where the sporting activity is valued, and where the functions performed by the different roles of this learning community are evaluated.

Sport as a privilege in Spain

Generally, the variables which may determinate that sport is a privilege in Spain include the scale of values in some Spanish families, the numbers of weekly hours of PE in the Spanish curriculum, and the extra-school approaches to providing opportunities for sports participation. The provision of extracurricular sports activities allows access to physical activity and sport, if it is important for the individual and his family (in its scale of values). It is not always a question of money, as young people may be able to pay but are simply unwilling or not interested and prefer to spend their time engaging in other leisure time activities (e.g., watching TV or playing videogames). It is important to offer both multiple and varied (e.g., recreational vs competitive) physical activities that allow young people to express themselves, but more important is that practical guidance and tutoring from the school is provided.

In Europe, numerous institutions are strenuously emphasising the importance of sport and physical activity as a requirement in attempts to reduce the prevalence of obesity, overweight and Type II diabetes in the population. However, there remains a paradox in that the number of hours devoted to the PE curriculum is simultaneously being reduced, thus limiting the opportunity to educate people about the health benefits of active lifestyles. Although free extracurricular physical activity opportunities are provided, these alone are not sufficient in addressing the issues that are impacting on the health of the general population.

Extracurricular sporting practice is necessary but not solely sufficient because it does not reach everyone, either due to the scale of values adhered to by families, as discussed above, or because young people are not motivated to engage in such physical activity for a number of reasons (e.g., participation only offered to the best sports performers because nowadays the motivation is due to a win focus rather than an emphasis on learning or personal improvement). There appear to be different values in school sports activities and in extra-school sports activities. When young people practice physical activity inside and outside the school, they often receive conflicting messages about why it is important to participate in sport (e.g., self-improvement/health benefits vs. desire to be a winner). Therefore, there must be supervision by the school because the important thing is the well-being of young participants.

The NAOS Plan specifies that it is necessary for schools to provide a PE curriculum of high quality. People involved in the provision of PE in schools must “recognize the essential role of Physical Education in the development and maintenance of health and overall development of people, and its important role in creating security and cohesion within society” (Ministerio de Sanidad y Política Social, 2005, 1).

The chair of European Traditional Sports and Games Association (ETSGA) Jaouen (2009, 7) explicitly states that “obsolete arguments continue to influence many countries in their physical education policies in which traditional games are often excluded, except in some cases, such as in Spain where the education system allows traditional games to be taught in the universities of physical education”.

Conclusion

So, what can be done? Perhaps the first step to take should be modifying

syllabuses to include the regulations that emphasise the importance of motor activity at school, and then make the school be responsible for all kind of physical and sport activity taking place, not only in the school but also outside it.

This implicates:

- Increased number of hours of PE in the prescriptive curriculum (in a form that is suitable for everyone).
- Creation of physical practice habits in lifelong education.
- Helps reduce overweight (150 minutes of physical activity per week is required).
- Activities (especially sporting) should be multiple and varied.
- Avoiding the sedentary lifestyle.
- Organizing the extra-school sportive participation of young physical activities undertaken within school can maximise the opportunities of practice throughout life.
- Extracurricular activities are more selective and must compete with the offer of many other activities. It is necessary to remember that the activities performed must be most likely to be continued in the future.
- The sporting experience must be positive, because if it is negative, it can have the opposite effect (e.g., rejecting or avoiding the physical activity). Sports practice should be inclusive and suitable for different skill levels. The most important collaboration is with parents, ensuring that families, PE teachers and monitors of extra-school adhere to the same values and principles.
- Everyone must collaborate for sports practice to be a universal opportunity.

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