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Self-assessment of the competences of early childhood education teachers to conduct lessons of physical activities

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Key words: early childhood education; physical education; teacher's competences

Summary

Primary school education is the most important stage in a child's development. Therefore, it is very important that the first teacher, who is an authority for a young child, is competent in all areas of education, including the implementation of physical activities.

Based on the results of the research presented in this article, an attempt was made to determine the self-assessment of early childhood education teachers regarding their competence to conduct physical education activities. The research was conducted in 2015 during a training course for teachers from the Łódź Province, by the Laboratory of Physical and Health Education at the Faculty of Educational Sciences at the University of Łódź. The

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research results were prepared on the basis of interviews with 30 teachers working in primary schools in grades 1-3, participating in the training

This study presents the answers of the surveyed teachers to 10 questions. Most of the respondents assessed their competences to conduct physical activities quite well. They would be eager to learn in this area if the courses put more emphasis on the practical side, and if they had the opportunity to transfer the acquired skills to their schools.

Introduction

Primary school education is the most important stage in a child's development. It is during its duration that it is supported in all aspects. Therefore, it is very important that the first teacher, who is an authority for a young child, is competent in all areas of education, including conducting physical activities.

Education at the first stage of the process requires teachers to have comprehensive knowledge, many competences and personality traits necessary in this profession. In addition to the teacher's general competences, which are: didactic, caring, educational, environmental and research ones, one should also focus on the competence to conduct physical education classes. In most universities, early childhood education teachers have very few classes that would help them conduct this type of lessons. And yet "a teacher, regardless of the epoch and time, is a person with confirmed personal predispositions and competences, supported by appropriate higher education - substantive as well as pedagogical and professional preparation for formal education in education"³.

At the first stage of education, a student spends a lot of time with his tutor. In her article, Emilia Chomutowska⁴ mentions who the teacher is and what predispositions and tasks they face. It compares the teacher to:

1. Supervisor, preparing by creating lesson plans, searching for various types of games and activities for children, appropriate for a given group of students. After the initial schedule of the day is established, he observes his charges, and such "careful observation of behavior during play enables adults to get to know the child's inner world, allows them to penetrate into

³ T. Malinowski, *Nauczyciel i społeczeństwo*, Warszawa 1995: 75, Polish.

⁴ E. Chomutowska, *Kim z zawodu jest nauczyciel wczesnoszkolny?*, http://www.eid.edu.pl/publikacje/kim_z_zawodu_jest_nauczyciel_wczesnoszkolny_,185.html [dostęp: 30.12.2016].

dilemmas that bother them, identify their possibilities and unmet needs”⁵. Thanks to such observation, the teacher can make corrections to the teaching material he has prepared.

2. A person who can organize all kinds of fundraisers. The collections may include trips, going to the cinema, going to the theatre, museum or swimming pool. Manages the class or school budget.

3. Actor or director, creating performances, scenes, inventing roles for his students. The educator is a person who promotes education. He encourages his students to actively participate in school life.

4. A person who can diagnose his student and identify his problems. In addition, it is properly prepared to solve these problems in an appropriate manner by creating adequate forms of work with a student who needs support.

5. A person who acts as a role model for others. He is an authority and a figure worthy of attention. Children pay attention to the tutor's behavior at every turn. They look at how they deal with students, their peers from the teaching environment, and with students' parents.

6. The best person in his profession, specializing in mathematical, geographical, biological and sports fields. It is the educator who must have similar knowledge in every respect. This is especially important in initial teaching, where one teacher conducts geography, biology and physical education classes. It is advisable for the teacher to expand the acquired knowledge during training or improvement courses, all kinds of workshops and teacher meetings.

7. A person with artistic skills who has an appropriate aesthetic sensitivity. Artistic games are a very interesting alternative to spending free time. They bring a lot of joy to children. They also positively influence their psychomotor development.

8. A person who can give favourable advice in times of need. He improves the work of children at school, encourages his students, but also draws attention to unfavourable actions on their part. He supports at every stage of education and reveals any mistakes made. Sets up an action plan and marks progress. She runs her class and cares about safety. He is an advisor for parents of students who come for advice in various situations. The teacher gives all comments in order to best help parents and children in further educational work, which should be carried out at home as part of consolidating the knowledge provided at school

⁵ G. Kapica, *Zabawa jako forma wychowania* [w:] *Encyklopedia Psychologii*, W. Szewczuk (red.), Wydawnictwo Fundacja Innowacja, Warszawa 1988: 1032, Polish.

10. A person who flawlessly moves in the field, knows the city plan and knows where to find appropriate institutions and facilities. Teaches children road signs and safe behaviour outside of school. He is the guide of his class.

These are just some of the professions (roles) a teacher has. It all depends on what attitude he adopts and whether he will like his job so that children cannot develop in a friendly atmosphere, full of warmth and understanding. The role of the punishing teacher, who was an authority, but not a creative person, ceased to exist a long time ago. How a teacher performs his professional functions is influenced by the competences he acquired during his education and preparation for the profession.

Teacher qualifications

The teacher acquires his competences in the process of education and during professional work. However, you cannot equate competences and qualifications, because the latter are acquired during courses, trainings and are documented with certificates, diplomas, awards, etc.

The ordinance of the Minister of Science and Higher Education on the standards of education preparing for the teaching profession specifies general and detailed effects obtained by a university graduate by defining detailed learning outcomes: knowledge, skills and social competences⁶.

On the other hand, the Teacher's Charter (chapter 3)⁷ specifies that a person holding the position of a teacher must have a higher pedagogical education and follow generally accepted moral principles. He/ she cannot have health contraindications for performing this function.

Both moral, physical and health education is carried out during physical education lessons at school.

Conducting physical activities at school at the first stage of education

Physical education is - apart from recreation, tourism, sport and rehabilitation - a component of physical culture. Maciej Demel and Alicja Skład describe physical culture as "an expression of a specific attitude towards one's own body, conscious and active concern for

⁶ Rozporządzenie Ministra Nauki i Szkolnictwa Wyższego z dnia 25 lipca 2019 r. w sprawie standardu kształcenia przygotowującego do wykonywania zawodu nauczyciela, Dz.U. 2019, poz. 1450: 27-63, <http://prawo.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU20190001450/O/D20191450.pdf> [dostęp: 20.02.2020].

⁷ Karta Nauczyciela, *Wymagania kwalifikacyjne*, Warszawa 1982: 7-8, Polish.

one's development, fitness and health, the ability to organize and spend time with the greatest benefit for physical and mental health"⁸. In school, it involves a systematic and goal-oriented process. Children perform the exercises over a period of time to show how much progress they have made. It is therefore important to follow the student's interest and development opportunities. Failure to adjust the exercises to any of the factors may cause injuries or overload, which may lead to severe and sometimes irreversible damage to the spine. Therefore, physical education is often associated with health education, which in a passive or visual way deals with the topic of a healthy lifestyle. It is influenced not only by physical activity, but also by nutrition and knowledge of your body and its capabilities

Research method and material

The study uses the method of a diagnostic survey with the interview technique, with a specially constructed interview questionnaire for early school education teachers. The aim of the presented research is to show the self-assessment of the competences of teachers from grades I-III to conduct physical education classes and their preparation in this regard. The research sample of N = 30 were teachers from grades I - III: N = 8 first-class teachers, N = 10 second-class teachers and N = 12 third-class teachers, who in 2015 took part in the educational project entitled "Creator of health and physical activity", conducted by the Laboratory of Physical and Health Education at the Faculty of Educational Sciences at the University of Lodz.

The main research question was formulated as follows: How did the surveyed teachers of early school education assess their competences to conduct physical activities with children in grades I-III of primary school?

Results

Based on the interviews conducted among teachers of early childhood education, it can be determined how they themselves assess their competence to conduct physical education classes and are they aware of: what role does movement play in educating students in the first stage of education?

This article presents the respondents' answers to 10 questions.

⁸ M. Demel, A. Skład, *Teoria wychowania fizycznego dla pedagogów*, PWN, Warszawa 1970: 13, Polish.

The first one, which concerned their self-assessment of competences to conduct physical education classes, 20% of the surveyed teachers described their competences as very good. Most of the respondents, as much as 60%, are good, while 10% of the respondents define their competences both at a bad and insufficient level. In grades II of primary school, only 10% of respondents described their skills as very good. The largest number, 50%, admitted that they thought skills were good, and 40% that they were insufficient. Class III teachers were more divided, which may be due to their awareness of the need for exercise - 30% of teachers admitted that they have very good competences to conduct physical education classes. The same number of teachers admitted that they have good and bad skills to conduct such classes. The least, because only 10% of the respondents admitted that they had insufficient level of it.

To the next question: Who should conduct physical education classes at the first stage of education: early school education or physical education teacher? Most of the respondents agree, 26 people believe that at this stage of education, a teacher of early childhood education works well, while 4 believe that a qualified physical education teacher is needed. There will also be people who emphasize that an educator who would have more support from physical education teachers would also be a good solution to support the physical development of children.

To the third question: Do they know what other skills can be learned in physical education? Most teachers notice that during PE lessons it is very easy to teach children: maths, Polish, as well as English and social behaviours, such as group collaboration, empathy. All the teachers admitted that physical education classes are very important in educating the young organism, they influence its development and often build its character. Thanks to them, students learn to cooperate, selfless help, acquire new knowledge, concentration and logical thinking. Physical education for all surveyed teachers is important in teaching, because students at this stage of education have a great need for exercise and at least partially it is satisfied in school lessons.

To the next question: Do they willingly conduct physical activities in their class? The teachers agreed that they are willing to conduct physical activities, but 1/3 of them indicated that they prefer classes in the gymnasium. However, as they admitted, most often they do not dress up in sports clothes because they do not have the conditions for it. Most often they only change shoes.

To the question: Where are physical education classes most often conducted and in what forms? The answers of the surveyed teachers were very similar. All of them conducted classes in the gymnasium, corridor, playground, school playground, in the classroom, as well as in the meadow near the school. 5 teachers noticed the problem of running sports in the school corridor, which is dangerous and does not give a sense of comfort. Four teachers admitted that once a week students are provided with swimming lessons, thanks to which the children improve their swimming skills. All of them were dominated by games and movement games, general development exercises, obstacle courses, slaloms, outdoor games, team games, ball games and games with an animation scarf. Only two teachers indicated the gymnastic exercises, i.e. the forward and backward flip.

To the next question: How do they prepare the studied movement activities for students in their class and prepare lesson plans? Most of the respondents did not create their own lesson plans because they considered it a waste of time. According to them, the most important are interesting and inviting lessons. Some admitted that they create mini-drafts consisting of entries or use ready-made drafts. This is ensured by the publishing house from which they have their textbooks. The surveyed teachers use various accessories, such as hula hoops, sashes, pouches, cones, balls, jump ropes and gymnastic mattresses. Most of the teachers admitted that while learning the exercises themselves, they show them and explain them verbally. Sometimes, however, they use the help of more agile students.

To the 8th question: Do they implement the assumptions of the core curriculum in the field of physical education? All admitted that they were implementing the goals of the core curriculum for physical education in grades I-III of primary school. At the same time, half of them emphasized that they care about safety during classes and adhere to health and safety rules and rules that they have established together with the children. One pointed out that she remembers to be quiet and calm, and focuses on carrying out tasks assigned to students. Two teachers admitted that they introduce elements of corrective exercises in their classes, mainly breathing exercises.

To the next question: Are the designated physical education classes also conducted by a qualified physical education teacher, only four teachers replied that they had specialist teachers at their disposal who conduct physical education classes in their classes. Unfortunately, other people cannot count on such support. Some, however, indicated that they receive help from physical education teachers when they need advice, want to borrow equipment or support themselves on the merits.

To the question 10th: Do the respondents participate in the forms of teacher training in physical education and in what? All admitted that therefore they are on the "Creator of health and physical activity" course to improve their qualifications. At the same time, half of the teachers admitted that in the past they had participated in courses that did not meet their expectations because they provided only theoretical knowledge. At the same time, as many as 23 respondents have no expectations regarding the participation in self-improvement in conducting physical activities. The rest of the teachers have a rather radical view of the courses, workshops or trainings they have participated in. According to them, during such meetings information is provided that is not applicable to school realities. Moreover, teachers feel that sports schools are preferred there, as it is known that they have better equipment and more qualified teachers and sports coaches.

Conclusions

Early childhood education teachers should be characterized by such personality traits as: communicativeness or responsibility and be aware that they are responsible for the development of their students. In connection with his education, he should know the methodology of educating students at the first stage of education and be able to adjust the methods, forms and means of his educational work to the needs and capabilities of a young person. The surveyed teachers assessed their competences to conduct physical activities quite well. However, it should be remembered that - as Seweryn Sulisz points out "if a teacher is to educate by his example, conduct a dialogue with the student, convey the values related to physical culture, then in his everyday life he must act as if he would like his students to act. If, on the other hand, there is a discrepancy between what he does and what he says, this discrepancy is immediately noticed by children and is one of the reasons for the low efficiency of the physical education process"⁹.

This article shows what is the self-assessment of early childhood education teacher competences to conduct physical education activities. It is important to be aware of how important this item is for the proper shaping of a young organism and what should be done in this regard. It is also a game, thanks to which children can relax and a subject where students can gain additional skills, e.g. math or language.

⁹ S. Sulisz, *Wybrane zagadnienia teorii wychowania fizycznego* [w:] *Wychowanie fizyczne w kształceniu zintegrowanym*, S. Sulisz (red.), WSiP, Warszawa 2000: 12, Polish.

The surveyed teachers improve many skills that are needed in conducting physical activities. However, the majority of teachers of early childhood education $N = 26$ admitted that their skills are sufficient to conduct classes in grades I-III. Only $N = 4$ stated that a specialist who knows the physical development of students better would be better for children.

In turn, other researchers, based on their own results, write about deficits in theoretical and methodological preparation for managing the process of physical education by early school education teachers, K. Żegnałek, E. Gutowska-Wyrzykowska (2015), B. Woynarowska (2010), D. Skrzydlewski (2002), S. Sulisz (2000).

That is why it is important to create such opportunities by universities or other teacher training institutions that will allow them to train. The system of education during studies should also be changed to one that would give educators a wide range of knowledge in various fields and would put greater emphasis on the methodology of teaching physical classes at the first stage of education. It would also teach them how to conduct classes so as not to bore or discourage children from participating in physical activities. Barbara Woynarowska (2010) also wrote about the insufficient preparation of early childhood education teachers. The way physical education classes are conducted in grades I-III, very often determines the further development and the attitude towards physical activity of the child. One should be aware of this and take decisive systemic solutions for this purpose.

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