

THE IMPACT OF POSTMODERN SOCIETY VALUES ON PROFESSIONALIZING PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SPORTS TEACHERS

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Abstract: *This paper highlights the changes of the Romanian school required by the exigencies of a postmodern society characterized by: dynamics, globalization, diversity, lifelong learning, communication, etc. One of the major restructuring needs of the Romanian school is the one of professionalizing teachers by redefining and re-evaluating teaching skills. In the research conducted on pupils', students' and teachers' perceptions on the role and competencies of physical education and sports teachers, conclusions were drawn that underline the need for developing/training physical education (PE) teachers' skills from several perspectives: professionalizing teaching career; paradigm shifts in school (student-centring, skills training, "A different school", etc.); compatibility between the students' needs and the requirements of the labour market.*

Key words: *postmodern values, teachers' professional identity, teachers' professionalism.*

1. Introduction

Many recent studies on contemporary society [1], [2], [3] highlight some of its paradoxes such as localism - globalism, standardization - customization, etc. The values of this society are also reflected in the academic world: from the student-centred learning to the integrated approach, from satisfying students' needs to the sustainable society, from the inclusive school to the elite school. If to all this we add the consumption culture and the invasion of media in all areas of life, we have a complete picture of our society.

The implications of this society on education constitute a major challenge to

all those involved in forming and educating the citizens of this world. More and more questions arise as to what school, teachers and parents should do in order to help the young adapt to the postmodernist requirements [11].

2. Physical Education (PE) subject - a constructivist approach

We emphasize that in our analysis we consider physical education as the subject held in mainstream education through the compulsory curriculum and we do not take into consideration schools with sports profile.

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PE is analysed in the context of centring education on skills and proves to be one of the subjects that has a strong formative potential. We refer here to the fact that PE contributes to training skills such as: communication, entrepreneurship, interpersonal and civic competences, learning to learn, culture, these meaning 5 out of the 8 key competences. To really, tangibly develop these skills, the educational actors' expectations towards this subject, the way it should be addressed to in schools and in other extra school contexts must be redefined. We refer here to approaching PE from a constructivist perspective: this subject's closeness to real life, focus on the training needs of the student and the necessity to address PE from a holistic socio-pedagogical interdisciplinary perspective.

We start from the idea that physical activity means not only training the body's physical qualities, but it is an opportunity for knowledge and self-awareness of mental qualities: willingness, motivation, affectivity, emotional intelligence, social intelligence, team spirit, competitiveness, etc. However all these are developed through PE activities in school.

The constructivist paradigm [4], [10], that promotes student-centred learning, learning in groups, learning in an emotionally positive context, casts a different light on human learning, understood as a process to which human beings are continuously and totally committed, both cognitively and emotionally, both as a human individual and as a representative of a community in which he lives.

From the perspective of constructivist paradigm in education, "Physical Education and Sports" subject meets many of its defining characteristics: it is centred on skills, takes place in a relaxed atmosphere, has a positive emotional background, the teacher is perceived rather

as a group leader than as a teacher in the pedagogical sense of the term, students work together to "team spirit". Yet, the demands of society and individuals are bigger and bigger and more nuanced: society requires competitive, self-confident individuals, able to handle ambiguous situations, to face failure etc.

In this context, school and its actors are forced to rebuild and redefine roles and responsibilities in light of the new social and individual requirements.

"Undoubtedly, the teaching profession is currently facing new kinds of pressure and undergoing profound changes regarding roles, competences, values, the basic knowledge of teacher training, training strategies, the assessment system and professional certification" [8]

Redefining roles and skills is related to how teachers perceive their own professional identity.

A research conducted by D. Beijaard, N.Verloop, J.D. Vermut [1] on the professional identity and the perception of one's own professional identity shows that many teachers perceive themselves rather as specialists and practitioners than as pedagogues. The teachers who believe they to be specialists consider that without sound knowledge in the field, one cannot become a good teacher. This is the basis of the teacher's authority. The ones who believe they to be practitioners are interested in the conditions of learning, planning and projecting the teaching activities. The 'pedagogues' are interested in the way that pupils study and in conducting attractive teaching activities.

Another important aspect in this study was that teacher's teaching context, experience, and biography are categories of factors that may influence their perceptions of their professional identity. In an analysis of the teacher training strategies used in Romania as compared to other teacher training systems,

T. Pălășan [5] concentrates on examining the paradigms of the professional teacher, which stand at the basis of the teacher training programmes. According to the author, a prototype of the professional teacher would be: ‘a role- model, a technician, a practitioner, a wise person (‘the reflexive practitioner’), a social actor, a person who is aware of his/her own identity, meaning ‘ a person who is interested and aware of his/her own personal development’ [5]. This latter feature seems of great importance to us, because it raises most problems in the post-modern society and educational system alike. Based on the definition of the concept of identity as ‘central dimension of the concept of self and the individual, representing his/her general position in society, deriving from his/her belonging to social groups and societies, from its social patterns and its social status’ [7], one can state that the professional identity of the teacher is in fact the conception on his role as a professional, on his competences and on the expectations he/she has to rise up to. Starting from this study, we wanted to investigate how role of the teacher of physical education and sports is perceived by pupils, students and teachers from the Romanian school.

3. Research design

The purpose of this study is to identify the students’ and teachers’ perception towards the PE teacher’s roles and responsibilities in Romanian schools.

The research was conducted on 220 subjects: pupils, students and physical education teachers. A questionnaire of 20 closed items, concerning the hierarchy of the individual’s values, was designed and applied and two focus groups were created. The questionnaire aimed at how students appreciate the importance of PS in the curriculum, at identifying elements of

sports culture (values specific to sport, models from the sports world, taking part in sports events, deep knowledge of certain sports, etc.), the PE teacher’s roles and responsibilities.

The questionnaire was applied to a total of 100 students from a theoretical high school, 100 students in the first and second year from the Faculties of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Music, Philology, Mechanical Engineering, who all have one class of physical education and sports in their curriculum.

The focus group was attended by physical education teachers with over 10 year - experience in education and third year students from the Faculty of physical education and sports, which are to become physical education teachers.

4. Results and Discussions

The data collected through the above methods were subjected to quantitative and qualitative analysis. The answers of the respondents pointed out that there is a positive attitude towards sports, most respondents (88%) considering that school PE classes should be of 2 hours a week. This is confirmed by answers of the pupils’ attending the ‘‘A different School’’ national program in 2012, who declared that sports activities were among the favourites [6], [12]:

- Ecological activities 25%
- Sports activities 23%
- Visits to museums 13%
- Participation in concerts 10%
- Trips 5%

Elements of sports culture are quite superficial and reduced to watching sports news, to poor knowledge about sports and knowledge on average of two personalities from the world of sports, the ones mostly publicized. The greatest impact on sports culture is played by media. A large percentage of the subjects (88%) say that

they watch sports programs, pursue athletes' lives, and read sports magazines. Differences in sports culture are recorded in students, which differ from pupils through frequent participation in sport

events (especially boys who take part in football matches).

The interviewed subjects think that the values developed by sports are the following:

Table 1
The frequency of values among youngsters and among adults

Values	Frequency among pupils	Frequency among students
Health	35%	43%
Performance /work	20%	23%
Competitive spirit	17%	21%
Fair-play	15%	17%
Team spirit	25%	28%
Tolerance	12%	22%
Courage	15%	15%
Perseverance	28%	25%

Most subjects questioned declared that they have a favourite sport, which they have practiced. The percentage of the

preferred sports is shown in the table below:

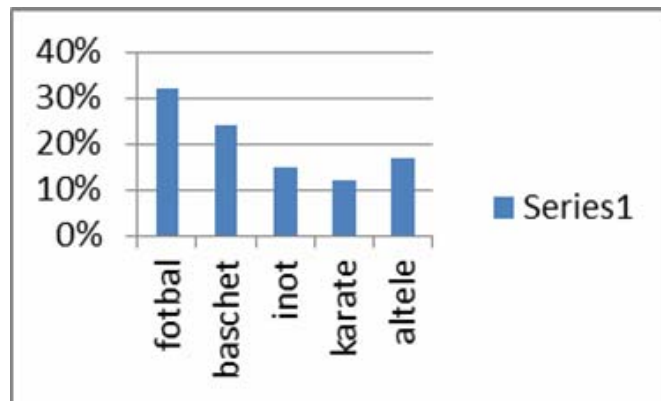


Chart 1. *The percentage of the preferred sports among pupils and students*

A concerning the roles and responsibilities of physical education teachers, there have expressed the following views:

a. design and implementation of physical education and sports classes: 30%

b. design and implementation of inter-school sport competitions: 28%

c. design and leading trips: 15%

d. transmission of general knowledge about the most popular sports: 13%

- e. transmission of information about training and development of the human body's physical parameters / capacities: 9%
- f. participation, along with the pupils, in various sports events: 5%

Regarding the perception about the PE teacher, he is seen by pupils and students especially as a specialist in sport or as a sportsman and less like a class manager or teacher / educator.

	Frequency among pupils	Frequency among students
Specialist in sports or as a sportsman	58%	56%
Class / group manager	12%	20%
Teacher / educator	30%	24%

Fig.2. *The frequency of perception about PE teacher*

The two items above show that there is a "traditional" image, somehow limited to the roles and responsibilities of the physical education teacher.

The qualitative analysis highlighted and enriched certain data interpretation resulting from the quantitative analysis. The answers from the focus groups conducted with students from the Faculty of Physical Education and Sports and PE teachers stressed the idea that contact between people in general, including students, are mediated. This is a coin with two sides: on the one hand, the media promotes the development of positive attitudes towards sports exercise (there has frequently been invoked the following slogan - "for a healthy life, practice exercises for at least 30 minutes a day") down to the determination of some subjects to practice a sport or simply exercise, on the other hand, this induced the false idea that practicing a sport is a fashionable matter, sometimes extremely easy, for which physical capabilities are sufficient.

School, through physical education classes, succeeds to a small extent in influencing pupils' and students' values and mentality. There still appears to be a traditional image of sports and PE teachers in Romanian schools: PE is a subject that has an ambivalent status: on the one hand, it is seen more as an "easy" class, which takes place outdoors and students feel comfortable when playing different sports (handball, basketball, football) or a time when they feel constrained by rules and scales too "high" for students who are not athletes.

PE teacher's status is as contradictory: on one hand, it is seen as a teacher is more of a sportsman and less of a teacher. His role, however, has begun to be reaffirmed by school's orientation towards the student, the community and the real life.

One argument for this is "A different school" national program, where physical education teachers were resource-teachers for schools in the design, carrying out extra-curricular activities with formative impact for pupils: competitions, trips, etc.

5. Conclusions

The present research, although it has a limited power of generalization, it is valuable through the reflection problems it proposes:

There is a discrepancy between the way the PE teacher is seen and the expectations pupils and students have towards him. This discrepancy can be reduced in two ways:

1. Rethinking PE teachers' competence profile (even if sport requires certain skills and physical qualities, the pedagogic training must prevail). The PE teacher should form a sports culture that guarantees lifelong sports practising for individuals, that forms a healthy individual from the physical, mental and social point of view.

2. Rebuilding the design of physical education and sports classes so that the foundation for a sports culture be put in school. As we noticed from our research, the decisive impact in shaping sports culture remains very much to the hands of individuals and the media. Students' sports culture is superficial and contains items presented by the media. School contributes very little to promote sporting values really necessary in our society: cooperation, tolerance, fair-play, etc. From this perspective, the physical education class should be reconsidered: as an opportunity for failure management, for developing self-confidence, etc.

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