

Fiera Didacta - Florence – May 20, 2022

Physical education in primary School

**Prof. Marc CLOES
University of Liege, Belgium
AIESEP president**

Good afternoon to you,

First of all, I would like to thank the organizers of this seminar for their invitation. I would like to say that it is a privilege to be part of this panel. In fact, it is not so usual to have the chance to speak with important stakeholders and policy makers.

Before beginning my answer to the question that the moderator just ask, I would like to recall some important information and I will begin by one of the 2020's recommendations proposed by the WHO for youth between 7 and 18 year-old. It is that these young girls and boys should accumulate at least one hour of MVPA (moderate to vigorous physical activity) per day. It means at least 60 minutes 7 days a week ... To reach that minimum level, they could be involved in various physical activities: sport leisure activities, non-sport leisure activities, active transportation (going somewhere walking, biking, skating ...), functional activities (doing housework), 'professional' activities (physical education and school physical activities, student works). This variety underlines that, if sport is for sure an important source of physical activity, it is far to be the only one. Such statement implies that youth have to be taught to recognize and use all these opportunities to adopt an active lifestyle. It is so important because, as a research conducted in the French speaking part of Belgium, only a limited part of the 13 and 15 year-old adolescents are really interested by competitive sport. Mainly because they are not talented enough to feel confident. By focusing only on sport, that is traditionally competitive, one can lose the majority of the youth who risk rejecting physical activity because they are not physically literate. It means that they do not have the fundamental motor competences, nor the minimum fitness level, nor the positive attitude towards movement. Often, they do not have the basic knowledge about how their body allows them to be active.

That said, I would like to explain what is AIESEP. AIESEP is an international association gathering higher education institution proposing physical education programmes as well as individual staff members of these institutions. AIESEP's main mission is to promote high quality research in sport pedagogy. It means that we are studying teaching and teacher education in physical education, physical education being considered in a broad meaning as we are interested by all contexts where people can do physical activity: school, sport settings, leisure and even rehabilitation or specific populations ... We have members from the five continents. It helps us to have a transversal view of what is proposed in different cultures and countries. We learnt that, even there are common principles, there are also national specificities that can influence how the people learn, react, live ...

To identify the competences that a physical education (PE) teacher should acquire and develop during his/her career, it is necessary to speak first about the 17 United Nations sustainable goals. You may know that, in 2015, UN decided to work in a way to increase the quality of life of all people on Earth by 2030. Among those goals, because it is directly connected to the topic of this conference, it is important to highlight the improvement of health and the development of quality education. Following these global

goals, UNESCO developed the concept of Quality Physical Education. As illustrated into one of the AIESEP statements that are available on our website, this concept is linked to the idea that, nowadays, PE should contribute to prepare physically educated citizens who will adopt an active and healthy lifestyle for their whole life. It means that PE teachers should become physical activity promoters, meaning that they are becoming more than sport providers. They have to propose PE lessons that will help children and adolescents to change their lifestyle. Of course, it will not be possible to achieve such mission alone with some PE lessons per week. The collaboration of many other actors of the school life will be fundamental. But PE teacher are those who are supposed to have the most appropriate preparation to play that role. They are now considered as the corner stones of the promotion of physical activity in schools and are considered as the central actor of what is called the 'active school' model or 'comprehensive active school model'. All around the world, these models were applied to organize and structure projects that showed positive effects in youth lifestyle. Under the umbrella of the school policy, five pillars are supporting the actions of the educators: (1) the Quality Physical Education that was mentioned earlier; (2) the extra-curricular physical activities (initiatives organized directly by the school before or after the school hours or in collaboration with other actors of the community of life like public services, sports clubs or federations, non-profit associations, private organizations, health organizations ...); (3) the active transportation (actions in favor of use of non-motorized mode of transportation); (4) the adaptation of the school environment (recess places and equipment, use of sport facilities ...); (5) the physical activity in the classroom (organization of Physical Activity Pauses in School – PAPS, interdisciplinary activities ...). In all of these pillars, PE teachers can be those who deliver the activities as well as those who are preparing other actors to deliver them.

To achieve such missions, it is necessary to have PE teachers who have a specific knowledge in sport sciences, who are able to translate it into practice and to apply it to children or adolescents, knowing that those two publics have specific characteristics on motor, physical, psychological, social, and emotional domains. It means that these educators need to have a strong and specific background in pedagogy (teachers must be able to find the ways to deal with the diversity of the pupils or students characteristics in working contexts that are not always ideal). They should be able to collaborate with others (colleagues, principals, parents as well as any partner outside the school). It requires an open mind and leadership competencies to imagine and implement projects. The latter will need some managerial competences. Last but not the least, these PE teachers should engage themselves in a continuous professional development process because the children or adolescents that they know today will probably have different attitudes, mentality, codes, and expectations in 10, 20, 30 or 40 years. As the society will evolve, the PE teachers will have to adapt their teaching approaches. In some circumstances, they will have to innovate and co-construct approaches that are not existing yet. One particular example is the use of the new technologies that became so important during the Covid-19 pandemic, even for PE. To have such 'super PE teachers', states has to implement initial and inservice programmes in which these competencies are specifically developed using the approaches that they are supposed to use with children and adolescents. It means that higher education has also to change its own pedagogy by placing the students in the center of their learning, offering collaborative and applied approaches. Higher education should also increase its collaboration with the practitioners to create stronger links between them and the field.

Before closing that speech, I would like to speak about three other concepts that could change fundamentally the way in which PE is taught. In fact, it seems time to become aware about the benefit of PE. The first one receive a growing interest all around the world. Maybe do you already know it: the physical literacy. Using my own words, I would say that it corresponds to the motor, physical and emotional bases that a child should develop to become confident when doing any physical activity.

Without such physical literacy, children will not be motivated and convinced for adopting an active lifestyle. Therefore, only the talented children will become the active adolescents who are attracted by sport. Proposing to PE teachers to teach in a way to develop concrete links between what they teach and how the pupils/students can transfer it in their own life when they are out of school is the second concept that I wanted to present here. I call it the 'societal transfer'. Other authors speak about meaningful PE. It means that pupils and students are invited to apply in their personal life context what they learn during the PE lessons. It could contribute to real change, mainly if the conditions of such transfer are analyzed with the learners. Following and measuring the impact of their teaching, PE teachers would become accountable. That is the third and final concept to be proposed. In fact, I consider that PE teachers (as any other teacher) should try to work in a way to change the life of the youth, at least by bringing little concrete behaviors, knowledge, and/or attitudes: a teacher that changes the life! And is aware of his/her impact.

Thank you for your attention. It would be my pleasure to answer to your questions and/or share additional information.