

# INNOVATIVE APPROACHES OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SPORT IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

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## Abstract

*In the current era, physical education and sport know similarities, as well as differences to the previous historical periods, but also new, substantial elements, mainly in technology, information and culture. The theoretical background we start to discuss innovative approaches in physical education and sport carried out in educational institutions starts from the outline of essential functions of physical education and sport (Petecel 1980; Carstea 1999; Dragnea 2002).*

*What are the current aspects and the direction of actions in the coming years? Can we find innovative methods in the pedagogy of physical education, which could turn into basic approaches in schools and universities? This paper examines a series of opportunities of action, taking into account the social and informational changes in contemporary society, covering innovative approaches focused on higher interaction, complementarity and physical education for life.*

*In conclusion, it is only with the support of new, interdisciplinary pedagogy that we can sustain the modernization and implementation of physical education and sport programmes in the current academic system*

**Keywords:** *physical education and sport, nonformal education, motivation, social interaction, complementarity.*

## 1. Introduction

People have considered, from immemorial times, that physical education supports a healthy life style. Along many centuries, physical education was necessary to man in his accomplishment of economic or domestic works, as well as cultural ones. Starting with the Industrial Revolution, the case gradually changed, many of the physical works performed in various professions being replaced by increasingly complex machines, tools and devices.

Education represents learning facts, information and getting certain skills; being a complex process, it implies assimilating and understanding elements which the society thinks necessary for the existence in a certain culture and community, both to carry out different occupations and professions, as well as for preserving people's health in general. The culture of this society confirms the values one learns or rejects those which contradict the basic principles of the community each individual lives in. The result is a certain pressure to initiate young member, members of the society, in the element which provide a selective environment, of a clear educational benefit, during their whole life, but not necessarily covering all information which they will continue to get.

Sport knew in the last couple of decades an unprecedented development for the earlier period, after WWII, many of its functions remained constant during this time, even if they were influenced by the historic and social changes brought by modernity. Despite this, we can notice that sport and physical activity new a modernization of its core values, functions or roles it plays in our society.

The current paper tries to find the answers to the following reflection points for an education aiming to have impact upon one's whole life: what are the current specific elements and the directions of actions for the coming period? Can we find innovating directions which turn into fundamental approaches in schools and universities?

Our analysis starts from the main aspects of pedagogy in this area, to which we will explore a few lines of action needed in finding innovative working means. The theoretical background of the paper is based on key contributions provided by researchers such as Stela Petecel who presents elements of tradition coming from the Greek and Roman antiquity (1980), and Adrian Dragnea who details physical education and looks at the role of sport addressing all individuals (2002). The literature to be used in order to bring forward proposals for interactive methods includes, but does not limit to, contributions brought by specialists such as Dan Banciu (2005), Ion Ștefan (2005), Gheorghe Cârstea (1999), Virgil Tudor (2005), Adina Glava (2009) and Monica Stănescu (2013).

## 2. Key functions in Education and Physical Education

Physical education and sport are part of a long system of traditions and activities which place man in the area of harmony between mind and body, in order to build, educate and shape it for performance, for also in the perspective of lifelong learning, conservation of energy and biologic potential, of techniques specific to individual sports and the ability to cooperate in a team. Through such activities, the individuals preoccupied by sport on a regular basis (speed, resilience, strength,

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spring, mobility and fitness) manage to build a profile during their professional and personal life, to develop cognition skills (perceptions, representations and thinking), as well as volitional ones (courage, initiative, decision, perseverance and patience), coupled with affective ones (feelings and emotions). All of those build one's personality and temperament, shape the psychic and develop needed competencies for a demanding life styles, increasingly stressful for today's man.

Before we explore the way in which education and sport mix with a series of pedagogic perspectives, mainly innovative ones, it is vital to outline the main directions which this activity brought to mankind from the perspective of the functions it plays:

- a) Physical functions, particular to this activity compared to other human subjects. Starting from Aristotle, according to whom "It is not necessary to ask whether soul and body are one, just as it is not necessary to ask whether the wax and its shape are one, nor generally whether the matter of each thing and that of which it is the matter are one. For even if one and being are spoken of in several ways, what is properly so spoken of is the actuality"<sup>1</sup> or the idea to take care of the body before one thinks about the soul<sup>2</sup>.
- b) or the many authors demonstrate the real effects on body and intellect. A related function is the sanitary one. Starting from the age of the Reform, various works of medicine and biology point out the benefice effects of physical education on one's health (such as stimulating growth for children, improving the blood circulation and digestion etc.) In the contemporary age, after WWII, rigorous studies undertaken by Anglo-Saxon researchers in the fifties and seventies proved that people practicing sport are less likely to get an illness and live longer compared to sedentary individuals. Also in the seventies, according to studies done by American researchers, it came out that physical activity can lead to curing certain affections such as tuberculosis, schizophrenia, and others.
- c) Cultural function. Physical education and sport have a serious impact on individuals. From the perspective of sport, it makes use of the popularity of sport celebrities to influence people in society, which renders a cultural value, symbolic for this area. Secondly, sport has a demonstrated ability to support social integration and inclusion, from individuals spending their free time within a community where the person can perform physical

exercises with other individuals sharing similar interests. Physical education and sport manage thus to make people become friends, or may lead to personal aversion. For the case of higher education, young people manage through the mere participation to physical education to become integrated not only in the group they are assigned to, but in other groups of activities as well, such as fun and entertainment. In addition, physical activity shapes one's body, which provides an aesthetic stimulus and serves human interest to display a harmonious body in front of their community. Modernity transformed the beauty of one's body through physical education in a prosperous economic activity of high impact in society, so that young people are more and more attracted to fitness centres, exercises building their muscles and aesthetically appealing body.

- d) Economic function, which could also be named an industrial one, since physical education and sport cannot stay outside the economy of any nation. Physical tasks and sport support the economy of states and are regularly supported through governmental subsidies. This function occupies three main directions: spending, production and labour force. From the perspective of finances, there are both investments, as well as substantial profit from the production of sports items, body building cosmetics and equipment, as well as promotional materials associated to celebrities. Such activities occupy a clear range within a national economy, encouraging young people to take part in activities made popular by local and international stars from professional sports or those who work in bodybuilding, relaxation and physical welfare.

As physical education continues to develop and develop area by encouraging people to work their body, the number and range of research themes in this field significantly widened. Despite such developments, the changes in the way of thinking the teaching and practice in the classroom has not known a smooth route, without obstacles. Taking into consideration that physical education and sport coexist on the two fronts of work – kinesiology and educational research – the work of specialists exploring this area in higher education managed to impact both fields. Physical education remained closed to the pedagogy of adults. Moreover, the pedagogy of physical education and sport in European higher education currently broadens its own profile literature, influencing the class practice in state and private universities<sup>3</sup>. This reference framework is

<sup>1</sup> (De Anima ii 1, 412b6-9) in Stephen Menn, "Aristotle's Definition of Soul and the Programme of the De Anima", Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy, v.22, Summer 2002, pp. 83-139.

<sup>2</sup> Stela Petecel, *Antichitatea greco-romană despre sport*, (Bucharest: Editura Sport-Turism, 1980), p. 19.

<sup>3</sup> Educația fizică și sportul în școlile din Europa – Raport Eurydice, Agenția Executivă pentru Educație, Audiovizual și Cultură EACEA, Comisia Europeană, 2013.

united as an educational approach under the concept of “sport for all” used by Adrian Dragnea<sup>4</sup>, a motto essential in training students, as well as teachers and instructors of physical education.

### 3. Pedagogy in Adult Physical Education and Sport

Physical education and sport are at present looked upon as a constitutive component of school education, but also in training adults. From this perspective, specialists have analysed the role of formal education in building positive skills, but also the specific, increasing role of nonformal activities outside the classroom. In addition, recent studies have highlighted the characteristics of methodology and organization in physical education curricula in the Romanian education system<sup>5</sup>. Other researchers<sup>6</sup> note that physical education is integrated as a means to support accessibility and continuity, a social trend with economic and moral impact<sup>7</sup>. Pedagogy, in terms of etymology, comes from the Greek *paidagogia*, which is made of: *pais* = child and *agoge* = to lead, to guide. Pedagogy therefore holds the meaning of “leading a child, or guiding him.” Pedagogy is, broadly speaking, the art to support the child towards his own training, to shape personality, according to patterns established by the society.

As a component of education, pedagogy refers to:

- The core and features of education;
- The aim and tasks of education;
- The values and its limits;
- Its content;
- Its principles;
- Its educational process.

In terms of innovation possible in the current educational systems of higher education in various European countries, there are a number of issues meant to enhance the following directions of research and practice:

1. **Interaction between physical education and psychology.** There are numerous researchers who claim that physical education needs the constant support of psychology, that the way in which physical activity takes place has a serious impact not only on the child, but that it will impact the future personality as we desire. The shared space of physical education and psychology places under detach the role of cognition in social sciences, the theory-research-practice approach in institutions of higher education, the role of interventions aiming to stimulate the individual and the perception of motric experience. Such a direction implies the understanding of factors which

influence the psychologic and social activity of a person, his/her health development, the leading role of parents, mentors and trainers, as well as working for an objective evaluation<sup>8</sup>. We cannot speak about education solely, but approach the sciences of education which appear as the effect of cross-disciplinary interactions, within which the following disciplines are included: biology (neurologic and physiologic conditioning of child development), psychology (psychologic processes included and impacting learning), anthropology (cultural-historical expressions influencing a human), sociology (conditions and social impact of education), politology (relationships and functionality of educational policies at a certain moment). Thus, the above-mentioned disciplines interact with pedagogy through the set-up of disciplinary constructs. They include, but are not limited to: pedagogic psychology, sociology of education, pedagogic axiology, school hygiene, culture of physical education, international policies across national standards and curricula. They are undoubtedly reflected upon physical education and sport. Some of these connections have been observed several decades ago, but only in the last three decades researchers and practitioners focused their attention in research carried out in institutions with an educational profile, as well as on the debate, resulted from the research, of reflecting on the changes necessary and demanded by the educational environment.

2. **Education and social justice.** Along this direction, recent studies developed the concept of physical education as social interaction. In addition, during competitions for amateurs as well as professional athletes, experts observed that athletic activity leads to building civic skills, in the spirit of fair-play and fairness. This also applies to participants in physical education tasks in higher education institutions, willing to support each other. Those involved in physical activity are generally willing to express their opinion about the way this is designed, communicate in an open way with teachers, and are interested to promote sport among their friends. This new type of individual profile acknowledges the complex relationships operating in sport, become aware of social responsibility and get involved in active ways to spend their recreational time. It is about a number of people with an income from medium to above average who are interested to support deprived people in their community, trying to get a social role in civil society. Physical education as a phenomenon of civic support, of equality, tolerance and anti-discrimination are values fully

<sup>4</sup> Adrian Dragnea, *Teoria educației fizice și a sportului*, ediția a 2-a, revăzută, (Bucharest: FEST, 2002), p. 111.

<sup>5</sup> Monica Stănescu, *Didactica educației fizice*, (Bucharest: Editura Universitară, 2013), p.54.

<sup>6</sup> Gheorghe Cârstea, *Teoria și metodică educației fizice și sportului*, (Bucharest: Editura AN-DA, 2000), pp. 80-81.

<sup>7</sup> Ion Ștefan, *Introducere în sociologia educației fizice și sportului*, (Brașov: Editura Universității Transilvania, 2005), pp. 79-96.

<sup>8</sup> Virgil Tudor, *Măsurare și evaluare în cultură fizică și sport*, (Bucharest: Editura Alpha, 2005), pp. 162-163.

contributing to counteract delinquency and criminality. From this point of view, specialists debated the role of criminality in contemporary society<sup>9</sup>, and physical education is one means able to back educational programmes in secondary education and tertiary institutions in order to support a generation able to reject such phenomena.

3. **Education in the modern digital world.** From this perspective, physical education is placed on two main directions: play as physical activity needed to man, as well as the holistic approach. Physical education is no longer cultivated per se, isolated, but adapts to the current needs of people, takes into account stress factors, the impact of daily communication in online media, the willingness to relax, to socialize, but also to support family and extra-family relationships. Physical education in gyms placed in institutions of higher education is enhanced by communication activities and those taking place in fitness gyms and relaxation centres, combined with a healthy caloric consumption and healthy diet, the consumption of fibres and outdoor activities.

The most challenging issue of today's society is the unprecedented technological development, at an explosive rate compared to previous historical eras, in the last two decades, when the revolution of the communication means and digital applications turned into a new revolution. Considering that so much from the life of individuals takes place with the support of the mobile, of computer and software installed on such devices, the interest of people for physical activity, especially outdoor, faced a serious decline, the interest of children and youth going in the area of communication, online communication and games played online. At present, almost all educational systems acknowledge that it is difficult to face this issue, but there are teachers and researchers who look for an answer to the question: what kind of motivation factors can we find, how can we stimulate the interest of children and young people to have physical exercise? Is the national system able to change school and academic curricula, and certain aspects in the pedagogic practice to match this challenge?

The solutions for such a direction presuppose following action lines such as those proposed below:

- *Higher interaction.* From this point of view, a solution consists of using physical tasks that do not aim for top performance, but aim at involving rather equally all participants. The teacher or instructor is thus preoccupied to actively engage students, namely to become a mentor for some activities carried out together. Instead of simply pointing and describing the kind of tasks which students are to apply and perform, especially during examinations, the teacher turns into a guide, a mentor with the mission to open the interest and keep up the willingness to engage in sport.

- *Complementarity.* Physical education does not have to exclusively take place in schools and universities: the subjects of the learning process are encouraged to carry out activities outside traditional education, aspect which can be useful in the assessment of a teacher for a semester. This implies that teachers can even take into account the participation of their students in related activities performed by the students they examine, such as dance, drama, volunteer work involving physical work at a more intense pace than in labs or gyms. Moreover, complementarity also implies a constant dialogue with all those involved in the educational process: first of all students and teachers, but also students part of the same group, or teachers in the same department/institution, between students representatives and academic management, that is for various layers of the formal and nonformal communication. The goal of this dialogue is not only to inform the other(s) on one's own opinion, but to permanently explore and continue to cooperate, to find directions of action leading to benefits for physical works, feedback methods, and ways to improve methodology, and ultimately educational policies. This direction is far from easy, there are elements with a clear level of difficulty for teachers and mentors: during 10-15 years, there are changes not only on the labour market, with an increasing demand for humanities and informatics, but there are within sport competitions and in the economic area new types of physical activities. For the moment, the infrastructure and the current national training cannot but offer a limited range of physical education practice in universities, such as football, basketball or handball and athletics. However, the interest of the young generation goes to the area of newer activities, both for winter, as well as for summer (surfing, diving, rollerblades, snow rafting, snowboarding, mountain cyclism, or kangoo jumping or parcour, to name only a few).

- *Physical education for life.* Together, teachers and students find the means to accomplish daily physical activities, at work and at home, in what we call lifelong learning. Participants are encouraged to discuss in informal clubs, to explore and use a healthy life style, in a holistic approach. Young people are encouraged to find what kind of food and beverages contribute to stress, how they can give up or diminish smoking, what are the risks of alcohol or drugs addiction, as well as simple yet effective means to enjoy nature, to take daily walks, to have regular trips, to spend summer or winter holidays doing sport activities specific to each season.

Starting from the need of physical education as a holistic-based activity, it is necessary to ask what kind of results we might achieve if we can appeal more to creativity and inventivity in the classroom. The two types of questions we launch for reflection are: a) what directions could physical education adopt in the future?

<sup>9</sup> Dan Banciu, Ecaterina Balica, „Tendințe ale criminalității violente în comunitățile rurale. Evaluarea și percepție publică”, în *Revista Română de Sociologie*, serie nouă, anul XX, nr.1-2, București, 2009, pp.154-163.

And b) how can teaching and learning about health have a higher role in the physical education curriculum to underline the vision of a body which exists as a biological, naturally given, but which remains after years spent in higher education under the influence of the society and of the culture of which the individual is a member further on?

To put in practice such ideas, a new rethinking, a renewal of the physical education practice and sport in formal and nonformal education is a must. How can we reach such a goal? It is first necessary to assess and rethink the training of teachers, who need to understand better the social and technological changes with an impact in the whole contemporary society, as well as an ongoing modernization of curricula, in line with the demands of the labour market and the European framework of projects addressing youth. Moreover, the types of activities planned for in the current practice ask for innovative approaches, for example keeping groups of girls and boys in the same type of physical activity, instead of splitting them and engage in isolated tasks, whenever this is possible. Their participation in the same group does not imply that girls will have the same performance as boys, but that interaction will be better for both groups, the interest for a shared activity can stimulate all. From this perspective, the approach to get the interest of all students is *physical education as a form of movement*. In addition, to put in practice any kind of new approach, it is vital to understand who the “subjects” of this process are. In this case, the subjects are not students only, but also teachers of physical education and sport, those with a decision role in writing curricula, defining activities, but also their implementation, namely other members of the academic body in each institution and stakeholders of educational policies from higher education institutions and agencies, governmental bodies coordinating public policies in education.

Such approaches do not work in isolation. The academic body in the whole educational system needs to find the kind of approaches suitable for all students, to set learning objectives and examination items in cooperation with decision-takers in each institution and preserve an attitude of cooperation and permanent learning in each school or university. In what concerns the relationship with students, teachers and mentors aim, to put in practice such approaches, certain types of activities meant to motivate, open mind and use body to new elements, encourage children and youth to adopt an active life style which is to support them for their whole personal and professional life. All the directions proposed above are aligned in an academic learning as a complex process, as defined by Adina Glava<sup>10</sup>, listing the laws based on which this process takes place: motivation, reverse connection, repetition and transfer,

debating them in the perspective of an effective education.

#### 4. Conclusions

Analysing the topics presented in this paper, it results that physical education and sport in European higher education face substantial changes in the last couple of decades. Current theoretic frameworks place the functions of physical education in a new light, underlining elements of interest and impact in the current age. We further explored a few innovative directions which are started to be discussed, based on a cross-disciplinary vision which requires the need of correlating knowledge in this area with that in other fields: psychology, sociology, justice and information technology.

To support such approaches, the author proposes a few lines of actions as innovative approaches, using the principles of interaction, complementarity and lifelong learning. To close on an optimistic note this plead for rethinking physical education and sport in the current educational system, we think that we can wrap up by using a quote provided by Jean Giradoux, a French writer, essayist and diplomat: “Sport is about delegating to the body a few of the strongest virtues of the soul: energy, audacity, and patience.” (Le sport consiste à déléguer au corps quelques-unes des vertus les plus fortes de l’âme: l’énergie, l’audace, la patience.)<sup>11</sup>.

Along this vision, physical culture needs to be looked upon in a wider cultural context as a vital section of each person’s life, being about the development of the potential naturally provided and biologically inherited by each person, but also by the cultural potential from the social environment we live in, while this instils certain behaviours and main values which dominate the physical, social and moral environment, in such a way that it preserves health and welfare for each person, but also for activities performed in a group.

Any new knowledge, at the moment of learning, need to be designed from the assumption that they are valuable and benefice for the subject of learning. The teacher has thus the mission to prepare the conditions of sustainability and durability of each acquired element, of any ability practised in the educational environment. What is gained by a student at one moment is going to be used later in practice or to be correlated with other kind of knowledge, to apply them in either intellectual or material work. The durability and consistency of learning are provided by the learning ways and the nature of the teacher-student relationships, by the way in which teachers manage to influence students to use the same techniques outside a

<sup>10</sup> Adina Glava, Glava. *Metacogniția și optimizarea învățării: aplicații în învățământul superior*, (Cluj-Napoca: Casa Cărții de Știință, 2009), p.26.

<sup>11</sup> *Le Figaro*, online edition, <http://evene.lefigaro.fr/citation/sport-consiste-deleguer-corps-vertus-fortes-ame-1331.php>, accessed 15 Dec. 2016.

formal educational background and to preserve and generate the acquired information in the context of new experience. The interconnections of knowledge can take place based on project work or assessment moments, when recap or practising what has been learned turn into compulsory conditions, an essential opportunity to reassess the acquisitions, to have a synthesis, to get connections between various cognitive

layers and practical abilities. Practice leads thus to full assimilation of knowledge in the very intellectual and biological being of any individual, supporting him/her to continue his/her life with the support of learned content. Later practice simply helps him/her to evaluate what has been learned and re-structure and validate the abilities and accumulated information at the level of school and university this person is educated in.

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