

ACTIVITIES IN THE NATURE AS A SIGNIFICANT FACTOR IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF TASKS OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION TEACHING

(Professional paper)

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Abstract

Due to the physical inactivity of children in urban areas their motor functions are increasingly impoverished and the biological balance of their organisms is disrupted. Man has been alienated from the nature, which is an environment from which he has originated. The negative effects of modern life could be eliminated if man practiced more and went more often to the nature and spent more time there. Modern school physical education cannot be confined to compulsory classes, because it has complex tasks that cannot be completed in three classes per week. Sports and recreational activities have to be a daily obligation and need of students. Children's spending time in the fresh air with a variety of activities has a positive effect on increasing the body's resistance, better functioning of the respiratory system, blood circulation, digestive system, nervous system, movement apparatus, and the development of coordination, balance, agility and dexterity. The content of the recreational activities curriculum should also provide an important tool for acquiring new knowledge, skills and habits, developing the positive attitude towards work, fulfilling numerous obligations and acquiring working and hygienic habits. In order to implement the recreational activities in the best way, what is necessary is the great commitment and motivation of both children and educators and teachers, who through their professional work with the application of scientific knowledge and the use of teaching aids and equipment, primarily those that can be found in the nature, should enable the implementation of outdoors activities as intended. Students show great interest for teaching in the nature, point out that it is more interesting than the usual classes since they have the opportunity to participate in a variety of physical activities and that these activities have beneficial effects on their health and overall development.

Keywords: *students, teaching in the nature, elementary games, motor abilities*

INTRODUCTION

Activities in the nature provide good opportunities for the implementation of tasks of physical education teaching of younger school age and they are one of the good ways to overcome the weaknesses of a class-lesson system, and adjust the teaching to students' interests. Students show great interest for activities in the nature because they have an opportunity to deal with a variety of physical activities that have a positive impact on their health and overall development.

Activities in the nature or school in the nature are synonyms for a lot of terms such as: school in the open nature, school in the forest, school in the clean air, air school, school in the sun, student centers in the nature, and so on. Today, we mostly encounter the terms such as school in the nature, recreational classes, and activities in the nature.

No matter how we call it, in any case, classes in the nature contribute to "the comprehensive develop-

ment of a personality, primarily to the development of independent thinking, the ability of observation and perception, self-service, friendships, collective spirit, children are taught about time management and free time (outside home, children realize that they first must do things necessary to sustain life, then what is useful for acquiring knowledge and, finally – pleasant activities in their leisure time" (Pedagogical Dictionary (Педагошки речник) 1967: 609).

TEACHING IN THE NATURE – CONCEPTIONAL DEFINITION

The concept of teaching in nature represents "a special form of full-day organized educational activities of the school with boarding facilities, which takes place outside of their place of residence, in the nature, with expended pedagogical work through leisure activities. Educational work is correlated with psycho-physical recreation in the nature, and implementation of teach-

ing activities, specified in the curriculum, is adapted to the specific conditions of the natural and local environment; the activities most suitable for the implementation in these conditions are chosen. All educational activities are managed by the professional teaching and non-teaching staff" (Nikolić (Николић), 1994: 18).

Teaching in the nature is "the form of teaching where children learn about their homeland, where, far away from the noise of the city, students can learn how to take from the nature what is good, and preserve it at the same time." The importance of school in the nature has been well-understood by the doctors, "they suggested the opening of the first so-called school in the forest in Berlin suburbs Charlottenburg in 1904. The school was created for children with poor health and children who were underdeveloped due to bad social conditions" (Janković & Rodić), 2002: 174). The main characteristic of this school was that the entire educational work was aimed at strengthening the health of children, and because of that they spent most of the time playing, having a rest and having fun, while they gained knowledge through first-hand experience in the nature and outdoor classrooms.

Even today, there are debates – how to define the aim of activities in the nature?

"Activities in the nature, teaching in the nature, picnics, winter holidays and summer holidays are extracurricular activities realized outside the school. Their aim is acquiring and mastering the part of the curriculum by direct exposure to the phenomena and relations in the natural and social environment, learning about cultural heritage and economic achievements that are related to the activity of the school, and recreation and health recovery of students" (Ordinance on the Basics of the Program of Rest, Recreation, Climate Recovery and Teaching in the Nature (Правилник о основама програма одмора, рекреације, климатског опоравка и наставе у природи), 1995).

Terms such as extracurricular activities and "leisure activities" had been used for a long time. The majority of experts dealing with these issues consider that these terms are unacceptable because they separate these activities from teaching. They think that the term "out-of-class activities of students" is acceptable and justified by the fact that the implementation of the curriculum depends mostly from these activities as well, and implementation of the curriculum has been assumed through both class and out-of-class activities. They define out-of-class activities in the following way:

"Out-of-class activities of students in physical education are planned and organized forms of work, based on the needs, interests and free will of students. Together with class forms of work they provide the comprehensive implementation of the objectives and tasks of the physical and health education, thus raising the students' awareness of physical culture as an integral part of a modern man's life" (Arunović, et al., (1992: 188).

Whichever term we choose, the essence and basic responsibility of education in all its forms is to mitigate

the adverse factors that increasingly and more intensively affect people, and even more the children, and their developing organism and to help them lead richer and more harmonious life in accordance with the nature.

They are expected to contribute to:

- the development of socialization of pre-school and younger school age students;
- the improvement of mental and physical health of pre-school and younger school age students;
- the development of love towards nature and awareness of the need for its protection;
- the development of collaborative relationships with friends, educators and teachers;
- the development of independence of children and students and
- the effective realization of teaching activities in the modified, natural conditions.

The development of students' physical abilities and preservation of their health should be the top priority task of the society. Unfortunately, their health has been threatened by the negative consequences of urbanization of the environment, increased air pollution, traffic noise, and the lack of available green areas. Due to physical inactivity of children in urban areas, their motor skills have dropped increasingly and biological and psychological equilibrium of the organism have been undermined. Nurturing the movements in nature must be equal to the need for food and sleep. Walking around fields, meadows, forests, up the hill, down the hill and activities in the fresh air have a very positive effect on a child's organism.

Activities in the nature came into play in our areas only as a consequence of raising the awareness about the increasingly endangered man's environment and the need for better organized health protection, even his survival. They are especially popular today, when we increasingly turn back to nature and fight very intensively for its preservation. Thus, schools in the nature become schools of life in the true sense of the word.

If prepared adequately and implemented professionally, activities in the nature give very good results in all domains of teaching, including the physical education.

How important it is to exercise and spend time in the nature was pointed a long time ago by Pelagić (Пелагић), (1952.) who said, "Thousands of people, weak and boring, who are a burden to their families and who spend their lives without any joy, could have been, if they had exercised when they were young, happy, hard-working and healthy people. Never forget that the happiness of our children depends on physical exercise".

It can be concluded that schools in the nature, in the world and in our country, are organized primarily with the aim to strengthen the health and resistance of poor-health children who usually spend 7-10 days there. "Teaching is conducted outdoors, and knowledge is gained mostly through first-hand experience and practical work. Most of the time is dedicated to recreation and having a rest in nature; on the playgrounds and in the swimming pool, which are located within the school. The existence of these schools has its justification; they

have shown certain results, i.e. they have had a positive effect on the overall psycho-physical development of children” (Nikolić (Николић), 1994: 15).

In order to conduct teaching in the nature, it is necessary to provide space, facilities, equipment, teaching aids and appropriate staff. While teaching in the nature lasts, for working with students, it is necessary to engage class teachers, animators, technical staff, and it is certainly a must to provide health protection of students. It is advisable that students are accompanied by a physician all the time, from the moment of the departure to the moment of returning to a place of residence, in order to act preventively on the students’ health. Preferably, the facilities should be located in the favorable climatic conditions, near the sea, lake or river, or on a mountain at an altitude of 600 to 800 meters.

The preparation of students for spending time in the school in nature can be viewed in several different aspects. They include ”pedagogical, psychological, intellectual, physical, social and educational preparation“ (Radulović (Радуловић), 2012: 70-76).

The responsibility of class teachers is great when it comes to preparing students for teaching in the nature. If the preparation is well and systematically conducted, the possibility of achieving the goal and tasks of teaching in the nature is far more certain. If the preparations for the realization of this type of teaching are inadequate or spontaneously approached, a chance for students’ gaining valuable knowledge and experience in a very favorable environment and different conditions will be missed.

During the teaching in the nature a greater motivation of students is evident. “They are enthusiastic about many phenomena; thereby the motivational and emotional aspect of teaching, that is, the process of learning, is raised to a very high level. No less important is the psychological aspect of teaching, related to the curiosity and other processes of cognitive competence for learning” (Janković & Rodić, 2002 : 182).

REALIZATION OF ACTIVITIES IN NATURE

Free-time activities are an integral part of the timetable of educational work. Since one of the basic tasks of school in nature is to improve the health of children, sports activities and various elementary games are especially significant. Students independently choose, organize and realize the free activities. Class teachers facilitate better organization and more successful realization of a chosen game. These activities should directly depend on climatic conditions, a season and capacities to organize certain activities.

As we can see, a significant proportion of time during students’ stay in nature is planned for elementary games. A game, “as one of the forms of physical culture, can be defined as a spontaneous and free activity of children and adults that gives them pleasure and in some ways confirms their individual and collective capacities” (Milanović, & Stamatović, 2006 : 35).

Elementary games are by the form of movement and

their content simple and suitable for every student. They are used “in physical education teaching and are applicable to all forms of physical culture, and they can be modified to all ages and different conditions and can be conducted by very simple rules” (Pedagogical Lexicon (Педагошки речник), 1996 : 156).

The characteristics of elementary games are “free action and expression of: abilities, skills, ingenuity, creativity, persistence, outwitting of friends, defiance, gaiety, expression of a state and desire for locomotion and manipulation; simplicity and availability; playing time as long as mutually agreed; simple, suitable or arbitrary equipment and spaces for playing; simple rules of the game, in fact, agreement and mostly unlimited number of participants” (Zdanski (Здански), 1998 : 153).

The selection and application of games depends on what they are expected to achieve, on the available space and equipment and on the weather conditions.

In winter time, when the snow conditions allow, sports activities would be sledding, skiing and snow games. These activities must be lively, dynamic, with a lot of movement, in order to maintain the body temperature and prevent catching a cold. The teachers must take care of children’s clothes and the footwear; they should prevent the legs wetting, especially as the wet clothes and footwear are difficult to dry. However, it does not mean that time should not be spent in the snow; it is only necessary to put some limits and take care of the conditions.



Picture 1. A snowman



Picture 2. The first steps on skis

If the weather is warm, low intensity games should be played. Before starting the game, a teacher should

gather the students around himself / herself and briefly and clearly explain the game. The rules violation should not be tolerated, because it leads to indiscipline and improper realization of the game. From elementary games the catching games are mostly used (catching games in the chain, catching games in trees), games with changing the place by running "A cat and a mouse", "A wolf and a lamb" "The head chasing the tail", "Statues", "Fly, fly", "Passing the ball overhead", "A fight for the nest", "Between four fires", "Long jump with gradually increasing distance", etc.

We should try to realize field games and other activities in the open space by using natural conditions: exploration games, detecting games, searching games and so on. It is essential that the aforementioned activities are performed in the open air and that students should be exposed to natural factors as much as possible.

In the nature, it is possible to realize all natural forms of movement that enable the success of surmounting space, obstacles, successful manipulation of props, simply put in motion all body parts and meet a series of demands of physical education. Acquiring these skills contributes to basics of developing the motor skills, which can be a base for later building of complex and demanding motor skills. Exercising in nature, where the children are surrounded with trees and chirping of birds, not only raises the level of their motor and functional abilities, develops the strength, speed, coordination, accuracy, balance, but also improves the adaptability of cardiovascular and respiratory system to physical effort to which children are exposed through various activities.

In addition to sports and elementary games, a good walk also provides a lot of pleasure, and has a beneficial effect on the organism, especially on the activation of the muscles of the body, respiratory and circulatory systems, elimination of the consequences of hours of passive and static load of the organism due to sitting and lying, elimination of the consequences of excessive intake of high-calorie food, and enables exploring the nature and communication among the people.

Despite the fact that it is possible to organize classes in the sports hall or in the classroom, we should bear in mind: "A walk to the outskirts of a city, a nearby park, a hill, a stream, or a river is better and more beneficial than the best organized class in the classroom" (Đorđević (Ђорђевић), 1979: 69).

On the picnics, a variety of teaching activities can be realized, primarily a natural forms of movement (walking, running uphill, downhill, through the forest or high grass, skipping stumps, logs or streams, crawling, climbing a tree, hanging, throwing, catching). Various elementary games with natural forms of movement, hiding, sneaking, adapted to the conditions ("Remember the way", "Find a hidden object", "Scouts", "A bird jumps in the field", "Cockfight", "The train game", "Running in pairs"), ball games, etc. (Nemec (Немец), 1999).

CONCLUSION

Nowadays, the children mostly spend their time in-

doors, with a minimal or no physical activity. Teaching activities in the nature, specified in the curriculum should be an important tool for acquiring new knowledge, skills and habits, developing positive attitude towards work, dealing with numerous obligations and creating working and hygienic habits.

Teaching in nature expends the knowledge acquired at school, enables the students to learn in an obvious way, and provides good conditions for teaching all the subjects, especially physical education. It helps the students to develop a love for the nature, create a habit to go to the nature and spend time there, learn about the characteristics of the area where they are staying; it eliminates the negative consequences of living indoors and physical inactivity; enables walking, hiking, picnics and games in the clean air, etc. Teaching in the nature is a synthesis of educational and health-hygiene tasks that cannot be viewed separately. All of them make a student-centered whole with the purpose of their better development and life training. Activities in the nature offer the students the opportunity to develop their hidden potential and preferences, for which maybe there is not enough space or time in the process of teaching.

The importance for organizing activities in the nature for younger school age students lies in developing their ability to experience and learn about the nature, perceive its laws and beauties, while understanding that the survival of all living beings on the Earth, including the mankind itself, depends on its preservation.

For all these reasons it would be good to enable the students of lower grades of primary school to spend time in school in nature, because it can provide possibilities for organization and realization of physical education teaching. Walks, picnics and various elementary games, other activities in the natural environment will be a source of great pleasure, while having a beneficial effect on their organism and health in general.

In order to implement the activities in nature in the best way, what is necessary is the great commitment of both children and teachers, who through their professional work with the application of scientific knowledge and the use of teaching aids and equipment, primarily those that can be found in nature and should enable the implementation of outdoors activities as intended.

"A happy life is one which is in accordance with the nature"

(Seneca).

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