

Gender in physical education practice

Physical education (PE) occupies a special place among school subjects. It is the only school subject which shapes the pupils' bodies and not their intellect. In addition, there are no exams in physical education that open the way to the next stage of the pupils' education, nor is it among the subjects tested during the secondary school final exam. This is the reason why physical education is not always treated seriously by the pupils, their parents or also school principals. Physical education teachers are forced to constantly struggle for the serious treatment of the subject they teach. Nevertheless, in times of increasing incidence of civilisation diseases related to a sedentary lifestyle, maintaining pupils' physical activity at a high level during PE lessons seems to be very important. The research results show that the number of children actively participating in PE lessons is going down in Poland, especially in the case of girls and secondary school pupils (Woynarowska et al. 2015). The majority of teenagers also fail to meet the guidelines for the recommended level of daily physical activity (Kalman et al. 2015). Thus, it is crucial to have a close look at PE lessons in terms of their attractiveness for the girls and boys. PE lessons could significantly contribute to creating a habit of an active lifestyle and by that counteract the negative effects of a sedentary lifestyle. However, the research conducted worldwide so far reveals that PE lessons do not equally serve all pupils. Girls and boys lacking sporting skills are definitely less willing to participate in PE lessons. Girls in physical education lessons are often perceived as a "problem" or a deviation from the norm, where the norm is seen as active boys who like sports.

Considering the above, the project is aimed at: (1) analysing behaviours of pupils (both girls and boys) and teachers during PE lessons and the meanings attributed by them to gender in the context of PE lessons and physical activity, (2) getting to know the opinion of school principals, legal guardians and academic teachers responsible for the education and preparation for the profession of future PE teachers about the meanings attributed to gender in the context of PE lessons and physical activity. With regard to school principals, we will focus on the meanings attributed by them to PE lessons at school and to counteracting any potential gender inequalities in educational practice. We also aim at getting to know the expectations of legal guardians of children attending PE lessons at school from PE lessons for their children (and whether the expectations differ depending on the child's gender), how they assess such lessons and how important are such lessons for them. In turn, we wish to get to know the opinions of academic teachers responsible for the education and preparation for the profession of future PE teachers in order to learn about the meanings attributed by them to physical activity during PE lessons, how they understand and what meanings they attribute to potential (biological or cultural) differences between boys and girls and whether they notice any potential gender inequalities in educational practice.

The afore-mentioned research objectives are going to be fulfilled using the following research methods: (1) Participant observation of PE lessons, (2) Focus group interviews with girls and boys observed during PE lessons, (3) Individual in-depth interviews with PE teachers, school principals, legal guardians of children attending PE lessons, as well as academic teachers of physical education methodology course, teaching future PE teachers, (4) Quantitative research based on a representative survey. Using numerous research methods will allow for obtaining an in-depth explanation of the studied issue.

This research project refers to the field of sociology of education, and results of the studies may contribute to illustrating any potential gender inequalities with regard to PE lessons. In the long-term, the obtained results may become the foundations for follow-up research aimed at restructuring the educational practice in order to prevent low participation of girls and boys in physical activity during PE lessons or even feeling discouraged to activity and abandoning an active lifestyle, also outside lessons.

References:

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