

LEISURE EDUCATION AS A TOOL FOR HEALTH EDUCATION

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Abstract: *The paper is focused on finding new opportunities to develop pupils' key competencies in broad-based Health Education using the potential of education through extracurricular activities. It presents selected results of a research survey which monitored certain aspects of educational reality in primary schools as well as the nature of leisure activities for children and adolescents. The findings confirmed the need to link formal and informal education components in educating to a healthy lifestyle and through school prevention programmes focused on risk behaviour of children and youth. The designed interdisciplinary system of leisure education in primary school can be an effective support for Health Education.*

Key words: *health education, leisure education, risk behaviour prevention, systematic approach*

Developing pupils' key competencies in a transformed school

The transformation of Czech schools is now in a phase of gradual introduction of new curricula. The approved Framework Educational Programme for Basic Education (RVP ZV, 2007) provides in accordance with the progressive trends in education a number of major changes. It restates the objectives of basic education. It directs teachers to develop in pupils especially those vital skills they will be able to use in specific situations. It clearly defines the results of education, i.e. the core competencies which a pupil should achieve. School education should equip all pupils with competences to a level that is attainable for them. Its spirit must to the maximum extent consider the individual approach to pupils, focus on their development potentials and their activities, which can further develop their disposition. (PoI, 2007).

Contemporary tendencies to changes in teaching and learning paradigm are based on cognitive psychology, social and pedagogical constructivism, while taking into consideration the requirements of humanistic psychology with an emphasis on the holistic development of personality. Czech schools also follow the gradual transformation from behavioural approaches to the concept inspired by cognitive psychology and respect for

social and cultural aspects of learning. In practice this means a transition from transmissive to constructivist approach to teaching. (Spilková, 2005).

In the phase of basic education, the following aspects are considered to be of key importance: competencies for learning; problem solving skills; communication skills; social and personal competence; civic competence; and work competence.

These competencies are intertwined in various ways, they are of intersubject nature and can only be acquired as a result of the overall education process. Therefore, their formation and development should be the aim and be contributed by all educational content, pursuits and activities taking place at school. Education to citizenship is also of irreplaceable importance.

The curriculum is defined generally and it is assumed that every school and especially the teachers themselves will find ways, which can lead to the most goals most effectively. There are many ways to fulfil this mission, but not all are suitable in meeting today's educational goals and the development of key and newly understood professional competence (Belz, Siegrist, 2001). Therefore, teachers find themselves before a number of unanswered questions: What strategies and teaching methods to choose? How to construct a functional model of the learning process? What teaching approaches to develop? How should the life of our school change?

Health Education as part of the curriculum

Health Education as an educational field of the secondary school is focused on building skills needed for the preventive protection of human health. It teaches students to actively develop and protect health in all its forms (social, psychological and physical) and be responsible for them. Pupils build up hygiene, eating, working, and other preventative health habits, learn how to prevent accidents and behave safely in everyday and emergency situations. Due to the individual and social dimensions of health, this educational field of Health Education is closely linked with cross-cutting topic of Personal and Social Education (RVP ZV 2007).

If teaching is to meet the above objectives and also to contribute to the prevention of risk behaviour of children and youth, it is necessary to open the way to students to self-knowledge, to understanding their own behaviour and that of others in the context of different life situations. Implementation of such education requires specific methodological approaches, the search for innovative strategies that reflect pupils' current interests and needs. Working with specific preconceptions, i.e. the personality characteristics of individuals, social climate in the class, with previously acquired skills and preferred values of life is expected.

Efficiency of Health Education in secondary school is thus directly dependent on the extent to which the expected outcomes of the 'Man and His World' education section have been fulfilled in primary school, but mainly on what attitudes pupils created on the basis of all life experiences so far. In some aspects of Health Education (prevention of risky behaviour, learning moral principles and ethical standards, etc.), the created prepositions, habits and value systems are already difficult to correct due to pupils' specific adolescence developmental characteristics (Csémy, 2005).

Therefore, increased attention should be paid to children of younger school age in this regard, creating space for targeted Health Education. This means to provide the required number of stimulations in compulsory school education and also a wide enough variety of opportunities for children to engage in time in different health promoting leisure activities, as early as in primary school, i.e. the period when the child is naturally proactive and has a great need to experience success (in the ideal period for the development of all aspects of the child's personality).

Potential of education through extracurricular activities

Leisure education can be applied with significant importance in direct relation to primary school education process, but only provided that it takes place under the guidance of professional teachers who provide pupils with a meaningful use of leisure time and create space for their overall development (Hájek, 2008).

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As already mentioned, primary schools currently bring their education programmes to life and collect their first experience of implementation. Unlike compulsory education, leisure education did not have any framework programmes created and it depends on each educational institution, whether and how they implement these activities into their school programme.

Traditional school education facilities of interest include the after-school club, which is being extensively used by children of younger school age even nowadays. To illustrate it, there are approximately 3,976 after-school clubs in the Czech Republic, attended by 239,878 children (Institute for Information in Education - statistics as of 23 July, 2010). These are not insignificant numbers.

Education in the after-school club is directed to fulfil the general goals of education just like school education. However, compared with conventional compulsory education it has its own specifics and a linked high educational potential that can directly support the achievement of the expected outcomes of citizenship education.

During my practise teaching experience I have had the opportunity to work with children on the first and second level of elementary school, with both boys and girls, experience the environment of several schools and especially look into the secret life of children in the school environment. Based on personal experience, however, I became convinced that the school, especially the after-school club, falls short of its possibilities by far, not only in developing the competencies necessary to protect health and the prevention of risk behaviour in children, but also the pupils' overall personality and social development. The effect of the after-school club is only reduced to a social function, i.e. it becomes a financially undemanding "nanny", ensuring the child's safety and supervision when school is over and parents are at work or otherwise busy. Thus, a potential space for effective development of all aspects of children's personality including preventive health competencies, becomes a mere "waiting room" where the children just uselessly wait for their parents.

To what extent is my subjective feeling approaching reality? Do schools use the potential of education through extracurricular activities? I tried to look for answers to these questions in broader research, tracking the current problems associated with the introduction of newly conceived curriculum in primary schools.

A probe into educational reality in primary schools

In connection with seeking ways to optimize the conditions for the development of key competencies of primary school pupils, qualitative research investigation was carried out in 2009, aimed at monitoring and deeper analysis of the current situation in providing leisure education at the first level of selected primary schools. The aim of the research was to determine whether the selected schools ensured leisure education for pupils of younger school age so that they could optimally exploit its potential in terms of expected outcomes defined in the pedagogical documentation.

The research was based on an initial assumption that extracurricular activities for pupils of younger school age in primary schools, implemented through the after-school club extends the school's possibilities to influence the children's development both during and outside school (Decree No 74/2005 Coll. Extracurricular Education).

Research methods

The research survey used several methods to collect information that allow a qualitative assessment of the current state of the monitored educational reality:

- an analysis of pedagogical documentation relating to extracurricular activities organized by the school (especially the after-school club)
- non-standardized observation of operation in the after-school club,
- recording sheets for guidance teachers (child-minders)
- a structured interview with pupils of younger school age,
- a questionnaire for parents (with space for free expression).

Survey implementation of and presentation of partial results

The survey was carried out at three primary schools in Prague, where the activity of eleven after-school club departments was systematically described, attended by 290 children at the time of research.

a) Analysis of pedagogical documentation relating to leisure education in schools

It was found that the objectives set out in the after-school club programme correspond in general to the objectives set out in the RVP. An effort to develop pupils' key competencies is apparent. The programme structure and description of planned activities, however, show that leisure clubs are often scheduled so that they overlap in time. The system therefore does not allow children to develop their skills in several areas. At the same time, low diversity and low capacity for involvement in school activities on

offer was recorded (compared with the number of children who attend the after-school club). Children spend most of the time in “their” group and all activities are conducted by one guidance teacher.

Topical plans for each department differ in style, structure and detail of description (definition of expected outcomes, scope and quality of activities’ description and conditions for possible implementation). This suggests that the management of after-school clubs does not work systematically with thematic plans the guidance teachers have created, (e.g. through evaluation). It is not clear from the very brief description of activities to what extent and whether an active involvement of pupils is intended.

The programmes of each department (“on paper”) are usually overrated, stating a variety of activities that can not be managed with the children in a limited time, space and with the given material equipment.

It is interesting that all addressed schools offered ethics education within the school club groups. Yet also in this case, pupils were limited by low capacity. Realistically, this means that a school club is regularly attended only by 18 “chosen” children. Others have to do without this educational activity, despite their personal interest.

b) Monitoring the time when children stay in after-school clubs

The average primary school pupil will spend almost as much time in the after-school club as in the actual lessons (i.e., every weekday they develop their knowledge and skills in the teaching process under the guidance of teacher for 4.14 hours on average and then spend the subsequent 3.26 hours ‘waiting’ for their parents in the after-school club). Is it a meaningful and actively spent or wasted time?

This “time-space “ can be fully utilized to develop knowledge, skills and abilities of children through recreational education. As it was revealed from the parents’ testimony, they fully rely on the fact that the described options will be used for their children’s development. After coming home, no more activities are offered to children by the parents. Due to the fact that children come home from the after-school club in the late afternoon, there is no time for them. Children usually write their homework and head to bed.

c) Assessment of the environment designed for extra-curricular learning in the after-school club

The focus observation method was used to obtain information about the environment in which children reside in the afternoon, monitoring selected parameters that have a significant impact on the efficiency of educational activity. An analysis of records showed that the examined after-school club environment did not fulfil the demands of education in some parameters, i.e. in health, recreational and educational areas. There are some examples to illustrate this.

Two schools involved in the research have the children remain after school in the same room in which they struggled with words, reading or multiplication tables in the previous four to five hours. The only difference between teaching and after-school club is that the teacher was replaced by a guidance officer or tutor and the students can devote themselves to activities at their discretion or the discretion of the tutor. However, the statement they ‘may’ is too eloquent. For children are very limited in the selection

of activities by this enclosed space. Therefore tend to play on the computer, watch TV or to passive games. It is exactly the impossibility of movement that is a significant problem. A lower school-age child has a great need for motoric activity. Reduction in meeting this need and the associated minimal ventilation of accumulated aggression can result in problematic behaviour towards peers and adults. This is of course “rewarded” by penalties and sanctions on the part of the child-minders and the child loses a positive relationship with the school environment. The after-school club becomes like detention, the child is punished without having primarily offended.

An important aspect (related to this) is the colour of the after-school clubs interior. Classrooms are mostly whitewashed, although white, as confirmed by scientific studies, stimulates activity and aggression (similarly like red shades). It is therefore worth to consider customizing the colours of paint in each room to what purposes these spaces are used for. Rooms designed for relaxation and rest should rather appear in light blue shades that have a calming effect.

Another negative phenomenon which was recorded in the after-school club sections involved in the survey and which can not be ignored, was the considerable noise. It is proven that the sound intensity also has an influence on human behaviour. The need for somatic reactions, irritability and aggressiveness increase with increasing noise. Children should definitely be able to escape from disturbing (not only auditory) perceptions, find a quiet place, a space where they can relax or engage in preparation for lessons.

This brings us into a vicious circle. Reducing children’s somatic activities in conjunction with invigorating paint of their “bars” inevitably leads to aggressive manifestations in behaviour. With increasing aggression, the intensity of noise increases of course, which again enhances children’s activity and irritation.

d) Comparative analysis of the activities of after-school club activities

Specific activities in after-school clubs were monitored by an independent observer as well as the educators themselves and recorded in prepared data sheets. A categorical system was created for the analysis of the data, allowing the material to be qualitatively evaluated. A transcription of text material into summarizing communications was used, lessons learned by observation and structured interviews were implemented, all complemented by one’s own commentary. Multi-dimensional assessment was applied, including the extent of leadership, maintained control by the teacher, share of activities where can be assumed that children were active during their realization and the activities where no direct involvement of children was expected or required.

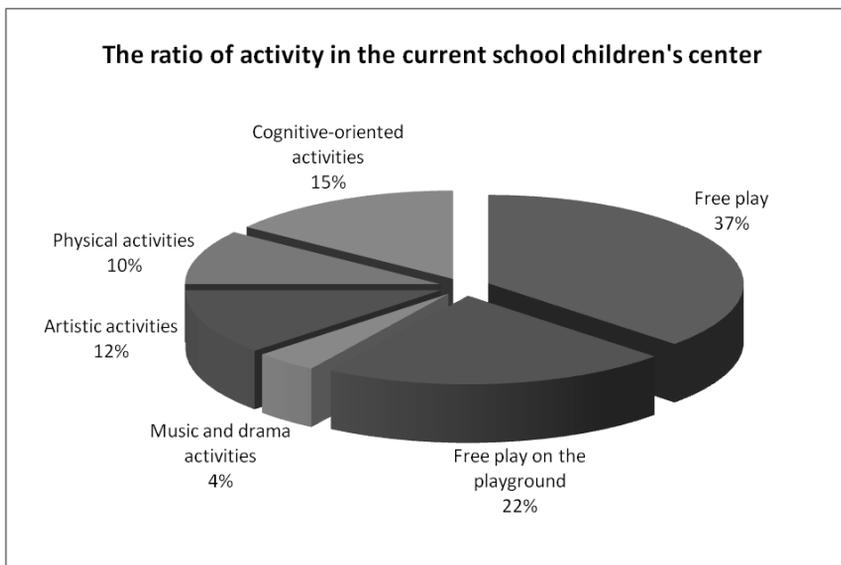
Research has shown that the activities where a child is guided in its activities by teaching staff are included in the programme only by 44 %. Due to the fact that the “organized” category included all activities of the leisure clubs (where professional guidance is essential), the investigation output is alarming. With regard to the activating potential of activities, it should be noted that undertaken activities only activated their recipient by 52 %.

A typical after-school club situation includes the fact that the activity of children who need to compensate for several hours of “sitting” in the classroom, exceeds the guidance teachers’ idea of what can be “permitted” to children in the after-school club .

In many cases, in an effort to capture the children’s interest, whilst providing discipline (and maybe even easy work) the teacher usually sits the charges before a television screen. Paradoxically, this leads to the opposite effect than the educator intended. The children calm down during the screening, but an explosion of emotions, activity and aggression will be inevitable after its completion. It is scientifically proven that a person has somatic responses on visual stimuli in TV spots.

Thus, if we put a child aside in the clutches of television entertainment, their aggression is constantly suppressed and once it must escape from its “prison”. The use of these practices is almost reprehensible specifically with school age children. Indeed, according to the basic thesis of evolutionary psychology, the period when a child attends primary school is a stage characterized by activities associated with the child’s need for performance and valuation. The above mentioned methods for reducing children’s own movement and activity can be bound to pathogenic consequences.

A comparison of the data obtained from programmes implemented by the individual departments categorized into cognitively oriented activities, movement, art, music and drama and to compared their representation with the free play. The results were converted into graphical form for illustration.



The graph shows a very low representation of physical activity (10 %). The observed proportion of physical activity (active rest) definitely does not meet the recommendations of experts (particularly paediatricians) in the general children’s health promotion. Most activities are made up by free play (59 %) realized in the school premises or in the school playground.

Free play on the playground can be assessed as a positive activity, but only under certain conditions. It was found that children in the school playground generally separate (by personal sympathies and relationships) into several groups, where each of which is devoted to certain activities. Some people play football or end-ball, but there still re-

mains a high percentage of children who spend time in the school playground passively sitting in a circle of their friends and literally waiting until their parent frees them from captivity of the after-school clubs.

The survey results revealed that the after-school clubs are dominated by stereotype. Each activity is repeated every day, and the organization of each department is static and without changes. The offer of after school activities may not be sufficient for the interdisciplinary development of all children attending the after-school club.

f) Summary of information obtained from individual interviews with school-age pupils

The vast majority of surveyed pupils identified as their most popular activity the one in the leisure group which they visit during their stay in the after-school club. Ethics also include the very popular groups. Unfortunately, some children favoured playing computer games and watching TV. Nearly a third of pupils admitted that they did not like the after-school club. Some expressed a negative attitude towards a particular activity (e.g., the common reading, making themed products), others did not like the after-school club itself. They especially complained about the noise and constant disturbing stimuli or the lack of toys. There was also a significant proportion of those who testified that they were bored during their stay in the after-school club.

An interesting finding showed that the popularity ratings of children's activities on the part of the guidance teachers did not correspond with what the participants of these activities themselves testified. Children reported their least favourite activities which includes such activities, which the teachers believed the children liked. This proved a certain optimistic blindness on the part of the educators to the reality of their action. Different opinions on common reading are an example. Children identified it as the least favourite activity in the after-school club. They were bothered by the control of their own reading because of the monologue principle of this activity. This means that children enjoy reading, but do not like to listen to the "public" reading others.

Conclusion

The implemented research survey showed that schools, especially after-school clubs, did not use much of their options in the area of leisure education, which means they do not sufficiently support the objectives of primary education in the interdisciplinary personality development.

An analysis of data obtained from surveyed schools indicated that the objectives defined in prepared after-school clubs' topical programmes and plans were not adequately met in real activities. It turned out that most teachers (child-minders and tutors), whose activities I had the opportunity to carefully observe, were trying to offer a varied programme to the children in their departments. In any case I do not want to question their pedagogical erudition, interests and personality traits to ensure effective leisure education.

However, I do see a problem in the concept of leisure education in schools. I consider it necessary to change the current model of after-school clubs and the overall approach to leisure education in primary schools. I mean the inevitability of transformation of after-school clubs into a form of interdisciplinary leisure education system. (Marád, 2009).

There is vast potential in leisure education on the first level of primary school, opportunities for further educational activities and development of all aspects of children's personality. Therefore, the school should offer a substantially wider range of leisure groups (whose capacity should match the interests of children, or respectively, their parents). Given the current social preferences, groups aimed at developing physical activities should hold a dominant position among them, together with the area of ethical education and education through experience. Such activities can be an effective support for the later achievement of expected outputs of Health Education at the 2nd level of primary schools and can lead to the formation of children's habits to enjoy free time in accordance with the principles of a healthy lifestyle.

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ZÁJMOVÉ VZDĚLÁVÁNÍ JAKO JEDEN Z NÁSTROJŮ VÝCHOVY KE ZDRAVÍ

Abstrakt: Příspěvek je zaměřen na hledání nových možností rozvoje klíčových kompetencí žáků v rámci široce pojaté výchovy ke zdraví, a to využitím potenciálu zájmového vzdělávání. Uvádí vybrané výsledky vlastního výzkumného šetření, kterým byly sledovány jak určité stránky edukační reality na základních školách, tak i charakter náplně volného času dětí a dospívajících. Zjištěné skutečnosti potvrdily potřebu propojovat formální a neformální složku vzdělávání v oblasti výchovy ke zdravému životnímu stylu a v rámci školních programů prevence rizikových projevů chování dětí a mládeže. Účinnou podporou při výchově ke zdraví může být navržený interdisciplinárně pojatý systém zájmového vzdělávání v primární škole.

Klíčová slova: výchova ke zdraví, zájmové vzdělávání, prevence rizikového chování, systémový přístup