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Peer Exclusion at Physical Education

Abstract

School sports give all pupils opportunity to learn to be tolerant to others regardless of their differences or shortcomings. This is getting more and more important due to the growing differences in physical and motor skills, different social backgrounds, besides there is a growing number of pupils having different backgrounds, nationalities etc. Peer exclusion at Physical Education (PE) in primary schools which can take many forms should be treated properly, according to teachers' opinion. The most frequent causes of exclusion are the lack of motor skills, being overweight, some character features and social status as well. It is normally a very painful problem for the excluded pupil which often leads to avoiding sports activities or maybe even to cutting PE classes.

Sports teachers should be aware of the problem, be able to identify the source of troubles in their classes and to solve them.

Keywords: peer exclusion, physical education, primary school

Introduction

Fight against social exclusion in education and also other types of exclusion is becoming an increasingly prevalent topic. The importance of the educational system in the increase of social inclusion is also highlighted in the report of the Commission of European Communities to the Council and European Parliament on efficiency and equity in European educational systems (European Parliament resolution of 27 September 2007). The report concludes that to increase competitive advantages and social inclusion in the EU, educational systems must be reformed to increase their efficiency and equity.

There are many documents supporting the idea of equal participation of all students in the learning process, both at European and national, Slovenian level. This is the orientation in all curricula for school subject of sports in primary and secondary school. It is similar at the pre-school education level.

In primary and secondary schools, we often face multiple challenges related to pupils coming from different social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds which are becoming more and more diverse. At PE in primary and secondary schools there is also a growing difference among students in their motor skills. The increasing range can be confirmed by the surveys (Strel, Starc, Jurak, Kovač, 2012). This broader range is observed by teachers themselves which causes many difficulties in their teaching.

Physical education is one of the areas where elements of education should be even more strengthened. The goals of physical education in the vocational education system emphasise the importance of social learning (Kolar, 2011). Social learning is particularly present in sports games, where students through the adoption of game rules learn relations in the group: their interests are submitted to the interests of the group, to mutual assistance, consideration, understanding and accepting differences.

Problem of peer exclusion

We observe from our own teaching experience as well as from working with schools that the unwanted behaviours occur also in PE lessons. And by unwanted behaviours we mean the phenomenon of peer exclusion.

Discriminatory forms of behaviour occur on the basis of various factors, in different learning areas or sports content. It is possible to notice reluctance to less skilled pupils and to pupils belonging to socially disadvantaged groups, national minorities and others.

Therefore, some pupils experience exclusion in sports games and they are even ridiculed because of their lack of skills. This often leads to avoiding PE lessons which are normally very popular with young people. PE is the school subject which in its curriculum highlights both the educational and socialization goals as well as those related to the acquisition of locomotor skills.

This is an example of the curriculum in primary school:

General starting points:

- adheres to the principle of equal opportunities for all pupils, taking into account their diversity and difference;
- pedagogical process is planned in a way that every pupil is successful and motivated; and
- encourages pupils to develop human relationships and sports behavior.

Operational objectives:

- creating views, attitudes and behaviours; and
- giving a pleasant experience to play sports.

Similar but expanded objectives and baselines are also being applied in secondary schools.

Teachers are informed about the records in the curricula, as these are their core documents used every day for lesson planning. Nevertheless, the results of the task evaluation which I have done with colleague Špela Bergoč show that it is still possible and necessary to do many things about this issue.

The online survey EnKlikAnketa has been chosen to get the answer for the mentioned problem. The survey was answered and completed by 81 teachers.

Analysis of the responses to the survey

The given results were quite surprising for us because it was really for the first time we spoke about exclusion, and the same was for teachers of sport and physical education teachers.

The majority of teachers responded that this is the topic (problem), it is necessary at least to speak about or even more that it should be properly treated.

The answers about the most common causes of exclusion are expectedly more dispersed. As the most frequent cause of exclusion is given momentum incompetency, then follow personality features, after it obesity and finally social status. As less common causes are listed ethnicity and skin colour. Religious affiliation is not perceived as a cause of exclusion; other responses were not recorded.

This raises the question about the extent to which the surveyed teachers recognize situations in which exclusion occurs in sports. In order to illustrate some

typical examples of peer exclusion, a short video was made in one of primary schools, which was also shown some participating teachers in our project.

A video showing four different examples of exclusion during the PE lesson was shown to the participants. When playing the video for the second time, we stopped it at each sequence to talk about the particular situation. The participants confirmed that this issue appears more or less frequently also in their classes. They admitted also that they hadn't paid enough attention to the problem before or even more they hadn't seen it as such problematic one.

Of course there are many other possible situations in which peer exclusion occurs in in a more or less obvious way. This is particularly the case with sports games.

Some more findings from the survey

About the question of how to solve the problem of exclusion teachers answered that they cope with it by talking with a group or with the pupil who excludes. Next there are some possibilities of adapting the rules for the pupil's own experience of exclusion and workshops treating this issue when having classroom hours.

Peer exclusion is by far the most common in sports games, it is less noticed in exercises in pairs and groups, then follow the relay games, gymnastics, dance and run. This results were more or less expected.

When participants answering the questionnaire were supposed to make a comment, suggestion or observation, they wrote:

- exclusion was a minor problem in the past, but for the last 10 years it has been much more present;
- pupils are not sufficiently informed about how to handle situations of exclusion;
- being excluded is a huge problem for the pupil;
- excluded pupils are more difficult to be motivated to work, they are not interested in new things since all these new situations create new exclusion possibilities.

Other opinions: the appropriate issue; this is a most actual issue at PE.

How to prevent peer exclusion?

The first step to prevent exclusion is to raise teachers' awareness about the existing problem. It is also remarkable and important to notice that the experience of being excluded is a very painful event, furthermore it is usually not their fault and it is often very difficult to prevent or avoid it.

It could be that the excluded child normally starts avoiding certain activities by inventing various apparent reasons for it or even starts completely rejecting PE classes. It is quite likely that in some cases it becomes the reason for obtaining different medical apologies.

We believe that the most efficient manner to prevent this phenomenon in PE classes is to organise different preventive actions-events and raise awareness among all teachers in school.

Speaking of the first three years of our school system, there are in the educational curriculum various topics related to social life and they are strongly connected with everyday life, besides our rights and obligations make part of it.

The outstanding among them in the curriculum is the thematic unit of the school subject Recognition of the Environment.

We must not forget to stress the importance of interdisciplinary / cross-curricular teaching which offers many opportunities to present real life situations within sports in a more practical way.

As a school subject, physical education or sport represents a more meaningful context and it can be connected with many other subject areas. Here we have in mind the relationship between human beings which needs to be completed with different rules, such as the respect of diversity, the acceptance of differences, the need for cooperation, loyalty, help the weak etc.

The next step is to identify such situations during the process of teaching. The truth is that if a teacher pays at least some attention to the problem of exclusion during his classes, the latter is quickly recognized and could be much easily prevented. If this is not the case, a teacher cannot take the appropriate steps and plan lessons in which no such events would not occur.

It is also possible for the teachers to take notes of their own perception of the problem among pupils in different phases of lessons and make the comparison of several classes.

In our opinion the most effective measure a teacher can take is to adapt the rules to the context and needs of his pupils and organise lessons in a way to prevent any possibilities of exclusion.

Conclusion

The final survey conclusion shows that the problem of exclusion is present in Slovenian schools at PE; therefore, it is necessary to treat the problem in the appropriate way and find concrete solutions. Teachers also need more information about this and they suggest this topic to be discussed in a more detailed way in future trainings and seminars.

How to act in the future to develop and disseminate teacher's awareness of exclusion?

We hope that sport as a school subject will represent one of the main factors to increase the social integration role of schools. It is therefore important for teachers to become aware of peer exclusion, since sports lessons are already pre-planned and realised which means it is possible to control this phenomenon.

It is also important to say that the newly introduced school subject Optional elective subject sport offers some new possibilities for teachers to integrate and teach strategies about being tolerant to differences in PE content. The objectives and the content of the curriculum (the document) supplement the regular program of sport, and the starting point in the preparation of lessons is the respect of equal opportunities for all pupils and taking into account their diversity and difference (Kovač, 2013).

The most important thing is to include children themselves into the process of detecting and solving the problem of exclusion at PE lessons.

We have realised many discussions with PE teachers in different working groups. Many good and new ideas were found and created due to our work and

finally we can conclude with certainty that the work on this issue must continue in a more or less systematic way in the future.

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