Meeting Student’s Well Being and Educational Goals in Physical Education Classes

MEETING STUDENT’S WELL BEING AND EDUCATIONAL GOALS IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION CLASSES

Cristiana POP

Abstract

Well-being is a cognitive construct related with quality of life, life satisfaction and happiness. It integrates objective and subjective parameters, a various life domains and it is influenced by individual values. The foundation of total well-being is the physical health because promoting health enhances vigour, resilience, employement and social outcomes. Further, health is conditioned by our own habits and behaviour and the accumulation of positive and negative effects on health and well-being is for over the life-course. One of the main goals of physical education is to instil in students the values and skills of maintaining a healthy life style and to enhance their overall growth and harmonious development. An obesity prevention program is required in Romanian schools, at least at puberty age, when the students are more sensitive to body changes and more self focused. Physical education might make a more significant contribution to young people’s self image acceptance if lessons are planned and delivered with this specific student’s subjective goals in mind. Aerobic exercise, strength-training, and combined aerobic/strength-training interventions are equally effective. In non-formal physical activities the selection of exercise type depends more on preferences and personal goals.

Keywords: physical activities, body image, health education, overweight, life style

JEL classification: I13, I23, I31

1. Introduction

Well-being is a cognitive construct related with quality of life, life satisfaction and happiness. It integrates objective and subjective parameters, a various life domains and it is influenced by individual values. As happiness is different for every individual, a good life can have different connotations for different people. Also subjective aspects about well being are related with understanding and communicating these particular values.

The quality of life is multidimensional defined and there is a correlation between these aspects of well-being. Researchers includes among these dimensions physical well-being, material well-being, social well-being, emotional well-being and career (self development and professional activity) well-being (Felce & Perry, 1995). Among these components, the foundation of total well-being is the physical health because promoting health enhances vigour, resilience, employement and social

1 Cristiana Pop, The Bucharest University of Economic Studies, crispotir@yahoo.com
outcomes. Further, health is conditioned by our own habits and behaviour and the accumulation of positive and negative effects on health and well-being is for over the life-course.

One of the main goals of physical education is to instil in students the values and skills of maintaining a healthy lifestyle and to enhance their overall growth and harmonious development. It seems to be natural for a child, a teenager or a youngster to be active, playful and willing to spend some time with peers in a physical activity. Thus, promoting physical activities, a healthy lifestyle and underlining that exercising has long-term benefits overall well-being becomes a necessity in PE classes. This is happening maybe because „man is the only animal who has to be encouraged to live” as Nietzsche said in the XIX-Th century.

2. Contemporary challenges for physical education goals

Food habits and customs do change, and they are influenced in many different ways. Urbanization, modernization and globalization have often led to diets in which a greater percentage of energy intake comes from sugar and fats, and the consumption of salt is considerably increased.

Often youth and children are the targets of advertising for high-calorie, high-fat snacks and sugary drinks. The goal of these ads is to sway people to buy these high-calorie foods, and often they do. Children are easily tempted by instantaneous pleasures, e.g. sweets, candies or chocolate bars, and they are not necessarily in a position to balance their short-term satisfaction versus their long-term consequences. Companies are exploiting this luck of self control and discernment by the way they provide information to consumers and for children is not easy to understand the permeable boundaries between education, advertising and entertainment.

Research shows that exposure to food advertisements produces significant increases in calorie intake in all children and the increase is largest in obese children (Halford, 2007). The role of parents is to watch and balance the children's diet and there for their personal example is decisive.

As they grow up children are building a picture or image of themselves. This image develops through the things that they can or cannot do and by how other people see them. Poor opinion of our body can cause low self esteem and self confidence. Constantly watching ‘perfect’ bodies can feed teenage insecurities over attractiveness and weight. Studies demonstrated that idealized body image contributes to eating disorders (anorexia and bulimia), steroid use, and plastic surgery.
In a study I made about students’ needs and expectations relating to physical activity I interviewed 182 students (120 female and 62 male) mostly between 19 and 20 years old. 63% of the girls said they are not satisfied with their appearance; the most common problem they face is weight, many believing that they weigh too much and just only a few considering that they weigh too little. The biggest dissatisfaction is linked with the region between waist and knees: size must be thinned, abs must be defined, muscles must be free of cellulite, or toned, or increased in volume. Also male students are not completely satisfied with their appearance; just 20% are happy with their body image; 16% are not content with their body shape and weight and 64% are working to improve their (mostly upper) body.

Students’ desire to improve their appearance is a point in favor of physical activity, in order to motivate them to participate periodically and consistently in physical education classes, as well as in independent activities.

Slimness is seen as the desirable standard and as the beauty pattern especially for young women. Landmarks that society promotes are very severe for most girls and put them in a position of inferiority, repercussions on self esteem and confidence. Self-esteem is a psychological component of self-image and there is a strong, positive correlation between them (Abell & Richards, 1996). Self-esteem is how we feel about ourselves, and our behaviour clearly reflects those feelings.

During adolescence girls, more than boys, have particularly concerns about weight, body shape and self image. In our studies on a young female sample I find a strong positive correlation between body image and self esteem (r = 0.52; p = 0.005) and also between health perception and self esteem (r = 0.36; p = 0.005) (Pop, Ciomag, 2014). Our conclusion is sustained of other similar studies on female adolescents and young adults (Jaworowska and Bazylak, 2009; Khan, Khalid, Khan, Jabeen, 2011). In young man case the correlation between self esteem and body image assessment is not so strong, but positive and statistically significant (r = 0.33; p = 0.005). The same result we obtain when we compared the self esteem results and health state self assessment.

It means that any influence on body image or health perception also has effects on self-esteem, or that acting on physical level results in changes on the psychological level also. This holistic approach offers us, as physical education teachers, a subtle instrument for changing mentalities and attitudes in addition to physical skills and abilities.

Our children and teenagers, born after the PC and Internet was largely introduced are the digital generation. From the early years of life they grow up with computer games, having accounts on social on line communities and searching for information on Internet. They are using new patterns of learning, communicating and behaving more and more related with screens activities. Screen activities
include watching television, surfing on line or playing video games and are all of them associated with sedentary behaviour. In a Canadian study is sustained with data that children and teenagers (8-18) spend an average of 42 hours a week with media, versus 8.75 hours with physical activities. The preschoolers’ risk of obesity jumps 6% for every hour of TV watched per day, 31% if the TV is in their bedroom (Epstein, 2008).

The authors of other Canadian extensive survey and a meta analysis of the topic conclude that relationships between sedentary behavior and health are unlikely to be explained using single markers of inactivity such as TV viewing or video/computer game use. Nevertheless they agree that “the total amount of time per day engaged in sedentary behavior is inevitably prohibitive of physical activity and the cumulative effect of multiple sedentary behaviors reduces total daily energy expenditure” (Marshall, et all, 2004). A sedentary life style has a certain influence over the children’s body weight.

For an overweight person, the awerness of his or her body size and volumen will determine a social reluctance, timidity and low self confidence reflected in her/his posture and attitudes. Beside, the socio-cultural patterns associate fatness with laziness and overweight persons are easily labelled as dawdle.

Before and in parallel with formal education, children acquire life habits in family, tending to adopt the example of their parents. Therefore parents have an important responsibility in promoting a healthy life style in family and thereby giving a good example to their children. The effect of family life style is tracking more then one generation. Overweight and obesity tend to run in families. A child who has overweight parents, who eat high-calorie foods and are inactive will likely become overweight too. However, if the family adopts healthy food and physical activity habits, the child's chance of being overweight or obese is reduced.

Education and health care system give a weak counterattack to this aggressive epidemic and to consumtion culture which push the young generation in a greedy lethargy (Pop, 2013). Healthy lifestyle programs, an increased number of adequate physical activities or cutting out unhealty foods on children meals are examples of remedial measures taken in schools and families.

One of the key responsibilities of an effective PE teacher is including health notions in physical education classes. For overweight children this knowledge contributes in:

- choosing a healthy and balanced diet;
- being aware of a consistent physical activity benefits;
- enhancing individuals understanding of their own and others corporeality;
- providing a safe exercising and emotionally environment for all children.
3. Conclusions and recommendations

Sedentary behavior and its consequences overweight and obesity are getting global proportions, and requires urgent and coordinated prevention measures. An obesity prevention program is required in Romanian schools, at least at puberty age, when the students are more sensitive to body changes and more self-focused.

Physical education might make a more significant contribution to young people’s self image acceptance if lessons are planned and delivered with this specific student’s subjective goals in mind. The exercise intervention on changing body image depends on frequency and intensity of training (Campbell & Hausenblas, 2009). The changes in body image are positively when the exercise are performed on more days per week and at least at a moderate intensity. Aerobic exercise, strength-training, and combined aerobic/strength-training interventions are equally effective. The type of exercise depends more on preferences and personal goals. A sensitive task for a teacher dealing with students with a low self image acceptance is to help them to set realistic and achievable goals through appropriate exercise.

A few concluding recommendations can lead to an enhancement of vigour and health for students of all ages and sizes:

- To encourage the young people to set realistic and assumed goals and motivate them to keep weight under control by combining diet and physical activities;
- To develop critical thinking which enables young people to choose exercises and practice methods suited to their age and personal goals;
- To establish a good relationship between effort and recovery and in the same time to make clear that individuals are responsible for their own task success or failure;
- Exercise enjoyment is positively associated with motivation for physical effort. Physical education teachers can enhance enjoyment by creating a good working climate, by adding variety to workouts, and by ensuring that the fitness programs are physically challenging and respect the subject’s preferences and personal goals;
- To emphasize that the accumulation of positive and negative effects on health and well-being is for over the life-course and that investing in prevention reduces health costs;
- To provide all young people, of all sizes, with meaningful, relevant and positive physical education and physical experiences and eventually to deliver a healthy, valuable working force for society.
REFERENCES


