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Body culture within the EU's competence system

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ABSTRACT

Hamar P, Szilva Z, Soós I, Dancs H. Body culture within the EU's competence system. *J. Hum. Sport Exerc.* Vol. 6, No. 1, pp. 146-152, 2011. Proficiency and habits in body culture cannot be disregarded when drawing up integrated cultural competences that meet the challenges of the 21st century. This is all the more true if we aim to define the key competences of the cultural content and proficiency knowledge with regards to the school system. Therefore, it was astonishing to discover that body culture was omitted of the EU's key competence framework. In our study we would like to endeavour to list reasons that support the necessity of key competences reflecting on the values of body culture. We hope that this study will ensure that knowledge relevant to physical and mental health, healthy lifestyle and fitness will appear as an independent section in the EU's key competence framework. **Key words:** EUROPEAN UNION, KEY COMPETENCES, BODY CULTURE.

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INTRODUCTION

“The secret of Oxford and Cambridge is, that in these places first of all real men are brought up and not sour philosophers who are boiled in their own sweat or others of that kind and in this effort the main tool in their hands is sports that does not oppress the body through the spirit, but instead opens the soul through the body.”

(Albert Szent-Györgyi, 1930)

The creation of a new competency framework became a priority in European Union (EU) education policy. This competency system would include competences that are essential for acquiring and renewing modern knowledge, which facilitates lifelong learning and helps individuals to manage in the modern societal and economic world and also helps in personal self-realization. In the EU countries the knowledge and abilities that make all the EU citizens able to adapt to the rapidly changing modern world are arranged into a conceptual web of key competences. Hence, it is why the defined system of the key competences became the standard for the content of the school education (Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of Europe, 2006).

Proficiency and habits in body culture cannot be disregarded when drawing up integrated cultural competences that meet the challenges of the 21st century. This is all the more true if we aim to define the key competences of the cultural content and proficiency knowledge with regards to the school system. Therefore, it was astonishing to discover that body culture was omitted from the EU's key competence framework. This omission seems to be unreasonable because we believe that there is one single school subject or area like Physical Education, which, if not practised properly or especially not practised at all, may cause irreversible damage.

In our study we endeavour to list reasons that support the necessity of key competences reflecting on the values of body culture. We hope that the study will ensure that knowledge relevant to physical and mental health, healthy lifestyle and fitness will appear as an independent section in the EU's key competence framework. We encourage this in the knowledge that some competences are partly overlapping and inter-related, elements of one supporting the competences of the other areas. Competence development projects set forth key competences in a complex system.

A few thoughts about competences

The word “competence” originates from the Latin “competentia”, which means suitability, skilfulness. It is fundamentally a cognitive characteristic but motivation elements, abilities and emotional factors also play an important part in it. Another interpretation implies that competences comprise basic knowledge that reveals the individual's competitive abilities in life.

In competence-based education, competence means possession of knowledge about something. Competence-based curricula emphasize abilities that need to be developed as opposed to content-based curricula, which emphasise syllabus design. In this curriculum, the main driving principle is the adaptability of knowledge. Answering the question “why” stands in the centre and the requirements focus on the level of understanding. While developing these curricula, aspects of usefulness come to the fore.

In Hungarian pedagogical literature, competency means those motives (needs, demands, interests, habits, attitudes, connections, prejudices, beliefs, faiths and knowledge that are related to these) that help decision making, and it also includes motivating feelings and organizing abilities (with the habits, skills and knowledge) that all form a connected system (Nagy, 1996). From the point of view of our topic, education for a healthy and cultured way of life has over-riding importance. Personal competency, development of personal motives and skills, the facilitation of the development of personal knowledge belong to this field.

Following these factors (and following the logic of József Nagy), we can pinpoint competences that have body cultural characteristics three ways. These are the socialization of the need for exercise from among the self-catering motives, motor skills from among self-catering skills and the health protection skills from among self-defence skills.

Socialization of the need for exercise focuses on the fact (although to a decreasing degree) that the need for exercise is very strong in schoolchildren. Children aged 6-12 constantly move around, unless they are restricted. Moving around a lot is also a facilitating factor in biological development. Besides spontaneous movement, choosing regular and everyday exercise (sports) in a professional way is also essential. Physical education, just as sport, develops personality through competing, competitive situations. But this cannot exist without achievement and the need for achieving results. This is the only way by which a student can get to a level where a stable interest towards sports and practising sport develops in him/her. This does not mean though that they need to get involved in competitive sports on a high level, but a desire for possessing personal fitness and living a healthy way of life becomes a firm conviction (Hosta, 2009).

The optimal development of *physical or motor skills* is a pre-requisite of the inter-action between man and his environment. Movement forms of different sports are good devices to develop these skills. The goal of physical education in schools is not only learning sports' techniques but also developing and maintaining the level of motor skills. And besides that, the Hungarian Educational system contains a speciality: the health rehabilitation for children who suffer from functional limitations and activity restrictions is included among the educational tasks of the schools (Simon, Fügedi, & Bognár, 2010). It is also important that extra-curricular opportunities (hiking, after-school activities, etc.) are available in schools as well. On the other hand, motor skills cannot be limited to the education fields of physical education and sport. Motor skills that are developed through practising different forms of movements have an effect on accomplishing the requirements of manipulation skills, technique, practical knowledge, material culture and visual education too. But here it is also necessary to emphasize the relevance of the features of the age groups.

Health protection skills serve to maintain physical and mental health and to prevent and cure illnesses. Customs, models, skills and knowledge help healing and prevent diseases/illnesses. The main body cultural aspects of this skill are education for healthy living that counter dangerous and risky habits and customs detrimental to health. A pre-requisite of health protection skills is the optimal level of the above mentioned skills. Movement forms that prevent injuries, basic self defence movements or knowledge of accident prevention (defence against toxic materials, preventing traffic or domestic accidents, etc.) belong in this category.

Competence systems in Hungarian curricula

Recent political changes in Hungary have brought about changes in value preferences, but the former approach of a nation only having a future that is healthy and physically active has remained; this persisting approach retains the value of health and physical activity. Thus, the following aim was

emphasized: "Development of understanding of the importance of health as a value throughout all areas in social and economic life is our highest common interest" (Program of National Revival, 1990, p. 5). All-round improvement of physical and mental abilities was, in the outlined future perspective, a task to be completed in order to meet requirements that were set by the environment in the fields of health, lifestyle and behaviour. Elementary, high school and university levels of education were indicated as the main fields to realize the tasks.

The common standards of teaching different cultural domains, so-called key competences (homeland; integration into Europe and the World; environmental education; communication culture; *physical and mental health*; learning; career orientation), were established in this spirit in the 1995 National Curriculum. Common requirements of physical and mental health reflect the changed point of view that "In addition to improving motor skills and abilities, physical education undertakes the role of:

- creating a balance between a healthy body and mind
- promoting a healthy lifestyle
- combating harmful addictions and substance abuse
- forming proper hygienic and sexual habits
- fostering recreation and/or rehabilitation (Hamar, Peters, Van Berlo, & Hardman, 2006, p. 88).

It is strikingly marked in the Hungarian Core Curriculum that preserving health and education for healthy life do not mean a preparation to prevent illnesses in the first place, but rather should create the joy of being healthy and operate with the values of healthy life. This mission cannot be limited to the schools and the teachers but it is also the task of the families and individuals as well.

A new *terminus technicus* (technical term) appeared in the 1995 National Core Curriculum and this was *competence*. Competences were mentioned in the documents of curricula in order to "include the basic features of thorough grounding expertises of different fields that are needed to bring effective decisions and be effective in practice" (NCC, 1995, p. 17). In this document, health appears as a value that covers the main cultural fields. Emphasizing the importance of a physically active way of life does not appear only among the developmental competences of physical education and sport but can also be found within the fields of biology and health.

The National Core Curriculum emphasizes within the fields of regulation of content, the key competences and skills that deal with communication, narratives, making decisions, following rules, highlighting the essence, *conducting life style*, cooperating, solving critical and complex information (243/2003. (XII. 17.) Decree, 2004). We can see that skills in connection with one's life style can be found among the main key competences in the Hungarian curricula. It is also important to mention that authorities do not only articulate the key competences but also set the goal of organizing skills that need to be developed and the key competences into a map of competences. They draw attention to many of the challenges in society such as the factors that endanger the development of the children's physical and mental health.

The role of the 2007 version of the National Core Curriculum in Public Education is that it shapes the knowledge, values, interpretation of education and learning in a way that is up to date in today's world. The following perspective of the future is important and needs to be quoted:

"Today the role the formal, informal and non-formal culture, mediator systems, institutions and organizations have decreased in importance. It will be the same and even more important in the future when we cannot expect from the school system to provide finished, complete knowledge. The main importance will be a shift towards the key competences that provide the prerequisites for life long learning" (202/2007. (07.31) Decree, 2007, p. 7643).

So the aims, the goals of the National Core Curriculum 2007 are to develop the key competences that are essential for a successful way of life and that prepare for life long learning.

We have already mentioned the inter-related systems of key competences in the introduction. These key competences are supposed to interpret the general aims of school education. These are the ones that each individual needs to possess in order to be successful in conducting his/her life, for active citizenship and for their social adaptation and work. Developing learning competences increases in value because human knowledge cannot be viewed as finite factual knowledge (it cannot for instance finish with secondary education) but it is a life long process of learning.

In the light of the above mentioned facts, we need to examine how great is the role of movement activities, exercise and sport that essentially influence health and have a role in prevention among the preferred, complex and emphasised aims that should serve the whole of Hungarian society.

It is sad, albeit a fact, that the body cultural values in the National Core Curriculum 2007 only appear as a part of social and citizenship competences. This is not even compensated by the fact that the main developmental goals include the physical and mental health (it is similar to earlier subject curricula). Though these two factors – physical and mental health – are part of quality life, it is a problem that regular exercise and health-conscious behaviour is not wide-spread among Hungarian population (Bognár et al., 2010).

The motor (movement) aspects of education for a healthy way of life, the system of customs that are physically active and life-long in character, the active and physically harmonious way of life, tolerance towards the handicapped, avoiding dangers, the fight against addictions and the formation of an adequate sexual culture *are not the highlighted developmental aims of the schools but fundamental goals, or even body cultural competences.*

Necessity of key competences in body culture

We firmly believe that the key competence that involves all kinds of values of body culture should not be omitted from the EU's framework of key competences and from basic pedagogical and educational goals. "*Body cultural*" should be employed as a *terminus technicus*. The main information, knowledge, skills and attitudes of this key competence can be summarized as follows:

- The basis of the body cultural key competence is that health as a value should become prevalent in all fields of social and economic life. An important point of view is that the protection of health can only be attained through individual undertaking.
- Individuals need to be aware of the fact that preserving health and education for a healthy life do not mean preparation to prevent illnesses in the first place, but it should create the joy of being healthy and operating with the values of the healthy life.

- Possessing body cultural key competences, individuals should be able to recognize the values that reinforce health and be able to adopt a behaviour that facilitates reaching and maintaining health. At the same time he/she should recognize and deny the factors and habits that endanger physical and mental health.
- Education on healthy living is a main aspect of this key competence. The pedagogical activity requires on the one hand the agreement with health, way of living and behaviour set by the environment, on the other hand an acceptance of the values of healthy living. In this sense, the body cultural key competence is life style key competence as well.
- The full-scale development and maintenance of physical (motor) and mental skills become a necessity. We need to emphasize the socialization of the need for exercise, because an abundance of movement and the development of motor skills also facilitate biological development.
- It is essential that a physically active and harmonious way of life features in a life-long system of habits.
- Individuals should learn the main movements that prevent injuries and accidents and should learn basic self protection activities.
- Tolerance towards handicapped people, including the physically handicapped, is also a requirement.

Development of the key competences of body culture can happen in early childhood, in elementary, in high school, in university and in adult education. Different levels of education can only achieve the required life-long development effect together with a conscious practice of sport activities. Collectively, family, school and sport institutions can provide the educational spheres of developing the competences of body culture.

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