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Basic Principles of Sports Schools in Working with the Early Primary School Children

Extended summary

The issue of physical activity of children and young people, as well as the possibility of practicing sports in the modern society that is developing rapidly, is becoming more and more urgent. Particular attention is drawn to many positive effects of engaging in sports and sports activities. The aim of this paper is to explore and analyze, by using the school of football as a model, the operational principles on which sports schools are based and to determine their possible implications for physical education classes in the lower grades of primary school.

Pedagogical literature emphasizes the importance of sports for the formation of healthy and versatile children and young people with desirable psychological and social competences who will be able to fulfill, by developing and manifesting creative and human potentials, their biological, social and psychological needs for playing and socializing. Research shows that a considerable percentage of children chooses to spend their free time using modern audio-visual technology (Branković et al., 2018), which is generally a sedentary activity, instead of using that time for some more dynamic activities. Physical education of children and young people from the earliest school age is necessary for the development of positive personality traits of students and for the prevention of various psycho-physical disorders. In this regard, the lack of engagement of some schools/primary school teachers, or the society as a whole, in the extra-curricular activities of the lower primary school pupils is critically interpreted, as well as the

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lack of a systematic assistance and support for overcoming this situation. In response, the number of sports schools attended by a large percentage of pupils aged 7-11 is on the rise.

Sports schools are based on certain principles and their work should be organized in accordance with these principles. These schools are mostly privately owned (providing two key conditions - finance and expertise), but they should be closely linked to mainstream schools, i.e., mainstream schools should develop a close cooperation with them. In addition, sports schools should function according to certain pedagogical principles observed by state schools (pre-set syllabuses, established schedules of activities and breaks, trained/educated coaches, regular groups of children of similar age, sports activities organized in accordance with didactic rules - methods, principles, forms of teacher-student interaction, etc.). The whole process of work and training in sports schools should be of an educational character, especially because they are dealing with young learners. They are educated in the domains of behavior, building a proper and correct attitude towards work, property, social values, collective ethos, equipment, etc. Trainings and competitions should be fun, exciting, actively engaging and activating all children, while their need for companionship and play (during and after trainings) should have a priority over other aspects, and where success is experienced as a maximum effort to improve oneself, and one's own knowledge and skills, not merely as an opportunity to win a game.

Bearing in mind that sport is very important for building a child's personality, the question of the quality of the pedagogical work of sports schools with young children of primary school age is gaining momentum. It should be thoroughly checked whether the work of sports schools is subject to systemic controls, whether the initial education of trainers who are directly involved in working with children is adequate and if they are pedagogically qualified or not, whether all these schools have pre-prepared syllabuses for working with the youngest children, what their work patterns are like, how the selection processes are conducted, whether the schools take into account the psycho-physical abilities of children, how they conduct competitions, etc. Given that these schools are financially supported by parents, this fact can represent a problem because not all students have the opportunity to fund them. The large number of children involved in sports and the under-representation of sports in the curricula for grades 1-3 call for the necessary curriculum changes and the provision of a systematic support of the relevant ministry for the promotion of sports in the lower grades of primary school, as well as an additional support for training teachers to practice and implement sports with their students, both during professional development seminars and during their initial university education. It is good to know that some relevant documents are being enacted and various actions and campaigns have been recently undertaken for the promotion and development of sports (especially for children and the youth). We should also look at the models implemented in other states as examples of good practice, as well as consider the actions these countries have successfully undertaken.

Keywords: teaching physical education, pupils, sports, sports school, school of football.

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