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Transversal Competencies in Physical Education in the Finnish National Core Curriculum 2014 for Basic Education

Kompetencje kluczowe w zakresie wychowania fizycznego w fińskiej podstawie programowej z 2014 r. dla edukacji podstawowej

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ABSTRACT

The article presents an overview of transversal competencies through the prism of physical education. The main component of the study was an analysis of the National Core Curriculum 2014 for Basic Education in Finland. Analyses of the curriculum began with a literature review on changes in the Finnish curriculum, especially transversal competencies. The next step was to concentrate on the curriculum and to identify how issues of physical education were solved. The problem method was used, including the study of documents concerning educational change. The article uses primary rather than secondary sources. In order to present physical education from a Finnish perspective, the following research questions were formulated: 1) What tasks are included in the curriculum? 2) What are the strengths of the physical education curriculum? 3) What role does the national curriculum play in the global success of Finnish education in the 21st century? To sum up, the national curriculum plays a major role in the global success of Finnish physical education in the 21st century and prepares global citizens who are able to live in the contemporary, globalised world.

Keywords: transversal competencies; physical education; Finnish education; globalised world

Teachers at all levels of schooling expect that they will be given the full range of professional autonomy they need to practice what they have been educated to do: to plan, teach, diagnose, execute, and evaluate.

(Sahlberg, 2015, p. 105)

INTRODUCTION

Finland has implemented an educational policy that contributes to sustainable leadership and change (Hargreaves, Fink, 2006). In this light, education in Finland is seen as a public good and has a strong “nation-building function” (Sahlberg, 2015, p. 58). This article presents an overview of transversal competencies through the prism of physical education in the Finnish National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2014. The paper will examine what is embodied in the document drawing attention to the development of students’ physical education skills through the basic education curriculum in Finland.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

In order to present physical education from a Finnish perspective, I formulated the following research questions: 1) What tasks are included in the curriculum? 2) What are the strengths of the physical education curriculum? 3) What role does the national curriculum play in the global success of Finnish education in the 21st century?

The main component of my study was an analysis of the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2014 in Finland, especially those parts covering teaching content, which are applicable to all schools in Finland. As I mentioned previously, analysis of the curriculum began with a review of the literature on changes in the Finnish curriculum, especially transversal competencies. The next step was to concentrate on the curriculum and to identify how issues of physical education were addressed. I also used the curricular guidelines, differentiations, and support for primary schools in grades 3–9, including content areas.

I employed the problem method, including the study of documents concerning education. I collected data concerning specific areas of political activities and “macro-themes of discourse” (Wodak, Krzyżanowski, 2008, p. 156). The problem method derives from an educational phenomenon which is placed in time and related to society. From this perspective, it is necessary to contrast different views, regularities and principles. In this article, I aim at using primary rather than sec-

ondary sources, which were published appearing in different places and at different times. I took the validity and reliability of the documents into account. I chose representative documents and analysed the meanings conveyed in the documents, along with their intended and perceived contexts.

The most important step appeared to be analysis of materials accessed in the library of the University of Helsinki. The next step was the choice of materials for final analysis. This research used sample materials which were the most representative and which provided the greatest support for the project. I took into consideration the sources of studies: National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2014 (2016), Hargreaves, Halasz and Pont (2008), Hargreaves and Shirley (2009), Niemi (2015), Sahlberg (2015) as well as Salminen and Annevirta (2016). The analysis of documents was intended to focus equally on documents emphasising “the constructive mechanisms contained in the arguments, ideas, or concepts” (Rapley, 2007, p. 194). Furthermore, it was necessary to understand and then describe “the trajectory of all of these modern ideas, practices and identities that are currently taken for granted” (Wodak, Krzyżanowski, 2008, p. 205).

TRANSVERSAL COMPETENCIES

The Finnish system of education has not been influenced by market-oriented reforms of education based on the standardisation of teaching and learning in schools. The Finnish education community has remained unconvinced that globally introduced reforms would have a positive impact on Finnish schools. According to Sahlberg (2015), the Finnish Way is an alternative approach to the global educational reform movement. A similar attempt, named the Finnish Model, has been developed by Castells and Himanen (2002) as well as by Dahlman, Routti and Ylä-Anttila (2006).

The Finnish Way is a “professional and democratic path to improvement that grows from the bottom, steers from the top, and provides support and pressure from the sides” (Sahlberg, 2015, p. 142). As Hargreaves and Shirley (2009, p. 102) claim “it builds powerful, responsible and lively professional communities in an increasingly self-regulating but not self-absorbed or self-seeking profession”. Educational policy in Finland has put an emphasis on teaching and learning, by supporting schools to prepare optimal learning environments and create instructional content that will help pupils reach the main goals. According to my analyses, Finnish teachers design high standards and improve their schools through professional collaboration, which is especially seen in physical education.

The second decade of the 21st century has introduced many changes in the Finnish education. The development of the usage of transversal competencies in cross-subject teaching has forced Finnish teachers to take them into account in the aims of each subject. Moreover, all the introduced educational changes are strictly

related to promotion of “the employability of the individual, social cohesion and the global competitiveness of Europe through the development of human capital, especially as cheap labour is not a competitive advantage for the EU” (New Skills..., 2017, p. 1). Transversal competencies are fruitful for characterising knowledge and values. As a result, students are able to lead a meaningful life and function satisfactorily in society.

The development of transversal competencies has been closely related to the concept of learning and the school culture, which are described in the National Core Curriculum. Finnish society trusts teachers’ professional skills and ways of overcoming school problems. Matti Koskenniemi (1944), famous Finnish educator, used the term “pedagogical love”, to describe teachers’ approach to teaching. Consequently, the local providers of education (municipalities) and local teachers prepare the local curriculum. Local providers of education collect tax revenue and decide how to allocate the collected money to schools. This decentralised system of education is responsible for equal opportunities for all students. As a result, long-term strategic aims are prepared and implemented at the national level.

The country has widely analysed the competencies needed by students in Finland’s future society. The National Core Curriculum (2016) presents the concept of transversal competencies, which are closely related to knowledge, values and attitudes. These competencies include:

- thinking skills and learning to learn;
- taking care of oneself and others, managing daily activities, safety;
- cultural competence, interaction and expression;
- multiliteracy;
- ICT competence;
- working life and entrepreneurial competence;
- participation, influence and building a sustainable future. (National..., 2016, pp. 21–26)

THINKING AND LEARNING TO LEARN (T1) IN THE CONTEXT OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Learning and thinking skills directly influence the development of the competencies needed in life. The ways in which students perceive themselves and cooperate with other students are related to their thinking and learning. According to the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2014 (2016), there are various ways for students to seek, evaluate and produce information. It is related to students’ conscious reasoning and their personal experiences. The document stresses the importance of students’ trust in their own skills and being able to devise new solutions.

In the course of my analysis I found out that Finnish pupils are prepared to perceive different viewpoints, answer unexpected questions, and support their own

ideas and points of view. In this light, Finnish students are able to present topics from various perspectives, find and see alternative solutions, and open-mindedly compare different points of view. The schools put an emphasis on recognising students' personal methods of studying, improving learning strategies, developing inner motivation, and positively perceiving life-long learning.

TRANSVERSAL COMPETENCIES (T2) IN THE CONTEXT OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION

According to the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2014 (2016), Cultural competence, interaction and self-expression (T2) refers to children growing in a culturally, linguistically and philosophically varied world. In this light, it seems indispensable to underline the preconditions needed to lead a sustainable lifestyle, together with respect for human rights, skills, and the ability to express themselves.

There is no doubt that the National Core Curriculum (2016) stresses the need for children to recognise and appreciate the meanings of different cultures in the surrounding environment, and to build their cultural identity. According to my analyses, children study their cultural heritage and try to recognise their "social, religious, philosophical and linguistic roots" (National..., 2016, p. 22). Students are guided to be aware of cultural, religious and philosophical differences in the world. In this light, students study how to modify and design culture to explain the importance of well-being. The National Core Curriculum (2016) places an emphasis on the recognition and appreciation of human rights, along with the rights of children.

On the other hand, during physical education classes, students learn how to put themselves in the other students' place and try to examine the problem from varied viewpoints. All school activities should teach students how to build respectful and trustful attitudes towards other students and people. The school community underlines the significance of positive school interaction and cooperation, together with the ability to express themselves in varied situations. School education should promote the development of students in the context of their language skills, with the ability to interact and express themselves. The document stresses the need to support students' creativity and imagination through expressing emotions, thoughts and ideas during all lessons.

THE IMPORTANCE OF TAKING CARE OF ONESELF AND MANAGING DAILY LIFE (T3) IN THE CONTEXT OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Managing daily life is related to a wide range of students' skills – according to the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2014 (2016, p. 23), these include such areas as "health, safety and human relationships, mobility and transport, acting in the increasingly technological daily life, managing personal finance and

consumption". At school, students are encouraged to practise skills needed to lead daily life and to work for the environment.

According to my analyses, students at basic education level recognise the factors that influence well-being, health and safety. They study how to have successful relationships and take care of people. These skills are emphasised during physical education lessons. Students are encouraged to study key symbols of personal safety and to look after their privacy. They are taught how to set personal boundaries, to know their own rights, and to examine advertisements critically.

MULTILITERACY (T4) IN THE CONTEXT OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Multiliteracy as a competency refers to interpreting and preparing one's own judgments about varied texts, in order to understand different paths of cultural communication in society. Multiliteracies are differences in cultures and contexts, and present special "cognitive, cultural, and social effects" (New London Group, 1996, p.64). Multiliteracies describe a wide range of phenomena; there are many types of multi- and alternative literacies which contribute to enrichment of the forms of reading and writing presentations. Consequently, students get familiar with the same materials from varied perspectives. Multiliteracy "means abilities to obtain, combine, modify, produce, present and evaluate information in different modes, in different contexts and situations, and by using different tools" (National..., 2016, p. 23).

On the other hand, well-used multiliteracy supports learning and critical thinking skills during lessons. While students are developing the above-mentioned skills, they also discuss and investigate ethical questions. According to the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2014 (2016), teachers should prepare students' paths to practise their critical thinking skills in classroom activities. During lessons, teachers are obliged to use varied texts to help students overcome obstacles related to textual understanding in school environments. My analyses show that as a result, pupils are able to engage better in learning, and interpret and produce different types of texts. According to Sahlberg, "all teachers are professionals who are able to understand teaching holistically and improve their work continuously" (Sahlberg, 2015, p. 117).

WORKING LIFE AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP (T6) IN THE CONTEXT OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Technological advancement and the globalised economy have influenced the job markets in the light of changes in working methods. According to the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2014 (2016), Finland's basic education develops engagement through a positive approach towards working life and under-

standing the significance of work. The lessons help students to obtain knowledge about entrepreneurial operating methods, together with the leisure time needed for students' future careers. My analyses show that physical lessons contribute to the improvement of collaboration and interaction skills. Students are taught through disciplined risk-taking tasks and projects, in which teachers use teamwork and project work.

A variety of conclusions can be drawn from examining the documents. Firstly, Finnish schools prepare conditions for students to practise activities independently or with other students, and to conduct them regularly throughout their life. Secondly, students learn reciprocity and the pursuit of a common goal, in order to be able to plan their work, create hypotheses, analyse different solutions and draw conclusions. In this regard, students become aware of various work difficulties and try to solve them. They analyse disappointments and failure, which are common in workplaces. Thirdly, students are encouraged to creatively and open-mindedly seek new life opportunities in the changing work environment.

PARTICIPATION, INFLUENCE AND BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE (T7) IN THE CONTEXT OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION

According to the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2014 (2016), effective democratic participation is enabled through civic activities, to promote a responsible approach to the future of the country. As a result, students learn democratic rights and freedom, which is the mission of the Finnish schools. Consequently, they are encouraged to be interested in the school community life and democracy in society.

During lessons, they study the significance of nature protection, and how to use the media and its potential in this process. Moreover, their lessons are based on trust, agreements, and the significance of rules that help students to express their views constructively. On the basis of my analyses I found out that Finnish students are able to practise negotiation skills and study positive conflict resolution. They deal with conflicts by considering diverse perspectives of political parties and a sustainable way of living. To facilitate this, students are encouraged to think about the future from the perspectives of the past and the present. In this manner, they are supported in considering the importance of their life choices, lifestyles and living conditions.

RESULTS

The main task in grades 1–2 in basic education, according to the collected documents, is to control students' well-being, affirm their body image, and its influence on their physical, social and psychological functioning. Physical educa-

tion lessons should create positive experiences and support students' active way of living. During lessons, teachers "introduce the elements of physical activities, exercise together, promote equity, equality and togetherness, and support cultural diversity" (National..., 2016, p. 158). All physical activities are linked to seasonal and local conditions and are conducted in a safe and sustainable way. The main goal is to mentor students in following a physically active lifestyle and to educate them in how to be physically active. To adopt an active lifestyle, students are encouraged to participate in physical activities tailored for their age, and to improve their physical functional capacity.

According to my analyses, in grades 1–9, students acquire indispensable knowledge and skills in varied lesson situations. There is an emphasis on respectful interaction, responsibility and deep-rooted self-development among students. They study how to successfully regulate their emotions and develop an affirmative self-image. Students learn how to promote health in the context of opportunities for joy, active participation and socialisation during lessons, with cheerful competition.

In grades 1–2, teachers focus on students' perceptual motor skills, basic movement skills, and try to develop students' social interactions during activities where they work together. Students study how to overcome emotional obstacles during physical activities. The Finnish core curriculum emphasises physical functional capacity and presents six objectives. Firstly, students are encouraged to be physically active, and to try new physical activities together or alone, with wide-ranging expressions of their body through physical activities. Secondly, students' physical functional capacity is reinforced by practising perceptual motor skills and by observing themselves through their senses. Students make decisions that are appropriate to the situation which is created during the physical activity. Thirdly, the objectives support students' movement skills, especially "balance, locomotor and manipulative skills" (National..., 2016, p. 159), to enable them to use them in varied life situations and during different seasons. Fourthly, the objectives of instruction include guiding students to move carefully in each environment. Fifthly, students are introduced to water sports, to teach basic swimming skills. The last objective is particularly significant, as it guides students to behave safely during physical activities.

On the other hand, this part of the document also underlines the significance of social functional capacity, where the most important aspect is the students' guidance to regulate their expressions of emotions, and to assume responsibility for the success of joint physical activities. This aspect is closely related to the T2, T3, T6 and T7 competences. The next part takes into consideration the support for teamwork skills.

OBJECTIVES OF THE INSTRUCTION IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION IN GRADES 3–6

The main goals in grades 3–6 of basic education seem to be intended to establish and diversify students' movement skills. There is an emphasis on social skills, well-being, students' independence and eagerness to lead an active lifestyle. Teachers encourage “exercising together and improving skills by practice” (National..., 2016, p. 294). This allows students to conduct their own planning of activities, and they are responsible for the execution of physical activities, taking into account the students' development stage.

The objectives of instruction in physical education in grades 3–4 include physical, social and psychological capacities. Instruction in physical functional capacity encourages students to be physically active, through exercising and mastering perceptual motor skills. Teachers put an emphasis on making decisions which should be appropriate for activities, for the season, equipment, and students' “physical fitness: speed, flexibility, endurance, and strength” (National..., 2016, p. 294).

Objectives of the instruction in social capacities include guiding students to work together, and to conduct their physical activities along with their emotional expression. This takes into account pair or group work, togetherness of activities, and choosing the roles of teaching and learning. Psychological capacity instructions enable students to be responsible for their own physical actions and support them in independent physical activities. This concerns positive experiences of students' own bodies, self-efficacy, and being together; it is also closely related to T1, T2, T3, T4, T6 and T7 competences.

OBJECTIVES OF THE INSTRUCTION IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION IN GRADES 7–9

The task of physical education is to support students' well-being by influencing three aspects of their lives. According to the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (2016, p. 466), there is a need to support physical, social and psychological capacity and a “positive body image”. The document suggests introducing physical elements and activities, together with the promotion of equity, equality and togetherness in a climate of cultural diversity.

This level of basic education has two main goals. The first is to encourage students to lead a physically active lifestyle, and the second is to educate students through activities. These goals show that teachers can include transversal competencies along with physical activities. The National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (2016, p. 466) suggests including “respectful interaction, responsibility, long-term self-development, recognition and regulation of emotions and the development of positive self-image”. The suggestions presented above are part of

transversal competencies T2 and T3. Physical education provides occasions for joy, participation, social and relaxing activities; it contributes to playful activities, which include helping each other and promoting health.

On the other hand, according to the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (2016, p. 466), physical functional capacity promotes transversal competencies T1 (thinking and learning to learn) and T2 (cultural competence, interaction and self-expression); these encourage students to try different forms of exercise and to be physically active through life. The document suggests the importance of active participation T3 (taking care of oneself and managing daily life) in developing the balance, locomotor and manipulative skills, through activities for using, combining and spreading them in varied life situations during different seasons. The document encourages the evaluation, maintenance and development of strength, speed, endurance and flexibility in physical fitness, which strengthens the T3 competencies. Furthermore, it guides students' swimming skills and water rescue skills, as part of the fundamental T3 competences. According to Salminen and Annevirta (2016, p. 392) the curriculum change demands new working approaches, "problem solving, working and interaction, self-knowledge and responsibility, participation and influencing, as well expression and manual skills".

Social functional capacity, according to the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (2016, p. 467), supports and regulates students' emotions and expressions during activities; it arises from fair play during shared learning situations. It is closely related to T2, T3, T6 and T7 competences. The document stresses the importance of psychological functional capacity, and emphasises that T1, T2 and T3 competences encourage students to take part independently in physical activities. In the context of psychological competences, this underlines the significance of holistic well-being in correlation to an active physical lifestyle. It reinforces students' need to build positive emotions which are related to positive experiences of self-efficacy and affirmative self-image.

DISCUSSION

This study mainly concerned an analysis of the Finnish National Core Curriculum, especially parts which involve transversal competencies used in physical education in grades 1–9. A variety of conclusions can be drawn from examining the Finnish Way. The national curriculum plays a major role in the global success of Finnish education in the 21st century. As a result of my analyses of transversal competences through the prism of physical education, I perceive that the changes have been successful. Students are encouraged to be physically active, try new physical activities together or alone, with varied wide expressions of their body through physical activities. Moreover, students' physical functional capacity is reinforced by practising perceptual motor skills. As a result, students make decisions that are

appropriate for particular situations. The National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2014 (2016) encourages the evaluation, maintenance and development of strength, speed, endurance and flexibility in physical fitness; this makes students' T3 competencies stronger. Furthermore, it guides students' swimming skills and water rescue skills, as part of the fundamental T3 competences.

Social functional capacity, according to the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (2016, p. 467), supports and regulates students' emotions and expressions during activities; it follows fair play during shared learning situations, and is closely related to the T2, T3, T6 and T7 competences. The document stresses the importance of psychological functional capacity, as it emphasises the T1, T2 and T3 competencies to encourage students to take part independently in physical activities. Furthermore, I observe the importance of psychological competences, which underline the significance of holistic well-being in correlation with an active physical lifestyle. Students are able to support and regulate their emotions as well as to express them during activities. Taking all the above into consideration, it can be concluded that teachers in Finland prepare global citizens who are able to live in the contemporary, globalised world.

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ABSTRAKT

W artykule przedstawiono przegląd kompetencji kluczowych, patrząc na nie przez pryzmat wychowania fizycznego. Głównym elementem badań była analiza Narodowej Podstawy Programowej Kształcenia Podstawowego z 2014 r. w Finlandii. Analizę programu rozpoczęto od przeglądu literatury dotyczącej zmian w fińskim programie nauczania, zwłaszcza kompetencji kluczowych. Następnym krokiem było skoncentrowanie się na programie nauczania i określenie, w jaki sposób rozwiązano problemy wychowania fizycznego. Zastosowano metodę problemową, w tym badanie dokumentów dotyczących zmiany edukacyjnej. W artykule skorzystano ze źródeł pierwotnych, nie wtórnych. Aby przedstawić wychowanie fizyczne z perspektywy fińskiej, sformułowano następujące pytania badawcze: 1) Jakie zadania są zawarte w programie nauczania wychowania fizycznego? 2) Jakie są mocne strony programu wychowania fizycznego? 3) Jaką rolę odgrywa narodowy program nauczania w globalnym sukcesie fińskiej edukacji w XXI w.? Podsumowując, ogólnokrajowy program nauczania wychowania fizycznego odgrywa dużą rolę w globalnym sukcesie fińskiego ucznia w XXI w. i przygotowuje globalnych obywateli do życia we współczesnym i zglobalizowanym świecie.

Słowa kluczowe: kompetencje kluczowe; wychowanie fizyczne; fińska edukacja; zglobalizowany świat