

Functions of outdoor adventure education programs

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Abstract

This research had as an objective to identify modern theoretical aspects which define education through adventure. Experiential education can be found in the performance systems of education, contributing to acquiring general competences from the syllabus but also to developing non-cognitive social abilities.

Together with formal, non-formal and informal education, outdoor education comes to complete the student's image, thus curricular adaptations being required. The boundaries of adventure education are expanding continually due to the programs that are analyzed, observed and implemented at a worldwide level. This can involve a wide range of participants, from students from the primary level to adults.

The activities are based on recreation but also involve values and abilities extremely useful in daily living. During the adventure education activities, abilities and theoretical knowledge from History, Psychology, Ecology, or Geography are correlated with experience during the practical application performed throughout a program of specific activities.

The effects that the participants benefit from are especially those of developing the manifestation index of motor skills, vital skills usefully applied and coordinative capacities. Its practical nature establishes it as an extension of Physical Education, which has as an objective the formation of a healthy lifestyle and makes the transition from passive to active learning.

Key words: adventure education, outdoor education, physical education, conceptual delimitations

Introduction

The possibilities to change the methods used during practice activities led us to the idea of conducting a research regarding the functions of outdoor education through adventure. As part of experiential education, this can be found in the educational performance systems, which contributes to the acquirement of the general competences presented in the syllabus but also to the acquirement of social and non-cognitive abilities. It has been increasingly observed that students use in their free time television and internet as a source of information at a large scale for creating components of individual study and virtual information transmission of certain landscapes from nature.

One of the aims of physical education, according to the Physical Education and Health Society, is that children need to establish "patterns of regular involving into a significant physical activity". However, the participation in physical education courses alone is not enough for pupils

and students to reach the daily recommended levels of physical activity (Schwamberger & Sinelnikov, 2015).

Their content is diverse and depends on the general aim of the program, on the target group and on the nature of activities that create the program. The defining objectives proposed by EA programs are increasing physical activity, developing leadership skills, social and personal development, assimilating some survival techniques, assimilating knowledge in the natural science domain and developing skills that are found in nature-oriented sports.

Education through adventure (EA), a basic component of experiential education, favors the creation of physical harmony, the consolidation of motor skills and the increase in the manifestation index of a bigger intellectual accomplishment which can become the basis for a positive behavior of humans in society (Bădău, 2014). EA is a teaching approach where the human being is placed in an unfamiliar environment, which creates imbalances and focuses on developing problem solving skills. This can stimulate self-efficacy and intergroup relations and

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can reduce ethnic identity; therefore, it can be used as a process of social integration because the exterior context encourages social and interpersonal abilities (Shikuku et al., 2015).

Experts in the field define EA as a variety of activities and teaching experiences and learning that usually implies a close interaction with a natural environment with elements of danger or actual risk, where the result, although uncertain, can be influenced by the participants' actions and the circumstances (Ewert & Sibthorp, 2014).

Outdoor education has synthesized over the years models based on practices and continues to grow in popularity as an educational frame for physical education teachers around the world, and more models have been modified by adding the adventure and controlled risk component, proving to be a success that can be applied to different contexts in the physical education domain (Fernandez, 2015).

During outdoor activities, there is correlated knowledge from different school subjects such as physical education, history, psychology, ecological education, or geography (Karppinen, 2012). The skills acquired by students through the organizing and the performing of activities are of an educational, motor and safety nature, organization, instruction, easing, flexible leading, judgement based on experience and collaboration (Bădău, 2017). EA activities stimulate physical, mental, social and cultural abilities, experimenting in real circumstances the human boundaries, taking risks, emotional stimulation, novelty and challenge (Moldovan & Enoiu, 2015).

The researchers' attempt to define it during the last decade has pointed out the boundaries of the new type of education which are in a continuous expansion due to the programs that are designed, researched and implemented at a global level. Its addressability includes a wide variety of participants, from primary level students to adults. The activities start from the concept of recreation but come together with a set of abilities and values extremely useful in real life.

The functions of adventure education

The relation between the structured activities of spending the free time and the positive results of development is a major component in analyzing youngsters and teenagers (Mahoney et al., 2005; Trainor et al., 2010; Bradley & Inglis, 2012). Adventure education has the potential to reach the mass population. In the field of education, adventure education has become a distinct subsystem, whose main purpose is the development of people's abilities and skills.

The main objective of adventure education, as part of non-formal education, is the same as that of formal education, which needs to lead to wisdom, accomplishment and personal development among people. In the last twenty years, EO programs in general and EA programs in particular have reported a series of positive effects on personal and social development, on physical activity, academic performances and leadership abilities for a wide variety of participants and age groups (Waite, 2011).

The hypothesis of education with the help of adventure is that exposure to challenges, games on the ground and at an

altitude or personal development experiences helps the groups to change while they are exposed directly and deliberately. This targets the synchronization of four functions: educational, social, motor and recreational (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1 – The functions of adventure education (original contribution)

The educational function is represented by very valuable activities for society, vital for individual and group survival, for community's and nation's survival. Education is normally unnatural and children and teenagers reject it because it is against instinct, natural behavior. The importance of implementing education for any human society has been recognized since ancient times and over the years, solutions have been proposed and applied for the educational process to reach its objectives. Studies place EA specific activities in an area that favors a strong impact on the educational, cultural and outdoor aspects (Camarda et al., 2010), their results being personal development and cognitive abilities development. The improvement of educational and academic preparation must target adaptation to international standards and the curricular modernization tendency. The increase in physical education competitiveness among the young generation can be achieved by implementing some innovative subjects in the curricula that can assimilate information and abilities according to the modern requirements of physical activity practice.

The social function generates multiple positive effects on several social categories. The recreational type of activities offers the possibility to form good communication and develop interpersonal confidence. In this way, new qualities can be discovered, new friends can be made, working groups are formed and the socialization phenomenon appears within the group. Involvement and constant participation in outdoor activities allow for increased socialization in all the other domains where students interact. Therefore, a social transfer is identified from recreational activities to different areas of society. Practicing these as a social phenomenon leads to human social integration, assuring abilities that allow a normal development of social life. Social abilities are not innate, as are temperamental features or reflexes. They are learned, for which reason there is a significant deficiency in modern society (Johnson & Chin, 2016). Non-cognitive abilities represent important assets in developing resilience, defined as a positive adaptation to a situation despite the presence of risk (Rutter, 2000; Masten, 2001). From an economic point of view, cognitive and non-cognitive abilities are

equally important. According to economic studies, the increase in the level of non-cognitive abilities has an effect on behavior that is comparable to and sometimes even higher than the increase in cognitive abilities (Heckman et al., 2006). EA programs of specific activities represent a modern method through which full development of a child-teenager-youngster-adult can be accessed by assimilating social and non-cognitive abilities. These permanently target integration in all its forms.

The motor function is mentioned in studies that confirm, in the case of developed states, a high level of association between practicing physical activity with a recreational purpose at a personal level and a high social activity. Statistics show that 17% of the adult population is totally inactive from a physical point of view, and a proportion of 41% is represented by adults who, despite exercising, do not have a sufficient level of physical activity to take advantage from its beneficial effects (Martin et al., 2006). EA focuses on growing and developing through activities based on the principles of experiential education. This improves motor and psychological capacities by exploring the real circumstances that involve a certain level of risk and stress. EA is a dynamic form of education available today and therefore, the motor aspect is found and given a great importance during the program activities. The objective of using EA is to help people mature themselves through experiences, which promote physical, cognitive and emotional development. The constant presence of EA programs in the students' life develops the basic motor skills usefully applied, the manifestation index of motor skills and coordinative capacities. The analysis of evidence suggests that the specific programs of EA activities have the potential to contribute to teenagers' development from a physical, social, affective and cognitive point of view. Research supports that it is one of the activities where a series of parameters of the physical development and fitness level can be improved. This also mentions the EA distinctive role in acquiring and developing children's movement abilities and physical strength as well as in improving the level of concentration, which can bring indirect benefits to the academic results (Richard et al., 2009). EA programs have a large variety of activities such as backpacking, rope courses from high or low altitude, climbing, sky, snowboarding, forest biking, certain interval time trips during the night, applied track in adventure parks, orientation with a map and a compass, photo trip adventure, canoeing, performed outdoors, which contributes to proactive behavior by improving mental and social abilities (Ionescu & Bădău, 2018). These require from the participants: an active involvement that implies technical and physical skills and from the organizer: an optimal management of potentially dangerous situations that involve a certain risk. Combining the idea of motor development through formal activity during physical education lessons and EA potential, representing non-formal education, results in a new vision of the real dimension and potential that must be improved in the curricula by implementing a new optional school subject at certain levels of education.

The recreational function is represented by activities that belong to non-formal education. These have been diversified

during the last years, generating new classifications, from the performing environment to the degree of difficulty, the fun part, risk assumption and the large variety of values or life abilities assimilated or developed. A very important aspect that defines modern non-formal education represents the possibility of adults' participation, no age limit, in recreational or self-development activities. An important aspect of the outdoor adventure education programs is that they can contribute to the level of participants' well-being, the concept of recreation or active participation during the free time in relation to the proposed personal development is identified in specific actions and activities of the EO and EA programs. Physical exercises and recreational education specific exercises are of great importance and represent the core of wellbeing that defines the health concept. The physical effort performed in a group has a social integration role. Teenagers who wish to extend the systematic practice of EA specific activities require an optimal space for each experience and also meeting their basic needs. By forming a new vision of the activities with a recreational and personal development role and also of the exclusive positive aspects, the recreational function of the EA programs is aimed at maintaining permanent contact, in order to assimilate the offered benefits on a social level and to maintain the health state. The role of recreational activities in society surpasses the dimensions of certain recreational activities, being part of the citizen's development and preparing program for work and for social life (Ganea & Grosu, 2018; Badau, 2017). EA specific activities in relation to general motility ensure the harmony and the ease of a motor manifestation through different body activities, amusing, sporting as an expression that requires the intervention and coordination of important muscle groups.

Conclusions

1. These possibilities offered by technology cannot be considered a replacement for the authentic real life personal experiences and cannot replace each student's effort and involvement in their own development.
2. Their integration in a school stage through non-formal education and then in a continuous stage of education throughout the whole life must represent a constant preoccupation for creating an appropriate environment ensuring and keeping a balance in personal development.
3. Practicing specific outdoor and adventure education activity programs represents a solution for promoting a healthy lifestyle.
4. Methodical and constant practice has positive influences on the cardiovascular, respiratory, locomotor, nervous systems and on the optimal functioning of metabolism.
5. Physical activities in the presence of programmed adventure have a major impact on motivation, the degree of involvement and the limits of the allocated time with irreparable negative effects on physical, cognitive and emotional capability.
6. EA is performed in a well-established time and space and is accompanied by a feeling of tension or risk, but also by the feeling that the activity is not an ordinary one.

Conflicts of interest

No conflict to declare.

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