

History and Present Time of Physical Education

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ABSTRACT

The first mention of standards for physical education in Slovakia refers to the Ratio education reform. This took effect on the territory of Hungary since 1777. Caring for physical education was one of the aims of the school. The requirement of compulsory school physical education is raised the first time by the poet Jan Kollar. Another Hungarian reform in the mid-19th century included physical education among the optional subjects, and this subject is taught in some cities. Physical education became a compulsory subject in 1868. Physical education was taught according to the Spiess system and the hours were for more classes or somewhere just for boys. Physical education teachers have been trained since 1871 in Budapest. A significant promoter of physical education was Ivan Branislav Zoch, author of the first Slovak textbook on physical education (1873). The level of physical education increased after the formation of Czechoslovakia in 1918. Physical education was a compulsory subject in schools other than universities (since 1938). Since 1939, in Slovakia the future teachers of physical education were trained in the Physical Education Institute of the Slovak University. The Physical Education Institute underwent a number of organizational changes. In 1960 it was converted into the Institute of Physical Education and Sports, Comenius University in Bratislava, and its direct successor is the Faculty of Physical Education and Sports, Comenius University in Bratislava. Beyond this, the physical education teachers are also trained in other institutions in Slovakia.

KEYWORDS

physical education, preparation of school teachers for physical education, school, compulsory school subject, sport

Preface

With regard to physical education in Slovakia it is necessary to mention two aspects:

1. The efforts to introduce physical education into schools as an optional, respectively as a compulsory subject. That results from the importance of introducing the subject as a subject efficient for health and for education generally.
2. The obligation to prepare qualified teachers of physical education, as a consequence of the existence of physical education as a subject in schools.

The time of existence of physical education (as a school subject) on Slovak territory we have divided into nine periods:

- I. Prior to 1777,

- II. National Revival (1777 – 1848),
- III. From the Revolution of 1848 to the end of the First World War (1848 – 1918),
- IV. First Czechoslovak Republic (1918 – 1938),
- V. Existence of the totalitarian Slovak Republic (1939 – 1945),
- VI. Period of so-called “partial democracy” (1945 – 1948),
- VII. Socialist Czechoslovakia (1948 – 1989),
- VIII. Democratic Czechoslovakia (1990 – 1992),
- IX. Democratic Slovak Republic (from 1993).

I. Prior to 1777

On Slovak territory the religious schools existed since the 12th century and were attached to religious institutions (e.g. monasteries, churches etc.). We have no records of physical education in these schools. The village schools started to grow after the birth of towns. In 1465 the Academia Istropolitana (the first university on Slovak territory) was founded. Later, during the Reformation and Counter-Reformation more types of schools were founded, also very well known universities in Trnava (1635), Košice (1660) and the mining academy in Banská Štiavnica (1760) (Vajcik 1995). Some references to physical education we have in school and university rulebooks, where physical education is located under *recreation*. Physical education is perceived as extra-curricular activity, without stable content. Students and pupils practised some games and excursions. In this period there was no formalized physical education teacher training (Perútka, Grexa 1995).

II. National Revival (1777 – 1848)

In 1777, the new school reform (Ratio educationis) occurred and brought considerable changes for physical education. Rationalism and the philanthropic movement influenced the ideas about the school system. Ratio educationis included a study and disciplinary procedure and standards for rational, moral and physical education. All schools had to have two fields for physical education: one near to the school and one outside of town. The Ratio educationis reform also defined the role of physical education, the means for methodological education tasks for the implementation of physical exercises, the rules of the games for schools, the directions for the organization of tournaments and the rules for construction of physical education fields. Standards for training physical education teachers did not exist.

The reform was an elaborate system of school physical education. Major problems regarding school physical education was the material backwardness of gym facilities and a lack of qualified teachers. An adjusted reform in 1805 did not make provisions for physical education. The most lessons in physical education are in children's homes, e.g. 18 lessons of physical education per week in Trnava (Drenko 1977).

The municipal judge in Levoča Jozef Kritsche already claimed in 1829 to teach physical education. In the period without qualified teachers the unqualified teachers should teach this subject.

The Slovak poet Ján Kollár (1793 – 1852) demanded the introduction of physical education on Slovak territory as a compulsory subject in 1849. Ján Kollár recommended dividing the school system into three distinct forms: primary, secondary and superior schools. At all levels physical education should be a compulsory subject (Perútka, Grexa 1995).

III. From the Revolution of 1848 to the end of the First World War (1848 – 1918)

This period, until the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (1918), is characterised by the existence of four physical education systems (German, Swedish, French and Czech) and by the birth of modern sport and its global penetration. After the Austro-Hungarian compromise (1867) the strong Hungarisation on Slovak territory also began. From 1851 to 1868 physical education was an optional subject in the schools (in accordance with Bonitz-Exner reform). After the war against Prussia this situation changed. The physically very well prepared Prussian army was a model. In 1868 (Eötvös reform) physical education became, on the Hungarian territory of the empire, a compulsory subject in the city and village schools and was based on the Spiess system (Perútka, Grexa 1995). At the end of the century, the curriculum of physical education was enriched with athletics, sports games and (for boys) with premilitary education. But physical education was not regularly taught. Material conditions were not appropriate. Regular teaching of physical education is evidenced by the early 20th century. Later (in 1874 at secondary schools and in 1883 at lyceums) physical education became a compulsory subject at other schools. This physical education was also based on the Spiess system, enriched in winter with optional activity (skating). At the colleges and universities physical education was not a compulsory subject. This is strange, because these schools were a base for the sports movement in development. The level of school physical education was negatively influenced by public prejudices and religious groups. On Slovak territory, other negative factors were: lack of gym equipment, unqualified teachers and Hungarisation. The lessons in Hungarian reduced the number of other lessons, including physical education.

The preparation of physical education teachers started in 1871 in Budapest and in Vienna. In 1891 it also started in Prague. But this preparation was not consistent: there were few teachers and a lack of gym equipment. Physical education associations helped to teach the future teachers, but they could not operate in Slovakia. On Slovak territory the Slovak physical education associations could not be created (Stráňai 1965).

After the fall of Bach absolutism, three Slovak lyceums were founded. For physical education the most important lyceum was in Revúca (founded in 1862, ceasing to exist in 1874). The propagator of physical education, Samuel Ormis, presented the history of movement activities, ancient Olympic Games and requests for teaching of physical education (Grexá, Souček 2007). Ivan Branislav Zoch (a teacher of physical education in Revúca) is considered as a founder of school physical education under the Slovak conditions. He started to teach this subject in 1866. Near the lyceum he built some equipment (rings, bars, horizontal bar, ladders, cords etc.) for lessons in physical education. Pupils also exercised with balls, short bars, and an arch. Physical education was taught only in the autumn and summer months, twice a week, with two lessons in the afternoons (Wednesday and Saturday). Zoch organized excursions and swimming for the pupils (Zoch 1873). For the needs of school physical education he published in 1873 a textbook “Krátky návod na vyučovanie v telocviku hlavne pre školy národné” (Short guide on teaching physical education particularly for national schools). In this textbook he divided physical education into eight parts (free exercises, joint exercises in cadences, jumps, exercises with apparatus, exercises with the cord, dance, combat exercises and games). Physical education was in Revúca (but also in two others lyceums in Martin and in Kláštor pod Znievom) an optional subject.

IV. First Czechoslovak Republic (1918 – 1938)

The birth of the Czechoslovak republic in 1918 was an important stimulus for democratisation. Public education changed by using the Slovak language in schools. The school system was

reorganized and the Czechoslovak state created the pedagogical academies (one year institutions) in Prague, Brno and Bratislava. In this period physical education was a compulsory subject at all schools except for colleges and apprentice schools. The law on military education introduced physical education (in 1937, before the split of Czechoslovakia and the Second World War) at colleges as a compulsory subject (Svara 1933).

Primarily in Slovakia there was a noticeable lack of qualified teachers of physical education, e.g. at city schools (in 1931) about 50% of physical education teachers were unqualified! But the preparation of these teachers did not reach the desired standard. The preparation of physical education teachers for secondary schools resembled a workshop! The Czech teachers of physical education started to come to Slovakia to help in teaching this subject (Perútka, Grexa 1995). Between the two world wars, physical education was taught according to the Spiess system.

V. Existence of the totalitarian Slovak Republic (1939 – 1945)

Czechoslovakia ceased to exist in March 1939. The birth of the Fascist Slovak Republic in the same year brought another satellite to Hitler's Germany. In school education there were important new educational aims: respect of authority, clericalism, intense nationalism, anti-Semitism. In secondary education co-education was abolished. The Czech teachers had to leave Slovak Republic. School physical education was closely linked to extra-scholastic education within the state organisation for youth, Hlinka youth (an analogy of the Hitler Youth in Germany).

The Slovak University in Bratislava (the name of the Comenius University in Bratislava from November 1939 to November 1954) started to prepare teachers of physical education in the Physical Education Institute of the Slovak University, created in October 1939 (Perútka 1980). The original proposal for the study of physical education in the Physical Education Institute was as follows: To study physical education along the lines of Fascist states (Germany, Italy, Hungary). In 1941 the responsible leaders made a working trip to Germany. Finally, the German model was deemed unacceptable, and they developed their own Slovak model. The preparation of future physical education teachers was conducted in collaboration with the Faculty of Medicine. According to available data, however, the Institute did not have many physical education students. In 1939 it had only 29 students. In 1944 and 1945 only 11 students completed studies of physical education. During the Second World War students were engaged in the Slovak National Uprising, especially skiers (Stráňai 1965).

VI. Period of so-called "partial democracy" (1945 – 1948)

The Czechoslovak Republic was recreated after the Second World War. Soon, in April 1946, physical education became an equivalent subject in all schools (meaning it had the same status as all other school subjects). Teachers of physical education received the same salary as all other teachers (from 1946). But during this period communists absorbed power and abolished all elements of political pluralism.

In the Pedagogical Faculty of the Slovak University a new physical education department was established. The full agenda of school physical education was subject to the exclusive competence of the Ministry of Education. The state created regional office inspectors of physical education. They improved the level of teaching physical education in schools. The content of the subject was enriched with combat sports, swimming and ice skating (Perútka, Grexa 1995).

VII. Socialist Czechoslovakia (1948 – 1989)

From February 1948 Czechoslovakia became finally a totalitarian state. The politics of the Communist Party influenced all life in the state, including education in schools.

The communist system did not eliminate the lack of equipment and the qualifications of teachers. The law from 1948 unified the school system and Soviet instruction was formally taken on. The Soviet educational system was, more or less, adopted in all socialist countries.

In 1953, the Institute for Physical Education and Sport was created in Prague. The same institute existed in Slovakia from 1960, and five years later it was transformed into the Faculty of Physical Education and Sports, a contemporary leader in physical education and sports instruction in Slovakia.

The curriculum for physical education in schools was modernized according to the world standard. The Educational Research Institute in Prague was responsible for the creation of curricula (Sýkora 1996).

During this period we can observe an increase in the number of qualified teachers of physical education in all schools. Other institutions started to prepare teachers of physical education e. g. pedagogical faculties in Prešov, Banská Bystrica, Nitra.

Physical education played an important role to prepare people for the future of the socialist society. In the framework of international cooperation between socialist and developing countries, the foreign students started to study in physical education faculties in Slovakia, particularly in Bratislava.

The future teachers of physical education prepared in the faculty in Bratislava in two subjects: physical education and another subject (e. g. history, geography, biology, civics, English language, German language, Hungarian language etc.) (Peráčková 2006).

VIII. Democratic Czechoslovakia (1990 – 1992)

This period is characterized in particular by a de-politicisation of all life in the country. The most important task was the de-ideologisation of teaching. This process concerned education in schools, including de-politisation subjects, also physical education. Very significant was the communist heritage – a lack of gyms and other physical education and sport facilities. At the end of this period Czechoslovakia was facing the second split of the republic.

IX. Democratic Slovak Republic (from 1993)

The second split of Czechoslovakia and the birth of the democratic Slovak Republic brought new impetus to the development of physical education in schools. On the international level, the physical education acquired a new dimension. The world changed and school instruction demanded new attitudes. Researchers started to find a lot of defects in school physical education and also to resolve them. The most important problems to be resolved were: innovation of curricula and enriching with new physical activities, changes concerning the swimming lessons, enhanced integration of the disabled, differentiation of the curricula for secondary vocational schools, need to build new facilities, innovation of the instruction of future teachers of physical education and improvement of financial and social evaluation of teachers (Peráčková 1996).

The preparation of future teachers of physical education continues. From 1960 to 2005 about 5500 teachers of physical education finished their studies at the biggest faculty – the Faculty of Physical Education and Sports, at Comenius University in Bratislava (Peráčková 2006).

A new accreditation of study programmes of the universities (from 2004) brought changes in the area of physical education. Faculties created new study fields and study programmes, in accordance with the needs of time and market, e.g. The Faculty of Physical Education and Sports created new study programmes: Sport and health and several combined study programmes (teaching of physical education and training, teaching of physical education and health).

After the economic boom in Slovakia, the institutions responsible for physical education started to use the money from euro funds, to build new gyms and other facilities for physical education and sport.

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