1 Health(a)wareness

The health of children and adolescents has, for decades, been a topic of interest in most parts of Europe. The World Health Organization (WHO) and UNESCO have supported various campaigns and health programmes. The European Union (EU) and the European Commission (EC) funded several projects dealing with the promotion of health and physical activity in these age groups. Many of these projects have been focussed on the school setting and especially on the subject of Physical Education (PE). One approach is to enhance students’ health awareness through modified PE class and other physical or sports activities at school. A recent example of such an innovative approach is the project Health(a)ware: An experienced-based learning and teaching approach for physical and health education (project number: 128737-CP-1-2006-1-DE-COMENIUS-C21) funded by the EC in the Socrates program, Comenius 2.1 action – Training of School Education Staff – with a focus on secondary schools. As a part of the Lifelong Learning Programme of the EU, the aim of Comenius is to support young people in the acquirement of life skills and competencies important for their individual development as a European citizen.

Among the current priority areas of the Comenius programme you can find the topic “Participation in sports”. It seems to be of special interest for the EU to help young people to acquire skills and competencies related to a healthy and active lifestyle in order to respond to the increasing health-related problems of children and adolescents across Europe.

In accordance with the ideas of the Comenius programme, the project Health(a)ware was established in 2006. The concept of teaching health topics at school in order to improve knowledge transfer, individual abilities, competencies and skills, as well as behaviour and habits, requires a pedagogical and didactical framework, and an exceptional health methodology which was developed during the life of the project. The methodology leads to a teaching structure with experimental learning settings including PE class, as well as cross-subject teaching approaches and project work.

The Health(a)ware project was initiated and coordinated by the group of Prof. Dr. Elke Knisel, Prof. Dr. Hanno Strang and Dr. Antje Stache at the Humboldt University of Berlin in Germany. Their research focus lies on the pedagogical and psychological aspects of health. The topics of the cooperating teams at the different universities cover natural sciences and health (Prof. Dr. Marcela Gonzalez-Gross; Polytechnic University of Madrid), health education and intercultural learning (Prof. Dr. Ralf Erdmann; Norwegian School of Sport Science in Oslo), historical and philosophical aspects of health (Assoc. Prof. Dr. Irena Parry Martínková; Charles University in Prague), and health didactics and methodology (Prof. Dr. Michal Bronikowski; University School of Sport and Physical Education in Poznan; Prof. Dr. Konrad Kleiner; University of Vienna).
The idea of the project Health(a)ware was to develop a close partnership between the universities which results in an interdisciplinary approach based on different perspectives of health. Additionally, a close cooperation between local schools and the involved universities was established which leads to health-promoting school networks which work together on a European level. In this framework the European school network HEPE (Health and Physical Education) was built in order to develop an empirical-based and movement-oriented health education approach for secondary schools. Partners of this multilateral school project funded by the EU (project number: CML-BE-07-00514) were the Wilhelm-Maybach School at Berlin (DE) in the coordinate function, the Linderudskole in Oslo (NO), the school I.E.S. El Alamo near Madrid (ES) and the Bundesgymnasium in Vienna (AT).

The outcome of the project Health(a)ware is this handbook. The book consists of two parts. In the first part a pedagogical and didactical framework for school-related health education and health promotion is outlined. In the second part an innovative teaching approach together with teaching examples are presented to show how the idea of health education and health promotion can be implemented. The aim of the book is to link a theoretical framework and practical implications regarding intercultural aspects in teaching health at school.

The target groups of the book are teachers, students and professionals of health promotion and education, pedagogy and didactics, psychology, health sciences and other health-related subjects in different institutions (e.g., schools, universities, and health organizations), societies and non-profit organisations involved in health promotion, health experts and participants of vocational and in-service training. We enable them to extend their health knowledge and their didactical and methodological competencies in addressing young people at the age of 12-16 years with the topic health. Our book provides many teaching examples together with different kinds of physical activity. However, to improve students’ health-related behaviour the topic health and physical activity is not limited to the subject PE but includes other subjects in the natural sciences (Biology, Chemistry or Physics) and the social sciences (Languages, Drama, History or Psychology). In our book we show teaching examples with PE in connection with these subjects as proposals for cross-subject teaching. Additionally, we describe teaching examples for school-related project work with the topic health and physical activity which go in line with the interdisciplinary approach of the project Health(a)ware. According to this approach and the pedagogical background the teaching examples include various perspectives of health and physical activity conceptualised in four modules: Body & Measurement, Body & Time, Body & Bodies and Body & Environment.