The Significance of Expression through Movement during Educational Process

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the significance of expression through movement in modern education. People’s attitudes towards their body image are described both in the context of physical culture and as they are perceived by society. Also discussed are the necessary changes to be made in physical education programs.

The aim of the study is to analyze students’ attitudes towards movement expression as a manifestation of body consciousness and the importance of using it in different aspects of social life. The study was carried out with 224 students from the University of Physical Education and the University of Technology in Warsaw. The paper is based both on opinion polls and empirical study. Different research methods, such as a questionnaire and an analysis of documentation, were applied.

The resulting analysis indicates the need for movement expression in youth, both for personal and career development, nowadays an essential factor of success. Expression through movement is an important field of physical education that should be developed in modern times. Therefore it seems justifiable to include it in physical education programs at schools and universities. Above all, expression can become a useful tool for functioning in a dynamically changing social environment.

KEYWORDS

expression through movement, body language, mimics, physical education, society

Introduction

Every human being has a body and a personality, the latter being expressed through emotions (Shaver, Schwartz, Kirson and O’Conner 1987). With the development of civilization we need to develop our bodies, consequently our posture, which has been found to be a particularly powerful tool in both expressing and recognizing emotion (Bianchi-Berthouze, Cairns, Cox, Jennett and Kim 2006). Our vast potential and multiple limitations are the fundamentals of every activity, not only the physical. Unfortunately, in many spheres of life, the approach to human beings is instrumental and they are treated like objects.
The role of this kind of physical activity is to make people conscious of their bodies. They learn to understand their bodies, to release tension, and to freely express emotion through movement. Such forms of expression are lost in contemporary civilization. These activities are beneficial, especially nowadays when we have to face serious problems in our everyday life.

The ability to communicate is essential, as it allows us to avoid misunderstanding and misinterpretation of our behaviour. Effective and conscious communication, combined with a creative and innovative approach to many issues and perfect psychophysical condition, are the determinants of human personality. The latter can be expressed through movement using different methods of expression. Successful emotional communication has been demonstrated in a variety of kinesic forms, including gait (Montepare, Goldstein and Clausen 1987, Montepare Zebrowitz and McArthur 1988), animated geometric figures (Heider and Simmel 1944), and dance/expressive movement performances (Arnoff, Woike and Hyman 1992, Boone and Cunningham 1999, DeMeijer 1991, Walk and Homan 1984 Walk and Samuel 1988). Pantomime is another form of expression through movement and mime, dating back to ancient Greek times. Modern pantomime is a popular form of theatre, incorporating dance, song, slapstick, cross-dressing, in-jokes, etc. Other popular forms of expression through movement include capoeira, tai chi and yoga.

Capoeira is an Afro-Brazilian art form that combines elements of martial arts, music and dance (Downey 2002). It was created by slaves from Africa some time after the sixteenth century. Now it is growing in popularity worldwide and there are many Capoeira schools all over the world. Tai chi, unlike tai chi chuan (a form of martial art), is a series of nineteen movements and one pose that together make a meditative form of exercise to which physical and spiritual health benefits are attributed. Some studies have found the practice reduces stress and relieves certain ailments. It focuses on circulating, developing and balancing chi, which in the traditional Chinese concept, is a kind of spiritual energy residing in every living thing (Li, Hong and Chan 2001). Tai chi is presently taught and practiced in many countries.

Yoga, the meditative practice originating from India, is also practiced worldwide; even the medical profession recommends it for reducing stress and anxiety, as well as preventing many other civilization-related diseases (Woolery, Myers, Sternlieb and Zeltzer 2004).

Expression through movement is generally understood as a form of communication using gestures, mime and body posture. In order to understand physical expression, we should realize how essential it is for our functioning. It is enough to say that every human being expresses his/her thoughts, feelings and emotions through movement (Santiago 2004).

In Poland, expression through movement, as an alternative form of physical education (PE), may revamp conventional sports classes by introducing some innovative solutions. Teaching alternative forms of movement during PE classes, such as dancing, pantomime, or theatrical gestures, remains unpopular at schools and universities (Brody and Hall 1993). Examples in which such elements were included in sports classes are rare, but these forms of physical activity have always readily accepted by the students and schoolchildren. The literature also suggests there has been a wide interest in such activities among youth, therefore they should be included more often in physical education programs at schools and universities. According to Diana Christodoulou (2010), the aim of PE in primary schools should be to promote healthy growth in students, including physical, spiritual and emotional development. Another purpose for PE is to contribute to the improvement of their health and their smooth integration into society.

Given these facts, the authors decided to find out whether young people are interested in learning expression through movement during their sports classes. The aim of the paper is to analyze student attitudes towards different forms of physical expression as a tool to develop their body consciousness, and to find out whether young people would like to be taught them at schools or universities.
It was assumed that the general level of physical expression development was low in the student sample, and therefore self-expression techniques should be developed in children and youth.

**Material and methods**

The sample comprised 224 students. The main selection criterion was the kind of university, thus two Warsaw universities were selected for the study: the University of Physical Education (n = 112) and the University of Technology (n = 112). The sample also included students from the Faculty of Tourism and Recreation of Josef Pilsudski University of Physical Education in Warsaw. Students aged between 23 to 25 years (females 23.79±0.50; males 23.91±0.29) and the students from different faculties of the Warsaw University of Technology aged between 22 to 24 years (females 23.95±0.86; males 23.27±0.63).

The questionnaire included open questions (the subject can write anything he/she wants) and closed questions (including single or multiple-choice with answer ranking) or semi-open questions (considering additional answers, apart from the presented options).

The questionnaire pertained to issues of expression, self-presentation and body language. The goal of the questionnaire was to collect the opinions and experience of university students in the area of expression through movement and the related issues. Based on questions relating to the subjects’ health, lifestyle, and participation in sports, an attempt was made to establish student attitudes towards physical activity and healthy lifestyles.

The questions were divided into four sets. The first set of questions addressed school experience in expression through movement and the role of this form of activity in physical education. The subjects reported their attitudes concerning PE classes, their experience with unconventional forms of movement and their opinions concerning whether expression through movement should be included in physical education programs at schools and universities. The second set of questions related to different body image components and perceptions of these components. Respondents’ attitudes towards body image (e.g. whether they think it is important for their future life and career) were assessed as well as their experience with body image development. The third set of questions regarded the range of body language and self-expression used in everyday life and the perception of these elements in society. The fourth set of questions applied to communication, public performance, and the role of expression through movement in socializing. The results were subjected to statistic analysis. Student t-test was used for evaluation of the differences. The obtained results were next analyzed using the independent Chi² test. In all cases the minimal variability level p ≤ 0.05 was accepted.

**Results**

**The lifestyles of the study subjects**

Questions pertaining to lifestyle, physical fitness, and participation in sports were designed to determine the subjects’ lifestyles and their attitudes towards physical culture. Statistically significant between-group differences were noted in the subjects’ lifestyles (p<0.05). Although no subject reported a sedentary lifestyle, a fact due to the age of the studied sample, 32% of the students from the University of Technology reported low physical activity levels while 68% of this segment reported they were physically active. Conversely, the majority (94%) of the students from Josef Pilsudski University of Physical Education reported involvement in physical activity. Such significant differences were also found for participation in sports. Although only two subjects from each group reported their involvement in competitive sports, more students from the University of Physical Education were found to participate in recreational sports (94% from the University of Physical Education vs. 84% students from the University of Technology).
School experience in expression through movement; different forms of expression through movement as part of physical education

The first set of questions related to the subjects’ experience with alternative forms of physical education and their opinions concerning these activities as a part of contemporary physical culture.

Most of the respondents from both groups reported positive attitudes towards PE classes. Such replies were prevalent among the students of Josef Pilsudski University of Physical Education (94%). About 76% of the surveyed students from the University of Technology reported they did not like their PE classes at school.

The replies indicated that alternative forms of movement such as dancing, aerobics, and pantomime were rarely included in PE classes. Statistically significant differences were found between the studied groups. A total of 110 students (98%) from the University of Technology reported that none of the above forms of activity had been included in their PE classes. Significantly more students from Josef Pilsudski University of Physical Education – 40 out of 112 respondents (35%) – reported their participation in such forms of physical activity and they most often mentioned aerobics and dancing.

Introducing diversified forms of physical activity to PE classes may develop positive attitudes in children and youth, both towards PE classes and physical culture. Boring PE classes, limited to routine exercises, running, or ball games may discourage children from future participation in sports and physical activities. Conversely, interesting PE classes that include elements of physical expression, such as dance, pantomime, and theatre, make children and youth develop their skills and talents. Therefore, it seems logical to include the aforementioned alternative forms of physical activity in physical education programs. If students find their PE classes unattractive, they frequently participate in extracurricular activities, e.g. dance lessons or amateur theatricals. The respondents most often reported participation in dancing, amateur theatre or yoga lessons. Statistically significant differences were found in the replies obtained for dancing and other extracurricular activities not mentioned in the questionnaire. The students from Josef Pilsudski University of Physical Education more often reported participation in extracurricular activities including ballet, acrobatics and Capoeira. A significant difference was also found in the results indicating that 9 out of 112 (8%) students from the University of Technology did not participate in any extracurricular activities (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Participation in selected extracurricular activities in the studied sample
(* - significant differences at the level p≤0.05)

The aforementioned extracurricular activities not only involve different forms of motor activities. Some unconventional forms of physical activity combine movement with art elements. Dancing, most frequently reported by the respondents, has always been a popular form of mass culture. Therefore, elements of dance should be included in PE classes as it is the most popular form of expression through movement and social interaction. The reported participation in less popular
activities (yet still readily practiced) like theatre suggests that people seek appropriate forms of expression. The replies of 32% of the students from the University of Technology who reported they had never participated in any of these activities indicate that such forms of expression are inadequately promoted by schools and universities. Demonstrating elements of various forms of physical expression during PE classes will enable students to discover and explore them, to create movement with their body, and to express themselves through movement. This will also motivate young individuals to participate in physical activities more frequently.

The studied population generally approved of the suggestion to include forms of expression through movement such as dancing, tai chi and theatre in physical education program. The reported positive attitudes towards alternative forms of physical activity indicate that expression through movement should be propagated as an integral part of physical culture. It is then justifiable to promote different forms of physical expression at schools and universities as part of physical education program.

The replies pertaining to attitudes towards alternative forms of movement in the studied population confirm student interest in these forms of activity. The majority of subjects, more than 50% from both groups, replied that these forms should be included in physical education programs at schools and universities; only 15% of both groups felt that these forms should not be included in a PE program.

This study uncovered generally positive attitudes towards alternative forms of physical education. Surprisingly, regardless of the university they attended, most of the students wanted to include expression through movement in physical education programs. Perhaps, then, teaching expression through movement at schools and universities as a separate subject would be a reasonable solution.

The concept of body image and body image perception

The second set of questions referred to body image perception and development. The vast majority of respondents (100% from the University of Physical Education and 92% from the University of Technology) agreed that body image development is important. The need for self-image creation is certainly determined by the needs of both the contemporary labour market and culture.

While at work and during social contacts, the perception of body image is based on visual impressions. Thus, learning to express thoughts and emotions is essential. Young people are aware of this and eager to learn. Also, more and more companies are aware of this fact and organize training courses about body image development for their employees. If such courses were considered in school curriculum, they would have a beneficial effect on pupils (Figure 2).
Working on body image is essential, as it is a complex issue comprising movement, gesture and vocal timbre. The results indicate that the study subjects know these body image elements and realize which ones usually attract other people’s attention. Generally, there were no significant differences in the results obtained for the studied groups, with the exception of the replies obtained for voice timbre, which was hardly ever mentioned. The most frequently mentioned body image components included intellectual level, silhouette, posture, clothes, and movement.

**Body language and self-expression**

The third set of questions addressed body language. The questions concerned the ways that body language is perceived under different conditions as well as the respondents’ personal attitudes towards self-expression. The results suggest that the vast majority of students (more than 80% of both groups) believe body language is intuitive and only a very small group thinks it is conscious.

Although the role of intuition in body language perception may be obvious, we should not forget that intuition is developed on the basis of earlier experiences. The more experienced we become, the better are our intuitive judgments. Therefore, we should develop and train body language beginning in our early childhood (Figure 3).

![Figure 3. Ranking expression through movement under different conditions](image)

Generally, the respondents believe that self-expression is most important at work. The next spheres of life where body image plays a role, as reported by the respondents, include social life, everyday life, and family life, respectively. Thus, we may conclude that people feel most comfortable at home with their families, when they do not have to pretend, or overexpose any of their character traits. The purpose of learning expression through movement is to develop a unity between the personality and body image. Over a half of the respondents believe that people are generally judged based on their body language and 29% admit it is a very important judgment criterion. Based on these opinions, we may conclude that body language is an integral part of body image; therefore, learning to be free, spontaneous and fully self-expressed is beneficial.

**Communication**

The last set of questions applied to communication. The respondents reported their attitudes towards public performance, the frequency of participation in the activities involving expression through movement, and the significance of expression through movement in social life (Figure 4).
The replies were similar in all the surveyed groups: 65% of the respondents were found to enjoy public performances; 25% reported feeling uncomfortable; 10% reported paralysing (stage fright) stress during public performances.

Most of the respondents reported they were interested in learning expression through movement. Over 80% of the subjects from both groups reported they enjoyed dancing, singing, telling jokes, and role-playing (Figure 5).

The next question pertained to the respondents’ social roles. Exactly half of them admitted being a “party spirit” and 11% replied they would like to be “party spirits” (Table 1).

Social roles are related to personality traits. Not everybody can be a leader or party spirit, yet it is important not to discriminate against any role, thus allowing an individual to feel comfortable with people. Interpersonal relations are essential for the development of expression through movement and body image.
Discussion

Human body is an organic matter. Human beings adapt to the environment through the nervous system, which enables communication by receiving, interpreting and transferring information (Castaner, Grasso, Lopez, Mateu, Motos, and Sanchez 2006). Therefore, it is essential to emphasize that a human being is a unity of body and mind: the body is a combination of physical and mental aspects, it is neither divided nor is an antinomy – body or body-soul, but it unites in action, when physical factors are in harmony with and are modified by the mental factors and vice versa (Albaladejo and Mur 2007).

A similar opinion was presented by Władysław Osmolski, a theorist of physical education, who already during the interwar period regarded a human being as a unity of body and soul, and emphasized that for the mind, body is a tool, for the body, mind is the aim. Together, the body and the mind form a living being (Kosiewicz 2004).

The opinions presented above suggest that a human being should be perceived as a unity of body, soul and mind. At the same time, these authors reject the Platonic and Cartesian concept of dualism between mind and body and accept the mutual influence of body on mind and vice versa (Kozielło 2002).

Emotions are created in mind and then shown in a person’s posture. For example, while sadness is the first emotion to be readily identified in movement performance of children and youngsters, happiness is the first emotion to be identified in facial expressions (Izard 1971).

This may be confirmed by the fact that every person expresses his/her emotions through movement and is the way he/she communicates with the environment (Schinca 2002). Ortiz (2005) agrees with this opinion, saying that we express our thoughts and feelings using body language to share them with other people. The Body is a fundamental component of education itself. Therefore we can say that the starting point of any education is always the body and that education can be seen as a process through which the human body develops from the simple condition of material and biological existence to a condition of spiritual awareness (Isidori, Abele, Sandor, Ganea, Taddei and Maulini 2010). Obviously, expression through movement is a complex activity, composed of multiple, strongly connected elements. Body image perception is generally focused on physical aspects (gesture, vision) and voice (intonation, rhythm). Verbal communication enables better transmission of the intellectual and abstract contents of information, while communication by gestures is usually focused on expressing emotions (Santiago 2004). Feelings and emotions are expressed by mimicking, gestures and vocal timbre (Arteaga, Viciana, and Conde 1997). Therefore, we ought to determine the role of physical culture in learning expression through movement. Since physical expression involves both the body and kinetics, it is obvious that it should be part of physical education. It is also essential to use the most popular forms of expression, such as dancing. While dance is strictly related to emotion expression, it also has qualitative and technical content (Cichella and Bianchini 2004). Also, using the principles of physical expression in such disciplines as gymnastics, figure skating or synchronised swimming (Poliszczuk 2003) should be considered. Expression through movement as part of physical education is an alternative for conventional sports classes at schools and universities. This is especially important due to the needs as suggested by the respondents.

Conclusions

Analysis of the results of the study indicates that expression through movement is an important aspect of physical education and thus requires further development. Including it in the program of physical education at schools and universities is recommended.

Analysis of the questionnaire indicates that most of young people are interested in such forms of physical activity, and believe that learning to express themselves through movement would help them in individual skills and future career development.
Expressing emotions through movements is an important element of non-verbal communication between people. The level of knowledge of body language determines the effectiveness of communication.

The techniques of body language involve expression through movement. As physical expression reveals many things about a person using them, people should be trained so as to avoid misunderstandings and misinterpretation.

The role of physical education in effective physical expression is especially important. This form of expression is an integral part of physical culture.

REFERENCES


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