

Do young Poles have a chance of success in sport (and not only)?

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ABSTRACT. The education of the next generations of young people is not only a social responsibility of the state, but also the opportunity for its more dynamic development. Education plays an important role in this process. The better the quality of education is, the better prepared young people are to lead the generation. In this process of cultural transmission education through and to movement should play a key role. There is no educational factor more stimulating the sensorimotor development of a child in the early stages of their life than creative physical expression. When it takes place in a safe and supportive environment, initially associated with the family, and later at school, it becomes a determinant of self-esteem and behaviours in further life. Although each child's development proceeds in a manner individually varied, certain mechanisms tend to be common. Intellect and motor skills can be either activated and developed in line with the talent of the child, or beyond the capacity of their potential (for example in health disorders). Unfortunately, qualitatively poor educational stimulation is equally dangerous for the achievement of the optimal development track. With a low level of physical activity do young people in Poland have a chance to compete with their peers in the world? For example, in sports competitions? Sport is, however, not the only measure of success. Will they be able to succeed in life, in the areas in which they want to develop? Will the scope of their possibilities be limited in the absence of appropriate sensorimotor stimulation at an early age? The answers to these and many other questions are sought in this article. It is directed to parents, teachers, and coaches, to all those who have, or may have, influence on the development of children. There are indicated certain relations, which may determine the pace and quality of children's development in the field of physical culture.

Introduction

Is being Polish to be synonymous with the absence of physical dexterity? Reading such a question many people will get indignant – How come? How about Kamil Stoch (and earlier Adam Małysz and "Małysz - mania"), Justyna Kowalczyk (a brave Polish woman who shows unusual pluckiness), and our skaters (who won Olympic medals for country without any indoor skating rink, proving you can be the best in the world without conditions for development!)? Yet it is only a part of our sports heroes – the “colder” one. And there are also Majewski, Małachowski and the girls who jump the highest in the world, the young athletes who do not give way to the fastest in the world. And after all handball players who so many times proved that we can fight to the last

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"drop of blood", and the volleyball players (male and female teams), who also can fight with the best. There were also rowers, and we could also enumerate canoeists (especially the female ones) who never give up the fight. Maybe we will also witness the rebirth of fencing – after all swordsmanship has always been our national strong point. Sometimes here and there appear single exceptional, young, courageous Poles who show that they are not afraid of anyone and can compete with the best. However, if the situation were closely analysed by a statistician, the conclusion would be that the proportion of these young outstanding Poles falls within the statistical error margin. After all, it is logical that the population of 38 million people must include a few dozen outstanding individuals (1%) in a particular area (for example talented in sports).

Obviously, we can investigate the situation in other countries in order to learn if it is different than in Poland. What that magical the residents of a tiny Jamaica have that no one

in the world can catch up with them? Is Korea so much ahead of us in the development of civilization that it could afford (as a country) 28 medals at the last Olympic Games in London (2012) and the next 8 in Sochi (2014)? Our score, yet found very successful, was 16 medals (10 in London, and 6 in Sochi). And the British - 65 medals in London? How is it possible? After all, Germany swept up 44, and the French 34. What do we lack to achieve such success?

The achievements of individual players, sometimes even groups or teams, indicate that it is possible, even here. Could it be that in order to achieve regular and significant success we lack an adequate system of training of children and youth? Or maybe we should not worry about medal scores, and instead take care of every young Pole's health (including physical fitness), assuming that a greater proportion of physically active individuals will translate into an increase in the number of those talented in sports?

And here we come to the mainstream of our considerations - what are the characteristics of the young Pole in the area of physical culture? What is the attitude of our youth to physical activity and concern for their own health?

Physical activity of young Polish people

From the study on population of 16-18-year-olds carried out by Oblacińska and Woynarowska (2006) emerges a not very optimistic picture of a young Pole. In the study the authors of the report conclude that "one in five 18-year-old rate their health as "so-so" or "bad", while 14% have chronic diseases. Every third 18-year-old is unhappy with their life, and over 40% have increased levels of psychological stress and aggravation" (Oblacińska and Woynarowska, 2006, p. 165). In the studied age group only 22% reached the recommended level of physical activity - five times a week at the level of intensity from moderate to medium (30% of boys and 14% of girls). 16-year-olds undertake physical activity more often than their older peers, and it is rather those in cities than in rural areas. Complete absence of physical activity was, worryingly, declared by 5% of the teenagers, and almost 40% declared undertaking it only occasionally. In the same group of teenagers 15% used computers at least 4 hours every school day and 40% at weekends. 17% of the examined group watched TV more than 4 hours a day, and at the weekend this percentage increased to 45%. It is no wonder that with such a sedentary lifestyle excess body weight was observed in 17% of adolescents, and twice more perceived themselves as too fat (Oblacińska and Woynarowska, 2006). The situation is aggravated by bad eating habits - almost 20% of the teenagers declared that they never eat breakfast and nearly 9% that do not eat dinner.

And what is the situation like in the younger age

categories? In the past in the period of primary education outdoor activities used to constitute an element of socialization of young people. Most often it was associated with some forms of movement games, and in older classes with sports. It applied to most of teenagers. Today only 33% of 15-year-olds spend their leisure time engaging in such activities twice a week or more often (twice as many boys as girls). The same time is devoted by 20% of 15-year-olds to computer games, and by a further 18% - once a week. They spend more time communicating with peers on the Internet (44%), more often in the city than in the countryside. At the same time children and young people declare overwork at school. In the case of 15-year-olds quite large and very large overwork is declared by more than 60% of the students, and among 13-year-olds more than 50%. There is also an increasing percentage of children and adolescents declaring dejection, irritation and loss of concentration, or even psychosomatic problems (Mazur et al., 2007). Perhaps the Internet has become a kind of escape from the overwhelming responsibilities which most often they have to face on their own, without support from family or school? Research (Kantanista et al., 2013) indicates that the high level of support from physical education teachers translates into larger physical activity. And in the cases of a scarce support low levels of physical activity in free time was observed. Such support affects also well-being and self-assessment of one's own health condition. One in four 11-year-old feels either a little or far too fat. Among 13-year-olds it is more than 40%, especially among girls, as it is in the group of 15-year-olds. Hardly a teenager rate their health as bad, but more than 12% of pupils aged 11 and 13 years and more than 16% under the age of 15 consider it "so-so". (Mazur et al., 2007). So underestimated self-assessment contributes to problems in dealing with peers, especially in terms of emotions, which eventually results in hyperactivity or frustration, and in extreme cases even hatred of themselves and their bodies.

The above information, even though it depicts the state of affairs, cannot be the only point of reference in the description of the today Polish young generation. Firstly, because most of it has a declarative character, and as known, even among those who declare physical activity or high level of fitness, there is a substantial group of those who only declare. Secondly, and probably much more importantly for public health, is not how active they are today, but how long they will maintain the activity after the obligation of education is finished. While it is relatively easy to verify declarativeness of the self-assessment on physical activity and physical fitness (e.g. by means of a simple Cooper test),

it is far more difficult to analyse the remaining determinants of lifelong activity and concern for one's own body and health. The website of the National Centre for the Study of Physical Condition of the Polish (www.ncbkf.pl) provides useful information on Cooper test, that allows anyone to quickly verify their strength, the basic element of health. The centile charts found there allow for an immediate assessment of the fitness level – there is only one condition – it is necessary to do the test. It seems that for every parent (or teacher) declaring concern for a child's health such a test, measuring a distance which one is able to go in 12 minutes should not be something beyond the ordinary. And yet, I do not know any parent who has ever taken the initiative to try such a test with their own child to learn of the state of their health. It may be due to the low social awareness of the links between physical fitness and health as well as their significance for quality of life (physical education at school is often blamed for insufficient awareness in this area - and as research shows - quite rightly). The causes can be traced also to fears of increasingly demanding attitudes of children. Are the parents afraid that the child might want them to give an example to follow? It is worth remembering that children are not the way we want them to be, but the way they see us. It is possible that the absence of such situations in the upbringing of children stems from the fact that we tend to declare certain things (e.g. good health condition, a high level of physical fitness, frequent physical activity and ... skills in some sports) rather than really implement them. We often do not realize what consequences the lack of movement can bring about for a child's health. For instance, what to do if a child aged 7 cannot run (alternately with moments of a march) a distance of 500 meters in six minutes? Should it be for a parent a signal to start worrying about abnormal development of a child? And if a 10-year-old has a problem with coordination, often falls, cannot catch a ball dribbled in his direction, or has difficulty with the simultaneous motor task and answer to a simple math problem, what then? Is it a problem whose underestimation can disrupt a child's normal development?

Child's development

Development is not only the result of genetic determinants (transferred to the child by the parents), but also a consequence of the motor activities undertaken by the child and diversity of experiences in this field. Once the child is deprived of the proper physical stimulation, the full development of its sensorimotor potential is reduced. Even the absence of crawling in the fifth or sixth month of life should be a signal for a parent. Crawling, or lack thereof, does not

have a determining influence on the development of child's locomotion skills, but can contribute to a lack of proprioceptive experience in coordinating movements (hand-foot, hand-hand), or in terms of balance and spatial orientation. In the subsequent periods it may lead to disorders in some school competences, for example in the area of graphomotor skills or dysorthographia (Kościelak, 1998), and thus contribute to some extent to perhaps a more difficult start in the education of the child. Possibly, but not necessarily. Failure to take compensatory actions may lead to the development of movement disorders, which include:

- disorders in micro movements of the hands - manifested in problems with writing, drawing, manual activities, lacing shoes, fastening buttons, sewing, cutting, DIY activities,
- disorders in the trunk movements and in their coordination with the movements of the limbs - reflected in the difficulties to keep balance or to do physical exercise.

It may also manifest itself in problems with manual dexterity (Kościelak, 1998), in particular in the delayed development of praxis (use of everyday objects):

- weak performance in micro movements
- lacking precision in movements
- disorders in motor coordination and in eye-hand coordination,
- lack of forearm-palm-fingers coordination.

It is worth mentioning that if proper steps are taken early enough (for example in the form of physical games oriented at hand-eye coordination) such backlog may be caught up.

Formation of motor abilities in case of the youngest children is related to the harmonious development of the musculoskeletal system, which in addition to bones, joints and muscles has to do also with the development of controls (of the nervous system). In the early stages of life coordination abilities play the key role; they involve predominantly neuro-sensory as well as psychological predispositions (Raczek et al., 2000). The process of the development of motor abilities is immensely complex and associated with movement skills. Raczek (2010, p.32) argues that "skills are regarded as specific evidence of man to perform a particular efficient, fast and accurate motor activity. They are formed in the process of individual human development and in the process of education and exercising, based on respective motor capabilities and movement experiences. A movement skill is therefore a potential condition, readiness or disposition to the effective performance of a particular type of a motor task [...] Unlike motor abilities they are therefore highly specific in nature,

indicating a very strong and direct relationship with a given movement activity. Hence, their names are identical to the names of the performed movement actions". The fundamental movement skills may be divided into those related to the basic forms of natural movements: translocation - locomotor (e.g. walk) and rotational (e.g. turn), non-locomotor (e.g. swing) and manipulative (e.g. grips). They provide a foundation for development of further, more complex motor activities and should be developed in early childhood. Huge responsibility in this regard, hence, lies with parents. A large variety of fundamental skills and diversity of experience in terms of their practical use become a foundation for future development of the motor aspects. The basis of special skills in turn is their specificity - dependent on the movements performed in the particular sport, in the area of artistic and motor activities, or in professional activities (Raczek, 2010). These are developed in the framework of a specialised training. From this perspective, it seems reasonable to ask the question posed in the title of the article - Do Poles acquire these skills in some particularly different way - first the fundamental ones, then special, finally expanding them in sports? If this mechanism is similar in all people it is worth considering why their development is so poor among the Polish.

It is known that the motor capabilities are determined by both motor abilities, which stem from the development of one's own potential, as well as movement skills acquired through learning and movement experience. Sports achievements are also driven by factors such as the complexity of technical elements characteristic for a particular sport or the level of cognitive requirements, often shaped by the influence of education and environment. All these processes are spread over time and take place together with other mechanisms responsible for the overall development of the child. Several stages in this development are worth a closer look.

After the initial stage when a child gains control over the manipulative movements (which may be facilitated by construction and manipulative games), they enter the stage of locomotion development and the upright body position (age up to 2 years). At the age of 4-5 years a child enters a period of the first peak in the motor skills development (Osiński, 2003). During this period, the degree of development of the nervous system is adequate to motor and cognitive capabilities of the child, it has an incredible capacity to learn new movement skills and activities. It applies equally to boys and girls. It is a particularly important stage in the development of talents for some sports (artistic gymnastics,

synchronic swimming, fencing, skating, tennis, where coordination abilities play an important role. It is also associated with the development of coordination abilities. It should be, however, borne in mind that a little mass of muscles, and what goes with it yet not too much muscular strength, makes children at this age get tired faster, especially when they are to perform precise and fine movements. Too strenuous training may disrupt the normal development path. That is why in this period there should be used as many movement games with a rich storyline, developing movement imagination and creativity of motor performance as possible. The burden of responsibility lies in this area with parents. Further development stages depend on the quality of the first movement experiences. Their description may be found in the relevant studies (e.g. *Physical education - work with talented students*, M. Bronikowski, A. Kantanista, A. Glapa, ORE, 2014).

Summary

The efficiency of the whole system of movement organization (motor coordination) is crucial for the future development of movement competences, but it is (or at least may be) an important part of the overall development. In the case of mental and physical development, "the role of motor coordination in the enhancement of efficiency in school physical education is crucial, as to a large extent it sets the pace and quality of learning, acquisition, improvement and stabilization of movement skills as well as their appropriate use in various situations and conditions "(Raczek, 2010, p. 99). Such an approach provides an opportunity to stimulate not only motoric development, but also the creative potential, some kind of creativity and ingenuity, which are necessary to achieve success in life. This success does not necessarily mean only sport achievements, not everyone can be a world champion, but anyone can achieve their personal best. So why doesn't it happen?

There are several reasons – starting from public unawareness (parents lack the knowledge), through the difficulties associated with organization and equipment, inefficiency of the school education system, with the school putting stress on capabilities rather than development. Worse still, as far as capabilities are concerned, attention is often paid to those who are already fit - as their further training can guarantee success for sports school teams, and thus, be evidence of 'good job' of physical education teachers. In reality teachers working in this way limit their role to instructors of specific disciplines only.

The weaknesses of the higher education in terms of the

preparation of personnel is also worth mentioning. If a student of physical education is to run / swim some distance in a specific time range, if they are to repeat a series of given technical elements, and they are not taught at the same time how to make a pupil run / swim or perform the series of exercises, what is its educational value? Should not the education of future teachers prepare them how to make a pupil willing to work? It may improve abilities of the pupil and in this way increase their sense of competence. If it is capabilities that are evaluated, the student will follow the same pattern and will bring these practices to school, where he will be supposed to work with children.

Today young people face bigger and bigger challenges - openness, dynamism of changes and relations, ability to adapt to rapidly changing conditions will be the most desirable advantages in the future. Life skills such as effective teamwork, leadership, making choices and taking responsibility for them will enable a more rapid adaptation to new environments, new jobs. Therefore, they will reduce the stress levels and nervous tension. If they additionally involve taking voluntary physical activity in leisure time, it will reduce the psychosomatic threat and improve health condition.

All the above mentioned aspects of a child's development become a necessity today, and creative stimulation of motor (and intellectual) development stems from the needs of modern civilization. If we want young Poles to be satisfied with their lives and to achieve success in their lives in areas of their interest then we have to think

about it as early as in the childhood. And then the percentage of those who will not only want, but will also be able to succeed in sport will increase considerably, which we will all be pleased with.

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