

## The modernization of the program for physical education (PE) in secondary schools

Lector Univ. Dr. Ghiocel Bota - University of Bucharest

Șerban Derlogea, 8 Dan Aikido - Center for Martial Arts and Associated Studies of the University of Bucharest

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**Abstract**

Obesity, irresponsibility, alcoholism, insensitiveness, violence, lack of social solidarity – are but a few of the serious ills in our society. They cannot be cured with the same means and methods which were used until now, i.e. in the public education sector. Therefore, in order to rectify them by building youngsters' character and civic attitude, we propose to change the programs for physical education lessons in secondary schools (K5-K12). The purpose of this new alternative of PE – called „utilitarian” - is: increasing the youngsters' attraction for the sport lessons, improvement of pupils' health and physical condition, learning of useful skills for the whole life, civic and moral education. This could be achieved by introducing new competencies in the physical education lessons: First aid in accidents; Survival of man-made or natural disasters, Team-building, Outdoor activities, Self-defense against violence and aggressions (Aikido), Civic and moral education. This modernization project has been named: “***One Dojo in each Romanian school***”. The main condition for an actual implementation of our proposal for modernization is the re-qualification of sports teachers, working in secondary schools.

### Approached topics

As a result of studies conducted by the Center for Martial Arts (CASA) of the University of Bucharest, we developed a proposal to modernize the curriculum for physical education and sports lessons in secondary schools.

### 1. Arguments for improving the school program for [Physical education](#)

- Most of the students from the University of Bucharest don't exercise regularly, often they even refuse to take any kind of exercise. Most of them have unhygienic and unwholesome habits such as: smoking, alcohol abuse, obesity etc. Even without doing serious investigations we assume that this situation is the same in all higher education institutions in our country. This is due to a wrong education received by young people in family, school, society - until they join the University.

- Starting from the basic idea that: "*a healthy mind can exist only in a healthy body*", we consider that the rejection of physic activity by young people has (and will have) disastrous results for them and for the entire society. The problem is especially acutely for students, because due to the superior education they are expected to become social leaders and influence a lot of other people.

- In fact, the statistics show that in many areas, the society and the Romanian people are laggard in terms of international competitiveness.

- According to many analysts, the cause of this weakness is the lack of "character" in most of the citizens, not lack of professional skills. It's not about their lack of "instruction" (scientific skills etc.), but about common sense and "moral/ ethical" education. This is due to a number of causes, mainly due to a wrong evolution of the society in the recent period: social downgrading, the irresponsibility of parents, lower quality of the teachers, biologic degeneration and others.

- Besides, the majority of the population manifests a low level of health and capacity for physical effort, due to causes like: sedentary lifestyle, lack of exercise, obesity and lack of hygiene education. Therefore, all Romanians (not the youngsters alone) are spectators and not actual players in sports, while their capacity for self-defense (against violence) is the disdain of everyone.

- Unfortunately, from public information (the late Law of Education etc.) it results that all recent efforts and initiatives for the reform of Romanian education system are oriented (almost) only toward the instructional components, and almost none toward the educational ones, or the forming the character.

### 2. Moral education is resulting from the activity in PE classes

*Good behavior* is contrary to basic instincts, so it's un-natural and unpleasant for men, and therefore rejected by individuals. Moral education means the control of instincts, that is of behaviors which are almost not at all influenced by mind or soul. Because of that, moral education can succeed only by influencing the body. Intellectual knowledge, through academic lessons or discussions, has but a small influence on the pupils moral.

The main way of influencing the body (and the instincts) with the result of forming the character is the physical effort - in various ways. By the way, it is known since Platon that the moral education can be done only using physical education.

On the contrary - and unfortunately - nowadays the usual method for character forming are academic discussions or free discussions between teachers and students. This wrong theory is currently promoted by official educators and by adepts of religious education, and is being used in our schools. But reality and results contradict this conception: all observations confirm that human behavior (character) is tightly connected to corporal (instinctive) aspects, which can be influenced very hard or at all by verbal means (i.e. talking etc).

However, it is also true that corporal education (physical education) alone isn't giving satisfactory results for the acquisition of a moral behavior.

Actually educators have to act on all the parts of the human being (i.e. body, mind and soul). Any component part of the person/ pupil neglected by the teaching process will sabotage the ethic progress of the individual, resulted from received education which is directed toward the other two parts.

*For the purpose of moral education the current intellectual method (based only on interactive discussions) is not efficient, if compared with the physical education.*

Because morals require a behavior contrary to the natural, its education can be done almost only based on coercion. Of course, in an ideal way the educational coercion should be efficient, subtle (even non-discernible), lasting, cheap etc.

Some specialists consider that the most efficient way of education for character forming is war (see Platon). This is because of the great conviction power of such “educational means” like: fear of death, clear evidence of advantages of solidarity, severe punishment for evasion of duty. However, this method is prohibitive from a material/ human point of view, even immoral if we consider the current spiritual attitude.

Therefore, educators all over the world searched for pedagogical surrogates who could obtain similar effects to those resulted from students direct or indirect involvement in war, but in conditions acceptable from social, economic and moral points of view.

The best surrogates for war education available until now, with substantial and concrete educational results are: *military instruction, oriental martial arts, (programmed) adventure education* . These combined methods make up a new PE – called *utilitarian* .

Unfortunately, these educational methods are available currently just for a very small number of citizens (or young people in our country):

- Military instruction is available only for professional military;
- Martial arts (like any other sport) are practiced only by a small number of people;
- Education by adventure is very expensive, being convenient just for the employers of big companies (which are paying for their employees education).

PE is known to improve not only the health level (for mind and body) or the capacity for physical

effort in the population, but also it could contribute decisively in diminishing the level of violence in society, mainly in schools.

The most receptive for this kind of education are teenagers. The rehabilitation of anti-social adults is an inefficient process, being very expensive.

However, for getting the most out of the multilateral values of physical education a new conception of the curricula and of the way sports classes are conducted is needed.

### 3. The improvement of school curriculum for Physical education lessons

The PE being taught nowadays in gymnasiums and high-schools has deficiencies in attaining objectives for the correct health, social behavior and moral education.

*Some deficiencies regarding correct health education are:*

- The sports taught and the associated activities carried in lessons have a performance or competitive character and cannot engage the entire mass of students - they even discourage students to practice sports for health.

- The games using a ball (the most usual activity in current sport classes) have some formative advantages, but they also exclude the use of some muscles groups and do not create special educational situations.

*Some deficiencies regarding correct social behavior are:*

- The information/ knowledge taught in sport classes aren't useful for regular life;
- Teenagers do not learn to practice sport voluntarily, all life.

*Some deficiencies regarding correct moral education are:*

- The usual sports activities have a competitive, individualistic character, sometimes a non educational one.
- The PE teachers haven't a constant concern for discipline and moral education of students, wasting the available educational opportunities offered by sports practicing.

*The proposed new curricula:*

All the deficiencies mentioned above could be avoided if the PE classes (and sports) carried in secondary schools and in colleges would have a different curriculum, with other main strategic features, i.e.: for general public, utilitarian and educational. (NOTE: Obviously the success of such a substantial change depends heavily of the teachers quality/ competence).

The new curriculum for physical education classes will include (see [www.derlogea.ro](http://www.derlogea.ro)):

1. *Utilitarian skills* (much more useful for usual life than currently taught sports like football etc.), like:

- *Survival* in difficult conditions (in/ after natural disasters, including the learning of various ways of traveling, climbing, swimming, self-defense etc.);

- Team-building (training of team spirit, solidarity, tolerance etc.) (Derlogea&Bota 2011);

- First aid in case of accidents.

2. Competence in *self-defense* with non-violent methods (the only suitable method available is Aikido - see # 4).

3. *Civic and ethic education* modules, using traditional academic methods.

4. Related to section 2 and 3 above: the establishment of *a Dojo in each Romanian school*, i.e. one (sports) hall where all the students could practice a nonviolent martial art.

We propose that the new educational method – i.e. utilitarian PE combined with moral education – to be introduced as a compulsory subject in sport classes for all secondary schools (gymnasiums and high-schools).

Evidently, all competitive and non-utilitarian sports used until now in PE classes, like: football, volleyball, gymnastics etc. could be further taught as a supplement in same schools to wishing students - besides the new ones proposed, which will be mandatory.

We shall briefly review some aspects and advantages of two important components of the proposed *utilitarian physical education*:

### **4. Aikido as a physical education in schools**

*What is Aikido?*

Aikido is a Japanese method of nonviolent self-defense (without punches, strikes etc.), its main purpose being the education of practitioners, for harmonizing the inter-human relations. Aikido means in Japanese language: “*The way for harmonizing the energies*” or “*The art of peace*” (Derlogea & Ionescu 1990).

This PE method has various educational advantages, concerning the physical, mental and moral sides of people, and consists of:

- *Self-defense skills* - much more useful in normal life than those provided by other sports (e.g. football, or other games);

- *Lack of competition* - which allows for all students to attend the PE classes;

- *Character education* resulting from: the specific exercises, the atmosphere or the context (specific to martial arts tradition and discipline) in which the exercises are developed, the teacher-student discussions, the educational tradition of Japanese civilization.

*The advantages of oriental educational methods as compared to those currently practiced are:*

In the treasure of traditional oriental cultural, the martial arts (as educational methods for the moral, based on fighting exercises) hold a special place, recognized and appreciated worldwide. Each martial art is a set of practical techniques and theoretical concepts about increasing the chances of success in a fight with bare hands or with weapons. But beside that, the martial arts are also a complex educational method, engaging all the components of the human being: body, mind and soul, by combining body exercises with moral (character) education. The specific drills of each art gradually transform the practitioner’s mind, body and spirit, enabling him to perform moral thoughts and deeds.

In comparison, the equivalent European methods are unilateral: the physical education is for the body only, other methods are for the mind (while the morality is purpose of none!).

As a result, the oriental educational methods are better than the European ones.

*Aikido* was invented by Professor Morihei Uyeshiba around the year 1940. He had the revolutionary idea of radically changing the purpose of the martial art he knew: instead of destroying the enemy – to love him, meanwhile using the practical exercises (combat techniques) for student modeling. Thus the student becomes a moral man, generous and tolerant, but also able to take care of himself and effectively defend from possible aggressions. The Aikido philosophy is almost identical to Christianity: “*Love your neighbor as you do yourself*”, however it is different from religion by its insistence on the use of physical education (self-defense) as the main forming method (“*sana in corpore sano*”). *Mens*

From the educational point of view, Aikido is superior to many other available methods and religions, which are based on sedentary mind exercises only. Although these methods are effective in certain conditions (as all of them are eventually enabling a moral behavior), they have the following shortcomings:

- As they do not use the physical communication channel for character’s influencing, for equal results the respective education methods require *a longer period of time* (economically unacceptable), or, if the available time is shorter, they provide unsure or not durable educational results;
- *The vulnerability of practitioners*, forced by the respective educational methods to become dependent on others for livelihood, personal safety etc.

As a method of physical self-defense, Aikido has the following advantages over other martial arts:

- it is nonviolent: not using strikes, but evasion and feints;

- it has a great accessibility: may be practiced by about 95 % of the population, regardless of age, sex etc. (compared with a maximum of 5-10% for the violent martial arts: Karate, Judo etc).

*The benefits of Aikido teaching in the PE classes:*

*Aikido has the following educational advantages:*

*1. Forming of participants character and teaching them self-defense (survival).*

It is a utilitarian Physical education for all people, which provides:

- Individual and collective survivability (referring to health, reproductive capacity, professional efficiency etc.);

- Social utility, and

- Spiritual education (including intellectual, moral, aesthetic sides) of each individual, mainly due to the imposition and repeated practices of strict rules of politeness, respect etc.

*2. It is an efficient education for proper health for everybody (and even more than that):*

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- It is interesting, enjoyable and affordable for almost all people, regardless of age (7-70 years), and especially for those unfit or less gifted;
- It is imprinting useful knowledge and skills, also character and thinking abilities, equally useful for sport and for normal life;
- Has circulatory efficiency, i.e. provides a high pulse for a long period (at least half an hour, as recommended by the World Health Organization);
- Develops capacities for response, speed and concentration;
- Has a large variety of: alternative movements, exercises for body control and coordination;
- Exercises the usually unused brain zones;
- Strengthen the psycho-social health resources through body awareness, learning of relaxation, valuing of social relations;
- Does not have exercises that can humiliate some practitioners; develops self-confidence;
- Appreciate individual progress, not the achieving or exceeding of other peoples performances;
- Two workouts/ lessons per week are enough training for most people;
- May be practiced all year around, several times a week, at hours convenient to a large number of people;

- Low occurrence of injuries, also the recovery period after an injury is significantly lower than the time people benefit from the positive aspects of workout;

- The necessary equipment is not expensive.

3. *It is a high quality physical education for students (and even more than that):*

- It is pleasant and attractive;

- Keeps young people busy throughout the entire lesson;

- Meets the needs of all young people, especially those with physical disabilities;

- Develops confidence in young people and eliminates embarrassing situations (such as being chosen or rejected as team member by the team captain; or knockout games etc.);

- Helps to learn self-managing skills such as: personal hygiene, goals setting and self-evaluation;

- Educate (inter)active skills such as: cooperation, fairness, responsible participation in physical activity and more important – in society;

- It is based on national standards that outline what young people have to know and what they should be able to do;

- It supports physical activity outside school hours;
- It develops knowledge, habit and skills to practice sports the whole life.

4. *Teachers could also benefit if they practice Aikido*, both in terms of personal (physical and mental health) and – especially – of the professional points of view. Disciplining the students through Aikido study would be very helpful for the schooling process. Moreover, exercises practiced together by students and teachers (of any skills) could create between them relations of a kind yet unheard nowadays, establishing a human (biological) solidarity favorable for the outcome of schooling and professional life. For example, which turbulent student would dare to not respect a chemistry, or arts teacher, who holds a black belt.... (Derlogea 2007)

Please note that *the appearance of a Dojo in each Romanian school* does not mean a new investment etc., according to traditional Japanese architecture, but would be just another working atmosphere required in the *existing gym hall*

. Any gym is good; a Dojo is not an exotic fad, but a simple hall where correct and serious education, with perspiration, is done. Still, it is true that some special mattresses ( *Tatami*

) would be needed, to be laid down on the gym floor, or gathered in a corner, as required by the gym's schedule. (Please note that in the context of utilitarian school sports, in the Dojo students could also learn or practice not just Aikido, but other martial arts as well).

## 5. Outdoor education

Outdoor education is a formal education dealing with living in outdoor, developed in nature and preparing students for the life outside an inhabited area. It develops in students the understanding and appreciation of self, of other people and of the surrounding nature,

representing an extension of the school curriculum and an academic enrichment.

The concept of this new type of education is that if introduced in difficult living conditions, even of survival, any student would concentrate its physical and mental resources at a much higher level than he does in normal life. (Derlogea 2001). People are much more sensitive when they live in the nature, as they realize being a small part of a naturally big whole (system). They reveal their true nature and are more receptive, no longer complying with the prejudices that usually drive them. Outdoor life shows to any isolated individual his weakness, and forces him to cooperate with other people.

*The aims of this form of education are:*

- Learning how to overcome the difficulties arising in normal life;
  
- Personal development and improving social relations;
  
- Development of a closer relationship with the environment;
  
- Understanding and compassion for the environment;
  
- Improving teamwork;
  
- Development of leadership competencies (leadership);
  
- Promoting spirituality.

- Decreased propensity to relapsing (in the case of criminals);

Education in the middle of nature is done through *scheduled experiences* carried out either in one place (stationary) or during a travel. Students take part in various “happenings” (actually events more or less adventurous, prepared in advance by educators), which present them with various problems. These scheduled experiences cause fear (of death) and stimulates their creativity to find solutions, and require them to cooperate between them. They also force the student to ask himself questions regarding his life (and to answer them!) - which otherwise, in the safety of the town life, would have never arise.

For educational experiences are used physical activities like: backpacking, hiking, activities in adventure (rope) parks, group games, boat traveling (Davis-Berman & Berman, 1994; Berman & Davis-Berman, 2005).

Through outdoor education, people – young or adults - learn how to motivate themselves to get rid of negative patterns of behavior, making the desired changes, finding their talents.

Learning positive attitudes and encouraging commitment in well-structured outdoor activities contribute to personal development and health. Scientific studies report the existence of a significant and consistent relationship between participation in outdoor activities and physical and psychological health. (Bota 2010) .

At the University of Bucharest we promoted outdoor educational programs for students, including mountain hiking, with activities in the Adventure Park (built in Predeal at the “Hotel Piatra Craiului”), also psychological and behavioral analysis sessions. Our results show that following principles and schedule should be considered in outdoor education programs: the assessment of the personal development needs of each participant, the grouping of participants according to the types of needs they have, the assessments of personality and behavior aspects, a theoretical introduction where participants are informed on the various shops they may join - according to their wishes, videotaping and photographing the students during the activities, interviewing the participants after each exercise (audio recorded), activity review (by an instructor and also by the team), personal analysis, individual feedback of each team member and trainer, conceiving future applications in personal life of behaviors and skills learned during the session, feedback from students in two or three months after the activity.

### 6. The training of physical education teachers

The main problem in implementing this modernization proposal consists in the formation of PE teachers for being able to teach the new methods of utilitarian PE - plus the civic and moral education lessons.

The extension of the abilities of sports teachers for secondary schools and colleges, for teaching also moral education through their PE classes, will bring them following social and organizational benefits:

- 1. A fuller and more effective participation in the strategic task of the Romanian school system;*
- 2. An increase of their socio-professional status;*
- 3. A raise of their intellectual and professional level.*

Unfortunately, such modern and effective methods of moral education through physical education are only accidentally known in our sports universities. They usually teach their students only skills for preparing youngsters for sport competitions and individual performances (ie. they form sport coaches etc), without any concern for general physical education or for the moral education.

### 7. Conclusions

1. Most of the causes for the catastrophic situation of the moral education of the population do not belong to the school system. However, this is still the most appropriate place for a (hopefully) saving intervention.

2. We believe that the character formation can not be done without the involvement of the students body. Therefore, the current tutoring practice and/ or religious lessons for moral in schools have been ineffective. All attempts to influence the behavior, because they are based solely on the mental communication channel, have led to the failures we see all around. Moreover, the same negative phenomenon is happening abroad also, both in West and East. Therefore, lately countries like England, USA, Russia, China, Japan, Singapore, Australia etc. have successfully developed new forms of moral education based on the use of a new kind of physical education – the utilitarian one.

This new physical education combines the physical effort (which produces health) with character forming activities, and with the learning of practical skills and knowledge useful for the entire life, such as:

- First aid in case of accidents;
  
- Survival in the event of natural or artificial disasters;
  
- Outdoor activities;
  
- Teamwork (team-building);
  
- Self-defense against violence and aggression (Aikido);
  
- Civic and moral education.

3. *We consider that the same solutions could give good results for our students also.*

## 8. Proposals

1. *The modernization of school curriculum for the “Physical and sports education” discipline in pre-university schools, so that PE lessons in middle- and high-schools to include utilitarian skills and civic and moral behavior.*

2. *The completion of the curriculum in universities for Physical education, and also the continuous training of existing school teachers of PE, by adding new skills required in teaching the new scholar curriculum.*

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