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HEALTH EDUCATION AND FITNESS IN AUSTRIAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Health education holds a crucial role in empowering primary school children by providing them with all necessary knowledge and skills to make well-versed decisions about their welfare and security. In Austrian primary schools, in particular, the emphasis on health education extends beyond merely instructing on the human body and proper nutrition; it embraces a holistic approach that addresses the physical, mental, emotional, and social scope of a child's life. This comes to be important in overcoming the problems related to prevention of overweight and obesity in early childhood as well as reducing the danger of being overweight in adulthood. Regarding the importance of the abovementioned issues and taking into consideration rapid social change and experience Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research [1; 5] finds it imperative to continuously renovate its educational agenda by launching reforms, ventures and projects. The latter underlines the necessity to follow an inclusive advocacy for the status of PE teaching in Austria that proves to be recognized as one of the country's national ideas. Primary schools prove to be an ideal setting for realizing programs <...promoting enhanced physical activity and health behavior at an early age and addressing the majority of children [4, p.637].

The key objectives of the Austrian school are defined by the School Act adopted in 1962 to promote the education of youth in the spirit of traditions and fundamental social values accepted, i.e., truth, unity, goodness and beauty [1]. Therefore, physical education lessons here are not just classes, but a whole system of activity with all junior pupils involved. I could confirm from my personal experience that each school is equipped with full-fledged playgrounds for football, basketball, baseball and volleyball and there are some equipped with swimming pools as well. All primary school students



participate in interschool competitions, which are even shown on Austrian television to promote healthy lifestyle from the early childhood and boost less active children to get engrossed in school sport. This also provides an exceptional opportunity for PE teacher to develop deep and thoughtful relationships with pupils and encourage them to cooperate and recognize both their own individuality and teamwork [3, p.120].

Most primary schools not only allocate 2 to 4 hours per week according to the school curricular but also provide opportunities for extracurricular sport activities to motivate schoolchildren in their free time by practicing rollerblading, ski or skate training as well as organizing school sports weeks getting young children engaged in swimming, riding bikes and tourism or holding interschool competitions, such as “Training for the Olympics” in 12 main Olympic sports. There have also been numerous schools specialized in a particular kind of sports in Austria.

Another feature that proves to be inspiring is the logical scheme according to which PE lessons are designed. In most schools the second part of the lesson is fitness when schoolchildren are split into groups with each of them being engaged in this or that kind of activity for a few minutes. That could include jumping over the rope, throwing a ball or doing push-ups. A few minutes later the teacher makes the groups change. Many schools have two-hour breaks between classes, during which the children can play football, ping-pong, basketball and that is done in a way so that they could decide what kind of sport they could be fond of or which is generally more acceptable to them.

Furthermore, membership in various sport clubs comes to be inspiring too. For instance, if a child is engaged in the football section, he can join the local football club, in particular Sport club “Rapid” commonly known as “Rapid Wien” [2]. Though one should pay fees for the membership in these clubs, nevertheless, they are not very high as a rule. According to Rapid’s philosophy (education and development of young players), its managers view their collaborations with partner schools as extremely important in order to combine academic and sporting education in a complementary manner. The club has taken the decision to work together with more private schools in order to take into consideration various regional conditions and contexts [2].

Thus, a generalization of Austrian experience provides full evidence to the fact that physical education and sports in primary schools occupy one of the key positions in the country’s school curriculum. This helps to form all necessary skills and physical development abilities of primary school children as well as prepare them to adjust to physical and social environment.

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