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## Planning physical education – from theory to practice

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### Abstract

Planning and teaching physical education represent two of the most important and complex aspects of the professional careers in this field. We aim at emphasizing the teachers' perception on the relationship between the content as planned in different documents and the real content proposed by them during the lessons. From the planning documents, we found out that the annual and the semester plans seem to be the most useful. By establishing the correlations with the teachers' years of experience and teaching degree, but also with the school level, we found out some important aspects that recommend their different approach during the continuing education. The subjects of our research confirmed the difference between planning and practice, but we noticed that the majority thought that most of the competences in physical education could be achieved. Planning documents have a different importance to the teaching activity, depending on teachers' experience. In order to raise the pupils' interest in the physical education lessons, teachers have to implement new methods and means in their activity, especially for the less attractive contents.

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### 1. Introduction

The planning activity is often found in different professions. In most situations, plans are correctly understood and used. But there are some professionals who consider that planning is useless and too restrictive. This is regrettable, because plans express a conceptual approach to the activity content. [1] At the same time, there are authors who assert that the planning activity is correlated to the content scientific approach. When we plan, we project our activity according to the main principles and scientific recommendations for the respective activity. The planning process provides thus the premises for efficiency. [2]

In physical education, the planning activity still requires additional research. Being based on a set of strict rules and on numerous variables, this activity is represented by the prediction of the physical education teaching

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process. But this often leads to the creation of some formal documents that are not very useful to the teachers, unless they are presented on the occasion the school inspection. [3][4] From this perspective, we wanted to highlight the difference between the formal content (fundamental to designing and planning) and the informal content (the real exercises performed during the physical education classes). Generally speaking, the curriculum refers to all the educative processes and learning experiences the pupils are submitted to during their school years. Particularly speaking, the curriculum refers to all the school written documents containing the essential data about the educative processes and learning experiences provided to the pupils; these documents are usually called “formal curriculum”. [5][6][7]

The teacher plans the learning experiences relying on the school year structure and on many other factors such as teaching aids, expertise level, school tradition and pupils’ options. The particular teaching methodology chosen by the physical education teacher is reflected in the planning documents: annual plan, semester plan, learning unit plan (for a specific content) and lesson plan. Each document greatly supposes the learning process prediction, depending on the teaching process duration (one year, one semester or one hour). Despite the stable elements of the teaching design process, it also includes a series of variables; their action must be attenuated by the teacher, who has to adjust the teaching process. The teaching process construction can be sometimes changed while being implemented. Consequently, this will result in differences between the formal and the informal curriculum and between the prescribed and the real curriculum applied to physical education classes. The specialty literature provides little information about the relation between these forms of curriculum, namely the official one and that one created by the teacher during the lessons. Some authors mention a relatively frequent phenomenon related to the interpretation of the official documents normalizing the physical education teachers’ activity. [7][8][9]

Some studies tried to identify the factors that influence this interpretation and they found the following ones: teachers’ perceptions on the physical education working groups and the Ministry interpretations of the curriculum, teachers’ experience, gender and participation rate in sports and physical activities, teachers’ experiences during the school physical education and sports classes, teachers’ initial training, other teachers, situational constrictions. These approaches were classified as conservative, innovative or eclectic. [6]

Another study indicated that some teachers did not use the formal model for planning but instead employed informal planning habits that typically focused on daily activities, not coherent efforts to match objectives with content. [8] Within the plans are reflected also the decision strategies employed by experienced and debutants teachers while planning and teaching lessons. Experienced teachers had many strategies for managing pupils and facilitating individual pupil performance while inexperienced teachers focused on the interest level of the entire class. [9]

The present article is focused on plans, from the perspective of their implementation. Fully aware of the plan multiple meanings and concepts, we can state that the decision to apply or not to apply a plan actually reflects the teacher’s expertise level

## **2. Methodology**

**Aim.** This research aims at emphasizing the teachers’ opinion about the relationship between the planned contents and the real contents developed by them during the school year. Our intention is to raise the physical education teachers’ awareness about these differences and to encourage a more active attitude toward the operational character of the planning documents.

**Methods.** Our research, focused on the relationship between the formal and informal curriculum in school physical education, was conducted over the school year 2011-2012. The method used by us was the inquiry-based questionnaire, by means of which we measured the following variables: teachers’ perceptions on the content achievement level, on children’s competence achievement level and on the planning document utility, teachers’ preferences to teach certain contents, teachers’ opinion about children’s preferences to practice certain

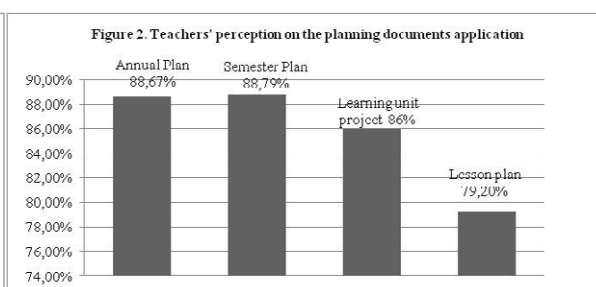
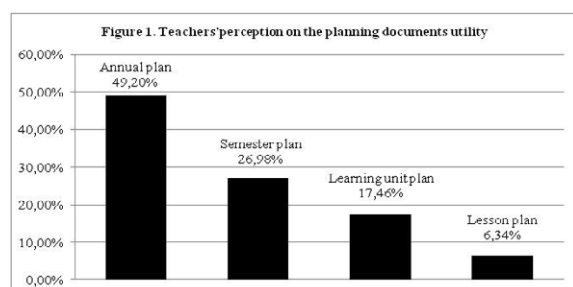
physical exercises. Respondents' answers were analyzed in relation to their years of experience, their teaching degree and the school level. The collected data were processed by means of statistical methods, in order to calculate the percentage of answers and the correlation between the identified data and the research variables.

Sample. The sample included 85 Bucharest teachers (most of them women) aged 22 to 65 years old.

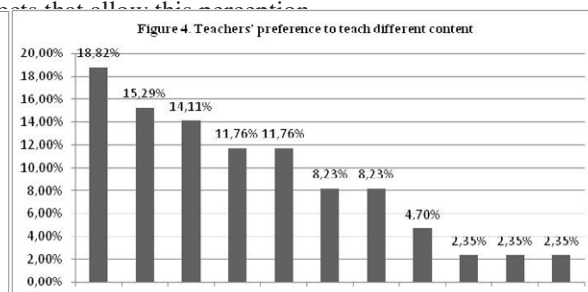
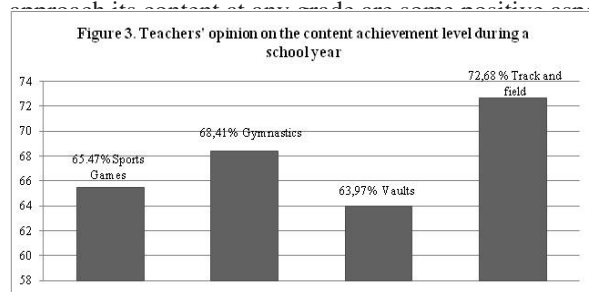
Their experience in physical education teaching went from 1 year to more than 25 years. Most of the teachers had their first degree (55%) and 32% out of them taught physical education at the primary and secondary school levels.

### 3. Results

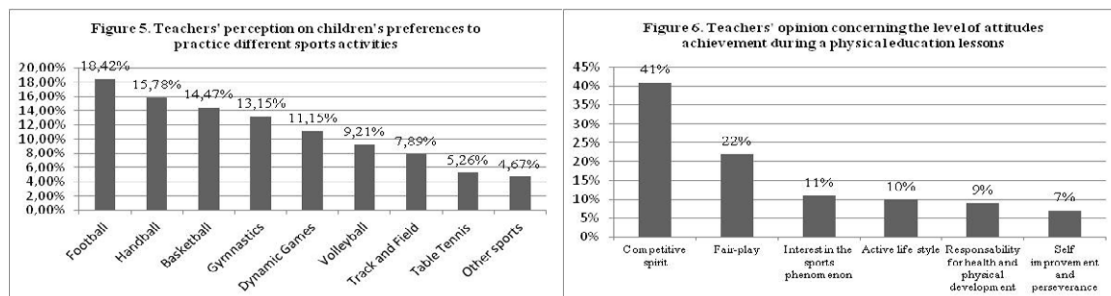
The obtained data were processed and discussed relying on both the answer frequency and the relationship between answers and teachers' identification data (years of experience, teaching degree and school level). Concerning the planning document utility, teachers consider that the annual plan (49.2%) and the semester plan (26%) are the most important documents for their teaching activity (figure 1). At the same time, they think that the lesson content can be realized 88.67% - for the annual plan, and 88.79% - for the semester plan (figure 2).



The content of these documents is destined to facilitate the acquisition of the general competences specific to the Physical education and sports discipline, at different school levels. The highest percentage reflecting the teachers' perception on the competence achievement level is obtained by "keeping and improving the health condition" (42%). At the secondary school level, this was the teachers' main option (63%). But at the high school level, teachers' main option was for the "development of the personality traits facilitating social integration" (56%). We consider that this result is influenced by the number of physical education classes from the frame-program. In primary and secondary schools, there are two lessons a week, while in high schools, there one single lesson a week. Teachers' years of experience and teaching degree did not make significant differences on this item. As we can see in figure 3, teachers consider that the track and field content can be assimilated to the highest percentage: 72.68%. The difference up to 100% represents the content planned in the teachers' personal documents, but not achieved during the lessons. The relatively small number of skills and the possibility to approach its content at any grade are some positive aspects that allow this perception.



At the same time, the respondents prefer to teach track and field (18.82%), gymnastics (14.11%) and handball (11.76%) (figure 4). We can thus connect their preferences to their perception on the content achievement. The highest percentage of preferences for track and field (a structured teaching environment) goes from beginner to experienced teachers (53%), in a significant manner, while for sports games (a less structured teaching environment), the highest percentage was given by the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> degree teachers. Although they like teaching track and field, at the item related to children's preferences for the physical education content the teachers agree that this content is hardly placed by the children on the 7<sup>th</sup> place (7.89%) (figure 7). This teachers' opinion did not correlate with teachers' experience or teaching level. But this difference between teachers' and children's preferences could create some problems for the learning process results in physical education.



Children's attitude is easy to identify from the teachers' answers, which show that competitive spirit (41%) and fair-play (22%) are the attitudes with the highest percentage of achievement (figure 9). Therefore, they are oriented rather to competition and the direct comparison to the other than to themselves. Not depending on teachers' experience or school level, this result could offer a real characteristic of physical education in our educational system. On the attitudes, the annual plan and semester plan did not offer information concerning the yearly approaching. Teachers' answer could be related only with the lesson plan content, when we can find the affective objectives.

## Conclusions

Among the planning documents, teachers prefer only two: the annual plan and the semester plan. There are no differences between teachers related to their experience or teaching degree. Under these conditions, we consider that between the teaching degrees there are significant differences determined by their teaching methodology, which means that beginner teachers need to prepare all the planning documents. But it is important to dispose of an operational format which could be used into the practice and could turn the plans into useful teaching tools. Although in Romania the school physical education is encouraged to approach such planning, we think that our teachers should be given more autonomy to design their plans within a more generous framework.

With reference to the content, it seems to be a big difference between teachers' preference to teach track and field and children's preference for sports games. This difference could be a factor susceptible to affect the relation between the physical education design and the real learning experiences provided to the pupils. We recommend a conceptual change about the track and field teaching, in the sense that this activity should be based on more dynamic games.

The teachers must be focused on the curriculum goals, not particularly on its content. If the same goal could be reached through two different contents, teachers should use the content which is more attractive to the children. So, it is not necessary to use the content just because it is stipulated in the curriculum. By accepting that the curriculum represents the system of learning experiences provided to the pupils, we have to accept that it could represent just a theoretical design if it doesn't have a strong relationship to the school reality.

From our research, it results that children's competences can be achieved in the school physical education lesson to a high percentage. Depending on the school level, teachers' perceptions are different. From the primary to the high school, the accent shifts from the motor and physical competences to the social competences. This perception could be influenced by the different number of physical education classes a week, which doesn't allow the teachers to apply motor capacity development methodology. In fact, teachers don't use a tool to assess the social competence development levels, their opinions strictly relying on the observation method.

The attitude achievement scores the highest percentages at "competitive spirit" and "fair-play", which illustrates the children's preference to compare themselves rather to the other than to themselves. The attitude training process must also be planned by the teachers, in a strong relation to the motor content. That is why it is so important to insert social and affective objectives in the planning documents.

Planning in physical education remains a major component of the teacher training. The learning variables and the teachers' experience create different perceptions on the planning process. We consider that the crucial priority in this important teaching stage is to come closer to the real teaching process and to avoid the theoretical approach. This one could create only the scientific background indispensable to an effective planning.

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