



UNIVERSITY OF NIŠ
The scientific journal FACTA UNIVERSITATIS
Series: **Physical Education** Vol.1, N° 3, 1996 pp. 1 - 8
Editor of series: Nenad Živanović, e-mail: znenad@fak.fak.ni.ac.yu
Address: Univerzitetski trg 2, 18000 Niš, YU
Tel: (018) 547-095, Fax: (018)-547-950

THE GYMNASTIC TEACHER AS A MODEL: A PEDAGOGICAL CRITIQUE *

UDC:371.12:796.41

John C. Andrews

President F.I.E.P.* England

Abstract. *The discussion opens with a number of preliminary comments and definitions which aim to put the author's analysis and comments into context and to provide a conceptual framework of reference. Criteria used to establish what may constitute an educational inter-action between teacher and taught are applied to situations in which one person adopts the role of leader of and model for the physical activity of a physical education lesson, or part of one, where the gymnastics proposed are done with the aim to produce certain fitness and health effects on the participants. Some suggestions are made by which the pedagogical value and educational content of such situations may be increased.*

1.PREAMBLE

The FIEP first came into being in 1923 and its origins were largely influenced by the development of what is now known historically as "Swedish Gymnastics". You will know, I am sure, that in these early days there were different and competing national systems of gymnastics and at that time there was rivalry between two organisations, the International Federation of Gymnastics (FIG) and the International Federation of (Swedish) Educational Gymnastics (FIGE), the forerunner of the FIEP, as to which should organise the gymnastic demonstrations and competitions in the 1924 Olympic Games.

Even during the very first deliberations of our Federation, in discussing the regulations for the conduct of sports meetings, there was considerable difference of opinion on the question of "competitions" versus "demonstrations"; some of the delegates holding that the word "educational" could not be coupled with "competition", but after full consideration it was agreed that, at any rate for the present, the International Federation

Received February 18, 1996

* An edited version of a paper prepared for presentation during a number of visits to Latin American countries in 1996-97.

* Fédération Internationale d'Education Physique

would be rendering greater service to education if it undertook the conduct of competitions as well as demonstrations. It was felt that, as competitions were bound to take place, it was better that the conditions should be decided by the Federation (FIGE). This did not last very long!

By 1930 the educational influence, and especially reference to the ideas of Per Henrik Ling and his son Hjalmar, had become so important that the Educational Gymnastics Federation (FIGE) became the International Federation of Ling Gymnastics (FIGL), which it remained until its name was changed again to become the FIEP in 1953.

After a very brief contact with competition within the Olympic Movement, the FIGL concentrated on its educational mission and organised many events, including mass gymnastics demonstrations involving thousands of gymnasts, coming from countries around the world where the "Ling System" had been adopted. You have no doubt heard of the "Lingiads" in Stockholm in 1939 and 1949.

If readers are interested in some more details of these early days of the FIEP, may I refer you to the FIEP 70th Anniversary lecture which I gave in Israel in 1993, which is published in the conference report. [1] (Available from the Wingate Institute, Israel)

Despite its long history, its continuing adaptation to a changing world, and its geographical expansion, FIEP remains very interested in the teaching of gymnastics as a rich medium of education for people of all ages.

However, my remarks in the remainder of this paper are not necessarily representative of those of other members of the Federation.

2.INTRODUCTION

I want to start by putting my comments on the role of the teacher in the teaching of gymnastics into a broad educational context, I also need to establish a clear framework of conceptual reference, and so I will make a number of preliminary points and provide my own overview of the teaching - learning process.

These ideas may not be acceptable to all, but, at least, they should allow each reader to understand both my concerns and the suggestions I wish to make to improve current practice as I have seen it recently in a number of countries around the world.

The particular situations I am focussing on today are those in which one person leads a group, sometimes quite large, through a series of repetitive movements, choosing and showing the movements, setting the rhythm or following a musical beat, calling the changes, and presenting this as form of gymnastics designed to have specific, beneficial effects on the body, for example, to improve " fitness ", and perhaps to be combined into "jazz dance", or "jazz gymnastics" etc. There are many names for more or less the same session content.

In this situation the teacher is the leader and dominant model for the actions of the participants for the majority of the duration of each session. Typically both the leader and the participants produce large quantities of physical activity and perspiration.

3.SOME PRELIMINARY POINTS

1. The first of my preliminary points is that it is not necessary to be a teacher to get

other people to move! For example, during my initial training for military service, I jumped and ran with the rest of the recruits in response to the orders of the sergeant instructor; at present in the TV news we are seeing images of the return of group exercises done to order and used for punishment/correctional purposes with criminal prisoners in the so-called "Boot Camps" in North America; and then again, at mass popular music concerts it is often only necessary for one member of a pop group to clap his hands over his head and make a sign for the audience to join in and, almost immediately, there are thousands of seemingly happy people in the audience doing the same thing, and most more or less following the beat of the music!

But to be a teacher, to work as a fully prepared professional, means that one is involved in EDUCATION and the process of education is significantly different from military conditioning to obey orders automatically and without question, or using physical exercise as a form of punishment, or even including it as an active participation part of popular entertainment.

2. The second preliminary point is that learning is an individual process and that the teacher's primary role is to facilitate the most effective learning by all those people with whom he or she is working.

Thus, (leaving aside for today a discussion about "self-education") EDUCATION must be a process of communication and inter-action between the teacher and each one of those people who are being taught, at least for part of the time.

Moreover, to enter into an educational role as a teacher also carries with it responsibilities which include, for example, demonstrating in practice care and knowledge about the content of instruction offered and its educational value, and about the teaching methods used, from the point of view of their effectiveness, as well as from the ethical and safety standpoints.

3. Moreover, the teacher's most potent intervention in the learning process of each individual (in teaching anything more difficult than something which can be learned at one attempt) is not in initial instruction, which may, of course, include demonstration, but in providing expert, individualised feedback as the learning process progresses to the stage where, finally, the teacher is no longer needed.

In most cases it should be true that the best teacher is working to increase the knowledge, skills and performance of the learner to the point where that teacher becomes redundant.

Taking the view that teacher-learner communication is at the heart of the teaching-learning process, I have developed a schema which shows some of the many important variables and possible barriers or points of potential breakdown in this process, I do not pretend this schema is all-embracing but it should help to understand the questions which I ask in analysing a session from a pedagogical point of view. See Fig. 1.

4. Education is not a theoretical but a practical process and it takes place in a specific situation: one in which general principles must be adapted to ensure the effective teaching of each individual learner, or group of learners, with specific objectives, content, system of evaluation, and also one effectively adapted to the specific environmental and material conditions in which the inter-action is taking place.

5. Where such teaching is part of the formal curriculum of a school or college, it is also necessary that it is conceived and presented as part of the total education of pupils: supporting and adding to the educational aims of the system as a whole. Certain forms of

exercise and instruction should not be presented "in a vacuum", divided from and presented without reference to the total programme of Physical Education and Sport, and to the whole education of all persons of school age within the educational system.

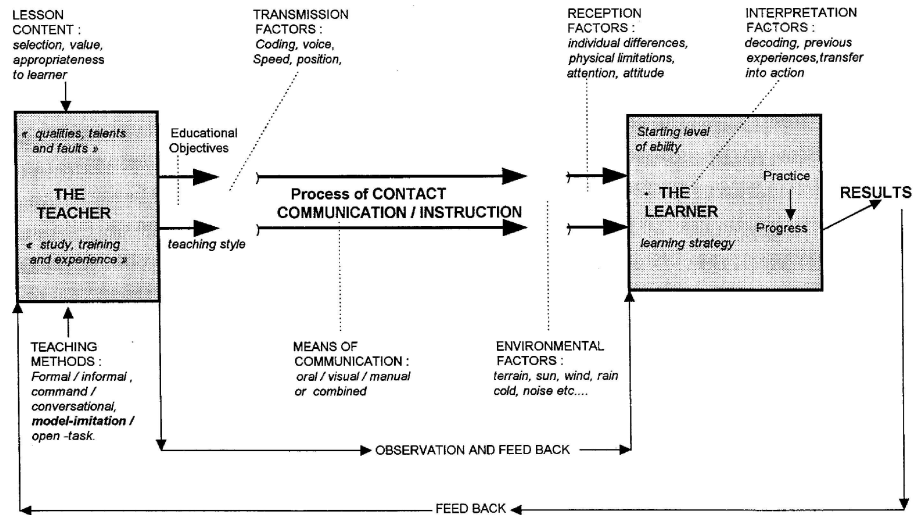


Fig. 1. A communication approach to teaching.

Of course it is possible for people to learn things through experiences, in "the university of life", without formal contacts with a teacher but it is my contention that when we adopt the role of teacher as a profession, precise and rigorous criteria must be used to decide what we present, and how we present and evaluate our work.

Thus, although I have no time to divert into a full discussion of the educational aims and objectives of our work, I hope I have made it clear that it is by the contribution of each part of the programme to these aims and objectives, (and thus the specific contribution of each gymnastics session we teach towards a total programme and its overall aims), that we must firstly judge the value of the work proposed by any teacher.

Moreover the effectiveness of that teaching may be finally judged, to a large extent, by the progress made by each learner, I can not readily foresee a situation in which a person could be assessed as "a good teacher" without some reference to the pupils, and the progress they have made directly or indirectly as a result of his or her intervention. (But neither do I recommend that we judge teachers simply on results because, as Diagram I shows, many other factors, perhaps out of control of the teacher, are also in play).

This brings me to consider different teaching methods a teacher or gymnastics leader may use and again space does not allow more than a few broad distinctions which nevertheless should permit me to underline some of my concerns about the dominant (sometimes exclusive) use of "the teacher as a model" method.

Note that I specify "the dominant use" of a certain method. Both my belief and experience is that a good teacher will use a variety of methods, and teaching styles, in the process of adapting his or her work to the different individuals, groups, situations and objectives, which are "all part of the day's work".

Resting always within the limits of what is ethically acceptable and safe, it is possible to range from "formally organised, command-response, direct methods" on the one hand, to, on the other hand, "informally organised, conversational contact and interaction", indirect methods, in which individual or group work is permitted, and where the teacher, although remaining quite clearly "in charge", with the overall responsibility and control, is only a preliminary facilitator and afterwards an observer and source of expert feedback for people working essentially on their own or with others in a task-response learning situation.

Thus the teacher's role within this broad continuum of teaching methods may vary from

a) choosing the content with already pre-conceived and specific outcomes in mind, followed up by giving very specific instruction, practical demonstration and taking the greater part of the decisions as to how much time is given to each aspect of the lesson, etc.....,to

z)...other situations in which much of the responsibility for the resulting responses and learning outcomes depends on each learner: as individuals, or in groups perhaps, responding to open-ended tasks, set by themselves, with a free use of time, space etc, and with very little direct intervention by the teacher.

Many of you may be aware of the work done by the late Muska Mosston [2] on a "Spectrum of Teaching Styles" and I recommend an article in the Spring 1993 British Journal of Physical Education by Anne Williams [4] entitled "Aspects of Teaching and Learning in Gymnastics" which relates the spectrum to your special field of interest. To summarise so far, and, I hope, to leave you in absolutely no doubt where I stand...

Teaching is a professional activity, needing considerable study, training and experience, and which is uncompromisingly linked with learning. For this reason a teacher must be in contact and communication with each pupil.

The contents of his or her sessions must be educationally valuable and presented as a part of an overall programme.

The various teaching methods used must be adapted to the learning potential and progress of every individual, even where people are taught in groups. They must also suit the contents proposed and the particular environmental situation in which the session is taking place.

All methods used must be ethically sound and safe.

To be a teacher is first and foremost to be an educator.

From that basis I would now like to turn to the question.....

Why is there such an interest and increase in "model-led" gymnastics, jazz gymnastics, aerobics sessions etc., outside schools and formal education: a form of activity which is now finding its way back into school programmes?

In Brasil I am told there are more than 4000 private studios, "academies" or fitness clubs operating in the Sao Paulo area alone, offering sessions, or series of sessions to improve fitness, health, physical attractiveness, and, in some cases, being promoted as part of "modern, consumer-orientated, leisure provision and social life in a club atmosphere". Although Sao Paulo may be an extreme case, I know that similar establishments are to be found widely around the world.

There is no doubting their popularity, or that at least a part of the general public is willing to pay for such activity. Moreover quite large numbers of physical education

teachers take such sessions, (many as an additional form of financial income), and some may also propose similar sessions with their pupils as part of their Physical Education programme in schools.

In observing this work and talking with many participants and promoters of this form of activity, I have tried to decide why this commercial enterprise, and especially the way it is directed and "packaged" seems to be so attractive. The following are some of those observations made, and the comments I have received:

Reference is most often made to the following points:

a) The very strong musical support which is used. The amplified sound, with a strong bass/drum rhythm, accords with fundamental body rhythms and evokes many people's natural movement responses to such stimuli. In some cases the participants say the stimulation is erotic.

b) As in the early days of mass gymnastics exercises, it is possible to work with a large group of people, each individual having a relatively small amount of individual space in which to move. In that aspect, there seems to be an economical use of space and time.

c) In private fitness clubs, although "working-out" physically, the person acting as a leader/model with a group often does not have any real contact with individuals, or an educational contract (albeit unwritten) to improve an individual's performance. Similar sessions are repeated at intervals throughout the day (or evening). The paying clients can "take it or leave it", if they are tired they can drop out, if they do not arrive, come late or go early, that is their business, and although the leader needs to be on show and at work physically most of the time, there is a little responsibility to educate on the shoulders of the leader-model. This is often called "casual participation".

d) Many participants are also very often dependant and not especially demanding. In early 'work-outs', before particular routines are ingrained, we can observe that if the model stops, a large number who are following and imitating his or her movements will be 'lost' and will also stop. Imitation and repetition can be relatively undemanding processes and many clients are quite happy to play "follow the leader".

e) The model often represents, or is adopted by the participants as, a desirable image, for example, of youth, energy, fitness, or possibly of sexual attraction.

f) Some, (but of course not all), leader-models show a tendency to be very ego-centric and exhibitionist in their work: seeming to be more concerned with focussing the attention of their different groups on themselves as the leader/model, rather than focussing their attention on those they are teaching.

In some places I have seen gymnastics sessions done in a dance studio with a large wall mirror where the leaders have spent the majority of their time with their back turned to their class, looking into the mirror and correcting their own positions and movements, with very little regard to what is going on behind them! To be paid to spend one's time in this way obviously has appeal for a certain number of people, including trained teachers who know the hard work needed to teach other parts of the physical education programme, using other methods.

g) In many countries model-led gymnastics has also been heavily commercialised for general public consumption, not only through the setting up of private clubs, but also in the sale of a whole range of small equipment, footwear, clothing, books and videos. Perhaps above all, such gymnastics are "in fashion" at the moment! In France, for example, to buy the footwear and clothing to be "à la mode" costs at least 200 US

dollars. With such a rich market to exploit, the whole weight and skills of commercial advertising may be employed to popularise such lucrative activity.

h) And finally, even going back to the days of Ling and Swedish Gymnastics, we accept there exists a serious scientific and medical background to this activity, of which the general public is now more or less aware. It is used in advertising such sessions and their benefits, and such publicity nowadays fits in well with popular ideas and concerns about healthy living, exercise and preventative medicine. There are real benefits possible. See, for example, Dr. Roy Shephard's excellent book [3] *Aerobic Fitness and Health* published in 1994.

Of course FIEP supports the continued reference to scientific theory and the latest research to direct all our professional work and this makes me even more critical when I see exercise being prescribed and claims being made which do not take into account such factors as the controlled intensity, duration, and frequency of activity, the correct positioning and range of movement of different articulations, and, above all, the correct adaptation of the gymnastics proposed to the physical condition of the participants as individuals.

4.SOME POSITIVE SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

I would like to conclude this paper with some positive suggestions and matters on which to reflect which arise directly out of the preliminary points and critical analysis made earlier.

1. Accepting that acting as a demonstration model and leader is just one teaching method amongst many, and one which is not always the most effective aid to learning, question its use every time you employ it, and mix it with other methods to promote the most effective progress of each participant towards the objectives of each session.

2. Liberate yourself from the dominant role of model and directive leader, so that you are better able to move around your group to observe, correct, and motivate its members. Try to give as much attention and feedback to individuals as is possible.

3. If leading movements, or following those of someone else, are among the selected (and quite legitimate) objectives of the session, exchange this role amongst members of the group, (and not simply by replacing yourself with one or two other participants who take on the role of "special assistants").

4. Ask yourself frequently if the responses which you have selected, for example, to accompany a certain rhythm, are the only ones by which to achieve the objectives of the session? Is there a place, and should there be, for individuals to work out their own responses? If you can include more good ideas, from more people, the session is likely to be richer in content and this demonstrates also that those people probably know what they are doing and why they are doing it.

5. Examine your teaching situation in light of all the factors influencing the effectiveness of your communication with each and every person. Check the selection, coding, transmission, reception and decoding of the "messages and information " which you are trying to pass. And try to eliminate or, at least, reduce the negative effects of the environmental factors surrounding your communication and inter-action with the participants in your sessions. Remember the great importance of feedback in both

directions.

6. If you are using amplified musical accompaniment, make sure that sound levels are kept at a reasonable level, I have watched sessions where the sound has been too loud to the point of distortion and potential damage to the hearing of those in front of the loudspeakers. The practice I have seen in some places of amplifying the leader's voice over the top of such music may allow the leader to be heard but it once again adds to the overall and potentially damaging noise level of the session.

7. Ensure that all the exercises you propose, and those you observe and correct if they are proposed by participants, are based on and performed with reference to the best scientific (and medical) knowledge available, to make them the most effective and non-harmful.

8. Don't accept uncritically all that you read in popular books on exercise or find on commercial video cassettes. You should be competent to make judgements and be selective amongst the huge amount of material which is available in this form. You must be personally responsible for that which you teach.

9. Present your gymnastics sessions in light of a global view of the exercise needs, overall physical activities and life-styles of every one who comes under your responsibility as a participant in the lessons or gymnastic sessions which you present.

and finally, if you wish to work with school children, in curriculum time,

10. Ensure that the gymnastics sessions you teach are planned and delivered as part of an overall programme of Physical Education and Sport, even though you may not be responsible for, or required to teach, all parts of that programme.

REFERENCES

1. Andrews J.C.: FIEP 70th Anniversary Lecture in LIDOR R., DAVID B-S, and ARTZI Z. Proceedings of the 1993 FIEP World Congress, "Physical Activity in the Lifecycle", published by the Wngate Institute, Israel, pp. 8-22.
2. Mosston M. and Ashworth S.: Teaching Physical Education, 3rd Edition, Columbus, London, 1986.
3. Shephard R.: Aerobic Fitness and Health, Human Kinetics, Leeds, 1994.
4. Williams A.: Aspects of Teaching and Learning in Gymnastics, British Journal of Physical Education, Vol 24 No. 1 Spring, pp. 29-32, 1995.

NASTAVNIK GIMNASTIKE KAO MODEL: PEDAGOŠKA KRITIKA

John C. Andrews

U radu je otvorena diskusija o jednom broju preliminarnih komentara i definicija čiji je cilj da se analize i komentari autora stave u odgovarajući kontekst i, obzirom na to, obezbede konceptualnu osnovu za dalju raspravu. Upotrebljeni kriterijum utvrđuje šta može konstituisati jedan međuodnos između nastavnika i mišljenja primenjivog u situaciji u kojoj jedna osoba prihvata ulogu lidera, i fizičkoj aktivnosti kao času fizičkog vaspitanja, ili pak samo kao jedan deo, gde se gimnastika predlaže sa ciljem obezbeđivanja izvesnih fizičkih i zdravstvenih efekata na učenike. Neke sugestije u radu su učinjene kako bi se, u takvoj situaciji, istakle pedagoške vrednosti i vaspitni kontekst.