

PHYSICAL EDUCATION, FITNESS ACTIVITIES AND RECREATION AS INSTRUMENT OF SOCIALIZATION

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Introduction

The basic intention of this paper was to look at the sociological aspects of physical education, recreation and physical activities meanings and their implications on the society, physiological, emotional wellness of citizens. In the foregoing discuss, physical education will be addressed in its entirety especially as an integral part of education and the contribution to the socialization of people through participation in recreation and physical activities.

To this end, the authors first and foremost concentrated on expositing some of the key contexts while drawing on some hypothetical illustrations. Thereafter the specific influence of physical education on socialization was discussed.

An Overview of the Key Contexts

In contemporary times, sociology has been viewed and defined. It has been related to the arts, social and pure sciences. Happily enough, the core points of all the views centre around the fact that sociology is the scientific study of human beings in their relation to one another. Sociology focuses on the fact of human togetherness. It studies the patterned regularities of social interactions as they exist everywhere in the world. It must be added that the above is meant to give a frame of reference upon which to act, since sociology is seen as a scientific study of the society or of human interactions or social behaviour.

When individuals learn to contribute to their societal demands, when they learn the ways of the group, become functioning members of their society, act according to its standards, accept its rules and in turn become accepted by the group, it is said that such individual is socialized. Next is to describe socialization.

It is the process of mutual influence between a person and his fellow men, a process that results in an acceptance of, and adaptation to, the patterns of social behaviour, it is the function of the society

to socialize the youth by helping them to acquire social experiences, social habits and social relationships. It is equally worthy to note that the individual youth (on whom physical activity has the greatest influence) or any person at all, ceases to be an individual. The self as it relates to others in the society is now integrated into it.

Further to the above on socialization, it could be looked at from the point of views of (i) The society acting upon the individual and or (ii) The society acting on the individual responding to societal norms, creed or set down rules, culture or tradition.

It is the aim of this paper to see if physical education, in its ramifications influence socialization and where found to be: to see if it acts as a tool to affect this process of socialization in any way.

Therefore, time will be spent to the discussion of physical education, its aims and meaning. It is a generally known fact that the field is an integral part of education which concerns itself with the development and maintenance of the human body and his mind.

Specifically, it helps the man to acquire social experiences, social habits and social relationships. It is its interest to develop the social phases of personality, attitudes and values by means of games, sports and related activities. In its broad sense therefore, physical education in this paper is used or referred to or shall include sports (competitive, and recreational) play and games.

Quoting David Riesman, a 1950 sociologist, "Play may prove to be the sphere in which there is still room for there would be autonomous man to reclaim his individual character from the pervasive demands of his social character". This clearly suggests that play enables the man to appreciate his environment and cultivate behaviours that would tally with the demands of same. Flanagan (2009) supported this that Physical education class can provide students with not only with the opportunities to establish habits and attitudes through situations for problem solving, self-expression, conflict resolution but also socialization.

Physical educators view play, as an accepted area of physical education that has the potentials for helping human beings to have better relations with each other and to be a dynamic social force in society. A close look at the theories of play more than proves this. This is well illustrated in the surplus energy or Spencer-Schiller theory, relaxation theory, inheritance or recapitulation theory, wish fulfillment theory and self-expression theory to mention just those.

To balance the discussions on the rosy and utopian ideals believed and credited to physical education, it is significant to note that all that is believed about physical education activities is not believed by all. Some hold that physical education is not a good socializer especially when one looks at the aim of an athlete who is bent on winning, quoting James Keating, a philosopher, "Athletes, properly speaking, do not play, they are committed to the pursuit of excellence on attempt to excel, surpass, go beyond the accomplishment of others" one would see that the individual devoted athlete thinks of self as opposed to "togetherness" which is the Key to socialization.

Good enough though, the two references are narrow in scope. It is a general consensus that through a well-directed physical education programme, children can develop skills for (1) worthy use of leisure, a socializing avenue. (2) Engage in activities conducive to healthful living, another socializing avenue. A child with appreciable personality will find it smooth to interact with his peers and otherwise. (3) Develop socially the individual by developing his character and good human relationship. An easy to ask question is how is this effected? The answer is not farfetched in that physical activities demand discipline, forthrightness, cooperation, obedience to rules of the game, movement from one type of environment to another, to mention just a few and (4) physical education contributes to the physical and mental health of the child. It goes beyond saying that a mentally retarded child cannot interact well nor can a physically maladjusted being socialize freely.

From the above functions or aims that physical education is pursuing, one can rightly say that it may help build a strong, experience and culture for which it is meant. Culture as we know expresses the basic values of a society and consists of the things that we have learned to do, to make, to believe and to enjoy in our lifetime.

Hypothetical Illustrations

At this juncture, the authours lend credence to the opinion that socialization does not begin and end in the school. Rather, it goes to the home and streets and hence, physical education as a continuing process at school with hands-on activities continued at home and where else socializing institutions can be found.

This is in line with the thinking of Brainreuther who said that “the exploration of the problems of the life of society cannot be squeezed into the narrow school frame of traditional discipline, the problems of physical culture goes to the home and stadia.

In pursuance of this, physical education has embraced sports in its scope. And here, it shall relate to both consumer sports and producer sport. The former denotes the spectators either at the stadia or at home watching the game; the later denotes the real active participants.

Essentially, the consumers are the greatest social beneficiaries in watching competitions; they are opportune to mix and interact. Think of a Nigerian stadium where people from all walks of life converge to watch a match and where men with different and diverse tribal and ethnic inclinations meet. They are forced during the course of the game to exchange ideas and views, knowingly or unknowingly they are socializing. It is not out of place to say therefore that once again, one of the major physical education activities has fulfilled its aim as a socializing instrument.

To many, physical education is a dynamic social force in that it satisfies or helps to sum up the basic needs of man. These needs include preparation for life as it was manifest in the lives of the early man. Also, it includes the need of the child to move around, to love and be loved. The mother, sisters, brothers on the father help the child to recognize his physical limits by giving challenges when the child is just crawling or walking.

The child who wants the ball to itself instead of giving it out to others for onward transmission and who is called to order by getting the ball from her and giving it to another, is indirectly been taught the socializing act of “live and let live” and ‘give and take’. In the same way, he is been led to appreciate the fact that it does not exist as an island but has some obligations towards others in a gregarious society Ruthirakuhan, Luedke, Tam, Goel, Kurji, & Garcia, (2012) .

The works of Simads, when he studied normal adolescent boys and girls concluded that the greatest need of these adolescents was opportunity for social participation and that the personality handicap was social isolation. Physical education and recreation were indicated to be means of avoiding this and fostering social inclusion. Also, the works of kight etal, that drew conclusions concerning camping experiences in the changing of social and emotional needs of children and adolescents more than prove that physical education is a dynamic social force indeed.

Further still, the need to dance is another area which, if allowed to flourish, aids socialization. Dance, we know is related to physical education. It goes without saying that this aspect of physical education and recreation has helped to fulfill their functions as instruments of socialization.

Physical Education also helps in the process of change. It allows for cultural interaction and physiological change. Studying students objectives in physical education, Schurr found that many fresh student high school girls mostly want to learn to control emotions and be good sport, and learn to loose graciously in competitions and challenges. The word “to learn” can note the eagerness to “change”.

A Nigerian athlete that is opportune to travel out does so not without bringing back some of the other land’s way of life. Ordinarily, it may be the other land’s dress, either in a small way or to a large extent, it has effected some cultural change and integration. Prior to now, Nigerians engage in

traditional dance only. But now, the social awareness is drifting to the “Rock” and “Soul” dance steps and the adulteration of the “Juju” dance steps.

In another sense, physical education opens up avenue of identifying individual differences especially amongst the sexes and aids either faction to behave so and in line with status quo and interact wholesomely with each other.

It is common knowledge that the society at large is an agglomeration and function of small groups. These small groups co-relate to effect a properly functioning whole. These groups may be quasi-groups or social groups proper. The quasi-groups refer to those groups whose members may be unaware or less aware of the existence of the group for example, the crowd, social classes, status groups, age groups and sex groups.

Interrelating Group Dynamics With Physical Education and Recreation

The social group proper which shall be main focus point is defined as “an aggregate of individuals in which definite relations exist between the individuals comprising it and each individual is conscious of the group itself and its symbols”. Further, it needs be added that a social group has at least a rudimentary structure and organization including rules, rituals, norms and ethics and having a psychological basis in the consciousness of the members. So, a family, village inhabitants, trade unions, Nations, political parties and members of all team sports any answer to the name of a social group.

Before a group can function well to build a society, it has to fulfill certain dimensional implications of (1) cohesion, (2) permeability (3) stability (4) Density (5) potency and (6) Polarization.

The question of how does physical education helps to get integrated into a unified society is answered in the fact that physical education activities are carried out in small social groups proper. These small groups characteristically agree with the definition of a social group.

To a large extent, all games and sport teams (groups) with no organization and whose members lack awareness as to the reason why they are brought together as a team and the common goal is doomed to poor performance. What is been driven at is that physical education groups or groups formed via physical education activities traverse the quasi group phenomena to a social group proper Kirk, Macdonald, & O’Sullivan,(2006).

It is instructive here to note that a quasi-group is fluid and variable and may give rise to a social group proper for example, a feminine sex group may become a feminist association, in like manner, a collection of people at a volley ball court from all walks of life for the singular purpose of recreation may develop later into a social club with set goals, standards and structural make up. When this happens, then the group is no more quasi but proper.

Another way of looking at groups from the stand point of physical education activities and recreation is from the point of view of primary and secondary groups. To the physical educator, the primary groups are his major concern. This is in the sense that primary group’s singular character of intimacy, face-to-face association and cooperation’s have great implications for him.

Groups founded through physical education have great physical proximity of members while the smallness of the groups are advantageous as examples, the volley ball team is made of nine members, Basketball, ten members, soccer, eleven members to mention just a few. Added to the above it its enduring character. Relationships made in the field of sport are eternal.

Athletic, sports and games are common dominators that bring youths from socio-economic levels together on a common basis. The athletes in school tend to be more socially mobile than nonathletic and, other things being equal, has greater opportunities to achieve upward social mobility.

The above presupposes sports and games as a giant factor in building an integrated society (through building integrated groups) and whereas, “an integrated social group is one in which there is a great deal of social interaction within the group and people are bound together by such

organizational bonds as common goals and purposes". In a well-integrated social group, each individual would tend to accept every individual in the group as close personal associate.

The group dimensional values are also found in physical education or rather that physical education enhances the propagation of these group dimensions especially if the group members participate in sports and games thus:

(i) Group cohesiveness is enhanced through sports. Physical education activities create in the minds of people the "We" feeling rather than the "they" feeling. It is common to see members of a team, especially a winning team "Nourishing their pride and vanities. They boast of their superiority, exalt in their divinities and look with contempt at outsiders". These attitudes when taken to the "external world" help to a large extent, in socializing the individual. There is pride in what the state or community or society does. The idea of patriotism is developed and citizenship is enhanced.

(ii) Team sport encourages internal cohesiveness in their play periods. The team members play with understanding and the idea of give and take is there in these groups. If these are transferred to the society there is positive socializing taking place. Because of the impersonal nature of their relationship, they can do the same in the community at large.

(iii) Group Potency is another realm of group dimension. This implies that the members identify themselves with the goings on of the society. This is true of team sports. A soccer star wants to be identified as such equally; a tennis player will like to play tennis or nothing at all. This goes with all the other games even in athletics where individuals want to show off.

If these are looked at as means of group potency, then one can see that physical education will help in this direction. Citizens will want to be known as patriotic citizens who owe allegiance to self, others and the state. (iv) A fourth dimension which is group polarization. This implies that groups have a common bond and are working towards the same goal or aim. Without mincing words, it is a known fact that physical education has set goals and ideals.

In the words of Book Walters, "physical education aims at the optimal development of the physically, socially and mentally integrated and adjusted individual..."

From the point of view of the crowd, one discovers that the crowd, a type of quasi group, though gathered from various places has the common aim of watching a match been won or lost by either of the teams. This in a way is a type of common bond or aim. When of course "Fan clubs" or 'Fan groups' are looked at, one discovers that the bond is stronger and more potent. It is clear therefore that physical education activities socializes through this dimension of polarization.

Also, from the point of view of players, they have the common goal of winning. When these polarized attitudes are transferred to the society, then there is all the reasons that can be advanced for physical education being a socializing agent through the group dimensional approach.

The whole place is rife with illustrations showing physical education as a socializing factor positively. However, when poorly handled, physical education can lead to unsocial tendencies which may have antisocial results.

For instance, where the programme does not agree with the culture of the people or when participant's culture is at variance to some of the ideals or methods of performing physical activities. It may lead to a rejection of the field and consequently, it sociological benefits. Bad handling of physical education programme in schools may lead to rejection, lack of confidence in oneself, aggression rather than friendliness and competition rather than cooperation.

Conclusion and Implications for Peace and Conflict Resolution

Despite these fears, one finds physical education and recreational activities positive socializing instruments more overwhelmingly witnessed, illustrated and favoured than its negative socializing influences. It could be deployed as active ingredients of peace propagation and conflict resolution since they exhibit strong characteristics of group dynamics. Nations like Nigeria have

adopted the core ingredients to generate after war reconciliation, reconstruction and conflict resolution in the past. This should continue.

Through physical activities, great strides can be made in achieving social progress and more satisfaction in living. Juvenile delinquency, race prejudice, intolerance and discrimination perhaps can be alleviated and progress can be made toward their elimination from any democratic society. Physical education can help to promote a happier and more cohesive and cooperative type of group living O'Leary (2012). .

It is also not instructive to note that, after all said and done about physical education been an instrument of socialization, it cannot achieve this in isolation of so many other factors.

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