

## **Physical Education in Norway**

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#### Abstract

Physical Education has a long tradition in the Norwegian Educational system, which is based on different rationales and arguments for legitimation. After a brief historical description and a status presentation the focus will be leaded the main three perspectives, which are emphasized through the actual curriculum. The explanation and discussion of these perspectives is summarized with some comments about new perspectives in the physical Education teacher training.

Key words: educational system, physical activities, educational competence, curriculum 2006, legitimating, superordinated goals, physical education teacher.

## Introduction

The general data and facts in this article about the Norwegian educational system are in the maintain based on website publications provided by the Norwegian Ministry of Education<sup>1</sup> and the "Norwegian Board of Education"<sup>2</sup>. In addition were used the curriculum guidelines for Norwegian compulsory schooling (K'06)<sup>3</sup> and the overview article by T. Moser et al. [14].

The Norwegian compulsory schooling, which is valid for all children in the age from 6 to 16, was introduced in 1997 after the so-called "Reform 97". From 1889 to 1959 the compulsory education was only 7 years; in 1960 two years were added. The reform of 1997 transferred the school beginning age from 7<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> years old and there-with one year more was added. Nowadays the structure of the Norwegian compulsory education consists of three periods: the primary stage (1<sup>st</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> grade), the intermediate stage (5<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> grade) and the lower secondary stage (8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> grade). These 10 years of comprehensive compulsory school ("grunnskole") are obligatory and equal for all children.

The current curriculum ("Kunnskapsløftet K'06") includes following subjects: Norwegian, Mathematics, English, Social Studies, Natural Science and Environmental Subjects, Arts and Crafts, Music, Home Economics, Christian Knowledge and Religious and Ethical Education, and Physical Education. In addition there are periods dedicated to special topics, which can be used for physical activities and on the intermediate grade (5<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th)</sup> pupils have 76 hours physical activity over the course of three vears.

It is necessary to start with terminological explanation for to get the right understanding of the subject Physical Education in Norway. The first point is the name of the subject, which have had different denotations. The earliest was legemsøvelser ("body exercises"), then for a period gymnastikk ("gymnastics") or gym, as the pupils sometimes still call it today. Since 1939 the official

Almost 100% of all children in Norway from the age of 6 to 16 attend compulsory school. In 2009/2010, this group consisted of 614000 pupils; 98% of them attended state schools [14, p. 514]. This group included also all children with foreign citizenship or immigrants, who have the same rights and conditions as Norwegians.

<sup>1</sup> http://www.udir.no

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> http://www.ls.no

<sup>3</sup> http://www.ls.no/K06/K06\_eng/

name is *kroppsøving* ("physical education"). This denotation is quite conscious used in distinction from *idrett* ("sports") for to denote the educational orientation, which looks at the individual personal development. The skill and achievement orientation, which is usually the connotation to sports, is just a subordinated aspect in this understanding.

The other differentiation is to see in elongation of the first point. Formally it is to distinguish between Physical Education and physical activities. Physical Education requires an educational competence, which is not necessary for physical activities, even if it possible to attribute a certain educational importance physical activities. The meaning of education or activity will in any case have consequences for the lessons in consequences in choice of the content, the purpose and the methodical approach and realization. And it is one of the most problematical aspects of Physical Education in Norwegian School today.

# Physical Education in the Norwegian Educational System

Physical Education has a relatively long tradition in the Norwegian school system, even if in the first educational law in Norway, which was formulated already more than 250 years ago, it was not by a long stretch a place for Physical Education. At this time, body, movement, bodily development and all kinds of physical activities were seen as a natural part of children's daily life and growing up. Therefore it was no need to take care, to emphasize or to educate. Quite the contrary, emphasizing the body and engagement with the body were not allowed and even related to sin. Mainly it was the political situation and military needs, which changed the opinion, and in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century for the first time body exercises were named as a subject in school. But, of course, this subject was only for boys, and mainly it was related to preparation of military training and building up a strong body for to be able to defend the country. In 1848, "gymnastics" became an optional subject, and in 1889, it became compulsory for all boys in city schools. Pupils in rural schools didn't get the same option before

1939. This and other remaining differences between urban and rural schools disappeared only 1959, when the "Common School Law" came out [6].

The importance of Physical Education increased extremely after the First World War, under the influence of the development and spreading of sports and recreation activities in the society. And again it increased after the Second World War, when values and pedagogical intentions of Physical Education and sports obtain a big relevance in the Norwegian educational system - as in the society in general. Until today the subject has a high acceptance and significance both in public and professional educational discussions. Following political and public trends, the main focus has changed from time to time, which means that Physical Education was reasoned and legitimated in different ways.

The actual major focuses are:

- a learning perspective: preparation readiness for learning at all; e.g. supporting attention and concentration; preventing dyslexia; developing social attitudes and competencies, etc;
- a health perspective: problems with overweight, anorexia or unhealthy growing up; prevention of physical and psychological diseases; mental and psychosocial wellness, etc;
- a lifestyle perspective: preparation and implementation of an active and healthy lifestyle; lifelong sport engagement; "friluftsliv"; "body and soul"; etc.

These topics and their intentions will be described and discussed after. Summing up Physical Education was partly a subject only for boys, in periods different for urban and rural schools, and in periods also different for boys and girls. In the last fifty years Physical Education has become an emancipated subject for mutually boys and girls. And the present situation is that the particular school has the option to decide for to give common or different offers for boys and girls.

## **Physical Education Today**

#### The Volume

Physical Education is one of the 10 obligatory subjects in the actual Norwegian curriculum (Læreplanverket Kunnskapsløftet 2006). The syllabus assigns a particular number

of 60-minutes periods as a sum to each subject. It is impossible to say something about the actual hours per week, because every school individually has to distribute these periods convenient to the local plans, circumstances and possibilities. The sum for the whole compulsory period is:

Subject	primary stage (1 <sup>st</sup> – 7 <sup>th</sup> grade)	lower secondary stage (8 <sup>th</sup> – 10 <sup>th</sup> grade)
P.E.	478 hours	228 hours

Calculated on the basis of 38 weeks of school per year it will be approximately 2–3 hours per week. In reality the pupils in the first stage (1<sup>st</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> grade) have fewer hours than the pupils in higher stages. At first sight it may surprise, but in addition to the ordinary hours in Physical Education the pupils have periods of "free activities", and "school and pupils options". These periods include usually a lot of physical activities.

The reason for this allocation is given on the one hand in a greater flexibility in scheduling and planning, which gives a possibility for concentration or focusing on special topics or for a special period. On the other hand, it is because of the structure of the country, which shows a very big spread in rural population. Around 40% of pupils attend so-called small schools (multigrated schools), where different ages and grades learn together.

It can be concluded that the situation for Physical Education in Norwegian compulsory schools has not changed in the last fifty years. There was no significant change in the number of lessons, but it must be also noticed that Norway has been all the time among the countries with the lowest number of lessons in Physical Education in Europe [4, 15].

## The Aims

In the syllabus from 1997 were defined four major aims for physical education, which are still leading as "learning perspectives" also for the actual curriculum from 2006:

"General aims for the subject are:

 for pupils to experience the pleasure of movement and by exploration, performance and creative activities learn to master a broad range of activities.

- for pupils to gain impressions and practical experience of the natural outdoor environment and develop their knowledge and understanding of man's place in nature.
- for pupils to acquire positive experience and knowledge of various forms of play, sport, dance, outdoor adventure activities and other physical activities as part of their culture and as a foundations for a physically active lifestyle.
- for pupils to build up knowledge of the human body in order to understand and respect different abilities, and to be able to safeguard and promote their own health. Pupils should develop a positive attitude to the body."

(Curriculum guidelines for compulsory education, L97, Physical Education<sup>4</sup>).

Physical Education is seen as a very important part of the general education. Physical activities are essential to the physical, mental and social development of children. The school environment should be able to compensate the lack of normal movement possibilities, which are partly disappeared because of e.g. changes in ways of life and leisure facilities. Children spend less time to physical activities, play, sports and outdoor adventure activities. Here Physical Education should prevent this negative circle and initiate a positive circle for movement engagement.

In the actual curriculum the special goals are formulated very broad as "competence aims".

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<sup>4</sup> http://www.ls.no/L97/L97\_eng/

These competence aims are not related to each year, but to the stages, that means, given after the 4<sup>th</sup>, the 7<sup>th</sup> and the 10<sup>th</sup> grade. How to reach and in which kind of movement or sport subject the goals will be fulfilled, lies in the responsibility of the Physical Education teacher. The methods can alternate between voluntary exercise, set assignments, instruction, and pupils' experimentation and creativity.

#### The Domains

The subject Physical Education is structured in main domains, which become more differentiated in realms from stage to stage, and which are built up on each other. These realms must be regarded as integral parts of a comprehensive curriculum. At the same time they are intended to show distinct directions which are explored in depth.

Grade	Main Topic					
1 <sup>st</sup> -4 <sup>th</sup>	Activities in different situations and arrangements					
5 <sup>th</sup> -7 <sup>th</sup>	Sports activities and dance		Friluftsliv			
8 <sup>th</sup> -10 <sup>th</sup>	Sports and dance	Friluftsliv		Activity and lifestyle		
11 <sup>th</sup> -13 <sup>th</sup>	Sports and dance	Friluftsliv		Training and lifestyle		

The main realms are formulated very broad. That is in according to the flexibility of the time schedule. The schools are very free and flexible to fill the broad realms with their concrete topics which should be related to the local and cultural needs, wishes and possibilities.

It is not quite easy to understand the subject and its implicit intentions just by looking at the several objectives and contents. It can be understood as a compromise of the two general pedagogical principles and legitimating for Physical Education: Physical Education as training of the physical (the biological ideology) and Physical Education through the physical (the educational ideology) [2, 19].

Physical Activity must be based on the experiences and interests of girls and boys alike. A special point should be to emphasize that pupils should be brought into contact with each others' interests. To build up a climate of mutual condense and trust, so that they will feel safe enough to dare to try out their skills in areas which they have not mastered. All pupils should experience types of physical activities and exercise, which are adapted to their abilities and physical capacities. Therefore all methods have primarily to start and to be related to physical activities. Also in case of the primary goal is focused on knowledge or theoretical understanding, it is demanded a starting point from practical experiences. This means learning of the body, about the body and through the body [1, 22].

Another principle is "learning by playing". Play activities should be the dominant activity, especially at the primary stage, but principally it is important at all stages. Play is seen as a basic learn activity for all learning, not only for body development. Children learn with all their senses and by actively using their bodies. They must therefore be given plenty of time for play throughout the school day, not only in Physical Education periods, also e.g. in breaks between lessons. Play is a way of maintaining traditions, giving the pupil mastery of his or her own body, and developing creativity. Play is a natural starting point for physical education. Beyond that play should support and consolidate the automatization and specialization of basic movements and speciality movements.

## **Status and Perspectives for Physical Education**

In generally there are no threats to Physical Education today, even if a discussion about necessaries, aims, values or legitimating of this subject starts periodically. There is no doubt about necessity of daily movement and activity of pupils. Research about people's health, changing of movement areas and increasing of inactivity has several times underlined the importance of movement [15, 16]. Health providing work and

continuous motivation for physical activity were named as Physical Education's most important goal. Physical Education has a high reputation among the pupils, independent age and type of school. Also Physical Education teachers', their colleagues' and not least the principals' view on Physical Education is very positive and the subject is well accepted [10, 11]. "In principle, Physical Education is accepted on a par with other subjects in Norwegian compulsory schools. Its marks, for instance, are of similar importance to those of any other subject" [14]. This guite high status can be seen in the context of that the Norwegians' attitude to sport activities is quite favourable. The enthusiasm for sports influences also the attitude to Physical Education, even if there is a not too low difference between these both subjects.

Of course, the society has taken note of permanent changes in leisure activities, which for the most part are reason of changes in facilities and possibilities for physical activities. To react on this and to try to compensate the Norwegian state has used in the last decades a lot of money for to improve and to upgrade the school gardens and the environments around the schools, for to stimulate to more varied activities and movement at all. The intentions with the actual superordinated goals will now be presented and discussed.

## The Learning Perspective (Basic Skills)

Approximately ten years the government had launched a "quality reform" [18], which partly was influence of the non-satisfactory results of the Pisa-Study, and which should look for an enhancement of the teaching and learning situation, with the perspective to produce better results. The actual curriculum (K06) is the first result of this reform, which has a significant impact on physical activity, but not implicitly on Physical Education. One of its central issues is a major focus on the development of basic competencies in compulsory education. These competences include skills in communication, writing, reading, numeracy and arithmetic and digital technology. In addition to these basic skills there are named competencies as social competence, learning strategies and motivation (effort and stamina). These last named, in

conjunction with the increase of number of lessons at the primary stages, lead to reflections about other methods or anyhow a variation of methods and activities. In these thoughts the reform dedicated more time to physical activity, because the increase of theoretical subjects has to be accompanied by more breaks and possibility for movement. The pupils should have a "period of varying physical activity in the middle of those days on which the pupils do not receive any form of physical training" [18, p. 20] (translation: HZ).

Another result of the reform is a "daycare service" at the primary stage. Before and after school time pupils can stay in school environment, have different activities, and most of them are physical activities. But persons, who are in charge of these activities, must not necessarily have any formal education in Physical Education. And here it shows a principal problem or disadvantage: it will be not seen as essentially or mandatory that people who providing physical activities and movement for children must have special qualities and competencies. A significant number of these persons have indeed not any formal training in Physical Education. The same problem still accompanies the Physical Education lessons. Especially on the primary stage there is little formal competence among teachers. In spite of several reforms and changing in teacher education, the formal competence of Physical Education teachers is not really increased the last 30 years. Nearly the half of Physical Education teachers has no formal training [10, 21]. The formal competence of ca. 25% is only corresponding to 15-25 ECTS, which means the minimum of what is possible.

In this perspective the understanding of Physical Education as compensation for academic learning situations has to be seen as a **Physical** Education's disadvantage of possibilities and objectives. The learning perspectives - learning of, about and through movement [1, 20] - come off badly, and in this view the (academic) status of the subject is designated a poor value. That may be also the point that Physical Education is not named with its special competencies in phrasing of the superior aims, the "basic competencies".

Although motor skills and senso-motoric competence has to be seen as basic for writing, numeral understanding and developing of learning strategies at all, they are not named explicitly. In other words: Physical Education can contribute only slightly to the academic learning and development. This understanding can interpret that Physical Education is first and foremost physical activities which are merely a device for recreation and a compensation for the academic subjects. "There is no reflection noticeable in conjunction with the activity, let alone an understanding of its pedagogical possibilities and values" [14].

## The Health Perspective

The primary argument for increasing physical activities has been all the time a good health. The ancient education perspective "a healthy soul in a healthy body" is still valid. Today it's much more important to find compensation and measures, which regarding children's poor movement environment and passive everyday life activities. The school is the only institution, which gets hold of all children and youth. Therefore school must have a key position to activate and to motivate to a more active life. Physical Education itself uses this argument more and more for the legitimating of itself: to learn and active stimulate physical and psychosocial health. This is nothing quite new already in the curriculum from 1939 good health was one of the main aims - but the perspective and the approach have changed actually during the time. Actually the main health argumentation is to compensate the poor movement because of poor daily environment of the children, to compensate the poor movement because of increased use of TV- and computer-activities of the children, and to build up more knowledge about the body and a more conscious use of the Questions and discussions bodv. about overweight as well as bulimia, or other actual bodyweight problems have to be approached as important problems of the modern society. Good personal health is the premise of good public health and a healthy lifestyle.

### The Lifestyle Perspective: "Friluftsliv"

Friluftsliv is a special Norwegian or Scandinavian subject, which can be translated to "outdoor adventure" or "outdoor life activities". But all translation can not catch at all the real meaning of this subject. Outdoor life activities have always had a big importance for the Norwegian people, in Norwegian society as well as in Physical Education. Friluftsliv is a special way of Norwegian lifestyle, which is strongly connected to the Norwegian life into and with the nature. Friluftsliv today has two roots: the first is the very old fashioned tradition to work in and to use the nature for to survive, e.g. hunting; gathering fruits, nuts, herbs, mushrooms; fishing; working with wood, water, snow and ice. The other is to use the nature as a recreation area in leisure time. This, the second root, Norwegians have overtaken from the English upper class people, who started these activities in the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Today this recreation aspect is the main reason for friluftsliv activities, added more and more of high sensation activities in the nature like canoeing, rafting, climbing, off-piste skiing, and other "survival activities".

Already in the syllabus of 1939 friluftsliv was named, however just in this meaning that physical activities should be mainly in friluftsliv areas. In the 70<sup>th</sup> of the last century, the importance of friluftsliv in leisure time increased extremely, also in school. Friluftsliv became an own subject, in equality with e.g. skiing, ballgames or swimming. Since that time the status and the of significance friluftsliv was constantly increasing. In the curriculum of 1996 friluftsliv represents a quarter of Physical Education, and in the actual curriculum from 2006 friluftsliv is a half or a third part of teaching lessons in Physical Education. The syllabus emphasizes: "Outdoor adventure activities figure prominently Norwegian life. This activity must promote the pleasure taken in physical activity and in our magnificent natural scenery, as well as promoting concern for the vulnerable parts of the natural environment. The impressions made on pupils can help them to understand their own role as parts of nature and develop in them responsive attitudes to natural and environmental protection" (Curriculum guidelines for compulsory education, L97, Physical Education, http://www.ls.no/L97/L97eng/).

The formal structure and distribution of the subjects follows herewith two strategies: the school and special Physical Education has to compensate the lack of friluftslivs activities, which in earlier times the families have arranged. At the same time the pupils should be prepared for this healthy lifestyle, which still should be the main focus in Norwegian society. The other reason is that with such open activities it is much easier for the schools to organize the school schedule in such way that for the first pupils can get outdoor activities and movement every day, and for the second that the weekly lessons in Physical Education can be gathered up so that it is possible to have a whole "friluftsliv day" every month or several times in the school year.

Friluftsliv and the model of "outdoor school" – that means to move parts of the lessons or the whole day outdoors – gives the schools a good

possibility to fulfill the demand of daily physical activities, without an increased number of lessons in Physical Education.

#### **Summary and Perspectives**

The major goals make obvious that the Norwegian Physical Education has a certain priority on the educational perspective. They show a very clear tendency that the understanding of Physical Education is predominantly characterized as recreation and non-academic compensation. This may also explain the low formal professional status of the Physical Education teacher. Been well accepted, but no need or necessity for special competency for his task. Only in the secondary stage, when special sport subjects come more in the focus, special sport competencies are required. Up to the 7<sup>th</sup> grade the teacher as a "generalist" can manage the needs of the Physical Education lessons. This has also characterized the teacher education.

The actual teacher training is a four year study with the following schedule:

Year	Autumn			Spring			
1.	Pedagogy 10 ECTS	Norwegian 10 ECTS	Religious / Ethical edu. 10 ECTS	Norwegian 10 ECTS	Religious / Ethical edu. 10 ECTS	Mathem. 10 ECTS	
2.	Pedagogy 10 ECTS	Norwegian 10 ECTS	Mathem. 10 ECTS	Pedagogy 10 ECTS	Reading / writ- ing/ numeracy 10 ECTS	Mathem. 10 ECTS	
3.	Optional 30 ECTS			Optional 30 ECTS			
4.	Optional 30 ECTS			Optional 30 ECTS			

Physical Education can be an optional choice in the third and/or fourth study year. That means the students can choose 60 or 120 ECTS Physical Education. In this system the teacher student can choose certain school subjects, but in general it would be expected that they could teach in all school subjects. The teacher training in Norway is mainly interested to produce "generalist", teachers who should be able to teach all subjects in school. The consequences especially for Physical Education were shown above.

In the course of the reform, which meets both the school and the higher education, the teacher education is actually in a reform, too. Mainly two points are in the focus: The formally 4-years education will be 5-years Master education. The general teacher education was valid for the whole compulsory school (1st-10th grade). The new teacher education has two different aims: a teacher for primary part (1st-7th grade) and a teacher for lower secondary part (5th -10th grade). The new education and teacher training give also the possibility to choose certain subject, but only in these study subjects the students are allowed to teach. This is without doubts a big improvement and it will increase status of Physical Education. But in addition, the further training of Physical Education teachers will be one of the most important tasks and

challenges. At all, one can expect that these measures will lead to a qualitative improvement of the Physical Education lessons, so that Physical Education will be more than recreation and non-cognitive compensation.

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