

Embracing democratic pedagogies through Meaningful PE: Experiences of teachers in North Macedonia

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Abstract

Meaningful Physical Education (MPE) is an approach that aims to ensure physical education (PE) experiences are relevant, enjoyable, and personally significant for all students. It emphasizes key features such as social interaction, fun, challenge, motor competence, and personal relevance (Beni, Fletcher & Ní Chróinín, 2017). To support these aims, democratic pedagogies are used to create inclusive, student-centered environments where learners have a voice and choice in their experiences. Together, MPE and democratic strategies promote a more engaging and empowering form of PE. This study explores the experiences of three PE teachers from North Macedonia in using the democratic pedagogies in PE and noted changes in students' behavior. The teachers participated in a six-month training program on Meaningful PE, as part of the Champions in MPE for Inclusion and Diversity project. Following the training, teachers implemented MPE principles in their teaching practice, with a focus on democratic pedagogies. Strategies included offering students' opportunities to choose activities, games, warm-ups, partners or groups, and starting stations or equipment. We applied qualitative approach for the study. Data were collected through individual interviews and analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis. Findings indicate positive changes in student behavior, including increased motivation, engagement, willingness to participate and express their opinions. Students felt a stronger sense of ownership and inclusion in PE lessons. For teachers, the process revealed unexpected insights into students' interests and needs, challenging prior assumptions and encouraging more responsive teaching practices. This study highlights the potential of integrating democratic pedagogies within the MPE framework to enhance student participation and support quality, inclusive PE.

Key words: *principles of meaningful PE, PE teachers, pedagogies in PE, democratic, children voices*

