

Difficulties and Challenges in Physical Education

Yesterday evening (31-10-2007), I randomly watched an interview (press conference) conducted with Mr. Ran Erez, chairman of the Teachers' Organization, with Meir Shavit, mayor of Dimona, and with Eyal Shavit, journalist, moderated by Menashe Raz.

The interview discussed the reasons and implications of the teachers' strike, with comments on the status of education in general and the status of teachers in particular. During the conversation, I was shocked to hear a series of questions and cynical remarks by Mr. Shavit towards Ran Erez: "A physical education teacher only works 24 hours in school! Does he prepare lesson plans? How can he be compared to other teachers? What does he invest beyond the frontal teaching hours at school? What's the difficulty in being a physical education teacher?" These and other cynical questions and remarks, which were heard while displaying contempt, amazed me and proved how unaware the public is of the uniqueness of the physical education profession in schools on the one hand, and demonstrated ignorance in the very asking of these questions on the other. It's important for me to say that I appreciate every profession and every teacher! However, the **physical education profession is uniquely one of a kind!**

In the following article, I will try to briefly review the difficulties, challenges, and complexity of the physical education profession in schools.

Risk of injuries in classes – Due to the nature of the profession and the importance of physical activity, students are exposed to risk factors for injuries that can be caused by various reasons, such as: lack of proper preparation, poor physical fitness levels, unsafe equipment, an unsuitable learning environment (that's what we have), wrong decisions and judgments by students during activity, overcrowding, weather conditions (danger of slipping in winter, dehydration in summer), violent reactions (verbal and physical) from students due to inability to cope with failure in a game or individual dissatisfaction with the dynamics of the lesson, and more. The teacher must be alert to what is happening during every moment of the lesson and respond according to changing circumstances.

Responsibility for safety – Physical education classes are characterized by social interactions and physical encounters between students. Physical injuries are caused by two main reasons: First, as a result of games or different types of activities. Second, as a result of quarrels between students over disagreements, unnecessary curses, or "jokes" about their classmates. The responsibility for safety and the physical and emotional well-being of students in physical education classes rests with the teacher

and is a crucial consideration in building lesson plans. Needless to say, every mother, Jewish or foreign, wants to know that her children are protected and safe during the lesson.

Gaps in abilities and motivation for physical activity – In the learning group, there are enormous gaps in abilities and motivation for engaging in physical activity. There are no homogeneous groupings based on personal abilities or learning levels. The teacher needs to interest and motivate everyone simultaneously. A large number of students in the class – on average, learning groups of up to 40 students! The large number makes it difficult to involve everyone in the lesson at the same time, especially in traditional ball games (soccer, basketball, volleyball), and the active learning time for each student is shortened.

The teacher has great difficulty providing personal feedback. It should be noted that in physical education, the teacher is required to provide a variety of feedback: quantitative feedback, qualitative feedback, formative feedback, summative feedback, verbal feedback, and visual feedback, and the responsibility for the well-being and progress of students is very great. The implication of such a large number of students is difficulty in listening by the student, a relatively short active learning time, and fewer feedback opportunities for each student.

Lack of proper equipment and facilities – First, the teacher has old equipment at his disposal. There is a lack of equipment and teaching aids in schools due to budget cuts. Second, there is a shortage of sports facilities (fields, halls, fitness facilities), and often teachers are forced to improvise a facility or field and adapt it to the curriculum. Third, there is exposure to external stimuli. The physical education teacher teaches outside, so he and his students are exposed to countless external stimuli during the lesson (wandering students, maintenance work, rehearsals and preparations for ceremonies, classes moving from place to place) that cause attention scattering during learning and teaching. These factors and constraints make the task of teaching physical education even more difficult!

Flawed judgment in scheduling physical education hours – Many schools do not consider or choose to prioritize English, mathematics, and science subjects when building the schedule. As a result, many physical education teachers teach simultaneously (sometimes even six teachers in parallel!) with a lack of sufficient facilities and equipment for everyone! It's important to emphasize that building a teacher scheduling system in the school should first consider the constraints of the lack of sports facilities for optimal and safe operation of students. In addition, it's advisable to avoid scheduling physical education classes in the late afternoon hours due to heat stress.

****Coping with natural elements and damages**** – The teacher is exposed in his daily work and throughout the year to weather ailments. He does not teach in a protected and air-conditioned environment. In winter, rain falls on him and he gets wet, and in the scorching summer, he "evaporates" from the heat and humidity. This teaching profession is the only one in the school that is directly affected by weather conditions. Physical education teachers suffer from sun damage in spots, skin wrinkles, and worst of all, skin cancer with its various symptoms despite using sun protection over the years! The teacher is also exposed to eye damage from the sun's rays, therefore he is forced to wear sunglasses to reduce damage to the vision system. Try to imagine how a teacher feels after six or more hours of teaching in a standing position, when he's dealing with heat stress and needs to give feedback to nearly 220 students.

Burnout and physical fatigue – The physical education teacher teaches while standing throughout all his working hours at school. One of the characteristics of physical education teaching is the steadfast standing (literally: physical and mental) of the physical education teacher throughout his professional life at school. The physical education teacher will continue to physically stand in front of his students, regardless of his level of education and teaching experience. Despite the ongoing physical effort and accumulated wear, he is required to show enthusiasm and high motivation to encourage students to engage in physical activity. Ongoing damage to vocal cords – Due to the difficult physical conditions that the physical education teacher deals with, such as: open field, nearly 40 students, and exposure to external noises (car noise). The physical education teacher is forced, throughout his career, to speak loudly and even shout so that all students can hear him in the open space. Such repeated vocal effort causes chronic hoarseness, calluses on the vocal cords, and even premature retirement due to voice loss.

Endless creativity and renewal – The physical education teacher is committed to teaching according to a curriculum that recommends a variety of topics and learning content and general literature recommended for reading. The physical education teacher doesn't have literature of lesson plans divided by topics! He must compose and adapt the lesson plans according to the conditions in the field, while considering and dealing with the factors mentioned above. In order to make the profession attractive, he is often forced to invent games and challenge his students with tasks they haven't experienced before. The teacher uses many and varied accessories, breathes meanings into them, and gives them interpretations to encourage physical activity. Physical education teachers often participate in training and conferences to update themselves and especially to get new ideas from which they can create relevant and attractive lesson plans for students.

Sports attire and youthful sporty appearance forever – How should a history teacher look? How should a computer teacher look? And how should a sports teacher look? All teachers are expected to set a personal example in behaviour and speech. The physical education teacher is also obligated, in addition to this, to wear sports attire, including sports shoes in all seasons (which causes chronic development of foot fungi) and weather conditions, and is expected to maintain a youthful and sporty appearance forever! Woe to the teacher if he is seen by his students smoking or tasting chocolate or daring to bite into junk food, because how ridiculous he would look in the eyes of his students. He must be true to his teachings and set a personal example in maintaining a healthy lifestyle during his activities at school and during his personal life.

Education for various values and health promotion – The physical education teacher is committed to developing socialization processes among students. The role of the physical education teacher is not only to improve physical fitness and impart sports skills, as many think, but mainly to educate for values and their implementation through a variety of games and motor tasks. The physical education lesson is the only lesson that allows social interactions between different students! The teacher educates for respect for others, equal opportunities, prevention of violence, and taking responsibility while setting boundaries and establishing rules and procedures. All this is done through a variety of games and tasks. In addition, the physical education teacher educates for a healthy lifestyle and for changes in nutrition habits and physical activity during leisure hours.

Varied and creative lesson plans – In light of all the above, one can understand how important and vital it is to prepare lesson plans and teaching units. The goals of physical education in the emotional, social, intellectual, and physical domains cannot be met without preparing a lesson plan! The physical education teacher does not teach from a book or read from a page during the frontal lesson. This fact creates a mistaken impression among the public, and it seems as if he arrives without prior preparation ("shoots from the hip"). It's a big mistake to think so, because the teacher is required to memorize the lesson plans, including dozens of lesson stages, combined with mental flexibility, allowing him to adapt himself to changes and constraints in the field. In conclusion, without preparing a lesson plan and optimal mastery of the material and teaching topics, the physical education teacher endangers himself and his students with many problems, some of which could end in injuries and lawsuits!

Taking responsibility and contributing to the system beyond expectations – Many teachers among physical education teachers in the country fill additional roles in the school and take responsibility for additional activities such as: trip coordinator, security coordinator, first aid provider, responsible for sports days and organizing events at school (ceremonies, educational initiatives, active breaks, etc.). This is in addition to participating in meetings, parent meetings, pedagogical councils, attendance reporting

and grading, supervising during breaks, and other school commitments. Physical education teachers often find themselves going to accompany trips in different grades of the school, both because they are popular among students and mainly because of the principal's claim that he doesn't have other teachers in physical fitness that he can assign the task to. The meaning of accompanying trips is extended absences from home and the teacher's family sharing in the burden of the trips.

The one engaged in a "mitzvah" (commandment) is not exempt from it – Unlike other colleagues for whom physical activity serves as an escape and release from the sitting culture in which they live; the physical education teacher is required, after dealing with the difficult working conditions described, to train in his spare time. Only those who engage in teaching physical education feel the difficulty, fatigue, and accumulated wear at the end of each workday. How hard it is to find the mental and physical strength to go train for yourself!!

The teacher feels that he has given so much of himself that he has no strength left for himself. In addition to all the above, the physical education teacher is forced to deal with prejudices and ignorance as demonstrated by the interviewer who unfortunately represents part of the population. Physical education teachers find themselves pondering the question, whether considering all the above it's worth continuing to teach in school?!

Or perhaps to develop in the private market and non-formal education? The private market and non-formal education include, among others, the following areas: personal trainers in gyms, coaches in sports teams, instructors in various sports clubs in country clubs or workplaces, and more. The working conditions and requirements in these places are relatively easy compared to working in school, and the salary can reach up to 10 times that of school! Indeed, good teachers retire from teaching physical education after a few years or retire after their sabbatical year, having been exposed to the big money and the relative ease of obtaining it without the accelerated burnout that exists in formal education.

In conclusion, if there are still physical education teachers who do sacred work and believe in the Educational Mission, **please protect them and their dignity at all costs!**