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# The Crisis of Physical Education in the Discourse of Mimicry: Ukrainian and Global Contexts

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## Abstract

This study presents a qualitative analytical approach through a critical analysis of data to critically describe, interpret, and explain the crisis in physical education (PE) in Ukraine and the world. The subject of consideration is the Ukrainian PE curriculum, which must be followed by all teachers when making lesson plans. Among the many different obstacles for Ukrainian PE, the study focused on one of the most important and hidden barriers, which is a kind of multiplier of the crisis – the culture of mimicry. Institutional mimicry is a serious problem that has been poorly analyzed, but it is actually very significant and often causes crises or slows down the progress of PE. Ignoring or failing to understand the factor of mimicry reduces the possibility of escaping a crisis or even makes escape impossible. The results show that the mimicry of PE is at least two-tiered: on the one hand, it is bureaucratic (external), and on the other, it is "internal" (based on tradition). Mimicry in the Ukrainian reality of PE is not advertised, but there is almost no alternative path for development. The constant mimicry of PE in Ukraine has created a paradoxical situation in which scientific expediency yields to politics and eventually leads to a new crisis. The study shows that there is a missing culture of influence on political decisions in Ukraine. Ukrainian PE teachers have a culture of mimicry, not a culture of leadership. The Ukrainian PE curriculum for secondary schools contains contradictions in its theoretical and practical parts.

**Keywords:** Curriculum, bureaucratic, tradition, policy, Ukraine

## Introduction

As in many civilized countries in the world, physical education (PE) is in crisis in Ukraine. A very indicative marker of the crisis is the number of people involved in physical activity both in educational institutions (direct marker) and after graduation (indirect marker). The number of pupils and students involved in PE is extremely low in Ukraine. In schools where PE is a compulsory subject (the curriculum provides for 2-3 academic hours per week), only 45.9% of students participate (Sportmon.org, 2018). As for the population that does not have any special time for exercise, the statistics are even worse. The results of an all-Ukrainian survey show that

> *only 3% of the population aged 16 to 74 had a sufficient level of health-improving physical activity (at least 4–5 times per week lasting at least 30 minutes), the average level — 6%, low level (1–2 hours per week) — 33% of the*

*population. Hypokinesis is characteristic of the majority of the adult population. Among children, the popularity of sedentary leisure is growing.* (Rada.gov.ua*,* 2016).

Compared to the countries of the European Union, the Ukrainian case looks bad:

*Around 28% of the European Union (EU) population aged 16 or over did not do any exercise outside working time in 2017, in contrast with the rest of the EU population, who undertook some form of sports, fitness or recreational activities in their leisure time. In a typical week, just over one quarter (27%) of the EU population exercised for up to 3 hours, 17% for between 3 and 5 hours and 28% for 5 hours or more. In the most EU Member States, the majority of the population carried out some form of exercise in their leisure time, with the highest proportion in Romania (96%). Athwart there were two Member States where less than 50 % of the population were physically active outside work: Portugal (45%) and Croatia (36%)* (Eurostat, 2017).

The Ukrainian statistics raise the question of whether people are incompetent or their own worst enemies. There are many reasons for sedentary behavior as well as many barriers to physical activity, including those of a meteorological nature (Sainchuk, Sainchuk, & Fidchunov, 2021). In fact, due to the lack of indisputable evidence that PE in educational institutions forms the habit of an active life in the future, there is cause for doubt in the civilized world about the feasibility of this subject. Since the late 1980s, some scientists have from time to time made futurological predictions about PE, even predicting its complete disappearance (Siedentop, 1987; Taggart, 1988). In the first decade of the 21st century, this issue is still relevant. In "Physical Education Futures," Kirk (2010) calls for radical reform as a guarantee of a stable future for PE in schools that would make its extinction impossible. Zeigler (2014) believes that the next 10–15 years will be crucial for PE and sports education. Crum (2016) states that in the final report of a governmental advisory committee concerning the desirable structure and content of Dutch school education in 2032, PE is no longer mentioned as a subject in the core curriculum.

Despite the fact that research leads to the conclusion that the PE crisis lies within the discipline itself, this reason, despite all its rationality and weight, is not the main one. Old methods can be improved upon and new approaches can be invented and implemented, but failure is inevitable. It is impossible to consider everything; the world does not stand still. The roots of the PE crisis are rather in the permanent diffusion of goals. As a result, PE must in fact adapt to new educational demands. Pangrazi (2010) argues that professional PE organizations change their focus every 5–10 years. Bocarro et al. (2008), Jago et al. (2009), and McKenzie et al. (2008) analyzed the history of the organization of PE and found that over the past few decades there have been significant changes and transformations associated with the transition from the traditional sports-skilled orientation of PE to a broader direction related to health, fitness, and lifelong physical activity.

At the same time, the subject of PE is unchanged; it revolves around the human body and corporeality.

One scientific publication (Sainchuk, 2016) briefly describes the methodologies through which it is possible to explain and interpret the causes of the PE crisis phenomenon in Ukraine's educational sphere. It provides an approximate non-hierarchical list of the phenomena and factors that have long directly or indirectly affected PE and which should be taken into account now and in the future to prevent the crisis:

*public policy; programmatic (legislative) lability/flexibility; public request for physical activity; social image of the profession; globalization demands; scientific paradigm of PE; articulation of the axiosphere of physical education itself; socio-stereotype of modern children (students); learning environment (hierarchy of subjects, the problem of their equality); Recruitment policy (entrants) for teaching PE, etc.* (Sainchuk, 2016, p. 88).

A content analysis of the scientific literature and conferences shows that the PE crisis is not often the subject of systematic research. Moreover, the European Database of Sport Science (Ecss2006.com, 2021) has accumulated all scientific contributions presented at the annual ECSS Congress since 1996. A search for the word "crisis" in the 30,100 abstracts produces only five results, and even these are remote in relation to our problem. Therefore, we believe that this issue requires special focused consideration for discussion and reflection.

## Methods

### Documents for analysis

We analyzed the Ukrainian PE curriculum for secondary schools as a statutory policy document that guides teachers in planning and teaching PE lessons and assessing students.

**Data analysis**

To achieve the aims of the research, we selected the method of critical analysis, which offers a heterogeneous approach to theory and a practice that examines the historical and socio-political dimensions of texts primarily concerned with the relationship between power and language. Critical analysis attempts to expose hidden power and taken-for-granted assumptions and also embraces multiple perspectives, gives space to unheard voices, and stimulates social criticism (Holland & Novak, 2017).

Critical analysis aims to produce interpretations and explanations of areas of social life that both identify the causes of social wrongs and produce knowledge which could (in the right conditions) contribute to righting or mitigating them. Moreover, these interpretations and explanations include not only those of the people who live and act in particular circumstances, but also those who seek to govern or regulate the ways in which they do so, including politicians and managers. A critique of some area of social life must therefore be in part a critique of interpretations and explanations of social life. Moreover, since interpretations and explanations are discourse, it must be in part a critique of discourse (Fairclough, 2013). Critical analysis is suitable for the scholarly investigation of texts and contexts that shape social processes and practices and can be employed for understanding and indicating the reason for the existence of a PE crisis, helping identify its hidden causes.

For a critical analysis of the Ukrainian state's PE curriculum, we used the three-step analytical framework developed by Rossi et al. (2009) that is in turn a modification of the work of Fairclough (2001) for critical discourse analysis. Nevertheless, unlike Rossi et al. (2009), in the second stage we conducted a thorough analysis of the network of practices that are located within and not through the discourse (the semiosis itself): a linguistic and semiotic analysis. According to Fairclough (2001), Stage 2 can take the form of an analysis of (a) the network of practices it is located within, (b) the relationship of semiosis to other elements within the particular practice(s) concerned, and (c) the discourse (the semiosis itself).

**Table 1.** Analytical framework

| Stage | Description |
|---|---|
| 1. Focus upon a social problem that has a semiotic aspect. | PE does not help students form an interest in physical activity and develops skills that are not actually needed in life. |
| 2. Identify obstacles to the social problem being tackled. | Obstacles to solving the PE crisis were identified through analysis of the educational network of Ukraine and the peculiarities of its management. |
| 3. Reflect critically on the analysis. | The social positioning of PE is localized in the Ukrainian educational network and other countries with dissimilar cultural environments. |

*Source:* Fairclough (2001), Rossi et al. (2009).

The stages were conducted as follows:

Stage 1 focuses upon the description of the social problem. In this study, the social problem is that PE does not help students form an interest in physical activity and develops skills that are not actually needed in life, unless students pursue a career in sports. PE can even create a negative experience of exercise, which is likely to be remembered later in life (Cardinal, Yan, & Cardinal, 2013). Because of this, a low percentage of the population in Ukraine is involved in physical activity. Eliminating differences between theory and practice in PE curriculum is seen as a way to make PE more relevant and socially just.

Stage 2 of Fairclough's framework is to identify obstacles to the social problem being tackled. Obstacles to solving the PE crisis were identified through analysis of the educational network of Ukraine and the peculiarities of its management. In Ukraine, there is no autonomy of educational institutions. Everything is subordinate to the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine. The ministry approves the syllabus and curriculum. For PE teachers to plan the educational process, they must rewrite that curriculum.

The official Ukrainian PE curriculum for secondary schools (Mon.gov.ua, 2017) was selected for this critical analysis. This official document was constructed in a working group in 2012 that included two PE teachers, two scientists, and three bureaucrats. In 2017, the new working group (three PE teachers, three scientists, and two bureaucrats) renovated the curriculum. This text represents the politics, values, and ideals that a small working group considered to be important for teachers implementing the curriculum and for all students in secondary schools in Ukraine. A text analysis of the official Ukrainian PE curriculum was conducted to ascertain the government's priorities in the area of education. The text analysis involved coherence and contradiction across policy goals, a structural

overview of the curriculum, a description of the key foundations and competencies of the subject, content and indicative assessment expectations, and the identification of official abilities and physical fitness discourses.

As part of Stage 3 of Fairclough's framework, we determined the social positioning of PE, localized in the Ukrainian educational network and other countries with dissimilar cultural environments. As part of this phase, we used the critical discourse analysis framework in the Systematic Literature Review presented by Mullet (2018). We were interested in using the relevant literature and approaches of scientists from different countries to find recommendations to overcome the PE crisis. The primary method used to search for studies was utilizing online library research databases (i.e., EBSCO [SPORTDiscus], Google Scholar, Web of Science, and Taylor & Francis Online). Our approach required a comprehensive literature search with subsequent critical analysis of methodological quality and findings of the corpus of relevant publications. Relevant articles were searched for and selected using the key terms associated with the PE crisis and ways out of it: "crisis," "reform," "revisiting," "future," "changes," "transformation," "tradition," "policy," "dilemma," and "strategy," all paired with either "PE" or "PE curriculum."

## Results

When attempting to understand the variety of factors propelling the PE crisis, the main thing is to avoid getting lost in surface details. The phenomenon of mimicry is a serious problem that is often ignored and under analyzed, but it is actually very important and often causes crises or delays in the progress of the institution.

The institution of PE and sports is especially sensitive to this topic. The study of the phenomenon of institutional mimicry allows us to get out of the "interior" of the problems of a particular science and take into account factors that are often overlooked. Ignoring or failing to understand the factor of mimicry reduces the likelihood of escaping crises or even makes such an escape impossible.

In the discourse of mimicry, PE appears in two aspects: the first can be called *"**external mimicry**"* (also known as ***bureaucratic***), and the second is "***internal mimicry***" (***tradition***). Ukrainian scientists have developed a specific "mimicry immunity." On the outside, it is an adjustment to the directive vectors, because nothing can be done; in the middle, it is an established tradition of functioning. Something is not very conducive to progress, and sometimes it is not immediately apparent what hinders the development of PE more, external or internal mimicry. Both forms of mimicry are interconnected; they are not isolated. Similar situations can be observed in other countries in the Western world.

***"External mimicry".*** Institutional mimicry is so natural in the Ukrainian system of government that it is difficult to imagine how a bureaucratically dependent industry could function without it. Many good, and in fact revolutionary, ideas simply perish in the bureaucratic circle. It is almost impossible to break the vicious cycle. Strategic planning and relevant "road maps" remain an impossibility when faced with the conditions and rules of public administration, especially with regards to an issue as sensitive as funding.

For PE in Ukraine, mimicry is generally an artistic practice for the self-preservation and self-defense of the industry. The historiosophy of the institutionalization of PE reveals the complete mimicry of this phenomenon, in which the internal logic of development is eliminated under the pressure of external, usually political, goals (Sainchuk, 2021). Moreover, institutional mimicry in the Soviet Union was the only option for physical culture and the survival of the professionals who worked in this field. However, today, when the system is more open, the sports industry still struggles to overcome the Soviet background and continues to wait for guidelines for its development rather than producing and defending them. If the science of physical culture and sports fulfilled its mission as dictated by its social function, then special efforts to prove the desired vector of the development of PE would not be needed: the facts and only the facts would speak for themselves. Only serious and lengthy scientific research with appropriate conclusions can provide the irrefutable argument that multiplies attacks on and campaigns to discredit the values of PE.

PE as part of the general educational system in Ukraine is an experimental platform unprotected from the political situation, all because of the lack of proper autonomy of educational institutions and scientific dominance. Because of the political involvement in education, fundamental principles and paradigms can be transformed with each subsequent change of government. In any case, a transformation is often declared and some steps are taken in the stated direction. However, the educational structure, like other state structures, is so clumsy that before a plan can be fulfilled, the "new" vector becomes "old" and loses its essence, after which another government begins another "modernization." Despite the various twists and turns, everyone does their job based on established traditions in a particular field and their own perception of the situation. Only when it is not possible to "twist" do they

integrate some parts of the "new" into the "old." It is not difficult to guess what results from this. Rational planning, timely control, and everything else that can be attributed to a properly organized process must take into account as many factors as possible that hinder or promote success and could prevent or minimize the negative consequences of the actions of reformers. However, it so happens that in Ukraine scientific grounds do not always dictate and condition reform. PE, of course, is no exception to this.

***"Internal mimicry" (tradition).*** Many traditions and ideas have outlived their usefulness in education in general and PE in Ukraine in particular. Nonetheless, they continue to exist as long as their followers are alive or in power. It has long been proclaimed that knowledge, skills, and abilities are the mission of education; now, they are competencies. However, it is not because of fatigue that knowledge, skills, and abilities have become connotations of the word "competence." The problem is something else altogether: a poor understanding of PE goal-setting. Goal-setting can be quite abstract, and it is necessary to be as specific as possible. In Ukrainian PE, this is generally difficult to do and, again, everything depends on the personal perception of those who embody the educational process. Some PE teachers "stand up" for the development of physical qualities and sacrifice everything else; others form skills in the sport they love and have professional experience in; others simply "throw" the ball that the pupils want – they could be recorded as fans of sports, games, or leisure; the fourth type imposes the ball or other sporting device that is available.

The PE curriculum introduced into secondary schools (Mon.gov.ua, 2017) formally legalized freedom of choice for the teacher and to some extent for the students, as the content of the variable component of the educational institution may be formed independently of the modules offered by the curriculum.

According to the plan, the teacher must ask students about the modules they want, but in practice the material and technical base of the institution or the teacher's loyalty to a particular module, and in fact, their competence in it, can be decisive. What if students want to do aerobics, sambo, horting, or cheerleading and the teacher only learned about these activities from the curriculum? The curriculum content for the most part is a mix of everything from motor actions to a variety of physical activities. There is nothing wrong with this uncertainty; the only question is what is achieved in the end, as the mission of educational discipline is to form competencies that will be useful throughout life. This is why funds are allocated for education from the state budget. Undoubtedly, students gain some motor experience in PE lessons, but after graduating from an educational institution they do not engage in physical activity – not the one they were taught in the institution, nor any other. We also cannot speak about the independent ability to organize safe motor activity. This is why in some countries, PE is not included in educational programs; some want to throw it out for good, and only scientific data on the potential benefits of exercise prevents them from taking steps once and for all to do away with this educational discipline.

**An example of institutional mimicry of PE**

In Ukraine, the entire process of PE lesson planning is carried out in accordance with the program of physical culture approved by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine. The physical culture curriculum for secondary schools (Grades 5-9) states the following:

> *Physical education in primary school is aimed at achieving the overall goal of basic general education. The purpose of basic general secondary education is: development and socialization of students' personality, formation of national self-consciousness, general culture, world-views, ecological style of thinking and behaviour, creative abilities, research and life support skills, ability for self-development and self-learning in global change and challenges.* (Mon.gov.ua, 2017).

In the last few years, another reform called the New Ukrainian School has been implemented. The main goal of this reform is to create curriculum that will be pleasant to study and will give students not only knowledge they can use in class, but also the ability to apply that knowledge in everyday life. Ten key competencies have been identified for the New Ukrainian School (Mon.gov.ua, 2016); these are comparable to the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council (Eur-lex.europa.eu, 2006) on key competences for lifelong learning.

The analysis of normative documents showed that PE is not mentioned in the key competencies for lifelong learning for the EU or Ukraine. A person must be competent in everything, be able to properly "operate" technological devices, but not their own body.

Since Ukrainian education has become focused on the formation of specific competencies, and for PE such competence is not allocated separately, PE must "seek" and "show" itself in each of them. Environmental literacy and healthy living seem to be the closest competence to PE, but the explanation of this competence does offer grounds to make this claim.

At times, it appears almost anecdotal how PE corresponds to each of the educational competencies or the language of the program – it is invested in the formation of key competencies. Here is an example of the "contribution" (!) of PE to mathematical competence:

***«Skills:*** *use mathematical methods during physical education, to create individual fitness programs, self-assessment of one's own physical condition, to keep track of competitions in various sports, to calculate and analyse heart rate at rest and during exercise, to calculate efforts to achieve the goal by analysing speed, distance, trajectory, etc.*

***Attitude:*** *awareness of the importance of mathematical thinking for fitness and sports activities»*

***Training resources:*** *tasks to overcome the distance, creating a menu of nutrition.* (Mon.gov.ua, 2017)

Here is how PE is "invested" in initiative and entrepreneurship:

***«Skill:*** *to fight, win honestly and accept defeat with dignity, control your emotions, organize your time and mobilize resources, assess your own capabilities in the process of motor activity, realize different roles in game situations, be responsible for your own decisions, enjoy your own strengths and recognize shortcomings in tactical actions in various sports, plan and implement sports projects (tournaments, competitions, etc.)*

***Attitude:*** *initiative, activity in physical culture, responsibility, courage, awareness of the importance of cooperation during game situations.*

***Resources:*** *sports competitions in various sports* (Mon.gov.ua, 2017).

It does not make sense to continue here as doing so will not change the essence of what is being said. PE is in each of the competencies, except its own. This is despite the fact that PE is a separate discipline.

PE as an educational discipline requires the allocation of its own competence; children require specific motor competencies which will surely matter to them in the future. This "Procrustean bed of competencies" which PE should mimic seems absurd and only confirms the marginal status of PE in the constellation of educational disciplines. If one desires to be in the program, they must adjust. No one doubts that PE should correspond to the educational vector of the state, but it is not clear why it is necessary to mimic non-inherent competencies. Mathematical competence is best formed through mathematics, algebra, and geometry rather than PE, biology, or language. The same goes for other disciplines. This only shows the marginal status of PE. In this context, PE is not so much an educational discipline as an interdisciplinary switch.

## Discussion

In Ukrainian sports science, despite the complaints (indirect or direct hints) and fragmentary delineation of the crisis, no constructive studies have been conducted. Research in Ukrainian specialized journals on PE and sports is full of evidence of the benefits of specially organized physical activity for both the physical and mental condition. Unfortunately, this is not included in the list of key competencies. At the same time, understanding problems for the future of PE and creating a vision for overcoming the crisis is in the long-term scientific interest of the world (Kirk, 2010; Konukman et al., 2012; Tinning, 2012; Sullivan, 2021; Ward et al., 1999; Yli-piipari, 2014; Zeigler, 2010).

For Thorpe (2003) and Casey and Larsson (2018), the PE crisis is mainly a crisis of dominant discourse that shapes and is shaped by ideology and habitus (Fernández-Balboa & Muros, 2006). For Kirk (1994), Crum (1993), Belcher (2008), and Kretchmar (2008), the PE crisis is related to identity. For Vargas and Moreira (2014), the PE crisis stems from a lack of epistemological identity in the teaching profession.

Crum (2016) states that the precarious position of the PE profession can at least partly be explained by the ideological legacy of the profession.

A significant factor contributing to PE's apparent resistance to change is the role that governments play in the construction of PE curricula (Gray et al., 2021). PE curricula are not politically neutral; they embody discourses that reflect and influence the beliefs, values, and practices of society (Hardley, Gray, & McQuillan, 2020). Multiple policies and discourses play out in educational contexts. The conditions of uncertainty and possibility, which some researchers call a "policy storm," within the institution of PE generate a great degree of uncertainty; this positions the various actors responsible for course delivery, including the academic staff and the course leader, as both subjects and agents of policy (Lambert & O'Connor, 2018).

However, multiple other factors also influence different approaches to the adoption of different criteria in making decisions related to PE. There exists a dynamic interplay between the external dimensions of context (i.e., neoliberal policy-making and pressures and support from the local educational authority and the school inspectorate) and the internal dimensions of context (i.e., school-based traditions, school demographics, and support and

resourcing for PE) in policy enactment (Wilkinson et al., 2020). Artefacts play an integral role in supporting and shaping curriculum policy enactment (Lambert et al., 2021).

Progress in the PE profession is slowed by a cycle of nonteaching and the dominance of traditional methodologies. Socialization factors operate to preserve and perpetuate the status quo of the profession, which is rooted primarily in team sport content (Richards, Housner, & Templin, 2018). Teacher socialization is a mechanism for program reproduction, and reproduced programs promise to maintain inherited patterns of socialization (Richards et al., 2020). Furthermore, PE teachers are resistant to change (Griggs & Fleet, 2021); they continually participate in reproductive practices and tend to make limited changes to PE curricula (Herold, 2020).

Scientists are constructing whole concepts that PE must adhere to in order to maintain its integrity. Some scientists see the most advantageous position of PE in the concept of the "hedgehog," not the "fox." This concept belongs to the field of marketing and was first developed by Collins (2001). Collins posed three questions to help organizations identify the hedgehog concept: (a) What are we deeply passionate about? (b) What can we be the best in the world at, and/or what can we not be the best in the world at? (c) What drives our resource engine? Johnson (2014) calls for PE professionals to hold a discussion to identify and disseminate answers to these three questions in order to ultimately identify the hedgehog concept of PE. His own position is that the greatest number of opportunities for students is provided by learning through games, which is a legitimate hedgehog concept for PE.

Hawkins (2008) criticizes PE professionals' lack of pragmatism to set values in this area. He emphasizes the futility of constantly trying to adjust PE to new requirements (recently, the kinesiology is mostly focused on health and well-being). He offers to reorient PE around the idea of the game. It is this concept that can produce more sincere feelings about professional values.

Pesce et al. (2018) declare that any redesigned PE proposal must start with children and their ecologies and be projected towards a grand vision. The indivisibility of the rights to health and play is a key opportunity for PE:

> *Active play is both a right to be fulfilled and a powerful means to promote the holistic development of the physical, cognitive and social prerequisites of health and civic engagement* (Pesce et al., 2018, p. 221).

For Kirk (2019), the shift in curriculum policy to health and well-being may well offer an opportunity for rethinking the mission of PE in schools. The growing prevalence and negative effects of precarity may provide a powerful rationale for doing so.

In order to maintain PE as part of the school curriculum, the profession needs a new paradigm. It is necessary to form a new way of theoretical thinking and new ways of action in practice. Crum (2016) outlines the main characteristics of the new paradigm by discussing the following issues:

> *(a) justification as a school subject, (b) objectives of "teaching movement and sport", (c) view of human movement, (d) didactical principles and (e) an "ecological" curriculum and institutional openness* (Crum, 2016, p. 238).

Crum (2016) believes that in the future, schools will provide sufficient space in their classrooms only for subjects that

> *(1) are emancipating because they prepare youngsters for a relevant, humane and independent participation in social and cultural life; (2) can be arranged according to the typical institutional status of the school; and (3) cannot be fulfilled better by other socialization agencies* (Crum, 2016, p. 238).

PE professionals continue to live on the marginalized fringes of education globally. PE in schools lacks a strong policy infrastructure as well as a multi-faceted, evidence-based policy strategy to enhance the position of the profession. Until kinesiology scholars start carrying the ball in the game of policy development to support PE in schools, the subject will continue to limp along as it has for decades (Van der Mars, 2018).

Harris et al. (2020) identify PE teachers and teacher educators as key policy actors in terms of what they prioritize, do, and achieve. These researchers are confident that

> *PE's vast potential to enhance children's lives across all nations and contexts relies on teachers' readiness and ability to confront and cope with issues within the field* (Harris et al., 2020, p. 42-43).

McCuaig et al. (2020) encourage PE practitioners and faculty to

> *create their own wicked problem parties, reaching out across disciplinary, professional and national boundaries to invite as many stakeholders as possible to the task of devising innovative initiatives that can secure the care, health and wellbeing of young people in precarious times* (McCuaig et al., 2020, p. 66-67).

Looking forward, Cooper et al. (2016) recommend three specific strategies for physical educators to assert themselves and impart their knowledge in an effort to build support for policy implementations that enhance the delivery of PE and physical activity in their schools and communities. First, it is important to develop a direct feedback loop between policy, its implementation, and its upstream and downstream effects. Second, PE teachers, school administrators, and other health professionals need to educate decision-makers and policymakers about the importance of PE and physical activity so that specific policies can be developed and implemented. Third, college and university faculty involved in PE and health-related fields need to recruit talented, conscientious, intellectually curious people into these disciplines to advance the health and PE profession. Stolz et al. (2019) argue that PE could benefit from a shift from a disproportionate focus on practice or practices to theory as a means of closing the gap between theory and practice. They equate work on reforms or change in PE with the myth of Sisyphus from Greek mythology.

The weakness of the humanitarian studies, especially those of a philosophical nature, and the tradition of mimicry reduces the chances of PE surviving in the educational field in the global capitalist world. Kosiewicz (2019) emphasizes that the alleged superiority of biological sciences within physical cultural sciences and the connected marginalization of the humanities – which, after all, constitute a necessary and thus unquestionable foundation for cultural studies – is therefore a clear challenge in the institutional field of physical culture.

The PE crisis is caused by both internal and external factors that correlate with each other. We should not wait for the situation to change for the better; we have to fight for ourselves. Education reform is now in effect a marketplace of business opportunities and commercial solutions (Ball, 2018). Today, scientists are recording a new challenge for PE: curriculum work is being outsourced to new actors in the global education industry. Health and PE has become a big business, and the outsourcing market is growing (Enright, Kirk, & Macdonald, 2020; Griggs & Randall, 2019).

Almost any educational project in the world has one goal: promotion in a broad public context involving not only professionals but also politicians. How many good PE projects and ideas are buried due to institutional dependence and PE teachers' lack of independence?

## Conclusion

There is nothing catastrophic in the phenomenon of crisis because the world does not stand still; everything changes over time and undergoes new assessments. Adjustments or even reforms are quite a natural thing for all sorts of institutions established by human society, even if they have long functioned almost flawlessly. Failure or crisis is an uncompromising reason to implement real steps to correct a negative situation.

Scientists constantly identify, describe, explain, and justify the need for changes in PE. In every country in the world where PE operates, there is something to adjust, improve, or reform. Depending on the country, scientists offer different options for improving and changing PE: from a softer redesign to conceptual and systemic reforms and transformation.

Kirk et al. (2018) suggest that even in a positive situation, a case can be made for the redesign of PE:

> *Even in apparently favorable situations, redesign may be necessary, possible and desirable* (Kirk et al., 2018, p.152).

In PE in Ukraine, there is a rather specific tradition of change; it is mimicry or adaptation to new educational goals or turns. Chronic mimicry of PE has turned this discipline into a pathetic process of finding unusual approaches to the modernization of PE and, surprisingly, the scientific basis is not always as decisive as it should ideally be. Institutional mimicry is a leading factor in the development of the PE crisis in Ukraine.

In Ukraine, performance discourses related to developing motor abilities for different types of sports continue to dominate as the main purpose of PE curriculum. No matter how relevant and timely the slogans and actions for change in PE curriculum have been, they have mainly embodied the theoretical section. The sporting core has remained unchanged for decades.

One of the obstacles to dealing with the PE crisis is the need for interactions and communications involving all stakeholders at different levels of the process of producing policy and institutional change to be realized. The problem of the so-called "crises" of educational disciplines in the post-Soviet countries exists because there is a permanent transition from educational authoritarianism to educational liberalism. However, this process is not necessarily natural or even accepted by all, especially those who are accustomed to the Soviet style of imposition and dictatorship in government. The missing culture of influence on political decisions exists not only among PE

teachers, but among all others as well. Teachers have a culture of mimicry, not a culture of leadership. There are no professional societies like SHAPE America, and there is no movement in this direction. Therefore, mimicry will remain a reality for PE in Ukraine for a long time.

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