

The Exclusion of Fencing Within the Curriculum of Schools of the Valencian Community

Laura Ruiz-Sanchis^a, Concepcion Ros^a

Abstract

One of the least selected contents by teachers of physical education (PE) in high school is the combat sport. Several authors have reported the neglect suffered by these activities in the Spanish school environment, stating a number of social prejudices and beliefs that affect their selection in school, e.g., they are aggressive and dangerous. Fencing is usually not included for several reasons: lack of knowledge about sport, its complexity, the cost of practice materials, lack of teaching materials, and the limited researches. This paper presents the results of a survey of 106 PE teachers of Valencia (Spain) in order to know what are the main causes that affect the non-selection of fencing as a sport in school, with emphasis on the lack of training and materials, both specific in fencing's learning.

Keywords

Fencing, school, selection, curriculum, physical education (PE)

Since Spanish educational reform in 1990, the physical education (PE) takes a key role in the educational context, promoting comprehensive development of students at the motor, intellectual and attitudinal contents (Diaz 1999: 59-65). Recently, it is noted that the trends and practices have varied gradually, therefore the number of physical activities and sports programs changes and increases. In this new approach and within the block of "games and sports" (OLE 2006), several adversary activities are collected, among which are combat sports, such as content that facilitates achieving the overall objectives marked in the curriculum for the PE (V. Carratala and E. Carratala 2004).

The sports content within the PE of Obligatory Secondary Education (ESO) is among the most selected teaching schedules, as claimed by studies conducted locally (Zabala, Viciano, and Lozano 2002;

Salinas and Viciano 2005) or at national level, as Garcia Ferrando and Llopis (2010) provided in the study of habits of sports in the Spanish citizens.

Regarding the selection of different sports in the educational program, it is recommended to be aware of the importance of common culture that influences curriculum's design (Diaz 1999; Blazquez 2001). Furthermore, in teaching practice, it is necessary for a reflection on some aspects such as teaching the most appropriate model in each situation, the selection of the most appropriate contents to be taught, how it is going to propose, what process will continue its

^aCatholic University of Valencia, Spain

Correspondent Author:

Laura Ruiz-Sanchis, Catholic University of Valencia, Ramiro de Maeztu, 46900 Torrent, Valencia, Spain
E-mail: laura.ruiz@ucv.es

application, and what are the most appropriate activities for students in each context (Del Valle and Garcia 2007: 37-40).

From this point of view, combat games give this process a new approach to the practice of skills and abilities that will contribute positively to the creation of new driving habits that will help students to prepare their autonomy and responsibility, to mobilize their understand, and to diversify skills and knowledge in the motor domain (V. Carratala and E. Carratala 2004). Combat activities can thus be included in the programs and plans of PE school, extracurricular, sports initiation and recreation, thus contributing to the education of the students (Molina and Villamon 2001).

Fencing is an individual mode of combat and opposition, where actions take place in the presence of the adversary and motor behavior of both opposite intentions (Alarcia, Alonso, and Saucedo 2000).

Within adversary sports, fencing is ideal for school, for its unique characteristics. This specialty gathers a large number of educational values within the very essence of sport, such as: improvements over the strategic thinking, behavior, attitudes, creativity and socialization. To adapt it to the educational context, teachers must modify the sport so that students have access to this practice and can work throughout with a "sport of situation" as fencing is (Iglesias, Anguera, and Gonzalez 2007). In other words, the use of fencing as an educational resource for the development of skills and abilities from a psychological, psychomotor, cognitive, emotional, social and attitudinal, is an appropriate activity to show respect to their rivals, referees, teachers and materials (Ruiz-Sanchis, Bastida, and Ros 2011).

NO VARIABLES INFLUENCING SELECTION OF FENCING

Despite the contributions mentioned, teachers do not select the fencing as content. According to Robles

(2008), the problem lied in five variables that influenced their choice of content in schools. These variables are: academic training of teachers, teacher experiences and interests, demands and interests of students, facilities and available materials to the school, and lack of educational proposals. Other authors (Castarlenas 1990; V. Carratala and E. Carratala 2004; Molina and Villamon 2001; Espartero and Gutierrez 2004) have shown that marginalization suffered by fighting sport in schools was due to the widespread view of teachers: they perceived them as violent.

Also, teachers keep in mind that selection of school programming content depends on their experience as student, and in different sports. In most cases, this selection is conditioned for having practiced in adolescence or early adulthood (Castejon 2005). At this point, fencing stands them as a great unknown and therefore, a great disadvantage in the selection of sports content, influenced by the beliefs and the lack of domain that PE teachers have on it (Espartero and Gutierrez 2004; Ruiz-Sanchis et al. 2011).

Fencing specialist authors such as L. Lodetti and G. Lodetti (1995) and Toran (1995) considered the two basic reasons for non-selection of fencing: the high cost of materials and the complexity of the sport. Material cost has been reduced by the possibility of using plastic materials that reduce equipment weight. Other authors reported that in addition, this new material increased the safety of the activity and had enormous methodological and didactic potential, unthinkable barely 10 years ago (Alarcia et al. 2000: 16-18).

For all these reasons, this study tried to know what they know, how they act, what they think and what they need about the content of the fencing at the school.

Do You Know of Fencing

In a study by Villamon, Espartero, and Gutierrez

(2001), before the arrival of the Bologna University System to Spanish universities, the presence of combat sports in the curriculum of the National Institutes of Physical Education (NIPE) and Faculties Science of Physical Activity and Sport (FSPAS) of Spain, could be studied, confirming that judo is an integral part as a core learning, compulsory and optional subject in the curriculum of almost all the centers. However, only five centers chose fencing as optional, or in other ways.

Many authors (Brousse 2002; Molina and Castarlenas 2002) have pointed out the importance of the inclusion of martial arts in the curriculum of PE, on the grounds that the sport of wrestling is a comprehensive educational activity (Iglesias et al. 2007). Actually, the inclusion of control activities in the FSPAS graduates curriculum does not show the real importance of those sports; there is a low presence of those contents in PE school in Spain, unlike what happens in other countries with similar cultural and geographical habits (Theeboom and De Knop 1999). In most European countries such as Italy, France, Germany, etc., fencing is not only popular as a federative sport but in recent years the interest of introducing this sport in PE sessions at school has been increased (Estevan et al. 2011).

In Spain, it shows a great lack of content control in the school PE curriculum. In the study on the practice of combat sports, carried out with students of FSPAS (Villamon et al. 2001), only 1.3% of students surveyed received classes related to these activities, supporting numerous authors who have denounced the neglect suffered by such activities in the Spanish school environment (Brousse, Villamon, and Molina 1999; Molina and Castarlenas 2002; Ruiz-Sanchis et al. 2010).

The data obtained in the work of Villamon et al. (2005) started from a preliminary study whose purpose was to identify the previous experience in combat sports of college students of the Bachelor of FSPAS in Valencia and Leon. From the participants,

49.5% reported previous experience. When they were asked about what were the most practiced combat sports, they selected 16 sports. Judo ranked first (37.81%), karate in second (25.37%), and taekwondo in third place (17.91%). The remaining 18.91% is split between 13 modalities. Fencing is not among the sports played. The results of this study are consistent with increased practice and federated license number of these disciplines in this country. In combat sports, fencing is found in the seventh place with 7,335 licenses compared to 107,850 judo licenses (Superior Council Sports 2013). Ranking established in this study shows a clear trend of future teachers of PE toward Oriental modalities (Villamon et al. 2005). Recently, there is an expansion of Asian martial arts, to the detriment of Occidental combat sports where fencing is including. However, these sports, as Theeboom and De Knop (1999) explained, are not practiced following their essence, which is transformed or modified with Western habits, establishing clear differences between the original practice at a technical level and at a philosophical level.

How to Act in Front of the Fencing

In relation to the contents of the blocks of PE, Viciano and Zabala (2004), on work with Granada faculty, analyzed the main factors influencing their choice when selecting the blocks or other contents of the PE as in ESO. The superiority in their choice was first fitness-health, followed by motor coordinative qualities, and games and sports. This may be because teachers have a greater mastery of these contents (Castejon et al. 2001), and throughout their training, at different stages of the education system, they have had experiences and acquired knowledge about them (Matanin and Collier 2003).

Research carried out by Dos Santos et al. (2011) presented the results of the application of a subject called "Opposition Games", among students in the Bachelor of PE of Federal University of Parana

(FUPR) in Brazil. The study aims to determine, once completed the subject, what is the interest of future professionals in applying opposition games. Most respondents (73%) believe that the opposition games are important in training and that the subject has offered the necessary resources for the future implementation of these activities in schools. However, this positive view decreases when asked about the feasibility and applicability of the opposition games at school, as 54% say they do not have the confidence to carry them out in the educational center. In this sense, the conclusions are interesting in a study by Ruiz-Sanchis et al. (2011) with students in grades 4th and 5th of the Bachelor of FSPAS of the Catholic University of Valencia (CUV). They gave a positive prediction rate of 49.5% for the future selection of opposition games or at school activities, coinciding two factors, initial training and practice in school.

Furthermore, the demands and interests of students are important factors that should guide planning (Viciano and Requena 2002). In this sense, a study of faculty of Granada by Zabala et al. (2002) revealed who practiced sports in PE class. According to the students of this research, it was the teacher who decided, in 83.11% of cases, compared to 10.55% of the time in which students were those who chose, and 6.33% when the decision was made by teacher and students jointly. Students and teachers had coincidence between their practiced sports in PE sessions. Students reflected their preferences in the following order: volleyball, soccer, basketball, badminton, table tennis, hockey, and athletics. Thus, the most demanding sports are almost exactly the most practiced (Zabala et al. 2002), and this has greatly influenced the social value of sports that exists in society, which reaches students through media, sports organizations, and most especially, through parents. In this sense, and according to the list of sports defendants, students currently receiving very few stimuli associated with the practice of combat sports, compared with those who may receive in

relation to other sports (Robles 2008).

What Think of Fencing

There is a misconception that combat sports are aggressive behavior and therefore are not selected in the classroom (Thabot 1999). According to Brown and Johnson (2000), the practice of martial arts provided an alternative view, which can help overcome the traditional mind/body dualism, which historically drew the Occidental PE. They also highlighted the link between martial arts and non-violence, to develop carefully selected physical experiences, but oriented toward the elusive, rather than the violent kick permission (Lamarre and Nosanchuk 1999; Brown and Johnson 2000). Heyden et al. (1999) emphasized its utilitarian aspect. With the results of their study on aggression and the use of various types of defense before it, the authors believed that personal defense could be integrated in PE. Then, it is reasonable to believe that introduction of non-traditional content in programming raises students interest in the novelty and consequently in their motivation. Combat activities motivate very often the students; on the one hand, because they are not traditional content within the PE and on the other hand, the fight is used to be considered taboo, "sightseeing", and it also results in a incentive (Annicchiarico 2006).

Bastida, Ros, and Ruiz-Sanchis (2011) published data of a study with 106 teachers of Valencia, who found no significant differences in the importance given to the teachers to the danger and risk of fencing: 86.8% thought that the content was not dangerous, 67% believed that it promoted aggressiveness, and 73.6% believed that it was risky for students. It is concluded that teachers' beliefs about the dangerousness, risk and aggressiveness of fencing as school sports are not a determining factor when choosing the content.

V. Carratala and E. Carratala (1999) believed that parents had great importance as agents of socialization, as there was a high correlation between the interests of

parents toward sport, and sport participation levels of children (Castillo and Balaguer 1998; Garcia Ferrando and Llopis 2010).

What Need for Fencing

There are teachers who teach sports content in terms of facilities and materials that schools have. Robles (2008) highlighted the high percentage of teachers teaching in their particular sports classes considering the material available at the center: 57.6% of teachers agreed with this statement, and 25.6% totally agreed; these data were similar to those obtained by Viciano and Zabala (2004). According to Castejon (2005), the sports facilities in schools were made to practice certain traditional sports like football, basketball and handball.

Regarding the specificity of facilities, in the case of combat sports indoor facility would be needed. Brousse and Matsumoto (1999) noted that there were few centers with adequate facilities for these sports but fencing in schools can be done without this facility, because there were no falls, projections, or floor work and youth practiced this mode with footwear, so the floor can be different. For fencing, practice materials are more important than the facilities. "Materials are not required for the game, but they are very valuable to increase student interest in the activity" (Palacios, Toja, and Abraldes 2001: 1).

Among materials for fencing practice in the classrooms of PE, various proposals can be found: first, in the market there are specific materials as the sword, the mask and some of the body-guards of various brands, and second, that does not involve a burdensome economically investment for the center. There is a possibility of recycling alternative material or modifying it by workmanship by the students themselves. The reuse of materials allows us to include fencing in school and work aspects related to values education through an awareness of the consumer in today's society and the possibility of preserving the natural environment.

In this sense, the cross-cutting subject of consumer education defines a set of attitudes such as the assessment and care of facilities and equipment. Teachers must find alternatives to sophisticated materials or prohibitively expensive, so, it is possible to substitute them by other materials or they can be manufactured by the students themselves.

Ponce de Leon et al. (1999) concluded about an interdisciplinary program on environmental education, based on production of teaching materials and games in PE, that the student has a high level of motivation toward this activity and a large involvement of the whole group. Additionally, reuse of material allows the development of other values, for example, creativity (Rodriguez, Quintana, and Lindell 2009).

On the other hand, Robles (2008) informed that in the specific literature, the educational proposals in connection with combat sports grip, which facilitated the implementation of the same from an educational-training model, were very much reduced (Brousse et al. 1999; Camerino and Gutierrez 2011). Moreover, most of them are aimed at teachers, to some extent known or combat sports dominate grip and hit, or specific praxiology dominates these modalities (Robles 2008). In case of fencing, teachers perceive a lack of control by the ignorance of the mode, but there is great interest of teachers in learning the basics of fencing, spending their free time for it. The study by Ruiz-Sanchis et al. (2011) confirmed that. For the participant sample, there is a significant lack of curriculum materials adapted to the work of PE. According to Dos Santos et al. (2011), these data were also related to the number of publications related to combat sports—only 2.9% of those associated with these sports. The main theme in those research was judo biomechanics (Correia 2010), showing the almost total absence of fencing content.

This gives an idea of the complexity of the problem and the difficulty of introducing this sport at the school. Therefore, the aim of this survey is to know the real reasons that influence teachers when

Table 1. Variables, Indicators and Questionnaire Items Designed

Variable	Indicator	Item
Do you know about fencing	Knowledge Combat sports	1, 11
How to act in front of the fencing	Training Difficulty	3, 13, 2, 5
What do you think of fencing	Aggressiveness Dangerous and risks Motivating	10, 4, 14, 8, 7
What need to know of fencing	Formation Materials	6, 9, 12, 15

teachers select the sports.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sample

The sample covers professional secondary school teachers in PE who wanted to participate freely, by sending a questionnaire to the 722 centers of secondary education, with the final participation of 106 teachers (62 males and 44 females).

Instrument

The questionnaire designed for this study has been validated by the “technique of judges” with 15 closed response items, at a Likert-type scale: “1” strongly disagree, and “5” strongly agree. The variables revolve around the teacher figure and the choice of the sport of fencing, and finally there are four questions: Do you know about fencing? How to act in front of the fencing? What do you think of fencing? And what need to know of fencing? (see Table 1).

The four sub-scales show acceptable internal consistency. They consist of the following constructs with corresponding Cronbach’s alpha coefficients: (1) training and difficulty (.70); (2) aggressiveness and dangerousness (.78); (3) knowledge and motivation (.89); and (4) training and curriculum materials (.75), with a total value of $\alpha = .74$, suitable for research on attitudes (Perez-Juste 1983).

To analyze the results, the statistical software

(SPSS v17.0) has been implemented. It has performed a descriptive analysis and differential analysis using *T*-student (independent samples) χ^2 and analysis of variance (ANOVA one way).

RESULTS

Among the teachers in the sample, 72.7% claim to know the sport of fencing, but only 33% considered capable of implementing a teaching unit (TU) of fencing designed by themselves. On the other hand, 72.6% say that fencing is an easy sport to understand and teach for their students; 76.4% believe that in order to apply the TU they require specific training; and 43.4% are fully willing to invest their free time in learning the sport.

About 75.5% of teachers value the fencing as a motivating content for them and 62.3% say that it is also for their students. In this sense, they found significant differences between younger women (20-30 years old), who valued this sport as motivating and had higher score on the view that their students would like to fence in PE class ($p = .03$).

On the other hand, only 13.2% believe that fencing is dangerous and aggressive for their students; 67% consider that it discourages aggressiveness; and 72.6% of teachers think that it is risky for their students. In the assessment of fencing as an aggressive, dangerous and risky sport for students, older women (31%) admit that it is a dangerous sport, while in the

case of men, most experts believe that it is not a dangerous or aggressive sport ($p = .01$).

Regarding the opinion of teachers about whether there should be more fencing materials, 86.8% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that it should be so. Finally, the poll found that 34.9% agreed that the fencing material is expensive to carry out a TU at their center.

DISCUSSION

The data obtained show that the type of fencing is known by teachers but not deep enough to apply a TU in their classes. They feel poorly trained, with 37.7% of teachers who do not take place in their classrooms. As Mendoza, Sagrera, and Batista (1994), and V. Carratala and E. Carratala (2004) said, the contents that were not mastered for teaching were not selected, as fencing happened.

Teachers do not perceive fencing as a particularly complex activity, and 72.6% believe that it is easy to learn and teach, slightly distorting the idea proposed by Saucedo et al. (2009): it is a complex sport. Teachers, in general, are interested in receiving any training or previous experience about fencing, with 76.4% of teachers who are willing to invest their free time in learning mode, which is important because, as Robles (2008) exposed, teachers need prior academic training and practical experience. It is noteworthy that 86.8% of teachers confirm the lack of curriculum materials adapted to the school environment, confirming what Saucedo et al. (2009) and Robles (2008) said, and it is proposed in the introduction of this article. Regarding the materials for fencing practice, only 35% of respondents believe that the fencing material is expensive, not being a direct cause for the lack of practice of fencing in school.

Finally, teachers think about contents of the fencing at school as a motivating activity for themselves and their students, and believe that this is an interesting educational resource for the

development of specific skills and general skills (Iglesias et al. 2007; Ruiz-Sanchis et al. 2011). It is further shown their displeasure against certain prejudices (Villamon et al. 2005), as it is a modality that promotes aggression and that can be dangerous when put into practice in secondary schools.

CONCLUSIONS

Teachers are aware of the sport of fencing, but do not feel enough prepared and able to develop a TU for classroom programming. Still, they do not consider fencing particularly difficult to learn and teach, especially if they receive training and adequate material resources to carry it out. Also, they show high motivation and interest to its implementation in the classroom.

They know their lack on fencing, but there is great interest of teachers in learning the basics and spending their leisure for learning it. They confirm that there is a lack of curriculum materials adapted to the work of PE, being a greater belief among female teachers.

Teachers' beliefs about the dangerousness, risk and aggressiveness of fencing are not a determining factor when choosing the content; being less experienced teachers, they strongly agree that it is not dangerous or aggressive, and also consider that the cost of the materials is an impediment to its implementation.

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Bios

Laura Ruiz-Sanchis, Ph.D., professor, Department of Didactic Human Movement and Physical Activity, Catholic University of Valencia; research fields: development and design of curriculum materials, school physical education, sport opponent, history of the sport and fencing master.

Concepcion Ros, Ph.D., professor, Department of Didactic Human Movement and Physical Activity, Catholic University of Valencia; research fields: teaching methodology physical education, development and design of curriculum materials, values of physical activity and gender studies.