



«Care of the self» as a pedagogical concept of the physical education of student youth

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Abstract

Objective of the study is to analyze in what way the concept of “care of the self” can act as an instrument of the physical education of the student youth of the city of Volgograd, and to substantiate the pedagogical guidelines ensuring the transition from the recognition of the value of health to regular practices of self-preserving behavior.

Methods and structure of the study. The article reveals the potential of the concept of “care of the self” as a pedagogical instrument of the physical education of student youth and shows its connection with the stability of everyday practices aimed at strengthening health. The empirical base of the study is represented by the results of a questionnaire survey of 400 students aged 17–30 studying in the educational organizations of the city of Volgograd.

Results and conclusions. It was established that the majority of the respondents recognize the care of health and education as socially significant practices influencing the possibility of being useful to society, and at the same time a gap is recorded between the expressiveness of the value attitudes and the regularity of actions. A conclusion is drawn about the pedagogical expediency of designing, in the university environment, an “infrastructure of care of the self,” translating the intentions of students into regular forms of physical-culture and health-improving activity and self-regulation.

Keywords: *care of the self, physical education, student youth, Volgograd, questionnaire survey, health preservation, everyday practices.*

Introduction. The modern pedagogy of the physical education of students increasingly turns to the problem of the discrepancy between the declared value of health and the insufficient stability of real behavioral practices: the regimen of motor activity, self-control, prevention, the rational organization of educational and life load not infrequently have a fragmentary character. For student youth, this problem is intensified by the high intensity of educational and informational loads, the prevalence of sedentary forms of leisure, and the blurriness of life regimens, which makes health a resource subject to constant “erosion” in everyday life [1, p. 10].

Under these conditions, the concept of “care of the self” acquires methodological significance for the pedagogy of physical education. In the scientific-pedagogical understanding, care of the self is not reduced to an individualistic attitude toward comfort; it is interpreted as a culturally mediated practice of self-build-

ing, including self-discipline, reflection, a responsible attitude toward the bodily and psychophysiological resource, and a readiness to maintain an optimal level of working capacity and viability [4, p. 43]. That is precisely why “care of the self” can be considered as a pedagogical “bridge” between values (the recognition of the importance of health) and actions (regular physical-culture and health-improving practices).

Objective of the study is to analyze in what way the concept of “care of the self” can act as an instrument of the physical education of the student youth of the city of Volgograd, and to substantiate the pedagogical guidelines ensuring the transition from the recognition of the value of health to regular practices of self-preserving behavior.

Methods and structure of the study. The study was carried out on the basis of a combination of general-scientific and pedagogical methods (analysis, synthesis, comparison, generalization, pedagogical



interpretation), as well as the sociological method of questionnaire surveying. The questionnaire survey had a one-time (cross-sectional) character and was conducted among the students of the educational organizations of the city of Volgograd.

The sample of the study amounts to 400 respondents aged 17–30. The instrumentarium of the study included questions about value attitudes and the self-assessment of the intensity of experiences, the frequency of actions, as well as a block recording the recognition of a number of everyday practices as socially significant (in particular, those connected with health, education, care of those around).

Results of the study and discussion. In the pedagogy of physical education, the question is fundamentally important: what internal foundations make practices of health stable rather than episodic [3, p. 18]. The concept of care of the self makes it possible to describe this foundation as the “internal infrastructure” of subjectness: a student maintains health not because “it is necessary,” but because he understands the bodily resource as a condition of educational success, professional fitness, quality of life, and social inclusion [5, p. 22]. In this logic, physical education ceases to be only a regulated discipline and becomes a technology of forming self-preserving behavior, built into everyday life.

The empirical data show that for the majority of the respondents, care of the self already has a pronounced socially significant dimension, which means that it can be used as a pedagogical resource for strengthening the motivation for regular motor activity and preventive practices.

The conducted questionnaire survey made it possible to reveal a significant contradiction between the intensity of subjectively significant attitudes and the frequency of their practical realization: strong/very strong experiences (in the original questionnaire – with regard to value-laden themes) were noted by 58.75% of the respondents, however regular actions were declared by only 25.25%; 49.5% act “sometimes,” and 25.25% – “rarely/never.” In the context of physical education, this structure of answers can be interpreted as a typical “gap between intention and behavior”: a student recognizes the importance of health, but does not maintain the regularity of practices (training routine, self-control of the sleep regimen, nutrition, prevention). Consequently, the task of physical education in the educational institutions of the region consists not only in the transfer of knowledge and norms, but

also in the construction of conditions under which care of the self becomes technologically “convenient”: accessible in time, understandable in structure, measurable by result, and supported by a community.

The most significant for the topic of the study is the block of answers about health and education as forms of care of the self. 75% of the respondents recognize that the care of one’s own health and education can be considered as a socially significant practice (in the original logic of the questionnaire – as socially useful and value-approved), with 42% choosing unconditional agreement and 33% – partial agreement. It is essential that the most widespread argumentation is connected not with private well-being, but with the functional connection of the personal resource and social usefulness: 42% directly indicate that health and education are the basis of the possibility of carrying out useful activity.

A clarifying question reinforces this conclusion: 82.25% of the respondents consider that the care of health influences the possibility of being useful to society; of them, 45% note that the influence is significant, and 37% – that it is rather pronounced. For physical education teachers this is fundamentally important: the care of health is legitimized by students as a value having an “external” effect (not only for oneself, but also for those around). Consequently, the motivational strategies of physical education can rely not exclusively on medical arguments (“it is so useful”), but on a broader socio-pedagogical frame (“health is a condition of educational, professional, and social productivity”). In practical terms, this means the need to shift the emphasis in the educational environment from one-time events to regular micro-practices: the planning of motor activity, the norming of loads, the culture of recovery, the prevention of overstrain [2, p. 59]. It is precisely these elements that constitute the content of care of the self as an instrument of physical education.

The results of the empirical study testify to the fact that the conceptions of the students of the hero-city of Volgograd regarding care of the self to a significant extent go beyond the framework of an individualistic interpretation and include a pronounced socially oriented component. Thus, 76.25% of the respondents indicate the social significance of the everyday care of those around (in the original instrumentarium – as part of value-approved practices), and 94.5% share the attitude of responsibility for the state of the natural environment and the rational use of resources.

The high level of support for constructive criticism



as a socially significant position (86.75%) should be interpreted not only as a characteristic of value orientations, but also as an indicator of the formedness of the reflexive resource of the students. In fact, the matter concerns the readiness of the student body to assess the quality of the educational and socio-cultural environment and to put forward proposals for its improvement. In the sphere of physical education, this circumstance sets a promising direction of pedagogical work, oriented toward strengthening the subject position of the students through project-based and research formats. Potentially productive in this respect can be the practices of monitoring the accessibility of sports infrastructure, the development and testing of student programs of motor activity.

The analysis of the rating of everyday practices that received the maximum assessments of significance (the share of "5" answers) makes it possible to state the dominance of normative-cultural foundations in the structure of the respondents' priorities. The highest indicators are recorded for the positions connected with a careful attitude toward cultural heritage and public spaces (81.5%), as well as with the observance of laws and respect for the rights of others (80.75%). A noticeable place is occupied by practices reflecting educational discipline and professional formation (53.25%). The care of one's own health and the well-being of those around is assessed as maximally significant by 50.25% of the study participants, whereas volunteer and social activity – by 46%, which indicates a somewhat more moderate expressiveness of attitudes toward participation in organized forms of prosocial activity while preserving the significance of individual-everyday contributions.

For the purposes of physical education, the revealed hierarchy sets a fundamentally important interpretive frame: health is recognized as a significant value, but in the structure of everyday priorities it yields to norms possessing a higher degree of symbolic and cultural consolidation. Consequently, the pedagogical strategy in the area of physical education must be oriented toward strengthening the semantic representation of health preservation – through its positioning as a cultural norm and at the same time as an element of professional responsibility. In this case, care of the self functions as a meaning-forming construct connecting the bodily dimension (the preservation and strengthening of health) with the normative one (self-discipline, the regulation of behavior) and the social one (social usefulness, responsibility toward others).

Conclusions. The concept of "care of the self" should be interpreted as an integrative pedagogical technology of the physical education of students, oriented toward the simultaneous solution of motivational and behavioral tasks. In this case, health is set not only as an individual value, but also as a functional resource of educational success, professional competence, and social effectiveness. Thereby a semantic motivation of participation in physical-culture and health-improving activity is formed, and a mechanism of behavioral stability is set, based on the regular reproduction of micro-practices of self-regulation and everyday motor activity.

The materials of the questionnaire survey of the student youth of the hero-city of Volgograd testify to the pedagogical productivity of the concept under consideration for the purposes of physical education. In the conceptions of the majority of the respondents, "care of the self" is correlated not only with personal well-being, but also with the possibility of preserving social capability and effectiveness in educational, professional, and communicative situations. At the same time, a characteristic contradiction is revealed between the expressiveness of value attitudes and the actual regularity of actions: the declared significance of health is not fully reinforced by stable everyday practices, which is manifested in the insufficient systematicity of motor activity and the deficit of self-regulation skills.

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