



Good Practices – Gelvonai gymnasium, Shirvintos region, Lithuania

Sports is very important in our lives. Sports in the school environment is a positive influence on lifelong participation in sports and physical activity. PE and sport contribute to the development of the whole child in several ways, such as health, physical and emotional wellbeing, cognitive and social development. That is why it is very important for pupils to be physically active, participate in PE lessons, extracurricular sports activities and exercise as much as possible. We all know that in today's day and age, pupils are spending more time glued to TV screens, smartphones and rooted to their seats. Teachers and also parents emphasize that young people should do sports and understand that it is important to be healthy and to do well at school. So several years, we have a few ways that help us to encourage more sports participation in our school.

1. Sports camp.

Our school is located in a rural area, not far away from the river Shirvinta, so our teachers like to spend time there with their students, starting with primary classes to school leavers. We use different ways to get there – a school bus, a bicycle, or simply go on foot. At first our camps lasted for 2 or even 3 days, but now we have only 1-day camp. Every year, at the end of a school year we have some days that we call non-traditional educational days. Mostly we use them for educational purposes, students take part in various excursions, meet famous people and, of course, all of them are waiting for a sports camp. Luckily, one of our teachers used to live near the river, he has its own campsite with the main facilities that make staying in there more comfortable and possible. This camp is a big challenge for our teachers as we have to look after and occupy sometimes more than 50 students. It is very important to make a schedule of the day, including sports activities but also some activities of other school subjects, such as biology, science, geography or technology.



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The main aim of this camp is to distract our students from their smartphones, tablets or computers and involve them in physical activities and let them feel the beauty of nature with all its benefits.

The preparation for the camp starts from making a team of teachers. Usually, all class teachers take part in this event, PE teachers and some teachers volunteers because it is not so easy to look after such a big number of students, especially when the weather and the water is warm and a lot of students want to go swimming. However, it is very important to think about meals, as the main dishes we cook on the fire. At the same time, we should take into account that every time we have to prepare new activities, think of making new things that could be interesting for our students. It is nice to say that teachers in our school are creative, their heads are full of great ideas and every year we can offer activities that students don't expect.

So, let's look at our day at a sport camp.

Early in the morning, we arrive at a campsite. Then we have camp's opening ceremony and raise a flag of a camp. After that we announce the timetable of the camp and divide students into teams. The number of teams depends of how many students attend. We give students some time to come up with a name, a slogan and the introduction of their team. Usually, we make mixed teams and as it is a sports camp, we use the competitive method. Then the main event of the day starts. Most of the students take part in various activities, mostly our teachers try to think of interesting activities, games, use unusual tools or equipment. Sometimes students have to climb, to crawl, to shoot or jump as well as to sing, to draw or create a haiku. We don't play traditional games such as basketball but, yes, darts and volleyball are the favorites. Students who don't participate in competitions help with the meals. They make sandwiches, look for the wood, collect wild plants for tea. It is also educational to learn more about plants that we can use for our food. Those who like fishing compete in fishing competition and try to catch some fish for soup. In the afternoon, we have dinner that traditionally we cook on fire. And there is a time for a rest, swimming in the river. After a break we continue with the competitions. When all activities are done, and the winners are awarded, we sit around the campfire with a cup of





tea and discuss about the day, what students like the most, what problems appear during the day and what we can improve for the next year's camp. Tired but happy we close our sports camp and return back to school and then home.

It is very important that even non-sporty students love participating in this camp and feel good, can improve their teamwork skills, sportsmanship. We also think, that taking part in this event teaches students the value of collaboration, to be responsible, stay positive, built their character. As we have students with the special needs, however, by participating in sports, they not only gain an outlet to relieve the stress but also to improve their mental health overall.

2. Kayaking

This sports is new in our school. At first, we, teachers, tried it and then offered to our students. As we have a river nearby, so we go kayaking every year, it's never mind, in autumn, spring or summer. Mostly it depends on the weather and the level of our river. The Sirvinta river mostly is flatwater and can be paddled most of the year. It also has white water sections and can be paddled only at a higher water level at spring flood or after heavy rains. But it is said that this river is safe for kayaking or canoeing. The length of the river is 138 km and it flows into the Sventoji (the Holy). The river is calm but not monotonous, its banks are high and sandy or very flat and suitable to stop, recreate, swim and entertain. Obstacles that are found in this water route are shoals, shallow fords, large stones and meanders.

We organize 1 day long trips with some stops in order to rest, have a snack or explore the surroundings of the river which are rich of various nature and cultural heritage objects. So students can learn more about history of our region, visit mounds (Pasodninkai, Maskoliškiai, Manciusenai, Sliziai), manors (Lapsiai), old wooden crosses and mythological stones (Liukonys). These objects attracts their attention.



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Usually we have some routes. It depends on how old our students and how physically strong they are. We can choose from the shortest route, approximately 6 km till our campsite, for younger students, to 26,5 km until the Sventoji. If we choose the longer route, we finish it near Upninkai village (Jonava region), paddling 2,5 km on the Sventoji river. Students like kayaking on our river because flowing water, ravines and rock obstacles make it a fun and memorable one. Paddling is a great way to enjoy the waterway.

Kayaking involve paddling a small craft through water, so you can improve your aerobics fitness, strength and flexibility. It also teaches responsibility and discipline.

3. Cycling.

Cycling is a very popular activity with our students. Most of them have bicycles so it is not a problem to organize a bike trip for all ages of students. And also our school has some bikes that we can offer to those who do not have them. Riding a bike is healthy, fun and a low-impact form of exercise for all ages. Cycling is easy to fit into our daily routine by riding to the shop, school or work.

Usually we have trips around our place. The furthest places that we have reached were Moletai Astronomical Observatory (Moletai region) – 76,4 km and Bazuoles mound (Trakai region) – 58,5 km. Both they were 2 days bike trips. But now we do not do such long trips. Students like cycling, and we have visited a lot of famous places near Gelvonai town. Cycling is safe enough because there is not any busy roads and the territory is flat, we try to avoid motorways, so students feel safe. Also it is fun, cheap and good for the environment. Cycling is useful for our health, our body and our minds.

Every time we ride on a new route we come back with many new stories and memories. New roads also mean new challenges and threats, but they also mean new possibilities.

So, when did you last smell the rose or walk on a new road?



To sum up all our practices, I can say that students have to participate in school sports to increase confidence, mental alertness and self-esteem. It helps to teach various skills to students like leadership, patience, team efforts and social skills.

