

METHODOLOGICAL-DIDACTIC ASPECTS IN TEACHING SKIING TO CHILDREN OF YOUNGER SCHOOL AGE

Martin Jílek, Jana Mílová, Ivan Růžička, Roman Šinkovský

Department of Physical Education and Sport, Faculty of Education, University of Hradec Kralove

Abstract

This paper analyses appropriateness of used methodological-didactic approaches in teaching skiing to children of younger school age. Based on the verification in practice we suggest suitable approaches for this age group. We also present possibilities of use of ordinary school P.E. equipment and aids. The most applicable methodological-didactic form for this age group seems to be the so-called „circus training“ which shows significant efficiency in time spent on the slope while skiing and it also increases enjoyment and experience of involved children.

Key words: skiing, circus training, younger school age, methodological-didactic aspects, skiing of children

Souhrn

Příspěvek analyzuje vhodnost použitých metodicko-didaktických přístupů ve výuce lyžování dětí mladšího školního věku. Na základě ověření v praxi doporučuje vhodné přístupy pro tuto věkovou kategorii a ukazuje možnosti využití běžných školních pomůcek ve výuce lyžování. Nejvhodnější metodicko-didaktickou metodou u této věkové kategorie se jeví manéžová výuka, která významně zefektivňuje čas strávený výukou lyžování a zvyšuje prožitek u vzdělávaných dětí.

Klíčová slova: lyžování, lyžování dětí, mladší školní věk

Introduction

Skiing is specific, goal-oriented activity which offers not only a unique possibility of healthy exercise in the mountains, but it also presents a very important place in the development process of physical, mental and social abilities and skills of an individual. The downhill skiing historically belongs among the most favourite activities not only in the Czech Republic. The mountainous terrain, where it all takes place, shows a very positive influence on people's health in all its demansions. One of the main reasons why a significant part of the Czech population doesn't go in for this activity at the present time is the lack of adopting the basic skills in the childhood age. This is exactly the period of time when a closer relation to a certain physical activity is born. This early won skill can lead to a further improvement in the future. An ideal age for gaining and follow-up fixing of basic skiing skills is the younger school age. School, and specifically the first level of education offers this alternative only sporadically. The pragmatic reason for not organizing skiing courses at the lower level of primary schools can be seen in either teachers' mistrust in own abilities or/and in a certain difficulty in organizing and managing skiing courses for this age group. Most teachers forget that children at this younger school age foremost want to play and that traditional organizational forms of skiing lessons could be boring, dull and inefficient.

Problem

For many years we have been involved in teaching skiing to children of elder school age and to adolescents. The obvious advantage of working with these age groups is the fact that the methodological process of teaching is both well described, published and also verified in practice. On the other hand, similar literature and audio-visual material dealing with the youngest age group is not sufficient. In recent years, we have been working on a methodical teaching video material dealing with specific problems in teaching skiing to children. This DVD is primarely ment for parents, instructors and teachers who are engaged in

teaching the youngest skiiers especially at so-called winter activity weeks. The accomplished results are freely available at <http://lyzovanideti.webnode.cz>. Based on our own observations, we have verified that children at this age are very intolerant to the regular organizational forms called „snake formation“ and also the predominant „gradual descending“. In our own evaluation the effectiveness of these forms was at a very low level. In a significant extent, it was confirmed that the children in the second part of the "snake" don't not know what to do and based on this fact, their motivation to work on the slope rapidly decreases. The “gradual descending” offering space to a high-quality feedback is also very inefficient - a high level of inactive downtime extends into the sphere of motivation and leads to the loss of concentration. Based on this experience we were looking for the optimal way how to make their first steps on skis more enjoyable while maintaining high efficiency in the teaching process.

Theoretical outcomes

Characteristics of the age

The development of motor skills is largely dependent on the physical and mental maturation of an individual. The younger school age is a transitional period between the playful preschool age and more advanced pupil behavior. The child is able to concentrate on an activity for a relatively short period of time. On one hand, new motor skills are quickly mastered, on the other hand, they may have little persistence and in case of less frequent repetition are even quickly forgotten. Younger school age is a period of growing interest in physical activities that require dexterity, endurance and strength. It should be noted that the "(...) motoric performance doesn't depend only on age, but also on external conditions: if they are properly supported, they show faster and more differentiated increase" (Langmeier, Krejčířová, 1998: 117). Not only the external environment, but also the methodology of work (Příbramský, 1999) together with the implementation of adequate teaching activities (the rational management of the process) belong to essential parts of the skiing training (Růžička, Baláž, 2001). In connection with adopting the skiing skills Trembl

(2006: 6) states that "the best age for learning is between 6 - 10 years of age". The process of acquiring new motoric experience during this period is mainly bound to the institution of school and the teaching process. The perception of a younger schoolchild ceases to be a random process and becomes an intentional, goal-oriented observation. The intensity and stability of concentration depends on the immediate motivation and creativity of teaching lessons (Jobánková et al., 2002). To activate the attention the teacher can contribute with various matters of subject, its structure and adequacy in scope (Raková, Matúš, Krátký, 2011). Physical concepts are usually tied to the specific experience.

Extremely significant area is the use of appropriate forms of work and the application of basic principles of teaching children of this age. Selected ski activities must be integrated into the world of children which means to compete, play and choose activities, so that actions don't become stereotyped and that children keep more easily attention and permanent interest. The best environment for purposeful development of skiing skills in this age category is "specialized learning area for children - children's ski playground" (Tremel, 2006: 9). The ski-schools of a commercial character are generally suitably adapted to the age specifics and offer plenty of appropriate equipment and stimulation. However, they can't be used for group lessons. It is therefore necessary to build such a ski playground according to our own possibilities and to a specific intent in the form of a "training slope, located aside from the main skiing hustle" (Maršík, 2006: 5).

Finally, an essential aspect of effective teaching of young skiers is managing the entire process. The organization of the ski training is for ski instructors (teachers) the tool which converts their ideas into a meaningful, intense, various and entertaining lessons. Therefore, one of the fundamental pillars of the teaching should be the game – the best tool for the acquisition, consolidation and application of creative skills. To a large extent, the game is also used as a

tool for creation of relationships, shaping the child's personality and creating a positive atmosphere of the educational process. We can find its irreplaceable position at any stage of motoric learning in all phases of ski training of children. Using the correct ratio of spontaneous and controlled game in the skiing training we significantly apply the principle of distraction of young skiers from “technical” demands of the training towards their spontaneity and natural enjoyment. This application actually goes from the very content to the forms that are positively reflected on the overall quality and results of teaching (Růžička, 2001). The demands to maintain a high level of motivation of children for given action often changes and this all in accordance with the requirements of the certain age group to the need of the game approach.

Using a diverse range of creative devices, which are available at schools on a regular basis, we can easily influence participation rates and concentration of children in the activity. Appropriate application of fitting forms of work can similarly provoke the desired response in the form of higher activity of children and also and more effective progress during the motoric learning (Žídek, 2004; Lind, Sanders, 2004).

Forms of work

Generally, the most common organizational forms of work during the skiing lessons are:

1. Training in teams (6-15 skiers) – Forms of descents:
 - a) Gradual descending with instructor below.
 - b) Gradual descending with instructor in the middle section.
 - c) Gradual descending with instructor at the top.
 - d) Reciprocal form of teaching.
 - e) Snake formation with instructor in front.
 - f) Snake formation with instructor at the end.
 - g) Descending in small groups.
 - h) Differentiated training - the teacher with a select group, the rest alone.

- i) Descending in the pack.
- j) Activities in formations.
- 2. Training in groups (4-6 skiers)
- 3. Individual training (1-3 skiers)
 - a) Work at sites.
 - b) „Circus training“.
 - c) Skiing advisory - consultative form of teaching.

By using thought-out forms of work we can eliminate the major risk of teaching. The risk is the emphasis towards achieving a high level of skiing skills, but omitting the children's experience and enjoyment. We mustn't forget that especially younger generation operates in the further educational process with the won experience and impression from the first contact with the activity. In this sense, it is necessary to focus more on the process than on the target.

Selected form of training organization

One of the organizational forms that are often neglected is the so-called „circus training“ (Strobl, Bedřich, 1999). This form meets the highest needs of working with children on the slope. In principle, it is an activity within a defined area in the form of a short and easy slope where children use prepared activities and sites for an effective practice.

The ski instructor or teacher, moving in the given area usually without ski equipment, works as an organizer using a wide range of accessories and aids (e.g. ropes, poles, cones, balls, skipping ropes etc.). This organizational form is traditionally used mainly in commercial ski schools in the Alpine countries and we can also see it in a number of foreign educational films aimed at teaching children skiing. We are convinced that this concept of training presents the most suitable form of work at winter activity weeks or outdoor winter training courses at primary schools. The „circus training“ form of organization shows in each training course elements

of playfulness, spontaneity and a high degree of efficiency, as well as optimal use of training aids and the chosen terrain.

We distinguish two basic variations of this form of work:

Circus training without ski lift - children practice individually or parallelly in pairs, the teacher is positioned in the middle of the chosen area.

Circus training with ski lift – there is a short ski lift in the given area (usually rope tow) which children use to move up and then independently practice assigned activities or tasks at set-up sites.

The „circus training“ organizational form allows children not only to master the basics of downhill skiing in an enjoyable way, but also to realize gradually independent movement on an appropriate ski slope with a high degree of efficiency and safety.

Objective of work

To suggest and verify appropriate approaches in leading the training in praxis, including training exercises for the development of basic skiing skills among children of younger school age.

Methods of work

The concept of the methodological approach for children of younger school age has resulted from the two year work in running various ski courses.

The verification was conducted by qualitative and quantitative research. To verify our methodology in practice, we used the method of direct leading of training in combination with the survey, observation and controlled interview. All of these techniques intermingled with each other.

Characteristics of the research sample

The basic research of the group sample was created by 22 children from the first grade class (in age 6-7 years) of the Grammar School Štefánikova in Hradec Králové.

Characteristics of teachers

A) female, teacher at primary school, 1st-4th grade, age: 36, school experience: 6 years

B) female, P.E. teacher at primary school, 5th-9th grade, age: 34, school experience: 8 years

C) parent, 2 children (age: 9 and 7), second time at the skiing course, age: 35

Process of verification

The basic anamnesis (assessment of skiing skills) of the group sample took place on February 2nd 2011 in the ski center Bedřichovka in Orlické Záhoří (Course 1).

The verification took place during the winter school trip which was organised in term 7th-11th April 2011 in the ski center Radvanice in the Eastern Bohemia. The children participated on skiing lessons in the extent of two practice hours (morning programme) and two practice hours (afternoon programme). The research was held both during the skiing course and at its end (Course 2).

Basic questions for teachers and parents:

1. Do you see a change in teaching skiing among children by using the „circus training“ organizational form?
2. Do you see the change in approach of children when using various school P.E. equipment (balls, ropes, poles etc.)?
3. What do you consider the greatest benefit of this approach?
4. Where do you see the biggest obstacle for using this organizational form in practice?
5. Do you consider this organizational form suitable for skiing training of children of younger school age?
6. Did you feel appealed (convinced) by this organizational form in such a way that you will use it in other skiing courses while working with this age group ?

Basic questions for children:

1. How long have you been skiing?
2. Did you like better the organizational form of skiing behind your teacher (instructor) in so-called „snake formation“ or the „circus training“?
3. Do you like to practice skiing with or without additional aids?

Presentation of possibilities of using ordinary school P.E. equipment in the „circus training“ organizational form



Fig. 1. Example of using ordinary school P.E. equipment



Fig. 2. Example of using ropes in easy variations



Fig. 3. Example of „circus training“

Conclusions

Teacher´s responses:

- 1) Do you see a change in teaching skiing among children by using the „circus training“ organizational form?
 - a) We experienced this organizational form for the very first time. The children were very satisfied with the variation of using different school P.E. equipment which led to better and faster mastering of skiing skills. It was not necessary to look for other motivation elements. The given time to teach skiing on the slope passed very quickly thanks to diversity and frequent changes in activities.
 - b) Thanks to intergration of this organizational form the children were very active all the time and they happily and excitingly shared their impressions from completed activities. When they didn´t succeed in completing any task they weren´t afraid to repeat it and try it again. A minor change or modification of the track ensured that the children managed to try already mastered skill in new ways. In fact, they didn´t even have time for misbehaving.
 - c) The atmosphere and the „drive“ of the group was exceptional.

- 2) Do you see the change in approach of children when using various school P.E. equipment (balls, ropes, poles etc.)?
 - a) With the use of further school P.E. equipment and aids the time passed so quickly that some of them didn't even want to have a snack break.
 - b) Before that I hadn't realize to use e.g. swimming aid for teaching skiing, besides we have this equipment at our school which makes it even more accessible. Only now we can see opportunities for its further use.
 - c) Thanks to the used equipment the children didn't even realize that they repeatedly practice the same skiing skill, but their attention doesn't linger. A minor change of equipment (e.g. a gymball for a dice, adding extra rope etc.) helped to keep the interest in the same activity.

- 3) What do you consider the greatest benefit of this approach?
 - a) The greatest benefit is the variety of possibilities to prepare more tracks (sites) with a various difficulty according to skill levels of children.
 - b) A present parent who accompanied the group could be used as a helper by setting the course or fixing some sites during the programme.
 - c) The involvement of all children who are constantly in motion. The children don't need to wait for each other and during the short lift ride they can observe what to do in the upcoming descending. Then they receive only a bit of information for clarification from the teacher on the hill.

- 4) Where do you see the biggest obstacle for using this organizational form in practice?
 - a) Nowhere.
 - b) Only laziness of a teacher.
 - c) I don't see any obstacle. It is only necessary to prepare all the equipment and tasks (sites) in advance which we want to realize that day on the slope. We must also think of the transport for the planned material.

5) Do you consider this organizational form suitable for skiing training of children of younger school age?

- a) Yes, of course.
- b) Yes.
- c) Yes.

6) Did you feel appealed (convinced) by this organizational form in such a way that you will use it in other skiing courses while working with this age group ?

- a) Yes.
- b) Absolutely.
- c) Yes and I will recommend it to other teachers, too.

Children´s responses:

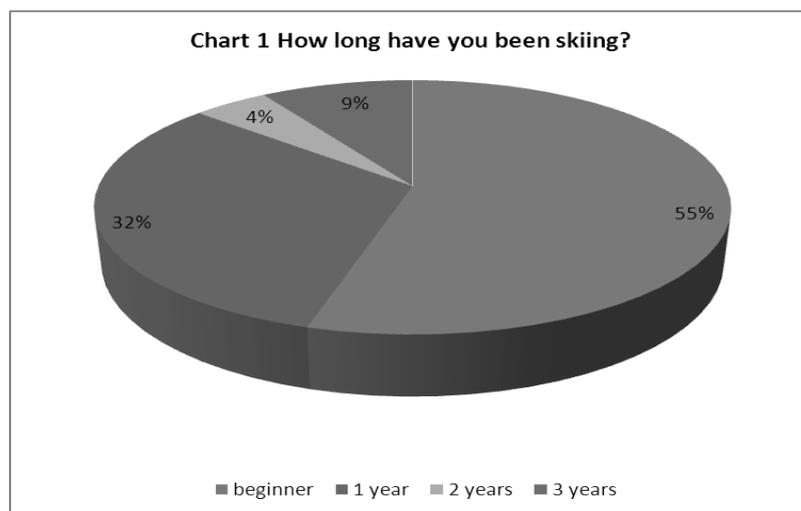


Fig. 1. How long have you been skiing?

From the graph it is obvious that the most children at the course 1. were skiing for the first time. The „circus training“ could be used also for practising basic breaking skills.

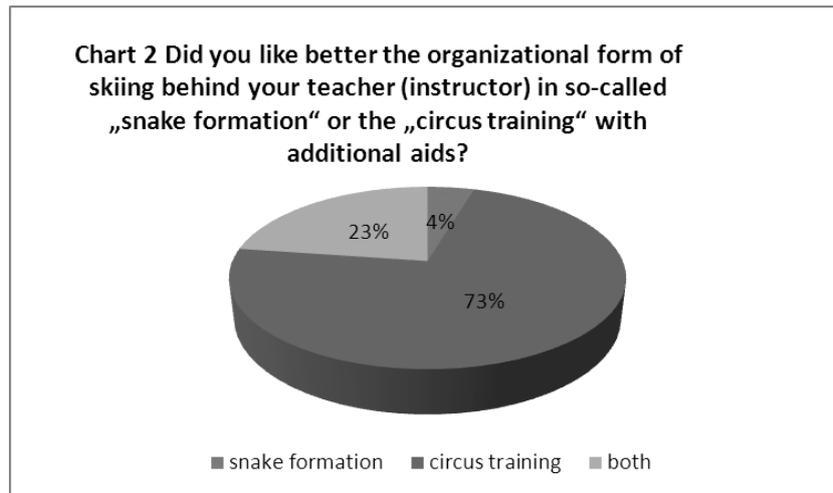


Fig. 2. Did you like better the organizational form of skiing behind your teacher (instructor) in so-called „snake formation“ or the „circus training“ with additional aids?

The 73% of children responded that they liked the most activities based on the princip of the „circus training“.

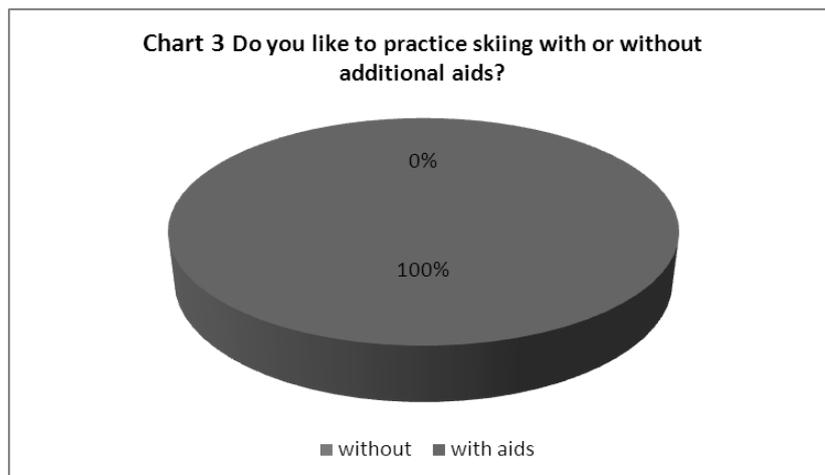


Fig. 3. Do you like to practice skiing with or without additional aids?

All the children responded that they like to ski while using additional equipment and aids.

Discussion

We consider the number of training courses needed for adequate verification is very low. Mainly because of the available low budget, the verification was conducted at only one skiing course. In the following years, further verification

will continue without personal assistance of the authors. Valuable comments from the teachers will be incorporated into other articles.

From the given answers it comes out that the level of children's experience significantly arose during the course. This result evokes thoughts to use a appropriate diagnostic method to locate and evaluate this level of experience.

We also conducted a survey among the participating children at the end of the course. Considering the age of the questioned participants only three questions were prepared and we must consider the answers as orientational – only for presenting the progress of the course. The principal questions were : how long has the child been skiing, if they like better the organizational form of skiing behind the teacher (instructor) in so-called „snake formation“ or the „circus training“ and if they like to practice skiing with or without additional aids? From the answers it comes out that the majority of children (12) were beginners and a significant number of children (7) started skiing last year. An exceptional case were two children who stated that they skied for three years already. Based on the acquired answers we can consider this group for rather above-standard one. The children visit a city school from where there is rather a longer way to mountains. We supposed that there would be even more beginners. Most of the children (16 from 22) replied to the second question that they like to use prepared exercises on the slope more than the usual way of practising. We assume that the organizational form „circus training“ gives the children more freedom (children set their own speed, they choose the terrain etc.). The one child's personality comes better to display. One child stated that he likes the snake formation behind a teacher better. Five children liked both forms equally. It is interesting that all the children who chose this answer were not the beginners. We can assume that their answer was influenced by their former skiing experience. The third answer among all the children was the same. All of them like to ski with the additional equipment and aids. This answer proved the conclusions of the authors Růžička (2001), Žídková (2004) and Lind, Sanders (2004). By using a variety of additional equipment and aids we can positively

influence the level of involvement and concentration of children on the given activity.

From our experience we know that the organizational form „circus training“ requires at least two instructors with a different role. One instructor demonstrates prepared exercises and the second one (organizer and helper) prepares the course (setting slalom poles, throwing balls etc.)

Conclusions

The objective of this work was accomplished. We verified our theoretical assumptions. For running skiing lessons at school skiing courses for younger school age it is absolutely necessary:

1. To choose the right terrain:
2. rather small and well arranged ski center
3. appropriate slope inclination (not more than 15°)
4. tow rope for utter beginners
5. To use team strips (reflex vests) for better control of children, especially if there are other schools, groups and public
6. To use the „circus training“ organizational form. The teacher rather organizes activities.
7. Not to push children to advanced skiing skills (e.g. carving), but to develop basic skiing skills (sliding, edging, dynamic balance etc.).
8. To use the school P.E and skiing equipment as much as possible (skiing poles, skipping ropes, ropes, hoop, cones, half inflated overballs, half inflated gymballs, swimming foam aids etc.)

References

- LANGMEIER, J. & KREJČÍŘOVÁ, D. *Vývojová psychologie*. Praha : Grada Publishing, 1998. ISBN 80-7169-195-1.
- LIND, D.; SANDERS, S. *The Physics of Skiing*. New York : Springer, 2004. ISBN 0-387-00722-9
- PŘÍBRAMSKÝ, M. *Lyžování*. Praha : Grada, 1999. ISBN 80-7169-786-9.
- RAKOVÁ, P.; MATUŠ, J.; KRÁTKÝ, K. *Mladší školní věk*. [cit. 2011-04-27] Dostupné na: <http://www.vemeste.cz/2011/04/mladsi-skolni-vek/>.
- RŮŽIČKA, I.; BALÁŽ, J. Komparace metodiky české a slovenské lyžařské školy. In: *Sborník 8. mezinárodní interdisciplinární konference Optimální působení tělesné zátěže a výživy* (Editor: Martiník, K., Komeščík, B.), Hradec Králové : Gaudeamus, 200, s. 306-310. ISBN: 80 – 85109-47-6.
- RŮŽIČKA, I. *Lyžování hrou*. Sborník 5. mezinárodní vědecké konference Hry v programech tělovýchovných procesů, Plzeň: PdF ZČU, 2001. ISBN: 80-7082-829-3.
- STROBL, K. & BEDŘICH, L. *Učíme lyžovat*. Olomouc : UP, 1999. ISBN 80-7067-990-5.
- TREML, J. *Lyžování dětí*. Praha : Grada, 2006. ISBN 80-247-1570-8.
- ŽÍDEK, J. *Lyžovanie*. Bratislava : PEEM, 2004. ISBN 80-88901-90-1.

Autor: Mgr. Šinkovský Roman, Ph.D.

roman.sinkovsky@uhk.cz