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**Relaxation teacher in the opinion  
of students of relaxation techniques specialization**  
**Nauczyciel relaksacji w opinii studentów  
specjalności techniki relaksacyjne**

**Summary**

Several years ago, the precursors of relaxation seen the need to implement it to schools, because it determines the comprehensive development of pupils, ensures calmness and concentration. More and more institutes in Poland offer to acquire skills of relaxation teacher, including Wrocław Academy of Physical Education, which created the first Postgraduate Studies of Relaxation Techniques, Postgraduate Studies of Psychosomatic Yoga Practice, and Specialization of Relaxation Techniques in Recreation. This paper aims to identify the attributes of a good relaxation teacher in opinion of students of that specialization. We specify the criteria for evaluation (author's evaluation sheet ONR-9) in our opinion useful in the evaluation of relaxation teachers' work. We also investigate on what level of practical skills are students graduating from Relaxation Techniques in Recreation specialization.

**Key words:** relaxation, teacher, competence, evaluation criteria, students of Academy of Physical Education

**Streszczenie**

Już kilkadziesiąt lat temu prekursorzy relaksacji widzieli potrzebę wdrażania jej do szkół, gdyż warunkuje ona wszechstronny rozwój podopiecznych, zapewnia odprężenie, spokój i koncentrację. Coraz więcej ośrodków w Polsce oferuje zdobywanie kompetencji nauczyciela relaksacji, w tym Wrocławski AWF, jako pierwszy tworzący Studia Podyplomowe Technik Relaksacyjnych, Studia Podyplomowe Psychosomatycznych Praktyk Jogi, czy Specjalność Techniki Relaksacyjne w Rekreacji. Niniejsza praca ma na celu wskazanie cech, jakimi powinien charakteryzować się dobry nauczyciel relaksacji zdaniem studentów kształcących się właśnie w tym zakresie. Wyszczególniamy również kryteria oceny (autorski arkusz oceny ONR-9) naszym zdaniem przydatne w ewaluacji pracy nauczyciela relaksacji oraz badamy, na jakim poziomie umiejętności praktycznych znajdują się studenci kończący specjalność Techniki Relaksacyjne w Rekreacji.

**Słowa kluczowe:** relaksacja, nauczyciel, kompetencje, kryteria oceny, studenci AWF

**Introduction**

It would take long to enumerate the benefits of relaxation to modern humans. Just like in the areas in which we could use positive its impact, especially for the well-being and health considered in positive terms (Kulmatycki, Torzyńska 200). Currently, psychologists

use the beneficial effects of relaxation training to support psychotherapy, doctors apply it in the treatment of somatic diseases, coaches of competitive athletes introduce a dose of mental and relaxation training (Siek 1990; Kulmatycki 2012). Over thirty years ago, in the book *Function of The Relaxing Exercises in the Modern Process of Education*, Andrzej Szyszko-Bohusz postulated the need to implement atmosphere of peace, relaxation and concentration into the curricula of schools and universities. He believed that they determine a comprehensive personality development of students. Already then, the scientific and technological revolution had a significant impact on human lifestyle, making changes such as haste, increased tension, neurosis, unproductive energy dissipation, in consequence leading to disproportionate frustration and loss of joy of life (Szyszko-Bohusz 1979). The precursors of relaxation in education such as William James and Annie Payson Call saw a huge potential of “rest training” (Zielinski 2011). Their demands for change in the lifestyle and functioning of modern human are still valid. Almost one hundred years ago, the need for implementation of relaxation to pedagogy was seen, yet relaxation surpasses the walls of schools and universities in very small steps (Kulmatycki 2007; Urbańska et al. 2012). It is also noticed by Teml, who believes that relaxing exercises should be found in schools as “shaping the personality of the student and stimulating the learning process, so the school could become more humanistic” (Teml 1997, p. 7). Students of specialization *Relaxation Techniques in Recreation* that are undergoing an apprenticeship training in primary, lower secondary and upper secondary schools confirm that only a small percentage of teachers know and use any relaxation exercises. Many of them excuse themselves with curriculum overload and the lack of time to introduce such content. Perhaps the reason also lies in the lack of competence to carry out relaxation activities. Optimistic is the fact, that in Poland we can find more and more places offering education for relaxation teachers, opportunity to gain skills and experience in this field. As first in Poland, Academy of Physical Education in Wrocław in 2007 created Postgraduate Studies of Relaxation Techniques. June this year, students of the fifth edition of these studies will defend the diploma. In 2010 Postgraduate Studies of Psychosomatic Yoga Practice were established and the third group of full-time and part-time students began studies in the fall semester of 2012 on specialization *Relaxation Techniques in Recreation*. We are happy about the great interest in the issue of relaxation and the growing number of competent people involved in it. Unfortunately, still there are few places providing job for relaxation coaches. In Wrocław there is just one commercial institution that offers its customers a passive relaxation. We realize that it is a specific form of group work that requires adequate preparation, but we encourage also those teachers and lecturers who do not have formal preparation to reach for the benefits of relaxation. The following paper by identifying characteristics of relaxation teacher and specifying evaluation criteria will indicate these aspects, which teacher preparing to perform relaxation should pay attention to. Teacher should know the different groups of relaxation exercises (Kulmatycki, Torzyńska 2012). The proposed criteria, rated on a seven-point scale (where 1 means not satisfied and 7 maximum satisfaction) evaluation sheet ONR-9 will be listed and ranked in the results and conclusion.

The aim of research is to identify assessment criteria relevant to evaluate work of relaxation teacher and illustrate the profile of a person using relaxation techniques in their work. We believe that the increasing need to introduce relaxation techniques to

schools, universities, and a growing group of people who are competent to carry out such activities determine the need for evaluation tools to measure their work. This raises the question of whether anyone can be a teacher of relaxation.

Research questions:

1. What characteristics should a teacher of relaxation have?
2. At what level of practical skills are students of the second year Relaxation Techniques in Recreation specialization?
3. Which of the criteria proposed by the authors are most relevant for the future teacher of relaxation techniques?

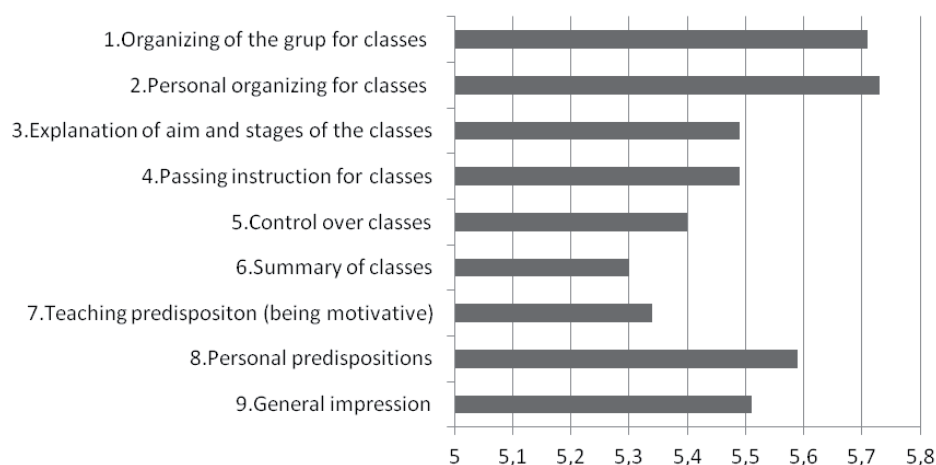
### **Material and Methods**

Fifty full-time students and twenty part-time students of the second year of postgraduate Tourism and Recreation took part in the research. It was the students' free choice that they happened to be on the Relaxation Techniques in Recreation specialization. During the second and third semester they had the opportunity to have contact and practice passive and active forms of relaxation on subjects such as: Relaxation Massage, Psychosomatic Hathayoga Exercise, Relaxation in water, Jacobson's Progressive Training, Body Awareness Exercise, Relaxation Forms of Movement Expression. Two terms of studies consists of about 90 hours of lectures on the history of relaxation techniques and stress issues, as well as 200 hours of practical exercises. The subjects mentioned above were conducted by different people, which allowed contact with various styles of teaching and probably gave an opportunity to form an opinion on the profile of a good relaxation teacher. The survey was conducted during the fourth semester of 2012/2013, during the obligatory course Relaxation Techniques Methodology. At the beginning of the semester, students were asked to specify the attributes, which they believed a teacher of relaxation should possess. We received replies from 55 people. In addition, during the semester students were required to conduct prepared by themselves a 20-minute relaxation exercise session and each of them was evaluated by the other participants with evaluation sheet ONR-9. The size of the groups varied in subsequent sessions (depending on attendance). After a few weeks of contact with the criteria proposed by the authors, students were to choose the two most important.

### **Results**

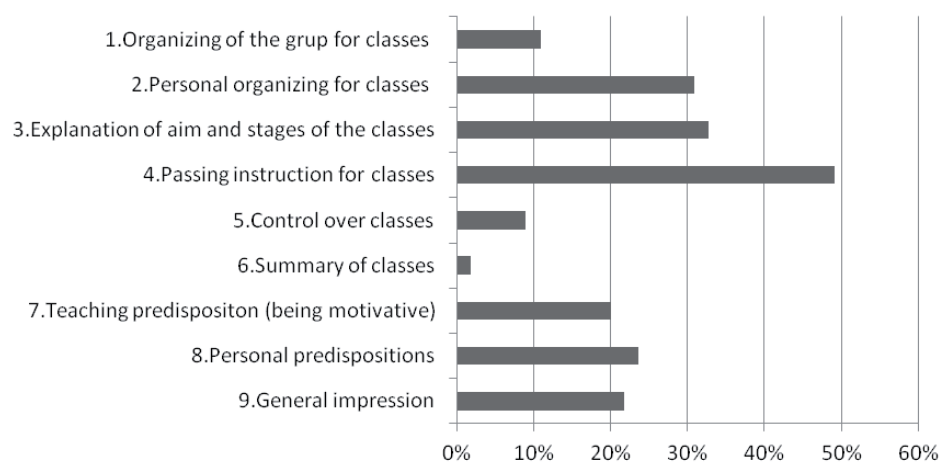
During the research 37 students prepared and conducted relaxation exercise sessions. On average, each session was evaluated by 18 people. Analysis of the data from the 674 ONR-9 sheets shows that students got on average 5.5 points, taking into account all the questions. The average values on the scale of 1 to 7 points awarded for each criterion are shown in Fig. 1.

These values range from 5.3 points to 5.7 points. According to the students the best performed tasks were "personal organizing for the classes" (5.73) and "organizing of the group for the classes". "Personal predispositions" were assessed at 5.59 points. Evaluation of the questions on "general impression", "passing instructions for classes", and "explanation of aim and stages of the classes" were close to the overall average 5.5 points. Somewhat less appreciated was "control over classes" getting an average of 5.4 points. The lowest rated were "teaching predispositions" (5.34 points) and a "summary of classes" (5.3 points).



**Fig. 1** Average values in the assessment of relaxation exercises sessions prepared by the students according to given criteria

Students had a choice of the two most important criteria from the nine given (Fig. 2).

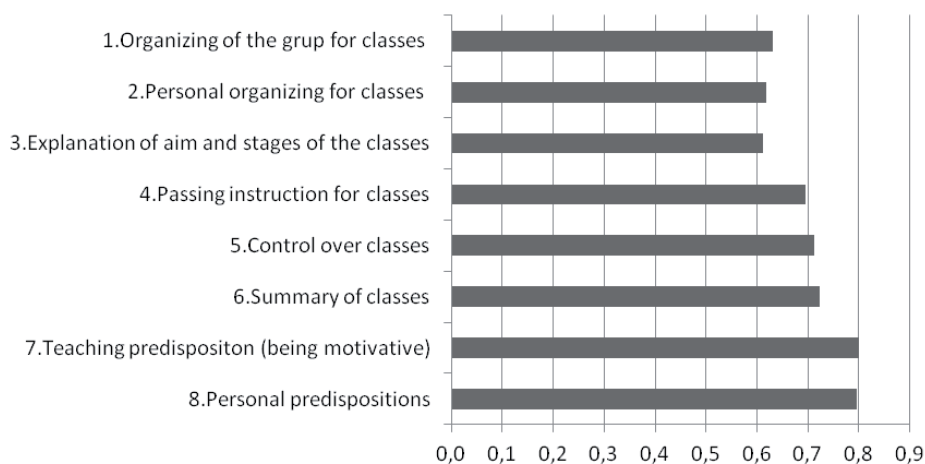


**Fig. 2** Percentage of two most important criteria in the relaxation teacher evaluation chosen by the students from ONR-9 sheet

Almost half of the group (49.09%) as the most important criterion while evaluating a teacher of relaxation indicated “passing instructions for classes”. At the forefront of the work of relaxation teacher is a proper voice disposition. The way of modulating the voice, intonation, suggestive narration are of great importance, since it is voice that introduces participants into the state of relaxation, especially during passive relaxation. To a large extent, teacher’s calmness and lack of stress manifest in their voice, which

helps to generate a welcoming atmosphere. The second criterion defined as the most important was “explanation of aim and stages of classes” (32.72%). Skillful explanation of the purpose and stages of the course is necessary, as it provides the person undergoing relaxation direction of work and a relative sense of security. Please remember that in the relaxation, which is a process of getting into the state of being relaxed, superior is the very process and not the aim itself. Slightly less students have chosen as the most important criterion “personal organizing for classes” (30.90%). It follows that in the opinion of students relevant teacher’s preparation for classes, the use of additional materials, props, and teaching aids is important while evaluating the relaxation teacher. The next criteria chosen by nearly one-fifth of students were: “personal predispositions” (23.63%), “general impression” (21.81%) and “teaching predispositions” (20.00%). While evaluating personal and teaching predispositions, the input of work done by a teacher has the slightest effect – to a large extent these are the attributes conditioned by the character of a person. Among all nine, these are the criteria most difficult to develop. However, the overall assessment of feelings seems to be the most subjective and often determined by the factors far away from factual evaluation, such as sympathy or antipathy towards the teacher, positive or negative attitude to the chosen technique, and not infrequently it is dictated by the well-being of the subject that day. Almost 10% of students pointed “control over classes” and “organizing of the group for classes” as important criterion. Only 1.80% chose “summary of classes” as an important criterion in the evaluation of relaxation teacher. In this case the choice of students could have been dictated by the lack of sufficient skills in their own relaxation sessions, which is confirmed by the average note they gained at this point. It is in the sixth point that received the lowest score 5.3 (Fig. 1). Skillful summary of the relaxation classes, relevant commentary and asking questions guiding to the feelings that might have accompanied the participants is a very important part of each session. To enable participants to verbalize their experiences, provide the space for discussion about the positive and negative feelings from the experience of deep relaxation substantially complete the session. However, these are the skills that come along with experience in conducting such sessions and are also proportional to the time spent on teacher’s own practice.

The correlation coefficients of each questions with the last criterion proposed by our list of sheet ONR-9 “general feeling” are within the range of the weakest correlation  $r=0.61$  with Q. 3 and the strongest  $r=0.80$  with Q. 8. Thus, most of the values in the range of high correlation. Correlations of two criteria: teaching predisposition and personal predisposition have reached similar maximum values.



**Fig. 3** The correlation coefficient of each question from ONR-9 sheet with a “general feeling” (question 9)

Table 1 shows the list of characteristics that relaxation teacher should possess according to the students of Relaxation Techniques in Recreation specialization. Students could indicate any number of attributes. We did not try to group these features, but to combine them in ranges of most common choices only.

**Tab. 1** Characteristics of relaxation teacher in the opinion of students on Relaxation Techniques in Recreation specialization

No.	Teacher's characteristics	Percentage range
1.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <u>Inner peace</u></li> <li>– Self-controlled (controlling emotions)</li> <li>– Open to people</li> <li>– Indulgent</li> <li>– Helpful</li> <li>– Objective</li> <li>– Appropriate tone of voice (calm voice)</li> </ul>	=>30%
2.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <u>Patient</u></li> <li>– Disciplined</li> <li>– Friendly</li> <li>– Kindly</li> <li>– Warm</li> <li>– Creative</li> </ul>	=>20<30%

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3.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– With theoretical and practical knowledge</li> <li>– Communicative</li> <li>– Full of positive energy</li> <li>– Maintaining good contact with the group</li> <li>– Cheerful, smiling</li> <li>– With a proper diction</li> <li>– Professional</li> </ul>	=>10<20%
4.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Neat appearance</li> <li>– Controlling the environment, orderly</li> <li>– Focusing attention</li> <li>– With a sense of humor</li> <li>– Self-confident</li> <li>– Not making fun of students</li> <li>– Intelligent</li> <li>– Attentive</li> <li>– Consistent</li> <li>– Tolerant</li> <li>– Incentive</li> <li>– Body conscious</li> <li>– Skillfully taking criticism</li> <li>– Eloquent</li> </ul>	<10%

### Discussion

“In the complex conditions of the present reality, which is constantly changing towards to development, personality of the teacher must be open and engaged, seeking and capable of self-creation” (Tchorzewski 1999, p.23, cited by Lewandowska-Kidoń 2007, p.192). Autocreation requires self-determination from the teacher, which “shall be based on self-knowledge and self-experience” (Tchorzewski 1999, p.23, cited by Lewandowska-Kidoń 2007, p.192). Regular relaxation training promotes learning about ourselves, thus the first and inexorable task of the relaxation teacher reaching for the relaxation techniques is his own experience and the many hours of relaxation and associated symptoms firsthand. Own practice will provide internal peace as well as appropriate control over emotions.

Siek believes that the speed of relaxation learning increases with participation in group activities under the guidance of a “good teacher” (Siek 1990). However, he does not specify how should this good teacher be characterized. In the literature we can find a lot of information about the competence of the teacher at all. Many authors have attempted to divide them and rank. However, there is little discussion about the profile and the additional competences, which should have relaxation teacher or teacher from other areas but reaching for relaxation in their work. Many relaxation techniques are mild in character and practicing it individually or under the supervision of unqualified teachers we should not be afraid of the negative effects, but more of the lack of results (Vickers, Zollman 1999). According to Grochmal, the instructor while teaching relaxation “explains the differences between tense and relaxed muscle and gives verbal instructions suggesting the accumulation of relaxation process” (Grochmal, 1979, p.230). The book *Theory and Methodology of Relaxation in Relaxing and Focusing Exercises* contains only a brief mentioning of the general remarks



about relaxation technique, in which a few sentences are devoted to individual teachers. Among others, Grochmal suggests that the voice of the instructor should have pleasant sound, and instructions were uttered eloquently and clearly. He also believes that “moves, posture and behavior of the instructor should be characterized by kindness, calmness and composure in every move” (Grochmal, 1979, p.230). When we look at the features listed in the Table 1 mentioned by respondents, we can easily find there the qualities mentioned by Grochmal. According to majority of respondents, inner peace and self-control should be a primary, most visible feature of relaxation teacher. The authors of the book “Progressive relaxation training”, a guide to progressive relaxation, hope that therapists and teachers reaching for this method will not use it in a mechanical way (“robot-like way”) or devoid of emotional involvement. They point out to establish cooperation with the “client” and secure their trust (Bernstein et al. 2000).

### Conclusion

It is hard for us to answer the question of whether anyone can be a good teacher of relaxation. In this work we wanted to draw attention to the characteristics of relaxation teacher and the most important aspects when conducting relaxation training sessions. The results of the research about relaxation sessions carried out by the students are optimistic. They show that theoretical and practical skills acquired during studies are satisfactory. Students received on average 5.5 points in seven-point scale. The lowest score was obtained for “summary of classes” and selection of that criterion as less important in the relaxation teacher evaluation shows the lack of sufficient experience of respondents. However, we should not ignore this element in the relaxation training, as communicating outside the experiences in the relaxation training leads to exploration of the natural state of relaxation. The most important criteria in evaluating teachers relaxation provided by the students allowed to rank them in the following order:

1. Passing instructions for classes
2. Explanation of aim and stages of the classes
3. Personal organizing for classes (props, materials)
4. Personal predispositions (atmosphere during classes)
5. General impression (all aspects)
6. Teaching predispositions (being motivative)
7. Control over classes (time, corrections, set of exercises)
8. Organizing of the group for classes (set of places, teaching aids)
9. Summary of classes (remarks, questions, comments).

The most important proved to be a skillful passing instructions to exercises and this is the first that we point out to teachers. Despite different abilities, everyone is able to develop appropriate voice disposition. It is important that the instructions are passed at a comfortable volume, spoken clearly, with the changeable and not monotonous intonation. From the observation, often for the first time carried out by the students of relaxation, results that the biggest problem they have is giving instructions too quickly. It happened commonly that the envisaged relaxation time shortened by a few minutes. In the face of stress in front of the public students had lost all sense of time running between spoken suggestions.



Suitable personal organizing for the classes, preparing relaxation scenario tailored to meet the needs of participants, taking into account the level of advancement or group integration, interweaving forms of passive movement with right amount of exercise can be a challenge for the teacher of relaxation. Even more that at the beginning of getting accustomed to the world of relaxation it may encounter resistance from the participants. Factors influencing the process of relaxation, such as mindfulness and introspection are not accompanied by modern human every day. So it is worth to diversify relaxation sessions with additional materials, props, music, and with small steps bring participants closer to focus on themselves. Preparation of the scenario of the classes and session will surely help to carry out classes efficiently. Prepare an outline of classes or sessions will help to carry out activities efficiently and foremost it will enable to explain the aim and stages of the classes. This is especially important for beginning teachers. On the other hand, in such a subtle area as relaxation the teacher should be open to changing plans depending on the disposal of the participants and unforeseen circumstances (noise, group too numerous, the lack of proper equipment).

The result of the correlation of various criteria with question 9 “general impression” (Fig. 3) directs the summary toward the teaching and personal predispositions. We recorded the strongest correlation of these two criteria with the general feeling of students participated in the relaxation sessions. Taking into account many years of experience and the above results, we conclude that even the best-prepared script, organization of the group and control over it will not produce for the teacher climate and atmosphere convenient to isolate participants from the outside world stimuli and to experience complete relaxation.

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