

A Future Direction for Physical Education: A Mandate for Change

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As we progress through the last decade of the 20th century, the value and contribution of various components of traditional educational curricula are being challenged. Identifying and achieving learning outcomes for all subject areas K-12, focuses upon student accountability and the employment of teaching strategies that are stimulating and evaluative in nature. Physical education is continually subject to criticism regarding its place within the total educational process. As financial concerns often times predominate over “educational quality”; educational leaders are now forced to choose and “sell” their programs. A system of merit justification exists in many school districts, whereby only the essential and most prestigious content areas receive support from school administrators and boards of education. As physical educators we have always been a proponent of “educating the total child”, in which the psychomotor domain is an essential factor. Can we be satisfied that the continuance of our profession be reliant upon traditional principles, or will the salvation of physical education be based upon a refocused inventory of subject matter that appeals to a much broader constituency?

Research in physical education and the more generic area of wellness is extensive; whereby the value of physical activity and all the facets contributing to good health are well documented. New catch-phrases such as: “daily quality physical education”; “outcomes for a

physically educated person”; and “developmentally appropriate physical education”, have been publicized through major campaigns by AAHPERD, State Associations, and in numerous journals. These promotions and their guiding principles are research based, and are noble contributions to the profession. Extraordinary efforts have been put forth by some of our leading physical educators toward creating a forum of awareness that describes the significant benefits associated with the objectives we endorse.

Even though such efforts have been monumental, has the status of our profession been enhanced? In general how many states have increased school-based programs (instructional time, taught by certified physical educators) as a result of these campaigns? Realistically, increasing requirements in hard economic times still remains an elusive goal. With numerous obstacles confronting the profession, perhaps the one variable that we can effect internally is the quality of our teaching, and the “education” of others as to what the benefits of physical education are.

If we cannot at present increase instructional time, a primary objective should focus around motivating youth towards being more active participants in physical activity along with acquiring knowledge about health-related issues (wellness concepts). Fox (1991), characterizes a successful physical education program as one that employs an approach sensitive to developmental change and emphasizes lifetime participation rather than performance. Such a system will most likely develop a psychosocial orientation in children that fosters long-term participation.

While studies have shown that a lack of physi-

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cal activity among children and adults is considered a major factor in the development of symptoms associated with hypokinetic disease, the support for additional physical education instruction has waned, mired by a stigma of “the traditional program”, where the sports skill emphasis dominated, and only the highly skilled achieved success. Additionally, the alarming results of the National Children and Youth Fitness Study (NCFS) (Parts 1 and 2 1985, 1987), which addressed the low levels of fitness of our youth and the lack of adequate physical education instruction in our schools should have served as an impetus for re-direction of objectives, both from a philosophical and programmatic point of view.

Restructuring our teaching priorities in physical education must be implemented using a three step sequence that will initiate change and hopefully broaden our support base.

1. We must re-educate ourselves as professionals as to what basic outcomes should be stressed. A philosophical re-direction may be necessary to sustain our viability. We should not solely exist because of a legislative mandate or requirement, but upon the value and quality of our teaching.
2. We must motivate the children to want to be physically active and develop an understanding of how to exercise appropri-

ately with the knowledge of why exercise is important.

3. We must re-educate parents so that they can guide their children to make appropriate decisions about wellness choices which include psycho-social and nutritional behaviors, as well as lifetime activity patterns.

School physical education programs should remain as core components of education; however, the substance and integrity of the profession needs to be revitalized featuring—physical, cognitive, and affective ingredients that will stimulate learning and produce an individual skilled in wellness education. This is our future direction, this is our mandate.

References

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