



Physical Education is Critical to a Complete Education

A Position Paper from the National Association for Sport and Physical Education

Overview

Physical education plays a critical role in educating the *whole* student. Research supports the importance of movement in educating both mind and body. Physical education contributes directly to development of physical competence and fitness. It also helps students to make informed choices and understand the value of leading a physically active lifestyle. The benefits of physical education can affect both academic learning and physical activity patterns of students. The healthy, physically active student is more likely to be academically motivated, alert, and successful. In the preschool and primary years, active play may be positively related to motor abilities and cognitive development. As children grow older and enter adolescence, physical activity may enhance the development of a positive self-concept as well as the ability to pursue intellectual, social and emotional challenges. Throughout the school years, quality physical education can promote social, cooperative and problem solving competencies. Quality physical education programs in our nation's schools are essential in developing motor skills, physical fitness and understanding of concepts that foster lifelong healthy lifestyles.

Physical Benefits

Physical education is unique to the school curriculum as the only program that provides students with opportunities to learn motor skills, develop fitness and gain understanding about physical activity. Physical benefits gained from physical activity include: disease prevention, safety and injury avoidance, decreased morbidity and premature mortality, and increased mental health. The physical education program is the place where students learn about all of the benefits gained from being physically active as well as the skills and knowledge to incorporate safe, satisfying physical activity into their lives.

Elementary

In the elementary grades, the physical education program emphasizes the development of fundamental locomotor, non-locomotor, and manipulative skills through the main content areas of educational games, dance, and gymnastics. The movement framework, (i.e., body, space, effort, and relationship) is also a part of the core content and is the basis for developing, expanding, and refining children's range of motor skills and awareness. Quality instruction by physical education professionals is critical if children are to develop fundamental motor patterns (e.g. jump, throw, skip, hop, catch, and kick). The motor skill foundations established during the elementary grades may enhance children's social, cognitive and physical development and increase the likelihood of continued interest and participation in physical activity. Fitness at elementary grades is supported by a rich experience in many basic movement forms.

Middle School

The middle school student is ready to experience a wide variety of applications of fundamental movements, including traditional sports, adventure activities (e.g., rock climbing, ropes, kayak, skiing), and lifetime or leisure-oriented activities (e.g., roller-blading, biking, dance). It is during this period when students are capable of refining, combining and applying a variety of sport-related and lifetime skills. Students may explore after-school opportunities for specialized or/and competitive physical activity programs.

Rapid growth during the pre-adolescent years may affect students' interests, choices, and activity patterns. Therefore physical education programs offer a variety of activities to meet and expand student interests. Fitness development becomes more systematic. Students develop specific fitness components, set goals and assess personal fitness levels.

High School

High school students become increasingly more independent as their daily lives become more complex and diversified. High school students begin to make decisions and choices in taking increased responsibility for themselves. Quality high school physical education programs provide students conceptual and practical understanding of: 1) health-related physical fitness, and 2) how to maintain a health-related level of physical fitness. Physical education plays a vital part in helping high school students maintain and refine the skills and knowledge needed to select physical activities to use throughout their lives.

Cognitive Benefits

Children learn through a variety of modalities (e.g., visual, auditory, tactile, physical). Teaching academic concepts through the physical modality may nurture children's kinesthetic intelligence.

Academic constructs have greater meaning for children when they are taught across the three realms of learning, including the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains. Greater depth and relevance can be achieved when the subject matter constructs are related to each domain of learning. Research has demonstrated that children engaged in daily physical education show superior motor fitness, academic performance, and attitude towards school versus their counterparts who did not participate in daily physical education. Physical education learning experiences also offer a unique opportunity for problem solving, self-expression, socialization, and conflict resolution.

Elementary

Research suggests that young children learn through active engagement with the "stuff" of their world. Children in elementary school acquire knowledge through physical exploration of their environment. Physical education may provide children with learning experiences essential to the formation of mental schemes (i.e., mental patterns or systems that describe the ways people think about the

world; building blocks of thinking). Children form more effective schemes by physically interacting with their environment. Quality physical education programs facilitate exploration of movement in various contexts that enhance acquisition of knowledge.

Middle School

Middle school students are intensely curious, prefer active to passive learning, and definitely favor interaction with peers during learning activities. The early adolescent exhibits a strong willingness to learn things they consider useful. They enjoy using skills to solve real life problems. Quality physical education programs provide a medium through which middle school students can refine and expand upon their physical repertoire of skills. It has been shown that students miss fewer days of school because of illness and exhibit greater academic achievement because of the physical vitality gained in physical education.

High School

During the high school years students should be given more in-depth learning opportunities so they can understand the mechanical, physiological and social-psychological aspects of physical activity. High school students' growing ability to compare and contrast, analyze, and synthesize information enables them to apply movement principles in new and meaningful ways. Students can more fully understand the role of physical activity in preventive health and analyze the pros and cons of various types of physical activity in lifelong health.

Affective Benefits

Physical competence builds self-esteem. Quality physical education programs enhance the development of both competence and confidence in performing motor skills. Attitudes, habits, and perceptions are critical prerequisites for persistent participation in physical activity. Appropriate levels of health-related fitness enhance feelings of well being and efficacy.

Elementary

Quality physical education programs can contribute to the development of self-esteem among children. Children who are more active may have greater social success and positive relations with peers. Children need many opportunities to experience personal feelings of success and achievement in physical activity settings. Explorations of various movement capabilities contribute to feelings of joy and accomplishment.

Middle School

Quality middle school physical education programs provide students unique opportunities for demonstrating leadership, socialization, and goal setting skills. Involvement in physical activity has shown a consistent relationship with mood, self-esteem, and other indices of psychological well-being in early adolescence. Student preferences become more specialized at this age and the preference

influences students' motivation to continue in physical activities. A youngster's feelings of perceived competence also affects future participation and self-esteem. Despite the physiological changes that occur at this age, students are generally willing to work cooperatively toward common goals because the desire for peer group acceptance is strong. Risk taking is attractive and students accept the challenge of setting and achieving personal goals. Physical education programs have a unique opportunity to provide learning experiences that enhance middle school students' self-esteem.

High School

During this phase of development, students begin to select activities based more on personal interests. Other factors affecting students' choices of physical activity may be their level of health-related physical fitness, body type, geographical location, and socio-economic group or circle of peers. Physical education programs must continue to enhance students' fitness development and offer an array of activities from which students can select.

Attitudes, habits, and perceptions are critical prerequisites for persistent participation in physical activities. To help students achieve self-realization through physical activity, the physical education program can guide student choices and help them become self-directed in the selection of activities that are satisfying. The importance of commitment and dedication in achieving success may be emphasized in physical education. Physical activity habits and preferences are not static, but are continually in a state of flux throughout one's lifetime. High school is a time when students can establish habits and attitudes about the role physical activity will play in their lifetime. This is the time for students to explore their preferences related to physical activity and perhaps specialize based on abilities and interests.

Physical Activity Improves the Quality of Life

Regular physical activity improves functional status and limits disability during the middle and later adult years. Physical activity contributes to quality of life, psychological health, and the ability to meet physical work demands. Physical education can serve as a vehicle for helping students to develop the knowledge, attitudes, motor skills, behavioral skills, and confidence needed to adopt and maintain physically active lifestyles. The outcomes of a quality physical education program include the development of students' physical competence, health-related fitness, self-esteem, and overall enjoyment of physical activity. These outcomes enable students to make informed decisions and choices about leading a physically active lifestyle.

In early years children derive pleasure from movement sensations and experience challenge and joy as they sense a growing competence in their movement ability. Evidence suggests that the level of participation, the degree of skill, and the number of activities mastered as a child directly influences the extent to which children will continue to participate in physical activity as an adult.

In early adolescence participation in physical activity provides important opportunities for challenge, social interaction, group membership, as well as opportunities for continued personal growth in physical skill.

Participation for high school students continues to provide enjoyment and challenge as young people express preferences for activities that meet their specific interests. A comprehensive, well-implemented physical education program is an essential component to the total education of students. Physical education prepares students to maintain healthy, active lifestyles and engage in enjoyable, meaningful leisure-time pursuits.

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