



INFORMATION SHEET

What do students think of physical activity?

A major challenge for teachers is how to guide students toward a lifetime commitment to physical activity. Methods commonly used by teachers, such as competition, tournaments, special privileges and awards, have not always been successful. The question we need to ask is: What motivates students to become physically active?

The experiences which children and youth have at school can have a lasting impression on them and determine whether or not they continue to be physically active in later years.

Research suggests that the reasons why children and youth are physically active are quite different from the reasons why adults are active. Let's examine some of the findings in relation to children, youth and physical activity.

Why do students participate in physical activity and sport?

Research conducted by the Australian Sports Commission in 1991 identified the following reasons why students played sport:

- ✧ It's fun (98%)
- ✧ It makes you feel good (90%)

- ✧ Something to do (81%)
- ✧ You make new friends that way (75%)
- ✧ I am really good at it (75%).

These findings are supported by the *NSW Schools Fitness and Physical Activity Survey, 1997* which found that the main reasons why boys and girls participated in physical activity were as follows:

Boys

- ✧ to keep fit
- ✧ to keep healthy
- ✧ to feel good about themselves
- ✧ to have fun
- ✧ to spend time with friends

Girls

- ✧ to have fun
- ✧ to keep fit
- ✧ to feel good about themselves
- ✧ to keep healthy
- ✧ to control their weight.

(NSW Department of Education and Training, 1997)

As the research suggests, one of the most influential determinants of regular participation in physical activity and sport is fun or enjoyment. Efforts to promote physical activity would do well to focus on this particular component.



What are students' attitudes to physical activity?

Clough, McCormack and Triall (1993) found that students' attitudes to playing sport differed, depending on the context and the people involved.

<i>How children felt about playing sport</i>	<i>Playing sport in class time (%)</i>	<i>Playing sport with family or friends (%)</i>	<i>Playing sport for their school (%)</i>	<i>Playing sport for a sporting club (%)</i>
Excited	44	63	56	64
Too organised	27	11	18	21
Boring	29	10	12	10
Fun	62	80	57	61
Satisfying	40	50	43	47
Too many rules	30	12	22	21
Dangerous	17	16	15	19
Others take it too seriously	42	20	31	32
Too competitive	42	20	31	32
Challenging	38	40	49	58
Develops skills	56	48	49	59

Sample: Boys=525, Girls=523

Table: Students' feelings about playing sport in different contexts

Source: Clough, McCormack and Triall, 1993

Some of the findings from this research were as follows:

- ✧ While playing sport was generally regarded as fun, it was more fun when played with family and friends.
- ✧ The best context in which to develop skills was in class time or with a sporting club.
- ✧ Many students found PE lessons too competitive.
- ✧ A very small number of students considered playing sport to be a dangerous activity.

What activities do students like?

It is a difficult exercise to come up with a definitive list of physical activities that all students like. *The NSW Schools Fitness and Physical Activity Survey, 1997* found that both organised and non-organised activity contributed to the overall activity levels of students. Students in Years 8 and 10 were asked to report the physical activities they do at school, before and after school, and at weekends.



The survey found that six activities were reported by 30-35% of boys: cycling for fun, school sport, walking for transport, soccer, cricket, swimming and basketball. Two activities were reported by more than 50% of girls: swimming and walking for transport. A further five activities were reported by 20-40% of girls: school sport, walking for pleasure, netball, cycling for fun and dance.

The survey also asked students to nominate one activity they would most like to do, and whether that activity is currently available to them. It found that no activities were nominated by a large proportion of students. There was a great variety of activities nominated and students reported that they already had access to the range of nominated activities.

A Western Australian study on girls and activity found that many girls like to try new things and take part in a variety of activities in PE and sport. They also prefer to have less time on “repeat” sports, to have more say in what they play and to be allowed to play “traditional male sports”.

(Malaxos and Wedgwood, 1997)

Putting it into practice in your school

The most influential determinant of why children and youth become involved in regular physical activity is fun or enjoyment. It is important, then, to ensure that we are offering a broad

range of activities, so students are able to participate in activities which they like. Where possible, include students in the decision-making process concerning what sports and activities are offered in the school’s PDHPE and sport programs. This could be done through the school SRC or student body, or by surveying random classes or students.

Have you tried:

- ❖ surveying your students to find out which activities they would most like to undertake?
- ❖ exploring the full range of activities which could be offered in your school?
- ❖ considering the activities which could be offered if, say, different equipment or additional line-markings were available?
- ❖ organising a meeting between the primary and high schools to discuss the types of activities and programs offered?
- ❖ developing a K-10 scope and sequence in PDHPE by linking the feeder primary schools and the high school?
- ❖ targeting the inclusion of one new game or activity each year in your school’s program?
- ❖ using community facilities located near the school which could enrich the variety of physical activity experiences for your students?
- ❖ contacting community sporting associations or local personnel with expertise in physical activity to add variety and expertise to your PDHPE program?