



## INFORMATION SHEET

# *What is good physical education?*

One of the aims of physical education is to enable students to develop positive attitudes towards physical activity and lifelong habits of participation. The initial physical activity experiences which the child has at school will impact significantly on attitudes and practices in later life. Hence we need to ensure that the experiences in physical activity at school are positive in order to achieve this aim.

Most children, given encouragement and the opportunity, will choose to be active. However, as the child grows up this changes. In primary school, there is very little difference between the skill levels of boys and girls or their enthusiasm to participate in physical activity. As children grow older, the difference between boys' and girls' skill levels becomes more pronounced and girls are more likely to drop out of physical activity, especially between the ages of 13 and 16 years of age.

To address this situation, physical education and sport programs need to cater for the different requirements of all boys and girls, to ensure that students remain physically active throughout their school years and in later life.

## *Characteristics of good physical education*

One way of achieving this is to ensure that physical education and sport meet the needs of all students. Some of the

key characteristics of good physical education include the following components.

- ❖ Activity levels are high for the majority of the session. Children and youth need to be moderately to vigorously active for 3 x 20-minute sessions per week, in addition to the daily 30 minutes of accumulated activity time recommended. We need to consider ways in which the time available for PE may be used as an opportunity to be vigorously active, while achieving the other learning outcomes of physical education.
- ❖ There is an emphasis on fun. This means including more activities in PE which make children "feel good" and which develop skills and physical competencies that contribute to lifelong habits. The aim is to encourage students to make physical activity a part of their daily lives, both in and out of school.
- ❖ Activities cater for all students' needs. This includes the needs of all boys and all girls. Some groups of boys are more likely to enjoy competitive and structured physical education experiences than some groups of girls. More girls tend to enjoy social interaction and play and prefer less structure in their physical education than most groups of boys.
- ❖ A safe environment is provided for participation. Facilities and equipment need to be well maintained. Children need to be

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given adequate instruction and practice before participating in activities that have an element of risk.

- ✧ The development of motor skills is emphasised. This is crucial in the early years to enable students to participate in activities in later life. One reason why many adolescents, particularly girls, drop out of physical activity is that they do not have the necessary skills to participate.
- ✧ Activities include variety and challenge. Activities need to be modified and changed regularly to maintain interest and enjoyment.
- ✧ Unstructured play activities are included. Structure and rules are sometimes a turn-off for some students, particularly girls. Free play situations allow for creativity and independence, and many children respond positively to these types of activities.
- ✧ The atmosphere of the lesson is non-threatening. Children need to feel comfortable and safe and to be able to make mistakes when developing skills. Children also need to experience success. The skill level of the activity needs to be carefully chosen so that students can experience success, but also be challenged when participating in activities. One way of getting children to experience success is to focus on self-improvement rather than to make comparisons with others in the class. For example, fitness testing and comparing results may act as a “turn-off” to physical activity for some students rather than “turning them on”.

- ✧ Differing methods of class organisation are used. Classes could be organised around ability levels or gender to make activities more enjoyable for all students.

Children and youth choose to be inactive or are turned off physical activity for a range of reasons. Some of these include failure, embarrassment, boredom, lack of encouragement, competition, injuries or lack of self-confidence. It is important to be aware of these factors when developing and selecting activities for children.

Much of the enthusiasm for physical activity is generated by the teacher. Where possible, teachers should show that they genuinely value physical activity by participating in some way in the lessons. It is impossible to be completely involved in all sessions, but there is always scope to reflect a positive approach or to take part in some small way.

Children will enjoy physical education if they can achieve everything which is asked of them. The challenge is to improve on the previous effort to allow for success and to assist in the development of positive attitudes to physical activity.

Promoting physical activity in its variety of forms is the key to increasing the participation of children and youth. Fun, success, skill development, active time and excitement are key ingredients that need to be maintained in physical education in order to ensure that activity patterns continue in later life.