

## **Physical Education's Contribution to Health and Wellness: Part 2<sup>1</sup>**

Lynn Randall

Healthy children have a better chance of performing well in school (Suhrcke, & de Paz Nieves, 2011). As noted by a number of agencies<sup>2</sup> the health and wellness of Canadians has been deteriorating in recent decades. Physical education programs are uniquely situated to positively contribute to the health and wellness of children and youth. The main objective of Canadian physical education programs is to educate each child such that when they graduate from public school, they are 'physically literate' (Physical and Health Education Canada, nd). Physically literate individuals are those who "...move with competence in a wide variety of physical activities that benefit the development of the whole person" (Mandigo, Francis, Lodewyk, & Lopez, 2009, p. 27). Inclusion of the words 'whole person' in the definition is intentional and meant to draw attention to the fact that physical education seeks to develop not only the physical abilities of students but also deliberately sets out to foster the social, emotional, and cognitive development of students as well.

---

<sup>1</sup> This is the second of a two-part article. The first article presented information on the current state of student wellness in Canada. This article discusses the potential positive contribution physical education can have on children and youth's health and wellness.

<sup>2</sup> For example, UNICEF, Active Healthy Kids Canada, Health Canada, and the Heart & Stroke Foundation.

## **Physical Education and Physical Development**

Regular participation in various forms of activity positively influences one's health and wellness (Health Canada, nd). If children are expected to take part in structured or unstructured activity, they need the tools to do so. The tools for participation in all forms of activity are movement skills. Children and youth need to be able to run, jump, throw, kick, strike, and catch with confidence and competence or participation in activity will not occur. Unlike other leisure activities like reading where one's ability is unknown to a casual observer, participating in movement activities is often very public. If you cannot catch, it is obvious; if you run awkwardly, it is obvious; if you attempt to throw and never hit your intended target, it is obvious. Few, if any, children and youth would voluntarily and intentionally put themselves in a situation where their lack of skills is publically on display for others to view. The opposite is also true: students who feel competent in their abilities and have acquired basic skills, are much more eager and willing to participate in activity. Physical education is the only subject that specifically aims to equip students with the movement skills necessary for voluntary participation in activity both during the school day (recess/lunch) and after school.

## **Physical Education and Social Development**

A quality physical education program can foster students' social development. When working alone, students learn to share space with others and respect the personal space of their classmates. They often work collaboratively in pairs or small groups, sharing equipment with each other. They learn to encourage each other. As practice attempts are made, the results

are assessed, reflected upon, modified, and refined over and over again with persistence and perseverance until eventually, automation is achieved. Students can be encouraged to assume roles of responsibility by taking out, distributing, and putting away equipment, leading warm-ups, and assuming refereeing roles.

### **Physical Education and Emotional Development**

For some students, moving makes them ‘feel good.’ Research investigating the relationship between activity and mental health has found a positive correlation between physical activity and good mental health. Participation in movement activities can reduce anxiety, stress, and depression (Bailey et al, 2011).

### **Physical Education and Cognitive Development**

The pressure schools and teachers experience in the pursuit of ensuring positive results on high stakes testing (provincial, national, and international student assessments) has led numerous schools and individual teachers to cancel physical education classes so they can spend more time preparing for the test. Numerous studies have been conducted that have investigated the effect of physical education on academic achievement. In *every* study, students who participated in regularly scheduled physical education classes scored equally (and sometimes better) than those students who spent less time in physical education and more time in the classroom (Shepard & Trudeau, 2013). The results have led critics to conclude that, since some studies produced no effect, then why bother. That is incredibly short sighted. What such results actually demonstrate is

that students can afford the time away from the classroom without any detrimental academic effects.

## **Conclusion**

Children's health and well-being are important considerations for schools because of the direct positive relationship they have to student learning and development. Although schools cannot be expected 'to do it all', they can continue to provide opportunities and experiences that contribute positively to the health and well-being of all children. There are numerous outcomes that contribute positively to children and youth's well-being that can be realized through participation in a quality, daily physical education program. The benefits can only be achieved through active participation. For many students, the only movement opportunities they have are while they are in school. At present, physical education is a required subject in all provinces and territories in Canada. Noting physical education's potential contribution to students' overall health and well-being, and noting how health and education are positively correlated, teachers and schools need to work towards ensuring their students experience quality, daily physical education.

## **References**

- Bailey, R., Armour, K., Kirk, D., Jess, M., Pickup, I., Sandford, R., & PERA Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy Special Interest Group (2009). The educational benefits claimed for physical education and school sport: an academic review. *Research Papers in Education, 24*(1), 1-27.
- Health Canada. (n.d.). Healthy living: Physical activity. Retrieved from: <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/physactiv/index-eng.php>

Mandigo, J., Francis, N., Lodewyk, K., & Lopez, R. (2009). Physical literacy for educators. *Physical & Health Education Journal, 75(3)*, 27-30.

Physical & Health Education Canada. (nd). *What is the relationship between physical education and physical literacy?* Retrieved from:  
<http://www.phecanada.ca/advocacy/advocacy-tools/what-relationship-between-physical-education-and-physical-literacy>

Shepard, R., & Trudeau, F. (2013). Quality daily physical education for the primary school student: A personal account of the Trois-Rivières regional project. *Quest, 65(1)*, 98-115.

Suhrcke M, & de Paz Nieves C (2011). *The impact of health and health behaviours on educational outcomes in high- income countries: a review of the evidence*. Copenhagen, WHO Regional Office for Europe. Retrieved from:  
[http://www.heartandstroke.com/site/c.ikIQLcMWJtE/b.3484343/k.2A0B/For\\_Parents\\_\\_Healthy\\_Weights\\_in\\_children.htm](http://www.heartandstroke.com/site/c.ikIQLcMWJtE/b.3484343/k.2A0B/For_Parents__Healthy_Weights_in_children.htm)

Lynn Randall is an associate professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of New Brunswick. The focus of her teaching and writing is on improving public school physical education programs.

Correspondence regarding this article can be addressed to [lrاندall@unb.ca](mailto:lrاندall@unb.ca)