

ACHPER WA The importance of Health and Physical Education and Health and Physical Education teachers in Western Australian schools

Background

An educated nation, comprising active and healthy young people strengthens the successful future of the Australian population. Research shows that if children develop competence and confidence in their motor skills, they are much more likely to participate in physically active pursuits in adolescence (Stanley, Ridley, & Dollman, 2012) and that regular activity for children increases the probability of an active adult lifestyle (Janssen & LeBlanc, 2010). Importantly, positive associations have been found between sufficient levels of physical activity and musculoskeletal health with health related aspects such as good nutrition, psychological wellbeing, cognition and readiness to learn. Thus, Health and Physical Education contributes to a preventive health agenda as well as an educational agenda.

Health and Physical Education (HPE) is the learning area that mobilises the holistic development of the skills, knowledge and understanding necessary to make healthier, safer and more physically active living throughout life. Experiential learning is at its core through a variety of motivating physical activity contexts, such as games, sports, dance, aquatics, outdoor education and recreation. HPE should offer learning 'in' (movement skill development, fitness), 'through' (personal, teamwork, empathy development) and 'about' (biophysical, social understandings) movement and physical activity thereby supporting student engagement and enjoyment of regular movement (Arnold, 1979). Personal, social, community and culturally-sensitive, health-focused learning enables students to support their own and others' health, wellbeing and safety. HPE serves the developmental needs of students of all abilities. Teacher expertise and adequate teaching resources are essential for quality HPE programs.

A positive relationship between physical activity, physical education, health and academic performance has been demonstrated in several studies (see Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010). These studies suggest that increased curriculum time dedicated to physical and health education does not detract from academic performance of students, even though class time is reduced.

ACHPER WA's Position on HPE in Western Australian Schools

We support and promote healthier, safer and more active living to the people of Western Australia.

We assert that education and schools are critical to the development of health enhancing dispositions in children and young people of all abilities.

We inspire demonstrated excellence in inclusive teaching and learning of HPE in schools and communities.

We engage with research and data to guide evidence-based quality practice.

We advocate that all schools should have access to specialist teaching to enhance the development of highest quality HPE pedagogy and programs. This should include direct teaching, support to classroom teachers and the facilitation of school/community links.

We connect members, teachers, schools, parents, community organisations and peak bodies to facilitate health promoting support networks.

We engage and partner with members, teachers, schools communities, peak bodies and likeminded associations for the betterment of HPE and the health and wellbeing of children and young people.

We support the strengthening of the role of school leadership in creating and maintaining a culture in which high quality teaching is developed and growth in student achievement is always central to decision making (Department of Education, Focus, 2019).

We advocate to increase the capacity of teachers to use their knowledge of the history, culture and experiences of Aboriginal people, and explicitly use this in classroom practice and resources to improve outcomes for Aboriginal students (Department of Education, Focus, 2019)

We advocate that HPE is essential for learning to analyse and demystify often contradictory 'health' messages to which students are exposed. Explicit teaching and learning support a growth mindset. Students learn social skills, positive decision making and problem solving, to be resilient, to grasp opportunities, to play fairly, and to resolve conflicts.

ACHPER WA *champions* quality teaching



Through the mobilisation of the five philosophical propositions and/or key ideas (WA HPE Curriculum) that are the foundation to meaningful, diversified, differentiated and inclusive HPE.

More specifically, teaching in HPE should:

1. focus on educative purpose;
2. use a strengths-based approach;
3. include critical inquiry of information and practice;
4. value movement in a variety of activity contexts; and
5. develop health literacy.

By providing varied opportunities to develop, practice, and critically engage with health challenges, HPE is a compelling investment in the holistic development of the health and physical literacy of all children and young people in the present and the future.

ACHPER WA Advocates:

HPE is an essential learning area for all Kindergarten to Year 10 students and that physical education and health opportunities be built into Year 11 – 12 schooling. More particularly, that:

- in the compulsory years of schooling a minimum of 120 minutes per week of curriculum time be allocated to HPE, supplemented by additional opportunities for incidental physical activity time throughout the school day for children of all abilities;
- education sector policies and practices do not curtail both curriculum or incidental physical activity and healthy environments for students and teachers;
- school policies and practices prioritise health and activity-promoting environments (such as, play space allocation; playground equipment; canteen menus, etc.);
- all primary and secondary schools have access to qualified HPE specialist teachers;
- ongoing professional learning support be available and undertaken at least annually by teachers of HPE;
- teachers adopt contemporary, quality HPE teaching practice based on the five propositions;
- teachers program a variety of developmentally appropriate, physical activity contexts relevant to their school setting (i.e., not the same activity context each term across all the class levels);
- school-based research on HPE teaching and learning be undertaken to inform practice and programs;
- teaching excellence in primary and secondary HPE be recognised via an annual awards scheme; and
- outdoor education be promoted to connect young people with nature and to develop confidence, resilience and problem solving.

References

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