

Chapter 1

Introduction to Elementary Physical Education

Probing Questions

1. What role, if any, does physical education play in the education of school children?
2. How has your experience in physical education influenced your view of physical education?
3. If you had to implement a physical education program in your school, what would it look like?
4. How do children benefit from being physically active?



Teaching in American schools today is truly a unique and dynamic challenge as the student population continues to become more diverse and the responsibilities of teachers in schools continue to expand. In reality, your sole responsibility as a teacher is no longer just to ensure that students learn the content, instead you are being asked to carry out the roles of counselor, psychologist, policeperson, doctor, and mediator. Performing these duties competently can be a daunting challenge. Yet, probably even more challenging than fulfilling these roles is the responsibility given to you to teach the expanding content that is required in elementary schools. This content not only includes teaching reading, math, language, and writing skills, but also character education, music, and social skills. Additionally, you might also find yourself responsible for having to teach physical education, which we have found to be a source of concern for many elementary education students and teachers.

We feel that how an individual responds to these challenges provides some insight into how they will fulfill the role of “Teacher.” We believe a teacher is someone who regardless of the circumstances will do whatever it takes to help students learn the material. The challenge of teaching the content of physical education for some individuals will test this belief. You may be saying to yourself, “But I’m not even good at sports, how can I possibly be held accountable for teaching the content?” For us, the

question we feel you must ask yourself is “Am I a Teacher?” When you find yourself outside your comfort zone, unsure of your ability to teach the content, do you still try to do everything you can to provide students with quality learning experiences?” If this is you, then open your mind to the content and information following in this book and enjoy the learning experience.

Shared Mission

There are over 50 million children attending over 110,000 schools in America today. Although these children come from diverse backgrounds and have unique life experiences the educational mission is the same; and that is, to educate the whole child so that they become healthy, productive, and responsible citizens. It is this mission that guides teachers in N-12 school settings to ensure that children can read, write, calculate, experiment, move efficiently and think critically. Thus, it makes sense that the shared mission of all teachers in the education of the whole child is to help them develop:

- mentally - the acquisition and use of knowledge
- emotionally - the awareness and expression of feelings
- physically - the healthy functioning of the body
- socially - the ability to interact with others and the environment
- spiritually – the capacity to find meaning and purpose to existence in general

Teachers make sure that by the time students leave high school, they have the basic knowledge and skills that will help them be productive self-sustaining individuals for a lifetime. In addition, there would be relatively few, if any, arguments if we suggested that it is every teacher’s responsibility to ensure that students learn to respect themselves and others, to adhere to the rules and procedures of the school, and to interact with others in positive ways. Thus, regardless of the subject you teach, it is the mission of every teacher to help children to demonstrate personal and social responsibility.

Unique Mission

If the shared mission of all teachers is the education of the whole child, the unique mission of physical education is specifically geared toward meeting the physical aspect of the child. When you examine the school curriculum, it becomes apparent that physical education is the only content area that would meet the physical component since no other content area in the curriculum focuses on developing motor skills in children. Thus, the unique mission of physical educators is to teach children how to move effectively and efficiently so that they may achieve the ultimate purpose of any physical education program which is to “guide children in becoming physically active for a lifetime” (COPEC, 2000).



Figure 1-1. Active Children

We believe that in order for children to achieve the goal of being physically active for a lifetime, the physical educator must help children:

- develop motor skills so that they can actively participate with success,
- develop an appreciation for the different ways the body can move,
- develop an understanding of how physical activity is beneficial to the body.

In order to achieve this goal, the physical education program exposes children to a range of activities that allows them the opportunity to explore and grow physically.

Physical Education, can then be defined as a planned, sequential program of instruction designed to develop **movement skills, fundamental motor skills, sports skills**, and physical fitness for lifetime participation in physical activity.

Understanding the Language

When discussing the unique mission of physical education, we use terms like physical activity, exercise, and physical fitness to describe what we feel are critical elements within a physical education program. When you think about these words, does the same image appear for each term? We would hope that the images that come to mind would be discernable from each other. The reality is that although these terms mean different things, many people use them interchangeably. Thus, we thought it would be useful for understanding the information in this book to clearly distinguish between the terms (see Table 1-1).

Table I-1

Term	Definition
Physical Activity	Any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles resulting in energy expenditure.
Physical Fitness	A measure of a person's ability to perform physical activities that require endurance, strength, or flexibility. It is achieved through a combination of regular exercise and genetically inherited ability.
Exercise	Physical activity that is planned, structured, and repetitive bodily movement done to improve or maintain one or more of the components of physical fitness: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aerobic capacity • Muscular strength • Muscular endurance • Flexibility • Body composition

SOURCE: USDHHS. (1996). *Physical activity and health: A report of the Surgeon General Executive Summary*. Atlanta: USDHHS, Center for Disease Control (CDC), National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion.

The definitions in Table I-1 clearly distinguish the differences between the activity terms that are commonly used in the physical education context. We feel that until individuals recognize these differences, it is hard to provide a program that is reflective of the mission of physical education.

Benefits of Physical Activity

The reigning opinion from many health experts is that lifelong participation in physical activity has a positive impact on an individual's health and well-being. Physically active people tend to be healthier and seem to experience a better quality of life. With that belief, it is now acceptable and desirable to encourage purposeful engagement in physical activity starting during the early years and physical education appears to afford the best opportunity to reach a vast number of people. More importantly, the role the physical education teacher plays in this important movement is to help children develop the skills that will help them to be physically active throughout their lifespan.

Unfortunately as the importance of being physical activity becomes more apparent throughout the United States, the amount of physical education required during the school years is steadily decreasing (NASPE, 1993) and many schools use the classroom teacher to teach physical education. Over the years, state requirements for "daily" physical education have slowly eroded. This is in direct opposition to the substantial concern resounding from health experts about the current level of inactivity among the Nation's youth and as the obesity level of the nation continues to increase. Since physical education seems an ideal way to encourage activity and develop fitness among children, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the National

Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE), and the American Heart Association (AHA) all recommend comprehensive daily physical education for children K-12.

Health Benefits

According to the CDC, the percentage of overweight children aged 6-11 and 12-17 has more than doubled in the past thirty years. With the knowledge that there is a direct relationship between obesity and cardiovascular disease it is important to start identifying ways to fight this problem. Three national reports, Healthy People 2000, Healthy People 2010 and the U.S. Surgeon General's Report (1996), have had a significant impact on providing overwhelming evidence of the role that physical activity plays in the prevention of disease and its health benefits. Box 1-1 highlights the health benefits derived from engaging in physical activity.

Box 1-1. Health Benefits of Physical Activity

- Helps build and maintain healthy bones, muscles, and joints
- Helps control weight, build lean muscle, and reduce fat
- Prevents or delays the development of high blood pressure and helps reduce blood pressure in some adolescents with hypertension
- Reduces the risk of dying from heart disease
- Reduces the risk of developing diabetes
- Helps control weight
- Promotes psychological well-being

Source: Surgeon General's Report on Physical Activity and Health

The exciting news is that these health benefits can be gained by developing a lifelong habit of engaging in "moderate" amounts of physical activity (See Box 1-2).

Box 1-2. Examples of Activities Considered to be of Moderate Intensity

- Brisk walking
- Bike riding
- Roller skating or blading
- Playing outdoors
- Raking the yard
- Participating in various youth sports
- Swimming

Current recommendations from the Surgeon General indicate elementary school aged children should accumulate at least 30 to 60 minutes of age-appropriate physical activity from a variety of physical activities on all, or most, days of the week. No longer is it suggested that the health benefits are gained from establishing a level of physical fitness that was often considered unachievable by many individuals. With these

recommendations, there is a new sense that being able to experience of health benefits of physical activity now seems obtainable.

Cognitive Benefits

As you may already know, infants learn about the world around them by exploring and interacting with their environment. They are born with billions of neurons and they create neural nets or grouping of neurons that act in unison to produce specific actions. It is these early learning experiences that are critical in helping children establish as many neural pathways as possible in their brain. These neural nets are formed early and neurons that are not used typically fade away, so early movement experiences strengthen neural connections thus beginning the lifelong educational journey. It is important to remember that movement is critical to learning because it basically starts the learning process.

This is an exciting time to be a physical education teacher or someone responsible for helping children learn to move and be active, since there is a considerable amount of information detailing how critical physical activity is to the cognitive functioning of children. The prevailing belief among many developmentalists is when children are provided stimulating environments in which to learn and grow they utilize more of their brains' capacity, by building more neural networks. With this in mind, it is believed that children who are active may develop and strengthen parts of the brain that inactive children may not.

The Role of Physical Education in the Elementary School

Elementary school children have an innate desire to move and play. When you watch them you will notice that they love to chase, flee, dodge, jump and tumble. In a school environment where there are rules governing student behavior, these actions can be problematic. In a typical school day, you will often hear teachers dictate to students to, "Stop running in the hallway," "That chair is to sit in, not stand on" or "Stop that horseplay before someone gets hurt." In the appropriate venue, these actions would be a welcomed sight. In physical education, we want children to run, jump, balance, and tumble. So instead of squashing this desire to move, elementary physical education teachers help children learn different motor skills and how to use these skills to safely explore the way the body moves in space, with effort, and with others and objects. It is critical for children to develop these skills so that they will be able to successfully participate in a variety of individual and team activities or sports such as inline skating or soccer for the rest of their lives.

Thus, the physical educator's job is to implement curricula and instruction that emphasizes the enjoyment of lifelong participation in physical fitness and physical activity. In addition to helping children to become more skillful, the role of the physical educator includes:

- Helping children gain confidence in their motor ability
- Fostering in children a positive attitude toward physical activity and physical fitness

- Helping children respect individual differences among individuals in activity settings
- Promoting a desire for children to engage in physical activity outside of the school environment
- Managing the instructional environment to help children feel safe physically and psychologically
- Helping children demonstrate personal and social responsibility
- Providing planned sequential programs of instruction to meet national standards

In order to meet the goal of having children become active for a lifetime, you must provide children with quality physical education programs that meet the needs of individual students in an environment that is accepting and safe.

The Significant Impact of the Teacher on Children's Perceptions of Physical Education

Invariably when you start a discussion about children's physical education experiences there is always a dichotomous dialogue (See Box 1-3).

Box 1-3. Learning Task to Stimulate Class Discussion.

Get with three friends and write independent answers to these questions.

- Was there a time when you were really frustrated in your physical education class? What were the circumstances?
- What was your favorite activity that you played during your elementary physical education class?
- If you could change one thing about your elementary physical education experience, what would it be?
- What do you see as the greatest challenge facing you as a physical educator?
- The contribution that physical education makes to the development of the whole child is...

Compare your answers. Are there consistencies across your responses? How do you think these experiences might affect the way you will teach physical education?

Some students when we discuss their elementary physical education experience share fond memories of playing with their friends, playing on the jungle gym bars, or even playing their favorite games. On the other hand, there are some students whose faces cloud over and they have a distant look in their eyes as they seem to be caught in an unpleasant dream. They recall the embarrassment of trying to hit the ball in softball and missing, or trying to kick the ball and missing in kickball, or the laughter of their classmates as they tripped and fell during a relay race. For some adults their attitude toward physical activity and fitness were shaped by these experiences in physical education.

The root of many negative experiences in physical education which caused the subject to become the bane of some children's existence can usually be traced back to poor teaching practices and poor content development. Regrettably, some children would benefit from not having physical education if the program uses inappropriate teaching practices and content. These programs typically turn children "Off" physical activity and convince them they are not good at sports. Children in these programs become learned helpless. That is, they feel they lack the requisite skills to be successful, so they fail to try. This feeling is most evident when you hear a child say, especially the younger ones, "I can't." Unfortunately, children learn this behavior quickly after repeated failed attempts to be successful at a task and then quickly learn how to avoid experiencing the feeling of frustration in the future, by giving up before trying.



Figure 1-2. Children Need to Believe they "Can" helping them become more successful while participating in physical activity.

Because this happens frequently, there is a movement across the country to implement the "New PE", in short, creating programs that are more engaging and exciting for all children. We believe this is a distressing commentary for the state of physical education, if the rally cry has become that "physical education should stimulate learning for all children." We believe the "New PE" would be a reflection of common practice if physical education teachers were exposing children to worthwhile programs. The good news is we have seen and been involved in a number of elementary physical education programs that provide children with fun and exciting programs while holding students accountable for the content to be learned. In these programs, the teacher fosters the belief in children that they "Can" by

By now it should be clear, the teacher sets the tone for the type of experience children have in physical education. Whether that experience is positive or negative is contingent upon the value you place on students learning the content of physical education.

Effective Teaching in the Physical Education Setting

Since we believe that you as a teacher will have a significant impact on students' perceptions of physical education, then it is a necessity that physical education programs are taught by effective/good teachers. The following questions are used to frame the content for this section:

- What does effective teaching in physical education look like?
- Is it different from good teaching in the classroom?
- How does one distinguish between a good teacher and a poor teacher?

These are difficult questions to answer since the complexity of the learning environment makes prescriptive teaching ineffective. Yet, we believe that there are five characteristics of effective teachers. Although these characteristics are not specific to physical education, they guide and inform teaching practices and are exhibited by effective teachers. As each characteristic is presented, try to see how it might look similar or different to teaching in the classroom. Once you make the connection and understand how each characteristic guides practice, you will be better able to teach the content of physical education. A good teacher who is concerned with student learning will exhibit the five characteristics, thus ensuring a better physical education experience for children.

The Knowledgeable Practitioner

The first characteristic of effective teachers is they are **knowledgeable practitioners**. As an expert teacher, you have a thorough understanding of the content and know to teach the content to children. This is reflective in your ability to make explanations meaningful and connect new information to something familiar for the student. Additionally, you know how to translate material to students in a seemingly effortless and systematic manner that facilitates student comprehension of the material.

It makes sense to assume that “teachers” know the material. Yet, often you are asked to teach material they are not familiar with or comfortable with in an effort to meet the curriculum demands of the school or school system. Each teacher is different in their strengths, weaknesses, and interests, so some content areas will be easier to teach than others. To be an effective teacher that is knowledgeable will require, for some, a continued journey of learning that comes outside the confines of the college preparation course for the content area. Thus, at some point, it becomes your responsibility as a classroom teacher to collect and study new material that will help you become more knowledgeable about the content you are teaching.

The Good Communicator

Effective teachers are *good communicators*. It can be said that the foundation for any good solid relationship is the way individuals relate and communicate with one another. When communication breaks down it usually leads to misunderstandings, uncertainty, and frustration. In order to eliminate this from happening, you must be able to clearly verbalize to students what is expected and how students are to go about meeting these expectations. Our experience has shown that when students know what is expected and understand the directions for the task, it alleviates uncertainty and frustration on the part of the student and more importantly, wasted instructional time.



Figure 1-3. Students need Clear Expectations

instructions and students must feel secure to indicate if they don't understand them. This will help to ensure that everyone is working on the same page.

There are two particularly important aspects of presenting tasks to students that require good clear communication and they are demonstrations and learning cues. These two instructional functions help children focus on the critical elements or strategies for the required task, often allowing students to work independently of the teacher. More importantly, it should be conveyed that communication between you and your students should be a two-way street. You must be able to give clear quality

Creator of a positive learning environment

More effective teachers *create an environment conducive to learning*. It is safe to assume that when the learning environment is filled with uncertainty and conflict that relatively little learning takes place. One function that effective teachers engage in to help foster a positive atmosphere for learning is to manage and organize the learning environment. This is not to say that good managers are effective teachers but effective teachers are good managers. Within this function, good managers establish rules and routines for students that will guide classroom procedures throughout the year. These routines usually involve how to enter and leave the gymnasium, starting and stopping an activity, use of equipment, working with groups and dealing with behavioral disruptions (Graham, 2000).

We know that effective teachers use the time at the beginning of the school year to teach these rules and routines because they do not assume that students will automatically learn the procedures because they were verbally stated or written on a poster. Additionally, effective teachers will use their management skills to organize learning experiences that facilitate high practice opportunities and high levels of student engagement. Thus, in this type of learning climate, an observer will not see children waiting in line, playing on large sided teams, or waiting an extended period of time for instruction.

Provider of Meaningful Feedback

Being able to provide meaningful *feedback* is another characteristic of effective teachers. Think about the last time you tried to teach a person a new concept or skill. When the person was experiencing trouble, what did you do? You probably offered a few hints or clues that you thought might help them to learn the information better. For example, one common theme taught by most elementary



Figure 1-4. Quality Lessons Engage All Students

classroom teachers is the difference between right and left. One technique you might use to prompt students who are experiencing trouble is to raise just the thumb and index finger of both hands in front of their face and see which hand makes an “L” and you remind them that this is the left hand or left side of the body (See figure 1-5).

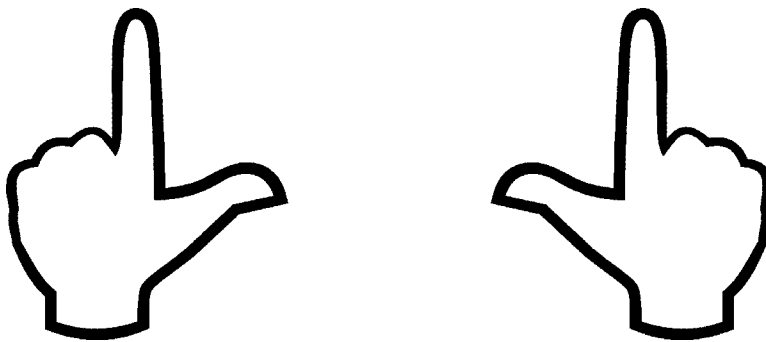


Figure 1-5: Graphic of a Strategy Teachers Use to Teach Children Left from Right

Although being able to quantify how feedback aids student learning is of continual debate among teaching professionals, it is universally accepted that feedback does have an influence on student performance. This is evidenced when children are performing tasks and you provide them with some information about the quality or outcome of the performance. It is believed that children use your information to make adjustments to subsequent practice tasks. There are numerous types of feedback used by teachers to aid performance that include but are not limited to: positive, negative, approval, disapproval, general, specific, supportive, and congruent. It is generally accepted by many physical education professionals that most useful type of feedback given during instruction is specific and congruent. That is, specific feedback highlights what needs to be corrected and congruent feedback means that it relates to the learning cue or critical features of the skill identified during the lesson objective.

Creator of Stimulating Learning Tasks


Probably one of the most important aspects of teaching is creating stimulating learning tasks. The key is to have good content development, and to structure the content appropriately. By knowing the logical skill progression and using this knowledge to create learning tasks that are motivating and suitable for students, you will have students who are engaged in tasks that are individually appropriate. It is also likely that they will exhibit high success rates.

We know that in order to present children with appropriate tasks of varying levels of difficulty, effective teachers use various instructional strategies that allow children to work on their individual skill level. When this happens, students usually are engaged in good practice and experience a high rate of success.

A Concern with Student Achievement

Finally, it must be noted that an effective elementary classroom teachers may not necessarily be an effective physical education teacher. Nonetheless, we believe that regardless of the content, those of you who are concerned with student achievement will provide children with quality instruction and learning experiences. In order to achieve this goal, you must exhibit the characteristics of effective teachers by establishing sound management techniques, using appropriate feedback, structuring sound and appropriate learning tasks, and having children engaged during instruction. Because we believe these characteristics are critical to the success of teachers, they will be reinforced and discusses repeatedly in this book.

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Over to you. . . 

1. You are attending a school board meeting where there is a discussion centered on eliminating physical education from the school curriculum. The school board opens the floor for questions and comments from the audience. Make a stand defending the importance of physical education.
2. There are multiple roles for the physical education teacher. Identify what you feel are the three most crucial roles the physical education teacher fulfills and explain your position.
3. Effective teachers are knowledgeable, good communicators, create good learning tasks, provide appropriate feedback, and create a learning environment conducive to learning. Do you think there are additional characteristics that should be included that effective teachers exhibit? Justify your answer. Is there a characteristic on the list that you think should be eliminated? Why?

Portfolio Tasks. . . 

1. Interview one of your classmates concerning his/her experiences in elementary physical education. After the interview, use the information you gathered to write a 1-page description of the impact of those experiences on his/her current view of physical education.
2. Develop a "Concept Map" or "Webbing" for physical education.
3. Identify 3 websites that could serve as a resource base of sources you could go to or use to support physical education in the schools.
4. Make a commitment to engage in some form of physical activity daily for at least 30 minutes (cumulative) for the next 15-weeks or for the duration of this course. Keep a daily log that includes: duration of total activity, type of activity, how you felt at the completion of the activity. At the end of this commitment, review your log and check for any themes related how you felt physically, mentally, emotionally, socially, or spiritually.

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Glossary

- Fundamental Motor Skill.** A basic motor action with a specific movement pattern.
- Movement Skills.** All movement patterns that require bodily action.
- Knowledgeable Practitioner.** An individual who has a thorough understanding of the content and knows how to teach the content to children.
- Physical Education.** A planned, sequential program of instruction designed to develop basic movement skills, sports skills, and physical fitness for lifetime participation in physical activity.
- Sport Skills.** Proficiency in using fundamental motor skills in competitive situations.