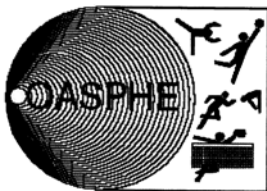

What do elementary educators think of the current Ontario Health and Physical Education Curriculum?

Summary of Findings from the 2006 Elementary Health and Physical Education Curriculum Review Survey and Related Literature for consideration in Curriculum Review



OSPHE (Ontario Association for the Supervision of Physical and Health Education)
Ophea (Ontario Physical and Health Education Association)

Overview

In September 2007, the Ontario Ministry of Education began the review of the Health and Physical Education Curriculum. In preparation for this review, OASPHE (The Ontario Association for the Supervision of Physical and Health Education) in partnership with Ophea, conducted the *Elementary Health and Physical Education Curriculum Review Survey* with educators in the fall of 2006 to gather feedback about the current H&PE curriculum.

Elementary educators across the province had the opportunity to complete the survey, which was offered in both French and English. A statistically significant and regionally representative number responded, and were indicative of more than 45 school boards from across Ontario. The majority of respondents were teachers followed by principals and vice-principals. The majority of teacher respondents were Generalists, while principals and vice-principals were typically either Specialists or Honours Specialists in Health and Physical Education.

Findings from the survey have been summarized along with relevant literature into Key Messages to be considered in the Health and Physical Education curriculum review process. They have been organized to reflect messages in relation to the *overall curriculum*, as well as messages that are *specific to the three strands of the curriculum – Healthy Living, Active Participation, and Fundamental Movement Skills*.

These are presented in the following pages and will be widely circulated amongst elementary educators across Ontario to support them in providing input that will inform the revision of the H&PE curriculum. They will also be provided directly to the Ministry of Education to this end, and shared with other relevant ministries and non-government agencies and coalitions as appropriate.

Key Messages Regarding the Overall Curriculum

1. The Introduction of the *Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1-8: Health and Physical Education, 1998* should be revised and updated.

Approximately half of all respondents stated that there were omissions in the introductory section of the curriculum document. Some suggestions for revision included the following:

- Revise the description about the role of students with regard to their learning in a manner that is more specific to the Health and Physical Education curriculum.
- Include a clear message about the Ministry mandate for Daily Physical Activity (DPA), that is grounded in evidence and background information on child health (obesity, disease prevention, healthy child development, etc.). This should also include information regarding the DPA time requirements, clothing considerations, access to available support resources, etc.
- This section should include a mandated minimum number of minutes a week for the delivery of both the Physical Education curriculum and the Healthy Living curriculum.
- Update the information about the use of computers to include a variety of technology and to include a message about internet safety

With respect to supportive research and information that can be considered for the Introduction section, examples from current literature include:

- *Canada's Physical Activity Guides for Children and Youth* specifically recommend that inactive children and youth (ages six to 14) increase the amount of time they currently spend being physically active by at least 30 minutes more per day, and decrease the time they spend on TV, playing computer games and surfing the Internet by at least 30

minutes less per day. The increase in physical activity should include a combination of moderate and vigorous activity. Over several months, children and youth should try to accumulate at least 90 minutes more physical activity per day and decrease by at least 90 minutes per day the amount of time spent on non-active activities such as watching videos and sitting at a computer.

- CAHPERD recommends 150 minutes a week of physical education, but only one in five schools meets the requirement. On average, schools offer a total of 25 minutes per week of the moderate to vigorous physical activity needed to keep the heart and lungs fit.
- According to the data in the 2007 People for Education Ontario Elementary Schools Tracking Survey the overall average number of minutes per week of physical education in elementary schools in Ontario has declined by 6% from 2004 levels.
- Classroom-based physical activity was demonstrated to be effective for increasing daily in-school physical activity and improving on-task behavior during academic instruction. The intervention was effective in improving on-task behavior; after the Energizers were systematically implemented, on-task behavior systematically improved.¹
- Research results indicate a consistent positive relationship between overall fitness and academic achievement. That is, as overall fitness scores improved, mean achievement scores also improved.²

2. The current H&PE curriculum is inclusive, allowing all students to participate and achieve success.

Almost 75% of respondents indicated that the current curriculum provides the opportunity for all students to achieve success, although comments suggest there is some room for improvement. For example, information needs to be provided in the curriculum or an addendum that includes teaching/learning strategies to support students with special needs.

Additional research indicates that considerations for those children who may be more at risk of being inactive (e.g. newcomer students and English Language Learners, girls, children managing issues of overweight/obesity) are particularly important to address a lack of comfort with participation and corresponding decline in physical activity.³ Research also indicates the importance of ensuring quality programming is delivered regardless of socioeconomic status as a particular study showed that students in more affluent schools spend 20 per cent more physical education time engaged in moderate to vigorous physical activity than do students in low-income schools.⁴

¹ Golden, J., Mahar, Mt., Murphy, SK., Raedeke, TD., & Rowe, DA. (2006). Effects of a classroom-based program on physical activity and on-task behavior. *Medicine and Science in Sports and Exercise*, 38(12), 2086-2094.

² Grissom, JB.(2005). Physical Fitness and Academic Achievement. *Journal of Exercise Physiology*, 8, 11-25.

³ Balduck, Anne-Line., Cordon, Greet., De Bourdeaudhuij, Iise., Lefevre, Johan., Matton, Lynn., Philippaerts, Renaat., & Wijndaele, Katrien. (2005). Physical activity levels in 10- to 11-year-olds: clustering of psychosocial correlates. *Public Health Nutrition*, 8, 896-903.

⁴ American Institutes for Research. (2005). Effects of outdoor education programs for children in California. Report prepared for the California Department of Education.

3. The curriculum learning expectations within all three strands of the H&PE curriculum - *Fundamental Movement Skills, Healthy Living and Active Participation* - reflect a sequence of knowledge and skills from grades 1 through 8.

Over 70% of respondents indicated that learning expectations across the strands and sub-strands of the HPE Curriculum reflected a sequence of knowledge, allowing for the developmental progressions from one grade level to the next. However, there were some additional comments that should be further explored in discussion with educators as part of the review. These included:

- The curriculum expectations may reflect a sequence of knowledge and skills from grades 1 to 8, but this flow does not translate to the reality of the classroom.
- The curriculum needs to be more prescriptive for teachers who do not have a strong background in Health and Physical Education. More details and examples are needed.
- There are some gaps and overlaps in the scope and sequence (particularly in Fundamental Movement Skills and Living Skills) that need to be addressed.
- The effective connection of learning expectations across grades that link both health and physical education is something reflected in the work of other provinces as well. Using just one example in this regard, the Manitoba Education website states that “the combined PE/HE curriculum provides a connected approach to learning about the mind and about the body in a way that promotes active healthy lifestyles. Physical education and health education reinforce each other to give students a clear message about being active and making safe, healthy choices”.

4. The Living Skills (e.g., fair play, cooperation, respect for others, decision-making and goal-setting) should continue to be incorporated into the Active Participation and Healthy Living strands of the elementary H&PE curriculum rather than being a separate strand as in the secondary H&PE curriculum (*Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: Health and Physical Education, 1999* and *Ontario Curriculum, Grades 11 and 12: Health and Physical Education, 2000.*)

Two-thirds of respondents indicated that the Living Skills expectations of the curriculum should remain integrated across the Healthy Living and Active Participation strands, rather than be dealt with separately as is done at the secondary level.

Research supports this consideration, as a recent literature review indicated that as part of learning in the affective domain, physical education can have a strong influence on character development. By focusing on the social-emotional nature in relation to physical movement, physical education teachers can help students become self-assured members of society.⁵

⁵ DeCorby, Kara., Dixon, Sheryle., Halas, Joannie., Janzen, Henry., & Wintrup, Lainie. (2005). Classroom teachers and the challenges of delivering quality physical education. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 98(4), 208-221.

5. The Health and Physical Education curriculum expectations are better than average in:

- a. the preparation of students for lifelong healthy living; and
- b. addressing physical activity and current societal concepts and issues.

60 and 70% (respectively) of respondents indicated that curriculum expectations generally prepare students for healthy living and physical activity within the context of today's society. These results indicate that there is some room for improvement,

Ensuring that expectations can be effectively managed by teachers in a way that supports the development of students at an early age is critical. Research indicates that most young children have a positive attitude towards physical education. However, as they grow older, their perception of physical education as a positive experience seems to become more ambiguous. This paper reflects that quality physical education programs can help to maintain those initial positive perceptions.⁶

Recent media reports further support the need for quality programs, indicating that "today's children are 'physically illiterate' – just as they need to learn the mechanics of grammar to read and write, they also need to learn the 'language of movement'."⁷

6. Most respondents (84%) indicated that they are able to address 76-99% or 100% of the curriculum expectations for Health and Physical Education in their instruction. The most commonly stated reasons for not accounting for the remainder of the expectations were "too many expectations" and "lack of adequate resources" and "other".

Generally respondents indicate that they feel it is possible to implement more than three-quarters of the curriculum expectations. Comments provided to qualify the concerns regarding "too many expectations" and "other" frequently indicated that the problem was actually related to an inadequate number of minutes timetabled for the delivery of the Health and Physical Education curriculum. For example:

- The number of timetabled HPE classes is not adequate to meet all expectations. (there were an overwhelming number of comments in this regard).
- H&PE has a low priority as indicated by the frequency that class time in the gym is cancelled due to other events and functions.
- Healthy Living expectations (health education) are not a priority, are often not scheduled into the timetable, and are delegated to teachers other than the Health and Physical Education teacher. This leads to problems because the content of H&PE (one subject area) is being reported on by two teachers (*this issue is further raised in the findings specific to the Healthy Living strand*).

Comments provided by educators in relation to the concern over a lack of adequate resources included such issues as equipment, facilities and human resources. These were cited as additional reasons for teacher inability to account for all the curriculum expectations.

⁶ Trudeau, Francois., & Shephard, Roy. (2005). Contribution of School Programmes to Physical Activity Levels and Attitudes in Children and Adults. *Sports Medicine*, 35(2), 89-105.

⁷ CBC News. (26 October 2006). How to get kids moving: improving school phys-ed. Retrieved from: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/education/physed.html>

Comments included:

- The facilities (gyms) are unable to safely accommodate the delivery of the H&PE curriculum. e.g., not sufficient timetabled gym space, and many gyms are too small;
- There is an inadequate budget to purchase and maintain the necessary equipment for H&PE.
- There is a lack of human resources (specialists). Many recommended a specialist on every staff, or specialized itinerant teachers, or additional training for generalist teachers.

People for Education has assessed the human resources in relation to Health and Physical Education over time. The organization has presented the perspective that when regular classroom teachers must deliver the Health and Physical Education curriculum, classes are often missed and many classroom teachers do not have the knowledge or skills to deliver a program of vigorous physical activity. While the number of Health and Physical Education Teachers in elementary schools has increased from 30% in their 2005 survey to 41% in their 2007 survey (which marks a return to the number that existed a decade ago), half of the specialists are only part-time. This result is interesting to note in comparison with the results of the survey that indicate that the overall number of minutes for Health and Physical Education each week has declined by 6% from 2006 levels. This should be further explored in relation to the effective implementation of the curriculum, the review of that curriculum and the DPA mandate. It is possible part-time specialists are being hired to support the delivery of DPA but that less time is being spent on delivery of the Health and Physical Education curriculum.

Recent published research also indicates that pressure to provide time in the “curriculum budget” to more vocationally learning tends to seriously affect the status of physical education in schools.⁸

7. Although some teachers are using the Achievement Chart successfully, many others are having difficulty or are not using it at all.

40% of survey respondents identified significant challenges with the current Achievement Chart, indicating a need for some revision and/or supportive teacher education in this area.

As noted in the previous section, it is very important that educators feel they have the competence and necessary supports to effectively implement the H&PE curriculum and this is particularly relevant with respect to assessment. A variety of literature indicates that lack of teacher preparation and experience, compounded by ineffective communication and lack of administrative support are key inhibitors to effective implementation of curriculum and delivery of a quality program.⁹

8. In order for students to lead a healthy and active lifestyle, modifications need to be made to the elementary H&PE curriculum to address topics that are not currently addressed.

62% of all respondents indicated that there is a variety of important healthy active living issues that are not currently addressed in the curriculum. A number of specific changes were suggested which include the following.

⁸ Dollman, J., Norton, L., & Norton, K. (2005). Evidence for secular trends in children’s physical activity behaviour. *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, 39(12), 892-897.

⁹ Melnychuk, Nancy., & Robinson, Daniel. (2006). A Call for PE Consultants and Specialists: Let’s Get Serious about Implementing Quality PE. *Physical and Health Education Journal*, 72(3), 6-11.

- Increase the leisure/lifetime activities, to provide students with exposure to different opportunities in the community.
- De-emphasize competition and traditional organized sports, increase low-organized, life-time activities.
- Facilitate better awareness of community facilities and resources in order to be active (for athletes too).
- Topics such as spiritual and mental health, obesity and weight management and parental education, internet safety were also recurring themes.

In addition, research suggests that an effective program provides a curriculum of activities that is characterized by purposeful choice, novelty and fun that promotes the important role of the teacher in promoting health and fitness.¹⁰

Key Messages Regarding Specific Strands

The elementary Health and Physical Education curriculum is organized into three distinct but related strands: Healthy Living, Active Participation, and Fundamental Movement Skills which include overall and specific expectations within each strand. Survey respondents were asked to indicate which one of the three strands required the most revision. The key messages reflect these responses and provide additional information on areas of strength and those which need development in each strand.

Healthy Living

HL1: The Healthy Living strand requires the most revision as there are particular concerns that there are “too many expectations to cover” and “gaps/overlaps in the knowledge and skills” of this strand. However respondents also indicated that there are some strengths in the Healthy Living strand and they are listed below

42% of respondents indicate that there are “too many expectations to cover” in the Healthy Living strand of the curriculum. As noted previously, this is often an issue of time, as illustrated in this comment:

There is insufficient time allotted for both physical education and health education. Many choose to focus on physical education or other high priority subject areas and so are not able to adequately deliver the health education curriculum expectations. In addition Healthy Living (health education) is often delegated to other teachers (e.g., homeroom or coverage teachers).

50% of respondents indicate that there are “gaps/overlaps in the knowledge and skills”, as indicated in the following examples:

- current language is needed in the examples and expectations e.g., STI’s vs. STD’s;
- internet safety examples should be included for harassment and bullying issues;
- the use of inclusive language is needed e.g., healthy relationships should refer to terms such as gay, lesbian;
- in addition to grade 8, goal-setting could be addressed in Healthy Eating in several other grades;
- the Grade 2 Growth and Development material does not adequately prepare students for Grade 3;

¹⁰ Gannon, Greg., Halas, Joannie., & Carmina, Ng. (2006). The Challenges of Teaching “Fitness” in an Era of Physical Inactivity: Examples of Effect Practice. Physical and Health Education.

- Living Skills - goal-setting should be addressed in Healthy Living;
- Personal Safety and Injury Prevention should be updated with regard to media influence, racism and bullying; and
- the topic of Mental Health should be included in the curriculum.

In the *Healthy Living* strand approximately 45% indicate that the expectations are appropriate (age/grade) and do-able (can be successfully completed) by most students. Approximately 35% indicate that the expectations within the strand have good connections to student commitment for lifelong healthy active living – this also indicates that these areas could be improved .

It is important to determine how expectations can be addressed, how information can be streamlined and what gaps need to be addressed as health education is a critical element of creating a health promoting school environment. Successful studies indicate positive results in increasing student physical activity levels using interventions focused on increasing physical activity along with a health education component directed toward healthy lifestyles.¹¹ In addition, systematic research reviews indicate the importance of a health promoting school environment or ‘whole school’ approaches (i.e. incorporating curricular, policy and environmental strategies) were more effective than curriculum-based education alone.¹²

HL2: There is concern that the Healthy Living strand is often assessed and reported on by a different teacher than the other two strands although there is only one mark/grade for H&PE – many think there is a need for a separate box for Healthy Living distinct from Physical Education on the report card.

Also noted previously, a number of respondents identified concerns about two different teachers reporting on the separate curriculum expectations that contribute to one mark/grade in H&PE for a student. The proposed response to this issue is to establish two separate boxes on the report card - one for Physical Education (encompassing the Active Participation and Fundamental Movement Skills strands) and the other for Health Education which would encompass the Healthy Living strand.

Fundamental Movement Skills

FM1: The Fundamental Movement Skills ranked second with respondents for requiring the most revisions, again reflecting that there are “too many expectations to cover” and “gaps in the knowledge and skills” in this strand. However respondents also indicated that there are some strengths in the Fundamental Movement Skills strand and they are listed below

37% of respondents felt there is a need for revision of the Fundamental Movement Skills strand of the curriculum, with additional comments focusing primarily on the gaps in the knowledge and skills in this strand.

These comments included:

¹¹ Thomas, H. (2004). Interventions to Increase Physical Activity in Children and Youth Effectiveness of Physical Activity Enhancement and Obesity Prevention Programs in Children and Youth. Hamilton, Ontario: Effective Public Health Practice

¹² Timpero, A., Salmon, J. & Ball, K. (2004). Evidence-based strategies to promote physical activity among children, adolescents, and young adults: review and update.. Journal of Science and Medicine in Sport, 7 (1), 20-29.

- there is a need for the inclusion of a scope and sequence (a progressive organization of expectations) for fundamental movement skills (since many state that there are a variety of expectations at wrong grade level and that there are gaps in the required knowledge and skills). Many of these misconceptions could be clarified with the inclusion of a scope and sequence. This is necessary so teachers also understand that movement skills are learned in a sequential order e.g., an underhand throw precedes an overhand;
- there is a large range in the information provided, many stated that the expectations are inappropriate because they are too easy for the primary grades, or should be learned in combination rather than as separate skills (locomotion), while others stated that there are gaps in the manipulation skills.
- there are also gaps in that there are no expectations relating to sport or game strategies and tactics, or transferable fundamental movement skills
- there is a need for direction about the assessment of fundamental movement skills
- the curriculum expectations should include examples and experiences to address ethnic diversity e.g., cricket and seepak takraw.

With respect to the *Fundamental Movement Skills* strand approximately 40% felt that expectations are appropriate (age/grade) and doable (can be successfully completed) by most students and 35% indicated that expectations allow for a broad range of teaching assessment strategies, responses which suggest some promise but show that these areas could be notably improved. Specific comments from educators included that:

- the expectations can be evaluated in a variety of ways;
- the expectations are skill-specific and can be applied to many types of activity; and
- teachers appreciate that the fundamental movement skills are divided into the three sub-category divisions of (e.g., locomotor, manipulative and stability) skills.

Again, the literature reinforces the importance of ensuring that this important strand is effectively addressed, indicating that the development of basic movement skills at the elementary school level is fundamental to the acquisition of personal resources that enable children to experience some measure of success in a variety of activities.¹³

FM2: An overall expectation for safety should be created and added to the Fundamental Movement Skills strand.

More than 75% of survey respondents indicated the need for an overall expectation in safety in the Fundamental Movement Skills Strand. This was considered “essential for a successful program” and the following comments further qualify this recommendation:

- Safety is a primary concern and should be included in fundamental movement skills to ensure solid learning of the concepts.
- Safety procedures need to be clearly explained especially for new teachers and those not experienced in teaching PE.

¹³DeCorby, Kara., Dixon, Sheryle., Halas, Joannie., Janzen, Henry., & Wintrup, Lainie. (2005). Classroom teachers and the challenges of delivering quality physical education. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 98(4), 208-221.

FM3: To address sport/game strategies and tactics (Teaching Games for Understanding), specific expectations should be created within the Fundamental Movement Skills strand for junior/intermediate grades.

75% of respondents believe that specific expectations for sport/game strategies should be created for junior/intermediate grades in the Fundamental Movement Skills strand, as this helps students understand a wider range of games/activities. There was also concern expressed that many teachers don't have the background knowledge to teach/evaluate in this area and there were suggestions to include appendices containing this information. In addition it was stated that training must be provided so teachers have the background and support they need to be more effective.

Research underscores the important role of Teaching Games for Understanding in a quality program, indicating that "the Teaching Games for Understanding approach lends itself to the teaching of democracy in schools, since it empowers both teacher and learner and invites them to question the status quo (ecological integration). In this way, players focus on creating play as a shared experience, not just on being winners."¹⁴

Active Participation

AP1: The Active Participation strand requires the least revision of the three strands.

Only 19% of respondents indicated a need to revise the Active Participation strand of the curriculum - a small number of respondents felt there were "too many expectations to cover" and that "there are gaps in knowledge and skills" in this strand. Of those responses, some suggestions for revision are included as are the strengths of the Active Participation strand:

- provide more current examples in the living skills expectations
- many sub-strands are repetitive throughout the grades especially Living Skills and Physical Activity, e.g., "follow rules of fair play" and "demonstrate respect for peers" address the same thing
- Active Participation expectations need to be more specific for student success

Strengths of the Active Participation Strand

- The "Expectations within this strand have good connections to student commitment for lifelong healthy active living"
- The "Expectations allow for a broad range of teaching/assessment strategies".
- Most expectations are easily modified for students' abilities and ethnic background

AP2: Student participation (on a regular basis in physical activities) should continue to be the emphasis in the Active Participation strand of Health and Physical Education.

93% of respondents indicated that regular and varied participation should be the primary emphasis in the Active Participation strand.

¹⁴ Butler, Joy. (2006). Curriculum constructions of ability: enhancing learning through Teaching Games for Understanding (TGfU) as a curriculum model. *Sport, Education and Society*, 11(3), 243-258.

It is noteworthy that Health and Physical Education is the only curriculum area that has participation incorporated into the overall and specific expectations and that participation is essential to develop healthy active living and to combat diseases such as Type II Diabetes.

The Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute recently released the Canadian Physical Activity Levels Among Youth (CAN PLAY) study in 2007. Undertaken in partnership with the Public Health Agency of Canada and the Interprovincial Sport and Recreation Council, CAN PLAY is designed to collect comprehensive and accurate, objective information on the physical activity levels of Canadian children and youth (10,000 recruited annually in approximately 6,000 families). In 2005, 2006 and 2007, through the use of pedometers, CAN PLAY measured the exact number of steps taken daily for children and youth aged five to 19. This study indicated that children and youth who participated in sport and a variety of other physical activities took more steps and are therefore more physically active, helping to prevent chronic diseases such as diabetes. The foundation skills developed for active participation found in this strand of the curriculum can play an important role in overall physical activity levels.

AP3: Specific expectations regarding safety should be created and added in Active Participation (e.g., student demonstration of safety procedures related to physical activity, equipment, and facilities).

75% of respondents indicated the need for the specific expectations in safety in the Active Participation strand. Similar to comments identified in the Fundamental Movement Skills section, educators expressed strong feelings in this regard:

- Specific expectations give it the importance it deserves.
- It is critical for teachers to have something to reference safety procedures to (very important for generalists).
- Specific expectations for safety procedures would give teachers confidence when teaching new skills and also when dealing with doubting parents.

Summary and Conclusion

The findings outlined in this document indicate that there are several positive areas within the existing H&PE curriculum while at the same time identifying key areas for improvement and further development.

As such, this document serves as a useful starting point for further discussion with educators and to share with the Ministry of Education and other key stakeholders as a notable resource that can support the review of the Elementary Health and Physical Education Curriculum.

OASPHE and Ophea are committed to working together in partnership along with the Ministry, school boards and all relevant parties to ensure that the review and revision of the Health and Physical Education Curriculum results in positive directions for students, educators, and school communities.