



Physical Education Provision in Schools. A Role for Dance

COMMENTARIES

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to stimulate debate in relation to physical education provision in the school environment. The paper outlines the potential benefits of dance as a viable alternative/addition to the provision of traditional physical activities used currently in the school setting. Further to this, the paper also comments on the changing role of the physical education teacher in the delivery and structure of physical education classes. Finally, the paper discusses the usefulness of dance in relation to physiological and psychological benefits.

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Delivery of the Health Education (HE) agenda is extremely important for society, and school is an excellent environment to convey knowledge and values relating to the importance of health at an early age. Schools have an influence that is far greater than any other social institution when it comes to raising children's awareness of healthy living (Allensworth and Kolbe 1987; How to Promote Physical Activity at Your School. 2019). The development of a structured HE curriculum and provision are more important than ever in relation to the decline in Physical Activity (PA) levels and the associated increases in obesity and related comorbidities (Vaquero-Solís et al. 2021).

Despite the importance of HE, a report by Nasário et al. 2020, demonstrated lack of definition and direction related to the concept of HE in schools. The report also outlined a lack of curriculum development in relation to HE. Further to this, the report also suggested that the reasons for obesity in young children and the lack of engagement in PA was related to negative external factors. The external negative influences outlined have contributed significantly to the decline in physical activity, they are wide-ranging and include the media (72.6%), family (84.7%), and technological advancements. The technological advances include media orientated game participation (83.1%) and associated increased screen time associated with a decline in PA levels. The report also suggested that there were difficulties for school staff to provide meaningful curriculum enhancement stratagems to counteract issues linked with childhood obesity and the lack of PA.

This difficulty could be related in part to non-specialist teachers participating in PA lessons and in the delivery of practical classes. HE is undergoing a major transformation period that informs the PA school agenda and discipline to positively influence the lifestyles of young people. This development should help young people adopt lifestyle behaviors conducive to their health and well-being. The positive changes would include increased physical activity levels, dietary manipulations and information provided by schools related to health promotion and wellness.

HE integrates with various intervention strategies related to personal management and development of a healthy lifestyle. These strategies include disease prevention, health promotion and longevity. In schools, HE can be presented in many forms and is interrelated with several educational disciplines (Razouki et al. 2021). HE has been defined as a discipline which is an integral part of the education system (Razouki et al. 2021). Therefore, we can assume that HE resides at the junction of two major educational disciplinary fields. These major fields of development include health and physical education, which can be studied in conjunction with multidisciplinary subjects that embrace the disciplines of ergonomics, physiology, philosophy, sociology, psychology education, biology, social psychology, epidemiology, anthropology, physics, mathematics, and health sciences (Razouki et al. 2021). However, the promotion of physical education via engagement in PA has been demonstrated to provide the greatest health benefits for young people of all ages (Vaquero-Solís et al. 2021).

In these difficult COVID-19 times, the importance of the school environment and physical activity engagement for health development, health promotion and disease prevention become more important. Engagement in PA should be maximized and facilitated by governments and policy makers. Schools are specific educational providers and hubs of the community, and as such, have a huge impact in educating young people to take an active interest in their health by promoting safe, enjoyable, and meaningful PA. However, achieving this objective requires the mobilization of teachers (Nasário et al. 2020). Indeed, the later can make a specific and original contribution to HE by using an approach that helps pupils achieve their PA goals while providing interesting curriculum developments in PA lesson structure for all young people.

Physical Education is based on a set of physical and sporting constructs that relate to student development at three levels: cognitive, psychomotor, and socio emotional. Further levels of development include physical, moral, behavioral, and conceptual development. While it is agreed that physical education is important and beneficial for students, we need to be aware that there are tensions and issues relating to the presentation of PA programs in schools that are logistical and administratively difficult to overcome (Nasário et al. 2020).

Physical education teachers, who are often physical education non-specialists are often faced with difficult situations understanding, constructing, or implementing physical education training lessons and programs for different sports and activities. This may result in a reluctance

to teach physical education classes to their students. This reluctance can manifest itself as a lack of teacher student engagement. This can result in a less than enjoyable experience for students and can be a pre-requisite for the development of an apathetic attitude by the student community to the provision of physical education. As a result, it is important to consider the roles of teachers who may need new professional skills to facilitate delivery of high-quality physical education lessons and classes that are enjoyable, well-structured, and meaningful. The need to promote healthy habits in an educational context at an early age is very important.

If schools are providing physical education classes that are less than enjoyable, boring, non-informative and repetitive, the environment becomes stale and non-conducive to the development of a meaningful PA culture. This scenario provides a missed opportunity for schools to develop positive PA awareness for young people and is detrimental for promoting physical activity engagement and associated health benefits. For instance, studies have revealed the health benefits of PA, decreased screen time, and quality sleep for children and adolescents (Vaquero-Solis et al. 2021).

Alternative types of exercise, that can be implemented easily and delivered by teachers need consideration. Exercises that are enjoyable and provide ease of engagement with pupils that are non-expensive need exploration. Exercises that require little equipment and expertise, have not been fully evaluated in comparison to traditional sporting activities commonly taught in the school environment (Marschin and Herbert 2021). One such alternative activity is dance. Dancing can have important positive impacts for the cardiovascular system, muscular strength, coordination, flexibility, balance, and psychology of participants (Laird et al. 2021).

Because of the complexities, and in some instances difficulties, in providing a functional physical education system in schools, perhaps governing bodies and policy makers should consider implementing dance-based programs as an alternative or addition to traditional physical education classes. Dance lessons or practice require small financial investments, non-sophisticated equipment and can be structured to suit all ages and abilities. Dance can also be motivational, physically challenging, and enjoyable (Laird et al. 2021). Research has indicated that dance can minimize stress, enhance mindfulness, and promote positively quality of life (Koch et al. 2014; dos Santos Delabary et al. 2018). Dance has been described as unchoreographed, intentionally nonevaluative movement practiced by groups or individuals for purposes of individual expression. Dance has also been argued to benefit social and personal development (Laird et al. 2021). Individuals who engage in the practice of dance have reported that involvement helped with psychological health. For instance, individuals who reported increased durations or frequencies of dance had better scores on measures of psychological well-being (Laird et al. 2021).

Promoting PA behaviors in the school environment can contribute significantly to improving the health and well-being of children and adolescents. In this sense, dance related PA should be promoted from a national and international perspective within the educational context. This can be achieved by using innovative methodologies and the development of projects that encourage greater involvement of students and their families and can be beneficial from a truly global perspective, with the poorer countries of the world and developed western cultures taking advantage of dance as an alternative physical activity. This will synergize collaboration with teachers, students, and families in the development of activities that promote meaningful PA and healthy habits. These developments include the correct use of new technologies, decreases in sedentary habits, and compliance with the recommendations of moderate to vigorous physical activity in children and adolescents (Vaquero-Solis et al. 2021).

It seems that dance offers a viable physical activity alternative to traditional physical education provision in schools. Participation in dance provides social interaction, skill development as well as psychological and physiological health benefits. Teachers, governing bodies, and policy makers should consider the implementation/addition of dance activities for all pupils during physical education curriculum development (Laird et al. 2021). Increased health benefits accrued by active participation in dance classes are considerable. They require non-specialist teachers to deliver the classes and are inexpensive to implement. Dance participation can also potentially provide benefits for poor countries where the cost of specialist equipment and facilities are a serious economic limitation for quality and structured PA. Schools, governors, teachers, pupils, and governments need to consider the advantages of dance as an alternative/addition to the curriculum in the provision of physical education/physical activity classes in the school environment.

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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