Bringing Physical Activity and Physical Education into the School

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Introduction

The importance of physical education and making children physically literate is a topic that I have strongly become passionate about. Through the University courses I have completed thus far in getting my degree in Kinesiology and Education I have learned a lot about the need to educate children at a young age to make them active young movers as they reach adulthood. The chapter that I am reviewing from the book Educating the Student Body (Institute of Medicine, 2013), highlights certain areas that schools can conduct to help in aiding with the increased rise in physical inactivity.

Summary

The chapter illustrates that schools are looked upon when it comes to the increasing numbers of children that are becoming obese. Children spend large amounts of their day at school, and because schools already have the access, professional knowledge, equipment and space to implement and teach physical activity classes and programs they become responsible for childhood inactivity. Sedentary behavior is talked about extensively in this chapter, they categorize sedentary behavior into recreational and non-recreational. Recreational refers to “screen time”, while non-recreational is schoolwork and activities that are necessary to perform daily tasks like motorized transportation or eating a meal. Media plays a factor in shaping the perception of what children think is the norm for body weight, food choices and physical activity. Many opportunities to increase physical activity in school environments are provided within the chapter. They range from incorporating activity breaks into the classroom, bringing back the need of proper recess and increasing the importance of intra and extramural sports for children so that they are meeting the requirements of 60 minutes of physical activity per day. Although a majority of these programs are not mandatory, many children may choose to not participate and therefore impede the attempt to increase physical education.

Personal Response

Throughout my experience in physical education classes and extracurricular sports in high school I can vogue for a lot of the information brought up within this chapter. I was never exposed to the concept of classroom activity breaks in my school, but from reading this chapter and other lectures I’ve received on this topic it has shown to me that children are becoming more engaged in their studies after performing these mini brain breaks. With this increase of productivity, the children are performing better academically and are more willing to participate.

Institute of Medicine (2013) stated that:

“Breaks in the classroom provide an additional opportunity for physical activity throughout the school day with minimal planning no equipment, and a short amount of time required; they also incorporate learning opportunities for students” (p.266)

Although these classroom activity breaks are a new method for many elementary and secondary classrooms, I feel that with enough support, and the increasing awareness on the need for more physical activity that teachers will begin to adopt this growing idea. A factor that is brought up in the chapter that might cause concern is the competition with academic requirements, leading to some parents concerned that brain breaks are taking away from the learning of core subjects. But according to the Institute of Medicine (2013), “classroom physical activity breaks can occur in the classroom without compromising learning and in fact improve academic performance and classroom behaviors” (p.268).

Recess growing up was always something that any elementary child including myself looked forward to, the idea of spending time with peers and engaging in physical activity was the highlight of the day. But as stated in this chapter by the Institute of Medicine (2013), “several studies and reports across the literature have pointer to a decline in recess to make more time for academic subjects” (p. 272). From my past experiences my elementary school went from K-5, this meant that as I entered high school in grade 6 the routine of receiving a majority of physical activity during recess had to be made up for somewhere else, often during lunch or extracurricular activities. From past experiences, I encountered a similar situation where my opportunity to be involved in physical activity was taken away. In my high school, academic classes where backed up by physed classes, this meant that I had to choose academic classes which would help me get into post-secondary over taking physed which would help educate me in becoming a physically literate member of society. Recess is a very crucial part of the day for developing individuals and in some cases, can produce up to 40% of the required 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous daily activity. This being said decreasing the time allocated for recess will eventually lead to inactivity.

From my point of view the idea of Active Transport has to thought about from two perspectives; urban and rural. The proximity of a child’s house to school is ultimately the determining factor when it comes to walking or biking to and from school. In my hometown over half of the students had to take the bus to school because we grew up on farms, active transport wasn’t even an option. In urban centers, Whitt (2004) suggests that “Active commuting has been proposed as an ideal low-cost strategy to increase physical activity within the general population and can account for one-quarter of an individual’s total daily steps” (p.287). Active transport can be a safe and effective way to increase students daily physical activity, especially when a large portion of students live in the range walking or biking to and from school.

Conclusion

When it comes to dealing with the increased number of children who are inactive, schools offer students the greatest variety of opportunities to participate. This being said not every child will want to participate, so getting them engaged during required physed classes can hopefully assist in developing the ambition to try other forms of physical activity. My hope by becoming a physed teacher is that I’ll be able to work with students that are talented athletes who want to participate in competitive sports, but also work alongside students who might not be as athletic but are willing to try and explore new experiences. Every student has different interests and by realizing their uniqueness’s and building relationships with them it can helping in aiding my career is a future teacher.

Reference

Institute of Medicine. (2013) Educating the Student Body: Taking Physical Activity and Physical Education to School. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

<https://www.nap.edu/read/18314/chapter/8>