

WellSpring

Programmed for Success: Making DPA Work

Daily Physical Activity: Overcoming Two Challenges

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Alberta Education's daily physical activity (DPA) initiative has been in place for almost a year. Resources to support this initiative have included a handbook for teachers and administrators, workshops on implementation and activities, and an increase in base funding of approximately \$1,000 per school.

Despite this support, schools have faced two basic implementation issues:

- how to ensure that all staff responsible for DPA have the knowledge and skills to deliver a quality program;
- how to schedule DPA into a school's complex and diverse timetable.

Transferring Knowledge and Skills

Many Ever Active schools across the province have implemented a model for knowledge and skill transfer among staff. In this model, the school identifies and supports a lead teacher as he or she becomes familiar with developmentally appropriate activities for DPA. This support could include

- workshops from Schools Come Alive (www.schoolscomealive.org);
- teachers' convention sessions; or
- time to examine a variety of resources.

The lead teacher is then given many opportunities to share knowledge and practices with other school staff at professional development days, staff

meetings, and through individual mentoring. In this way, the professional development of one key teacher is systematically passed on to all staff to improve DPA delivery.



Fitting DPA into the Timetable

Although timetabling to include DPA can be challenging, there are many successful models. Alberta Education provides the recommended time allocations for each area of instruction in percentages that can be somewhat flexible. (See pp. 34–37 of the *Guide to Education 2005–2006* (Alberta Education, 2005) for more information (Alberta Education, 2005).)

Further, the Health and Physical Education Council (HPEC) of the Alberta Teachers' Association has long lobbied for daily physical education. HPEC believes that the best way to implement DPA is through scheduling daily physical education. Ever Active Schools and Schools Come Alive have gathered detailed demographics and timetables of Alberta schools that have successfully implemented daily physical education. The examples (Ever Active Schools, n.d.) include a variety of grade levels and demographics.

Linking DPA to curriculum by scheduling as much physical education as possible reaches beyond activity and addresses the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to be active for life.



Developmentally Appropriate Daily Physical Activities

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Growing evidence suggests that many adult diseases originate in childhood and that children in Canada are not sufficiently active for optimal growth and development (CAHPERD, 2005). We have a unique opportunity in the early stages of life to develop healthy lifestyle habits (Fishburne, 2005).

This article suggests four ways to help teachers change activities so that children experience success and enjoyment when participating in physical activity. This enjoyment will help children to maintain physically active lifestyles.

The Daily Physical Activity School Handbook

To increase the physical activity of school children, Alberta Education mandated 30 minutes of daily physical activity (DPA) for all school children and youth in grades 1 to 9. The draft version of Alberta Education's *Daily Physical Activity School Handbook* (2005) contains a wealth of practical information for teachers. (A new and more final version will be published in June 2006.)

The 96 activities in the handbook are varied and interesting and should cater to the interests of most children. Although the handbook offers some guidance on adjusting environments to meet individual children's needs, in general, it is up to teachers to select activities suitable for children.

Below are some other ideas to help make students' experiences in physical education positive and enjoyable.

Developmentally Appropriate Activities

It is very important that children participate in physical activity at a level appropriate to their current level of physical development and fitness.



Often children and youth are required to perform beyond their abilities. They may not enjoy the activity and be at risk for injuries. This is why it's important to determine the developmental level of every child in a program of physical activity.

Young children fall into three developmental levels, which roughly correspond with age groupings.

- Developmental level 1: Early childhood, ages 5 to 7
- Developmental level 2: Middle childhood, ages 8 to 9
- Developmental level 3: Late childhood, ages 10 to 12

There are distinct cognitive, physical, and social/emotional differences among children in these three developmental levels. To help teachers and practitioners, some books (e.g., Fishburne 2005; Fishburne, McKay, & Berg, 2005) describe physical activities within each developmental level (early, middle, or late childhood), so that children can fully participate in activities, avoid injury, and experience success. In this way, children maximize their enjoyment when participating in these physical activities.

The three developmental levels are designed to allow children of different ages and stages of growth and development to successfully complete the activities. However, the developmental levels are just approximate signposts.

Some children, although chronologically at a certain developmental level, operate either below or above the designated level. For example, a child with a developmental delay may not be able to successfully participate in the activities of the developmental level for his or her age. The instructional environment for this child will need to be individualized (made easier) to allow the child to experience success in the activity.

Similarly, physically gifted children may be under-challenged at the developmental level corresponding to their ages. These children will need higher challenges to maintain motivation and to realize their true potential. To ensure all children feel successful, teachers need to adjust activities to meet a number of children's special and unique needs. It is possible to modify activities to include all students, regardless of ability.

Four Ways to Modify Activities

1. Changing the Number of Participants

If the activity involves several children participating at the same time, consider decreasing the number of players.

More players means more options and more decisions for the players. Reducing the number of children helps reduce the complexity of the activity and increase the time on task. For example, more players will be able to touch the ball. Reducing the number of players also reduces the number of choices, helping the child who finds it difficult to experience success when the activity offers many different choices.

It is very important that children participate in physical activity at a level appropriate to their current level of physical development and fitness.

2. Changing Space

Changing the space where the activity occurs can change success rates. For example, increasing the amount of space for a competitive physical activity gives children more time to make decisions.

Allowing more time to complete movements will also often result in more success. Decreasing space usually results in more complexity and uncertainty for children.

3. Changing Rules

If children have trouble with the activity, consider changing the rules to complete the task. For example, if an activity requires 10 jumping jacks or 10 push-ups, change the rules to require only five jumping jacks or allow a child to do a modified push-up.

4. Changing Equipment

If a child is having difficulty with equipment, consider ways to modify the equipment to allow the child to more easily complete the task. Changing the size and number of balls, a juggling ball to a bean-bag, the ball to a beach ball or balloon, or the type or size of a racket can all result in different levels of success for a child. For example, if children are using resistance bands in their activity, ensure the bands are at a tension that is not too hard, so that they can do the exercises safely and effectively.

Summing Up

The *Daily Physical Activity School Handbook* (Alberta Education, 2005) is an excellent resource of physical activities for teachers. If teachers follow the guidelines suggested here, together with the ideas suggested in the handbook, then children will participate in developmentally appropriate physical activities. If teachers modify the activities and the teaching-learning situations to ensure they are developmentally appropriate for each child, then all students will likely experience success and enjoy their accomplishments. Such enjoyment will help children to sustain and maintain physically active lifestyles.

Mission Statement of the Alberta Centre for Active Living

Working with practitioners, organizations, and communities to improve the health and quality of life of Albertans through physical activity.

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