DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 319 687 SP 032 199

AUTHOR Kirk, David
TITLE Rethinking Daily Physical Education.
PUB DATE Jan 90
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the Commonwealth and International Conference on Physical Education, Sport, Health, Dance, Recreation and Leisure (Auckland, New Zealand, January 18-23, 1990).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Secondary Education; Exercise; Foreign Countries; *Physical Education; *Physical Fitness; Physical Health; *Program Development; *Program Effectiveness; Research Needs; Student Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS *Australia

ABSTRACT

This paper draws on the findings of a recent study of the Daily Physical Education Program in Queensland, Australia. A number of proposals are made concerning the future of daily physical education in schools. Two points in particular are emphasized. The first is that the quality and appropriateness of the research that has underpinned the establishment of daily physical education in Australia and other countries, and its bias towards fitness development, need to be questioned. The second is the need to move beyond innovations that rely solely on curriculum materials to create change and, instead, to incorporate these materials into a system that places at its center the professional development of teachers and emphasizes the reflective and critical practice of teaching physical education. (Author)

Rethinking Daily Physical Education

David Kirk, Deakin University, Australia

Abstract
This paper draws on the findings of a recent study of the Daily Physical Education Program in Queensland, Australia. A number of proposals are made concerning the future of daily physical education in schools. Two points in particular are emphasised. The first is that the quality and appropriateness of the research that has underpinned the establishment of daily physical education in Australia and other countries, and its bias towards fitness development, need to be questioned. The second is that we need to move beyond innovations that rely solely on curriculum materials to create change and incorporate these materials instead into a system that places at its centre the professional development of teachers and emphasises the reflective and critical practice of teaching physical education.

Paper prepared for the Commonwealth and International Conference on Physical Education, Sport, Health, Dance, Recreation and Leisure , Auckland, New Zealand, 18-23 January, 1990.

Correspondence to:
Dr David Kirk
School of Education
Deakin University
Victoria 3217
AUSTRALIA

There has been something of a revolution in school physical education recently, and Australian physical educators have been among the pioneers of a new emphasis in the subject. This revolution could be characterised broadly as a movement towards 'health-based physical education'. In the last decade, physical educators all over the world have become interested in the fitness and health benefits to be derived from school physical education as a foundation for regular physical activity during adulthood, and this interest has brought important and far-reaching changes to physical education's aims, content and pedagogy. In Australia, the writers and publishers of the Daily Physical Education Program were, in the late 1970s, arguably to the fore-front of this health-based physical education movement, especially so since their curriculum materials drew, rather unusually, on the findings of a series of research studies. These studies claimed to show that regular, daily physical activity of an appropriate intensity and duration could make children fitter and consequently improve their health status, and moreover, the extra time devoted to physical education did not detract from the students' performances in other areas of the curriculum. The apparent relevance of these findings to concerns over the less desirable spins-offs of sedentary living such as coronary heart desease, and the health-related thrust of this Australian work in school physical education, did much to capture the interest of the teaching profession and to contribute to the commercial success of the Daily Physical Education Program.

But one swallow, as the saying goes, does not make a summer. While daily physical education, and health-based physical education more generally, have made an unquestionably profound impact on school physical education of late, the story is not one of complete and unbridled success. In 1987, and after some five years of mapping the progress of the health-based physical education movement in Britain and Australia, I set up a study focused on Queensland primary schools to examine the ways in which teachers used the Daily Physical Education Program and to assess its influence on the curriculum[1]. The study confirmed that the Program is regarded as a quality resource for physical education in schools, but it also raised a number of questions about some of the assumptions underpinning the notion of daily physical education as it is expressed in the Program, health-based physical education more generally, and about strategies for changing teachers' and schools' practices. This paper overview briefly some of the main findings of the study, before discussing two problems that I suggest need to be addressed in rethinking daily physical education, firstly the adequacy of the research that is currently driving the health-based physical education movement and its preoccupations with physicality and functionality, and secondly alternative means of approaching educational innovation.

Findings

Teachers in the study generally responded enthusiastically to the Daily Physical Education Program. Many considered it to be a useful resource, attractively designed, easy to use, and a compendious source of ideas. We discovered some wonderful work going on in schools, and some very enthusiastic, capable and dedicated teachers. In some places, the Daily Physical Education Program has been a stimulus to improved interest and practice in physical education, and in these schools the pupils appear to have benefitted accordingly. At the same time, and consistent with the work of Tinning and Hawkins at Monteville[2], the study revealed that while interest and enthusiasm were often high in the initial stages of introducing daily physical education, it proved more difficult to sustain this level of enthusiasm among teachers and pupils as time passed. Moreover, there were few schools from the beginning of the 1980s that were able to accomodate the time allocations to fitness and skills recommended by the Program writers of 15-20 minutes of fitness and 30-45 minutes of skill work each day. We discovered that the most common arrangement in schools was three to four 15 minute fitness sessions and one to two 30 minute skill sessions per week.

Most of the teachers in the study expressed approval of the layout and content of the Program, but few used it in a systematic fashion, preferring instead to dip in to it for lesson ideas. Indeed, few teachers planned their physical education classes, and fewer still recorded children's progress. This lack of planning and sequencing of activities and of recording had important implications for teachers' abilities to meet some of the aims of the Program, particularly in relation to actually improving the fitness and skills of their charges. Many of the teachers were aware of the key principles underlying skill learning and fitness development, but lack of planning, sequencing and recording meant that progression in lessons was rarely achieved. The key imperative was, rather, the absorption of daily physical education into the organisational framework of the school with the least possible disruption, and we frequently found teachers timetabling their physical education classes to meet organisational rather than pedagogic ends (eg. 'blowing away the cobwebs'; 'letting off steam').

Reflecting the typical time allocation (3-4 fitness and 1-2 skill sessions/week), daily physical education was often called 'Daily Fitness' by teachers, and they were encouraged in this by the Queensland Education Department advisory teachers who reasoned that some physical activity each day, fitness or skills, was better than none at all. It was not surprising, then, that the achievement of physical fitness and the contribution of fitness to health emerged as a major justification for physical education proposed by the teachers. The prominence of talk about physical fitness over other ways of talking about the value of physical education was not the teachers' sole responsibility, though, since the separation of fitness out from other aspects of physical education had been prefigured in the organisation of the Program itself, had been the major preoccupation of the researchers involved in the South Australian experiments, and was

subsequently elevated to the level of a strategy for the implementation of 'Daily 15/30 Physical Education' by the Queensland Education Department.

For a range of complex reasons that this summary of findings only begins to hint at (but which have been spelled out in detail in a number of published papers[3]), I suggest that far from telling a tale of success built on sound, scientific research and an informed strategy for innovation, the Queensland study reveals that a corporeal, functional and largely ineffective form of health-based physical education has been taking shape in Queensland schools. As it has worked itself out in practice, physical education has quickly become little more than a series of mindless, repetitious physical exercises that ask little of children cognitively and do not even improve their fitness. In the process and largely due to its corporeal, functional focus, it leaves unexamined the whole question of the relationship between physical activity and health. I suggest, moreover, that physical educationists and exercise scientists can take little comfort in blaming teachers for these outcomes, since they are strongly implicated in promoting the ways of thinking about physical education on which health-based physical education programmes rest. Two matters for which they ought to take responsibility are the kinds of research that has underpinned daily physical education and the notion of physical education it has promoted, and the way in which the Daily Physical Education Program has been positioned in relation to innovation in schools. It is to more detailed discussion of these two issues that I will now turn.

Research Studies and the Focus on Fitness

Most of the research on daily physical education (and in relation to other health-based physical education initiatives) has generally tended to address mainly 'physiological' and 'psychological' issues. Australian studies of daily physical education, particularly those influential in the production of the Daily Physical Education Program, focused on the impact of vigorous physical activity on CHD 'risk-factors', such as percentage body fat, blood cholesterol and blood pressure. These studies also measured such things as academic performance, motor performance, pupils' attitudes to school and their social skills. Methodologically, these studies tended to adopt quasi-experimental designs, using pre- and post-tests, collecting quantitative data and manipulating these through descriptive or multi-variate statistical procedures. I have already argued in some detail elsewhere[4] that this approach to researching the impact of innovative school programmes has a number of important shortcomings. Here, I want to draw out some of the assumptions about physical education that guided this form of research and the problems these assumptions have created for other ways of thinking about school physical education.

The emphasis in this research and in other versions of health-based physical education on the role of exercise in promoting and maintaining health has lead to a view of physical education that is predominately corporeal and functional. In the process, the relationship between physical activity and health is portrayed as an unproblematic one, and indeed 'fitness' and 'health' have

in some places come to be accepted as equivalent or interchangable concepts. Physical education itself is reduced to a 'core' of activity that is functionally related to fitness development, and other activities become peripheral and by implication, less relevant or important. Worse than this, there is the implication that the main value of physical activity is for health purposes, and the major cognitive component is aimed at pupils acquiring health information and a desire to incorporate regular, vigorous physical activity as an integral part of their lifestyles. In an attempt to show that the extra time to be devoted to daily physical education would not affect academic performance detrimentally, researchers compounded this corporeal functionalism by contrasting physical activity with academic (cognitive) work. Indeed, by building their case for daily physical education on the basis of this contrast, they were actually contributing to the separation of mental from manual work, and lending their tacit agreement to the notion of the educational superiority of 'academic' work over 'physical' work.

Whether it has been the intention or otherwise of advocates of health-based physical education programmes to seek these outcomes, their influence in schools has already been, and will continue to be, pernicious. In the first place, a range of other ways of thinking about physical education and its value in the school curriculum are, at best, marginalised by this corporeal functionalism, and at worst eliminated from physical education entirely, and here I'm thinking about the aesthetic and creative dimensions of movement, as well as the purely pleasureable, hedonistic and kinaesthetic qualities to be experienced in school physical education. More importantly, perhaps, the notion of education through, in and about the physical is debased within health-based physical education, and the inseparableness of cognition and movement denied. Physical educators have often been reluctant to talk about physical education activities as practical knowledge, preferring instead to express their ideas about their subject in terms of 'skills' and 'fitness'. It seems to me that the gradual gains that have been made over the past decade and a half in relation to discussions of knowledge in physical education are considerably undermined by the corporeal functionalism of health-based physical education.

Innovation and Changing Educational Practice in Schools

While the daily physical education initiatives in Australia have claimed the distinction of being 'research-based', it must be recognised that this research has consisted almost entirely of the 'fitness-focused' experimentation I have just discussed. We can search the daily physical education research literature in vain (I have!) for discussions of innovation and change in schools[5]. This is unfortunate, because there is a considerable collective wisdom, generated from the mid-1960s on, of the impact of innovative initiatives on school practice. The main message this literature conveys is that innovations that rely on curriculum materials, no matter what the quality, to bring about change, will invariably be ineffective in achieving their goals. Good materials can play an important role to be sure, but the main path to 'success' has been

shown to be sensitive, gradual and appropriate structural change in tandem with the professional development of teachers.

There is little evidence to suggest that the producers of the Daily Physical Education Program gave the issue of how to position their Program in relation to schools much thought, beyond marketing a 'good idea' in a way that would 'sell'. The initial commercial success of the Program (we have collected some information which suggests sales are slowing down) suggests this marketing ploy was an effective means of attracting attention to the materials and even getting them in to schools. But it was at this point, at the interface between the 'producer' and the 'consumer' that the exercise broke down. Apart from the inservicing strategies some States employed to assist teachers, which were invariably haphazard and driven by local concerns, there was no national strategy for the implementation of the Program in schools, no organised plan for supporting its use, and no direction provided for sustaining the momentum created by the initial enthusiasm for the idea.

Rethinking Daily Physical Education

So far in this paper, I have, where I've thought it appropriate, tried to locate daily physical education within the broader category of health-based physical education, and to suggest that some of the problems revealed by the Queensland daily physical education study are generalisable to other versions of health-based physical education. I don't want to push comparisons too far, however, since I am well aware that there are important substantive differences in the experiences of physical educators with health-based programmes in different countries. In concluding this presentation, I want to make two proposals for rethinking daily physical education, the first of which is of specific import to the Australian experience of daily physical education and to anyone else who may be using, or thinking of using, the Daily Physical Education Program, and the second I think is of general relevance to most health-based physical education programmes around the world.

In making my first point, I want to propose a three phase plan for the development of sustained good practice in primary school physical eduction, centred on a revamped version of the Daily Physical Education Program or some similar creation. The first phase, which we might call 'Programme Development', involves a reworking of the Daily Physical Education Program, and trialling in schools including professional development work with teachers in the use and adaptation of the materials as a basis for good practice. Linking the work of primary school generalists and secondary school specialists would be an important feature of this professional development work. These trials should then be evaluated, including as a central component evaluations by teachers, leading to the production of a new, what we might now call, Physical Education Program. The second 'Marketing and Development' phase would involve the aggressive marketing of the new Program, both in the education sector and also in relation to the general public, with the intention of creating a new image of good practice in

teaching physical education. It would also involve the setting up of cooperative teacher development schemes between a group like ACHPER, teacher employers and the tertiary sector, and perhaps in conjunction with this an accreditation scheme for teachers in the use of the Program, administered by ACHPER. The third phase would involve the creation of 'Support Networks and a Review Process', involving the establishment of self-sustaining or self-regenerating teacher support and resource networks, with local, State and national link ups, again administered by an organisation like ACHPER. All of this work would feed into a review process of the teacher development and accreditation scheme, and involve periodic reviews of accreditation courses and the Program itself.

This entire scheme would need to be steered by a carefully constructed strategy that was built on the collective wisdom of almost thirty years of large-scale curriculum development work, learning from its mistakes as much as its successes. The scheme is also predicated on the possibility of gradual structural change that will allow State Education authorities to work with Federal, tertiary and other groups in cooperative ventures that maximise the expertise available. And inevitably, it is dependant on the availability of funding in the government sector and the will to use money for such a purpose, and on the ability of groups like ACHPER and other organisations like tertiary institutions to capture the funds necessary for the development of sustained good practice.

My second, more general point is in some respects a precursor to the kind of scheme I have just outlined, since it positions us as physical educators as the producers of ideas and ways of thinking about physical education. It is that we need to shift the focus of our thinking and discussing in physical education away from the limiting and conceptually inadequate notions of 'fitness' and 'skills' and to begin to reconceptualise physical education's educational value in terms of practical knowledge. While acknowledging that school physical education can be a useful contributor to 'the health of the nation' and can serve as 'a nursery of elite sport', it is time we shook off the tyranny of instrumentalism and asserted the value of physical education as a medium for the educational engagement of the whole, thinking, feeling, moving person[6]. It seems to me that while there is much of value to be gained from health-based physical education programmes, there is a real danger of too literal a reading of the relationship between fitness and health, and too much pressure on us as physical educators to produce the 'quick-fix' that will solve society's health problems over-night. The answer to those difficulties, I suspect, lies not in merely getting children fit, nor 'modifying their behaviours', but in fostering people who are sensitive to their bodies, are motorically competant and physically uninhibited, and who are intelligent and critical interpreters of the environments in which they have to live.

The barriers to altering the terms of our debates and shifting our thinking in new directions are considerable, however. It seems to me that much valuable knowledge has been lost from physical education since the end of the second world war in the profession's ignominious scramble towards academic respectability. At the end of the twentieth century, we are poised on

the brink of redefining our subject in schools as 'scientifically-based', the signs of which are already obvious to anyone who cares to look. This is not to say that science cannot usefully inform some of our activities as physical educators, but rather to point to the potential dangers of allowing ourselves to be seduced by the promise of technological saviour by submitting all of our professional concerns to the scrutiny of a particular version of 'science'[7]. As I say, the signs of this seduction are already to hand, and I propose that the health-based physical education movement and the corporeal functionalism it promotes in several of its manifestations suggests that the redefinition of physical education, its aims, content and pedagogy, is already far advanced.

In the 1963 Chadwick Trust Lecture, a certain Peter McIntosh, then a Senior Inspector of Physical Education in London, made the following comment, which is particularly appropriate to the sentiments of this presentation and captures something of what I want to say in conclusion about rethinking daily physical education. He said

> My last word is one of warning. Fitness as a topic and as a personal requirement has in recent years been receiving more and more attention, especially in the USA. The more affluent the society, the more attention that is paid to fitness. This attention could become a preoccupation, even an obsession. Fitness campaigns would then be a mark not of a virile and healthy society but of a decadent civilization.[8]

Notes

1. In this I was aided and abetted by Jennifer Gore and Derek Colquhoun. The Daily Physical Education Curriculum Materials Project was funded by grants from the University of Queensland's Special Projects Scheme and the Australian Council for Health, Physical Education and Recreation (Qld., Ltd.), which I gratefully acknowledge. The project was co-directed by David Kirk and Jennifer Gore. Derek Colquhoun interviewed most of the teachers in the study, and the early stage of the study (1985-86) formed part of his doctoral research - see Colquhoun D (1989) Healthism and Health-Based Physical Education: A Critique. Unpublished Thesis, University of Queensland. The views expressed here are entirely my own, and are not necessarily representative of the views of the other members of the project team or the sponsoring agencies.

2. Tinning R and Hawkins K (1986) Montaville Revisited: A Daily Physical Education Program Four Years On. Paper presented at the ACHPER Biennial Conference, Launceston, January.

3. The following papers and conference presentations have been generated from the project:

Kirk, D., Colquhoun, D. & Gore, J. (1988a) The Queensland Education Department and the Remaking of Daily Physical Education. Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Australian Association for Research on Education, Armidale, November.

Kirk, D., Colquhoun, D. & Gore, J. (1988b) Generalists, Specialists and Daily Physical Education in Queensland. ACHPER National Journal 122 (Summer), 7-9/36.

Kirk, D., Colquhoun, D. & Gore, J. (1989) Teachers' Perceptions of the Effects of Daily Physical Education on their Students. ACHPER National Journal 123 (Autumn), 13-16.

Kirk, D., Gore, J. & Colquhoun, D. (1989) Teachers' Use of the Daily Physical Education Program and the Problem of Fitness Development. ACHPER National Journal 124 (Winter), 23-27.

Kirk, D. (1989) Daily Physical Education Research: A Review and a Critique. Physical Education Review 12 (1), 21-30.

Kirk, D. & Colquhoun, D. (1989) Healthism and Physical Education. British Journal of Sociology of Education 10(4), 417-424.
Kirk, D. (in press) School Knowledge and the Curriculum Package-As-Text. Journal of Curriculum Studies

4. See Kirk, D. (1989) Daily Physical Education Research: A Review and a Critique. Physical Education Review 12 (1), 21-30.

5. I am aware that the British experience has been somewhat different to a degree, due particularly to Almond's work with action-research.

6. For an elaboration of these ideas see Kirk D (1988) Physical Education and Curriculum Study: A Critical Introduction London: Croom Helm, Chapter 4; and Kirk D (1989) Knowledge in Movement and the Physical Education Curriculum. The National ACHPER Physical Education Teacher 6(4), 1-7.

7. For an elaboration and critique see Kirk D (in press) Knowledge, Science and the Rise and Rise of Human Movement Studies. ACHPER National Journal; Kirk D (forthcoming) Defining the Subject: The Social Construction of Physical Education in Britain 1945-1965 (Falmer).

8. McIntosh PC (1963) Practical Aspects of Physical Education, reprinted in The Leaflet 64(8), p64.