

## **The active school concept: A project for physical education teachers**

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Health is a particularly important concern in the today's society as expenses linked to health problems are continuously increasing. Actions aiming to limit the phenomenon are needed and one of the priorities consists to fight against the increasing prevalence of obesity. In this field, the emphasis has been set on nutrition and sedentariness. It clearly appears that school and physical education are key sectors that should be directly involved in the approach that should be implemented (Young & William, 1989; WHO, 2001).

At school, any project that is focused on any aspect of the health would require the involvement of all actors: (1) the school principal who is in charge of the development of the school's project and to orient the strategic decisions, and; (2) all other actors of the school life such the pedagogical staff but also the students and their parents as well as the medical structures if they exist.

When it is question of promotion of a long life physically active lifestyle, the Scientific Statement from the American Heart Association Council (Pate et al., 2006) underlines five main dimensions that should be considered in order to determine the emphasis that one particular school provides: (1) physical education; (2) active transportation; (3) life environment (recesses, spaces); (4) sport at school, and; (5) physical activity in the classroom. We are considering that the presence of physical activity in the written educational school policy represents a sixth determining dimension that should be accessed in that perspective. In the analysis of 54 out of the 514 French speaking schools of Belgium, we showed that the mean score reached 9/20 with PA policy being the worst aspect (4.80/20) and facilities being the best (12.3/20). It seemed that the role that schools could play today in PA promotion is quite limited. These findings have been confirmed in another study based on 1997 Cale's model of active school (Van Hoye, Motter & Cloes, 2009). On the other hand, a third study underlined that it was possible to improve the involvement of one primary school in PA promotion through one action research (Cloes & Dequenne, 2009). In the latter study, OPHEA (2009) model of active school was considered. Finally, other examples of initiatives aiming to increase school in the development of an active lifestyle will be described (L'école bouge, 2006).

As stated by Tappe & Burgeson (2004), physical education should be considered as the corner stone of PA promotion at school. In fact, the physical education teacher is definitely the only teacher whose specific preparation allows developing theoretical and practical concepts related to physical activity and its effects on health. Beyond the fight against sedentariness, PE teachers are able to contribute effectively to the mastery of many other competences involved in the development of physically educated persons (NASPE, 1992).

Nevertheless, in order to meet the requirements, it is needed that PE respects two current concepts: literacy and accountability. It means that PE has to develop attitudes, knowledge and competences that would be used lifelong by the students, on one hand; to bring concrete modifications in youths, on the other hand. Several principles should be applied to encourage students to adopt an active lifestyle: (1) being a model; (2) updating ones' knowledge; (3) knowing ones' students; (4) planning; (5) acting; (6) controlling. Theoretical foundations and examples will be provided in the presentation. Based on Cloes, Del Zotto and Motter (2009), several categories of specific actions are proposed by PE

teachers in order to promote an active life style in their students. These actions aim to motivate students to be active, increase time on task or attendance or to encourage students to open their mind to a more positive attitude towards PA. As they mentioned, appreciating PE might be a first step in the direction of a lifelong active lifestyle

In conclusion, we consider that PE teachers need to become aware about the change in the definition of their role. In 40 years, they passed from teaching gymnastics to teaching sports while the society asks them today to become agents of the development of lifelong PA competences. It means that, during initial or continuous preparation, PE teachers' educators need to develop original activities that can help practitioners to develop their own actions on the field. According to the current development of the research on teacher education, this underlines the importance of collaborative research as well as the development of communities of practice. Strategies are existing and should be shared. Use of modern tools of communication represents a promising way to reach success. It should also be determining that professionals and researchers would learn to work together more closely.

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