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Editorial



The society in which we are living is in perpetual change and we face many challenges especially in education and in particular, Physical Education. We have to face the challenge of an increasingly sedentary world in which screen technology has become a major focus for many children and as a result, many countries record low levels of participation in sport. As a consequence, obesity figures are rising and many young people are not able to gain the health benefits of regular participation in sport.

However, there are a number of positive challenges for Physical Education. Recent research shows that physical activity has a powerful impact on the structure and functioning of the brain that opens up important avenues for research and practice. Early childhood is clearly a major focus for this new work but there is also considerable potential for exploring the relationship of regular physical activity and sport with the promotion of intellectual capital and academic achievement.

These are challenges that require a great deal of debate and careful consideration by researchers and practitioners. The challenges within this age range are crucial because this is when we can establish the solid foundations that children need to encourage them to take pleasure in sport and enjoy the health benefits. However, this means that we need to develop relevant and appropriate practices to ensure that children and young people can maintain their interest for the long term. To achieve this, many people believe that a socio-ecological approach to physical activity and sport promotion needs to underpin this work. Such an approach takes into account not only individual factors but also the broader cultural, social and economic environments.

The Canadians have understood this key point and have developed concepts such as the LTAD (Long-Term Athlete Development) and the DMSP (Developmental Model of sport participation) which aim to develop long-term physical activity for participants whether they are looking for sport performance, simple participation or personal fulfillment. They are also using the idea of Physical Literacy (which will

be new to many colleagues) and one its key components is a focus on fundamental movement skills (FMS) which is of great interest to this congress. There is considerable concern that many young people are not getting the benefits of being competent and confident movers. Hence, there is the need to focus on these important themes.

In this context that we need to develop a research agenda, responsible strategies, appropriate curricula and pedagogy to address both the challenges and exciting possibilities that we face but we need a forum to make this happen.

This congress has been organized to mark the 25th anniversary of CEReKI at the University of Liege and can serve as the forum for this important debate. It can be considered also as a follow-up to the 1st European Congress on Physical Activity and Health that focused on children from birth to 6 years old and was held in Epinal in 2010. The conference in Liege will focus on the key period between three and nine years, when children start to take part in organized physical and sporting activities.

This congress is a unique opportunity to meet worldwide scientific and field experts and to share with them knowledge and experience. It will provide the opportunity for critical reflections and discussions to stimulate a shared understanding of what we need to do to develop the research agenda for this age range that can inform and improve practice. It is also an opportunity to raise awareness of developing physical activity and sport programmes that are relevant to the needs of children.

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