



Position Paper

Health Education in Alberta Schools

A position paper prepared by the Health and Physical Education Council of the Alberta Teachers' Association in response to request from the membership.

Introduction

Health is viewed as a quality of the growing and developing individual. Each person needs to make decisions about health every day of his or her life. Health education is essential to the development and the well-being of the individual. The best time to begin health education is in the habit-forming years of childhood. School health education must become one of the most dynamic parts of the school curriculum.

Position

The Health and Physical Education Council takes the position that:

1. Health Education is an important subject in the school program.
2. Health Education should be taught at each grade level in Alberta schools.
3. A Health Education Program should be organized around a core/option structure:
 - a) A core program should be identified, complete with scope and sequence.
 - b) In addition, optional units should be developed to meet local needs, resources, and circumstances.
4. Students and parents should be appropriately involved in the planning and evaluation process.
5. Health services should be available to all students in all schools.

It is our belief that children express a deep need to understand their own development, and from Grade VII on (as shown in the 1972/74 study¹), they feel handicapped and often at a loss at not understanding. Students sense a relationship between understanding and mental health, and behavior and mental health.

¹Arlene McGinn, *Health Concerns of Alberta Junior High School Students, 1972/74*

The information young people have is formidable in abundance, accuracy, and error, and their eagerness for reliable information is impressive. They understand the fallibility of the knowledge and the opinion of peers. There is little doubt about the persuasive powers of the mass media, especially television. Burdened by the hodge podge of contradictory information that barrages them from all sides, students ask the school to teach honestly and clearly . . . and early enough . . . to help them build up critical powers so that they may *act responsibly*.

Definitions

Health

The state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. (World Health Organization).

Health Education Courses

All the activities carried on in the school system in the interest of health.

Health Education Curriculum Guide

A planned program of health education, prepared primarily for teachers, indicating objectives, content, methods and evaluation.

Health Services

Services available in the school:

- a) those developed in cooperation with provincial and local health departments,
- b) facilities in the school such as: sick rooms, showers, and sanitary eating areas.

Rationale

The Health and Physical Education Council of The Alberta Teachers' Association has been concerned with the quality and quantity of health education courses and programs in Alberta schools. Health education at the elementary level rarely receives more than two percent of class time. The pattern of junior and senior high schools was found to be the same. At the present time, a health education program need only be taught once during the three years of junior high, and correspondence course may be offered at the high school level.

In the past ten years we have gone through a number of disastrous "crisis oriented" programs in health education. The "Band-Aid" approach to program development does not work. We have a respectable animal and environmental ecology program in life science and biology and yet the study of human ecology, particularly as it reflects man's adaptations and man's maladaptations to the environment and its inherent health effects, is currently considered in most areas as unacademic or of little consequence. This can only be interpreted as a colossal oversight.

A global concern with health education in schools brought about the development of a reference source book for planning health education in the schools. The sources book, developed in 1966 by Professor Turner, was on behalf of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the World Health Organization (WHO). Ninety-four countries contributed comments, criticisms and relevant materials. The theme stressed throughout the book is that if health education is to be effective, it must be adapted to local needs and conditions. Health education should grow out of health problems which the country is facing.

“Indeed, most important of all,” states Turner (36:3), “is the adaptation of health education to the needs of the individual child by the classroom teachers.” Turner goes on to stress that the graduation of the instruction must be effectively related to the changing needs and interests of children at different ages.

At the Canadian Conference on School Health, Norman Goble (9), Executive Secretary of the Canadian Teachers’ Federation, suggested that the school had to become more effective in helping the child and adolescent cope with influences of modern society. “Schools must provide shelter from pressure while skills of survival are learned” (9:2). Goble emphasized that the family and community were also essential influences on the child, but the school had the opportunity and responsibility during the formative years to provide a well-designed health education program.

Health Education in Alberta Schools, p 4

MFP/bjs, 2003 03 13

G:\PD Data\bjs\d.Misc\Mfp.1\Position Papers\PP on Health Educ in AB Schools.doc