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Defining quality physical education: an analysis of international documents

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Abstract

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Defining Quality Physical Education: An Analysis of International Documents

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Background/Purpose: There is a growing interest in the international community to define key indicators of quality physical education (QPE). Although several leading international organizations have helped to generate documents defining QPE, there have been limited efforts to consolidate the information contained in different documents. The purpose of this study was to identify major indicators of QPE as defined in current documents generated through international organizations with a stake in physical education.

Method: An Internet search was used to develop an initial list of documents that (a) contained descriptors of QPE, (b) were developed by working groups/committees representing different countries and functioning through the support of an international organization with ties to, or an interest in, QPE, and (c) appeared to be the most recent and relevant documents regarding QPE supported by the respective organization. Documents were obtained and their reference lists were searched for additional documents possibly meeting the criteria. Altogether, 5 documents meeting all criteria were identified. A list of these documents was sent as part of an electronic survey to 225 leading physical educators, who were identified using online lists of editorial board members from 6 reputable physical education journals and online lists of board members from the organizations supporting the documents. These individuals were invited to indicate whether they perceived each document to be the most recent and relevant 1 supported by the given organization and to suggest additional/alternative documents meeting the aforementioned criteria. The documents were made available via e-mail upon request. Altogether, there were 31 respondents, whose feedback was used to expand the final list of documents to 11.

Analysis/Results: The documents were separately searched for key descriptors of QPE, which were distilled and summarized. Common descriptors from different documents were grouped, and the groups were revised to account for all distilled descriptors. This process yielded 8 major indicators of QPE: (a) It is available to all students as a right, (b) it is taught by professionally and continually trained teachers, (c) it is allocated adequate curriculum time, (d) it provides a positive and adequate learning environment, (e) it utilizes assessments to enhance learning in a way that is consistent with other school subjects, (f) it is learner-centered, (g) it promotes personal and social development toward healthy, active living, and (h) it is research-based.

Conclusions: The results highlight areas of international consensus about how to define QPE. The major indicators can be used to guide research and program evaluation in physical education.