

# Moving the nation towards

A new physical education programme is taking off in schools. Exercise scientist **Claire Nicholson**, who created the concept, sheds light on the programme and the importance of exercise for children

**S**chools have unique opportunities to provide adequate physical activity for young people through compulsory physical education periods and school sports programmes. These should occupy a special place in extracurricular enrichment.

Since 1999 the school subject physical education was excluded from teacher training. This field of knowledge was no longer afforded "specialist" status.

In the past a four-year specialist course for teachers interested in becoming physical educators was offered. The necessary content and skills needed to inspire and develop children physically and psychosocially were covered. Now, 11 years later, teachers realise the short-sightedness of this decision when they observe shifts in social behaviour, as well as in the health and wellness status of the country's youth.

Since January 2008 a designated period called physical education was re-prescribed (once a week), for all learners. As a subject physical education is now embedded in one of the core learning areas, life orientation. An extra period a week is dedicated to a "physical development-oriented" outcome. But the reality is that schools are not delivering adequately and many are not delivering at all.

The reasons given are:

- An under-resourced capacity to deliver;
- A dearth of qualified leadership, hence an absence of commitment to plan and implement a programme in accordance with the developmental stages of the children; and
- Lack of equipment and facility provision.

Worldwide physical education is regarded as a core curriculum requirement for all schoolgoing chil-



**Obstacle course:** Learners toss, visually track and catch their own Juggle-It

dren throughout all their schooling phases. The World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends participation in regular, quality physical activity for one hour a day, five times a week for children, but South Africa has scheduled only one period a week.

Unless we make this single-period opportunity highly effective, we are indirectly reinforcing a belief that the knowledge, skills and values acquired through physical education don't matter as much as, say,

maths or English.

Inadequate and insufficient participation in regular, quality physical activity renders children at risk throughout their lives. Overall, physical inactivity is estimated to cause 1.9-million deaths globally.

According to the WHO's position statement for children, regular physical activity helps children build and maintain healthy bones, muscles and joints, helps control body weight, helps reduce fat and helps to develop efficient functioning of the heart and lungs.

Engagement in activity especially helps to develop movement skills. Physical activity helps to prevent and control feelings of anxiety and depression. Engagement in play and sports gives young people opportunities for natural self-expression, development of self-confidence and relief from tension, as well as opportunities for social interaction and for learning the spirit of solidarity and fair play.

These positive effects help counteract the risks and harm caused by the demanding, competitive, stressful and sedentary life that is so common in young people's lives today.

Involvement in properly guided physical activity and sports can foster the adoption of other healthy behaviour, including the avoidance of tobacco, alcohol, drug use and violence. It has been found that children who are more physically active are also academic achievers.

To motivate purposeful participation in physical activity, an underlying commitment from the government is needed. As it has been legislated that every schoolgoing child must have access to at least one hour of physical education a week within the prescribed school curriculum, it is fair to ask: what is being achieved and what can be achieved?

#### South African scenario

In the context of the global call for action from the WHO, South African children are at risk of being left behind unless we act now. To respond quickly and effectively four key conditions are needed:

- Advocacy, leadership, willingness and commitment from schools with the expertise, programmes and capacity to partner strategically with less advantaged schools so that

- Transference of weight;
- Spatial awareness;
- Timing and rhythm;
- Hand-eye, foot-eye manipulation; and
- Cooperative and competitive team work.

The programme aims to grow and develop a child's physical competence. It emphasises the development of complex, yet fundamental, movement patterns of balance, locomotion and manipulation.

## Getting going ...

Launched this year, the Move-It, Moving Matters® was designed to ensure that all children engage in age-appropriate and enjoyable physical activity within the allocated physical education period each week.

The physical challenges emphasised in the programme include the acquisition and mastery of:

- Balance;
- Locomotion;
- Neuro-motor control;

# good health

The initiative is anchored and the "levelling of the playing fields" is sustained;

- Availability and distribution of an appropriate, progressive, learner-driven (not teacher-driven) outcomes-based, quality activity programme that corresponds with and complements the curriculum;

- A substantial source of funds from public-private initiatives, business, private donors and agency partners with a shared vision and on-the-ground support for at least the next four years; and

- Involvement of role-players and stakeholders to deliver as soon as possible.

Waiting for new policy construction, such as the school sport policy, and waiting for teacher training to "catch-up" on delivery of this scarce skill is not an option. Getting the children moving does matter, hence the development of a new programme, called Move-It, Moving Matters®.

#### As important as maths

In the same way that learners need a maths set to solve problems and execute geometric actions, the Move-It, Moving Matters® kit enables the learner to use the equipment to make the acquisition of motor skills easy and to promote enjoyment through movement as challenged by the cues and illustrations in the interactive learner manual.

Through the self-paced problem-solving approach, movement, play, games and exercise challenges are accomplished. With its phase-specific content, the programme shapes the neuromuscular development of the child while developing the learner's physiological capacity. The nature of the tasks is such that, with regular participation, bone mass, cardiorespiratory efficiency and neuromuscular functioning are developed.

The rationale for the introductory use of Skip-It, for example, is that 10 minutes of skipping-type jumping (vertical bone-loading activities) will stimulate bone density. Peak bone mass should be as high as possible so that bone loss, which occurs through bed rest, low activity levels and with age (resulting in a risk of fracture) is minimised.

The activities encourage fun and self-awareness and engage children in problem-solving physical tasks that require social cooperation.

Learners will be challenged to design a document and teach others to play a game they have devised,



Learners flip-exchange two Juggle-Its in one hand and then in the other. Much concentration is needed so the activity begins with learners sitting down first

using a set of rules.

Central to the effort is the systematic laying down of the foundations for the competences needed for dance, sport and recreation. The goal of the programme is to raise young people's achievement levels, their attainment of personal goals and their enjoyment of participation in activity for life.

Homework tasks encourage intergenerational involvement of all family members. Getting everyone involved in physical activity in the home is an interesting by-product of the Move-It, Moving Matters®. The programme encourages community participation on a far wider scale than the classroom. For example, learners must log their hours spent practising various activities with a friend or family member.

To take this initiative forward, commitment from schools is needed.

## Getting our children to play and participate regularly in quality physical activity is a must

A network of inspired leaders who are in a position to advocate, manage, mentor and deliver the programme widely is needed urgently so that a significant difference is made within and across all regions.

There is no doubt that the current small-time commitment (one period a week) must be used efficiently and

effectively. Empowering learners with the knowledge, skills and values associated with participation in activity for life is the goal.

Getting our children to play and participate regularly in quality physical activity is a must. It is a massive, multisectorial challenge, but it is possible to make a difference.

*The development of the concept was initiated by Dr Claire M Nicholson, the immediate past head of the division of physical education, sport and human movement studies/science at the University of the Witwatersrand. Kits are sold at R300 each. For more information go to: [www.movingmatters.co.za](http://www.movingmatters.co.za)*

## What do you need?

Each learner will have his or her own:

- Bag of activity tools that includes small, especially designed pieces of equipment all given unique names. The Blue Kit, which is the starting kit includes Skip-It, Fly-It, Do-It, Juggle-It and the particularly special piece for 2010 called Kiatch-It, which is a mini soccer ball (official handball size) that can be attached to or liberated from an elasticised system designed to inspire the acquisition of kicking and catching skills common with at least 10 sport types, ranging from basketball to water polo and from soccer to hockey goalkeeping.
- A set of interactive learner

manuals with age-appropriate activity challenges. Each activity challenge uses visual literacy to inspire action.

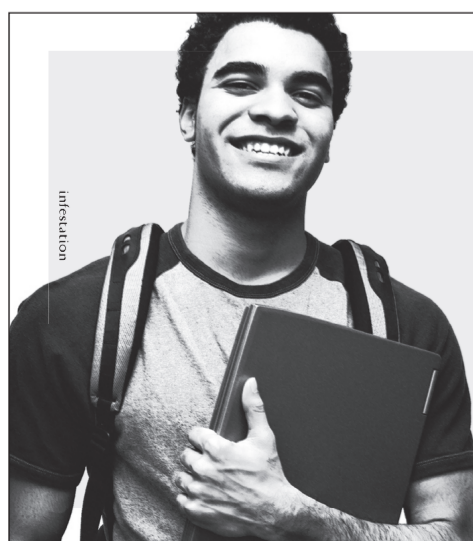
Through discovery learning, discussion and problem-solving, multiple intelligences are applied. As a consequence and through the doing of the activity, language, maths and other fields of knowledge are integrated.

Tasks such as performance repetition, developing own games, researching the origins of movement, counting, drawing shapes, measuring distances, managing time, calculating scores, evaluating peers, applying

assessment rubrics, recording progress, plotting performance graphs, writing narratives and emulating the visually represented task are examples of some of the challenges.

Each teacher will have his or her own:

- Teacher manual that guides the delivery, activity by activity.
- CD (IT element) that supports assessment progress charts (the evidence of competence achieved), prepares the term-by-term report for each child and grade and also enables certificates of competence, participation and endeavour to be produced.



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