

Teaching PE—All Fun and Games?

Question: Ours is a small, one-room school. We parents feel that the teacher is doing a good job, but one thing upsets us. There doesn't seem to be any organized teaching of physical education. The children play games like kickball, dodge ball, and softball at recesses. But isn't there more?

Answer: Yes, there is more. As you know, teachers need to have well-developed plans to teach any subject. Physical education is one area in which most teachers have not had the time (or perhaps the training) to plan.

Before we continue this discussion, let me introduce you to a very useful physical-education manual: *Happiness Is Physical Education in the Elementary School* by Ingrid Johnson. It is published by Andrews University Printers and is available through your Adventist Book Center. The manual takes advantage of some of the newer research efforts in movement education, and suggests games to be played, as well as an understanding of the skills needed for, and to be learned through, playing them. If parents were to spend a short time studying this manual, they might find themselves making plans to relieve the teacher of this part of his burden. In the process parents could gain a new physical fitness for themselves.

Most teachers have to take courses to obtain or continue their certification. Part of the requirements for certification could be fulfilled through completion of a movement education course from one of our colleges. The course offered by Andrews University is very worthwhile. Perhaps your operating committee could make discreet inquiry in that direction for your teacher.

The physical education program of a school should contain goals and specific ways to achieve these goals, just as any other part of the school curriculum. The usual elementary school physical education attempts are not a program but a collection of the teacher's or children's favorite games, or the most easily supervised activity to get the children away from the books for a few minutes.

Such efforts at a physical education program are not creative nor do they produce an understanding of what is to be, or has been, accomplished by the expenditure of time and effort. Should such an expectation be attached to the

physical education program? Yes. Children will benefit from knowing the possibilities of controlling and ordering their movements in order to be dexterous as well as to be alert and in control, whether in an active or relaxed state.

Traditional attempts at physical education contain few of the components needed to fully educate the physical being. Teachers and students often lack an understanding of the motor and mechanical processes that control coordination, despite the fact that students need coordination to be successful in games or even simple body propulsion. Teachers also fail to understand the combination of skills that must flow together to produce the integration of movements. However, children need this integration for large muscle movement before they can be successful with small muscle movements.

Students as well as teachers need to be instructed about the motions involved in both work and play, so that they will have a better understanding of that marvelous mechanism, their body. Such understanding, when coupled with the health program, will help complete the knowledge needed for keeping the body fit to be the temple of God.

This discussion of physical activity does not ignore the betterment of the spiritual life that can result from regular exercise. Nor is the wise use of time and energy forgotten. However, these aspects of the topic are not covered here because they are generally understood and accepted by those who have studied the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy writings.

Ellen G. White's writings point to several kinds of activity needed for complete training and maintenance of physical well-being. Drawing together the counsel from her writings, we begin to see a fourfold pattern of physical education emerging:

1. General free play;
2. Directed play and games with study of the body and its coordination;
3. Walking, hiking, jogging, running, skating, skiing, camping, etc.;
4. Outdoor work in gardens, orchards, and fields.

Ideally, every school should provide instruction and practice in each of these four areas. The directed play and games can be more productive than most schools make them.

Games involve the body in coordinated activity. The skill coordination required is achieved by repetition. Repetition usually makes children "good" at a game, and they prefer to continue to play the game even after its purpose has already been achieved. What is really needed is introduction of new games requiring new skills so that more coordinations can be achieved. This is the concept behind the term *movement education*.

Games are made up of a *body part* (sometimes with an object) being used in a given *manner* (activity), in a given *way* (energy, speed, or tempo), and in a given *place* (space, level, direction). These components make up the *What, How, and Where* of movement.

The movement can be repeated in sequence or series and can be improved with learning and practice. The repetition serves to train and strengthen the body parts and thinking (mental chaining) that causes the parts to function. The mind must actively control and direct each series of movements. This training and strengthening sharpens the visual-auditory-motor-kinesthetic-tactile perceptions, which tell us where we are and how to react to our surroundings. Such awareness not only makes us feel alive, but can sometimes even save our lives.

There is a whole vocabulary pertaining to physical training and movement that describes and directs activities of the four components (or elements) of movement. A classified listing of this vocabulary with samples of combinations and activities that they produce may be had on request. Address your request to: The Editor: JOURNAL OF ADVENTIST EDUCATION, 6840 Eastern Ave. NW, Washington, D.C. 20012, and specify *Physical Education Lists*. Enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

Once the activities are devised and organized as to sequence, there is no great urgency for identifying each developing skill every time. The initial explanations and the teacher's awareness of the place of the "game" in the physical education program are all that is necessary.

Such a program would be truly physical education and would go far beyond the collections of games that characterize most programs.—Dr. Margaret S. Hafner.