Philosophy of Health Education - A Comprehensive Approach

A comprehensive school health program at the elementary level should influence, in a positive way, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours, ultimately leading to an enhanced quality of life for students. Through the involvement of home, school and community, the comprehensive school health program should relate to every aspect of a child’s life including: the physical, intellectual, emotional, social and moral development.

Basic knowledge and skills, as well as a positive self-concept are necessary if an individual is to make wise health-related decisions. It is important to involve young people in a health program in a meaningful way so as to guide them in the development of healthy lifestyle practices. Through a comprehensive school health program children can become empowered to choose health-enhancing behaviours and to alter the environments that affect them.

A comprehensive school health program encompasses a wide range of school and community personnel collaborating to enhance the well-being of children. The program deals with a broad spectrum of health topics in an integrated and holistic way. The health instruction component of the program should be coordinated with health services, within a healthful school and community environment.

Comprehensive school health programs achieve their goals through:

- formal and informal instruction
- support services
- a healthy school environment
- social support of peers, families, school and community
**Program Design**

**Curriculum and Instruction:** Curriculum includes topics such as: physical, mental, emotional and social development; nutrition; safety, substance abuse; family life and consumer education. A variety of teaching methodologies and learning strategies are essential in addressing the many needs and interests of students.

**Services:** Health education is more than curriculum. It includes health services such as screening, immunization, curriculum enhancement, emergency services, health counselling and continuing care. Community health and school health professionals working with administrators, teachers and students, provide valuable services and support for program goals. Similarly, other community agencies provide numerous resources.

**Environment:** Commitment to comprehensive school health aims to achieve a school environment that is clean, pleasant, accessible and conducive to and supportive of healthful living. In addition to the provision of instruction, schools must work towards creating and maintaining healthy school environments, as well as coordinating their efforts with those of parents, community agencies and systems that are responsible for providing health and social services to young people. Such an approach requires the development of policies and regulations related to AIDS, nutrition, smoking, quality physical education and recreation, as well as space and building design. Such policies and regulations should promote and reinforce health curricula and services.

These components of comprehensive school health interact with and complement each other resulting in growth and development in knowledge, skills, and behaviours.

Continuous reinforcement and support from a variety of sectors multiplies the positive results in terms of both health and education.
Comprehensive school health should enhance the daily life and future well-being of every student.

Within the context of health goals for Canada's children, a health program for schools in Newfoundland and Labrador should take into consideration:

- the developmental stages of the learner
- the needs and interests of the young people of Newfoundland and Labrador
- positive and negative influences of mass technology
- current research findings
- the environment and culture of the Province

The program should be sequentially developed, interactive and student-centred. It should foster critical and creative thinking and develop decision-making skills in order to promote physical, social and emotional wellness.

The ultimate goal of a comprehensive school health program for the elementary level is to facilitate the development of health attitudes, knowledge and behaviours through an holistic approach to health education, through promotion and through greater inter-agency collaboration and partnerships and to lay the foundation for the development of healthy, productive and contributing young citizens who are resources to their communities and province.

**Comprehensive School Health Model**

This model integrates curriculum, services and the environment with home, school, and community efforts in a supportive social climate.
Goals of the Program

To develop a basic understanding of the components of health:

- mental health
- physical growth and development
- self care
- active living
- drug education
- environmental health
- relationships
- nutrition
- dental health
- injury prevention and safety
- consumer health

To develop a positive self-concept and to exhibit self-efficacy.

To foster an awareness of the role of the school, the home and the community as they relate to all aspects of health.

To develop skills and to promote behaviours for health and injury prevention.

To promote and to reinforce positive attitudes towards health and well-being.

To foster the idea of self-responsibility and capability for health and well-being.

To help acquire a body of knowledge and skills that will lead to sound decision making regarding health and well-being.

To encourage the appropriate selection and use of health information and services.

To promote a holistic view of health as a resource for everyday living.
Program Overview

The health curriculum is based on the physical, intellectual, emotional, social and spiritual needs of the learner and current research in the area of health education with special reference to Newfoundland and Labrador. The design of the program is comprehensive in approach and consists of eleven components:

- Mental Health
- Relationships
- Physical Growth and Development
- Nutrition
- Self Care
- Dental Health
- Active Living
- Injury Prevention and Safety
- Drug Education
- Consumer Health
- Environmental Health

Although objectives and topics are listed separately, instructional planning using an integrated approach is encouraged. For example, mental health is basic to understanding and practice related to all other components of the program. Similarly, such skills as decision-making and problem-solving are not merely isolated skills for drug education, but are applicable to each topic addressed.

The comprehensive school health program must be viewed as an integrated, multi-dimensional life discipline which carries over into all other subjects of the school curriculum. Caution should be taken against teaching concepts separately and in isolation. Combining concepts and objectives across components reflects the reality of life situations and promotes integrated thinking.
Program Design

**Mental Health**

Mental Health is basic to a comprehensive health curriculum and relates to every other component of health. In the program, emphasis is placed on self-recognition, decision making and self-efficacy. This component is pivotal in its relationship to self-respect, stress reduction, social pressures and understanding the needs of others.

Provincial findings of the *Canada Health Attitudes and Behaviour Survey* (1985) indicate that Newfoundland and Labrador youth ranked lower than the norm in self-esteem and a high number did not feel understood by their parents. They also ranked high in the number of those reported as having trouble making decisions. The Mental Health component of this health curriculum takes these areas of concern and examines the emotional well-being of students and their support systems while showing the relationship between emotional health and other aspects of productive living.

The goal of the Mental Health component is to promote positive self-concept and to provide students with the knowledge, skills and experiences which will facilitate the transition into adolescence.

**Relationships**

The Relationships component examines the influences of family and friends on individual growth and development by exploring such topics as: family units, healthy friendships, peers, stereotyping, rights and responsibilities, respect, and consideration for self and others.

Positive family relationships help to develop responsible, caring adults where each member contributes in a positive way to the well-being of the family. Learning to get along with family members develops skills that will nurture positive relationships and attitudes later in life.

Provincial findings of the *Canada Health Attitudes and Behaviour Survey* (1985) indicate that compared to their Canadian counterparts, Newfoundland and Labrador youth ranked highest in number of those who felt that parents expected too much of them, and lower in number for those who felt understood by their parents.

Documented research regarding abuse, breakdown in communication and in relationships, makes this component a critical area of study for a comprehensive health program.
Physical Growth and Development

Physical Growth and Development focuses on the total physical development of the body through infancy, childhood and puberty. This component promotes an understanding of the various body systems, their relationships to one another and their overall contribution to health.

The Physical Growth and Development component provides information that is current, complete, accurate, and explicit with respect to the way a young person’s body develops and performs and is a necessary prerequisite to self understanding and responsibility for health.

Nutrition

The Nutrition component focuses on the importance of obtaining the appropriate kind and amount of food each day in order to maintain good health and the value of following Canada’s Guidelines for Healthy Eating.

Provincial findings of the Canada Health Attitudes and Behaviour Survey (1985) indicate that compared with their Canadian counterparts, Newfoundland and Labrador youth ranked lowest among all provinces for all grades, for the consumption of foods from the four food groups, lowest for the consumption of fruits and vegetables, lowest in Canada for milk consumption, and lowest in the consumption of food high in fibre.

To foster self-responsibility for healthy eating, opportunities are provided for increasing children’s awareness of food value by examining food supply including some fast foods and locally obtained foods in light of their nutritional value and cultural significance.
Well-nourished children are more alert and attentive and are better able to learn and to benefit from physical activity. It is critical, therefore, that nutritional knowledge is promoted and that young people are encouraged, within their capability, to make responsible decisions regarding food choices.

**Self Care**

The Self Care component provides children with knowledge about disease-causing bacteria and viruses, allergies, health conditions and the degree to which a person can contribute to his/her own health through immunization, personal hygiene and disease prevention behaviour.

Responsibility for hygiene and grooming increases as a person matures. This component provides opportunities for children to become actively involved with general health maintenance. The focus is on the development and reinforcement of positive attitudes and healthy practices, such as handwashing.

Proper care of the body is critical to a person’s general state of health and well-being and, consequently, including this as a component of the health program should increase children’s chances of avoiding serious diseases both now and later in life.

**Dental Health**

Continual advancement in medical technology and careful practice of dental hygiene can help people protect and maintain their teeth and often avoid the discomfort of major dental care procedures or permanent loss of teeth.

To a large extent dental health depends upon the consistent practice of good personal health habits and many dental problems can be avoided through the development of such habits. Children’s awareness of proper dental care early in life contributes to the acquisition of life-long healthful habits and attitudes.

According to Doshi (1987) the average five-year-old in the province has six to seven decayed, missing or filled teeth, the average fifteen- to seventeen-year-old has nine to ten decayed, missing or filled teeth, and seventy percent of Newfoundland and Labrador children are going to the dentist once a year.
This component provides children with knowledge about teeth, the care of teeth, and the practices which will assist them in achieving and maintaining good dental health as they grow and assume more responsibility for their own health care.

**Active Living**

Physical activity affects a person’s total well-being. The Active Living component focuses on the development of particular skills, attitudes and behaviours which are compatible with the promotion of active and healthy living. Inherent in active living is the pursuit of pleasurable and satisfying physical activities which become an integral part of a person’s daily life.

Children’s lives are full of opportunities for acquiring life-long skills and pleasure in active living. The freedom to learn about one’s personal potential and life in general, through a variety of experiences with physical activity, is essential at this important developmental stage.

The *Canada Fitness Survey* (1983) showed that while 70 percent of Canadian youth, age 10-19, claim to be physically active three or more hours per week for at least nine months of the year, they tend to pursue lower intensity activities in which potential fitness benefits are not always realized. The Survey also observed that many youth are not aware of the benefits of physical activity and fitness. In addition, youth who were more active than their peers reported more positive emotional well-being, scored better on more fitness test items, and had lower percentages of body fat.
Program Design

The objectives of the Active Living component are consistent with the physical growth and development of children, and include posture, relaxation activities, strength, physical work and daily physical activity. Through physical involvement, children are encouraged to acquire attitudes and skills which will increase the likelihood of active living as a lifelong practice.

Injury Prevention and Safety

Injuries are the leading cause of death and a major course of hospitalization for Newfoundland and Labrador children and youth aged 1-24. Each age group presents a different pattern of injuries.

An analysis of injuries conducted by the Newfoundland and Labrador Childhood Injury Prevention Program (1993) identified the following priority injury areas for elementary school-aged children:

- falls (5-9 year olds, particularly playground and sport related);
- bicycle injuries (5-14 year olds)
- all-terrain vehicle injuries (10-14 and 15-19 year olds).

Analysis of emergency room data from the Janeway Child Health Centre confirmed that of the over 10,000 visits to emergency from 1990-1992 for injuries, only 5% were wearing protective gear such as bicycle helmets and knee pads.

Underlying this component of the health curriculum is the recognition that growing up can be a risky time in a child’s life. To provide children with an understanding of how injuries can be prevented, potential hazards as well as precautions are identified.

To address the need for relevancy in the health curriculum, in terms of the cultural, geographic, and climatic conditions which affect student attitudes and behaviours, injury prevention strategies for all-terrain vehicles, skateboards, roller blades (in-line skates), snowmobiles, boats and guns are examined. Injury Prevention and Safety also takes into account the dangers related to sudden weather changes which occur in Newfoundland and Labrador and which can result in overexposure to the sun or to intense cold conditions. Increasing a child’s awareness of these conditions at an early age helps to promote appropriate decision making and injury prevention and safety in this environment.
It is also essential that children learn how to handle emergencies, especially in situations where an adult may not be present. Elementary school children should be able to recognize an emergency, approach it with calm, quick thinking and be able to seek out appropriate help. Educators are encouraged to identify and discuss Neighbourhood Watch and Block Parent programs in their areas. Emergency response skills promote confidence, demonstrate emotional maturity and an awareness of injury prevention and safety.

**Drug Education**

Drug Education focuses on how the body and different drugs interact and how personal choices about drugs affect the well-being of self and others.

The Drug Education component promotes the development of knowledge and skills that will enable young people to make informed, responsible decisions regarding drugs. Special attention is given to developing and practising communication, refusal, decision-making and problem-solving skills.

The provincial findings of the *Canada Health Attitudes and Behaviour Survey* (1985) indicated that Newfoundland youth ranked highest in the proportion of smokers and high in the number of those reported as having trouble making decisions and feeling pressure from friends to drink alcohol.

The Drug Education component is relevant to the specific needs of children in this province in terms of the impact of drug use, misuse, abuse and chemical dependency. There is an emphasis on identification, prevention, treatment and the legal implications of substance abuse.

**Consumer Health**

Consumer Health focuses on topics such as advertising of health products, sources of health information, access to health services, medical research and regulations.
Program Design

The need for careful selection of health products and services is stressed. The component also focuses on building an awareness of how the media, through advertising and promotion, influences our choices of products and services. Developing an awareness at an early age leads to increased understanding so that as potential consumers, children can learn to become more analytical and objective about products and services available in the marketplace.

The concepts addressed in this component can be linked to all the other health components of the program, in particular the section on drugs.

Environmental Health

Environmental Health focuses on the services and activities promoted in the community which assist people in their goal for optimum wellness. Two concerns of community and environmental health agencies are air quality and water quality.

The Environmental Health component of the program introduces children to the potential for reusing, reducing and recycling in this province. It also points to the need for action on the part of children, as well as adults, in addressing such issues as litter and its impact on the environment. Global issues of an environmental nature are also addressed including the depletion of the ozone layer, global warming and the greenhouse effect, and the types of pollution that threaten our ecosystem.

Responsibility for a clean community and ultimately the total environment lies with present community members and future citizens. The Environmental Health component aims to foster an awareness of the role of the school, home and community as they relate to a healthy environment.

The concepts addressed in this unit have natural linkages with topics discussed in the component entitled Self Care.