Several years ago, the National Association of Sport and Physical Education (1992) described the physically educated person as one who is fit, is physically active, is skilled, knows the benefits of physical activity, and values lifetime physical activity. As teachers, our goal is to help all of our students to become physically educated people. Each of the five characteristics of the physically educated person is important, but consistent with the focus of this special issue of Teaching Elementary Physical Education, I have concentrated on those characteristics that relate most to physical activity and fitness promotion. I have drawn on my own experience as an elementary school physical educator, youth sport coach, college teacher, and researcher to outline some guidelines for teaching physical activity and fitness. Many of the ideas outlined in this article are described in greater detail in the Alliance Scholar Lecture (see Corbin, 2002).

Physical fitness is a state of being. After years of debate, scholars have reached a consensus concerning the definition of physical fitness (see Corbin, Pangrazi, & Franks, 2000). It is a set of attributes that people have or achieve relating to their ability to perform physical activity (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 1996). Physical fitness is a state of being that consists of five health-related and six skill-related components. Evidence suggests that possessing good levels of health-related components of physical fitness (body composition, cardiovascular fitness, flexibility, muscular endurance, strength) is related to reduced risk of chronic disease and has wellness benefits (USDHHS, 1996). Skill-related fitness components (agility, balance, coordination, power, speed, and reaction time) are abilities that are associated with athletic performance but are not generally associated with health enhancement. Although both types of fitness are important and relevant for children, teachers should know the difference between health-related physical fitness and skill-related fitness and among the different components of each. Most current fitness testing batteries focus on health-related fitness because these components are associated with good health and wellness.

Our ability to change the fitness of children is not a great as most of us would like. As the NASPE statement cited above indicates, becoming physically fit is an important objective of physical education. However, research (Bouchard, 1999; Corbin, 2002) clearly indicates that heredity, maturation, and chronological age have as much, or more, to do with a child’s fitness than participation in regular physical activity. The fittest child in a class will likely be the oldest and most mature with genetics that foster fitness development. During the teen years, when youth begin to mature, physical activity will have a more dramatic effect on fitness. Teachers should not expect that the limited time spent in physical education is enough to make significant differences in the fitness of children as measured by physical fitness tests.

Teaching children about health-related fitness is an important goal. Some teachers say, “If I can't make children fit in physical education, what is the point of physical education?” All education is about teaching and learning. Children learn to read not only to know the mechanics of reading, but also to use the reading to learn in other ways. Learning to read is learning to learn. The same is true for teaching about physical fitness. Two of the characteristics of a physically educated person are “knowing the benefits of physical activity” and “valuing physical activity for a lifetime.” Teaching children concepts of health-related fitness and how to be more active to achieve it will help them to accomplish worthy goals outside of physical education class. Children learn to learn. They learn how to be active and to value fitness and activity for a lifetime.

The use of criterion referenced fitness standards, rather than normative standards, is recommended. Most current physical fitness tests, including Fitnessgram, the official battery of AAHPERD, uses criterion referenced health standards rather than normative standards. Criterion referenced means that student scores are compared to standards that indicate levels of fitness necessary for health, regardless of other students’ scores. Teaching youth about how much fitness is enough for good health is a worthwhile goal. A child can have reasonable hope of success if he or she is regularly active over enough time. For some, achieving healthy standards will come easily, and for others it will take considerable time. On the other hand, using normative standards, such as percentiles, compares child to child and does little to educate the child about the health benefits of fitness. Further, normative standards, if applied inappropriately, can result in feelings of failure among children.

Self-testing can help students learn important concepts. There are several types of fitness testing (see Morrow & Falls, 2003), including institutional testing, personal best testing,
and self-testing. Institutional testing refers to the use of precise testing of children for institutional and research purposes. Personal best testing refers to testing in which personal best scores are determined for each child. Both institutional and personal best testing take considerable class time, often more time than can be justified. While there are situations in which these types of testing are appropriate, the best form of testing for meeting educational objectives for all children is self-testing. Children are taught how to properly self-assess their own fitness, to interpret their own testing results, and to use the results to plan their own personal activity programs. (See Morgan, et al. article in this issue for ideas on using self-testing.)

**Fitness tests are not good indicators of student achievement or teacher success.** Because the fitness of children is limited by heredity, maturity, and chronological age (see section above), it is unlikely that large improvements in fitness will result from exposure to physical education class, even when daily physical education exists. Most schools do not have daily physical education. Physical fitness has many components, each of which require exposure to a specific type of activity. Further, physical education has many objectives including teaching skills, values, etc. There is too little time and there are too many things to accomplish. Using fitness tests as indicators of student achievement (e.g., grading) will result in discouragement for many children, especially those with less genetic predisposition to fitness and those who mature late. For the same reason, using fitness scores as indicators of teacher success is counterproductive, especially in the elementary school.

**Physical activity education is our paramount goal.** Physical activity is a process rather than a product. If you do the process (physical activity), the product (physical fitness) will follow to the extent possible for a given child. Teaching children to be physically active will help them to improve their current levels of fitness and help them to achieve their individual potential. If children learn to do physical activity correctly and learn to value physical activity, they will be active as children and stay active throughout life. It is for this reason that Earle Ziegler and I have proposed the name, Physical Activity Education for our profession. All of the characteristics of a physically educated person are related to being physically active. Those who are active become more skilled and improve fitness. On the other hand, good skills and good fitness increase the likelihood of regular activity. Knowing the benefits of activity and learning to value it help children to be active for a lifetime.

**Learning self-management skills is an important objective of physical activity education.** Learning physical skills is important. In the elementary school, teaching skills is one of our most important goals. As teachers, we believe that skilled people are more likely to be active later in life than those who are not skilled. But physical skills are not the only important skills. Self-management skills (Corbin, 2002) such as self-assessment, self-monitoring, self-planning, goal setting, and overcoming barriers are skills that can help youth to be active and fit for now and for a lifetime. Children are children, and not little adults. For this reason, we should not focus too much on benefits of activity that are too abstract for children to understand. Siedentop has referred to this as “pediatric geriatrics”—teaching children as if they were adults. We should not teach self-management skills to the exclusion of other important objectives, but we can begin to teach self-management skills in the elementary school. Some examples of the use of self-management skills include demonstrating how to do a fitness test properly as evidence of learning self-assessment skills, keeping step count records using a pedometer as evidence of self-monitoring skills, or using self-assessments to establish fitness or physical activity goals as evidence of goal setting. In the secondary school, as preparation for life, we can concentrate on them (see Corbin & Lindsey, 2002 for examples). Two of the characteristics of the physically educated person are knowing about and valuing physical activity. Teaching self-management skills can help meet these worthy objectives.

**Activity guidelines for youth are not the same as for adults.** Children are not little adults (see Corbin, 2002). It is for this reason that COPEC/NASPE developed physical activity guidelines for children (Corbin & Pangrazi, 2003). The guidelines were originally published in 1998 and were revised in 2003. Teachers of physical activity education should be aware of these guidelines and use them in their teaching. Some of the principal recommendations in the most recent guidelines include the following:

- Children need at least 60 minutes and up to several hours of activity each day.
- Long periods of inactivity (two hours or more) during the waking hours should be avoided.
- Children need several bouts (time periods) a day devoted to physical activity (for example, recess, physical education, and other opportunities to be active).
- Children need a variety of activities (from each area of the Physical Activity Pyramid—see Corbin and Pangrazi, 2003).

**Because a child can do something, it does not mean that it is appropriate for him/her to do it.** Children are not fragile, they are resilient. We know that concerns about a child’s ability to do vigorous cardiovascular activity and resistance training have been over-dramatized. For example, it was once thought that vigorous, endurance exercise would damage a child’s heart. Of concern, however, are those who feel that because a specific type of physical activity does not physically hurt a child, it must be appropriate. Nothing could be further from the truth. Forcing a child to do an activity, such as intensive aerobic training or resistance exercises, to enhance performance is contraindicated if the child develops a dislike of the activity. Regimented training, even if not harmful, is not appropriate for children because it can lead to negative feelings about exercise that may last a lifetime. As teachers, we should select activities because they help children to meet important educational objectives.

A recent debate about dodge ball illustrates the point. Much of the discussion has been related to the question, “Does it harm the child?” A more important question is, “What does it do for the child?” I believe that dodge ball is harmful to many children. But even if it were not harmful, it should not be used unless it can be shown to meet important objectives for all children. The same is true for all activities.

**Building intrinsic motivation is a key to promoting lifetime physical activity.** If, as I suggest in this article, promotion of lifetime physical activity is our primary goal, intrinsic motivation is critical. Intrinsic motivation means doing something because you choose to do it (autonomy) and because you enjoy it, rather than for some extrinsic reason or for a reward. As we teach children to be active, it is important that we help them achieve success, retain their intrinsic enjoyment of the activity, and help them build positive self-
perceptions (self-esteem) and self-confidence. The following recommendations should be considered when teaching physical activity to children:

- DO NOT tolerate peer comments and actions that deprive children of positive self-perceptions.
- DO encourage youth to be supportive of peers in activity—even those who are less skilled than others.
- DO NOT use language or take actions that undermine self-perceptions of children.
- DO find words and take actions that make all youth feel that they are included and respected.
- DO NOT condone or participate in actions that undermine the self-perceptions of children who are especially at risk (e.g., gay youth or those perceived as gay, youth low in physical stature or ability, youth who are underdeveloped or accelerated in development, youth who are high or low in body fatness).
- DO make it clear that physical activity is for all people.
- DO NOT use physical activity as punishment.
- DO find ways to make activity fun and enjoyable—not a chore.

References

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