



Effect of Physical Education on Health

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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to assess physical activity levels during high school physical education lessons. The data were considered in relation to recommended levels of physical activity to ascertain whether or not physical education can be effective in helping young people meet health-related goals. Sixty-two boys and 60 girls (aged 11–14 years) wore heart rate telemeters during physical education lessons. Percentages of lesson time spent in moderate-and-vigorous (MVPA) and vigorous intensity physical activity (VPA) were recorded for each student.

Keywords: physical activity, valproic acid, education, physical, high schools

Introduction: Regular physical activity participation throughout childhood provides immediate health benefits, by positively effecting body composition and musculo-skeletal development (Malina and Bouchard, 1991), and reducing the presence of coronary heart disease risk factors (Gutin *et al.*, 1994). In recognition of these health benefits, physical activity guidelines for children and youth have been developed by the Health Education Authority [now Health Development Agency (HDA)] (Biddle *et al.*, 1998). The primary recommendation advocates the accumulation of 1 hour's physical activity per day of at least moderate intensity (i.e. the equivalent of brisk walking), through lifestyle, recreational and structured activity forms. A secondary recommendation is that children take part in activities that help develop and maintain musculo-skeletal health, on at least two occasions per week (Biddle *et al.*, 1998). This target may be addressed through weight-bearing activities that focus on developing muscular strength, endurance and flexibility, and bone health.

School physical education (PE) provides a context for regular and structured physical activity participation. To this end a common justification for PE's place in the school curriculum is that it contributes to children's health and fitness (Physical Education Association of the United Kingdom, 2004; Zeigler, 1994). The extent to which this rationale is accurate is arguable (Koslow, 1988; Michaud and Andres, 1990) and has seldom been tested. However, there would appear to be some truth in the supposition because PE is commonly highlighted as a significant contributor to help young people achieve their daily volume of physical activity (Biddle *et al.*, 1998; Corbin and Pangrazi, 1998). The important role that PE has in promoting health-enhancing physical activity is exemplified in the US 'Health of the Nation' targets. These include three PE-associated objectives, two of which relate to increasing the number of schools providing and students participating in daily PE classes. The third objective is to improve the number of students who are engaged in beneficial physical activity for at least 50% of lesson time (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2000). However, research evidence suggests that this criterion is somewhat ambitious and, as a consequence, is rarely achieved during regular PE lessons (Stratton, 1997; US Department of Health and Human Services, 2000; Levin *et al.*, 2001; Fairclough, 2003a).

The potential difficulties of achieving such a target are associated with the diverse aims of PE. These aims are commonly accepted by physical educators throughout the world (International Council of Sport Science and Physical Education, 1999), although their interpretation, emphasis and evaluation may differ between countries. According to Simons-

