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## Health & Physical Education in NCF

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The focus group of the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) has recognised that the curriculum design for 'Health and Physical Education' is very challenging in terms of both content and evaluation and has rightly chosen to take a very comprehensive view of the subject. In the position paper, the group has tried to address the concerns related to health in all its dimensions, nutrition as also other social factors that contribute to the 'overall well being' of children at primary, secondary and senior secondary schools. There is a candid acceptance of the problems of under-nutrition, stunted growth and communicable diseases affecting children, not just during the schooling period but throughout their lives.

The group refers to the working definition on the subject set out by the Bhore Committee report way back in 1946 and suggests its adoption even today. According to it, the duties of a school health service are:

1. Preventive and curative health measures including detection and treatment of defects and creation and maintenance of hygienic environment in and around the school
2. Measures for promoting positive health which should include provision of supplementary food to improve nutrition levels and physical culture through games, sports and gymnastic exercises

The validity of these guidelines now, even after 65 years speaks volumes for our inability to implement these in our system. The government had set up a school health division in 1958 and efforts were made to integrate health education with school curriculum. The group laments that the integrated vision was lost both conceptually and in practice, perhaps because the school health programme was administratively under the Ministry of Health. The group has suggest-

ed that the various components of the school health programme must be an integral part of the 'Health and Physical Education' curriculum. The group also draws attention to the urgent need for coordination between various departments including health and family welfare, sports and youth affairs, women and child welfare, home and child education and so on.

Realising the importance of the mid-day meal programme (MDM), the committee has recommended that the MDM must become part of the curriculum. It has also included yoga as a part of the physical education for fitness and health of the children.

The group has unanimously recommended that this must be a compulsory subject up to class 10 and must be treated on par with other core subjects, allowing students to opt for it in lieu of one of the five subjects. The objectives and syllabi should reflect the four major themes:

- a. Personal health, physical and psycho-social development
- b. Movement concepts and motor skills
- c. Relationship with significant others
- d. Healthy communities and environments



To address these themes, the committee has formulated the following specific objectives to guide curriculum and syllabi planning:

1. To help children learn and become aware of health and develop a positive attitude towards it

2. To provide requisite services through the school health and nutritional programmes
3. To help children become aware of appropriate health needs at particular ages
4. To help children know and accept individual and collective responsibility for healthy living
5. To help children to be acquainted with nutritional requirements, personal & environmental hygiene, sanitation, pollution, common diseases and measures for their prevention and control
6. To help children know their status of health, identify health problems and take appropriate remedial measures
7. To create awareness about rules of safety in various hazardous situations to avoid accidents and injuries
8. To help children correct postural habits
9. To help children improve their neuro-muscular coordination through participation in a variety of physical activities
10. To help children understand the process of growing up during adolescence, HIV/AIDS
11. To provide skills for dealing with psycho-social issues in school, home
12. To help children grow up as responsible citizens by inculcating social and moral values through games, sports, NCC
13. To create interest among children for yogasanas and meditation
14. To address the physical and psycho-social needs of differently abled children

These objectives look very daunting to achieve and this has been recognised by the group. There is acceptance that the constraints faced by yoga and physical education are related to a number of factors that affect quality of school education in general. These include inadequate physical infrastructure, lighting, ventilation, water supply and transportation facilities. One other serious challenge highlighted is the absence of trained teachers on the subject in adequate numbers. In fact, this problem is traced back to the subject not being dealt adequately in the pre-service



and in-service training of the teachers at all levels. Thus, even when the subject is considered equivalent to other core subjects, in practical terms, it does not get the importance it deserves. Hence, a major recommendation of the group is to seriously address this matter of teacher preparation in yoga and physical education in general and the integrated approach with other subjects in particular.

Two other significant areas dealt with by the group relate to health needs of adolescents and a comprehensive mental health programme. The committee has emphasised the need to address the critical requirement of development of self identity during adolescence requiring careful and responsible handling of issues such as independence, intimacy, sexual health, HIV/ AIDS and drug abuse. On the matter of mental health, the committee has highlighted the need for equipping the children with mechanisms to cope with environmental stress and examination related stress. This is particularly relevant today in the context of the growing number of cases where the students attempt to take the extreme step in response to stresses of various kinds.

The issue of 'assessment' is perhaps not dealt with adequately. While it talks of a need for written test and practical test, the emphasis is still on 'conventional examination'. This could make this a typical subject like any other. Here the focus could have been on 'medical and physical examination' rather than on 'testing' the children. A couple of other aspects that seem to stick out are:

- a. The absence of even a single mention of the words ‘fun and enjoyment’ while talking about sports and games. Ask any child about sports and the first response would be ‘fun’. This aspect of ensuring that there needs to be fun in sports and physical education is completely missing. This could be because ‘sports’ is included as a part of health and physical education which is treated as a ‘subject’. Perhaps, schools should be encouraged to have a compulsory ‘sports and games’ period which is set aside for fun and enjoyment by children through a variety of individual as well as group games and sports.
- b. No mention of the mindset of a good physical education teacher. It may not be surprising to find in most schools that the PE teacher is among the most feared by children as the association is with punishment, physical pain and terror. This aspect should have been addressed in the part on PE teacher preparation.
- adoption of the comprehensive definition of the subject as spelt out by the Bhore committee report
  - inclusion of medical care, hygienic school environment, school lunch, nutrition, health, medical checkups and physical education in all its dimensions
  - making mid-day meals part of the curriculum
  - coordination of efforts of education and health departments
  - need for yoga and health education to have a minimum outdoor component
  - need for cross curricular planning and integration with science, social science, language and other relevant subjects
  - review of the curriculum for teacher training programmes for yoga, health and physical education and compulsory inclusion of this in all teacher preparations.

In sum however, the group has taken a fairly good and holistic view of the subject. Some of the key recommendations made include:

- make this subject compulsory upto class 10 and treat it on par with other core subjects

Throughout the position paper, there is a clear and strong feeling that this area has not received adequate attention and importance that it deserves. In this context, it is interesting to note that in the final NCF document, this subject gets ‘less than 2 pages’. That perhaps tells its own story.

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