



Philosophy of Health Education

A Position Statement of the American Association of Health Education (AAHE)

Health education is a unique and separate academic discipline. It influences individual, family and societal development, knowledge, attitudes and behavior. It seeks the improvement of individual, family and community health. Because the emphasis is upon health, both the process and the program may be said to originate in an understanding of the nature of health as it relates to humans as individuals or in groups.

The contemporary concept of health embraces the entire being. The individual is not a composite of separate entities, such as body, mind and spirit, arranged in presumed ascending order of importance. The individual is a multi-dimensional entity, with each component - chemical, physical, spiritual, intellectual or emotional - existing as an element within a complex of interrelationships. The individual is not a passive participant in the wellness process. Good health requires positive efforts directed toward total well-being. These efforts have larger potential for success when operating in a socio-political system that values individual, family and societal wellbeing. Individual attempts to enhance one's own well-being should be joined by a commitment to enhance societal well-being. Conversely, society as well bears a responsibility to promote the well-being of all individuals.

Education in health helps individuals seek that which moves them toward optimal stages of wellness. It means also to aid individuals and families in overcoming the debilitating effects of economic deprivation, the lack of balance, disease and accidents of life.

The ultimate goal of health education is to enable individuals to use knowledge in ways that transform unhealthy habits into healthy habits. It is difficult to expect that individuals can accomplish this end in a societal framework that provides confusing and mixed messages. It thus is an objective for health education to provide learners with the skills to judge messages received in terms of their potential benefit to self and society. It is also an objective to provide criticism of such mixed messages in public forums.

Paradoxically, educators in general or health educators in particular must teach individuals to look beyond health as an end or goal and to utilize health enhancing skills as a means for achieving life's goals. Though health itself may be quantitatively evaluated bio-chemically, health status can only be used as a qualitative measure of functional ability. Wellness is, in this functional sense, a means, not an end. Thus, the end should

involve greater societal well being.

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The mission of American Association of Health Education is to advance the profession by serving health educators and others who strive to promote the health of all people through education and other systematic strategies.

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