

# THE EUROPEAN NETWORK *of*

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# HEALTH PROMOTING SCHOOLS



*The European Network of Health Promoting Schools is a tripartite project launched by the World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe, the European Commission and the Council of Europe.*

## **Abbreviations**

**ENHPS** European Network of Health Promoting Schools

**WHO** World Health Organization

**EC** European Commission

**CE** Council of Europe

**IPC** International Planning Committee

# History

The European Network of Health Promoting Schools (ENHPS) was set up to establish, throughout the European Region of the World Health Organization (WHO), a group of model schools that would demonstrate the impact of health promotion in the school setting. The schools involved in the project would then disseminate their experience and information to the health and education sectors, influencing policy and practice in school health promotion both nationally and internationally.

Now widely heralded as an innovative approach to health promotion, the concept of the health promoting school was first mooted in the early 1980s. The original concept was discussed at a series of seminars and conferences, and these later provided the cornerstone for the development of the ENHPS.

The idea of a health promoting school network in countries was pilot-tested in 1991 in Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland. Following negotiations between the European Commission (EC), the Council of Europe (CE) and the WHO Regional Office for Europe, international agreement was reached to develop the project under the auspices of these three organizations. The ENHPS was formally inaugurated and opened for membership in 1992.

The ENHPS has expanded rapidly since then. By 1997, 37 countries were participating, each with pilot school networks of a manageable size. Many countries have entered a phase of dissemination, through the creation of national networks of schools. Schools have used examples of good practice taken from pilot networks. The school networks have generated valuable exchanges of views and ideas, expanding the development of health promotion for young people.

Participating pilot schools commit themselves to promoting health by making their environments safe and health-enhancing places in which to live, work, learn and thrive. This is achieved through building partnerships with, and encouraging teachers, pupils, parents and the wider community to work together to improve health.

Participating schools adopt an integrated, holistic approach to health promotion, prioritizing it within the curriculum, school management practice, and the school's physical and social environment. With partnership central to its ethos, the ENHPS provides a flexible framework in which project schools can determine their needs and work towards their goals.

# The concept

The rapid changes taking place in many countries of the European Region present challenges and new opportunities for health promotion. Clearly, the education system provides an ideal conduit for health promotion. It is important that health and education professionals and members of the community recognize this role, so that they can begin to address such issues as:

- how the school setting can be conducive to the development of healthy lifestyles;
- how it contributes to creating and maintaining the health of its staff, pupils and local communities; and
- which school procedures and environments require change to make the social and physical environment more health enhancing.

Consequently, the health promoting school aims to achieve healthy lifestyles for the whole school population by developing supportive environments conducive to the promotion of health. It offers opportunities for and requires commitments to the provision of a safe and health-enhancing social and physical environment.

The health promoting school sets out to create the means for all who live and work within it to take control over and improve their

physical and emotional health. It does this through changes in its management structures, its internal and external relationships, the teaching and learning styles it adopts and the methods it uses to establish synergy with its social environment.

## An integrated approach

Central to its success is the drive to integrate health promotion into all aspects of the school's daily routine. Thus, health promotion becomes an essential component of all curriculum activity, and the curriculum is structured to enable pupils to revisit aspects of health in varying and innovative ways throughout their school careers. Further, healthy programmes and practices are integrated into the overall school routine. This generates a greater awareness of and an improvement in working conditions, the development of stronger relationships and better rapport between the school and the community.

Active collaboration between pupils, staff, parents and the community, to implement the health promoting school concept, is encouraged. Environmental

improvements that affect the ethos of the school, school policy development and the creation of a supportive atmosphere for teaching and learning are also encouraged.

A holistic and integrated approach to health promotion such as this has a considerable impact on school life. It necessitates structural change and the introduction of new ideas and methods throughout the school. These permeate all levels of school life: from senior management through to the classroom and links with the external community. The health promoting school is an investment that European countries cannot afford to delay, avoid or ignore.

Experience in health promotion and education has shown that health promoting schools are characterized by a series of action programmes with the following goals:

- clarifying the school's social aims and highlighting its potential for health promotion;
- promoting a sense of responsibility for the health of the individual, the family and the community;
- promoting pupils' self-esteem, enabling them to fulfil their physical, psychological and social potential;

- developing good relations throughout the school's internal and external community;
- realizing the potential of specialist and other community resources to advise on and support health education and action for health promotion;
- planning a coherent health education curriculum;
- presenting a realistic and attractive range of health choices in order to encourage a healthy lifestyle; and
- providing a safe and healthy environment (meals, buildings, playgrounds, leisure facilities, etc.).

## **Project organization, management and coordination**

Supported by the international organizations, and owned by its participating schools, the ENHPS rests on a foundation of partnership.

Decentralization is also a key feature of the ENHPS. Its three sponsoring bodies (EC, CE, WHO) have formed an International Planning Committee (IPC). Representatives from each sponsor organization and a Technical Secretariat based at the WHO

Regional Office for Europe form the technical supporting body.

The role of the IPC is to provide a focus and ensure that links and opportunities for all parties are available within the ENHPS. Such management arrangements have minimized bureaucracy while maximizing results.

Each participating country has a national coordinator. These coordinators meet at least once each year to discuss experiences, needs and challenges, and to exchange ideas and information.

The Technical Secretariat supports their work by keeping abreast of ENHPS developments, providing technical guidance, and assisting with the organization of workshops. The Secretariat also gives presentations at international and regional meetings and produces teaching and training resources for project implementation and evaluation. It arranges the annual business meeting for national coordinators, which addresses the future needs of ENHPS members.



## European Network of Health Promoting Schools

### Management Structure International Planning Committee



## Successes

The commitment and eagerness of participating schools are already producing visible results. In many, pupils, staff, parents and community members are working together to implement the concept. A variety of programmes have been initiated. In some instances environmental improvements are already changing the ethos of the school. Health promoting policies are being developed, and supportive atmospheres for teaching and learning are being created.

modern technological innovations such as electronic communication and video with the more traditional methods of teacher and student exchanges, they share information and develop parallel health promotion activities. Their activities are monitored regularly, and the results are published in newsletters, technical articles, case studies and analyses.

## A European dimension

Developing the European dimension is central to ENHPS aims. The European Region contains many cultures, and developing a common understanding and recognition of this cultural diversity is an important part of the education process. Recognizing this, the ENHPS has from its inception set out to incorporate a European dimension. This has included twinning projects at both national and local levels in a bid to share experiences and gather international understanding and mutual respect.

Several twinning programmes are already underway. Combining

## Criteria for membership

Countries wishing to join ENHPS need to express their commitment to the concept of the health promoting school and support the principle of cooperation between education and health authorities at the highest level.

The individual schools nominated for membership must meet the criteria set individually by their countries. The basis for nomination is a commitment to the concept of the health promoting school.

In addition, many countries select schools for their eagerness to participate, the extent of their existing health education work and their geographical location. To ensure that the most appropriate schools are selected, countries

# Evaluation

assess the existing health education and health promotion programmes within nominated schools. They evaluate the schools' physical environment, work organization and human relations programmes, staff training and perceived needs for health promotion.

It is also vital that school pupils and staff must fully understand the implications and demands of joining the network. They need to be aware of the commitment needed and time it involves.

## Participating schools and countries:

- develop a three-year project plan;
- form a school project team and prioritize project initiatives;
- implement projects to tackle issues of both local and European relevance, which can then be used as models of good practice;
- implement activities that promote the health of young people, and foster a spirit of collective responsibility for personal and community health; and
- maximize the project's visibility and credibility, and facilitate the evaluation and dissemination of results.

Because participation in the network requires detailed planning at school level, objective evaluation and auditing are vital.

School projects are evaluated in the context of their own aims and objectives. National coordinators play an important role in the evaluation process in their own countries. Schools and national coordinators are able to update their knowledge and skills through specialist ENHPS publications and by participating in specially designed workshops on planning and process evaluation.

## The future

Many countries of the European Region are introducing radical changes to their education systems. Many of them are enthusiastic about the ENHPS, adopting it as a means to introduce new teaching and learning methods and to safeguard the health of their young people.

The ENHPS must therefore address the following challenges over the next few years, to ensure that it effectively fulfils its role as an agent of change. It must seek to:

- ensure that the national coordinators are highly trained in

all aspects of project management and innovation. Responsible for strategic planning, coordination and the introduction of change into schools, coordinators are critical to success at both national and international levels;

- devise the most effective means of maintaining momentum, sustaining the future of health promotion in schools, and influencing local and national policies;
- consider the most appropriate methods for managing the complexities of change within the health promoting school. The project's holistic approach to health promotion requires the introduction of fundamental changes in school approaches to education;
- assist schools in enhancing their physical and social environments to reflect the health promoting message. Initiatives could range from physical improvements (such as the introduction of smoking policies, healthy food in the canteen, and improving school cleanliness, safety and building maintenance) to the development of social policies designed to create a supportive atmosphere for teaching and learning. This supportive environment would stimulate

achievement, equality of opportunity and access to information, fostering a sense of individual pride and identity with community members;

- enable schools to adopt more participatory methods of teaching and learning. More conducive to health promotion, such methods require the development of specific skills and understanding in both pupils and teachers;
- develop a consensus on introducing and sustaining the most appropriate methods of management within health promoting schools. Many schools are traditionally hierarchical institutions with a top-down system of management, which is not particularly health promoting. A more open and participatory management style, in which staff and pupils have real opportunities to affect decision-making and change, needs to be considered;
- strengthen democracy within the health promoting school and investigate its impact on overall education policy. The aim is to generate a greater degree of democracy in the classroom;
- examine the role of the community in the context of the health promoting school, and encourage schools to open their

doors to the wider community. Since the responsibility for pupils' health lies equally with their families, communities and schools it is essential that the three areas work closely together;

- strengthen the project research and evaluation programmes. Research and evaluation are crucial to the success and development of ENHPS initiatives.

### **In addition, ENHPS will also aim:**

- to implement and disseminate the concept of the health promoting school;
- to provide some practical examples of how the concept can be implemented, and a framework within which its impact can be measured;
- to strengthen and encourage greater commitment from the education sector and provide opportunities for collaboration with health and other sectors;
- to foster a greater sense of project identity and pride among national coordinators, schools, parents and local communities;
- to ensure that the highest possible standards of quality are maintained;
- to ensure that financial and technical support is widely

available throughout the European Region, mobilizing the network to provide specific support to selected countries; and

- to launch an effective public relations campaign to promote the ethos and success of the project.

Children and young people hold the key to the future of the new Europe. Consequently they must be provided with the opportunities to realize their potential to become healthy, educated adults who possess the energy, skills and sense of responsibility so essential to their wellbeing in the modern world. The ENHPS is an initiative dedicated to achieving this goal.

The ENHPS is at the forefront of health promotion throughout schools in Europe. Education and health services around the world are showing great interest, and WHO headquarters is working to expand the concept at the global level.

The ENHPS has made some remarkable achievements, and will capitalize on the further potential and technical expertise now evident in Europe, to meet the health promotion challenges of the future and take the project forward into the next millennium.

# ENHPS Conference resolution

The ENHPS held its First European Conference in Greece in May 1997. The Conference was entitled “The Health Promoting School – An Investment in Education, Health and Democracy”; the participants comprised representatives of ministries of health and education in most countries participating in ENHPS, and of nongovernmental organizations (NGO’s), health promotion and education institutes. In the ENHPS Conference resolution, the participants called on the three sponsoring European organizations to strengthen their practical and political commitment to ENHPS. In addition, the resolution outlined the ten principles of a health promoting school, and concluded by stating that:

*Every child and young person in Europe has the right, and should have the opportunity, to be educated in a health promoting school.*

Schools are the prime force in creating a generation with raised expectations and high educational achievements. Health promoting schools will have a substantial impact in reducing inequities in society, thereby contributing to the health and wealth of the population at large.

## 1. Democracy

The health promoting school is founded on democratic principles conducive to the promotion of learning, personal and social development, and health.

## 2. Equity

The health promoting school ensures that the principle of equity is enshrined within the educational experience. This guarantees that schools are free from oppression, fear and ridicule. The health promoting school provides equal access for all to the full range of educational opportunities. The aim of the health promoting school is to foster the emotional and social development of every individual, enabling each to attain his or her full potential free from discrimination.

## 3. Empowerment and action competence

The health promoting school improves young people’s abilities to take action and generate change. It provides a setting within which they, working together with their teachers and others, can gain a sense of achievement. Young people’s empowerment, linked to their visions and ideas, enables them to influence their lives and living conditions. This is achieved

through quality educational policies and practices, which provide opportunities for participation in critical decision making.

#### **4. School environment**

The health promoting school places emphasis on the school environment, both physical and social, as a crucial factor in promoting and sustaining health. The environment becomes an invaluable resource for effective health promotion, through the nurturing of policies which promote well-being. This includes the formulation and monitoring of health and safety measures, and the introduction of appropriate management structures.

#### **5. Curriculum**

The health promoting school's curriculum provides opportunities for young people to gain knowledge and insight, and to acquire essential life skills. The curriculum must be relevant to the needs of young people, both now and in the future, as well as stimulating their creativity, encouraging them to learn and providing them with necessary learning skills. The curriculum of a health promoting school also is an inspiration to teachers and others working in the school. It also acts as a stimulus for their own personal and professional development.

#### **6. Teacher training**

The training of teachers is an investment in health as well as education. Legislation, together with appropriate incentives, must guide the structures of teacher training, both initial and in-service, using the conceptual framework of the health promoting school.

#### **7. Measuring success**

Health promoting schools assess the effectiveness of their actions upon the school and the community. Measuring success is viewed as a means of support and empowerment, and a process through which health promoting school principles can be applied to their most effective ends.

#### **8. Collaboration**

Shared responsibility and close collaboration between Ministries, and in particular the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health, is a central requirement in the strategic planning for the health promoting school. The partnership demonstrated at national level is mirrored at regional and local levels. Roles, responsibilities and lines of accountability must be established and clarified for all parties.

# Investing in the Future

## 9. Communities

Parents and the school community have a vital role to play in leading, supporting and re-enforcing the concept of school health promotion. Working in partnership, schools, parents, NGO's and the local community, represent a powerful force for positive change. Similarly, young people themselves are more likely to become active citizens in their local communities. Jointly, the school and its community will have a positive impact in creating a social and physical environment conducive to better health.

## 10. Sustainability

All levels of government must commit resources to health promotion in schools. This investment will contribute to the long-term, sustainable development of the wider community. In return, communities will increasingly become a resource for their schools.

These principles are enshrined within the concept and practice of the health promoting school. They provide the basis for investing in education, health and democracy for generations to come.

The Conference invites the European Commission, the Council of Europe and the WHO Regional Office for Europe to continue their support and leadership for this important work. The Conference asks all three organizations to act on this resolution.

**Every child should now have the right to benefit from the health promoting school initiative.**