



**Physical activity and health: building health-promoting schools in
Gqeberha and beyond**

INAUGURAL LECTURE

By

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Abstract

The health and well-being of children living in low-income impoverished communities in South Africa is of great concern. They have become victims of the poverty and growing inequality, and the country's purported status as the most unequal country in the world. Research has shown that there is a growing risk of children being affected by the dual burden of infectious diseases and the rapidly increasing non-communicable diseases, which has detrimental consequences to their growth, development and well-being.

The WHO advocates that every school should be a health-promoting school and stipulates that no education system is effective unless it promotes the health and well-being of learners, staff and the community. Targeting schools for health promotion initiatives makes sense. Children spend most of their waking time at schools, this is where most children can easily be reached and it is an important life-stage for establishing healthy behaviours. Schools are important institutions in communities. Schools in many poor communities in South Africa are often the only few safe spaces for children, responsible not only for their academic growth and development, but where children can play in relative safety and receive a nutritious meal through the National School Nutrition programme.

It is well-known that physical activity contributes to physical and mental wellbeing of children and adolescents. In South Africa, children from poor communities and schools have limited physical activity opportunities due to the marginalization or absence of Physical Education in schools, the lack of basic facilities and equipment, as well as the inadequate provision for extra-curricular and community sports.

In this lecture, I will share information on the research into the physical activity, health and wellbeing of primary school children living in the impoverished Northern Areas and townships in Gqeberha – which formed part of the 10-year collaboration between the Department of Human Movement Science at Nelson Mandela University, the Department of Sport, Exercise and Health at the University of Basel and the Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute, in Basel, Switzerland. Three large studies form the core of the 10-year collaboration: the Disease, Activity and Schoolchildren's Health (DASH) study, the *KaziBantu* Project and the *KaziAfya* study.

The lecture will also elaborate on the two key programmes in the *KaziBantu* project aimed at building health-promoting schools: *KaziKidz* is a holistic educational and instructional tool aimed at consolidating the practice of Physical Education and Lifeskills in school, to enhance children's overall health and *KaziHealth*, a workplace health promotion programme, designed specifically for teachers working in low-resourced settings, which embraces a behaviour change model and focuses on improving lifestyle behaviours.