HEALTH AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Level

F	1	2	3	4	5	**6**	B6

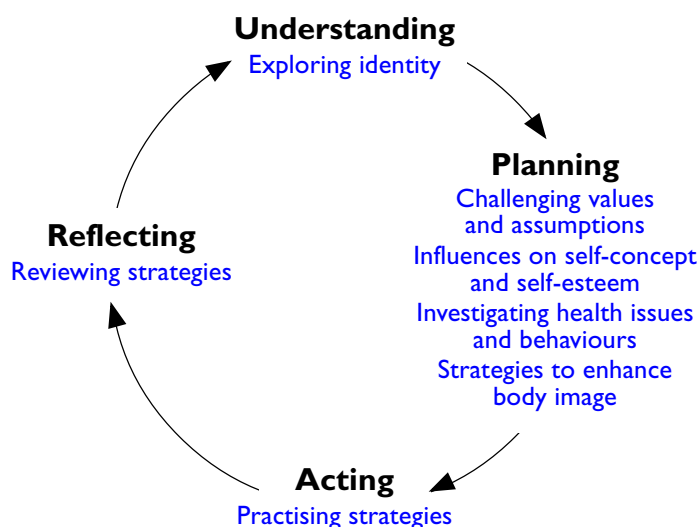# *B*ody image

> **Strands**
> Promoting the Health of Individuals and Communities
> Enhancing Personal Development

Purpose

Students explore the impact of the media as a key sociocultural factor influencing the health, self-concept and self-esteem of themselves and others. They develop strategies to challenge media images and messages about the ideal body, to break down stereotypes and, ultimately, to enhance their self-esteem and self-concept. Students also explore the relationship between body image, identity and health behaviours and practise strategies that help them respond to health concerns associated with body image.

Overview of activities

Activities in this module are based on a learner-centred approach with an emphasis on decision making and problem solving. As the following diagram shows, activities are sequenced in **understanding**, **planning**, **acting** and **reflecting** phases.

Understanding
Exploring identity

Planning
Challenging values
and assumptions
Influences on self-concept
and self-esteem
Investigating health issues
and behaviours
Strategies to enhance
body image

Acting
Practising strategies

Reflecting
Reviewing strategies

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Core learning outcomes

This module focuses on the following core learning outcomes from the
Years 1–10 Health and Physical Education Syllabus:

**Promoting the
Health of
Individuals and
Communities**

6.1 Students investigate the social, cultural and environmental factors
associated with a health concern of young adults in order to propose
strategies that promote the health of themselves and others.

**Enhancing Personal
Development**

6.1 Students evaluate the influence of sociocultural factors on their own and
others' self-concept and self-esteem.

Core content

This module incorporates the following core content from the syllabus:

**Promoting the
Health of
Individuals and
Communities**

• factors influencing health, in particular, society, culture and environment;

• health-promoting behaviours of individuals and groups related to
physical, social, mental, emotional and spiritual wellbeing;

**Enhancing Personal
Development**

• aspects of identity, in particular, self-concept and self-esteem;

• factors influencing identity and relationships, in particular, media and
popular culture, stereotyping, and values, attitudes and beliefs.

Assessment strategy

The following are examples of assessment tasks that provide opportunities for
students to demonstrate the core learning outcomes identified in this module.

**Promoting the
Health of
Individuals and
Communities 6.1**

• **Students create a poster celebrating diversity in body weight and shape,
and rejecting myths about the relationship between weight, shape and
health.**

**Enhancing Personal
Development 6.1**

• **Students prepare a report to accompany this poster, which analyses and
evaluates information gathered from relevant research about the impact
of media messages and images on the health, self-concept and self-
esteem of themselves and others. As part of this report, they outline how
the message presented in the poster helps students to challenge
stereotypical images and messages related to the body and body image.**

  – Does the student investigate the influence of the media as a
sociocultural factor influencing health?

  – Does the student explain how the message in the poster helps to
challenge stereotypical images and messages and to promote own and
others' health?

  – Does the student investigate the impact media messages and images
have on own and others' health, self-concept and self-esteem?

  – Does the student evaluate how media representations of the ideal body
can influence body image and own and others' health, self-concept and
self-esteem?

BODY IMAGE • LOWER SECONDARY

Background information

Body image and health

The physical, social, emotional, mental and spiritual health of individuals is connected to their sense of themselves — their identity. Self-concept and self-esteem are important parts of a positive identity and, in contemporary culture, are closely related to body image — that is, personal perceptions about one's body. This body image often results from comparing oneself with the dominant, ideal, stereotypical images presented in our culture.

The media, and the images they portray and the messages they convey, often provide contradictory information.

Dieting and exercising behaviours, which can be driven by a desire to conform to ideals of the body promoted by popular culture, are damaging to self-esteem and physical and emotional wellbeing. These behaviours are related to the increasing incidence of eating disorders and dangerous exercise regimens.

In Western societies, the thin body is seen as evidence of virtue and self-discipline, demonstrated by an ability to maintain strict control over weight and shape. Health, physical fitness, physique, youth and physical attractiveness are all seen as contributing to the stereotypical ideal body. Typically, bodies that are seen as overweight or flabby are considered socially undesirable, often with a resultant impact on self-concept and self-esteem. People are led to believe that one's body can be improved or changed by self-discipline, purchasing the right products or following the right diet or exercise regimen. The media often present unrealistic and unattainable body images as desirable and play a critical role in persuading young people to attempt to conform to these images.

Male and female ideals are different from each other and are implicated in the different body-shaping practices some young people engage in. Culture, class, disability and ability are other key factors that may send confirming or conflicting messages about identity, body image and health.

Students need to develop the knowledge and skills to recognise the social, cultural and environmental influences that have an impact on their sense of self and their health-related behaviours and take action to challenge these at a personal and social level.

Teachers need to be aware that because this module involves students reflecting on their own identity and factors affecting how they feel about themselves, it is potentially challenging and distressing. Given the statistics on the occurrence of eating disorders and excessive exercise regimens, it is highly probable that these issues will have a personal meaning for some students. An appropriate supportive classroom environment based on mutual respect and trust, and teacher sensitivity to students' needs are essential. Students who participate in behaviour rehearsals (scenarios) or who express a strong point of view about an issue may need to be debriefed.

BODY IMAGE • LOWER SECONDARY

Terminology

Learning experiences in this module involve use of the following language in the context of Health and Physical Education:

body image   self-concept
identity   self-esteem
media   stereotypes
popular culture

School authority policies

Teachers need to be aware of and observe school authority policies that may be relevant to this module, particularly policies relating to sensitive issues.

Social justice principles

This module provides opportunities for students to increase their understanding and appreciation of supportive environments and diversity. It includes activities that encourage students to:

• accept that a wide range of body types can be healthy and normal;

• understand how they and other young people are affected by dominant messages and images of youth and health;

• challenge stereotypical images and messages related to the body and body image, which are potentially damaging to their health and wellbeing.

Support materials and references

Cooke, K. 1997, *Real Gorgeous: The Truth about Body and Beauty*, Allen and Unwin, St Leonards, NSW.

Cooke, K. 1995, *Kaz Cooke's Totally Gorgeous: The CD-ROM* (with accompanying Teachers Notes), Film Australia, Lindfield, NSW.

The Famine Within 1990, video, K. Gilday (director and producer), Canada.

Goward, P. 1994, *The Body Image Kit: A Look at How We Think About Our Bodies, Ourselves and the Food We Eat*, VicHealth, Deakin, ACT.

Activities

It is recommended that students keep a personal journal, reflecting on the activities they participate in during this module.

Understanding

EXPLORING IDENTITY	Exploring identity and the factors that influence its development

▶   Students explore definitions of identity and its link to self-concept and self-esteem.

Focus questions could include:

- What is identity?
- How is our identity linked to membership of certain groups?
- How do we come to identify ourselves in relation to gender, ethnicity, culture, ability, disability, socioeconomic status and geographical location?
- What is meant by self-concept and self-esteem?
- How might factors such as family, peer group, school and popular culture influence self-concept and self-esteem?
- How is identity linked to self-concept and self-esteem?

Teaching considerations

Explain to students that self-concept and self-esteem are two components of identity. Self-concept is the image we have of ourselves in relation to other people or to a particular environment and includes our inward characteristics. Self-esteem is made up of judgments and feelings about oneself, which can change depending on life experiences and on interactions and relationships.

Through discussion, lead students to understand that identity is a complex mix, created in part by developing an understanding of ourselves as members of certain groups.

Both sociocultural and individual factors need to be explored to understand how our identities are formed, re-formed and maintained or changed. Some factors that may shape identity include age, cultural background, ethnicity, religious beliefs, ability, disability, migration, family income, geographical location, family and peer relationships, involvement in activities/interests, success/achievements and traumatic incidents.

▶   Students create a concept map identifying all the factors they believe would influence a person's identity.

Focus questions could include:

- What factors influence identity?
- What influence might physical characteristics have on identity? Why?
- What impact do ideas about masculinity and femininity have?
- What impact does ability or disability have?
- How do the media influence identity?

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- Which particular form of media sends the strongest messages to young people?
- What aspects of society enforce or contradict these messages?
- What influence do interactions with others have on our identity?
- Are these factors equally important for everyone? Why? Why not?

Teaching considerations

Students should include in their concept map factors such as gender, culture, geographical location, disability, sex, age, relationships with family and friends, physical appearance, occupation, personality, skills and talents, ambitions/goals, experiences, media influences and activities in which the person engages.

Issues relating to individual personality need to be balanced with discussions about the social and cultural construction of identity, particularly through things such as cultural understandings of what it is to be masculine or feminine, being a member of a particular cultural group, being a person with particular abilities or disabilities, or living in a particular location.

Planning

CHALLENGING VALUES AND ASSUMPTIONS	Identifying and challenging social and cultural values and assumptions about body image and the body

▶   Students examine the limited range of body types portrayed in magazines, newspapers, television advertisements, programs and video clips to identify images of 'ideal' male and female bodies. To do this, students could:

- collect images from a range of magazines targeting adolescents, and classify them according to the message they present — for example, unhappy, shy, quiet, friendly, sporting, confident, elegant, authoritarian, happy, casual;
- survey television advertisements aimed at adolescents to identify the product and the body image being used to promote the product;
- view a segment of a television program/music video and describe the images portrayed.

Focus questions could include:
- What were the dominant images portrayed?
- What range of images was portrayed?
- What are the features of the dominant female stereotype in relation to age, race, weight, height, body shape?
- What are the features of the dominant male stereotype in relation to age, race, weight, height, body shape?
- How do stereotypes of female beauty differ from stereotypes of male beauty?
- How are media images created to place emphasis on different parts of male and female bodies and on different physical qualities — for example, strength, grace?
- Which images are not represented — for example, Indigenous groups, disabled groups, ethnic groups?

- Which groups are not represented, or rarely represented, as 'beautiful'? (Encourage students to consider issues of age, race, disability, sexual preferences and social class.)
- Is this representation typical of the general population?
- What messages are these images telling you about your own body type?
- What do the images tell you about the identity of the person?
- Is the person presented necessarily the same as the image presented?
- Why do you think the images presented by the media are not representative of the general population?

Teaching consideration

The media often influence our sense of reality by presenting particular images as being 'desirable' even if the images contradict our actual experiences.

▶ Students develop a series of statements about the values and assumptions promoted by the stereotypical images of male and female bodies identified in the previous activity.

Focus questions could include:

- What values are promoted by media stereotypes of men and women?
- Are men and women valued for the same or different characteristics?
- Do such images place equal value on physical and non-physical characteristics?
- What assumptions are made about weight and shape by dominant media representations?

Teaching considerations

Consider issues such as the presumed relationship between weight and success, weight and self-control, weight and health, weight and fitness.

Resource Sheet 1

Some examples of stereotypical values and assumptions are provided on Resource Sheet 1, 'Fact or fallacy?'.

▶ Students choose one or more of their statements from the previous activity and write a commentary to identify information needed to challenge these generalisations and assumptions about body image, weight, health and fitness. They base their commentary around the following four questions: Whose voice is heard in this statement? What are you invited to understand about this statement? Who else may have a voice in this issue? What views might these other voices have? Students then discuss or debate their findings to challenge those assumptions.

Focus questions could include:

- To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statements?
- What assumptions, values and judgments are behind these statements?
- Do you know this to be true? How?
- To what extent does research support or challenge such assumptions?
- What is it about these statements that makes you feel uncomfortable or worried about yourself?
- How do your behaviours differ from the stereotypes presented in the statements?

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- Have you used any of these statements?
- Have you had any of these statements made to you? How did it make you feel?
- How do the media/others use stereotypes against you?
- How do the media, through their presentation of the 'ideal body', fuel uncertainties about body image?
- How do you use stereotypes to discriminate against/make judgments about others?
- How do stereotypical images affect your judgments about others?
- What are the effects of such images on individuals and on society?
- What action might be taken to challenge these images?
- How do these assumptions become part of everyday life?

Teaching considerations

Writing a commentary based on the four general questions will allow students to deconstruct the statements. This will assist them to develop basic critical literacy skills. It is important for students to realise that no text is neutral and that text can empower some people but marginalise others.

R **Resource Sheet 1**

This activity may need to be modelled to students. If so, teachers should choose one of the statements from Resource Sheet 1 as the basis for writing the commentary. Ask students to answer the four basic questions and record their responses.

▶   Students collect and examine pictures to compare images of today's 'ideal body' with images from earlier times (for example, 50 or 100 years ago) and with images from other cultures.

Focus questions include:

- What do you notice about the ideal body image today compared with that of 50 or 100 years ago?
- How is it different for males and females?
- How is it different for people of different ages?
- How is it different for people from different cultural backgrounds?
- Who or what determines the ideal body shape?
- Whose interests are served by this? Who is disadvantaged?
- Whom do you know who fits this ideal body shape?
- How does society reward these people in the short term? In the long term?
- How does it make you feel if you do not fit this ideal body type?
- Do unrealistic images about ideal body weights and shapes have an effect on our relationships with others? Are we more judgmental/critical of others? Do such stereotypes play a role in sexual and racial harassment of others?
- What is a realistic body image? Why do you think this is so? Where did you get such ideas? Who benefits from these beliefs? Would people from other cultures agree with you?
- How does the ideal body image differ among cultures? Why do you think this is so?
- What might the ideal body look like in 20 years time?

- How can we challenge the concept of the 'ideal body' to allow for genuine acceptance of difference?
- What do you perceive as a healthy body image? Why do you think this? Where did you get these ideas?

Teaching considerations

Ensure that the pictures used in this activity are not stereotypical pictures representing different cultures.

Issues of gender, culture, and disability are particularly relevant here and need to be included sensitively.

INFLUENCES ON SELF-CONCEPT AND SELF-ESTEEM	**Examining attitudes and assumptions about physical appearance and body image to determine the extent of influence on self-concept and self-esteem**

▶ Students develop a questionnaire to be completed anonymously by their peers about:

- the factors that influence their body images;
- how they feel about their bodies;
- what they do to change the shape or appearance of their bodies;
- what they understand about health issues in relation to body weight and shape.

The questionnaire should ask students to indicate their membership of particular groups, such as male/female, cultural background and religion. The data will be analysed later to explore how messages about body image and health influence the beliefs, attitudes and behaviours of different groups of young people.

Focus questions could include:

- Do you like your body shape? What do you like or dislike about it?
- What do you do to alter your body shape or body image?
- Do you use clothes or self-decoration to change your appearance?
- What do you understand about health issues in relation to body weight and shape?
- Are you currently on a diet to lose or gain weight?
- Are you currently undertaking a regular exercise regimen? How many hours a week would you exercise?
- Have you ever taken medication, steroids, laxatives or drugs to help alter your body shape?
- What do you know about health risks associated with weight loss and exercise programs?

Teaching consideration

Using the Internet or other networks, students could collect responses from students in other schools and in other geographical locations.

BODY IMAGE • LOWER SECONDARY

▶   Students analyse the results of their survey to evaluate the influence of social and cultural factors, particularly the media, on perceptions of ideal physical appearance and the consequent effect on self-concept and self-esteem.

Focus questions could include:

- Were people generally happy with their bodies? Why might this be so?
- Were different messages about ideal weight and shape given to boys and girls?
- Which groups of students tended to engage in particular types of body-changing behaviours?
- How many of the adolescent group use self-decoration such as tattoos, make-up, clothes or body piercing to improve their body image?
- How many of the adolescent group have ever dieted or are currently dieting? What are the reasons for this?
- How many of the adolescent group exercise purely for the purpose of weight loss? Is this healthy? What factors may be behind this?
- Are there differences between males and females? Why?

INVESTIGATING HEALTH ISSUES AND BEHAVIOURS	**Investigating health issues and health behaviours arising from media images and messages**

▶   Using the results from the survey and information from research activities, students investigate how images and messages promoted by the media have an impact on health behaviours and health issues that might arise. Different forms of media should be investigated — for example, television, films, newspapers.

Focus questions could include:

- What influence does the media have on dietary practices or exercise behaviours?
- What contradictions exist between the information presented about health and healthy bodies and the images portrayed?
- How does the portrayal of body image influence the dietary practices or exercise behaviours of particular groups of young people — for example, females and males?
- What effect might stereotypes promoted by the media have on your identity and on particular groups of young people — for example, Indigenous people?
- Which media form is the most powerful in influencing your body image? Why? What does this indicate about the impact of the media on youth culture?
- What is a 'healthy' body/body image? Where do you gain this understanding?
- How are our notions of 'health' and a 'healthy body' shaped by culture and history?

▶   Students discuss some of the health concerns associated with body image, including poor self-concept and self-esteem, that may result from social and cultural influences, such as media images and messages about the ideal body. Students predict what impact these influences may have on their social and emotional growth and development.

Focus questions could include:

- What are some links between body image, self-concept and self-esteem, gender and culture?
- How does a poor body image influence mental health? Emotional health? Physical health? Social health? Spiritual health?
- What effect might poor self-esteem and self-concept have on emotional growth and development? Social growth and development? What can be done to improve this situation?
- Is this the same for males *and* females or for members of different cultures?
- What adverse health behaviours can be associated with poor self-concept and self-esteem as they relate to body image?
- Why are these different for particular groups of people?

Teaching consideration

Health issues that may be associated with poor self-concept and self-esteem include anorexia, bulimia, adolescent depression, excessive exercising, poor dietary behaviours, high stress levels and suicide. Teachers need to be aware that these issues may have touched the lives of their students to some extent, and that they should treat this discussion sensitively. Superficial handling of the issues could easily reinforce or exacerbate the negative behaviours this activity is trying to reduce. Research confirms that merely telling students to say 'no' clearly does not work. Teachers need to be aware that the messages received through our culture are very strong.

STRATEGIES TO ENHANCE BODY IMAGE

Planning strategies to enhance self-concept and self-esteem in relation to body image

▶ Students investigate barriers to changing the dominant body image promoted by the media and explore ways of bringing about change. They develop a plan to address each barrier and to promote factors that support change. They also develop a range of strategies to support themselves and their peers in taking action to resist damaging media messages and images about the body.

Focus questions could include:

- Why are stereotypical images and messages about the body being presented? Which groups in society are promoting these images and messages?
- Who are the targets of these messages?
- Who is represented and who is omitted?
- What is your response to these images and messages? How might others respond?
- How do your responses affect your self-concept and self-esteem?
- Should the media change the type of body image they promote? Why or why not?
- Would the media want to change the type of body image they promote?
- What barriers might exist towards changing the type of body images promoted by the media?
- What factors might help change the body image promoted by the media?

- How can responses be changed to enhance the effect on adolescents' growth and development?
- How can you resist and challenge such images, as individuals and as a member of a group?

Teaching consideration

Barriers could include students' own personal beliefs and attitudes, advertising contracts and sales targets. Factors that may bring about change include a public concern for the health of adolescents.

Acting

PRACTISING STRATEGIES	Practising strategies to support the development of a healthy body image

▶ Students role-play situations where they support their friends in a range of situations involving low self-esteem related to body image. They practise making positive comments about their friends by recognising and acknowledging their attributes, and rehearse ways to resist and challenge negative comments about body shape and weight (see Resource Sheet 2, 'Role-play scenarios'). Alternatively, they could complete a reflective journal.

R **Resource Sheet 2**

▶ Students develop a set of personal affirmations/mottos to reinforce a healthy body image.

Focus questions could include:
- What physical characteristics do you have? Do you really want to change any of these? Why? Who are you changing them for?
- What activities do you enjoy doing? Why?
- What myths and stereotypes are promoted by the media?
- How do the media and popular culture influence health behaviours?
- What does it mean to be healthy?
- How do stereotypical images of adolescents affect your self-concept and self-esteem? Your social and emotional growth and development?
- Is this effect different for males and females or for people from a range of cultural and ethnic groups?
- What can you do to work against stereotypes? On your own? With your friends?

▶ Students create posters celebrating diversity in body weight and shape, and rejecting myths about the relationship between weight and shape and health.

▶ Students prepare a report to accompany their posters, analysing and evaluating information gathered from relevant research about the impact media messages and images have on the health, self-concept and self-esteem of themselves and others.

▶ Students present their survey findings about the way in which media messages and images influence health, self-concept and self-esteem to an appropriate person or organisation — for example, a magazine editor. They suggest the negative impacts on health that could result from some of the messages/images being portrayed, and present an appropriate strategy they have developed to challenge and resist harmful stereotypes.

Focus questions could include:

- What messages and images are being conveyed by this medium?
- Are these messages and images realistic? Why or why not?
- What messages and images should we be conveying? Why?
- What impact do these messages and images have on the self-concept and self-esteem of adolescents? On the dietary practices and exercise behaviours of adolescents?
- How is adolescent health influenced by these messages and images?
- What is a more appropriate way to convey the message?
- What is a more realistic body image to be promoting?
- Is it realistic to be promoting only one body image?

Reflecting

REVIEWING STRATEGIES	Reflecting on knowledge gained about promoting a 'healthy' self-concept and self-esteem, and on the inquiry processes undertaken to challenge media images and messages about the 'ideal' body

▶ Students review their personal journals to reflect on the activities they have engaged in throughout the module. They consider things such as how their opinions may have changed about acceptable body images, how they cope with accepting their own and others' body shapes, what strategies they have learned for rejecting stereotypes about body image, how health information can be misrepresented in the media, and the effect of stereotypes and generalisations about the ideal body and body image on:

- adolescent health issues;
- self-concept and self-esteem;
- gender and cultural identity;
- social and emotional growth and development.

Teaching consideration

Students may not want to share their journals with other students, and their wishes should be respected.

▶ Students brainstorm the advantages and disadvantages of using the inquiry approach to take action on a health-related issue.

Focus questions could include:

- Did the inquiry process assist you to identify the information you needed?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of conducting inquiries to discuss health issues?
- Are there other ways of resolving health issues?

BODY IMAGE • LOWER SECONDARY

Fact or fallacy?

- Girls/boys who are thin have more fun.
- Boys who are muscular have more friends.
- 'You're too fat' is a message used to sell products.
- The women/men I know are satisfied with their bodies.
- People who are in control of their lives are usually slim.
- Fat people are friendly and warm-hearted.
- Women/men who have jobs dealing with the public should be attractive.
- Thin people are usually more serious than plump people.
- Successful males get to the top by looking good.
- Most young women have an eating disorder.
- Our bodies can easily get out of control, so we must be on guard.
- Women are not attracted to fat men.
- Men are not attracted to fat women.
- Thin is beautiful.
- Most people are afraid of looking old.
- Women do not need to eat as much as men.
- Fat people are unhealthy.
- Females will spend a lot of money to be thin.
- Men will spend a lot of money to be fit.
- Most people do not care about the looks of people around them.
- Girls/boys worry too much about their appearance.
- If you like someone, it doesn't matter what size he or she is.

Source: Adapted from Cooke, K. 1995, *Kaz Cooke's Totally Gorgeous: The CD-ROM*, Teachers Notes, © Film Australia, Lindfield, NSW, p. 21.

Role-play scenarios

The following scenarios provide the basis for developing role-plays or for writing reflective journals. Students are expected to respond in a manner which enhances the health, self-concept or self-esteem of themselves and others.

Scenario 1

A friend continually puts himself down because of his physical characteristics, comparing his own body with images portrayed in magazines.

- What could you say to your friend to enhance his self-esteem and self-concept?

Scenario 2

You overhear a classmate putting a friend down because of her physical appearance. Your friend feels very bad about the criticism and believes she needs to do something to improve her appearance.

- What could you say to the person who put your friend down?

- What could you say to your friend to make her feel better?

- What advice would you give her about changing her appearance?

Scenario 3

A friend feels alienated from participating in physical activity because no role-models exist with her particular body shape — for example, short with a physical disability.

- What does this tell you about her self-concept and self-esteem and how could you encourage her to participate?

Scenario 4

A group of your friends won't go swimming because they don't like wearing their swimming costumes in front of other class members.

- What might have influenced them to feel like this?

- What could you do to improve their self-concept and self-esteem?

Scenario 5

A 'plain clothes day' is coming up at school. Your friends are all discussing what they will wear, but you decide that you will take a 'sickie' because you don't have the latest trendy clothes.

- What does this tell you about your self-concept and self-esteem?

- What could you do to improve your self-concept and self-esteem?

Acknowledgments

This sourcebook module should be read in conjunction with the following Queensland School Curriculum Council materials:

Years 1 to 10 Health and Physical Education Syllabus

Years 1 to 10 Health and Physical Education Sourcebook: Guidelines

Health and Physical Education Initial In-service Materials