



Children's ideas

What is health for you?

We all have an opinion on what health is. If we want to work to improve the health and wellbeing of children and young people, it is very important to start with their own ideas and understanding of health and healthy living.

The Shape Up approach emphasises the significance of consulting and discussing with children and young people. Moreover, Shape Up suggests taking children and young people's ideas seriously in the development of the project activities from the very beginning, rather than involving them in predetermined programmes and actions. Once children's ideas are considered, project activities can be planned which are relevant to them and related to their everyday lives.

Taking children and young people's ideas seriously makes it possible to identify what children are good at and appreciate what they already know about health. But the Shape Up approach takes one step further: it emphasises that the Shape Up work is designed in a way that can **challenge** young people's misunderstandings and stereotypes, **introduce new dimensions** of health-related knowledge and skills, and develop their competence **to take action** to improve health. These are the important roles of the teachers, facilitators, coordinators and other adults participating in Shape Up.

As a part of the preparation of the Shape Up methodological framework, we asked children of different ages (4-16) in Denmark and Spain to define what health means to them. Their drawings are accompanied by excerpts from the interviews which demonstrate the variety of their ideas*.



"Laura:
Juice & bread,
potatoes
& apple"
(Girl, Spain)

(*) See more about the research process in the Appendix.



"Friends"
(Girl, Denmark)

Having friends and good relationships with people

"There have to be people you care about, it doesn't have to be people who boss you around all the time, or who are angry with you."

(Girl, Denmark)

Children's ideas/What is health for you?

Being in good shape and keeping fit

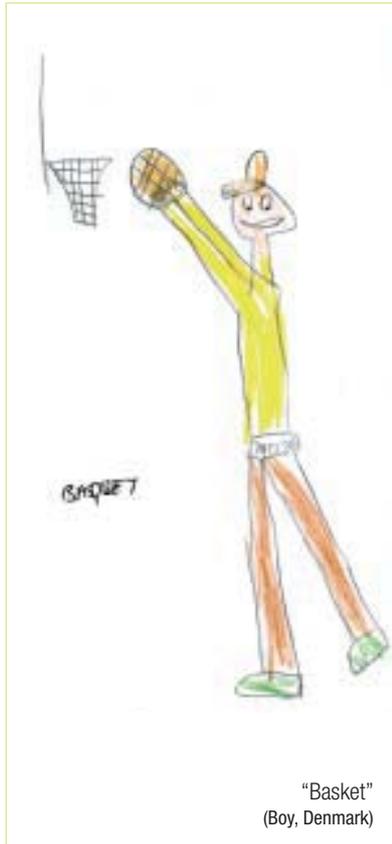
"To have no problem... with being overweight, and being able to run without having any... problems. And eating all kinds of different things...and eating few things which have a lot of fat..."

(Boy, Spain)

Not being poor!

"... if you are poor, then you might not think that much about whether you're eating the right fat content or not, then you just eat what you can get your hands on and then you must survive from that."

(Boy, Denmark)



"Basket"
(Boy, Denmark)

Balanced diet and exercise

"Eating fruit, doing sport, eating lots of kinds of things, not eating too many things that have a lot of fat, um... that's it..."

(Girl, Spain)

Living in a healthy environment

"You can always say [health depends on] what kind of environment you are living in; if you live in a city environment, it might be polluted, whereas if you live in the countryside, it is more environmentally-friendly or a bit more healthy, with clean air, right?"

(Boy, Denmark)

Shorter classes - a health issue?

Example from a Macedonian health promoting school

When asked what should be changed in their school in order to make it "healthier", the pupils at one of the Macedonian health-promoting schools chose to plan and carry out an action that would shorten the lessons from 45 to 40 minutes.

- For the pupils, this issue was linked to health, and they were able to articulate and defend their position by relating it to more time for sports in the middle of the school day, increased opportunities for socialising, a more relaxed time during the lunch break, etc. All these issues are indeed health-related, although, at the beginning, it was difficult for some of the teachers to appreciate this, because they were used to thinking in terms of the prescribed health curriculum topics.

Pupils selecting a health issue: SNEZANA JANKULOSKA and ROZA POPOSKA,
Experience from the Macedonian Network of Health Promoting Schools, 2001.