



PHYSICAL LITERACY

Physical Literacy: Teach Them to Fish, Feed Them for Life

By Ted Temertzoglou

It is Thursday morning and my rambunctious grade nine students wander into class. In today's class, twenty minutes will focus on cardiorespiratory fitness appraisals. They ask, "Yo, sir are we doing the beep test today? Are we doing the 12-minute run? What about the step test?" My answer, of course, is yes!

Before venturing further, I should put this into proper context. Quality physical education programs provide the best opportunity to develop physically literate students. They make the development of the skills, knowledge, and attitudes needed to become physically literate accessible to all. If more students understood how to lead healthy, active lives, perhaps we would begin to see a reduction in diabetes, as well as cardiovascular and other diseases that can be eliminated or significantly reduced through increased physical activity and proper nutrition. Such changes may also reduce the economic burden on our health care system that results from

inactivity and poor eating habits. After all, physical education is also excellent preventative medicine.

The following is an account of how a physical education teacher created an environment that fostered physical literacy for his students and their parents. This report focuses on the resources this teacher used and how they were implemented to help increase physical literacy levels among his grade 9 boys physical education class. This is not the only way to raise physically literate students, but one among many.

The Program: Teaching the Village to Fish

The first step is to disseminate the key objectives, course expectations, assessment guidelines, activities schedule, and evaluations policy. A letter is sent home containing this information for parents/guardians to read, sign, and return to the teacher. The letter includes a passage on the importance of "working together" (parent and teacher) to help students succeed.

Each student is then given a student resource called *Healthy Active Living: Keep Fit, Stay Healthy, Have Fun* (HAL) and a *Student Activity Handbook* (SAHB). These

resources provide the content students will need to make lifelong and informed healthy, active choices that are respectful to themselves and others. The HAL resource and reading lists are sent home with the student via email or in hard copy, and parents/guardians are encouraged to read along. The SAHB is used to record student results. These include Fitness Blasts (see inset), personal fitness goals, fitness appraisals, sport/ game strategies and tactics, graphic organizers for fitness/ health, and diagnostic assessment tools based on the previous year's expectations and outcomes. They are also used to assess "for learning" and "of learning" aspects of development. The teacher also asks parents to examine certain sections of the SAHB to ensure that their child has completed the work.

Engaging students and parents

We chose to open our health and physical education curriculum to parents because we wanted them to know what was being taught and how we were teaching it. In the absence of sound content founded on solid research, students turn to their friends, the Internet, or popular fitness magazines for advice. The advice gleaned from those sources is often misleading. Friends tell them about the latest and greatest supplement, while some Internet sites and fitness magazines try to sell students a quick fix or a piece of equipment that "turns fat into muscle". Instead of such unreliable sources, students and parents can rely on their Healthy Active Living resources to find more realistic answers to such questions.





During parent-teacher interviews, many parents express resentment about their own physical education experiences. In my professional experience, students whose parents were disengaged from physical education class when they were in school are likewise disengaged. Year after year I would hear parents' complaints: "If you were on a school team, you got a good mark." "They made us run and run until we dropped the class. I hated running." "If you were not on a sports team, you got a bad mark." "I dropped gym the first chance I could because I hated all the sports we did." Physical educators have all heard such concerns.

Not all parents have such negative experiences, but many do. Our physical education department wants to show such parents that the focus of physical education has changed drastically since they were in school. Both the athletically inclined and the not-so-athletically-inclined can succeed. We want to show that one does not have to be an elite athlete to get a great grade and that, despite athletic ability, one can get fit and become physically literate. Above all, we wanted parents to see that physical education teachers are here to help all students succeed.

In 2008, Newfoundland and Labrador was the first province to introduce a physical education student resource provided for its students called *Active For Life: Physical Education in Newfoundland and Labrador*. A memo from the Department of Education to its senior high school teachers explained: "This text... is a unique blend of information compiled by Newfoundland and Labrador physical educators intertwined with work done by physical educators from Ontario. The resource covers a wide variety of topics related to physical education, fitness and physical activity, as well as information related to leadership development and goal setting. As students learn more about fitness, they are encouraged to help their entire family develop strategies to include physical activity and healthy living practices in their everyday lives... As physical educators, you provide an invaluable service to the children of this province. This resource will assist in building the pride we all have for the physical education programs you are offering. This text, along with our new curriculum, provincial assessment and evaluation tools and various other teacher resources now available, is another significant step in offering quality physical education experiences to our students".

Using the resources in this manner serves several purposes:

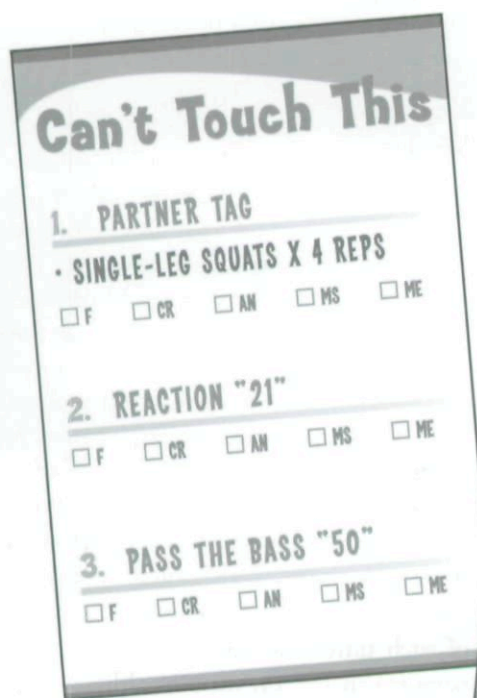
1. It gives students and parents accurate information about their physical, social, mental, and spiritual health.
2. It gives students the "why" and "how" when making decisions about their well being.
3. It allows students more time to gain a deeper understanding of what it means to become physically educated and physically literate.
4. It affords our parents a chance to see what is being taught in health and physical education class.

5. It informs our parents about the vital role that health and physical education performs in schools.
6. It helps parents become more engaged with what their children are doing at school.

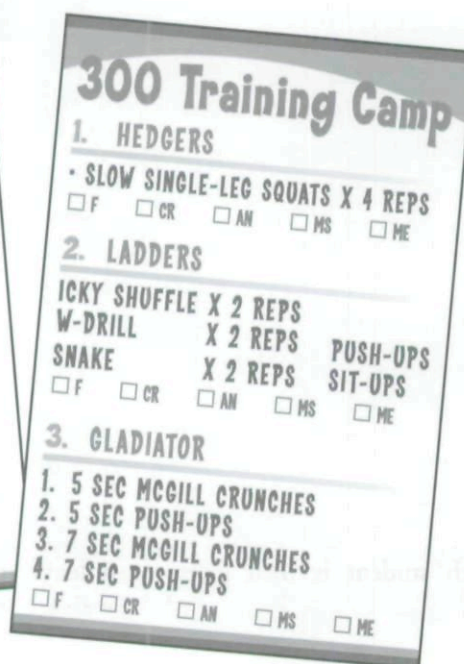
A typical class – Active Living

The first 20 minutes of each 75 minute physical education class begin with a "Fitness Blast". This is a series of moderate to vigorous, inclusive, student-centred activities, which aim to improve health-related fitness, as well as game strategies and tactics. Activities such as tag games (i.e., partner tag, chain tag, line tag, etc.), strength and conditioning exercises (i.e., lunges, push-ups, sit-ups, dynamic flexibility work, relay or ladder drills), low organizational games (i.e., pass the bass, drop it, rock paper scissors football, etc.) or fitness circuits, all can be performed with limited equipment in any open space such as gymnasiums, hallways, or staircases. All tag games are performed with partners and students choose how they would like to move. They can brisk-walk, jog, run, or sprint.

The Fitness Blasts is recorded on large chart paper and taped to the wall for students to see clearly (see sample Fitness Blast on this page). Under each Fitness Blast activity are the health-related fitness components. For example, "F" represents



The Fitness Blast



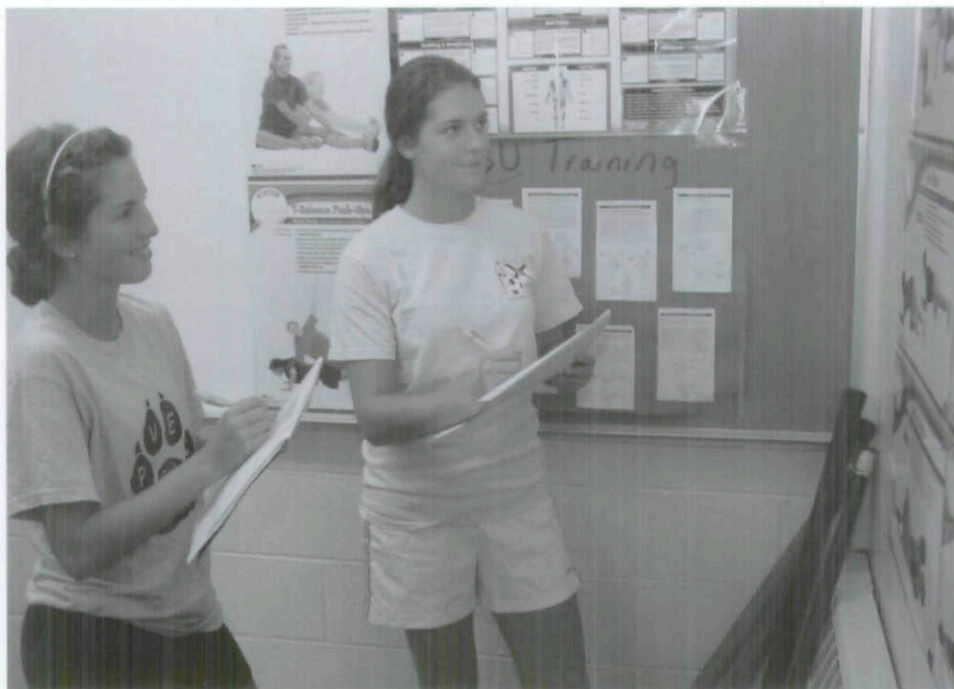


flexibility, "CR" represents cardiorespiratory fitness, and so on. After the blast is done, students record their results in their SAHB. After one week, students will have five Fitness Blasts that they can perform in any indoor or outdoor open space. To view video samples of Fitness Blasts visit www.thompsonbooks.com/video.

After the first week of these twenty-minute Fitness Blasts, students are given a few days to read the relevant information in their HAL resource. Parents are encouraged to read along too. In their SAHB, students record which health-related fitness components each Fitness Blast activity focused on. In time, students learn to identify which activities are geared toward some or all of the health-related components of fitness. By mid-semester students are ready to create Fitness Blasts for their class to perform.

Appraisals – emphasizing student choice

It is important that students understand the health benefits that can be gained by being physical fit. Fitness levels can be determined by performing a series of personal fitness appraisals that target health-related fitness components. From these results, students can identify areas



for improvement. The most important factor is that students themselves identify areas for improvement and develop solid fitness programs to meet their desired goals. Norms and standards based on athletic performance are only there for students who wish to use them for their own personal use. Marks are not awarded according to how well they performed on their fitness appraisals. Days before students perform their cardiorespiratory

appraisals, they research (in their HAL resource) which CR appraisal best suits their current fitness level. Typically the class is split: some students want to perform the twelve-minute run, others the step test, still others the beep test. What matters is that the student chooses the appraisal. In so choosing, they feel comfortable, competent, and motivated to perform. If parents have been reading along and doing some of the Fitness Blasts at home, they too are welcomed to join the class to assess their current fitness level.

Throughout the semester, parents are kept up to date on their child's progress and are informed if important issues come to light. They are also informed when personal goals are achieved. For guidance, parents are directed to passages in their HAL resources where direction or answers can be found. This personal touch is a great way to develop rapport with parents and students. Several parents commented on how much they appreciate someone looking out for their child's well being and for taking an interest in their family's health.

Feeding them for life

The key is to provide sound health and physical education content to students and to give them the opportunity to



discover how it applies to their daily lives. Students and parents are given the tools they need to be physically literate. The approach allows for choice, which makes both groups feel included and empowered and gives them a framework to ask informed and intelligent questions. In our class, students understand that what they learn affects their entire being for life. This is not the only way to increase physical literacy in our students, parents, and communities, but it is a way that worked for us. ■

REFERENCES

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On February 17, 2009, Nova Scotia's Education Minister announced the province's new physical education textbook entitled *Active Healthy Living: Physical Education in Nova Scotia*. The minister stated: "This engaging, informative textbook contains images of Nova Scotia students and teachers in action, along with a wealth of health-related information that I know will encourage young people to stay active throughout their lives... At a time of rising obesity levels and health related problems among our youth, it is essential we raise the profile of health and physical education in our schools and across society as a whole". All Nova Scotia students enrolled in grade 10 Physical Education received a textbook.

*I teach
Physical Education...
"Gym" lives down
the street.*

*Retenez
ces
dates!*

*du 21 au 23
octobre 2010
Toronto, Ontario*

Appel de conférenciers
La date d'échéance pour remettre
votre application est le lundi 19 avril 2010.

Conférence nationale de l'Ophea/EPS Canada 2010

Du 21 au 23 octobre
Hôtel Westin Harbour Castle • Toronto (Ontario)

Les délégués pour note conférence nationale cette année comprennent des enseignants/enseignantes au palier élémentaire et secondaire, des administrateurs, des conseillers en éducation physique et en santé, des intervenants dans le secteur de santé publique, des chefs de sports et loisirs, ainsi que d'autres intéressés à la santé des jeunes.

La date limite pour les préinscriptions est le vendredi 25 juin 2010.
Inscrivez-vous dès maintenant et épargnez la TVH!

Pour en savoir plus au sujet de cette conférence,
consultez le site suivant :

<http://www.phecanada.ca/Toronto2010/fra/main.htm>

