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Contemporary Issues of Our Time Assignment

### Teaching with Emphasis on Fitness or Sport Skills – Which is better?

In the world of physical education today, there is much debate whether it is better to teach the students specific sport skills or to teach with an emphasis on physical fitness. Physical educators will respond with answers proving that both options are correct. The history behind the debate extends to America's obesity rate. In Michigan alone, the obesity rate has risen to 28.9% in 2008 compared to 20 years earlier when it was between 10-14% ("U.S. Obesity Trends," November 20, 2009). With the obesity rate growing, more emphasis is being placed on physical fitness among the population. This is no different in physical education. Remember that physical education is often times the starting line for a physically active lifestyle. In order to be physically active, one must have some basic knowledge of a given sport or activity and the skills involved. Physical education classes are built to provide ways for students to engage in sports or other physical activity.

In order to combat the rising obesity rate, fitness based education should take place within physical education. Ward, Everhart, Dunaway, Fisher, & Coates (1998) discuss that physical education needs to make an impact by motivating the students to elevate their heart rate throughout class for health enhancement reasons and to give them a way to be healthy adults (p. 33). An emphasis on cardiovascular endurance would be the most common way to increase fitness levels and sustain an elevated heart rate. In order for students to take ownership in the fitness objectives, they could keep a diary including heart rates and their perception of the physical demands of the activity. To

foster student learning, the fitness principles should be lectured quickly and then put into practical use during class. This will give the students a much better way to understand how the fitness principles are accepted (Ward et al., 1998, p. 34). The goal with fitness based instruction is to equip the students with ways to be physically active and ways to measure their fitness level.

More commonly, however, you will find sport skills being taught in physical education classes. Students expect to learn the components of several sports and activities during their time in class. Many students resent fitness aspects of the class. In my physical education classes within my internship, the students have displayed that they would rather have more time to learn the day's activity than performing a warm-up run or any other type of fitness related task. They would rather have a shorter run or eliminate it altogether in order to become engaged in the skills being taught during that class.

My mentor teacher describes his views as a physical educator as wanting the students to be active. He will teach basic sport skills but his goal is to have the students playing games in order to exercise. He believes that not all students will become athletes so he would rather them have the opportunity to be active in class than strictly become an advanced athlete (S. Palmer, personal communication, November 10, 2009). He structures his classes with a long warm-up which includes a meaningful stretch, push-ups and sit-ups for strength, and a warm-up jog for cardiovascular endurance. These three aspects are part of the standards that make up what we know as the definition of fitness which include cardiovascular endurance, muscular strength and endurance, flexibility, and body composition. Participation and having the students give their best effort are

also emphasized throughout the class period. It seems as if he would rather stress a high fitness level among students than becoming proficient in certain sports.

There are two different ways to judge an individual's physical activity whereas the quality and quantity of exercise differs between health-related fitness and sport fitness (Ward et al., 1998, p. 33). In physical education there are students who range from physically inactive to vigorously active as well as students that are interested in enhancing their health and others who want to become more advanced in sports. Physical educators need to find a way to reach out to all students to help them reach their goals, so why not combine fitness with sport skill acquisition?

After reading through research on both fitness based instruction and sport skill instruction, I have come to the conclusion that they are mutually exclusive. I believe that they need to be combined to offer a whole program approach to the students. In order for students to become more excited about fitness, we as physical educators need to make it interesting and relevant to the overall program. Beudet, Acquaviva, & Grube (2004) offer the idea of combining fitness education with the sport education model where each has a dual role where the students will learn the sport and also ways to enhance their fitness within that sport (p. 40). A sport will be taught with its fitness components emphasized during each unit. There is much said in the media today about how fit professional athletes are becoming. This approach will allow teachers to emphasize the physical demands of the sport and what needs to be done in order to gain the maximum fitness level required by that sport.

More evidence that supports combining fitness aspects into sport skill acquisition is provided by Brusseau, Darst, & Johnson (2009) where students should have a choice in

which activities they participate in. The gym could be set up with stations where they can practice certain skills or participate in fitness activities (p. 50). The students could also rotate through each station to receive both sport skill instruction and fitness benefits. This would also allow the students to see how fitness is associated within a given sport. For example, “basketball jumps (i.e., jumping while holding a ball over their head) can be associated with rebounding” which will help show the students the need to strengthen their legs in order to jump higher to secure a rebound within a game situation (Brusseau et al., 2009, p. 51). Students may be more apt to participate in a fitness routine if it is relevant to the day’s activity. Sometimes students may need to be tricked into performing a physical fitness activity by combining it with sport skill instruction. This is where creativity can be placed within physical education in order to have drills that enhance fitness and improve skills.

My experiences in high school physical education focused on a mix of sport skill acquisition and fitness. Each week there would be a day where we were to run a mile and the rest of the week was designated for the given activity or sport. I enjoyed this quite a bit knowing that I was working on my fitness level as well as participating in sporting activities.

In conclusion, I do not feel that either fitness or sport skills are more important than the other. I think that physical education classes should combine both to make the class more fun and interesting. Of course, the aspects of fitness need to be stressed and reiterated throughout each unit in order for the students to learn maximally, but combine fitness within a sport so students do not lose interest.

## References

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