

Positive youth development through physical activity: Opportunities for physical educators

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Abstract:

As physical educators continue to advocate for school-based PE, they should also consider ways to extend their work into community settings in an effort to ensure that all kids have an opportunity to develop physical literacy. This article describes how positive youth development programs can provide an opportunity for physical educators to engage with youth outside of the school day.

Keywords: physical education | physical literacy | youth development programs

Article:

Physical educators continue to advocate for quality physical education during the school day. Recent articles in this column have elaborated on that issue (e.g., Richards & Wilson, 2012). Furthermore, government initiatives such as the Let's Move campaign underscore the importance of physical activity for youth. These initiatives are often aligned with evidence that demonstrates that many children are not physically active (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2000) and that rates of overweight and obesity are alarming (James, Leach, Kalamara, & Shayeghi, 2001). Physical education, taught by a qualified instructor, provides the primary avenue for providing physical activity opportunities during the school day and for physical activity promotion outside of school (McKenzie & Lounsbery, 2009). Additionally, physical education may contribute to increased academic performance in other subject areas (Rasberry et al., 2011).

Despite the need for quality physical education and its potential to promote healthy lifestyles and academic development, most students do not have adequate provisions of physical education (National Association for Sport and Physical Education & American Heart Association, 2012). As physical educators continue to advocate for school-based physical education, they should also

consider ways to extend their work into community settings in an effort to ensure that all children have an opportunity to develop physical literacy (Hemphill & Richards, 2011). Positive youth development (PYD) programs may provide an opportunity for physical educators to engage with youth outside of the school day.

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Positive Youth Development through Physical Activity

PYD providers attempt to build a range of developmental assets through youth's engagement in physical activity (Benson, 2006). The four main areas of youth development are: 1) physical, 2) intellectual, 3) emotional, and 4) social. The focus on physical activity can promote healthy lifestyles and fitness development. Academic goal setting and mentoring programs can support intellectual development. Ongoing participation in physical activity can promote skill mastery and build confidence. Finally, connectedness to positive adult role models and opportunities to interact with peers can facilitate the development of social skills (Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2005).

Physical activity is often described as the "hook" that engages students in something fun and intrinsically motivating while also engaging them in other enriching activities (Weiss & Wiese-Bjornstal, 2009). PYD programs aim to promote the transfer of skills into other environments, such as the school or community. For example, Hellison's (2011) teaching personal and social responsibility (TPSR) model uses physical activity to teach life skills to youth that can transfer "outside of the gym." The TPSR model has been used in physical education programs and in community-based PYD programs. However, PYD programs are most often found in community-based settings that capitalize on opportunities to engage youth in the afterschool hours and during the summer months.

Profiles of Positive Youth Development Programs

A recent review of physical activity-based PYD programs cited two particular programs as a model (Weiss & WieseBjornstal, 2009). The First Tee (www.thefirsttee.org) uses golf as the hook to engage youth and expose them to life skills. Various chapters are found in urban and rural settings throughout the United States. The TPSR model is most familiar to physical educators, given its use in preservice and in-service physical education. Members of the TPSR Alliance (www.tpsr-alliance.org), based in Chicago, IL, practice TPSR in a variety of afterschool physical activity settings. Examples of these programs include Project Effort at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and Beyond the Ball (beyondtheball.org), a

community-based sport program that utilizes TPSR to engage youth in a variety of outdoor and community-building physical activities.

Since 2000, the National Urban Squash and Education Association (www.nationalurbansquash.org) has developed several chapters of its PYD programs in urban cities across the United States. The programs offer squash instruction, afterschool enrichment, and community service opportunities to middle school youth. The organization emphasizes small programs with a long-term commitment to its youth. The program reports high school graduation and college acceptance rates at 90% or greater. A physical educator in Charleston, SC, sought to start an urban squash program in 2009. She volunteered her time to work with eight students after school on fitness development, academic enrichment, and community engagement activities. After soliciting support from local volunteers and nonprofit organizations, the group was given space at the local college five days per week. Since then, the program has grown to serve about 30 students and is funded by a dozen members of its board of directors. The funding provides a full-time executive director and a program director. Importantly, students in this program have opportunities to participate in physical activity five days each week. About half of the students do not receive physical education at all during the school day, while the other half have physical education one day per week.

Examples like this demonstrate the potential for physical educators to lead afterschool PYD programs. These examples also suggest that as physical educators continue to advocate for physical education, PYD programs can serve as an additional context for physical educators to serve youth. Given the exEmploying physical educators in PYD programs could provide an important link to the school day. Given their place in the school structure, physical educators may be more aware of the academic needs of students, social challenges in the school, or life skills that need to be addressed. Volume 27 • July/August 41 tensive training and knowledge of physical educators, they are well-positioned to lead PYD programs in afterschool settings.

Opportunity for Physical Educators

Physical educators have often served in dual roles as teachers and sport coaches (Richards & Templin, 2012). For example, public schools aim to promote holistic development in ways similar to PYD goals. Employing physical educators in PYD programs could provide an important link to the school day. Given their place in the school structure, physical educators may be more aware of the academic needs of students, social challenges in the school, or life skills that need to be addressed. Therefore, they are well equipped to address the transfer goals of PYD into the school day.

To begin to capitalize on this opportunity, physical educators can draw from the TPSR framework to demonstrate their potential for leading a PYD program. Additionally, physical educators can create spaces for PYD programs outside of the school day. This typically requires a partnership with the school or another local entity that can provide classroom and activity

spaces. They can also start a small afterschool PYD program to set a positive example or seek financial support and leadership through a board of directors. PYD programs have been funded by private donors, foundation grants, and public support. This should include a salary supplement for the physical educator. Physical educators have been successful in working with youth in afterschool coaching settings. The emerging field of PYD may provide an alternative for those teachers who are more interested in the holistic development of youth.

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