Standards-Based Teaching in Elementary Physical Education

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A quality physical education program includes a positive emphasis on student development of physical literacy, national standards and grade-level outcomes, promoting physical activity and supporting comprehensive school physical activity programming, and the following four essential components: (a) policy and environment, (b) curriculum, (c) appropriate instruction and (d) student assessment (SHAPE America – Society of Health and Physical Educators, 2015). The purpose of this article is to highlight methods for helping elementary physical education students become physically literate while providing teaching suggestions for each of the five SHAPE America National Standards for K–12 Physical Education (see Table 1).

Physical Literacy

A working definition of physical literacy includes “the ability to move with competence and confidence in a wide variety of physical activities in multiple environments that benefit the healthy development of the whole person” (Mandigo et al., 2009, p. 28). In pursuit of that goal, quality physical education teachers instruct students in a variety of skills and movement patterns (e.g., running, balancing, hopping, jumping, lifting, kicking, throwing, catching, etc.) and emphasize physical literacy for all students as a means to provide meaningful skill development opportunities and motivation for lifetime physical...
activity. According to SHAPE America (2014), the goal of physical education is “to develop physically literate individuals who have the knowledge, skill and confidence to enjoy a lifetime of healthful physical activity” (p. 11). Further, a physically literate individual has learned the skills necessary to participate in a variety of physical activities; knows the implications and the benefits of involvement in various types of physical activities; participates regularly in physical activity; is physically fit; and values physical activity and its contributions to a healthful lifestyle. (SHAPE America, 2014, p. 11)

The methods for developing physical literacy among students are included in a quality physical education program. Quality physical education programs include highly qualified physical education teachers; planned curriculum based on the national standards and grade-level outcomes; a focus on health and safety; appropriate class size, facilities, materials and equipment; time allocation conducive for learning knowledge, skills and dispositions; meaningful and purposeful use of technology; ongoing assessment; and total program evaluation (National Association for Sport & Physical Education, 2010). It is through a quality physical education program where students can learn what it means to be physically literate and spend time in meaningful learning experiences, motivating them for a lifetime of physical activity. Several examples of including effective teaching practices in a quality physical education program, aligned with the national standards, are further described in the sections that follow.

Teaching Practices. To prepare students for physical literacy, effective teaching must include methods for helping students develop the knowledge and skills to be competent, while also developing their level of fitness and affective characteristics. Quality teachers communicate through rules, verbal directions, teacher and student demonstrations, leading group skill practice, various assessments, a positive environment, and effective role models. Examples of developing physical literacy in an elementary physical education program may include the following:

- Verbal directions from the teacher: Statements such as, “Try again and step with your opposite foot” provide positive feedback for student learning.
- Student demonstrations: Selecting one or more students to demonstrate dribbling after everyone has had the chance to practice helps to improve student learning. Statements such as, “Give me a thumbs-up if you see all three skill cues for dribbling” are beneficial for all students.
- Partner feedback: Providing opportunities for peer feedback promotes student learning. Statements such as, “Tell your partner one thing he or she did well and one thing that has room for improvement” facilitate learning.

National Standard 1 – Skill Development

Skill development at the elementary level is particularly important because elementary students may not be required to take physical education again until they reach high school. In addition, individuals who learn a skill a certain way are likely to continue practicing the skill using the same form. Educators need to focus on specific grade-level outcomes to teach students past the introductory level. According to Rink and Hall (2008),

"In effective programs, children move from immature versions of these patterns to mature versions and begin to use them in more specialized settings. These are not the high-level skills of the athlete but rather the essential building blocks for a life of physical activity. (p. 209)

Methods to help students establish the foundations of a skill and meet objectives include the use of the skill theme approach, formal and informal assessments, and teacher observations.

Teaching Practices. Quality elementary physical education programs help students develop the appropriate developmental skills while focusing on standards during each lesson, incorporating a variety of instructional approaches (teacher led, individual exploration, cooperative learning, etc.), and breaking down the skills with appropriate progressions and practice opportunities. “Effective teachers not only must have a clear vision of the developmentally appropriate repertoire of motor skills that all children should learn, they must also devise lesson structures that truly do allow no child to be left behind” (Rink & Hall, 2008, p. 209). Examples of developing skills in an elementary physical education program include the following:

- The “I do, you do, we do” approach: This is a great way to assist students and help progress their skills. The teacher demonstrates a skill, the students demonstrate the skill, and then together they practice the skill. Students have the opportunity to focus on developing their skills with guided practice.
- The use of skill cues: Cues allow students to think about the skill as they perform each part of the movement. Educators can break skills down into small steps to help students learn.
- Modifying activities: This helps promote success, but it is important to create challenges for all levels of learners. Students are going to be eager to participate and learn when they experience success and have the opportunity for a challenge.
National Standard 2 – Concepts, Principles, Strategies and Tactics

Students can gain knowledge through the use of teaching strategies and learn and apply those strategies in other areas. A student who is able to perform an underhand volleyball serve, for example, may be able to perform an underhand serve using a paddle to strike the ball by transferring what has been learned through previous skill practice. On another note, once individuals understand the concepts of offense and defense, they may be able to participate in more physical activities that require offense and defense at ease. Learning strategies help students learn about movements and game tactics. Physical educators can alter activities and provide support that directs students to focus on the learning objectives. For example, when students have difficulty learning strategies of gameplay or specific skills, teachers can include group work, peer feedback opportunities, collaborative discussions, or the use of video and other technology to provide clarity. It is important to teach the “why” of the skills, with examples of different ways to be successful, instead of only teaching the fundamental skills.

Teaching Practices. Quality elementary physical education programs provide learning opportunities for students to develop appropriate strategies by modifying activities or games, creating rules that include specific criteria (e.g., a set number of passes), and providing opportunities to participate from various perspectives (e.g., offense and defense, for example). Examples of teaching strategies in an elementary physical education program include the following:

- Facilitated discussions: A great way for students to learn concepts and implement strategies is teacher-facilitated discussions. These discussions allow students to share their own ideas and collaborate with one another to create new ideas. Students can practice leadership and communication skills as they discuss concepts with their team.
- Huddle up: Students meet with their team or small group to create a strategy that helps the team develop a plan for success. Students will learn whether or not their plan worked and will have the opportunity to adjust.
- Use of videos: Videos produce real-time footage for students to observe their own performance repeatedly from a different viewpoint. Students can practice performing a skill or movement concept and get direct feedback from the teacher to continually improve throughout the duration of time. Furthermore, educators can access the video footage at a later time if needed.

National Standard 3 – Physical Activity and Fitness

Providing students with meaningful opportunities to develop their level of fitness can be challenging at times, because moderate-to-vigorous physical activity may not be enjoyable for some students. Knowing that the pursuit of and participation in physical activity for a lifetime is the ultimate goal, quality elementary physical education programs emphasize enjoyable physical activity, while also focusing on student learning and development.

Teaching Practices. Effective methods for incorporating physical fitness often include a consistent focus on the benefits of physical activity, the importance of physical activity for at least 60 min each day, continual encouragement (and even accountability) for physical activity outside of class (especially among programs where physical education time is limited), ensuring opportunities for daily recess, combining the health-related fitness components with fitness testing, and including skill development opportunities with fitness work. Examples of teaching fitness in an elementary physical education program include the following:

- Use of music: Music during fitness testing and practice is a great way to motivate students. Educators can also prepare activities similar to the fitness tests so that students benefit without realizing they are practicing.
- Logs and journals: Designing a physical education logbook will help students set goals and keep up with their results. Students can use their results to determine areas that need improvement in relation to each fitness component. Students can even create their own fitness table with specific goals included, ask parents to help students develop realistic goals, write down their favorite fitness activities, and list (or take photos of) home-based activities appropriate for improving one’s level of fitness. The main purpose is for students to have a visual representation of their performance and use problem solving to determine ways to improve their performance. This helps students reach or maintain a health-enhancing level of fitness.
- Participation: Encouraging students to participate in class, during recess and at home could help them expand or put forth more effort in meeting their daily recommended amount of physical activity (e.g., increase from light activity to moderate activity, walk hills, develop challenges with a friend, etc.). Teachers can ask students to keep an open mindset and participate in all activities or even help develop a scavenger hunt for the class. This is the students’ opportunity to learn and see which activities they enjoy the most.
- Student learning: Even during physical fitness pursuits, it is essential to promote physical literacy in this domain. Teachers can specifically highlight age- and developmentally appropriate fitness activities to be completed during class time, identify ways students can improve in their own time, help students monitor their fitness levels over time, and promote enjoyable physical activity for developing and maintaining fitness for a lifetime. Skill development and fitness activities can be combined for maximal instruction time and physical activity opportunities.

National Standard 4 – Responsible Personal and Social Behavior

Students need to learn personal and social behavior to be successful in life. A responsible individual has the ability to make
decisions that have positive outcomes and do not have negative impacts for others. Quality physical education programs give students the opportunity to exhibit responsible personal and social behavior through individual activities and interactions with small and large groups. Students have the chance to build confidence in individual skills, follow rules and directions, practice communicating, exemplify good leadership, and develop problem-solving skills. These characteristics can be useful in the future in many ways.

**Teaching Practices.** Students need real-life practice and experiences incorporating various aspects of responsible personal and social behavior. Effective methods for teaching these behaviors to students might include specifically focusing on positive characteristics and ignoring disruptive behavior when appropriate. Incorporating breathing techniques, stretches and balances can also help students manage and cope with stressful situations. It is beneficial to teach proper channels of communication. Using a conflict corner or a set of guidelines helps students find a resolution. Educators can hold students accountable for their actions through behavior procedures like warnings, parent notes and possible referrals. One example of teaching responsible personal and social behavior in an elementary physical education program includes the use of acronyms, such as PAWS:

- Prepare for success: Students need to prepare before entering the gym by wearing the proper shoes and comfortable clothing for physical activity and, if applicable, having their hair pulled back.
- Act respectful: Students learn a variety of new skills, and it is important to encourage one another with positivity (e.g., say “good job,” give a high-five or fist bump, etc.).
- Work together: Students learn to work together through cooperative learning and waiting their turn.
- Stay safe: Students are responsible for using equipment properly, maintaining self-control, and following procedures.

**National Standard 5 – Value of Physical Activity**

Students may value physical activity for various reasons, but it is important that they recognize that there are a multitude of motivators for physical activity, including health, challenge, social interaction, self-expression and enjoyment. Effective physical educators consider the values of students and what inspires them.

**Teaching Practices.** Teachers can use various methods to learn what students value by providing surveys and allowing for student choice, such as selecting their favorite activities at times. Students express their enjoyment when they have the opportunity to practice skills (achievement; intrinsic motivation), play in game settings (fun; extrinsic motivation), and freedom of choice (intrinsic motivation). When students ask to do an activity again, it is most likely something they value. Students often seek challenges when they are successful. It is important to encourage students to push themselves and improve their own individual skills. In support of helping students understand the value of physical activity, teachers can

- Survey students pertaining to activities they especially enjoy, somewhat enjoy or do not enjoy. This can give teachers a sense of what learning activities students value and will likely want to do again.
- Provide opportunity for voice and choice. In some settings, teachers identify the curriculum, activities, modifications and even specific equipment students must use each day. Flexibility in a quality physical education curriculum and giving students the opportunity to share their thoughts and concerns can foster more student learning over time.
- Discuss the concepts supporting the “value” of physical activity often with students. Teachers can highlight ways in which students can challenge themselves in some skills, participate for social interaction in other activity pursuits, be physically active for health purposes at times, or play games simply for the enjoyment factor. Discussions like this can help students truly identify what physical activities they do or do not value. This may provide a better understanding of how teachers can help facilitate meaning of these important concepts among students.

**Summary**

The SHAPE America (2014) national physical education standards focus on developing the whole child through the psychomotor, cognitive and affective learning domains. A certified physical education teacher should plan and implement quality programming with the use of policy and environment, curriculum, appropriate instruction and student assessment (SHAPE America, 2015). The national physical education standards, the three domains of learning, and the four essential components should all be considered when planning. This will help support the goals and objectives of the program, ultimately leading to student learning in physical education. Quality programs can be built with the use of the national physical education standards as guidelines and contribute to helping students be physically active for a lifetime. Educators have the opportunity to encourage students in their enjoyment of physical education by making sure they are engaged and learn to understand and value enjoyable physical activity experiences.

**References**

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