Exploring Role Modeling in Sport and Physical Education

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Reflecting on my experiences as a physical education teacher and sport coach, and currently as a physical education teacher education (PETE) professional, I have recently found myself full of a variety of emotions circulating around the concept of "role modeling" in physical education. I have often reviewed different theories supporting role modeling in teacher education (e.g., Bandura's social cognitive theory [1977, 1989], a learning theory based on the idea that people learn by watching what other people do), and I cannot help but think about my former K–12 students, current preservice teachers, my past and present colleagues, and the many professionals in physical education teaching and/or coaching in the field. I often find myself critically analyzing our profession in general, as I view physical education and sport from a variety of different lenses.

My past and present experiences have given me the opportunity to observe the field as an elementary, middle, and high school physical educator; varsity coach for a championship team; college professor teaching future physical education teachers and coaches; former college coach working with highly motivated athletes; collegiate and high school certified official; youth-sport coach working with beginners; and a "number one fan" for my own children who now participate in youth sport. As a result, I am continually driven to reflect on our profession as a whole.

Most of us are familiar with the three types of learning, in the psychomotor, cognitive, and affective domains (Bloom, 1956). Others may refer to these three domains in physical education as skills, knowledge, and attitude. We also know that best practices in physical education encourage us to teach to all three domains in each lesson, by planning for and teaching toward specific learning outcomes, perhaps many times with a greater focus on the psychomotor domain.

With those things in mind, my objective here is to provide an overview of role modeling in the psychomotor domain. In addition, I also discuss role modeling for what others may refer to as the fourth domain of learning in physical education: the fitness domain (Beaudet & Acquaviva, 2005). It is through these different lenses from which I suggest that our profession is not consistently demonstrating effective modeling in skill and fitness development among our students and athletes.

Role Modeling in the Psychomotor Domain

We know that the goal of physical education is to "develop physically educated individuals who have the knowledge, skills, and confidence to enjoy a lifetime of healthful physical activity" (National Association for Sport and Physical Education [NASPE], 2004, p. 11), and as indicated by Standard 1, a physically educated person "demonstrates competency in motor skills and movement patterns needed to perform a variety of physical activities" (NASPE, 2004). I am concerned about how we are presenting ourselves and our profession related to this standard. I believe that physical education goes well beyond getting students moving in class, increasing physical activity, or engaging in moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (MVPA) for a certain length of time. We should be providing significant learning opportunities for students to develop skills in a variety of activities in physical education and sport.

When we allow physical education to become a "mile wide and an inch deep" curriculum (as discussed in Rovegno & Bandhauer, 2012) by exposing students to a variety of activities without emphasizing competent skill development, we are not modeling effective practice in physical education. I see this "ineffective" practice taking place in elementary, middle, and high school physical education lessons and in youth-sport practices on a regular basis. Many times, the coaches of very successful and elite programs continue to emphasize and focus on the fundamentals—yet many physical educators do not. Why is there a difference? What do the elite coaches know and do that many physical educators do not? Perhaps the difference is related to time, resources, class size, or support for the program(s). Perhaps it is not.

Unfortunately, many students in physical education and coaching

settings never develop the fundamentals as a result of what is done (or not done) in those environments. Game play too often becomes the norm, and students are not given enough practice opportunities to become competent. As discussed by Silverman (2011), "the more time devoted to instruction, the more students learn" and "the more time that students spend in tasks where the teacher is actively teaching and monitoring how students are progressing, the more students learn" (p. 30). Therefore, I believe that we are not modeling effective teaching and coaching in the psychomotor domain when we limit the quantity and quality of skill development lessons.

In addition to providing opportunities for K–12 students to become competent movers, I am also concerned about the level of skill-development opportunities provided for preservice physical education teachers. The National Initial Physical Education Teacher Education Standards (NASPE, 2008) state that "Physical education teacher candidates are physically educated individuals with the knowledge and skills necessary to demonstrate competent movement performance and health enhancing fitness as delineated in the NASPE K–12 Standards." In order for this to happen, I am confident that PETE programs must follow the recommendation of Siedentop (2002), who argued for more skill development for PETE candidates. The physical education teacher candidate who enters the program with "competency in a variety of physical activities" (NASPE, 2004, Standard 1) is too often the exception rather than the norm. Therefore, in order for future physical education teachers to provide their K–12 students with the skills needed to perform a variety of physical activities, I support more skill development opportunities in PETE programs. Otherwise, we are modeling poor practice in this area as well.

Role Modeling in the Fitness Domain

Most physical educators and sport coaches recognize the importance of a physically active lifestyle and understand the need for physical fitness and fitness development. We review the FITT model, emphasize target heart rate, teach interval training, assess students using the FITNESSGRAM®, and preach 20–30 minutes of MVPA three to five days each week. Basically, we regularly promote physical activity and physical fitness among students and sport participants. However, I perceive that many physical education teachers and coaches are not interested in pursuing their own fitness development, or they are not willing to put forth the effort needed to meet the national recommendations for developing one's physical fitness. With that said, I understand that physical limitations may restrict some individuals from meeting the fitness recommendations. But I interact with many seemingly "able-bodied" physical educators and sport coaches who put forth very little effort (if any at all) to effectively model fitness development.

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Participating in regular physical activity at a level sufficient to promote health-related physical fitness is an important behavior for professionals in all fields of physical activity at all levels, including coaches, K–12 teachers, physical educators and kinesiology faculty members at higher education institutions, and fitness professionals (NASPE, 2010, p. 1). When we as physical activity professionals teach students how to develop a physically active and physically fit lifestyle (and often "push" them in that direction) but do not pursue a similar lifestyle ourselves, we are modeling poor practice in the fitness domain.

In addition, the way that physical activity and physical fitness are often promoted reflects poorly on our profession (and perhaps this is the area that disturbs me the most). When I officiate games and observe youth and high school practices, I regularly see coaches punish students with fitness activities; have students participate in fitness activities for extremely brief periods of time with long rest intervals (e.g., one set of "suicide sprints"); reward students only for speed and agility and not for their fitness development; and promote the same routine, mundane fitness activities over and over again. Physical fitness then becomes a

chore and a discouraging part of practice but is something often accepted as part of the culture or as a requirement for participation. We have the knowledge and the resources. We should be promoting physical fitness activities in an enjoyable, exciting, and meaningful way. When we fail to promote physical fitness in a positive way, we are also modeling poor practice in the fitness domain.

Conclusion

In closing, I encourage each of us to reflect on our experiences, practices, and specifically on how we model what we do related to the psychomotor and fitness domains. We are at a critical point in our society where sport skill development, physical activity, and physical fitness receive a significant amount of attention (from a variety of outlets), and yet the media often sends the wrong message and promotes practices we as a profession simply do not support. Ultimately, for modeling as it is presented here, I implore each of us to continue teaching for skill development, improve our own skills, engage in physical activity and physical fitness opportunities on a regular basis, and endorse physical fitness in a way that helps students "achieve and maintain a health-enhancing level of physical fitness" (NASPE, 2004, Standard 4).

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