Making Physical Activity Fun
by Melanie Mitchell, Ph.D. and Robert McKethan

Mrs. Jones is a physical education teacher who values the role of physical activity. Her philosophy regarding learning emphasizes that the selection of adult-type activities, equipment, and rules are prerequisites for student success. However, her students do not possess the same values. The discrepancy between the teacher’s values and her students’ values prompts one to speculate about the dynamics of the physical education program. This is an important consideration since a major goal of physical education is to provide enjoyable experiences that will enhance the likelihood of continued participation.

In the sections to follow, we identify problematic behaviors, the consequences of those behaviors and remedies for those behaviors. Although these descriptions are the context of a physical education class, these problems and solutions apply to any physical activity setting that involves children.

Age Appropriate Activities
Mrs. Jones’ third grade physical education class is beginning a unit in stickball. The equipment for this unit consists of dowel rods for bats and tennis balls. The class is divided into two groups of 15 students each. Regardless of readiness to play a full-fledged game, Mrs. Jones begins the unit without any skills practice. In this game, third graders are expected to hit a pitched tennis ball, field the ball, and successfully play the game.

If the activity is too hard and the children experience little or no success, they will be turned off by the activity and learn that physical activity is “not for me.” On the other hand, if the activity is too easy, the children may become bored with the activity and choose not to participate. This scenario is a perfect example of a teacher/coach not providing developmentally appropriate activities.

Providing developmentally appropriate activities is essential to fostering positive attitudes toward participation in physical activities. Some remedies for ensuring developmentally appropriate activities are as follows:

- The roles in games should match the developmental levels of the students. For example, a tag game in the primary grades should focus on tagging and fleeing. Whereas, in intermediate grades a tag game such as "Capture The Flag" involves more than just tagging and fleeing.
- The cognitive demands of the activity should be based on student developmental levels. For example, the games played by primary-aged students should focus on fundamental skill development and not game tactics.
- Grouping of students for tasks and applications (games) should facilitate many opportunities for each participant to be involved.

Regulation Equipment
Mrs. Jones’ fourth grade class participates in a unit in basketball. In this unit, the students are given opportunities to practice dribbling skills, shooting skills, and play in full-fledged games. She chooses to use men’s regulation size and weight basketballs. Also, these students are required to shoot at 10-foot goals.

Due to the equipment selection and goal height, students experience difficulty controlling, passing, and shooting the ball. The result for the students is frustration followed by giving up. Consider properly equipping students for game play by:

- Providing equipment designed for children (e.g., junior-sized basketballs).
- Modifying distances and boundaries to match children’s capabilities.
- Modifying the size and position of goals (e.g., soccer goals or basketball goals).

Regulation Rules
In all team sports, Mrs. Jones expects the students to use the rules of a regulation game in order to facilitate an understanding of how the game is played. For example, in the fifth grade soccer class, students play on regulation-sized field with 11 vs. 11 teams. There are two types of players in this game: Those who know the rules, have the prerequisite skills and dispositions, and those who lack the prerequisites. The students who lack sufficient skills are excluded from the game leaving them to be ball chasers. Soon, however, they grow weary and socialize with other excluded students. Some strategies for conforming rules to match student abilities include:

- Use small-sided games with modified rules to fit student needs.
- Begin with games that focus on basic game skills and progress to more complex games.

Emphasis on the score
Mrs. Jones’ sixth grade students are allowed to select their own teams for game play. Also, these games place a great emphasis on winning and losing.

One consequence of this arrangement is student arguments over scores and rule violations. Sometimes, these conflicts continue well beyond the physical education class. The signifi-
Activity
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cance of competition, winning and losing, and team selection further marginalizes the less skilled students. The dispositions acquired from these experiences will reduce the likelihood that children will participate in physical activity as adults. To reduce emphasis on competition:
• Provide students with games where scoring is determined by cooperative efforts.
• Never allow students to choose their own teams.
• Include rules that ensure active participation by all students.

Warm-ups
Mrs. Jones invariably starts class with calisthenic-type routines and a 10-minute jog around the perimeter of the gym or field. The warm-ups include various stretches, pushups, sit-ups, and other exercises. These routines are introduced at the beginning of the school year and are implemented daily.
Because of the repetitive use of the same exercise routines, students quickly become bored and dread coming to class. Boredom often leads to less-than-enthusiastic participation and discipline problems. Eliminate stagnant warm-ups by:
• Incorporating lively music to the routine
• Using instant activities such as tag games, skill routines, student suggestions for warm-ups.
• Using individual and team goals to foster greater enthusiasm when running is a part of warm-ups.

In physical education and physical activity programs, children must be presented with activities that foster knowledge, skills, and dispositions that support the continuation of physical activity following their school years. Planning that fails to take into account children’s physical, social, and emotional needs will have long-term consequences for engagement in physical activity.

Exercise
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Here are some general guidelines to keep in mind when beginning an exercise program for children. Remember that it important to match the activity or exercise with the physical maturity of the child.

Ages 2-6
At this age, kids are just learning many of the fundamental skills, such as throwing, catching, running, jumping, skipping, and hopping. It’s important to take the time and learn these and other basic skills correctly. They contribute to the proper development of the muscular and nervous systems in children, which in turn makes the road ahead a little bit smoother and much more enjoyable.

Since most kids in this age group are still in the early stages of physical development, a regular “exercise” program is generally not recommended. Rather, it’s suggested to stick with activities and games that emphasize the basic motor skills, but do not combine them in a complicated or confusing way. Games for this age group should focus on participation and not competition, as the added pressure of opposition can distract from the emphasis of skill development and enjoyment. Let kids be kids.

Some suggested activities for children ages 2-6:
• Playing catch
• Tumbling
• Jumping rope
• Swimming
• Tag
• Hopscotch
• Frisbee
• Walking
• Kickball
• Riding a bike

Ages 7-10
Children in this age group generally have a good grasp on the basics of movement and fundamental motor skills. Most will also have developed better memory and decision-making skills that should enable them to understand the basic strategies of simplified forms of some team sports. However, many may not be ready to handle the more complex movements and skills (or emotional demands) of some of the organized competitive sports.

For most children in this age group, focusing on combining the fundamental skills they’ve learned into more challenging activities and games should be the emphasis (i.e. kicking a ball for distance, throwing for accuracy).

Some suggested activities for children ages 7-10:
• Riding a bike
• Kickball
• Netball
• Baseball
• Tennis
• Table tennis
• Inline skating
• Dancing
• Gymnastics
• Soccer

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