

Hopefully Some Answers

I am honoured to be working with Steve Myrland and Greg Thompson on a project that, hopefully will add some substance to the current theoretical arguments about 'physical literacy' and movement development. In many research papers and commentary about the sedentary existence of the youth of today we hear of the lack of movement efficiency and physical activity. Much has been written about the detrimental effects this has on health and well-being, academic performance and behaviour.

Many nations National Health programs are buckling under the pressure of the ever-increasing problems of muscular-skeletal disorders, obesity, cardiovascular disease and other ailments associated with a poor lifestyle. We are not kidding ourselves when we think we can do some good and make a difference to this worldwide problem – we just want to have a go at trying to help.

Our target is the captive audience in the Primary School setting (starting with Kindergarten) where, it is hoped, children are receptive to movement and solving movement puzzles in a fun way. Nowhere else do we get the young of today in one place for several hours 5 times a week so there seems little point in trying to find another vehicle. One can argue that the 'home' is the best place to teach children the value of physical activity and quality nutrition but we have seen the epidemic actually start in the home so 'plan B' seemed to be the better option. Steve commented about this recently when he said, 'If premature mortality (and all the pain and suffering that entails) is not a sufficient motivator for a culture to change . . . the culture will not change.'

So we look to the schools. Recent efforts have foundered in the presence of a variety of obstacles and we have had to be very specific about what our intentions are. The propensity to shovel everything into a sports-specific, competitive games strategy was one of the obstacles set by governments and other decision-making entities. This 'one-size fits all' idea hasn't worked in the last 20 years and will not work in the future. One conversation between us contained the following:

The real challenge in creating and implementing a transformative PE program lies in having to face and deal with all the human variables; an uncooperative principal . . . obese teachers . . . turf-battles between other class offerings and disciplines--all that. Ultimately, we succeed or fail based on our program's ability to thrive in the real-world settings we will enter.

What we are going to attempt is the creation of a curriculum of movement that can fit into a variety of settings – the PE lesson, before school activities e.g. 'Rise and Shine, recess activities, classroom activities and a link to home where movements can be done with the family as 'homework'. There will be threads of assessment, progressive standards to be attained and an overall integration into school and home life.

If we can find a small number of schools to try these ideas and then track the changes we expect to see then others may follow suit. With enough successes we may see a groundswell of enthusiasm, especially when teachers realise how simple all this is.

The same principle applies to the developmental layers of sport. Although it is firmly understood that kids turn up to sporting clubs expecting to actually 'do' the sport and to improve quickly, the onus is on us all to create an appropriate journey. If all we have in our teaching / coaching toolbox is 'technical and tactical' then the problems will continue to exist. The key is to create a journey where there is a balance between the 'all round physical development' and the sports-specific components.

One of the above journeys may lead to a healthier person in adulthood and the other to a person better equipped to negotiate the journey to high performance.

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