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Be Active. Changing PE in schools.

I am sure we all agree physical education (PE) is a vital component in the learning and education of our children. Being active daily has a phenomenal effect on physical, mental and emotional wellbeing as well documented in research and experience. This education about the physical is not only beneficial at the time of exercise or physical activity but also in the development of healthy habits into adulthood by ensuring children “buy” into the benefits on offer. I make reference to the fantastic article in the QLD issue 5 “getting kids involved in PE at Schools” and the need for students to connect in the physical setting (Whipp, 2008). We need to address the needs and wants of the current generation and provide real solutions they can connect with and take ownership of whilst importantly appealing to all levels and abilities within a traditional class structure.

The stumbling block however has been the packed curriculum, inability to get quality moderate/high intensity workouts completed and finding activities all the class can enjoy. For too long PE has concentrated on Sports in providing this exercise basis for physical education rather than developing the rudimentary skills critical in skill development for any sport but more importantly overall health and addressing these at an individual level or per student basis. Is this achievable? I believe so, and this is where innovative ways of teaching and children experiencing and practising these skills has been born. Do not get me wrong, I am not against sports. The effect of a more specific and targeted PE program for all the class actually provides increases of participation in sports at lunchtimes, afterschool and weekends because of increased confidence gained in the concept called the NEW PE. Add to this the improved discipline of learning in this manner and reduced behavioural disruptions because of the engagement and responsiveness in class.

How does the NEW PE address individually each child and how does the approach actually provide more active outcomes.

The approach used now by over 2000 schools in the USA and UK centres around schools facilities, products and programs that involve some form of innovative, interactive or technology based resource. These products in some form almost trick the kids into learning rudimentary skills but the children themselves often control the development themselves, and the products provide feedback for their individual to improve against themselves. The class still operates in a group or class environment so the sense of “team” is still experienced.

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This NEW PE or interactive fitness class provides a minimum of 1 lesson per week where the students are engaged via technology they are “hard wired” for and can relate to. Previous social and ability barriers no longer are involved as engagement individually is achieved.

The carry over effect into more traditional PE lesson on other days is the key to the success of physical results achieved and the high participation levels in these classes and extra-curricular sports. It is important to note the lessons in these traditional classes are modified in length and specific skills to reduce any boredom and ensure all learning is maximised for all levels – again focusing on the skills rather than the sport but also including alternative skills like mountain biking or skateboarding/rollerblading.

There are a number of interactive and innovative products and programs used in these NEW PE curriculums. I am going to highlight one the HOPSport Training system which services over 600,000 kids every week. To highlight the impact of one I refer to an independent study conducted in North Carolina involving 8000 children, collaborators from 3 Universities and 20 independent sites. The Product for the NEW PE uses a multi-screen, dynamic presentation that captures kids attention and speaks their language. With 100’s of lesson plans to choose from the teacher selects a module then facilitates the learning by working along side the kids rather than instructing from the front. This falls in line with the generations of today and the need for acceptance at an equal level. The Program simply merges media with technology and provides an interactive medium to engage the kids.

The results compared with “Traditional PE” we might associate to and refer to where according to Whipp and Creasy, 2008 potentially produce a moderate to vigorous outcome of less than 5 minutes. Lesson in the NEW PE showed classes for example ‘Dance’ to have significantly more confidence in their ability to dance as well as their intentions to try it more often outside of class. Teachers and students agree that the NEW PE gave greater opportunity to observe, imitate and practice skills. Students had greater intention to increase their daily physical activity and the program keeps the active kids active, and improves the intentions of the least active students. All teachers reported high usability with the technology system; Although 52% of these teachers rarely or never used technology in PE, there was a significant increase in confidence after introducing the program.



When asked if they would like to make any other comments:

- 67% actively endorsed the product with phrases like “awesome” and “incredible time on task”
- 24% actively commented on kids enjoyment level with comments like, “students ask to do more” and “students enjoy the modules”.

In the USA the NASPE - The National Association of Sport and

Physical Education sets the standards for PE and recommends students in PE should spend 33% of their time in moderate to vigorous physical activity (MVPA). The direct measurement this NEW PE showed a minimum of 42% MVPA, and a maximum of 62% MVPA. This is directly a 55% more active class than during traditional PE which was also independently supported by observation. Over the course of a school year, that translates to an extra 12.6 hours of MVPA!

Assessing the program results further by Gender. In traditional PE, boys are significantly more active than girls. When the NEW PE is introduced, all students significantly increased MVPA and this effected the girls results by bringing them up to the same level as boys. BMI measures was for each student placed them in “healthy weight,” “overweight,” or “obese.” In traditional PE healthy weight students are by far the most active however overweight and obese students were more active than the healthy weight students were in traditional PE!

The NEW PE needs to be embraced and teachers are the leaders instrumental in instigating change and creating a legacy and impact for their students and community. The side benefit of such programs is for schools to extend the use of these resources for the community before and after school as an additional way to get Return on Investment and provide smarter use of facilities for the wider public to benefit from.

Further information of the NEW PE, studies, research and products and programs can be sourced from David Norman (BPhEd – University of Otago, NZ) and the EYE fitness organisation which serves Schools, Fitness facilities and community centres across Australia and NZ. Log on and register for a free evaluation and assessment of innovative ways to improve your PE. www.eyefitness.org 1800 771 079 or sales@eyefitness.org