# High-Activity Skills Progression

## A Method for Increasing MVPA

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*You don't have to sacrifice skill teaching in order to emphasize moderate-to-vigorous physical activity in your class.*

The "method wars" (teaching method A versus teaching method B) has a long and mixed history in educational research (Brophy & Good, 1986). One year, physical educators are trained that method A is a better way to teach game skills compared to method B, only to discover the next year that little-known method C is really best. It is certainly healthy, but confusing, for the profession to explore the merits of various teaching methodologies. Michael Metzler (2005), in his text *Instructional Models for Physical Education*, summarizes this phenomenon simply, "…there can be no one best way to teach physical education" (p. 14). We agree with Metzler and do not contend that the approach outlined in this article is the "best way." We submit the high-activity skills progression (HASP) to readers to enhance their teaching repertoire and believe that it is a positive method by which to balance student engagement and ever-increasing class sizes.

Academic achievement, or motor skill acquisition in the field of physical education, has been the most frequent variable under study when exploring student engagement. However, Sallis and McKenzie's 1991 landmark article, "Physical Education's Role in Public Health," made many health experts question this view. In their article, Sallis and McKenzie provided a strong rationale for physical educators to consider using their field as an avenue for the promotion of physical activity, and specifically moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (MVPA). Although target heart-rate values representing MVPA in adolescents are not consistently reported in the research literature, many exercise physiologists consider heart rate responses from 130 to 140 beats per minute to represent an MVPA threshold for adolescents (Fairclough & Stratton, 2005; Fairclough & Stratton, 2006). Sallis and McKenzie (1991) stated that physical education in schools is the only public institution currently responsible for promoting physical activity for all children and believed that physical education is an investment in society's economic and health care future.

Wallhead & Buckworth (2004) agreed and reported that participation in physical education is an effective method by which physical activity levels are positively affected in youths. Their literature review of physical education theory and research revealed that enjoyment of physical activity often results from successful mastery experiences, which lead to increased self-perceived skill competence and enjoyment. Several studies reviewed by Wallhead and Buckworth (2004) revealed that there is a


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The high-activity skills progression uses small-group activities to increase MVPA.

strong positive relationship between perceived competence and participation in physical activity.

*Healthy People 2010* points to the emphasis on the accumulation of MVPA during physical education (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2000). The *Healthy People 2010* document includes many health objectives that target physical activity behavior in adolescents, including one that aims for students to engage in MVPA during at least 50 percent of physical education class time. This recommendation is based on the premise that physical education should play a vital role in the promotion of public health (Sallis & McKenzie, 1991).

Several national agencies and organizations (e.g., American Heart Association, AAHPERD, American College of Sports Medicine, American Academy of Pediatrics) have made recommendations for appropriate amounts of physical activity for school-age youths in recent years. However, a recent literature review by Strong et al. (2005) recommends that school-age youths should participate, on most days of the week, in 60 minutes of various MVPA-producing activities that are both developmentally appropriate and enjoyable. The recommended 60 minutes of daily MVPA can be achieved in a cumulative fashion, and school physical education is one viable method of promoting the accumulation of physical activity.

The present challenge is that many physical educators feel they risk losing time dedicated to game-skill acquisition if they choose to emphasize MVPA. But, what if physical educators could have their cake and eat it too? What if skills could be developed while at the same time providing an intense, developmentally appropriate lesson that is also enjoyable?

## The High-Activity Skills Progression

The high-activity skills progression (HASP) is a game-skills teaching strategy that utilizes small-group instruction, progressive learning experiences, and efficient transitions to increase opportunities for MVPA. The HASP structure allows teachers to present these intense activities to larger classes in a developmental manner, with limited transition time. First tested as part of the Sport, Play, and Active Recreation for Kids (SPARK) curriculum (Rosengard & McKenzie, 2001), HASP was designed as an aid for upper-elementary nonspecialists and physical education specialists in teaching sport-related skills while keeping students actively engaged. A major advantage of the HASP format is that it is generalizable to multiple games and sports. Individual, partner, and small-group activities provide students with game-skill and strategy practice in a structured and safe setting.

The activities presented in HASP place an emphasis on process (e.g., proper throwing form) versus product outcomes (e.g., throwing five times). For example, a HASP lesson focusing on "Ultimate" game play would engage students in multiple partner activities in which they would demonstrate their throwing and catching form. The use of HASP provides teachers with built-in opportunities for teacher and student skill demonstration, practice opportunities, teacher feedback, and efficient transitions between activities. A unique feature of HASP is that each activity leads into the next, decreasing downtime during transitions.

Specific HASP activities are described below. Many of the activities are not new to experienced physical educators. What may be new is the structure, progression of activities, and transitions between activities to increase MVPA. Regardless of the physical educator's preference for teaching game skills and strategies (e.g., traditional or tactical), the order of individual, partner, and small-group activities can be adjusted to suit one's teaching style. The activities below are examples and are presented in a sample progression.

## Individual Practice

*Shadow Practice*. Students mirror the teacher and practice propelling and receiving without the implement. This initial phase is typically presented in a large group with students in a scattered formation. During this time, teachers look for proper grip of the imaginary object (e.g., tennis racquet) or proper footwork (e.g., basketball).

## Partner Activities

*Partner Practice with Implement*. Teachers can teach and reinforce technique as students practice together. Teachers can choose between scattered formations or a more structured set-up such as lines. Students immediately start playing catch or striking the object back and forth. As the partners are propelling the object back and forth, the teacher moves to a small group—perhaps to one corner of the activity area or one side of the structured set-up—and gives a single skill cue (e.g., point throwing shoulder to partner). After giving a group a skill to work on, the teacher can walk over to other groups and give the same instruction. This teaching approach allows 90 percent of the class to be active while presenting information to a smaller group. The teacher continues to supervise the perimeter of the play space until he or she has given students one or two critical elements

related to the lesson's objectives. As some students progress more quickly than others, skill challenges can be added to keep them on task.

*Time Challenge.* During the time challenge the teacher asks the students, "How many catches can you make in 20 seconds?" "During the next 20 seconds, can you improve upon your first score?" "How many of you improved your score?"

*Catch Challenge.* After two catches (or traps) of the object, students move their body to a lower position. Partners move closer and closer to the ground after each successful catch (or trap). When students are seated or lying on the ground, teachers can end the activity and direct students to make their way back up.

*Partner Step-back Challenge.* For safety, this activity requires a more structured set up, in which all students are throwing in the same direction. Students face one another approximately 10 feet apart. After every two successful catches (or traps), one student takes one step back. If the object is not caught or trapped, the designated student takes one step forward.

*Give-and-Go.* This activity will help students to find open space. Creating space simply means moving away from the person with the object, then making a quick 45-degree cut back toward the person with the object to receive a pass. The partner without the object moves to open space and then cuts at a 45-degree angle to receive the object. Switch roles after each toss or kick. Students can create the 45-degree angle by facing his or her partner, pointing one hand at the partner and the other hand at a 90-degree angle and then running between the arms.

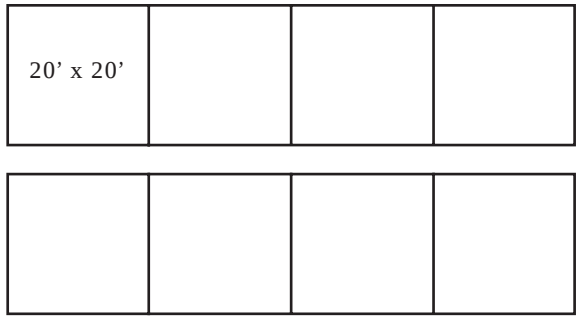
*Give-and-Go with a Fake.* Receiver makes a one-step fake before making the 45-degree cut. Practice the fake during shadow practice with the entire class before moving to the give-and-go with a fake. Have all the students plant their right foot at a 45-degree angle to the right, push off that right foot, and cut 45 degrees to the left to receive the object. Students do this in slow motion at first, eventually speeding up.

## Small-Group Activities

The authors define small groups as three to five students. In our experience three is best, but adjustments can be made depending on class size, available equipment, and activity area. The authors recommend setting up a grid (figure 1), outlined by cones or gym tape, for the following activities. Each small block of the grid represents the space in which a group practices. The size of the blocks of the grid is determined by the skill being practiced and the size of the activity area available. The authors suggest a 20- by 20-foot space for each small group of students.

*Two-on-One Keep Away.* In how many games do we see students standing still, calling for the ball, and wondering why they never receive the ball? Many students have never been taught how to move to an open space without the object. Inside the grid, one student has the object, another student is the defender in the middle and the third student is about 15 to 20 feet away. In this activity, the student propelling the object is stationary, and the defender guards the person with the object. The defender tries to knock the pass down or deflect the kick. Once the object is propelled to the receiver, the middle defender must guard the new player with the object. The defender must be at least three feet away. Thrown passes must go around the defender and not over the defender's head. This will force the receiver to cut 45 degrees to get open. Rotate defenders every 30 seconds.

Figure 1. Grid Set-up for Small-Group Activities




*Three-Catch 45-Degree Cuts.* In groups of three, two students work cooperatively inside their grid to complete passes/kicks while on the run. The third student acts as a defender.

*Three-Catch Games.* Ask the small groups to form a group of six with one object, while one student puts the other object away. Now there are two teams of three in each block of the grid area. The object of the game is for students to complete three consecutive passes to three different members of their team. Students score one point for three consecutive catches; the object is placed down for the other team to begin. If the throw or kick is incomplete in any way, possession moves to the other team. Here, a concept called the "principle of threes" may be implemented. The principle of threes means the majority of game rules involve the number three. The principle of threes might require, for example, *three passes to score*; defender to stand *three feet away* from thrower or kicker; *three different individuals* to catch the object; and if teachers find they need to speed the game up, they can require the object to be thrown or kicked in *three "alligators"* counted by the defender.

*Endline Game.* This game resembles Ultimate. The object of the game is to move the object in a particular direction towards the "goal." Any incomplete exchange changes direction. A goal is scored upon receiving the pass beyond the endline. The principle of threes is in effect. After a score, the other team puts the object into play at their goal line and moves toward the opponent's goal.

When teachers use the HASP activities consistently, students become familiar with its structure, therefore reducing transition time. It has been the authors' experience that students enjoy the repetition and feel safe and secure in repeating what they know. Two sample lessons outlining the HASP activities appear in table 1. Readers may notice

## Table 1. Sample Basketball Lesson Plans Using HASP

Instant activities and activities dedicated to health-related physical fitness were omitted from these lesson plan examples.

### LESSON 1

**Lesson Outcomes**

- Demonstrate a chest pass.
- Execute a fake chest pass.
- Move to an open area without the ball.

**Before Class Set-up**

- Set up grid area for every 6 students, about the size of one-fourth of a basketball court.

**Skill Practice (3 min.)**

- Teacher demonstrates a chest pass.
- Students shadow-practice chest pass without a ball.
- Teacher demonstrates faking a chest pass.
- Students shadow-practice faking a pass both to the left and right.

**Skill Drill (6 min.)**

- Teacher uses a partner strategy and students perform chest passes with one ball.
- HASP set-up—separate class into two lines facing each other. One student at a cone passes to a partner whose back is to the wall.
- Students include faking a pass either left or right.
- Challenges:
  - o How many passes can you catch in 20 seconds?
  - o Can you improve your score?
  - o Every two catches the outside student moves a step back
  - o Every two catches you and your partner move to a lower position
- After a few minutes of chest passes, move to bounce chest passes and repeat the challenge.

**Transition**

- Partners find two other partners to form a group of six and use two basketballs.

**Game: Keep Away (6 min.)**

- Students group in threes. Assign two groups of three to each grid.
- Teacher/student demonstration
- Use HASP set-up grid (figure 1)
- On the teacher's signal, the two outside students pass the basketball to each other without the middle person intercepting or knocking the ball down.
- The student stays in the middle until the teacher blows the whistle to rotate (every 30-45 sec.).
- All passes must be around the defender and not over the defender's head.
- Defender must only guard the thrower and be three feet back.
- Thrower can pivot but cannot move.
- Receiver practices making sharp cuts to get open.

**Skill Drill:**

- Students return to original partner and retrieve one ball.
- Teachers ask a group of students to demonstrate this drill.
- Partner with the ball is ready to pass to a moving target.
- Students practice how to move without the ball. Best practice is to run on a 45-degree angle.
- To demonstrate a 45-degree angle, have the student without the ball point an arm toward the passer, then point the other arm at a 90-degree angle, and finally run between the two arms.
- Passer passes to partner on the run.
- Switch roles and continue to pass to the moving target. As the students move closer, they have to run apart before making the 45-degree cut.

**Game: Keep Away (6 min.)**

- See above

### LESSON 2

**Lesson Outcomes:**

- Apply chest and bounce pass skills in a game situation.
- Demonstrate how to get open without the ball.

**Before Class Set-up:**

- Set up grid area for every 6 students about the size of one-fourth of a basketball court.

**Game: 3-Catch Game (12 min.)**

- Teacher/student demonstration
- Use HASP set-up grid (figure 1). Two teams of three.
- The object of the game is to complete three passes to your own team.
- Team scores one point for each three consecutive passes completed.
- After 3 consecutive passes, the ball is placed on the ground and the opponent takes possession.
- If the pass is incomplete, the ball goes to the

other team.

- Principle of 3s is in effect:
  - o Must defend 3 feet away
  - o 3 catches by 3 different people to score a point
  - o Must release ball by the count of 3 alligators counted by student defending the ball

**Skill Practice: 3-Person Pass (3 min.)**

- Students remain in groups of 3 and working in same grid.
- Two groups will share a grid.
- Each group of 3 works on passing and making 45-degree cuts to get open.
- Demonstrate a fake pass and then a fake while making a cut.
- Pass and move when you do not have the ball.
- Work on fake passes and fake moves.

**Game: 3-Pass Endline (15 min.)**

- Use teams from the 3-catch game.
- Teacher leads a game demonstration.
- Game is played with two teams on half of a full court. Two grids are joined. Divide each court with cones down the middle lengthwise.
- The object of the game is to score a point by passing the ball to a teammate across the endline.
- Ball may only be advanced by chest or bounce passing. Person with ball may not dribble or walk, they may only pivot, then pass.
- Players without the ball move to open areas.
- Game starts with an inbounds pass.
- A goal is scored when the ball is successfully passed to a player beyond the endline.
- If the pass is incomplete or dropped, the ball is inbounded from the closest sideline.
- If traveling occurs, the other team gets the ball. Use an inbounds pass from closest sideline.
- After a goal, the ball is put into play at the endline by an inbounds pass.
- Principle of 3s in effect
  - o 3 passes to 3 teammates are needed to score.
  - o Defender on the ball must be 3 feet back and cannot hit the ball out of the passer's hands.
  - o Defender on the ball can count to 3 alligators to force a pass.
  - o There is a turnover if the ball is not passed in 3 alligators.

how activities efficiently progress from one to another and utilize small-sided games. These two components of the HASP assist in decreasing downtime and increasing opportunities for MVPA.

## Getting Started

The authors highly recommend that practitioners consider integrating HASP techniques into their individual school settings to promote MVPA. Starting anything new can be difficult, of course, and it might be best to start slowly. In the authors' experience, teachers were more successful when they first tried implementing one or two of the activities listed above into their regular units. As they gained confidence with the activities, they grouped HASP activities in a progressive manner throughout their lessons. The authors suggest using the HASP set-up as a skill-demonstration and practice-time activity leading to strategy development and culminating in game-like situations.

## Summary

Overall, what makes HASP unique is its generalizability to a variety of sports and activities, the high activity level maintained during skill instruction, its developmentally appropriate sequence of activities, and its ability to keep students motivated during skill acquisition. The current health and physical education research literature supports the implementation of physical activities via school-based physical education (Gutin, Yin, Humphries, & Barbeau, 2005; Strong et al., 2005; Wallhead & Buckworth, 2004). Specific techniques to promote MVPA in physical education include teaching approaches like HASP.

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The lessons learned from the just evaluation systems presented in this article will help physical educators to further the goals of their profession as stated in the content standards of the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE, 2004). The findings are particularly pertinent to NASPE's standards two and six and their application to students in grades six through 12, who increasingly participate in physical education programs that include competitive sports. While the intent of standard two is the "facilitation of learners' ability to use cognitive information to understand and enhance motor skill acquisition and performance" (p. 12), the intent of standard six is the "development of an awareness of the intrinsic values and benefits of participation in physical activity that provides personal meaning" (p. 14). Although seemingly different, when it comes to student expectations in grades six through 12, both standards emphasize the ability to recognize and appreciate skilled performance (pp. 25, 48).

The recognition and appreciation of skilled performance in sport contests necessarily include cherishing excellence in the constitutive skills that define each sport. When excellence becomes their primary concern, students and sport communities in general develop and enact attitudes and predispositions that are conducive to the flourishing of their sports. When this happens, students become what Torres and McLaughlin (2003) called "meaningful resolution seekers." The difference between the latter and "outcome seekers" is that they "do not merely hunt for favorable results regardless of athletic merit. Rather, they consider sporting contests as the sites in which athletic superiority is determined through testing excellences" (p. 148). The implementation of evaluation systems that more justly recognize and reward athletes for the skillful display of excellence in the whole complexity of their sport is conducive to NASPE's "physically educated person," who, among other things, "Demonstrates understanding of movement concepts, principles, strategies, and tactics as they apply to the learning and performance of physical activities" (NASPE, 2004, p. 11).

Just evaluation systems value such demonstrations more than typical elite-style systems. While the latter assess and reward performance based only on outcome, the former more appropriately compensate contestants for the consistent execution of their sport's constitutive skills and the exemplary offensive and defensive performances such execution creates. Just evaluation systems call for students and athletes to cultivate a deeper appreciation for excellence and skill mastery within their sports. Therefore, these systems are worthy of endorsement by physical educators, coaches, and administrators, since they more accurately represent the values emphasized within physical education settings and interscholastic athletics programs. In short, if these professionals truly value excellence in competitive sport, they should implement fairer evaluation systems that reward the excellence displayed by students and athletes more accurately and honor it more substantially.

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