

By John Moore

High School Health and Physical Education: Reinforcing the 3 Rs

THE FIRST STEP IN BRINGING ABOUT EDUCATION REFORM IS TO PROVIDE **ACADEMIC RIGOR, VOCATIONAL RELEVANCE AND CURRICULA RELATIONSHIPS** IN PROGRAMS THAT STUDENTS SEE AS REAL.

SURVEY AFTER SURVEY SHOWS THAT EDUCATION IS A HIGH PRIORITY WITH THE AMERICAN PUBLIC.

Quality education also has bipartisan support with our local, state and nationally elected officials. The challenge is to blend the art and science of teaching into a meaningful educational experience for our students. The ultimate goal of the education process should be to improve instruction and increase student learning. To effectively accomplish this would truly result in education reform. Therefore, the first step in bringing about education reform is to provide academic rigor, vocational relevance and curricula relationships in programs that students see as real.

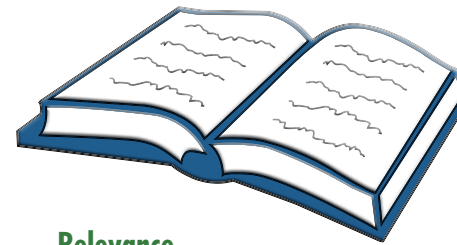
A health and physical education program is uniquely positioned to be both the change agent and the catalyst for education reform at the secondary level because healthy students make better students Symons, 1997). The health and physical education program at the Digital Arts and Technology Academy (DATA) in Albuquerque, New Mexico, utilizes the 3 Rs of rigor, relevance and relationships, which provide the philosophical underpinnings and the educa-

tional foundation of the program (Miles, 2005). This pragmatic approach has allowed DATA “to get real” with high school health and physical education students by actively involving them in their own education.

Rigor

Students complete individual goal-setting sheets, including their roles and responsibilities as well as the expectations of the staff. DATA utilizes the Polar TriFIT 4.9 software package and creates individual wellness profiles for each student with a focus on the components of health-related fitness. In keeping with academic rigor, all lesson plans are aligned with New Mexico health and physical education content standards. Additionally, students maintain individual exercise logs, including resting heart rate and target heart rate zones; this makes exercise intensity more purposeful, personal, effective and safe.

The program utilizes a computer lab as an instructional strategy. This lab is complete with high-speed Internet connectivity that allows students to log on to the Healthy Schools Network, and complete assignments related to exercise science and nutrition planning. Academic rigor is not limited to abstract thoughts and lengthy exams; rather, there are realistic daily expectations of students and teachers resulting in a shared responsibility that stresses the what, how and why of assignments. With an emphasis on the why, students buy into the benefits of an active and healthy lifestyle and begin to take responsibility for their own learning.



Relevance

The second program component of relevance addresses the larger issue of lifestyle management and makes health and physical education very personal, therefore more meaningful for each student. Through the use of instructional technology in the computer lab, students are empowered to make informed decisions while considering actions and consequences. Their learning includes class discussions and written assignments about physical activity and its correlation with physical, mental and emotional health as well as physical inactivity and its association with obesity, Type II diabetes and related health care costs.

An electronic file, including data from a nutrition appraisal and fitness test, is established for each student, and this baseline information is shared confidentially with each student and interpreted individually to ensure understanding. Indices such as blood pressure, body composition, flexibility, muscular strength and heart rate are monitored and recorded regularly, providing students with a personal profile complete with physical fitness and nutrition information. This approach motivates students because all comparisons are made to the individual student, providing relevance and a rationale for regular physical activity and a balanced diet.

Another aspect of relevance is the realm of developing effective life skills such as communication, decision-making and coping skills. In order to attain any level of competency or mastery, students must be given the opportunity to practice these life skills in a realistic and dynamic setting and the program provides just such an environment. Students can choose to participate in a variety of individual, dual and team activities, as well

as utilize the computer lab to complete weekly written assignments and participate in class discussions. Ultimately, the hallmark of a relevant program is demonstrated in the transfer of learning from one environment to another (school, home, work), and by making these critical thinking skills part of every student’s decision-making process.

Relationships

The final program component of relationships has two distinctive dimensions. The first applies to curricula linkages. Literacy, math and science do not happen in a vacuum and this program relies on these core curricula skills and integrates them into daily lessons. Literacy is critical in the computer lab and an essential skill in accessing the Healthy Schools Network and completing health-related worksheets. Math is utilized in the computation of heart rate data, the interpretation of graphical summary information as well as completing daily exercise logs. Science is a recurring theme with constant references to anatomy, physiology and biomechanics. High school health and physical education gets real for students at DATA through this integrated approach by illustrating to students the “why” of a comprehensive curriculum and just how closely programs are related.

The second dimension of relationships applies to interpersonal relationships between students and teachers. Teachers should strive to create a learning environment in which each child has a sense of worth in that class—a sense of belonging and a sense of competence (Goleman, 1998). It is at this time that teachers step out of the role of a content specialist and step into a broader role of resource teacher, mentor, “go-to-person” and student adviser.

This holistic approach becomes operational when teachers are able to teach children rather than just teach subject matter, and when they can effectively

demonstrate to students that all learning is related.

Getting Real Results

Effective contemporary programs are those that utilize cutting-edge technologies, integrate research-based instructional strategies, evolve to meet student needs, and address current market trends. This program goes beyond the rhetoric when it comes to promoting student success and the value of academic rigor, vocational relevance and curricula relationships. Empirical evidence in the areas of student attendance, postsecondary education and employability speaks volumes about how DATA has prepared students to explore and pursue fulfilling career pathways in health science.

Attendance is a major factor in schools attaining adequate yearly progress. At DATA the attendance rate in health and physical education is at 98 percent. There is also growth in the number of students pursuing postsecondary education; six percent of the graduation class of 2007 and 10 percent of the graduation class of 2008 are currently pursuing postsecondary specialized training in pharmacology, dental hygiene and personal fitness.

According to New Mexico Department of Labor stats, the number of jobs in health care was 38,247 in 2002 and it is expected to grow to 50,507 by the year 2012, with a projected entry salary of \$37,140, an estimated median salary of \$54,650 and \$70,000 for experienced workers. Employment in the health sciences can be a viable and rewarding career pathway. Students are primed for postsecondary success because DATA engages them with a unique, innovative and effective health and physical education curriculum that will serve them well long after they leave the program. ■



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