

Connecting School Physical Education to the Community Through Service-Learning

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Service-learning is a teaching method that provides opportunities for students to acquire academic, career, social, and personal skills through community service projects. The rationale for service-learning is that students learn best by doing, by serving, and by reflecting on their experience. Students become actively engaged in the needs of the community, and the experiences they bring back to the classroom become the basis for their classroom learning.

Increasingly, service-learning experiences are being incorporated into school subject areas such as language arts, math, science, and social studies (Wade, 1997). In physical education, however, opportunities to engage in service-oriented activities have been limited. While examples exist in other curricular areas, few examples of infusing meaningful service-learning experiences into the physical education curriculum appear in the literature. This is unfortunate because physical education programs provide a practical setting in which young people can identify and meet the sport and recreational needs of their communities by planning and implementing a service activity. As students undertake the service activity, they can bring their experiences back into school and reflect on issues that arise. On completion, their efforts can be recognized and celebrated. Finally, program evaluation can be conducted to inform future service-learning initiatives.

In service-learning programs, attention must be given to the clear articulation of responsibilities and goals, as well as to the provision of structured opportunities for students to reflect

critically on their service experience. The presence of four core elements of service-learning—orientation and training, meaningful service, structured reflection, and recognition—has been linked to positive educational outcomes (Witmer & Anderson, 1994; see table 1). The success of a service-learning program also depends on its overall quality, on the nature of the service activity, on the characteristics of the students involved, and, perhaps most important, on the nature of the personal experience that students derive from their service and from their reflection on that service.

The Chicago and Denver Programs

Two physical activity service-learning programs in Chicago and Denver have been developed and taught by two university professors and their graduate students since 1995. Five affective levels (Hellison, 1995) provide guidelines for helping students become more responsible. Two of the levels—effort and self-direction—address students' responsibility for personal development; another two—respect for the rights and feelings of others and caring for and helping others—address students' moral responsibility for their relationships with others. The fifth level focuses on the transfer of responsibility from the program to the rest of school, the playground, "the street," and the home.

Chicago: The Apprentice Teacher Program

The Apprentice Teacher Program in Chicago has evolved from The Coaching Club (Hellison, 1993). The Coach-

ing Club is a weekly before-school program that uses basketball to teach sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-graders in a South Side elementary school (in Chicago, elementary school is K-8). In the club, students learn to take responsibility for their own motivation and goals, their interaction with others, and the group's welfare.

The Apprentice Teacher Program gives Coaching Club members an opportunity to use the five-levels-of-responsibility framework while teaching at an annual summer camp held at a local university. The students of these apprentice teachers are eight- and nine-year-olds from a nearby housing project who attend basketball class for an hour a day, four days a week, over a five-week period. The purpose of the Apprentice Teacher Program is to extend the notion of responsibility that is the focus of the Coaching Club. In the Coaching Club, the students learn to coach themselves and each other, to resolve conflicts, and to evaluate their behavior and attitudes. The Apprentice Teacher Program is a logical next step for them because it requires them to assume responsibility not only for themselves (by traveling to and from the university and being punctual each day), but also for others (by providing basketball instruction to younger children).

Orientation and Training. As summer approaches, the sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-graders receive specific training in leadership and pedagogical skills to insure a smooth transition from coaching peers during the Coaching Club to coaching young children in the summer program.

Meaningful Service. The apprentice

Table 1. Core Elements of Effective Service-Learning Activities

Orientation and Training

- Information about the service site (agency/school purpose, directions to location, accessibility by public transportation, parking, dress codes, check-in requirements, etc.).
- Explanation of student responsibilities and how to perform the service work.
- Information on the individuals to be served and social/contextual issues related to the service.
- Problem-solving around the difficult situations that may arise.

Meaningful Service

- Service program is designed around community needs.
- Students involved in defining, designing, and modifying the service experience.
- The school/agency placements are committed to achieving the program goals.
- The service work is challenging and meaningful for the students.
- The school/agency contact people work effectively with students.

Structured Reflection

- Problem-solving specific situations and issues.
- Guarding against inaccurate perceptions/biases.
- Clarifying values as students confront new issues.
- Ongoing education on general issues related to service (e.g., family, socioeconomic, cross-cultural, and developmental issues in cross-age mentoring programs).
- Integration of service-learning with the rest of one's life.
- Community-building among participants.

Recognition

- Community event with invited officials and participants.
- Gifts (e.g., T-shirts, certificates, pins).
- Documentation of the outcome: video, newsletter, project, etc. for report to wider community.
- Media: honor participants via appearance on television, radio, or write-up in local newspaper; organize a school trip to honor students' responsible actions.

teachers are responsible for providing basketball instruction to the younger children. They meet one hour a day for 21 days within a five-week period. The children are divided into four groups of ten, and each morning there are four stations, each comprising half a basketball court and manned by a pair of apprentice teachers. Each group visits each station for 15 minutes of basketball instruction; thus each pair of apprentice teachers is responsible for planning and teaching a lesson four times each day. The children remain at their final station to participate in a brief reflection ses-

sion in which the apprentice teachers solicit their views about what they are learning in the camp and the extent to which they are enjoying themselves. Throughout the session, the program director and his graduate students are close by to provide suggestions and assistance to the apprentice teachers when necessary. The amount of assistance that the apprentices require varies according to their teaching maturity. The less mature apprentice teachers require close monitoring at the beginning of the program but less as it progresses, while others require hardly any assistance from the onset.

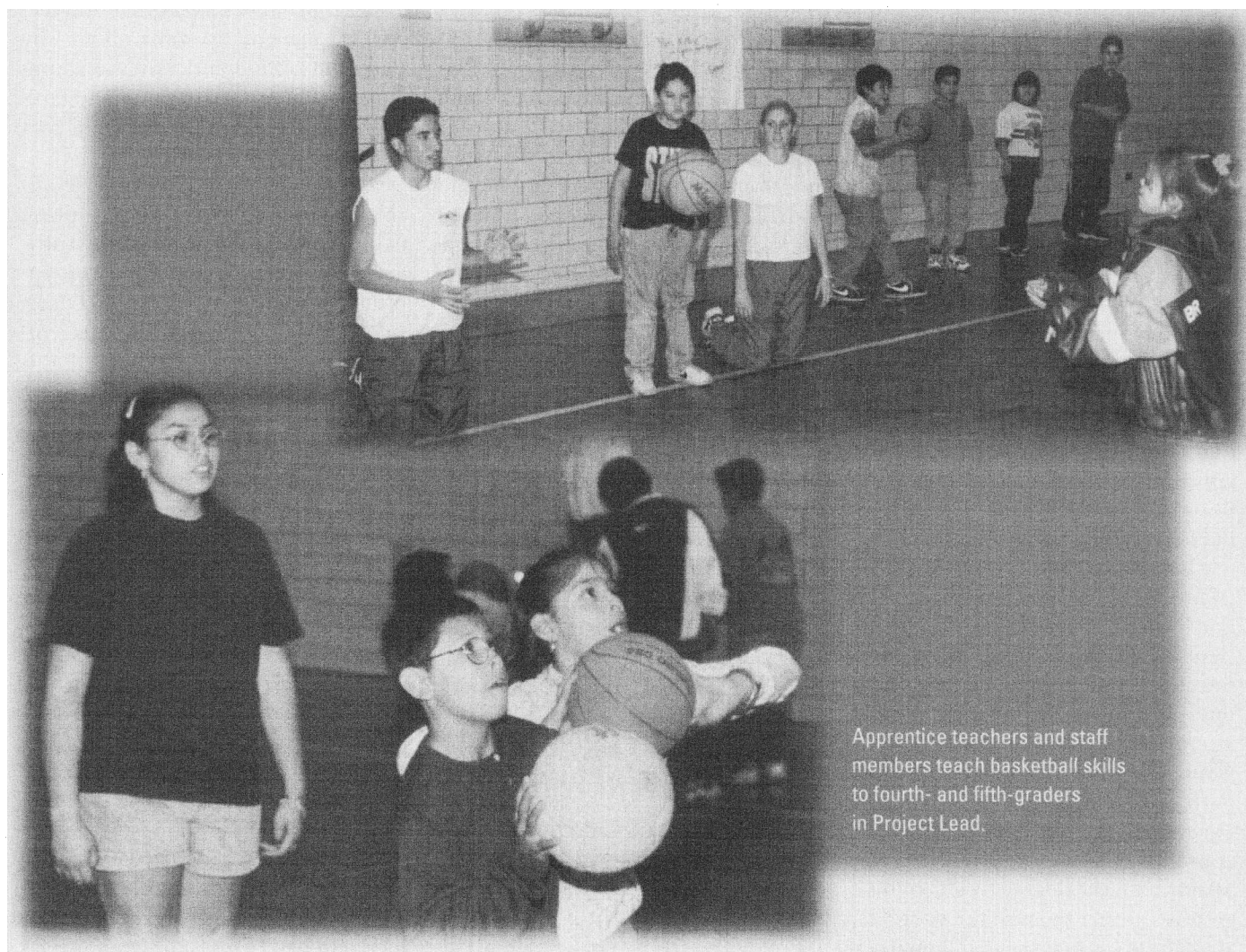
Structured Reflection. After the children are dismissed each day, the program director leads a group meeting to discuss the previous hour's teaching and to plan for the next day. The purpose of the group meeting is to provide a structured opportunity for the apprentice teachers to reflect on their service experience and to consider their effectiveness and contribution to the program. Issues discussed include teaching strategies that are and are not working, challenges presented by individual children, and teaching strategies that are or are not in line with the program's philosophy.

Recognition. The apprentice teachers receive several kinds of recognition for their service activities. A party is held at the end of the program, during which they are thanked personally by the director of the university summer camp. They receive clothing donated by Nike, a letter of recognition from the program director, and a free pass to the university recreation facilities. They also tend to attract the attention of the university paper, the alumni magazine, and the local television station.

Denver: Project Lead

Project Lead in Denver developed from the Energizers Club, an after-school physical activity program that has met weekly since 1994 in the gym of an elementary school located in an economically depressed neighborhood of northwest Denver (Cutforth, 1997). Project Lead serves 20 fourth- and fifth-grade Mexican-American boys and girls and uses physical activity—more specifically, tag games and cooperative games; fitness activities; skills practices in volleyball, soccer, and basketball; and modified small-side games—to teach responsibility.

Project Lead provides Energizers' graduates—presently sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-graders in middle school—with an opportunity to continue their involvement in the after-school program as apprentice teachers. They assist program staff by working with the fourth- and fifth-graders individually and in



Apprentice teachers and staff members teach basketball skills to fourth- and fifth-graders in Project Lead.

small groups. The purpose of Project Lead is to enable the middle-school students to put the knowledge they gained during their two years in the Energizers program into positive action as apprentice teachers in the program.

Orientation and Training. Each May, at the end of the final program session, the fifth-graders are asked whether they would like to sign up to be apprentice teachers the following school year. In September, these (now) middle-school students are invited to attend six one-hour training sessions to re-familiarize them with the program's philosophy and to explain their roles. Program staff provide instruction in teaching and coaching procedures, conflict resolution (for implementation ideas, see Hellison, 1995), communication skills, and time management. Success-

ful completion of the program qualifies the students as apprentice teachers in the Energizers after-school program, which runs from October through May.

Meaningful Service. Before each session, one apprentice teacher is assigned the responsibility of choosing a ten-minute introductory activity and teaching it to the fourth- and fifth-graders. In addition, all apprentices are required to assist the staff in teaching the activities of the day. Usually, this involves working one-on-one with a student, monitoring a small-group skill practice, leading a small-size game, or coaching a team. These responsibilities are explained to the coaches in a short meeting before each session.

Structured Reflection. The coaches meet with the program staff to discuss how the session went and to make

plans for the following week. The program staff drive several of the coaches home, so the discussions often continue on such issues as how individuals view their progress as coaches, how they are doing in school, and how the program fits into their lives.

Recognition. The Project Lead apprentices are recognized in several ways: they receive clothing donated from Adidas, as well as University of Denver notepads, caps, and wallets; they receive publicity when the program is covered in the university newspaper; and they are treated to dinner at a neighborhood restaurant. In addition, each May they visit the University of Denver campus, where students show them the dormitories, library, computer laboratories, and recreation facilities, and treat them to lunch in the university restaurant.

Program Outcomes

Four features of the apprentice teachers' service-learning experience lead to positive outcomes: contribution, reflection, connectedness, and aspirations. Their contribution is evident in the high degree of autonomy and responsibility given to them. Reflection occurs as they collaborate on problem-solving and teaching strategies and overcome the challenges of teaching. Feelings of connectedness arise from the supportive and collegial relationship with the adult program leaders. Aspirations to enter higher education are spawned as the apprentices become familiar with the university environment (Cutforth & Puckett, 1999).

Contribution. The apprentices' contribution to the programs takes several forms. First, the value of the experience itself, rather than external motivation, is sufficient to maintain their interest and to ensure their regular attendance. For example, support from Nike and Adidas has enabled both program directors to provide warm-up suits and other perks to the apprentices; however, when they are asked about the degree to which these gestures attract them to the program, all of them say that they would participate without it. As one apprentice put it, "I keep coming here so the kids will remember me."

Second, the apprentices experience some of the joys and the frustrations of teaching as they provide instruction to the youngsters. During the early program sessions, the challenge of teaching young children is a daunting one. Several apprentices worry about meeting the challenge of engaging particularly difficult children. However, as the programs continue, the apprentice teachers begin to relish the opportunity to reach out to others. Their performance improves, and they begin to concentrate on teaching the five levels of responsibility (Hellison, 1995) that they themselves experienced in the Coaching Club and Energizers Club—as one apprentice put it, "Teaching the kids what I learned."

Third, the apprentices receive praise, further adding to their growing sense of accomplishment. In Chicago, the director of the larger youth sports camp complimented them by saying that their teaching was superior to that of many of her adult camp staff. In Denver, the school physical education teacher regularly compliments their work. Furthermore, the efforts of the apprentices are appreciated by their young pupils. One typical comment is, "They [are] nice...because they help you shoot, they show you how to do defense and stuff." Such comments show the apprentice teachers that they are mak-

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ing a valuable contribution to the young children's lives. They also illustrate the reciprocal nature of service—the lives of both parties are improved as a direct result of the experience.

Reflection. During reflection sessions, the apprentices regularly discuss their teaching. The sophistication of the conversations reflect an increasingly mature attitude toward their role. For example, as the apprentices increase in experience, they plan their own practices and become aware of the need to challenge the wide range of abilities present in the class so that children do not become bored and off-task. Simultaneously, they learn that they have to be enthusiastic and "get into the activity." As one apprentice said, "They are going to be as excited as we are about it."

Thus, apprentices use both moral reasoning (learning to think about why boredom occurs and why the young children act in certain ways) and ethical decision-making (the "should" part of modeling enthusiasm).

The apprentices' ability to listen to constructive criticism and to respond by improving their teaching is heartening to the program staff. The apprentices' actions illustrate how service-learning experiences can empower young people to succeed and to be responsible and participating members of a community (Cutforth & Puckett, 1999).

Connectedness. A sense of community emerges as the apprentice teachers identify and grapple with teaching challenges, make plans for the next session, implement their plans, and reflect on their actions. Contributing to this sense of community is the tendency of the apprentices to "hang out" with the program staff after the meetings. In Chicago, the setting is the director's office, while in Denver it is in the gym and in program staff's cars on the way home. These informal occasions are characterized by much laughter and gentle ribbing between the apprentices and program staff, as well as the sharing of food and beverages, and they illustrate how mutual respect and involvement of all participants are key to service-learning experiences.

Aspirations. Exposure to the university environment has prompted the apprentice teachers to gain an appreciation of the value of higher education and to raise their aspirations to attend college. The program staff express the expectation that the apprentices can go to college if they work hard and stay focused on their goals, and this helps them see the connection between doing well in school and living successful and personally meaningful lives. The apprentices now see college education as within their reach. As one apprentice put it: "College is hard work but can also be fun if you act responsibly."

Overall, the experience of teaching young children improves the apprentice teachers' self-confidence.

concern for others, problem-solving skills, and enthusiasm for learning (Cutforth & Puckett, 1999). Participants are becoming aware of the ways in which they can help others, and most are eager to continue the work in following years.

Incorporating Service-Learning into School Physical Education Programs

Both the Chicago and Denver programs grew out of volunteer opportunities outside the school curriculum. However, their positive outcomes may prompt some teachers to consider incorporating service-learning experiences into their classes or extracurricular activities and, by so doing, connect learning in physical education to the needs of the community. Service-learning is a non-traditional pedagogical approach that stresses affective development as much as, but not at the expense of, more traditional psychomotor and cognitive outcomes. Teachers interested in implementing this innovative approach will need to help colleagues see how service-learning might look in practice, and how it can enhance existing efforts to achieve school learning goals, and district and state performance-based standards.

Many of the following suggestions are more appropriate for middle- and high-school students, but several could be undertaken with elementary-school children. Besides expanding opportunities for learning, most of the activities provide links to other subject areas; such links are indicated in parentheses.

Teaching and coaching sports and games to younger students (School-to-Work and Career Initiatives). With the elimination of elementary physical education specialists in some districts, young children are getting short-changed in this important curricular area. Many children are also in need of recreation opportunities that extend beyond traditional school settings (Hellison & Cutforth, 1997). In a fashion similar to the Chicago and Denver apprentice-teacher programs, students could be trained in basic teaching tech-

niques and, if legal and geographic circumstances allow, provide assistance to teachers in nearby elementary schools, homeless shelters, and recreational programs.

Working with physical therapists and other health professionals (Health Education; School-to-Work and Career Initiatives). Students could shadow and assist health professionals such as physical and recreation therapists as they provide physical activity routines to hospital patients and the disabled. This could be an invaluable experience for understanding the community's fitness needs and how these needs are serviced, as well as for exploring career

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options within health fields.

Assisting with the Special Olympics (School-to-Work and Career Initiatives). Students could assist the local Special Olympics chapter with preparations for district, regional, and national competitions. They could coach individual Olympians, help officiate, and perform numerous other tasks associated with competitive events.

Planning and helping build a community exercise facility (Math; Health Education; Science). Students could survey and identify the recreational needs of their community and work to meet them through the planning and construction of, for example, a stretching area or a community walking and jogging trail.

Assisting in events that increase community awareness of the need for regular exercise (Health Education). Students could help organize a walk, run, or

bike-a-thon, as well as help raise funds for worthy causes.

Visiting senior citizens' homes (Health Education). Athletes could visit seniors on a weekly basis. They could run a fitness and recreation program for the residents, and watch and discuss televised football, basketball, and baseball games with them.

Designing a school fitness center (Health Education; Anatomy and Physiology; Business; Computer Science). Students of all ages could help design a fitness center for their school. They could research the selection of equipment and determine which items will best meet their needs. Then they could solicit funds from local businesses and form partnerships with them to learn how to manage the center. They could also help run the fitness center by assisting teachers during the school day, and working before and after school when the center could be used by the community.

Program Design and Implementation

Table 2 (modified from Witmer & Anderson, 1994) presents a framework that can help teachers envision possibilities for service-learning experiences. Service-learning can be included in the curriculum as a separate course, an assignment within a course, or an extracurricular activity, with each being a required or an optional program. Service-learning is most prominent within the curriculum when it is taught as a separate course. For example, a course entitled "Service-Learning in Physical Education: Reaching Out to the Community" could be a requirement for all students or an option chosen by those who are interested in an alternative experience.

Any or all of the foregoing service activities could serve as the foundation upon which the four core elements discussed earlier could be built. However, a less prominent, but nevertheless valuable, location for service-learning in the curriculum could be as a required or optional assignment within a physical education course.

Table 2. Service-Learning Program Design Options

<i>Relationship to the Curriculum</i>	<i>Required Program</i>	<i>Optional Program</i>	<i>Examples</i>
Separate Course	A service-learning course is required for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all students • certain students 	A service-learning course is an elective option for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all students • certain students 	Course entitled: "Service-Learning in Physical Education: Reaching Out to the Community"
Assignment Within a Course	Service-learning activities are an assignment in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all courses • selected courses 	Service-learning activities are an optional assignment in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all courses • selected courses 	Coaching assignment with Special Olympics as part of track and field unit
Extracurricular Activity	Service-learning is a graduation requirement outside the curriculum and carries: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • credit • no credit 	Service-learning is a club activity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • within a separate volunteer club • within certain clubs 	Apprentice-teacher program

For example, the events, skills, and techniques learned during a track and field unit in a physical education class could have added relevance to students when they spend an hour or two each week preparing Special Olympians for an upcoming competitive meet.

Service-learning is not central to the curriculum when it is offered as a required or optional extracurricular activity. However, as we have seen in this article, an apprentice teacher program can be a powerful vehicle for achieving important affective outcomes. Each possibility possesses advantages and disadvantages that should be considered in light of a school's conditions, resources, and program goals.

Required Versus Optional Programs. Requiring service-learning as part of a physical education program results in more students benefitting. Because there is a danger that some will enter the service activity with apathy or resentment, however, the result may be

a substandard service provided to the community. Optional programs are more manageable, and though fewer students will participate, they are likely to enter with a higher degree of motivation and may learn more from their experiences. Optional programs are particularly appropriate when, due to finances and personnel resources, a physical education department cannot support a mandatory program.

Separate Courses or Assignments Within a Course. A physical education department could offer a separate course devoted entirely to service-learning or incorporate a service-learning experience into preexisting course content. When students take a service-learning class as a separate course there are several advantages. First, it is very visible both for the students (who can easily identify the goals of the course) and the public (who can see service-learning going on). Second, a course gives students time to develop the skills they will need at the service site, and to discuss their experiences with a

knowledgeable adult. Third, if schedules allow, the service activity might occur during the school day. When students participate in a service-learning activity within a class and it becomes a graded assignment for the class, the teacher can tailor projects appropriate to the goals of the course. The service activity could also be fulfilled outside class time, just like any other homework assignment.

Extracurricular Possibilities. Extracurricular service-learning projects take place outside the school day—either before or after school, or on weekends or vacations. These projects could be a graduation requirement with or without course credit or another club activity available to students. There are many options: group activities in which an entire club is transported somewhere to perform a service, individual service programs, projects to solve a community problem, and advocacy projects. Extracurricular projects are particularly appropriate for students who are unable to fit a service-learning class into their schedules during the day, but might well be able to do service-learning after school (as they do in Denver), or during the summer (as they do in Chicago).

Assessment of Student Performance. Assessment methods for service-learning experiences include students' journal writing, self-assessment, and research papers, as well as observations during placement site visits by the teacher, and evaluation of performance by placement site supervisors. For example, placement site supervisors can assess student performance by responding to a questionnaire that asks them to rate the student's performance (using a four-point scale ranging from excellent to less than satisfactory) on attendance, punctuality, attitude (e.g., accepts suggestions, shows initiative, exercises good judgment), and execution (e.g., accepts responsibility, progressively requires less supervision, follows directions, completes assigned tasks). Furthermore, students may complete a culminating project such as an in-depth paper describing the

placement organization, its clients and staff, its relationship to an important societal function, and so on. This project—along with the evaluations from the site, the students' journal entries, motivation level, ability to reflect on and improve their performance, and other factors—could determine their course grade.

Suggestions for Getting Started. In thinking about the viability of these program options for their schools, physical educators need to identify community partners who would be prepared to serve as student placement sites and who would work closely with them in developing the curriculum (including the program objectives, learning materials and experiences, assignments, and evaluation tools) and in supervising the students. Once community contacts have been made, perhaps the best initial approach is to make service-learning an extracurricular project. A more ambitious entry point would be to offer service-learning as an optional, within-course experience. One teacher who is truly committed to the concept could simply add a service component to other course assignments. When students elect to participate, they will be highly motivated and their efforts will achieve better results for the community. As the program grows, so will a student tradition of service-learning in physical education, and the idea of a separate course may emerge on its own without a top-down mandate. This approach starts small, but with opportunities for teachers to share experiences and ideas, interest can be cultivated among more faculty.

Conclusion

With careful planning, the infusion of service-learning experiences into schools can reinforce and validate the lessons learned in physical education classes. Simultaneously, the students' activity becomes an asset to the community, the range of environments for physical education is broadened, and education becomes a preparation for citizenship as well as scholarship.

However, modifying school physical education programs to include some form of service-learning is a challenging task. The most effective service-learning projects are developed by creative individual teachers at the school site. Teachers who are most involved in service projects are those who feel personally responsible for tackling important issues and who derive enormous satisfaction from seeing youngsters become motivated. If physical educators grasp the opportunity to initiate service-learning projects, many more youngsters will learn important skills and realize that they have the power to make important contributions to community needs.

During a time when physical education's ability to provide meaningful learning experiences for students is being questioned (Locke, 1992; Pennington & Krouscas, 1999; Stroot, 1994), service-learning projects have the potential to provide many more students with consequential activities. Students who learn by doing and giving are less likely to ask the questions, "Why are we doing this?" and "Do we have to do this?" Instead, they will be more likely to thrive in positions of responsibility that they rarely see within the confines of the school setting, as they participate in activities that relate to real world experiences and help others. Such thoughtful, active citizenship, in which young people work to build a better world and in which schools become increasingly connected to and engaged in the life of the community that surrounds them, is likely to create new roles for teachers and students in the 21st century.

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