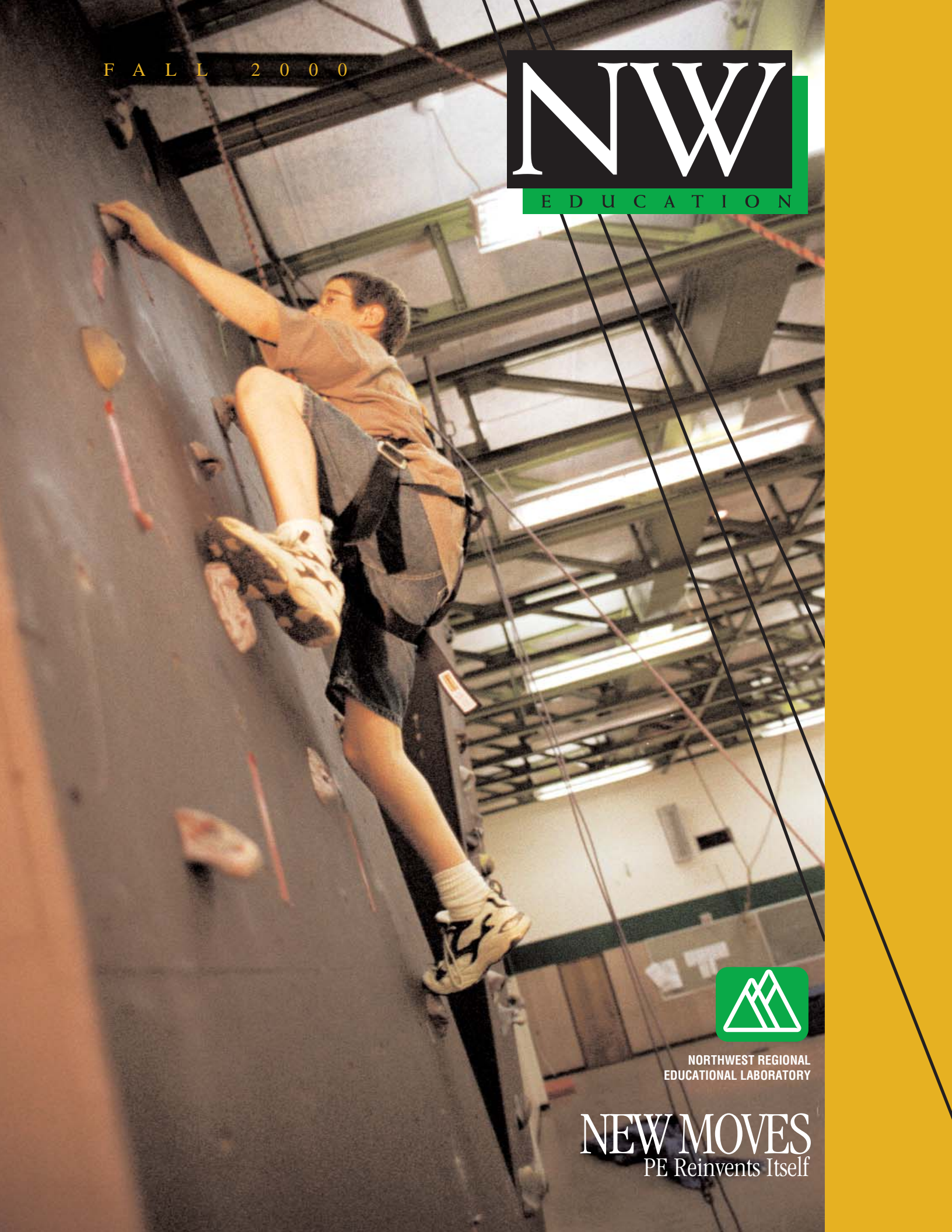


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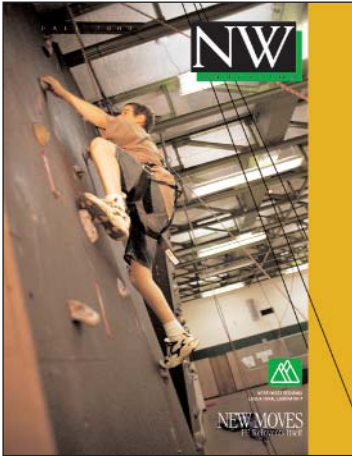
NW

EDUCATION



NORTHWEST REGIONAL
EDUCATIONAL LABORATORY

NEW MOVES
PE Reinvents Itself



ON THE COVER:

A climbing wall at Mountain View Middle School in Beaverton, Oregon, challenges students on both the physical and cognitive levels.

PHOTOGRAPH BY RICK RAPPAPORT

OPENING SPREAD:

Students at Seattle's Roosevelt High get pumped for the day in a morning class that includes cardio kick-boxing.

PHOTOGRAPH BY SUZIE BOSS

New Moves

PE Reinvents Itself

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Mention dodge ball and most people grimace or groan.

In the Northwest suburb where I grew up, we called it “prison ball.” Different name, same object: to smack your opponent mercilessly with a hard rubber ball. Before each PE class, I would say a silent prayer: “Anything but prison ball, please, please, anything but that.” When my prayer went unanswered and the team captains started choosing up sides, my prayer changed as my insides churned: “Please don’t let me be the last one chosen. And don’t let it hurt too much.”

Kids who got hit (the slow, the fat, the unathletic, the apathetic) had to go to “prison” and stand around while more kids got walloped. Always a scrawny child, I didn’t have a chance against the brawny players. I would cringe and cower behind some other hapless student when the powerful throwers were winding up, murder in their eyes.

Compared to this, dissecting pig fetuses was kind of fun.

It’s been 30 years since I took my last painful *whap!* in that dreaded game. Yet I can still feel the sting—to my skin and to my pride. Just about everyone else, it seems, despised dodge ball, too. A few months ago when I proposed doing a magazine on PE, my colleagues all made sour faces. “Yuck, I hated PE!” was a pretty standard response.

Dodge ball has not died. But there are signs that the mainstay of the old phys ed is ailing. Sure, you can still find this relic in gyms from Nome to Yellowstone. But lots of schools are replacing the pummeling with activities that kids of the 1950s and 1960s never imagined. Students are scaling rock walls. Juggling colorful scarves. Balancing—or teetering—on unicycles. In Salmon, Idaho, they’re skiing down an artificial mountain behind the school. In Corvallis, Oregon, they’re toning up on rowing machines and treadmills. In Seattle, they’re playing games of cooperation instead of competition—focused on beating their personal best instead of creaming their peers. Who could have predicted back in dodge ball’s glory days that the new millennium would bring Frisbee golf, inline skating, and interpretive dance to the schoolhouse?

PE’s renaissance, however, is threatened by money woes and back-to-basics trends across the nation. Lumped in with other so-called “frills” such as art and music, PE is a handy target when the public calls for higher academic standards and lower costs. Ironically, trimming this layer of “fat” out of school programs can add flab to young bodies. The impact of inactivity on human health is well-known. Around the Northwest, phys ed teachers and health advocates are fighting hard to keep PE—the “new” PE with its emphasis on lifelong fitness—in the curriculum. To get an inside look at some of the Northwest’s best efforts to save PE—and to leave dodge ball in the past with white lipstick and big hairdos—read on.

—Lee Sherman
shermanl@nwrel.org

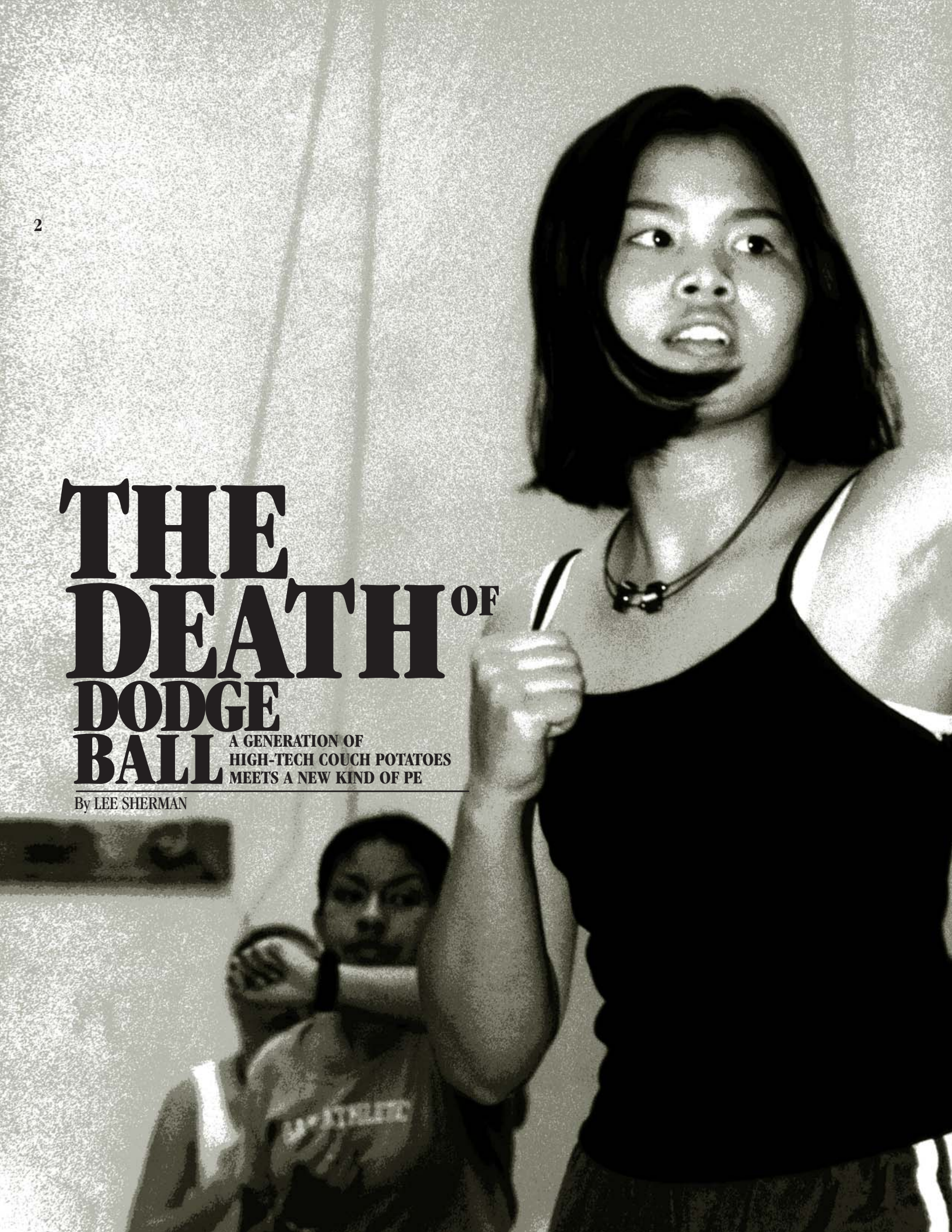
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THE DEATH OF DODGE BALL

A GENERATION OF HIGH-TECH COUCH POTATOES MEETS A NEW KIND OF PE

By LEE SHERMAN





A sixth-grade boy zaps digital monsters left and right without breaking a sweat. But climbing a flight of stairs makes him huff and puff. A 15-year-old girl tapes every episode of *Friends* and watches them over and over. One lap around the track, however, leaves her gasping. A mom drives her kids to Blockbuster to rent *Air Bud*. Across the street, the neighborhood hoop casts a lonely shadow in the afternoon sun. There's not a basketball—or a player—in sight.

Fingertip technologies have largely relegated swimming holes, tree forts, and sandlot ball games to history. In the vernacular of Generation Y, “surfing” has nothing to do with hanging 10 on a fiberglass board. Many of today's kids are deft with a computer mouse, and they smoke with a remote. But as they increasingly play and learn in the blue glow of cathode-ray tubes, their health and fitness have declined alarmingly. While their fingers may be nimble, their arms and abs are too often fat and flabby. For a lot of kids, their endurance for lolling on the living room sofa beats their stamina in the gym by miles. In the couch potato Olympics, today's kids would bring home the gold.

Schools must step up to fill the fitness void, health experts nationwide insist. Government agencies and advocacy groups such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and the American Heart Association are clamoring for daily physical education at every grade level. The surgeon general recommends that communities provide “quality, preferably daily, K-12 physical education.” Even the president recently called for a “renewal of physical education in our schools.”

But other factors are conspiring to undermine these recommendations. Just when kids are logging more seat time at home, school reformers and budget cutters are lopping nonacademic classes off the school roster. The convergence of dwindling dollars and higher standards has squeezed out PE in many states and districts. Together, these trends have created what some are call-

NORTHWEST STATES AT A GLANCE

Here's an updated look at PE in the Northwest as first reported in *Shape of the Nation*, a survey on state physical education requirements conducted in 1997 by the National Association for Sport and Physical Education:

ALASKA—

Who Teaches PE: At the elementary level most large schools employ physical education specialists, which means that most elementary students in the state receive some PE instruction each week from a certified teacher with a PE endorsement. Many of the smallest schools, however, do not employ specialists. The same is true of the middle and high school levels, where the larger schools have one or more certified teachers with PE endorsements, while the smaller schools do not. Teachers must complete six semester hours every five years to meet continuing education requirements, but there is no requirement that these credits be from their area of endorsement/specialization.

Student Requirements: The state has no requirements for elementary PE. At all levels, time allocation for PE is a district decision. Most districts give grades and include them in the GPA. One credit of health/PE is needed for graduation. Substitutions are accepted, but this is a local decision.

IDAHO—The state has developed a comprehensive PE curriculum.

Who Teaches PE: At the elementary and middle levels PE is taught by certified health and PE specialists. In high school PE is taught by certified PE specialists. Six hours every five years are required to meet continuing education certification.

Student Requirements: PE is mandated by the state in grades 1-8. Credit is given for courses taken as electives in high school, and grades are included in the GPA. One credit of health is required for graduation. No substitutions are allowed.

MONTANA—The state is moving toward a more health-oriented approach, termed Health Enhancement.

Who Teaches PE: PE is built into this component. At the elementary, middle, or junior high levels, classroom teachers or certified health and PE teachers teach PE. At the high school level, only certified PE specialists teach PE. Teachers must earn six university credits or 60 in-service credits every five years to meet continuing education requirements.

Student Requirements:

PE is mandated through Health Enhancement at the state level. Credit is given; seventh- and eighth-graders receive one-half unit each year, and ninth through 12th receive one unit over a two-year period. At the middle and high school levels, 112 minutes are required; at the elementary level, there is no time requirement. Grades are given, and are included in the GPA at most districts. One unit is required for graduation. No substitutions are allowed.

OREGON—All programs K-12 must provide instruction in physical education through common curriculum goals. The 1999 Oregon Legislature passed a bill to include physical education in the Certificate of Initial Mastery standards. The standards and benchmarks currently being developed will be implemented in the 2001-2002 school year.

Who Teaches PE: At the elementary level, more than half of the schools have physical education specialists. Classroom teachers are responsible for teaching PE in other schools. In middle schools, classroom teachers and certified health and PE specialists teach PE. In high schools, certified health and PE specialists are required to teach PE. However, there are rare instances when schools “misassign” other teachers to teach physical education.

Student Requirements:

PE is mandated by the state. In elementary and middle school PE is taught each year, with no time requirements. In high school, one year is required. Credit is given, and grades are included in the GPA. One credit is required for graduation. To waive any part of the graduation credit, a district must make a request of the State Board of Education.

WASHINGTON—As part of statewide educational reform efforts, health and PE are considered essential parts of learning.

Who Teaches PE: At the elementary level, PE is taught by classroom teachers. At the middle and high school levels, certified PE specialists and classroom teachers teach PE. Teachers (except those with master's degrees) must complete 15 hours of continuing education credits a year.

Student Requirements:

PE is mandated by the state. Grades 1-8 average 20 minutes a day. High schools require two years of PE. Credits are given, and most districts include them in the GPA. Two credits are required for graduation. Substitutions are allowed.

ing a crisis in children's health.

"Recent studies have shown that the vast majority of America's children and youth are not physically fit," the U.S. Department of Defense notes on its Web site. "And more tragically, they are not getting enough physical education to understand how and why to keep themselves fit for life."

To address this growing concern for the long-term health and well-being of Americans, PE is undergoing a radical transformation. In schools where PE has managed to hang on, enlightened teachers are introducing kids to activities they can take with them through the years. Instead of dodging a hard rubber ball, kids are mastering cool moves on inline skates and cross-country skis. Instead of doing a million jumping jacks, they're learning to maneuver mountain bikes, balance unicycles, bounce on pogo sticks, juggle plastic bowling pins—even manipulate wheelchairs with ease. They're paddling white-water kayaks. Dancing to Latin music. Fishing for rainbow trout. Climbing vertical rock walls. Doing stuff you might see on the cover of *Outdoor* magazine or in the pages of Sunday's lifestyle section.

"We need to find ways to attract students to the joys of movement," Professor R. Scott Kretchmar of Pennsylvania State University recently told *Education Week*. "We need to make it as powerful as the draw of computers and television."

OBESITY CRISIS

Advocacy for physical education is hardly new. Way back in the mid-1700s, no less an American icon than Benjamin Franklin was calling for schools to "have provisions for running, leaping, wrestling, and swimming," writer Jack McCallum reports in *Sports Illustrated*. But it wasn't until the next century that officials began linking physical education with public health concerns. And yet another hundred years rolled by before physical education became a national priority. That's when President Eisenhower created what is now

called the Presidential Council on Physical Fitness and Sports in response to a study showing poor muscle strength among U.S. students.

But, like so many initiatives in education, the PE pendulum has swung back again. Despite continuing calls from Congress and others for keeping and/or beefing up PE, physical education programs have dwindled or died over the last 10 to 15 years. Today, not one state mandates daily PE. Only one-fourth of high school students take gym every day, according to the landmark 1996 report of the Office of the Surgeon General, *Physical Activity and Health*. Between 1991 and 1995 alone, the number of kids taking daily PE plunged steeply, from 42 percent to 25 percent. Fewer than half of U.S. middle schools and just over a quarter of high schools require at least three years of PE. In fact, most high school students take only one year of PE between ninth and 12th grades, the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) found in a 1997 state-by-state survey.

"I think we're paying a tremendous price for the rollback in physical education," Surgeon General David Satcher told the convention of the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance in March. "One of the greatest contributions you can make to an adult's health is to get them started as a child on a lifetime of physical activity."

There is a loud lament among journalists, policymakers, health advocates, and physical educators over what Professor Charles Kuntzleman of the University of Michigan calls the "substantial erosion" of PE programs. McCallum drives the point home in his April *Sports Illustrated* article, "Gym Class Struggle."

"The saddest thing about the decline in physical education," he writes, "is that we now know so much about the benefits of physical fitness and the perils of a sedentary lifestyle. Principals and school-board members who themselves may be in fitness programs are often the ones who slash budgets and resources for

6 gym class; they do so even as they are inundated with reports about the obesity crisis in our Twinkie-eating, TV-watching, video-game-playing younger generation.”

Among the troubling findings reported by the surgeon general, the CDC, the journal *Pediatrics*, and other sources are these:

- As many as 25 percent of children and adolescents are overweight or obese
- The percentage of youths who are overweight has more than doubled in the past 30 years
- Nearly 40 percent of kids ages five to eight have conditions that significantly increase their risk of early heart disease
- Some 70 percent of girls and 40 percent of boys ages six to 12 do not have enough muscle strength to do more than one pull-up

Using facts like these to get people's attention, health advocates are fighting to keep or reinstate physical education in places where PE dollars are drying up and the three Rs are crowding out other subjects. There's even a Web site where teachers can get ideas for defending PE in their own schools and communities (<http://pecentral.org/websites/defendingpe.html>).

In Oregon, advocates recently won a big victory when they convinced lawmakers to include physical education in the newly developed statewide standards for a Certificate of Initial Mastery (for details, see “Saving PE: The Oregon Story” on Page 36). In Washington, D.C., Alaska's Senator Ted Stevens has won wide co-sponsorship for his Physical Education for Progress (PEP) bill. Currently making its way through the labyrinth of congressional decisionmaking, the bill would authorize grants of \$400 million over five years to schools and districts for equipment, curriculum development, and teacher training in PE. “It's not just to keep the next generation from becoming obese,” Stevens told Andrew Mollison, a reporter for Cox Newspapers, in April. “The kids who are causing all this violence and bullying are not getting the organized physical activity where you let off steam

ON YOUR MARK, GET SET, GO!

Preparing to Teach PE

By Barbara Cusimano

Across the nation, schools of education are fighting to survive. Education as a discipline is just not as highly valued as programs in engineering or computer technology, for instance. And since teaching is not a highly respected profession in the community, schools of education have had to fight to promote their programs within their own universities and at the same time try to draw in prospective students.

Physical educators are looking at a double whammy: Not only is *education* fighting for respect, so is *physical* education. Here in Oregon, physical education teachers have watched their programs shrink or disappear under the pressure of falling budgets and rising academic standards driven by education reform. The standards movement coincided with the 1990 passage of Measure 5, a citizen's initiative limiting property taxes. These two events dovetailed to hurt Oregon schools. The impact was felt in OSU's physical education teacher preparation program, as well. Some of our best mentor teachers—those who work with aspiring teachers in the field—lost their jobs. One of our mentor teachers received an award for out-

standing teaching one week and a pink slip the next. Even though she moved to another district further away from the university, we continue to send our students to her because she models exactly what we're trying to teach.

But there is a basis for optimism. About the time Measure 5 passed, the university moved to a fifth-year professional teacher preparation model. Prior to that we had an undergraduate program in which students earned a bachelor's degree while earning certification to teach K-12. Under the new program, students first complete their bachelor's degree and then apply to a one-year, graduate-level program. At the end of the year, they are certified to teach across all levels—from pre-primary through high school—and they hold a master's degree in teaching.

It's quite different from other education programs around the country. Most teacher preparation programs have students complete their coursework *before* placing them in a full-time student teaching experience. For our students, coursework and practice are braided together. They learn about teaching in their on-campus

methodology classes each afternoon and practice those new skills in their student-teaching classrooms each morning. This allows them to fully integrate theory with actual practice. Our program also puts student teachers into three school settings (elementary, middle, and high school) across the entire school year from September to June, beginning with the opening of school. Another unique aspect of our program includes the use of a cohort model within physical education content. Students enter the program together and progress through courses and experiences together. They provide invaluable support to one another as they develop new skills.

About 20 students typically apply to our program each year. We admit anywhere from half to three-fourths of those applicants. Our acceptance numbers are based on how well we feel we can mentor the students and on the number of quality mentor teachers available in the area surrounding Corvallis.

We have been very successful with our fifth-year program. Ninety to 95 percent of our graduates are hired each year, mostly in Oregon but also in Idaho, Washington, Arizona, Nevada, Colorado, and California. We get calls from administrators every year, especially from elementary schools, asking for applicants. We often have no one to send to them.

Because ours is a graduate program, we have attracted some older students who have been out in the world. Although they've had successful careers doing something else, they realize they missed the boat. They chose to go into business or some other high-paying field, but their dream has always been to work with kids in a physical education setting.

I think one strength of our program—and the reason folks want to hire our graduates—is that our courses are content-based. Of the 57 required credits, 54 are within physical education. Students learn the usual things about planning lessons, teaching skills, and assessment—but all within the context of physical education. They immediately take what they learn and transfer it to the classroom, rather than having to make those connections themselves from more generic content.

I would like to be optimistic about the future. I'm hopeful that as we spread the word and start educating folks about the new PE standards and benchmarks for the state, and the importance of developing a physically active lifestyle at a young age, there will be a turnaround in physical education programs in Oregon and beyond.

Barbara Cusimano is an Associate Professor of Exercise and Sport Science at Oregon State University. This year she received the Excellence in Teaching award from the College of Health and Human Performance. Professor Cusimano is widely published in her specialty, effective methods for teaching PE.



and learn about things like waiting your turn and not winning all the time.”

HALL OF SHAME

One hurdle advocates need to leap is the widespread dislike—even hatred—of PE among parents, policymakers, and the general public. Many baby boomers vividly remember the hurt and mortification they endured in punishing games like dodge ball and team sports that pitted athletic kids against clumsy ones, aggressive against timid. And then there was the cruel practice of choosing up sides. Countless children were deeply wounded when team captains passed them over again and again in favor of their more agile peers. “For most of us, the ghost of PE past looms large,” writes A. Virshup in *Women’s Sports and Fitness*. “Ask any group of 10 adults for their memories of gym class and seven of them will launch into litanies of frustration and humiliation: the groans when they came up at bat, the failure to do a single pull-up on the annual fitness test, the gruesome uniforms.” In her 1999 article, “Why Janey Can’t Run,” Virshup concludes that “PE seemed less a class than some tribal ritual for jocks to enjoy and the rest of us to endure.”

McCallum echoes this view when he writes: “We remember gym class so vividly because it brought out emotions and existential crises that are central to our development. Fear. Intimidation. Humiliation. Nausea. Abject failure. Angst. Neurosis. All that—and showers, too!”

Several years ago, a physical educator in Vinton, Iowa, championed dignity for kids when she convinced the school board to build individual dressing and shower stalls in the locker rooms. “When you ask kids whose bodies are changing to undress and shower in front of everyone, you’ve destroyed their self-esteem before they even get into the gym,” the teacher, Beth Kirkpatrick, argued.

There are still plenty of teachers who adhere to the “old” PE. But defenders of the “new” PE are on the offensive. *The Journal of Physical Education, Recre-*

8 *ation, & Dance* ran a three-part series in the 1990s called “The Physical Education Hall of Shame” in which author and educator Neil Williams lambastes the worst practices. Not surprisingly, the Number 1 “charter inductee” is dodge ball, which the author calls “a litigation waiting to happen.” In this brutal contest of the mighty against the meek, “at most, about half of the students really play—the rest hide in the farthest reaches of the gym.” Another top pick is Duck, Duck, Goose, a circle chase game for primary kids in which “at least half of the students in the class will never be picked, friends usually pick friends, and generally, about five students do all of the playing,” he reports. The author, a PE professor at Eastern Connecticut State University, is also scathing about elimination games like musical chairs. Such games, he argues, are “self-defeating, because the students who are in the greatest need of skill development are immediately banished, embarrassed, and punished, and then given no opportunity to improve.”

For inclusion in the Hall of Shame, activities or games meet some or all of the following criteria:

- Absence of the purported objectives of the activity or game
- Potential to embarrass a student in front of the rest of the class
- Focus on eliminating students from participation
- Overemphasis on and concern about the students having “fun”
- Lack of emphasis on teaching motor skills and lifetime physical fitness skills
- Extremely low participation time factors
- Organizing into large groups where getting a “turn” is based on luck or individual aggressiveness or competitiveness
- Extremely high likelihood for danger, injury, and harm

The old PE emphasized competition, while the new PE stresses cooperation. The old PE taught mostly team sports, which have limited application after formal

schooling. The new PE focuses on pursuits that students can use in the real world for fun and fitness. The old PE was geared for the physically gifted. The new PE is designed to let every kid succeed. Describing the gym-class renaissance in the *New York Times* several years ago, Melinda Henneberger describes “a growing curriculum overhaul in physical education, replacing competitive sports with activities that prepare children for lifetime health rather than for varsity teams. The goal,” she writes, “is not so much to learn to score a basket as to develop body awareness, hand and motion skills, and the confidence to try new activities.”

SIGNPOSTS FOR TEACHERS

To guide schools in designing high-quality physical education programs, NASPE recently developed a set of national standards to serve as “signposts” for teachers, in the words of Professor Terry Wood of Oregon State University. “The standards are not a national curriculum, but a set of criteria that provide a profile of the physically educated student at each grade level,” says Wood, who served on the task force that developed the standards. “Each state or district must determine the appropriate curriculum to meet the standards, which serves as a planning document for states and districts.”

The most surprising thing about the seven standards is the heavy emphasis on attitudes, social interaction, and thinking skills. PE teacher Tom Heath of Jefferson Elementary School in Corvallis, Oregon, explains that the standards fall into three broad areas: movement skills, lifetime fitness, and interpersonal skills, including self-management and respect for diversity. The National Standards for Physical Education indicate that a physically educated student:

1. Demonstrates competency in many movement forms and proficiency in a few movement forms
2. Applies movement concepts and principles to the learning and development of motor skills
3. Exhibits a physically active lifestyle

A QUALITY CHECKLIST

Carl Gabbard, Professor in the Department of Health and Kinesiology at Texas A&M University and past President of the National Association for Sport and Physical Education, lays out the following essentials of a quality PE program in an article titled “Physical Education: Should It Be in the Core Curriculum?” that ran in *Principal* magazine in January. A quality program:

- Is an integral part of, and consistent with, the total educational philosophy of the school
- Serves the diverse needs of all students
- Is based on an established written curriculum
- Is of sufficient breadth and depth to be challenging to all
- Is developmentally based and progressively sequenced from year to year
- Is regularly updated and revised
- Has well-defined objectives for progressive learning
- Is built around the development of efficient, effective, and expressive movement abilities
- Provides opportunities for the development of fundamental movement patterns and specific movement skills
- Provides experiences to enhance the development of physical fitness
- Provides opportunities for students to develop

skills in games/sports, dance/rhythm, and gymnastics

- Provides opportunities for students to enhance their knowledge and understanding of human movement in a variety of physical activities
- Promotes safe behaviors by incorporating proper safety practices into physical education lessons
- Fosters creativity
- Promotes self-understanding and acceptance
- Promotes positive social interaction and self-control
- Recognizes and provides for learning enjoyment and fun
- Helps each student learn how to manage risk-taking and other challenges

4. Achieves and maintains a health-enhancing level of physical fitness

5. Demonstrates responsible personal and social behavior in physical activity settings

6. Demonstrates understanding and respect for differences among people in physical activity settings

7. Understands that physical activity provides opportunities for enjoyment, challenge, self-expression, and social interaction

In its 1995 publication *Moving into the Future: National Standards for Physical Education*, the NASPE task force provides sample benchmarks at every other grade level, K-12. For example, to meet Goal 2 (“applies movement concepts and principles to the learning and development of motor skills”) a kindergartner should be able to walk, run, hop, and skip in forward and sideways directions, and to change direction quickly in response to a signal. She should identify and use a variety of relationships with objects (such as over, under, behind, alongside, and through). She should begin to use the “leg flexion” technique to soften the landing in jumping.

By sixth grade, a student should be able to detect, analyze, and correct errors in personal movement patterns. He ought to identify proper warm-up and cool-down techniques and the reasons for using them. And he should know basic practice and conditioning principles that enhance performance.

To meet the standard, a 12th-grader should, for example, be able to participate in a tennis match using all of the basic skills, rules, and strategies with some consistency. She should be able to pass the Red Cross intermediate swimming requirements; get nine out of 10 arrows on the target from 40 feet; navigate a kayak skillfully and safely through white water; use advanced offensive and defensive shots successfully in a racquetball game against an opponent of similar skill; and/or demonstrate the skills for a black belt in karate.

The first press run of 2,000 standards documents was snatched up quickly, Wood reports. But, he says, trans-

lating the words into practice is the critical next step. It could in fact spell life or death for physical education.

“There is little doubt that physical educators, pressured by the national reform movement with its emphasis on content standards, alternative assessment strategies, and higher-order learning objectives, were waiting for some direction,” Wood asserts in a 1996 article in *Teaching Elementary Physical Education*. “Now that the dust has settled after the initial rush to obtain the standards, teachers, schools, and districts are faced with a fundamental challenge not addressed in the document—implementation. How this challenge is met will determine the long-term success of the standards, and to some degree the future of PE in the public school system.”

Top-notch teachers, like Meg Greiner in the rural Oregon town of Independence, consciously build their programs around the concepts contained in the standards.

“Good teachers naturally do, because the standards are everything that physical education should be about,” says Greiner, who teaches at Independence Elementary. “It’s about diversity. It’s about movement concepts and manipulative skills. It’s about dance, rhythm, and coordination. It’s about fitness for a lifetime. It’s about self-management and social behavior. My classes are full of all those things.”

Every morning before the first bell, you can find Greiner alone in the empty gym. Wearing her “PE Rulz” T-shirt and a colorful pair of Hawaiian shorts, the award-winning teacher is thumbing through an eclectic collection of CDs—everything from polkas to Irish dance tunes to mariachi, ragtime, country, and zydeco (Cajun music from southern Louisiana, featuring guitar, washboard, and accordion). Not least are the hot pop stars like Celine Dion, Backstreet Boys, and Sheryl Crow. “That’s how you get the kids hooked in,” Greiner explains.

At 8:30 sharp she flings open the gym door and stands back. A herd of 350 gyrating grade-schoolers—mixed with a few parents and teachers—gallops in for Team Time, the all-school exercise class that kicks off

each and every school day. Chucking their backpacks on the perimeter, they quickly find spots on the floor while Greiner climbs onto a table up front. “All together now!” She leads them through a series of warm-ups and intricate dance moves. “Heel, heel, toe, toe, front, side, back, side!” she calls. Every foot is on cue, every eye is on Greiner, all children are quietly concentrating—except when they’re singing along with the music. “Lookin’ good! Don’t forget that hop at the end!”

No couch potatoes here. ■

snaps

SHOTS

FROM BOCCI TO BUKA BALL

ROOSEVELT HIGH SCHOOL

SEATTLE, Washington—

Although golf occupies a special place in his heart, Darrell Montzingo has never met a sport he didn't like. Now head of the department of physical education at Seattle's inner-city Roosevelt High School, Montzingo brings to his job a playful spirit and a fascination with games of all kinds. "My goal," he says, "is to introduce a new activity every year." He particularly enjoys bringing in games from other cultures. "I was in Spain last year, where everywhere you see old men playing bocci ball [similar to lawn bowling] in the dirt. Next year we'll start that. Buka Ball is an Asian game we use, too. It's like a cross between volleyball and Hacky Sack [footbag]. You use your feet, knees, or hands to kick a bamboo ball over a net, using volleyball rules. We like it because it equalizes males and females."

When Montzingo was hired at Roosevelt in 1992, the physical education program—consisting of team and individual sports and weight training—looked pretty traditional. Over the last eight years, however, the department has moved away from that approach to offer more choice and to focus more on lifetime leisure activities, including walking and individual sports.

To graduate at Roosevelt, students must take four PE classes for two full credits from a smorgasbord of choices. Tai chi has been available in the past; yoga, aerobics (including walking aerobics), handball, archery, and swimming are today. Lacrosse, more frequently played in private

than public schools, has been offered since Montzingo observed a game of it. Students can choose inline skating or the circus arts of juggling and unicycling. Next fall, the department will initiate a body-toning class, which the faculty hopes will draw more women into weight training. New in February, a rock-climbing wall is a popular addition.

Individual sports offered include croquet, horseshoes, and what Montzingo calls create-a-sport. "I try to get kids to make up games," he says. For this assignment, students typically combine two games and change the rules accordingly. Students have tried blending basketball with soccer or basketball with golf. Or they've dreamed up new variations of the old classic, capture the flag.

And, true to his real passion, Montzingo offers golf as well as coaching the school's golf teams. What he calls it his "inner-city golf project" is sponsored by the Professional Golfers Association. "Hey, you can play golf all the way until you're a senior citizen," Montzingo notes. "I tell the students that a lot of them will find themselves on a golf course for business reasons or with their families at some point in their future. It's a great life leisure sport."

Traditional team sports have not entirely gone by the wayside. But the old model of kids playing one sport all semester is no longer to be found. Instead, interested students rotate in the winter through two weeks each of Buka Ball, volleyball, basketball, and

hockey. In warmer weather, students go outside to experience ultimate Frisbee, soccer, lacrosse, flag football, and softball.

The department at Roosevelt at times uses heart monitors in fitness classes, so students can see for themselves what it takes to reach their desired heart rate. "Less active kids reach their target just walking, while others have to work much harder," Montzingo says. "The monitors are great; kids can check it for themselves, which empowers them and frees up the instructor."

Parents have given the program thumbs up. Says Montzingo: "They say, 'We never had the opportunity to do that!' In fact, parents are often more articulate in appreciating the program than the kids are. Still, we have a lot of kids who come in from ninth grade saying, 'I hate PE. I'll be the worst again, and no one will pick me for their team.' Well, here that won't happen. Those kids take alternative sports and find out that they can be as good and as active as the others."

In all their eclectic offerings, one thing is clear: Roosevelt PE instructors are steering students toward forms of exercise they can enjoy for years to come. "I want them to develop routines they will follow for the rest of their lives," Montzingo says. ■

—"Snapshots" by Maya Muir

LIFETIME FITNESS

DIMOND HIGH SCHOOL

ANCHORAGE, Alaska—When students take soccer from PE teacher Dale Kephart at Anchorage’s Dimond High School, they don’t have the usual all-or-nothing experience of playing in a game or, alternatively, sitting on the sidelines for the whole class period. Instead Kephart, who has been teaching one form of fitness or another for 33 years, keeps all the kids busy all the time. They start with warm-ups then move into a series of exercises—five minutes each of push-ups or crunches, dribbling, playing two-on-two, and mini-games where everyone is active—before the cool-down period. “It’s just not enough anymore to throw the ball out there and have them play,” says Kephart. “You get some cardiorespiratory exercise from that, but the other components of fitness aren’t addressed. We really try to build for a lifetime of fitness here, in all our activities.”

Kephart is a nationally recognized pioneer of this approach, and has been actively involved in promoting it since the early 1990s throughout Alaska in her work on the Anchorage School District Curriculum committee. Currently in that state, the most explicit introduction kids get to this approach is a Lifetime Personal Fitness Course, one of three semester-long PE courses required for graduation. Kephart identifies six components for all-around fitness: (1) cardiorespiratory fitness, or aerobics; (2) body composition; (3) muscular endurance (from repeated motions); (4) muscular strength

(from weight lifting); (5) flexibility; and (6) stress management, taught by progressive muscle relaxation techniques and visualization.

“We also teach about nutrition, substance abuse, posture, and miscellaneous subjects like the effect of hot and cold weather on exercise, because here in Alaska that makes a big difference,” Kephart says. “And we talk about how exercise helps prevent cardiovascular disease. We weave these concepts throughout so that classes actually teach wellness.”

But, she’s quick to add, the focus is still on activity. Despite all the concepts Kephart covers, she doesn’t like her students sitting still in class for more than five minutes. “Sometimes I have them grab their notebooks and work for up to five minutes on a worksheet,” Kephart says. “If they are doing circuits of activities around the gym, they pause before each one to work together figuring out questions on the sheet about that area. Or,” she continues, “sometimes I deliver the concepts during cool-down periods. At the end of the week, I ask them to work in groups to remember the points covered. Every second week, I test them.”

In developing curriculum for the district and her high school, Kephart and her colleagues relied on guidance from the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE), a member of the Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance. NASPE recognizes individual teachers

for excellence in the field. In 1998, Kephart won the Alaska NASPE award for High School Physical Education Teacher of the Year, followed by the Northwest district award, and finally the national award.

The video Kephart submitted to the award committee features her Lifetime Personal Fitness class. In it, she has students begin with a warm-up of some basic dance steps, followed by a stretch. Then students divide into groups and move through a series of stations focusing on the difference between moderately intensive activity (such as aerobic dance) and high-intensity activity (such as jumping). At each station, students do a different activity: aerobic steps, hamstring curls, jump rope, modern dance movements, jumping over small plastic hurdles, and a shuttle run in which a basketball is passed back and forth. “They learned how their heart rate varied during different kinds of activity,” says Kephart. “I finished with cool-down exercises, during which I reviewed the concepts.”

Kephart also stresses that she teaches leadership and critical thinking by having students teach each other what they have learned, and devise exercises to illustrate concepts for the entire class. Usually these are done cooperatively.

“I’ve always taught PE with fitness in mind,” says Kephart, “but now we have more information about how to do that, and we understand why it’s important. Our goal is to have all kids be as active as possible and to understand why that matters.” ■

COWBOY JITTERBUG

BIG SKY HIGH SCHOOL

MISSOULA, Montana—

Cowboy jitterbug is hot in Montana right now. It's also hot at Big Sky High School, where kids kick up their heels for credit. "We actually require it," says veteran PE teacher Maureen Thomas, "but it's also very popular. We offer it because we want our students to recognize that dancing can be part of an active lifestyle." Jitterbugging—soon to be followed by swing if Thomas has her way—is part of a strong emphasis on introducing teenagers to activities that can keep them active and healthy their entire lives.

Some of those activities offered for credit at Big Sky, such as tennis and softball, can be found at other schools and in most parts of the country. Other choices draw more heavily on the assets of the Montana environment. "Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks works with us on a fishing unit," says Thomas, "and we have mountain biking on trails near the school. We're working with the University of Montana to introduce kayaking. When possible, cross-country skiing is available, and even downhill skiing. The response this year to the latter was tremendous. We actually took 450 kids out on four separate days of ski trips."

Another favorite is "folf" (also known as "disc golf"), a combination of Frisbee and golf. "You throw something like a Frisbee only heavier," says Thomas, "and you have to hit certain holes. We bus the kids to a recreation site for it, and they

get a good workout hiking up and down those mountains."

Thomas and her colleagues are preparing about 100 students now to participate in a five-kilometer community run. "It's a walk/jog, and we care more about having kids take part than being front-runners," Thomas says. "We're offering practice in PE twice a week, and asking students to practice once a week on their own."

One key to the success of the Big Sky program is that, as much as possible, students choose and take ownership of their activities. At the beginning of the Lifetime Fitness class she teaches, Thomas lists all possibilities and students rank their preferences. The class rotates through the choices. "Last semester's class chose fly-fishing, tennis, golf, folf, and softball in the fall, and racquetball, badminton, the climbing wall, and downhill skiing in the winter," she says.

Thomas adds, "We have an elective every period of the day to make it easy for students to choose, and they are always full, with more kids wanting in."

Thomas also encourages students to take responsibility for their own health with heart-rate monitors during aerobic activities, so kids know what to aim for in their various sports. "Also, from the freshman year on, we require each student to keep an activity log," says Thomas. "Even moderate activity contributes to health, so we count it, too. This technique helps them be aware and take charge." The required

Health Enhancement class reinforces the message for freshmen and sophomores. Subjects include nutrition; violence prevention; sexuality; communications; drugs, alcohol and tobacco prevention; and mental health issues like stress and time management. "We encourage students to set personal goals for themselves in relation to each topic," Thomas says.

Thomas says she took much of the inspiration for these new ideas from annual conventions of the Montana Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance. She attended her first convention in the mid-1980s, and came home brimming with ideas. Since then, she has served as president and is now executive director. "Our field is changing so fast," she says. "Ongoing professional development is very important."

Thomas was singled out this year for her contributions to PE when she was named one of four Montana winners of the Milken Family Foundation Awards, which come with a \$25,000 prize.

When Thomas's name was submitted to the Foundation, someone voiced surprise that it would be given to someone who taught a subject that was not part of the core curriculum. State Superintendent of Public Instruction Nancy Keenan responded that in Montana, PE *is* core curriculum. ■



Gym Class Renaissance

In the "new PE," every kid can succeed, not just the jocks

Story by Suzie Boss

SEATTLE, Washington—

PE never used to look like this. At Meany Middle School in the Capitol Hill neighborhood, morning gym class gets underway with a blur of 80 bodies in motion, a whirl of skate wheels across the wooden floor, and the throb of a golden oldies soundtrack.

On the north side of the city at Roosevelt High, two dozen teens start the day kick-boxing to a funkier rhythm, doing their best to keep pace with a high-energy instructor named Teri Galloway. When she calls “time,” students pause to check their electronic heart-rate monitors and catch their breath. In an adjoining room, classmates line up to scale a plywood wall that’s been implanted with plastic “rocks” to use as handholds. Getting across the horizontal span without dropping to the padded floor takes not only upper-arm strength, but also good thinking.

At Sanislo Elementary in south Seattle, youngsters run a warm-up loop around the schoolyard then pour into the gym, eager to ride unicycles, turn handsprings, and juggle sets of balls, pins, and even tennis racquets with

the agility of circus performers.

Anyone old enough to remember when gym class involved choosing up teams for dodge ball will be amazed by the transformation.

And that’s great news, according to Bud Turner, coordinator of K-12 physical education for Seattle Public Schools. At 54, Turner has spent three decades selling his community on the benefits of what he calls “success-oriented PE.” It’s an approach that’s gathering momentum nationwide by teaching kids to work for their personal best rather than besting the opposing team, to elevate wellness above winning. “It’s all about kids saying, ‘Aha! I can do it!’” says Turner. “And then it becomes a personal thing, to see how far they can go.” The gym offers an ideal venue for teaching cooperation, creativity, and critical thinking, he adds, right along with physical skills.

From his involvement on national advisory committees and years of leadership and writing in the field, Turner knows that his school district “is far ahead of much of the rest of the country” in reforming its physical education curriculum. “PE gets the attention it deserves,” he

says, in a district that has adopted content frameworks for physical education and employs a teaching staff of about 150 PE specialists. And Seattle kids are all the better for it: Test scores consistently show them to be some of the fittest young people in the nation. Last year, the district had 6,000 students earning the Presidential Physical Fitness Award by scoring at or above the 85th percentile on each of five fitness challenges. Two schools in the district are national demonstration sites for the President’s Challenge, and others receive a steady stream of visitors.

While Seattle may be the largest district in the region to embrace the new PE trend, other districts and individual teachers are pedaling fast in the same direction. Classes in mountain biking, downhill skiing, and other thrill-packed adventure sports, along with more relaxing pursuits such as yoga and tai chi, are such a departure from gym classes of old that even *Sports Illustrated* has paused from covering pro sports to weigh in on their merits.

If these courses sound like the program listings from a private health club or outdoorsy resort, it’s no accident. The idea

is to make physical activity so appealing that it becomes a habit—especially for the 75 percent of high school students who are currently not enrolled in any PE classes, according to the U.S. Surgeon General. At a time when American youth are less fit and more fat than ever before, educators make no apologies for using fun to motivate kids to get up and get moving—not just for gym class, but for a lifetime.

NOBODY SITS OUT

Sue Turner, a Washington State PE Teacher of the Year, can remember what it was like to be a new teacher nearly 30 years ago. She based her curriculum on competitive team sports like basketball and softball, just as she’d been taught. But she couldn’t help noticing that the gifted athletes—maybe 10 or 15 percent of her students—would dominate the action while the majority of kids seldom touched the ball. When class ended, half the students would swagger out as winners and the other half dragged out as losers. “Kids came out of gym class screaming at each other about who had won that day. I knew they needed something different,” she explains, “where they could

16 compete against themselves instead of against each other. They needed alternatives.”

That’s when she started introducing individual activities like tumbling. Right away, the mood changed. Instead of jeering about gym-class victories or who got picked last for teams, students would cheer each other on as they learned to perform cartwheels or hand-springs. Before long, Turner was adding unicycles and juggling. (Her husband, Bud Turner, convinced the district to invest in alternative PE equipment; the district now owns a fleet of 3,500 unicycles.)

Teaching at a school that enrolls many children from low-income families, Sue Turner knows that most of her students would never have been able to afford private gymnastics lessons. Yet over the years, hundreds of Sanislo students have performed with SCATS, a skilled, school-based acrobatic troupe that grew out of her PE classes. Their goal isn’t perfection, but participation. “We could practice round-offs over and over until they were all doing them perfectly,” she says, “but that isn’t what we’re about. These kids love to fly,” she says, pointing across the gym to a girl

who turns a series of hand-springs so fast, her body seems to blur. “And they love to show off,” she adds with a laugh, pointing to a small boy zipping past on a big unicycle. “I want to get them to experience the thrill of that, so that they’ll learn to move for the rest of their lives.”

Barbara McEwan, another award-winning Seattle PE specialist, shudders to remember games like Soak ’Em that were par for the course when she started teaching 28 years ago. “The object was basically for kids to beat each other up with balls,” she says. Today, she’s more inclined to plan activities that require cooperation and problem solving. “These games won’t work if everybody tries to be the leader. They have to figure out ways to work together,” she explains. McEwan has to talk loud to be heard over the din of a gym full of first-graders engaged in what looks like a mini-carnival. In teams of four or five, kids try to toss tennis balls into a tall cylinder, keep a giant ball in the air, or drop a ring onto a cone. Each activity requires teamwork along with physical skills.

Designing activities so that all kids can participate—and feel

successful—is a hallmark of the new PE. That means no relay races where a dozen students stand and watch for every kid who runs. It means assigning open-ended tasks that allow kids to progress as far as they can individually. It means modifying traditional team sports so teams are much smaller and everyone gets more opportunities to practice skills. “You wouldn’t teach a group of kids to read by having one book and passing it down a line of 10 kids,” Bud Turner says, “but too often, that’s how we try to teach sports skills.” Instead, he promotes activities that teach all students “to learn to move and move to learn.”

Success-oriented PE also means broadening the curriculum to appeal to all kinds of kids—the ones sporting tattoos and green hair as well as those with crew-cuts and washboard abs. “Some kids would never participate in team sports, but they thrive in individual activities,” says Turner. Others love the competitive arena. “We need to offer something for all of them.” Recently, for instance, a group of girls signed up for a Roosevelt High aerobics class because they wanted help managing their weight. By the end of

the term, beams instructor Teri Galloway, “They were probably my fittest students.” Not only had their cardiovascular fitness and endurance improved, but they had learned to warm up and cool down to prevent injuries—all habits that promote a healthier lifestyle.

Although the new gym activities can look pretty loose and freewheeling, there’s a philosophy underlying the fun. “We provide a safe environment where kids can learn, no matter what their abilities, skills, or attitudes,” explains PE specialist and diversity expert Mona Mendoza of Meany Middle School. “Our kids give respect and get respect.” Her school teaches predominately low-income, minority youth, “and they know we have high expectation for them,” Mendoza says. “We won’t allow them not to be successful.”

Lasting personal success—not a fleeting team victory—is the big goal. In a recent interview in *USA Today*, Virginia Tech health and PE professor George Graham stressed the power of positive experiences to get kids hooked on fitness. “If you can design a program where kids are successful 80 percent of the time,” he said, “you have a good program.”

TRY ONE NEW THING

If Seattle's experience is typical, it takes time, energy, and creative fundraising to expand PE offerings beyond the old-fashioned basics. To stretch its budget, Seattle has built partnerships with a host of community sponsors, from the U.S. Tennis Association to golfers on the pro circuit to the Seattle Sonics basketball team. High school weight rooms—stocked with used, donated equipment—are functional but not fancy. Instead of leaving boxes of equipment to gather dust in school storage rooms, the district operates a PE lending library. Class sets of everything from heart-rate monitors to bicycles and helmets to yo-yos rotate from school to school, getting more use from more students. And the \$4,000 rock walls that are springing up in school gyms all over town are built with wood donated by a local lumber company and other materials paid for through “buy-a-rock” fund-raising campaigns.

Equipment alone doesn't make for an innovative PE program, of course. Just as important is a willingness by teachers to work with kids in new ways. In Seattle, the average age of PE specialists is about 50, Turner

estimates. Many teachers grew up on a diet of traditional team sports, and some traditions die hard. “A lot of them are used to teaching baseball, basketball, and maybe a little volleyball for variety,” Turner says. The best PE classes in the district, he says, didn't get that way because of fancy facilities or big budgets. “Staff is the key. The most important ingredient is good teaching.”

In his crusade to remake the PE mold, Turner visits at least half a dozen schools a day (driving a car with “PE4KIDS” license plates). He makes a point to bring along something new. One day it's pedometers to remind teachers to increase their own activity levels so they aren't teaching from the bleachers; another day it's posters to brighten gym walls and spread the pro-PE message. Turner will conduct a one-on-one workshop any time a teacher requests instruction in teaching a specific activity. Once a year, he puts on a West's Best PE conference that attracts several hundred attendees and presenters from all over the country. “It's packed with ideas that teachers can try on the spot and incorporate into our classes tomorrow,” says McEwan. Turner even produces



PHOTO BY SUZIE BOSS

SEATTLE MAINTAINS A FLEET OF 3,500 UNICYCLES TO HELP KIDS “LEARN TO MOVE AND MOVE TO LEARN.”

Everybody Wins

Get a group of PE teachers together and the conversation naturally turns to jock talk. They com-

pare win-loss records for adult softball leagues, share training tips for upcoming marathon races, talk about their golf scores and tennis matches.

“There’s nothing wrong with competition,” says Bud Turner, coordinator of K-12 physical education for Seattle Public Schools and a weekend warrior himself on the coed softball circuit. Indeed, many PE teachers are first attracted to the field because they’ve had positive experiences in sports.

But when it’s time for PE class, competition’s best left outside the gym. “Athletics involves only 10 to 15 percent of the student population,” says Turner, but PE is for everyone.

Turning the school gym into a place where everybody wins doesn’t mean that games have to be eliminated.

“We can modify games and manage competition,” Turner explains. Instead of nine-person softball teams, for instance, students can break into three-player teams for “coneball,” played on a scaled-down diamond where everybody gets more chances to hone fielding and hitting skills. Instead of training one or two students to be pitchers, everybody learns and practices the fundamentals of throwing and catching. Turner also suggests structuring games so that competition is added gradually, as students acquire new skills. They can progress from warm-up, to individual competition, to competition against a partner, to team games.

Although there are plenty of PE specialists who enjoy competing on their own time, “You don’t have to be a great athlete to be a good PE teacher,” stresses Turner, who trains future generations of PE teachers as an adjunct faculty member at four universities in Washington. “We want great teachers to go into this field—people who like kids and know how to be innovative.” ■

videos to keep fresh ideas circulating—one of the reasons teachers call him “a man of a million ideas.”

“Every year, I try to add one new thing to what I’m teaching,” says Darrell Montzingo, PE specialist at Roosevelt High. In his 21 years of teaching gym classes, he’s introduced everything from archery to racquet sports to rowing to golf. Montzingo appreciates sports that can be enjoyed by all students, whatever their physical abilities. And that’s right in line with district policy promoting PE activities that motivate students to succeed, “regardless of gender, size, age, and current level of ability or interest.”

Once teachers get comfortable with nontraditional gym activities, they often discover that their own job satisfaction goes up. “It’s so much more fun to teach this way,” says Jerry Ronk, PE specialist at Meany Middle School for 19 years. “And it’s rewarding to give kids a chance to better themselves. We encourage them to keep retesting, trying for better personal scores, right up to the end of the term. We want them to succeed. These activities build their confidence.” Once his students master a fast turn on roller skates, learn a

basic three-ball cascade in juggling, or build up the arm strength to hold a handstand, he says, “they feel like they can learn anything. And we see that attitude carry over to their academic classrooms, too. Their teachers come back to us and say, what did you do to get these kids so excited about learning?”

Teaching Above the Shoulders

Without a doubt, the new PE requires more thinking—by students and teachers alike. “We don’t just teach up to here,” says Montzingo, gesturing to his shoulders. “We take it all the way up to here,” he says, and taps his forehead.

Districts that can’t afford PE specialists may still be treating gym classes as “glorified recess,” admits Turner. Only seven states require PE specialists at the elementary level, according to a survey by the National Association for Sport and Physical Education. “There’s so much pressure on classroom teachers now to make sure their kids meet high academic standards,” laments Turner. “Most of them don’t have time to plan a new PE curriculum, too.”

With a little creativity, however, even a traditional class like weight training can be retooled

to fit the new PE model. Instead of just hoisting barbells, students can learn the names of the muscles, reinforcing what they’ve studied in biology. They can learn which exercises are most likely to produce gains in strength or flexibility, and which ones will improve cardiovascular fitness. They can use math skills or computer programming to track changes in their body mass index (BMI) or calculate their target heart rate. They can learn to develop their own training program, tailored to their individual fitness goals. The girl who’s interested in overall toning will find weight training just as valuable as the guy who wants to build his biceps.

Well-planned, purposeful PE offers opportunities to integrate not only academic lessons, but

cultural and social ones, as well. Rock climbing walls, for instance, provide an ideal backdrop for teaching the body and the mind. At first, students are motivated by the sheer physical challenge: Can they get all the way across without touching the ground? The instructor can make the task more challenging by asking students to use only certain rocks, or connecting pairs of students with a “lifeline” and having them stage a rescue of another student. Seattle has developed a rock-wall curriculum that includes physical activity, problem solving, creativity, and cooperation.

Do students appreciate the variety and depth of today’s PE? Probably not yet, admits Montzingo. “Not until they’re adults and look back will they

know just how much variety they were offered here,” he suspects. By then, with any luck, they will consider fitness not just a goal from those gym classes they took as kids, but something to embrace in their daily lives. “Will I keep doing this?” asks a wiry 12-year-old who learned to ride a unicycle when she was a first-grader and has been getting better ever since. “You bet!” ■



FIRST-GRADERS PARTICIPATE IN ACTIVITIES THAT REQUIRE MOVEMENT, TEAMWORK, AND PROBLEM SOLVING.

snap

SHOTS

ALL ACTIVE, ALL SUCCESSFUL SCHMITZ PARK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

SEATTLE, Washington—

“When kids first come to me, they often have a frumpy kind of ‘try to make me have fun’ attitude,” says PE teacher Barbara McEwan at Seattle’s Schmitz Park Elementary School. “One of my goals is to have enough great equipment here that all the children find something they absolutely love to do.” When kids are having fun, they’re more likely to meet McEwan’s even more important goal: to help her students raise their overall level of fitness. In this, she has been remarkably successful. “The kids get very motivated,” she says.

You can see their enthusiasm the minute you walk into the Schmitz Park gym. Some days, you’ll see kids climbing vertical rock walls or hauling themselves across cargo nets. Or you might open the door onto 40 children zipping around on unicycles or balancing on stilts, large spools, and balls. Other days you can find them bouncing on pogo sticks or racing around in an intense game of wheelchair tag.

“We don’t have any kids who need to be in wheelchairs right now,” says McEwan, “but we have had some in the past. When we did, we really wanted to find ways to give them a good exercise program, too, but the other kids were no match for them in a chair. So now we have many of our kids learn to steer and do wheelies, and they really enjoy it. When kids come along who do require chairs, they’ll have other children to race.”

Several years ago, after a lawsuit against the school prompted the removal of the monkey bars and

rings from the playground, kids were losing arm strength. “I had to figure out what else to do,” McEwan says. With the proceeds of an Eastertime chocolate-rabbit sale, the school bought a climbing wall. “It’s really helped,” McEwan says. “Some kids won’t ever be able to do a pull-up, but everyone can learn to hold their body weight for a while.”

McEwan likes the unicycles for teaching balance to kids from kindergarten on up. She speaks with pride of her class of 10 advanced kids who can idle—that is, rock back and forth—for five seconds to 30 minutes at a time. And, although it has been a struggle, she’s been able to find ways to get girls interested. “Girls are less willing to take falls,” she says, “but if they do it with partners and take it slowly, they find they like it, too. We’re about half girls, half boys now,” she says.

The result of this approach is verifiable success. Schmitz Park has been the Washington state champion for 10 of the 11 years it has been participating in the President’s Challenge Physical Fitness Program. McEwan considers the program fairly demanding. Children are tested on five skills: pull-ups, reaching beyond their toes, running a mile, shuttle running (which tests quickness), and curl-ups. The standards are adjusted for sex and age. For example a 10-year-old boy is required to do six pull-ups, while a 10-year-old girl must do three to reach the “presidential” level. “Most children can do at least some of these fairly easily,” says McEwan, “but at least one item on the test

usually gives them some trouble.” Kids who reach the 85th percentile or better on every fitness item qualify for the “presidential” (highest) award. At Schmitz Park, 60 percent of students are presidential winners. McEwan finds as a rule that enticing elementary students to run a mile is the hardest task. “Basically, we do it with games,” she says. “We use games where they have to keep running, or if they are tagged ‘out,’ they go do five handstands, then come back in.” Not only do McEwan’s students test well, but their squeals and smiles during class clearly show their delight. “I love to see them get hooked on juggling or something like that,” McEwan says. “And all the time I get kids who have gone on to middle school coming back to tell me how much they miss the PE we do here.” ■

MAKING A MOUNTAIN

SALMON HIGH SCHOOL

SALMON, Idaho—Outside Salmon High School, county trucks are dumping riprap and other materials from their spring clean-up in a huge pile. Soon 1,000 cubic yards of fill from the excavations for an apartment building will be dumped on top of that. Then a landscape architecture class at the school will install a sprinkler system and a rope tow. The aspen and pine trees they plant will be the finishing touch on Salmon High's very own 30-foot tall mountain.

The mountain is the brainchild of Zane Abbott and the PE department of which he has been a part for the last 21 years. It will be an all-purpose training hill, with a jogging course, used also for varsity sports conditioning, Nordic skiing, golf, and field archery. As a bonus, terracing will make one side into an amphitheater, providing the school with its first auditorium.

The mountain is an outgrowth of Abbott's longtime emphasis on lifetime sports. It's a calling that has taken him all over the county, sharing with students the many recreational opportunities Idaho provides.

PE was not always like this at Salmon High. Before Abbott arrived, gym class was pretty much the way he found it when he was a student himself. "The coach threw the ball out, and the kids played," is how he remembers it. Inspired by an article he'd read years earlier about programs that taught lifetime sports, Abbott began to initiate some changes when he was hired.

Now the school offers three PE classes. The first course, for sophomores, is Beginning Lifetime Sports. In autumn, students take snorkeling, skin diving, archery, and Pickle-Ball (a hybrid of table tennis, tennis, and badminton played with a wooden paddle). In winter, they try skating (ice, speed, and figure), hockey, badminton, alpine skiing, snowboarding, and, in their recreational skills segment, bowling, juggling, line dancing, Frisbee, and yo-yo. The course is completed in the spring with hiking, backpacking, orienteering, spin-and-bait casting, tennis, golf, and horseshoes. "With horseshoes, the state finals competition is held each year in one of our city parks, where we have a large facility," says Abbott.

"We bus our kids there to have the old-timers give them tips." Amid all the activity, Abbott also teaches his students about "wellness lifestyles," including nutrition, the effects of aging, and the specific benefits of exercise. Abbott writes a question on the blackboard every day, and gives out the answer the following day. Students are trained to figure out their heart rates and understand what their goal should be during exercise.

An elective class entitled Advanced Lifetime Sports follows. In the fall, this consists of white-water kayaking (in which students are sometimes bused to the area's rivers), bow-hunter education, and advanced field archery. In the winter, students learn Nordic skiing and snowboarding. The spring unit features climbing on a newly built

rock wall (which, for a cost of \$4,000, was paid for entirely by renting advertising space to local businesses). The unit also includes fly-fishing and rod building, along with knot- and fly-tying. "We have a nonconsumption permit with the state fish and wildlife department to catch and release fish," says Abbott. "We often get officials from the department to come talk to us about conservation at the same time." Mountain biking is also offered.

The final elective available is Coed Strength and Conditioning, taken by all kinds of students. This is broken down into three sections: hypertrophic lifting, in which students use light weights and many repetitions with many muscles; basic strength training, which involves heavier weights with fewer repetitions; and Olympics-style power lifting.

If popularity is any indication of success, Abbott's approach is a winner. The Strength and Conditioning Class is in such demand that students win a slot only through a randomized computer drawing. Although only one PE class is required, more than half of the student body is taking PE classes at any given point. Students clamor for more. When their mountain is finished this spring, students will have even more opportunities to get hooked for life on sports Idaho offers year-round. ■

LEVELING THE PLAYING FIELD

Adapted PE brings together kids with and without disabilities

Story and photos by DENISE JARRETT

BEAVERTON, OREGON—

“Oh crap!” the sixth-grader mutters. He’s guarding third base on the kickball court, and a girl on the opposing team has just kicked the ball high and long. She runs hard and lands on third base. The baseman, Nathan, leans over the arm of his motorized wheelchair and hisses at the girl, who hisses back triumphantly.

The ball’s kicked back into play, and Nathan shouts, “Throw it to me! Throw it to me!”

The girl on third runs home, but another is tagged. Three outs. The teams switch places, and Nathan (not his real name) takes his turn at the plate, the footrests of his wheelchair turned back and out of the way. Toes pointing down and leaning forward in his chair, he waits for the pitch. His teammates call from behind.

“Go Nathan!”

“Hey, you want someone to run for you?”

“Nathan, let him run for you.”

“No!” Nathan punts the ball and motors to first base.

Any grownup watching from the sidelines might think, now there’s a kid with a disability who’s just one of the gang. And, of course, that’s true. But every child is different, and Nathan’s wheelchair makes his differences particularly apparent.

Aware of this, everyone playing kickball on the court today is also engaged in a balancing act: treating Nathan like just another team member, yet extending some special treatment to level the playing ground.

At 12 years old, Nathan’s a seasoned juggler of both these spheres of his life, say his teachers. Born with arthrogryposis, a condition that causes stiff joints and weak muscles, Nathan’s learned to advocate for his independence when he yearns for it, and to accept help when he needs it. And, like any preteen, he might



Sarah Whitman and teacher assistants with students at Beaver Acres Elementary in an adapted physical education program for students with disabilities.

shirk a task now and then, or say a naughty word when the teacher's out of earshot. Mostly, he wants to succeed and to fit in with his peers.

These are also the goals of adapted physical education (APE). In an APE program, students with disabilities participate in a regular PE class, with some adjustments made to meet their needs and abilities. It's one of the latest approaches to providing students with disabilities services that address the needs of the whole child: his social, emotional, educational, and physical well-being.

Social awareness about the needs of people with disabilities emerged in the United States in the 1900s. The World Wars and polio epidemics impelled medical advances in orthopedic treatment. Services to individuals with disabilities grew steadily, and by the 1960s laws were being passed ensuring the education of students with disabilities. Today, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Public Law 101-476, mandates free, appropriate public education, including physical education, for students with disabili-

ties. Schools are required to place students with disabilities in environments that are least restrictive to their growth. Sometimes this means placing students in special PE classes where they receive intensive, individualized attention and the use of specialized equipment. Many times, the most suitable placement is in the mainstream class, with some modifications.

Sarah Whitman is Nathan's adapted physical education teacher. On staff at the Beaverton School District in a suburb of Portland, she

consults frequently with his regular PE teacher, Susan Fatland, at Mountain View Middle School. Whitman suggests ways that Nathan can stretch and exercise his range of motion while taking part in activities with his able-bodied classmates. Few adaptations are necessary to make the games and activities accessible to him. He does stretching exercises in his chair. In volleyball, he uses a larger beach ball, and, in kickball, he's permitted to "steal" bases. He can't run laps, but he joins the class in turns around the track,

motoring his chair and hooting at those he passes up. When he's parked, the other kids jostle for the handles of his wheelchair, a place of honor.

The physical, emotional, and social development of the child are key considerations of any adapted physical education program, says Whitman. Placing a child in a mainstream PE class can help foster positive self-esteem, social skills, and independence that will serve him into adulthood. Yet some children with severe cognitive or physical disabilities need the intensive and individualized treatment provided by a separate, special physical education class.

At nearby Beaver Acres Elementary, Whitman works with other members of the district's motor development team in an adapted PE class that includes the Movement Opportunity Via Education (MOVE) curriculum. The program uses specialized equipment to enable students to get out of their wheelchairs and into a prone position so that they can work on standing and participate in games. There are about eight children, each attended by a teacher assistant, APE teacher, or physical therapist. Holding the edges of a "parachute" in the gym on a recent day, the children, with the help of their teachers, toss and roll yellow balls on a brightly colored

tarp. Several of the children are upright in their specialized equipment, such as mobile prone standers, gait trainers, and tricycles that support and exercise their muscles. Despite the children's restricted mobility, the bouncing balls and billowing tarp excite great fun.

Placing children with disabilities in an appropriate program is a critical aspect of special education, and it's an area most likely to cause parents concern, says Whitman.

"Occasionally, parents want their kids in the regular class with kids their own age," rather than in mixed-age special education classes, says Whitman. "They're afraid their child may regress or pick up bad habits from other kids due to the varying levels of disabilities in a self-contained class."

How can children with disabilities get the attention they need? In what environment will they be most successful? How will their placement affect them emotionally? These are central questions teachers and parents must consider, says Whitman.

For Nathan, being with his able-bodied classmates is right where he wants to be. While he sometimes gets tired of explaining to them why he's in a wheelchair, he enjoys it when they clamor for an illicit ride on the back.

Kids will be kids. ■

Sarah Whitman teaches adapted physical education for the Beaverton School District in Oregon.



snaps

SHOTS

GETTING THE GIRLS TO GROWL

LEWIS AND CLARK MIDDLE SCHOOL

BILLINGS, Montana—Paul Mansingh's eighth-grade PE students fill the computer lab, searching Web sites for information on communicable diseases. Frowning with concentration and emitting oohs and ahs of discovery, they are cutting and pasting facts into reports. Mansingh's class will return several more times to the lab during the year to research health issues or work with educational software programs.

The way Mansingh blends computers with a varied selection of physical activities and an extensive health curriculum, while equalizing participation in the gym, sets his program apart from the garden-variety PE program.

For example, Mansingh noticed that when his classes played basketball, aggressive players would so dominate the game that nonaggressive children scarcely participated. He experimented to alter those dynamics and provide a quality experience for all. Now, he has the kids play two-on-two, three-on-three, or four-on-four, followed by separate boys' and girls' tournaments. "By then," says Mansingh, "we all have a good idea of who is and isn't aggressive. The kids split into two groups along those lines, and they choose. The kids like this. They're relieved, actually. Mostly it's boys who are aggressive and girls that aren't, but not entirely.

"But after awhile," Mansingh continues, "among the nonaggressive kids, leaders emerge. The whole group gets more assertive. When I separate girls

and guys in football, I find the girls really get into their own game and start growling and going after the ball. It's great!"

Mansingh's program evenly balances health and physical education, and the curriculum for both halves is extensive. In health education, he starts with a review of body systems and functions, using computer software among other tools. Units on drug awareness; tobacco and alcohol; the mental, physical, and emotional aspects of health; and communicable and noncommunicable diseases follow.

In a mental health unit, the children discuss how to develop a positive self-concept and make decisions, and how to handle stress, verbal attacks, and emotional problems. Mansingh wasn't happy with the worksheets that came with the textbook. "They were too easy," he explains. "Now I ask questions and have students write whole-sentence answers, and they communicate so much more. They gripe, but the material covered is too important to skim over."

In the unit on illegal drug use, as for others, Mansingh works to get group discussion going. "I pass a football around, and only the person holding the football can talk," he says. "We have ground rules. No put-downs. All ideas are valuable. No personal questions. Everything is confidential. "They have lots of questions, and they are really open. Sometimes I hear more than I want to, but that's OK. I'm open about myself, too. We've had great discussions."

The fitness of all 160 of Mansingh's eighth-graders is assessed according to the standards developed by the President's Challenge Physical Fitness Program. Students develop fitness goals for themselves and work toward them every day.

In the rest of the time, students move through paddleball, ultimate Frisbee, weight training, capture the flag, touch football, and weight training, in addition to team sports. In the latter half of the year, students bowl and walk, as well as play soccer, flag football, and softball.

The next step at Lewis and Clark will be for all the PE teachers to work together to create a more uniform program. "There are many teachers here with good ideas, doing similar things," Mansingh says, "but currently we each pick what we want to teach from 25 possible objectives, because if you did it all you'd rush through important information. We're working now on a process whereby we agree on which are the most important, and all work on the same 12."

Meanwhile, Mansingh, who has been teaching for only six years, continues to listen and watch his students for clues for how better to help them become healthier, more active people. "I demand a lot from them," he says. "I tell my kids, if you get an A in my class, you know you've done really excellent work." ■

Dance Like a Caterpillar

Movement is a big part of learning for little kids

Christopher Robin goes hoppity, hoppity, hoppity, hoppity hop.

Whenever I tell him politely to stop it, he says he can't possibly stop.

—A.A. Milne

By CATHERINE PAGLIN

PORTLAND, Oregon—

Amidst the general hubbub of a preschool classroom, a little boy sits on a child's rocking chair. While other kids dabble in sand, play concentration, or clip coupons for an imaginary store, the four-year-old boy rocks back and forth, slowly, deliberately. Then he lets go of the armrests in a brief "Look Ma, no hands!" gesture while the chair rocks full tilt. Finally, he grasps the armrests again, stands up, and marches in a small circle, holding the chair to his bottom.

Whether it's free play outside, dance and exercise in the gym, or just times when kids can roam from activity to activity, a developmentally appropriate classroom gives young children many opportunities for movement. "At this age their bodies need to move," says Kelly Petrin, the teacher in this Portland Public Schools Head Start class. "It's normal and it's something they're supposed to do."

Movement is essential to the physical and cognitive development of preschoolers, says the American Academy of Pediatrics. It's the way

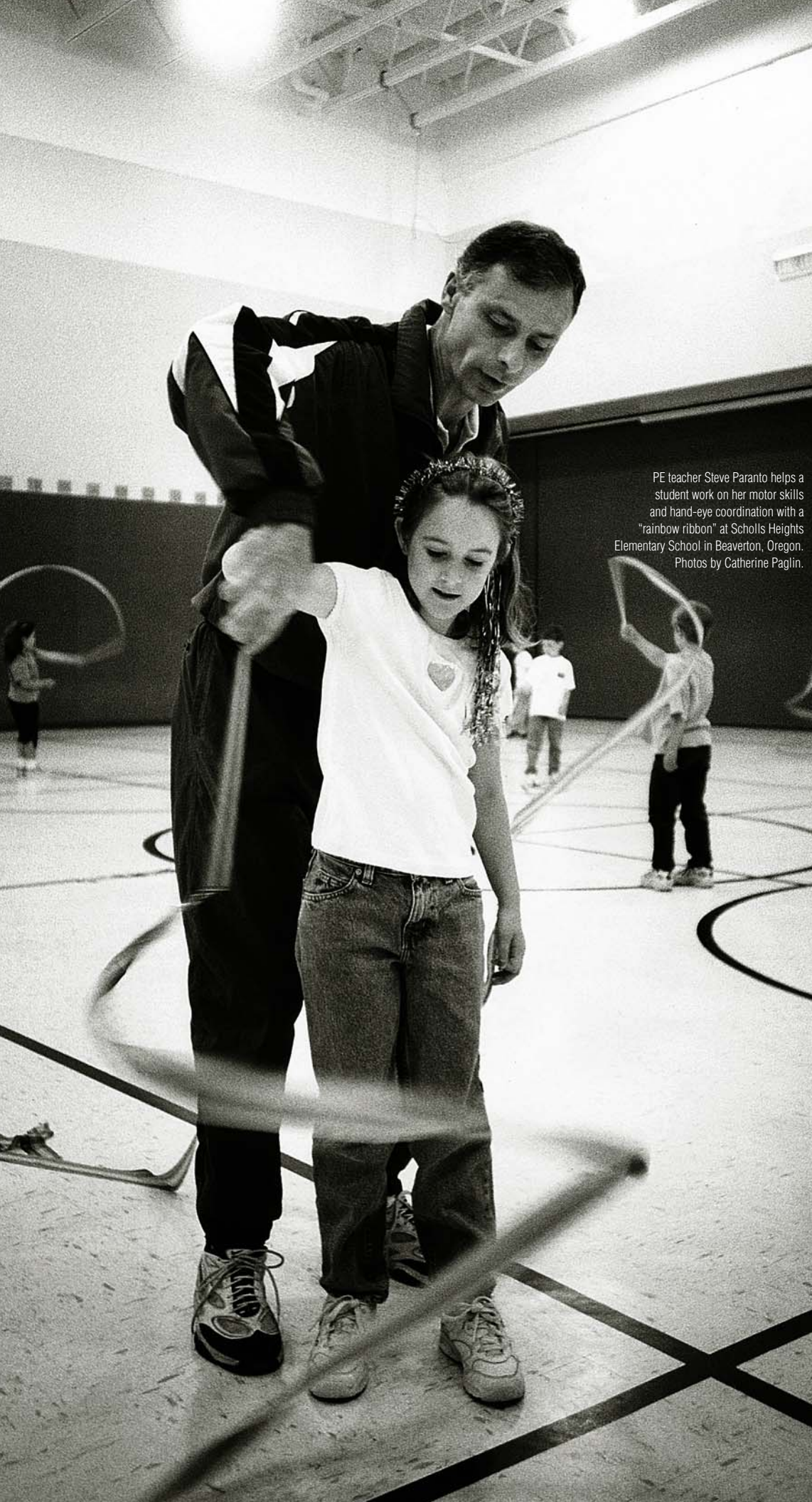
they explore the world. In the years before kindergarten most children master basic motor skills such as jumping, hopping, and skipping, though there is much individual variation in development. Movement experiences—in addition to stories, songs, games, puzzles, blocks, dramatic play, finger-painting, and all manner of other stimulating activities and materials—are a critical part of early childhood education. Beyond preschool, young children can learn to play games with rules and master more difficult activities—such as bike riding, jumping rope, and hopscotch—that will give them enjoyment and boost their self-esteem.

Formerly, young children got much of their physical activity in unstructured ways: running around the neighborhood, climbing trees, playing informal games in the street. Ironically, while educators and health professionals tout the health benefits of fitness, and even the importance of movement in brain development (see the sidebar on Page 30), children today have less freedom of movement than ever. Sue Bredekamp, Director of

Research at the Council for Professional Recognition, and a consultant to the federal Head Start Bureau, cites three contributing factors: heightened awareness of the need to protect children, heightened litigiousness, and heightened awareness of young children's intellectual capacities which makes it more likely that caregivers will place them in front of a computer.

These societal trends play out differently in different places. Petrin knows that some of her Head Start pupils are confined to small apartments and have no yard to play in. Ironically, others, lacking adequate adult supervision, may become more physically capable because they roam free. Steve Paranto, a PE teacher in the middle-class suburb of Beaverton, Oregon, sees something else: "I've noticed some kids are more active than kids were 20 years ago because their parents have them signed up for every little thing, but it's all organized. And then there's the other extreme of kids who do nothing because they're doing computers and video games and TV. So we have two extremes that we didn't have before."

Because of these social changes, it's all the more important for kids to move vigorously and learn motor skills at school or in child care. At a time when many babies and toddlers spend hours in car seats, strollers, and other restrictive devices, Oregon Migrant Head Start makes freedom of movement a cornerstone of its classroom design around the state. "In our infant classrooms, we don't allow any confining props—no motorized swings or infant seats that would restrain a child's movement," says Jeanne McNassar, education specialist with the Oregon Child Development Coalition which runs the program. Infants are placed on a blanket with stimulating materials, such as a mobile, within reach. If children are learning to crawl or creep, the teacher will place a toy a few feet in front of them so that they're encouraged to move forward. When children become mobile, they're supplied with equipment—such as ramps, slides, and bars in front of mirrors—to crawl up or for "cruising" (holding on to objects in order to walk). At every stage, teachers are encouraged to



PE teacher Steve Paranto helps a student work on her motor skills and hand-eye coordination with a "rainbow ribbon" at Scholls Heights Elementary School in Beaverton, Oregon. Photos by Catherine Paglin.

support children's current developmental challenges instead of, for instance, forcing them to attempt walking before they are ready.

Opportunities for movement are many and varied for the preschoolers in the Portland Public Schools Head Start program. The four- and five-year-olds in Petrin's class go outside as much as possible where they can play on ladders, slides, and swings, drive wheel toys and kick balls, or play follow the leader. They use balance boards, balance beams, and bean bags. In the gym they might move to music or rhythm. They might dance or do movements such as twirling and skipping, move like different kinds of animals, or practice stopping and starting on a signal. "Jingle, jingle, jingle jive, Walk while I count to five," chants Petrin. "One, two, three, four, five." Then she varies the chant, directing the kids to walk backward, run, jump, crawl, walk sideways, skip, hop on one foot, twirl, gallop, and move like

a tall giraffe, a low snake, a big elephant, and a small mouse. “We try to give them a lot of experiences with different music rhythms, music from different cultures, different ways of movement, and all the different equipment so that they’re getting new experiences,” says Petrin.

As Petrin chants, some children do the movements smoothly. Others are awkward and have difficulty walking backward and sideways. But Petrin doesn’t correct them. “For me to go up and say, ‘No, you’re not doing it right,’ would be inappropriate,” she says. “What we really try to do is give them the opportunity and encourage them to move toward the goal, but not expect them to get it immediately.”

Three times a year, in order to target instruction, she and the other teachers in the program assess each child’s general coordination and whether they are “careful enough, careless, or overly cautious” in how they move. They’re assessed on walking on three different sizes of balance beams, jumping over lines and off a chair, running, hopping, galloping, skipping, walking up and down stairs, and throwing and catching.

If Petrin finds that a child has difficulty with a particular skill, such as balance, she’ll include more activities such as standing on one

foot during the daily 20-minute gross motor period, or during group games such as Simon says. “In our program we try to allow children to leave here without those kinds of deficits,” she says. She’ll suggest to parents of kids who are lagging behind their agemates that they do more of certain activities with their child such as walking on curbs or skipping together.

Though most preschoolers will eventually learn the basic motor skills whether or not they have adult support and instruction, movement education has physical, social and academic benefits. “When you have skill-building along with physical development, the child gains increased competence and confidence,” says Bredekamp. Later, with additional adult support, that child is more easily able to learn more complicated skills such as riding a bike or skiing, she says. Petrin notes that “when children get into elementary school, being a little more physically capable actually helps them socially, too. They’re able to take part in the games and have fun and not be the one who’s the outcast because they’re just too clumsy to follow along.” In the cognitive realm, movement activities can help preschoolers learn body parts and understand abstract, spatial concepts such as up and down, backward, forward, and sideways, and over and

under. Psychologist Howard Gardner, author of *Multiple Intelligences*, even posits the existence of a “bodily kinesthetic intelligence”—the ability to solve problems and express ideas with the body, as do dancers and athletes.

The benefits of movement continue in the primary grades. “Children who are physically fit do better academically in general,” says Carl Gabbard, professor of motor development at Texas A&M University. “They have the energy to concentrate and carry out work.” And, he says, there’s good evidence that when movement activities are used to reinforce academic concepts, “children are enthusiastic and tend to remember and retain the information.”

That enthusiasm is readily apparent when first-graders at Scholls Heights Elementary School burst into the gym where Paranto is brandishing a “rainbow ribbon”—a multicolored streamer attached to a plastic stick. “What are these?” asks Paranto, pointing to drawings of a triangle, a square, and a circle, set up on cones. The kids call out the answers in chorus. He instructs them to trace all those shapes in the air with their ribbons, and then do the alphabet. “After you do the alphabet,” he tells them, “you can do some fun things like figure eight, tornado, rattlesnake, windshield

wiper.” As he talks, he demonstrates these motions to the children’s delight. “I bet you can make up some of your own.”

“This is going to be *so* hard,” a boy says gleefully. The kids rush into the activity, flourishing their ribbons, some of them consulting the drawings as they do so.

“Now they can really feel the shape,” says Paranto. “In the classroom, sometimes little kids will write in sand. It’s the same thing. It’s kinesthetic, but in a different way.”

“ABC . . . D!” says the boy, drawing his “D” in the air. Then he has to stop and retrace his steps mentally. “ABCD . . . E!”

When the kids have made their way through the alphabet Paranto steps up the pace. “Now we’re going to move just to be moving,” he says, flipping on a song with a strong beat. “When you turn music on kids start hopping around, using a lot more energy,” he says as the rainbow ribbons wave and twirl against the mauve background of the gym walls.

Paranto’s PE lessons touch on many “classroom” concepts—clockwise and counterclockwise, less than and more than, halving and doubling. “I listen at the staff meetings to find out what they’re working on,” Paranto explains. “They may be talking about how important it is for the kids to understand



Above, top: A "scooter board" exercise blends math concepts with motor and safety skills when teacher Paranto narrows the available scooter space from half the gym to a quarter of the gym, and so on.

Above, bottom: Kids learn some relationship and physics concepts when they experiment with making a parachute bigger and smaller by trapping air inside.

what a pattern is, and then I think, How can I incorporate that into my lessons? How can I at least get the word 'patterns' into my lessons?—because that's a step forward right there. Physical education is important enough to stand all on its own, but there are just some perfect places to make connections with the classroom. If the classrooms are studying a country you can do a dance from that country, you can do games from that country. It's so easy to get math involved in PE. And science, because you're propelling an object some of the time."

Paranto's colleague, Rick Knight at Hiteon Elementary in Beaverton, also incorporates literacy and math activities in his class. His young students bend their bodies into the shapes of the letters of the alphabet and apply math in games such as bingo bowling. In bingo bowling the students roll rubber bowling balls to knock down plastic pins, count the number of pins knocked down, and then mark off the number on a bingo sheet. Depending on their math skills, if the number is no longer available on the sheet, they can mark off two numbers that when added together or subtracted from each other equal the number of pins knocked down.

On a more basic level, Mike Barber, a Portland Public Schools special education teacher, uses

A CAUTIONARY NOTE ON BRAIN RESEARCH

In recent years, news about the brain has been all over the popular press and education journals. Brain fever has spread through the ranks of educators, early childhood advocates, and those with a sales pitch. We've heard a lot about brain plasticity, dendrites, neural connections, and "brain-based learning."

Some have asserted that brain research supports playing Mozart to babies, increasing funding for early childhood programs, using particular teaching strategies or curricula, or timing certain learning experiences around "windows of opportunity" when the brain is most receptive to them. Assertions like these are pinned on research findings such the following: the density of synapses (connections between neurons which create pathways in the brain) is highest around age three or four and begins to decline around age nine: the left and right hemispheres of the brain process different types of tasks; and "enriched" environments early in life stimulate the formation of synapses, improving the ability to do certain tasks.

But there's disagreement over what the research implies about teaching, learning, and public policy. Early movement experiences, for instance, help wire the brain for motor control. And, like other experiences they may stimulate the young brain to produce more synapses. Does this mean that

children who have better body balance will learn math more easily? as the owner of a children's fitness center stated in *U.S. News & World Report*. Does this mean that there are specific exercises that at any age can "develop the brain's neural pathways," and "integrate the brain's deeper structures" and thereby "bring about rapid and often dramatic improvements in concentration, memory, reading, writing, organizing, listening, physical coordination, and more," as one trademarked training program claims.

"I see a lot of dramatic kinds of marketing because of brain research," says Carl Gabbard, Professor of Motor Development at Texas A&M University and past President of the National Association of Sport and Physical Education, who is skeptical of such extreme claims. Physical activity is indeed good for brain development but the effect is general rather than specific, he explains. General physical activity stimulates brain development because it supplies the brain with glucose, its main energy source. However, "[A]t this point it is still quite unclear as to the specific types and amounts of experience necessary to stimulate the formation of particular neural connections," he cautions in an article in the *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance*.

—Catherine Paglin

movement to unlock verbal abilities of his emotionally disturbed kindergartners. “This population has high energy,” says Barber. “I like to give them experiences that are unique, and big, and match their energy. Dance offers the opportunity to experience things they can’t in other ways.”

In addition to other dance and movement activities, Barber, who is a member of the Portland-based aerial dance company, Aero Betty, introduces his students to the trapeze which is “full of metaphors of flight and escape and freedom. “We start with yoga class and do stretching on the floor and then we do a very safe and structured introduction to the trapeze where they learn about circles, swings, shapes. During trapeze there’s lots of language: ‘How does this feel? What are you doing? Can you describe the feeling of the circle or swinging?’ Giving them a visceral experience like that and then asking them to describe it is just having them practice using language appropriately—language that describes and expresses.”

POKER-CHIP DODGE BALL

Since young children’s minds and bodies differ from those of bigger kids, their activities, rules, and equipment need to be modified accordingly. Complicated rules and competitive play don’t work for

preschoolers, says Petrin. “We just play and move bodies,” she says. “Everybody plays together. But playing by a whole lot of rules—other than the rules to keep you safe—is really not appropriate for four-year-olds.” Both Petrin and Paranto avoid elimination games and others in which too many students spend too much time doing nothing. “A favorite one at this age level for a lot of people is Duck, Duck, Goose,” says Petrin, referring to a game in which kids sit in a circle and one—the duck—chooses another—the goose—to chase him around the circle until he reaches the goose’s place, whereupon the goose becomes the new duck. “I don’t like that game and I never play it in my classroom. Most of the kids are just sitting most of the time so I don’t consider it physical activity.”

Paranto has modified both the equipment and rules for dodge ball so that it’s a far cry from the traditional, aggressive melee in which the object is to get one’s opponents out by hitting them as hard as possible with a playground ball. “If this was done with the wrong ball, it would not be fun for a lot of kids,” says Paranto. “I see schools doing that and then you see articles saying dodge ball’s a bad thing. Yeah, you did it with the wrong equipment and it hurt.” In his version—poker-chip dodge ball—the kids throw

soft, squishy balls at each other and no one is ever out. If a child is hit by one of the soft balls and doesn’t catch it, he just grabs a poker chip from a container and puts it in his team’s bucket. The team with fewer poker chips wins.

When first-graders at Scholls Heights play dodge ball with the softer balls, they’re laughing and concentrating on throwing and catching, instead of cowering in fear of the strongest players. After the game, it’s time to count up the poker chips with the help of Paranto’s ventriloquist’s dummy, Kenny.

“We’re going to count them up,” says Paranto to Kenny, who’s dressed in a white shirt, bright blue pants, and spectacles. “The team that has the most in this game is actually not the winning team.”

“How come?” asks Kenny in a squeaky, nasal voice.

“Because they got hit more than the other team,” Paranto explains to the dummy. “The team that has ‘less than’ wins.”

“Oh, less than,” squeaks Kenny, knowingly.

“Do you guys know the sign for that?” Paranto asks the kids, who draw the “less than” sign in the air with their fingers.

After Paranto, Kenny, and a student count up the chips (one batch by twos and one batch by fives) the kids shout and wave as the teacher

returns Kenny to the back room.

“Good-bye Kenny, good-bye Kenny!”

For the primary grades Paranto focuses on dance and rhythm, games with simplified rules, cooperative group activities, and skills such as juggling, jumping rope, and unicycling. Kids can be successful at activities like these, regardless of their skeletal size or physical maturation, which can vary by as much as six years among eight-year-olds, according to experts. “When you introduce an activity, there’s so many levels that each child can perform that activity,” says Paranto. “If we were jumping rope, at a very beginner level they’re going to have the rope lying on the ground. They’re just jumping over it. The next step is both handles are in one hand and they’re turning the rope and jumping over it. They can’t miss. The next level would be one turn at a time. The next level is continuous jumping. In one class of, say, third-graders, you’re going to see all of those. You’re going to have the low end jumping over the rope and you’ll have the high end doing double unders.”

When teaching fitness activities, Paranto stresses that fitness is about working out at your own level. Fitness activities are structured to allow for individual differences. “Back in the older days we had kids running the mile and being last and they felt

32 bad,” he says. Today, with a second-grade class, Paranto turns on two tape machines, one with music, one with beeps that gradually get closer together. The kids run the width of the gym, then wait for the beep before running back. If they lag behind the beep three times, Paranto tells them, they are to walk clockwise around the gym’s outer edge. “Remember, we’re learning how to pace ourselves so we save our energy,” he says.

“You got to make sure they know, hey, that’s natural, everybody develops at a different rate. Kids learn skills at different rates too. Like Yuka’s riding the unicycle. Other kids aren’t doing that right now. Maybe she can learn in five hours. Maybe for me it’s 18 hours.”

WAVING THEIR WINGS

With each activity or technique Paranto introduces, he describes it, he demonstrates it, and then the children enact it. In this way, three different instructional techniques and learning styles—auditory, visual, and kinesthetic—reinforce each other. The emphasis, though, is on the kinesthetic.

This multifaceted approach is also evident in the preschool, not only in the gym, but in the classroom when Petrin reads *The Very*

Hungry Caterpillar by Eric Carle. Before she reads she hands out tiny, stuffed cloth versions of the insatiable caterpillar and all the things he ate—strawberries, apples, plums, and more. The children listen quietly, getting up when it’s their turn to stick one of the Velcroed images to a felt board. When Petrin’s finished reading, she says, “Let’s make our bodies pretend they’re the different parts,” and guides the children once again through the transformation from egg to caterpillar to cocoon to butterfly.

Clearly, her students understand the story with every ounce of their small bodies. “What was he doing while he was crawling around?” she asks the 13 four- and five-year-old caterpillars who are twisting and wriggling, either on their tummies or as they walk around.

“He was founding food!” cries a girl.

“Yes, he was finding food, so you can eat while you’re crawling around,” Petrin responds. The children open and shut their jaws as they pretend to eat all the foods they like until they’re big and fat and turn into cocoons. Then, at Petrin’s urging, they hold still, crouched and balled up, for a very long time. “We have to wait for more than two weeks,” says



Steve Paranto's students work on fine and gross motor skills, balance, and hand-eye coordination with a wide range of activities such as juggling (opposite page, top) and unicycling (this page).

Teacher Kelly Petrin of the Portland Public Schools Head Start program leads her preschoolers through an interpretive dance exercise in which the students pretend to be caterpillars emerging as butterflies.

Two students not only build motor skills, they also learn about patterns when they build pyramids with "cup stackers."



Petrin. Then it's time to take a tiny bite of the cocoon and push out. "Ooo, ooo," the children coo quietly, as they step lightly and wave their big wings. ■

snap

SHOTS

BEING BACON

MCDONALD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

MOSCOW, Idaho—“OK, class, let’s dance like bacon in a frying pan,” says Amy Thompson, movement specialist at McDonald Elementary School. “You’re lying there, just getting warmer and it feels good.”

Twenty-three first-graders sprawling on the gym floor wiggle meditatively, dreamy smiles playing on their lips.

“It’s warmer now,” says Thompson. “Ooh, you’re getting hot! You’re about to be crispy!”

As if they have springs in their legs, the children hop up, trying to keep off the imaginary skillet. They are dancing now, absorbed by the challenge of *being* bacon.

Thompson laughs. “When new kids arrive here, they just don’t get it. They say, ‘Tell me what to do.’ But I stress creativity from the beginning, from kindergarten. What they come up with is amazing.”

McDonald students have 45 minutes of PE or movement every day, and often Thompson has her fourth-, fifth- or sixth-graders spend a half-hour of that time choreographing a dance that they present to the class at the period’s end. She finds that boys are often resistant at first, but not for long. “Then they thrive,” she reports. “They want to choreograph as often as the girls, and they do some incredibly athletic moves.”

In kindergarten, Thompson has children work on body control and traveling through space making, for example, curvy or zigzag lines. In first through third grades, they do more explorative, unregimented movement. “We do a lot with the

weather,” Thompson says. “I’ll say, ‘Make your body look like it’s in a storm.’ Or we do vegetables. I’ll have them be a carrot growing, or a salad. There’s no right or wrong, but they’re engaged, moving. By fourth through sixth grade, I move into real dance steps, like line dancing, hip-hop, folk dance, maybe swing. The right music is crucial.”

Thompson did not always have this approach. There was nothing like this at McDonald seven years ago when she arrived. But the school has a strong arts component, and Principal Laurie Austin, a former PE teacher herself, backed Thompson’s approach to fitness. “I did a ton of reading and got to know the kids,” Thompson says. “Over time this is what I’ve found that works.”

“Amy develops the right side of the brain,” Austin says. “It’s so creative and dramatic—and innovative—that it really connects to the students.”

The sports and fitness classes Dan Peterson teaches complement Thompson’s movement work. He stresses cooperation rather than repetition of skills or drill practices. “I use sports as vehicles to understand teamwork, with fitness woven in,” says Peterson. He makes sure that the pitfalls of sports instruction as offered in the past are avoided. “For example, when we start on skills that lead to tennis, I have two kids work together, but only one has a racquet. The other tosses the ball for the first to hit. Instead of two of them bashing the ball around competitively—and missing, they work

together focused on improving their skills, developing self-esteem along the way.”

The school has a climbing wall, and the approach there is also cooperative. “Many children don’t have upper-body strength to support themselves on our wall, which has only handholds. But they can travel some distance if another child helps by holding their ankles.” The wall has only handholds because Peterson is finding that many of today’s children need to build upper-body strength.

At other times, Peterson’s classes look similar to Amy Thompson’s. Peterson sets up a maze of colorful six-inch markers and puts on a tape by legendary soul musician Wilson Pickett. Students gallop and skip through the maze to the music. Then Peterson connects the markers with wands, making them into hurdles, and the kids explode over the jumps with glee. “They’re getting a good workout,” says Peterson, “but they just think they’re having fun.”

Back in Thompson’s room, a third-grade class is discussing what to represent next. Giraffe? Washing machine? They decide on a bulldozer, and with no help from Thompson they quickly assemble themselves into a hooked shape that will grind its gears and scoop vigorously. The student who has waited outside will come in and guess what her classmates have become. They, too, think they’re just having fun. ■

PRESCHOOL ISN'T TOO YOUNG TO START

WILLARD L. BOWMAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

ANCHORAGE, Alaska—Kim Rampmeyer's preschoolers at Willard Bowman Elementary School are playing a favorite game: Alaska Highway. On their little "cars" (scooters), they pull or push themselves around "road kill" (a rubber chicken) and through a "tunnel" (a nylon parachute). At a make-believe car wash, paper streamers hanging from a row of track hurdles tickle the kids as they scoot through, and a fan blows off the imaginary water.

Twenty-five percent of Rampmeyer's students have physical, mental, or sensory disabilities. That doesn't stop her from including them as fully as possible. "We have one little boy in a wheelchair, who has a tracheotomy and a feeding tube. He communicates by blinking and uses one hand to move his chair," Rampmeyer says. "But he always comes on Thursday because it's PE. He loves it. When we play Alaska Highway, we lift the parachute and the car wash streamers above him. When we do kicking, we help him move his foot to kick a 48-inch beach ball."

Physical education is hardly routine for preschoolers, let alone for those with disabilities. When Rampmeyer started at Bowman, she had no idea that she would be pioneering the development of curriculum for both. But when she was asked, she dove in. "I had no training in adapted PE, special education, or early childhood," Rampmeyer recalls. "I searched for curriculum that would promote large-

muscle development and increase motor skills. Everything I found was based on imaginative play or one-to-one physical therapy situations. I observed the children in their classrooms and discussed specific disabilities with physical therapists. I learned. Now I make lessons for the more able kids and adapt them for the others."

The preschoolers work on gross motor skills by jogging or doing animal walks down a wide black line. By simulating tires, they do modified pushups. "We pump up as if we were a flat tire, then we have a blow out or a slow leak, and try again," Rampmeyer says. Preschoolers also do modified sit-ups, twirl hula hoops around their tummies, practice kicking and striking, and explore some basic climbing and balancing skills. Because many disabled kids have been carried by parents and isolated from nondisabled peers, they've had fewer chances to develop physical skills. For autistic or "globally delayed" kids, especially, the kinds of activities Rampmeyer provides are crucial to proper development.

Rampmeyer's older students engage in activities, albeit on a rudimentary level, more often associated with much older youth: orienteering, inline and ice skating, cross-country skiing, juggling, and snowshoeing. The district's goals include getting kids started on learning lifetime fitness skills. Rampmeyer's work shows that the elementary years are not too young to start. She is especially pleased to have

encouraged snowshoeing. "We have so much winter here," she says. "People are stuck inside being inactive for so long. But with snowshoes you can get out." Rampmeyer handed out information about snowshoes before Christmas last year, and many parents bought them as presents for their kids.

To raise grant money to purchase skis for the third through sixth grade, Rampmeyer had to make a convincing case that skiing could be made to enhance coursework in math. She did. "We can measure how far we go, our stride lengths, etcetera, and combine skiing with orienteering and map work," she says.

Rampmeyer's students are extraordinarily well behaved, and this is no accident. Rampmeyer uses Don Hellison's Levels of Behavior to make explicit to kids what is expected of them, from unacceptable behaviors (hitting, pushing, leaving without permission) to generous (showing concern for others, giving genuine compliments). Kids assess their own behavior accordingly every day. This approach has been judged a success by parents and other teachers alike.

Independence is encouraged in Bowman students, too. Entering the gym, they read warm-up directions on the door and begin on their own. Each student has a choice of equipment for many activities, and their choices become "theirs" for the duration. And they frequently have opportunities to create their own games and dances, which they show to their classmates.

Rampmeyer's work has long been recognized by grateful parents, but last year she received wider acknowledgement. After a rigorous selection process, Rampmeyer was named by the Council on Physical Education for Children (COPEC), a division of NASPE, to the prestigious position of representing all elementary physical education teachers from Washington, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Alaska. ■



Saving PE: The Oregon Story

THE PENDULUM OF SUPPORT FOR GYM CLASS HAS SWUNG FROM ONE EXTREME TO ANOTHER, AND IS SWINGING YET AGAIN

By JUDY BLANKENSHIP

PORTLAND, Oregon—

On this sunny April afternoon, 16 kindergartners at Glencoe Elementary are running 400-yard laps around the grassy, tree-lined track behind the school. To keep the five-year-olds moving and “out of trouble,” PE teacher Jim Anstine walks the track counterclockwise, greeting each child by name and holding up his hand for a high five as they run by.

“That’s good, Lucy, keep going,” he urges a dark-haired girl who’s

dawdling along. To an observer, he reminisces, “I taught her mother as a fifth-grader.”

“Higher, Mr. A, higher!” a boy yells. Rushing right at Anstine, the boy executes a “hoop jump” as he sails by.

With wiry gray hair and lively eyes behind tinted glasses, Mr. A, as everyone calls Anstine, has taught for nearly two decades at Glencoe, a pretty, mission-style school of 500 kids on Portland’s inner-southeast side. But there was a time 10 years ago when his job looked like anything but a sure bet.

“I was a full-time PE specialist at the time of Measure 5,” Anstine says, referring to the property-tax limitation law Oregonians passed in 1990 that radically cut funding to the state’s 246 school districts. “I felt stressed like all of our specialists did, and I started preparing for an elementary classroom teaching position by going back to school. “

Anstine was lucky. With strong support for PE at Glencoe, he kept his post. But many of his PE colleagues were not so fortunate. In the rural town of Mollala in Oregon’s wet Willamette Valley, Susan Fatland—another longtime veteran of the field—tells a very different story. In 1995, when the district was forced by Measure 5 to lay off all but two K-8 PE teachers, Fatland was among those who lost their jobs. She settled

into a sales position at Nordstrom.

But the following spring, her principal asked her to come back. Mollala had reconfigured the district to create an 800-student middle school, with positions for four PE teachers. “When I asked if it was a sure thing, he said, ‘Oh yes, we’re going to go forward.’”

So back to Mollala she went. Things were looking good—until spring rolled around again. “The principal called us in and said, ‘I hate to do this, but budget cuts force us to lay off the entire department.’

“I was devastated.”

She began a series of part-time PE jobs, moving from school to school around the region. Slowly, she worked her way back up to the 0.8 position she now holds at Mountain View Middle School in Beaverton. But for Fatland and hundreds of her PE colleagues in Oregon, the professional landscape had changed forever.

Ballot Measure 5, passed by Oregon voters in November 1990, is only the most visible assault to physical education in the state. Over the past 30 years, PE in Oregon has lost ground to a number of other factors, both fiscal and philosophical. The biggest hits have come from the back-to-basics movement of the 1970s and the standards movement of the 1990s. Both movements zeroed in on academic subjects. Other

subjects—art, drama, music, PE—got stalled on the sidelines.

“I don’t think it was just Measure 5,” says Barbara Cusimano, Associate Professor of Exercise and Sports Science at Oregon State University. “Educational reform hit about the same time as the budget cuts. Schools were being asked to do more but with less funding, and school administrators had to face difficult choices.” School administrators, stuck between growing demands and diminishing resources, reasoned that they should direct resources to those areas where the state is holding them accountable, Cusimano notes.

Finally, though, gym class is regaining lost ground in Oregon. New research on kids’ abysmal fitness has in part fueled that reversal. The tenacious efforts of dedicated PE proponents have also helped sway opinion. The public and policymakers are once again seeing the need for kids to sweat at school.

SLASHING BUDGETS

While Measure 5 is not alone to blame for Oregon’s PE woes, it is a major culprit. The infamous ballot measure dramatically changed how the state’s schools are funded. The law capped local property taxes and required the state to make up the lost revenue. For the first couple of years, state coffers and local cash re-



A grant from the city of Portland helps support after-school activities such as kung fu and the Twirl Club at Glencoe Elementary.

services were able to cushion the effect of the new law. But by school year 1992-93, massive teacher layoffs began. Shock waves were felt around the state as athletic and activities budgets were slashed, and PE was scaled back or cut altogether

The cuts hit a flash point in March 1996, when Portland, the state's largest district, announced it would be forced to eliminate about 500 jobs and cut 15 special programs. At the same time that Measure 5 went into effect, the state instituted a new formula to close the revenue gap between districts and equalize per-pupil spending statewide. While some rural, low-spending districts saw their funding increase by up to 25 percent, Portland's school budget shrunk by about \$50 million in the six years after Measure 5. By 1996 the district was spending 21 percent less on each student. For every 1,000 students studying art, music, or drama, there were just two teachers. For those interested in fitness, sports, and physical education, there were sometimes no teachers at all.

"We've cut all the fat out," Parkrose Superintendent Jacki Bottingim told *The Oregonian* newspaper in March 1996. "Then we cut the meat to the bone. The only thing left is the heart."

Ironically, Oregon's economy was booming with an influx of high-tech



A dedicated jump roper polishes her skills at an after-school jump rope club. Photos by Rick Rappaport.

industries, and in June 1991 the state Legislature had overwhelmingly passed the most ambitious school-reform plan in the nation.

The Oregon Educational Reform Act for the 21st Century—with the ambitious goal of creating “the best educated and best prepared workforce in America by the year 2000 and equal to any in the world by

2010”—raised academic standards for high school students in English, math, science, and social studies. PE was not among the subjects required for the certificates of mastery high school students were expected to earn.

DECADES OF DECLINE

PE teacher Don Zehrung has been around long enough to remember

when PE held a solid position in Oregon schools. “Fifteen years before the passage of Ballot Measure 5, the job situation was a lot better,” he reports. “PE may not have been on a level playing field with core curriculum subjects, but it was still recognized as an integral part of the school day. Back then kids had PE every day, just as they had math and

language arts,” Zehrung says.

Another long-time Oregon teacher, Diana Boyte, recalls a richness of courses available to high school students 30 years ago that is almost unbelievable in today’s bare-bones environment.

“Every high school student took two years of PE,” says Boyte, who retired last spring after a long career

in the Portland-area suburb of Beaverton. “Beyond the required personal fitness class, a student could elect five other PE courses, which included summer fishing, winter fishing, archery, tennis, and golf, as well as all the traditional team sports.”

Summer fishing? Golf? This dream world of PE courses available to some Oregon students, albeit those who lived in well-funded districts such as Beaverton, was too good to last. “Years before Measure 5 the state made the decision to cut back PE and add other academic requirements for graduation,” recalls Boyte. “The PE requirement for high school students dropped to one year, though it was still offered as an elective.”

Zehring offers an additional explanation for the trend away from sports and fitness. “In 1969, back when I was a student at Portland State University, *Time* and *Newsweek* ran simultaneous cover stories on “Why Johnny Can’t Read.” The back-to-basics trend was already beginning, but I think those two stories gave it tremendous momentum. It marked the beginning of an emphasis on academics and the decline of ‘extras’ such as PE, music, and art.”

In the next two decades the message became loud and clear: gym isn’t important. Budgets were cut, facilities fell into disrepair, and

teaching positions were lost, despite the 1987 recommendation from Congress that all schoolchildren have daily, high-quality, physical education from kindergarten through high school. By 1995 just 25 percent of the nation’s students attended a daily phys ed class, down from 42 percent in 1991.

No one can say for sure when the pendulum began to swing back in favor of PE. But the 1996 *Surgeon General’s Report on Physical Activity and Health*, which portrays a nation of kids out of shape and overweight, clearly jolted the nation into taking a second look at physical education.

SWEATING BULLETS

After two laps around the track, Anstine’s kindergartners work their way through a playground obstacle course and then, without pausing, run into the gym to practice jump rope. As they dash from one end of the gym to the other, some five-year-olds can only flail the rope above their heads. Others expertly skip over the rope every time. “Very few kindergartners can jump in the beginning of the year,” says Anstine, “but by the end of the year, 50 to 60 percent know how to jump rope. The girls seem to be better at this than the boys,” he adds.

Some PE specialists, like Jim Anstine, survived by being innovative

teachers and making themselves indispensable to their school communities. Described as the “heart of the school” when he won a teaching award last year from the Portland Public Schools Foundation, Anstine organizes an annual, schoolwide Run for the Arts event that this year raised more than \$20,000 for “extras” such as arts performances and artists’ residencies. In addition to teaching six PE classes a day, Anstine has taken on noontime duties on the playground, where he keeps kids working on their PE skills. He runs intramural sports for children who arrive early in morning, and he directs a popular after-school track and field program for the Portland Parks and Recreation Department.

“PE has always been a priority at Glencoe,” says Bob Tongue, PTA president and the father of a third-grader, “and Mr. A is such an important part of the program that we’ve always found a way to fund his position. He’s one full-time staff member but we probably get one-and-a-half to two times the work from him. That’s a real bonus.”

Other teachers took a different approach.

Emily Foster is just a few months into her new job as PE coordinator at Portland Public Schools—a position that fell under the Measure 5 axe, and was reinstated last spring. As if to caution that while PE may

have a toehold but has not yet made a solid comeback, Foster’s position is classified as half-time TOSA: teacher on special assignment for the district. A physical education specialist at Sabin Elementary School in Portland for 18 years, Foster, a tall, striking woman in her early 50s, was encouraged to take her new job by those who watched her proactive approach to the cutbacks of Measure 5, and her tireless efforts to professionalize and strengthen PE curriculum in Portland’s schools.

“Around the time of Ballot Measure 5, I remember (former Portland Superintendent) Dr. Bierwirth and the school board saying they were going to cut all PE and music. For a few days I just cried. I could not imagine what I would do. After a week of not sleeping and going through a real bad time, I decided to do two things: I would go back to school to get my classroom endorsement, and I would start advocating.”

Foster called every PE teacher she knew in the district. She asked them to urge parents and kids to write letters to the school board, the legislature, and the media. More than 90 parents and children sent letters. “We packed four different board meetings,” Foster remembers. “We had doctors come and speak about the importance of physical activity. I called Bill Bowerman, the famous coach at University of Oregon, and

when he heard the situation he said ‘I’ll be right up.’ In the end, the board was inundated.”

Among the letters was one from Foster’s mother, Toby McDonell. A retired professor of physical education at the University of Puget Sound, McDonnell reminded Bierwirth and the board that her daughter was Oregon’s PE Teacher of the Year in 1993, and suggested that if they had ever attended one of her daughter’s annual jelly-bean field days at Sabin Elementary—where 700 students win jelly beans

as they participate in skill stations—they wouldn’t dream of cutting PE out of the elementary curriculum.

The efforts of Foster, her colleagues, students, parents, and grandparents had an immediate pay-off. The Portland school board decided not to completely cut PE from the curriculum. But the inevitable staff and program reductions meant some teachers had to divide their time between two or more schools. Others took on classroom responsibilities. Still others, like Foster, went back to school for class-

room certification as a hedge against future cuts.

“This whole thing has been rough on children,” Foster says. “Every spring we would hear that we had to cut back. Music went to half-time, then we lost several instructional aides, an administrator, and a counselor.” PE at Sabin was saved, thanks to vociferous input from children and parents, and strong support from the site-based council. But job insecurity became an annual headache as predictable as taxes. In the spring of 2000—10

years after Measure 5—the district was facing cuts yet again. Says Foster: “I was sweating bullets.”

While PE is far from firm footing yet, the high-profile organizing has begun to have long-term impact. When, in 1996, the Pew Charitable Trusts funded a project to help urban school districts create content standards and benchmarks in several academic areas, physical education was included. Foster and her colleagues set to work to define exemplary physical education programs and common curriculum goals for

Programs like Glencoe Elementary’s Twirl Club pull in kids not traditionally drawn to sports.



elementary, middle, and high schools. Two years later, the team produced an impressive 90-page booklet that outlines physical education content standards for a wide range of skills and topics: motor skills, active lifestyle outside the classroom, physical fitness, diversity, and personal and social skills. For each content standard, the team developed common curriculum goals, benchmarks, and assessment examples.

“Everyone tends to think of PE as a soft subject,” says Foster. “I’d love to see it become core, and as important as everything else.”

PERSISTENCE PAYS OFF

There are other signs that change is on its way. In July 1999 the Oregon Legislature passed House Bill 3307, a bipartisan effort to add PE to the subjects required for certification under the Educational Reform Act. It was a victory for a persistent group of health and PE activists that included Zehring, who teaches at Conestoga Middle School, and Dr. Minot Cleveland, a Portland internist and chairman of the Oregon Coalition for Promoting Physical Activity. Other groups that joined the effort included the Governor’s Council on Physical Fitness and Sports and the Oregon Heart Association.

“I think House Bill 3307 is a demonstration that the majority of

our legislators have opened their eyes to the fact that we’ve got a health care crisis resulting from our sedentary lifestyles,” says Zehring. “The good news is that the Legislature passed the bill. The bad news is that they underfunded K-12 education, so that school districts are still faced with the tough choices of what to cut back.”

School funding remains a gargantuan issue in Oregon. Even so, there are more promising omens on PE’s horizon. The Oregon Department of Education has given PE a big boost by reinstating a state-level position that was obliterated by Measure 5.

“Physical education now has a place within the state education system,” says Margaret Bates, who was recently hired to fill the post, Educational Program Specialist for Physical Education. “Our first task will be to propose, and have approved, a set of standards and benchmarks in physical education. Meanwhile, districts need to recognize the importance of the Physical Education Bill (HB3307) and what it means to them.”

“People need to know what quality physical educators do and what a quality program looks like,” Bates continues, referring to the public perception of PE. “The old sayings of ‘give me 10’ and ‘take a lap’ are out. That is not physical education;

it is punishment. Physical education is teaching students how to enjoy moving and what it does for their bodies.”

At the national level, the pending Physical Education for Progress Act, or PEP, sponsored by Republican Senator Ted Stevens of Alaska, would give \$400 million to state school districts to improve PE programs—\$5 million to Oregon alone (a figure roughly equivalent to the salaries and benefits of the 100 PE teachers the state has lost in the last decade).

“These are all positive indicators that there will be a turnaround,” says Cusimano from Oregon State University, “but I think it’s a little too early to say we’re there. We’re not.”

As if to emphasize Cusimano’s point, the outcome of a cliff-hanger state election in May at first looked bleak. A local-option levy for schools appeared to have failed in Portland for lack of the required 50 percent voter turnout. But a final tally revealed that a bare majority of eligible voters had sent in ballots. The levy passed. The \$78 million tax increase over five years will restore 170 teachers, reduce class size, and help replace outdated textbooks. Some of the cuts to the arts and other special programs will be restored. At least for the moment, the hemorrhage in funds, personnel, and programs that has devastated Portland has been stanching.

“There is a new PE on the horizon,” says Foster. “I see more standards-based teaching, adequate budgets so every kid can have equipment, and professional development inservice days for PE teachers, like any other discipline. I see more respect for physical education.”

At Glencoe, Anstine keeps a watchful eye on a class of third-graders tossing neon-green tennis balls into the field. “Throw higher, girls, higher!” he encourages.

“I only see these children twice a week,” Anstine says, “but at Glencoe we use recess and playground time at lunch to make sure that every child gets 30 minutes daily of vigorous physical activity.”

He pauses and looks pensive. “In an ideal world,” he says, “every kid would have 40 minutes of PE every day.” ■



Dear Editor:

I am writing with regard to the article, "The Principal Kids Love to Hug" (Spring 2000). I was both shocked that Principal David Nufer at Finger Lake Elementary chose to present the situation as he did and amazed that it was actually published. As an educator and a principal of many years, I have learned that it is quite easy to compare oneself to one's predecessor in a favorable light, as the predecessor is no longer there. I have also learned that a school culture and strong programs are built over many years, and that while a program might experience recognition and suc-

cess during the oversight of one principal, the building blocks were usually in place years prior to that recognition.

I find it quite sad that Mr. Nufer chose to detract from the work of former Principal Nancy Carder and her staff at Finger Lake in the comments he was quoted as saying in the article. I believe that this "competitive" aspect to awards and recognition totally detracts from the collegiality we need to build between peers in order to improve education for all students.

A physical education teacher I once worked with had a saying posted on the gym wall that said,

"You don't need to blow out another's candle to make your own flame brighter." Unfortunately, in your zest to make the most of Mr. Nufer's accomplishments, this is what happened, and it is a shame. Dr. Carder is a talented and dedicated professional, who in my opinion could easily be named "Distinguished Principal of the Year" because of her talents, dedication, and hard work for children.

Patricia McRae
Executive Director
Elementary Education
Anchorage School District
Anchorage, Alaska

Dear Editor:

I was somewhat surprised that a professional publication promoting the positive work of principals (Spring 2000, "The New Principal") would in its contents allow a reporter/writer to laud one at the expense of another. It is my belief that every principal has strengths

and opportunities. No two are exactly the same. This does not always mean that one is better than another. It definitely means that your writer could have found enough of Mr. Nufer's accomplishments to write about without his negative references to my

work before him. In this case, only part of the story was told.

Nancy Carder Ed.D., J.D.
Principal
Chugiak Elementary School
Anchorage, Alaska

Dear Editor:

I just finished reading the article "A City Fit for Kids" (Winter 1999). I was very impressed with the commitment to the youth of the city of Boise. The ownership conferred on the youth of this city is an example to other cities around the country. These activities and events are developing future citizens who will take an active role in their community and government. They are also developing leaders. The idea of service is

missing in many people today, not just the youth. It is exciting to read about young people getting worked up over service to the public good. Specifically, I can identify with action of Boise's youth to build a skateboard park. Some young people in my hometown are working to this end, but encountering resistance. I think they are doing a great job and hope they are successful.

I particularly found the system-

atic evaluation to be interesting. By identifying the assets that help young people succeed, and then assessing them to check for development and to identify weaknesses, Boise is preparing its children for a successful future.

Randy Hartwig
Science Teacher
Marshfield High School
Marshfield, Wisconsin

Raising

Continued from Page 44

the lower grades. But we're not seeing a response to that recommendation. We thought that when the report came out, it would have a positive impact similar to the landmark report on smoking tobacco back in 1964—that it would change things. Administrators in education either are not aware of it or they just have too many other things on their plate.

NW: How have the national PE standards, which you helped to develop, been received in the field?

WOOD: The last time I checked, over 2,000 copies had been sold. They can't sell them fast enough because physical educators were demanding direction, and we gave it to them.

NW: Were there conflicts or sticking points among members of the Standards and Assessment Task Force?

WOOD: A major sticking point for us was that we came out with seven content standards, three of which deal not with the physical elements of PE, but with the psycho-social element. Three out of the seven! It really shows the trend in schools today. It shows that PE is prepared to address behavioral management issues and some of the interpersonal skills that kids are really going to need to function responsibly in a multicultural society.

NW: What did you personally argue most forcefully for?

WOOD: Many physical educators do not assess appropriately. So it's hard to show accountability for our programs. That's one of the main reasons physical education programs are cut when there's a budget crunch. I've been fighting for accountability through assessment for years now—that is, we have to grade more effectively, and we have to be accountable for what we do. One of the foundations of the educational reform movement and the national PE standards is the assessment piece. How do you know when your students have met the content standards? You have to assess. That's why in the standards document there's a whole section on performance or "authentic" assessment. I saw it as a key to helping physical education become more accountable and to survive in the educational system.

NW: What's the biggest mistake that physical educators make in terms of assessment? Just not doing enough of it?

WOOD: That's a large part of it. Another problem is the reliance on high-inference grading criteria such as attendance, participation, and effort rather than low-inference criteria such as performance of motor skill and paper-and-pencil tests of knowledge. And there are reasons for that. Part of it is lack of sufficient training. Part of it is that they're inundated with students. They want to get their kids active, they don't want to be assessing all the time. And then

just finding enough time during their day for all the paperwork is challenging. Much of the motor skill testing involves observation. While this type of assessment is subjective, when it's done properly with rating scales and checklists it's an effective assessment of one's skill. We have the methods for efficient and effective assessment. What it's going to take is retraining inservice teachers and training the new teachers who are in preservice right now. In the teacher education courses at OSU, we spend a lot of time on skill analysis and assessment.

NW: Do you have any sense of how many people are actually trying to adapt their curriculum to the standards?

WOOD: There are some communities and states that have really immersed themselves and are doing an incredible job. Wichita, Kansas, and Kentucky are good examples. But generally, there's slow movement. There are some states that have hardly started at all. Locally, a few of the larger districts such as Portland and Corvallis have adapted their curriculum to the national standards with some modification. However, my intuition is that the majority of districts have done little. Especially the smaller districts—they don't have the funds; it's a major undertaking.

NW: So many people say, "I hated PE." Do you see these new trends that you described earlier as changing that overall attitude toward "phys ed"?

WOOD: Yes, I do. I wouldn't blame those who say, "I really hated it." The individuals who were good at it liked it. Many of those who weren't naturally good at it—which is the majority of people—didn't like it at all. They felt threatened. A lot of practices that went on were not appropriate. But modern physical education teachers are extremely well trained in how to deal with kids. They're well versed in how to teach movement fundamentals in a way that's fun and enjoyable. If kids aren't interested in physical education, they're not going to recreate when they are adults. And so we spend a lot of time teaching our PE teachers how to make physical education interesting for kids.

NW: On the academic side, reformers are stressing the idea that every kid can learn and every kid can be successful. Yet I think a lot of educators might hesitate to say the same thing about physical education. Do you think every kid can learn to be skillful in movement?

WOOD: The idea here is not to mold kids into athletes. The idea is to give them minimal competencies to increase the chances that they'll want to recreate as adults and have a health-enhancing lifestyle throughout the life span. We have students set individual goals, not compare themselves to someone else. For individuals with a disability, we adapt the program to their abilities. The idea is to help each student reach his or her potential.

And remember that students are assessed in the cognitive and psychosocial domains in addition to the motor or movement domain.

NW: Is it important to get parents involved?

WOOD: Parental involvement is critical. We're working hard on not only advocating for physical education, but also getting parents involved in PE with their child at home. If the attitudes and behaviors are not modeled at home, it's difficult for the PE teacher to get the point across. Also, if parents don't understand what's going on in physical education, it's really hard to get support for your program. We work a lot with our preservice teachers on how to advocate for their program.

NW: Do you feel optimistic about the future of PE?

WOOD: Guardedly optimistic. If this country is to come to grips with rising health-care costs, we must focus the health-care system on prevention. One of the most cost-effective interventions is a sound physical education program. Currently, some programs are not as effective as they should be, but we know how to deliver effective physical education. It's a matter of convincing taxpayers, parents, and administrators to provide the necessary resources. As the father of two preschoolers, the bottom line for me is that we owe our future generations nothing less than the best we can offer. So let's get to it. ■



Raising the Bar

An Oregon professor helps bring PE into the standards movement

By LEE SHERMAN

Terry Wood of Oregon State University is one of eight PE experts nationwide who crafted the national PE standards, released in 1995 by the National Association for Sport and Physical Education. Widely published in the area of psychomotor measurement and evaluation, Professor Wood was a keynote speaker at the 1998 International Sports Teaching Symposium in Taiwan. *Northwest Education* Editor Lee Sherman talked with him about the standards and about PE's ongoing evolution.

NORTHWEST EDUCATION:
How has PE changed in emphasis and purpose?

TERRY WOOD: In the last two decades, we've seen an increased emphasis on movement fundamentals—teaching kids to move properly—particularly in elementary school. There is still an emphasis on sport in the upper grades, but it has shifted to leisure-time physical activity—that is, introducing an array of physical activities in such a way that kids will develop a positive attitude toward health-enhancing physical activities throughout the life span. More recently, we've seen the emphasis expand from education of the physical to educating children in three domains: cognitive skills, motor skills, and what I call psycho-social skills. The psycho-social area includes a multicultural component, and is aimed at helping kids with anger management, conflict resolution, taking responsibility for their behavior, and getting along with diverse populations—including individuals with different sexual orientation. And then there are certain values—habits of mind if you like—they should have, such as an appreciation for physical activity and the beauty of movement. This psycho-social area is receiving increasing emphasis, particularly as we see the increase of violent conflict in schools. The struggle in reforming PE is making the transition from the old to the new PE. It's a transition from a sport-oriented model to a physical-activity model based on content standards along with authentic assessment of students in the three domains. We have teachers who've been in the field for many years, and some of them

are still operating under the more traditional model.

NW: How many programs out there are good and sound?

WOOD: I would say that nationally, not a high percentage. Recent research has concluded that insufficient exposure to quality physical education programs is a primary factor in the major decline of the fitness levels of American youth. It's pretty sad. In Oregon we do comparatively well. But we could do a lot better.

NW: Oregon has been out front by including physical education as a content area in its Certificate of Initial Mastery (CIM).

WOOD: Since 1995, I've been involved in the lobby to get physical education into the CIM and get some teeth into it. That just happened in August of last year when House Bill 3307 passed. The bill mandates testing in physical education by the district at the third, fifth, eighth, and 10th grades. In addition, the Oregon Department of Education recently hired a PE specialist to coordinate the development of state content standards so that every program will be on the same page. The legislation mandates that the state Board of Education develop content standards in PE to be implemented by the 2001-02 school year as part of the implementation of the CIM. I'm hoping that they adopt the national standards so we can get moving. We don't have to reinvent the wheel.

NW: What would be the typical sad program you might see?

WOOD: The sad program would be a program that lacks facilities. So you get a lot of kids in a very small space, like a cafeteria with a slippery floor, and you've got to move the tables away. A sad program is one with too many kids and too few teachers, many who are classroom teachers minimally trained in PE. When a teacher spends all of his or her time in classroom management, the best they can do is get the equipment out and say, "OK, let's play some games." They're not teaching skills. I can't blame the teachers for this state of affairs because when you see 300 different kids a week, and you've got them in an inadequate space, what more can you do?

NW: Aside from the Physical Education for Progress bill now before Congress, do you see any sign of interest at the federal level for supporting PE programs?

WOOD: In the last few years there was a resolution passed by Congress for daily physical education. It wasn't a bill, there was no money, but the support from the federal level was a real boon for us.

NW: Symbolically, anyway.

WOOD: Yes, symbolically—that they at least felt it was important. The other significant event on the federal level was the 1996 *Surgeon General's Report on Physical Activity and Health*. It calls for adequate daily physical education in

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Issue Editor:
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