

Speak Up for Literacy!

Integrating Presentation and Public Speaking Skills into Senior Physical Education Classes

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According to the Ontario Ministry of Education, (2003a; 2004), literacy instruction should be integrated across the curriculum. Students who have a strong foundation in literacy skills, including reading, writing and oral communication skills have increased opportunities to experience success as active members of society. Conversely, students who have limited literacy skills will find it difficult to make a successful transition from high school to college or the work place. Leadership and teamwork, concepts prevalent in both Health and Physical Education (HPE) and the workplace, hinge upon successful communication skills. According to the New London Group (1996) “effective teamwork depends to a much greater extent on informal, oral, and interpersonal discourse” (p.66). Learning how to speak effectively, therefore, becomes a “social resource” (p.69) for life after school and for successful oral communication within HPE programming.

Traditionally, students with limited literacy skills have been placed in the senior HPE courses because of the perception that there are less literacy and numeracy demands in HPE than in other senior courses. Buell & Whittaker (2001), Marlett & Gordon (2004), and Berhman (2004) argue that there are in fact many literacy demands in HPE classes and there should be more explicit literacy instruction in HPE. Integrating the communication skills from the Presentation and Speaking Skills will help students meet the literacy demands of HPE. Table 1. outlines specific lessons taken from the Presentation and Speaking Skills curriculum that can be applied to HPE classes.

Table 1. Presentation and Speaking Skills that can be Applied to the Senior HPE Class:

- Communication Apprehension
- Audience Analysis
- Rapport
- Mental Dialogue
- Speech Planning
- Body Language – Gestural Mode of Communication
- Language Structure – Speaking to Inform, Persuade, or Entertain

According to the Ontario Ministry of Education (2003b), students who struggle with literacy respond to programs that “reflect a depth of knowledge and understanding; are connected to their lives,

culture, and future beyond the classroom; and encourage different viewpoints” (p. 19). At their best, the Ontario courses for secondary health and physical education offer challenging programs that demand complex literacy skills and provide opportunities for students to develop their affective and cognitive thinking skills. There are benefits to integrating oral communication skills, specifically public speaking strategies, into the senior physical and health education curriculum. These skills can help meet the future needs of students.

Literacy Needs of Students in Senior Health and Physical Education Classrooms

The literacy skills required for optimal engagement in HPE are complex and diverse. Luke & Hardy (1999) observe, “physical actions are notoriously difficult to describe and explain” (p. 184). This means that students have to transform knowledge and skills between what the New London Group (1996) classifies as the gestural mode and the oral mode. A student’s literacy skills may be challenged when s/he is asked to describe his or her physical experience, since it can be difficult to translate physical actions into words.

According to expectations outlined in Ontario grade 11 and 12 HPE curriculum (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2000b),

The Ontario Health and Physical Education curriculum requires students to use complex literacy skills. In the grades 11 and 12 Healthy and Active Living Education classes, a student uses oral communication skills when s/he is asked to demonstrate a movement skill, lead a warm-up or exhibit leadership skills in a team setting. Students should be given the literacy tools to succeed in these activities. The integration of explicit public speaking instruction from the grade 11 open Presentation and Speaking course into the health and physical education classroom will enhance students’ oral communication skills and also improve affective and cognitive thinking in the process.

students in senior level Healthy and Active Living Education courses are required to lead warm-ups and engage in activities in which they can demonstrate leadership skills while participating in team settings. These activities are also demanding because students may experience communication apprehension, “the natural nervousness that occurs when communicating with others, usually in a public setting” (Carlile & Hensley, 2005, p. 420).

Marlett & Gordon (2004) want “PE teachers to view physical education as a thinking subject and to prepare enriching lessons that integrate alternative texts and activities with the curriculum”(p. 226) that is, lessons that are informed by literacy across the curriculum. Further, they suggest students will learn more about HPE concepts by engaging in alternative texts, such as student-led warm-ups, skill demonstrations, and other leadership activities, rather than learning strictly through the presentational style. Integrating presentation and speaking lessons that focus on oral communication component of these activities would be beneficial to students as they learn to talk about what they are learning, orally reflect upon their experience with the physical activity, and vocalize the connections they see with the physical activity to their daily lives and future goals.

Le programme-cadre sur l’éducation à la santé et l’éducation physique de l’Ontario oblige les élèves à faire preuve de compétences complexes en littératie. Dans le cadre des cours sur les modes de vie sains et actifs offerts en 11^e année et en 12^e année, les élèves sont appelés à utiliser leurs talents oratoires pour décrire un mouvement, diriger une séance d’échauffements ou démontrer leur leadership au sein d’une équipe. Il y aurait lieu de fournir aux élèves les outils nécessaires pour mener à bien ces activités. L’inclusion de directives explicites sur la communication et l’art oratoire dans les cours d’éducation à la santé et d’éducation physique aide les élèves à mieux s’exprimer oralement et renforce leur présence affective et cognitive.

Behrman (2004) recognizes that focusing on literacy skills in the classroom may be perceived as an activity that takes time away from students participating in physical activity, but argues that literacy skills development will “augment, not replace, physical activity”(p. 26). It is possible to assert then, that senior HPE students will be better prepared to engage in course content if they are given the tools to enhance their learning and reflective abilities.

What Oral Communication Skills are Required in Senior HPE Classes?

The Healthy and Active Living curriculum for grades 11 and 12 specifies that students should be able to “demonstrate positive, responsible personal and social behaviour in physical settings (e.g. facilitating group cohesiveness and cooperation), and demonstrate leadership in creating a positive climate that promotes participation and safety (e.g., by officiating, mentoring, coaching)”(Ontario Ministry of Education, 2000b, p. 20). More specifically, according to the Ontario Physical and Health Educators Association [Ophea] (2000), grade 11 students are expected to:

... describe and demonstrate the specific rules and guidelines necessary for active participation and development of personal competence in recreation and sport activities. ... [and also] ...exhibit positive and responsible personal

and social behaviour. (Ophea, 1999, p.29).

The need for effective oral communication skills is particularly necessary for activities that require students to:

- “describe and demonstrate” specific physical activity;
- interact with others in a competitive and (sometimes) intimidating environment. For example, students engage in conflict resolution when there are disputes about a referee’s call;
- speak clearly to one another when they are trying to develop a team strategy;

grow more confident in sharing knowledge and experiences that will both enhance and demonstrate their learning. Ontario policy documents suggest using targeted instruction to help students develop such skills (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003a).

Leadership, is a skill that hinges upon effective communication and the ability to form relationships where the needs and experiences of others are prioritized. The HPE curriculum indicates that students should demonstrate leadership without giving any specific examples of

To assist students with the responsibility of describing tasks or giving instructions, it is important that student leaders are familiar with the language they will need to complete this task. Also, there are signal words such as first, next, and lastly, or behind, in front, and across from, that students can use to enhance the clarity of an explanation or a description. Furthermore, speaking techniques used in presentations are different from the speaking patterns used during a conversation. For example, a presentation of information includes an introduction, body, and conclusion. Teaching students the structures of oral communication is an important aspect of improving students’ comprehension.



Presentation and Speaking Skills Promote Affective and Cognitive Learning in HPE

Luke & Hardy (1999), and Marlett & Gordon (2004) suggest that teachers introduce and model affective and cognitive processes in HPE. The affective process is important because it is central to establishing rapport with the audience whereas the cognitive process appeals to the informational needs of the audience. Luke & Hardy (1999) also encourage the use of process and a conceptual framework for thinking. This is very much like developing a presentation using a speech plan. One of the skills of public speaking involves the speaker engaging in a mental dialogue with his or her audience. This encourages the speaker to consider what information the audience already has as well as the feelings and beliefs the audience may have about the topic. Learning to utilize an affective approach helps students to:

- show positive social behaviour and that involves learning how to be verbally supportive of team mates, especially when they are having difficulty with different physical skills.

what that may entail. Clear and focused oral communication enhances leadership, and the integration of presentation and speaking skills into HPE will enable students to connect more meaningfully with their peers. Specific components of the presentation and speaking course touch upon understanding verbal and non-verbal communication so that leaders can learn how to “adapt” their communication patterns accordingly (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2000a, p.87). The public speaking course teaches students that they may need to express themselves in different ways to connect with others.

- deepen their learning about physical activity;
- express how they feel about executing a movement during a physical activity presentation;
- discuss the experience of conflict during competition;
- develop the ability to convey a sequence of motions;
- deal with conflict resolution in an effective, positive manner.

Integrating Presentation and Speaking Skills in HPE Class

Staton & Tomlinson (2001) found that through “active engagement in the teaching of oral communication, students become more knowledgeable communication scholars and more skilled communication practitioners”(p. 213). Given the opportunity to learn oral communication skills, students

Students will be able to consider what information they will be required to share with the class as they learn develop their mental dialogue skills, which is the ability to ask what the audience wants to know or would be interested in knowing. For example, a good communicator should always consider what background information the audience needs to have in order to communicate ideas clearly.

Another important element of public speaking is to establish a rapport with the audience by appealing to the emotional needs of the audience. Students can address how people may feel about the physical activity, including the pleasures or anxiety of mastering skills and how the activity relates to identity. For example, a student who is leading a stretching warm up can address anxiety students may have about their flexibility, an anxiety which may prevent a student from fully participating in the activity. Additionally, the presenter may appeal to the class by describing an enjoyable sensation he or she may have while in a particular stretching position.

Teaching speaking skills in HPE contributes to the development of students' ability to engage with others in a positive manner. Marlett & Gordon (2004) argue "PE allows students to deal with conflict resolution in an effective, positive manner"(p.229). However, if students are not provided with a communication framework or strategies that could be applied in situations that involve conflict, the experience of conflict would not necessarily improve students' communication skills in a meaningful way. For example, students have different ideas about what type of movement and physical contact is acceptable during a physical activity and some individuals may have less control of their physical movement and cross physical boundaries unintentionally.

By introducing concepts of non-verbal communication, the elements of which are found in the Presentational and Speaking Skills course (Ontario Ministry

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of Education, 2000b), students can learn how physical movement may be misinterpreted. When there is a concern, i.e., bodily movement that may be misinterpreted as aggressive, students can learn how to identify it, express how they feel about the incident, and ideally arrive at a mutually agreeable understanding or solution.

Conclusions

Integrating skills from the Presentation and Speaking Skills course in senior HPE classes will enhance literacy instruction in senior HPE classes. Learners benefit most if explicit literacy instruction is delivered in all subject areas. Hence, it is important for HPE educators to be familiar with the complexities of the communication skills required in their classes as well as the structure of the language they expect students to use in their HPE classes. It is also important for instructors to know how

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to teach these modes of communication and language structures to their students, so that students (and instructors!) will have a better conceptual understanding of how oral communication is used in different situations.

There is a need for senior HPE teachers to approach oral communication as a foundational literacy skill – one that should be taught explicitly and, most importantly, practiced. HPE teachers who succeed in integrating oral communication instruction into their programming will be preparing students to make the transition from high school to college or the work place, where oral communication skills are highly valued as essential skills for success (HRSDC, 2005; Staton & Tomlinson, 2001). Most importantly, physical educators will provide students with essential skills they may apply to every aspect of their lives. ■