TEACHING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY
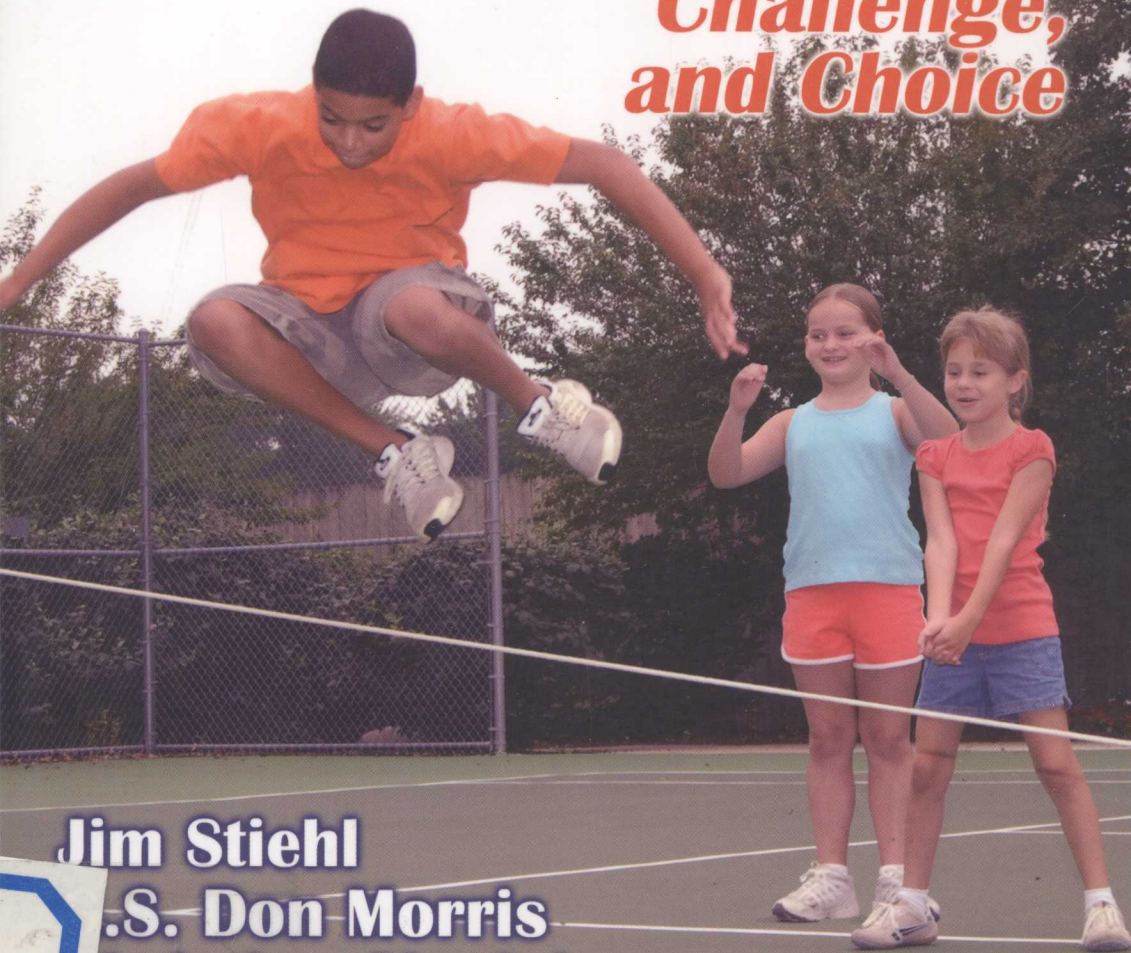
Change, Challenge, and Choice

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Teaching Physical Activity
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体育教学活动

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Preface

In the early 1990s, physical educator and professor Neil Williams established the "Physical Education Hall of Shame" to identify certain activity programs or games that are neither developmentally appropriate nor educationally sound (Williams, 1992). To qualify for induction, activities met at least one of certain criteria such as limited physical activity and participation time, potential to embarrass players in front of their peers, high likelihood for injury or harm, and an absence of purported objectives of the activity. Charter inductees included, among others: Duck, Duck, Goose; Musical Chairs; kickball; Steal the Bacon; and dodgeball. More recent additions have included such "misbegotten creations" as Simon Says, Red Rover, and Spud (Williams, 1994).

Unquestionably, these and many other physical activities are unsuitable in their familiar form, and they contribute to a climate that turns off many kids. But is it possible that simply discarding the activities amounts to little more than throwing out the baby with the bath water?

It might be worthwhile to reconsider "problem" activities such as those that have been banished to the Hall of Shame (Morris & Stiehl, 1989). Our proposal is simple: Examine aspects of an activity that make it "inappropriate," *but also* those characteristics that might be worth keeping, even accentuating. Lack of active participation and singling out an individual for failure are good reasons to frown on a game like Duck, Duck, Goose, for example. Then again, the thrill of suspense and the joys and skills of chasing and fleeing might be aspects worth preserving and enhancing.

What can we do to adjust activities that support our program goals while also prompting maximum participation among all players? How can we create healthy learning climates where all players feel safe, capable, successful, motivated, and connected to others, and where they have a sense of ownership or "buy in"? Such climates encourage kids to be more fully engaged. Moreover, they serve as an antidote to settings in which kids don't care to participate because they fear public embarrassment due to lack of skill; are physically self-conscious or feel different from other players; fear injury; or are not interested in competition, especially with others whose skills are much greater or lesser than their own.

As a leader, you have three choices in the way you use an activity with your group:

- Continue using it in its current form
- Cease using it altogether
- Alter it with an intent to retain or enhance its positive features, while reducing or eliminating its negative features

If selecting the third option (i.e., altering, changing, tweaking), then inviting player involvement by providing them with choices is an essential ingredient to their enthusiastic participation. Perhaps then you can nurture and promote physical activity in ways that will be "accessible to all children and their families in a high need, high demand environment" (Ennis, 2006, p. 56).

The purpose of this book is to share ideas about maximizing participation in physical activities. A key ingredient is to provide choices among suitable challenges. These choices may involve selecting from challenges that are offered by the instructor, which allows for some self-directed behavior among participants. At a more advanced level, it could involve choosing among options generated by the participants themselves, imparting a greater sense of autonomy and willingness to become engaged in a more personal and appropriate manner. Regardless, the presentation of challenges from which to choose will often necessitate changes to an existing activity. Although simple, the idea of change, challenge, and choice can bring about important and valuable consequences.

Part I lays a foundation for changing activities in ways that afford proper challenges to participants. It also suggests ways to shift the invention of challenges from leaders to participants, as well as ways to create the sort of climate most conducive to that shift. Specific tips and strategies are provided throughout these chapters.

Part II presents a variety of sample activities, each with specific suggestions to guide you in changing the activity to maximize participation in your group. These activities cover a broad spectrum of common categories of physical activity: games, adventure, fitness, dance, and sport and recreation. Not only will this section of the book add to your repertoire of ready-made games, it will teach you how to apply the principles discussed in part I to specific activities and may spark your imagination for making changes in any other activities you encounter.

Spending time with others in physical activities where everyone feels comfortable, competent, and fully engaged is one of the nicest things we can do for our own health and for the health and happiness of others. We hope this book will enhance that enjoyment.

Acknowledgments

We could not have found the state of mind necessary to write this book without a very important group of people: children. Moreover, it is beyond our skill as writers to capture the expressions of children as they engage in physical activity—delight, anxiety, confidence, distress, wonder. But we thank them all for their daily reminders that physical activities, when designed and presented appropriately, can be an important source of joy and satisfaction for everyone. We hope that all of the children with whom we have interacted over the years are continuing to enjoy the many pleasures of being physically active. And we thank them for sharing their stories, their concerns, and their ideas about how a diverse group of kids can learn and participate together.

We also thank our developmental editor, Jackie Blakley, who, in the midst of her "other project" (a daughter who is, at the time of this writing, now nine weeks old!), remained diligent in reviewing, adjusting, and improving our various drafts. In addition, we are indebted to Jackie Walker, whose gentle reminders and thoughtful suggestions kept us on task and on time. Finally, we would be remiss not to express our gratitude to Scott Wikgren, whose support for our ideas and for anything that contributes to kids' welfare has been unwavering.

Contents

Part I

Understanding Change, Challenge, and Choice

In part I, we provide a theoretical foundation for improving and designing activities that offer challenging options for all participants. The goal is inclusion—that is, to involve all players in a single activity by meeting their developmental needs, interests, and abilities. Although many of our examples may appeal to instructors in public school settings, the concepts apply to players of all ages, in all kinds of places.

Instructors often feel most comfortable with activities that are familiar to them. Similarly, many players prefer to repeatedly play activities that they know well rather than learn new ones. That is understandable. However, scores of activities are neither motivating for nor within the capabilities of all players; thus, those activities may require modification.

Chapter 1 lays the groundwork for altering and inventing activities that invite player involvement. This calls for considering players' needs and then adopting practices that both address those needs and achieve program goals. In subsequent chapters, we offer specific strategies for making alterations that involve change, challenge, and choice. We also present ideas for engaging players in many of the decisions required to ensure player involvement. Finally, just as the design of an activity will affect the nature of a player's participation, so too will the way in which the activity is presented. Therefore, we have included a chapter that describes how an instructor's choice of words can be critical to a player's level of participation. Some typical phrases that many of us use may be supportive and inviting, while others can be counterproductive and defeating. Thus, we offer some new perspectives on old patterns.

As you read through these chapters, keep in mind that the activities you and your players design will be limited only by your imaginations.

Chapter 1

Maximizing Participation: The Three Cs

Imagine a physical activity setting where all participants struggle and persevere to master increasingly complex skills, where they have no expectation of grades or awards, where they help and encourage one another, where they push themselves and understand that success comes from hard work, and where they are eager to take risks and to try new things. Does this sound idealistic? Not according to Richard Sagor (2002), who was inspired by the motivation and commitment to excellence of a group of young skateboarders. He attributed their enthusiasm to the desire to fulfill five universal needs: to feel competent, to belong, to feel useful, to feel potent, and to feel optimistic.

How is it possible to create conditions in a physical activity setting so that *all* participants are fully engaged—so that they are more involved, have a greater investment, have a greater sense of competence and self-sufficiency, have greater enjoyment, and are more physically active? This step-by-step book offers practical ideas about how to do just that.

This is a book about maximizing enthusiastic participation in physical activities. Therefore, this book is about instruction, not curriculum or subject matter. Although we provide sample activities in part II, our primary intent in doing so is to offer specific suggestions about how the concepts in this book can be applied to a variety of physical activities.

You can use the strategies in this book to support your program goals by taking into consideration participant needs. That involves giving careful attention to their interests and abilities. Then you can implement ideas that are responsive to those needs in ways that reinforce your program goals.

Beginning With Participants' Needs

Based on his intriguing study of teenagers' youthful dedication to skateboarding, Richard Sagor (2002) outlined five needs that all people have the desire to satisfy:

1. The need to feel **competent**: To feel genuinely capable as a result of success achieved through hard work and a desire to make progress
2. The need to **belong**: To feel safe and connected to others in a context where being different is OK, where "one size fits all" is not the norm, and where great emphasis is placed on "we" rather than "me"
3. The need to feel **useful**: To be able to make positive contributions to others while also learning from and about them
4. The need to feel **potent**: To experience self-control and autonomy, self-referenced progress, and self-sufficiency
5. The need to feel **optimistic**: To be confident in oneself and one's future; to enjoy a sense of possibility

Sagor further suggests that participants will commit to an activity in an attempt to satisfy these needs. Signs of this commitment frequently include the following: a greater willingness to handle challenges and to learn from and admit mistakes; the celebration of diversity and community rather than feeling at odds with it; more attempts to offer something to others and more striving to do good; a greater sense of investment and ownership; and a resilient, playful spirit coupled with an eagerness to try new possibilities.

Conversely, unmet needs will undermine any participant's degree of involvement in an activity. Someone who feels incapable, excluded, useless, or controlled is unlikely to be an enthusiastic participant.

For the purposes of this book (where the goal is maximum involvement by every participant), we have collapsed Sagor's five needs into the following three needs:

1. The need to feel **competent** (capable, proficient, successful because of effort)
2. The need to feel **connected** (safe, belonging, useful, an important part of a team)
3. The need to feel **confident** (autonomous, optimistic, hopeful in outlook, having a positive identity)

Consider these needs in your own life. Do they apply to how you feel at work? With friends playing golf? When invited to dance? Try this brief exercise: Imagine something that you like to do, such as swimming, hiking, or playing tennis. Now imagine something that you avoid

doing, such as swimming, hiking, or playing tennis. For both activities, ask yourself these questions:

1. Do I feel proficient enough to take on meaningful challenges?
2. Does it feel safe enough for me to make mistakes or not perform at a specified level? How do I view my role (important, unimportant)?
3. Can I choose my level of participation? Will my efforts lead to positive outcomes?

In all likelihood, your answers were less doubtful for the activity that you like and more doubtful for the activity you'd rather avoid. In other words, it's all in the mind-set that participants bring to the physical activity. And as instructors, we can influence that mind-set. Evidence is clear that the circumstances under which physical activities are presented will have a bearing on an individual's motivation to participate (Standage, Duda, & Ntoumanis, 2003). However, before discussing strategies for creating those circumstances, let's consider goals that an instructor might have for the participants and how those goals are associated with the participants' needs.

Physical activity should help students feel more competent, connected, and confident.

Relating Participants' Needs to Program Goals

Many worthwhile goals can be set for a program of physical activity. For instance, the needs outlined by Sagor correspond to various desired outcomes found throughout the youth development literature. As an example, Lerner, Fisher, and Weinberg (2000) have included competence, confidence (positive identity and belief in the future), connectedness, and contribution (sense of generosity toward others) among the desired outcomes for children and adolescents in any program.

The National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) has put forth another set of possible goals that apply directly to physical activity programs. Before mentioning these goals, however, a distinction between physical activity and physical education deserves mention. According to NASPE (2004), *physical activity* is bodily movement of any type and may include recreational, fitness, and game or sport activities such as jumping rope, lifting weights, or playing soccer, as well as daily activities such as walking to the store, taking the stairs, or raking leaves. *Physical education*, on the other hand, must provide learning opportunities, appropriate instruction, and meaningful and challenging content. Both physical activity and physical education are important because each contributes to the development of healthy, active individuals.

Although developed specifically for physical education programs (NASPE, 2004), the following outcomes merit consideration as goals for any physical activity program:

- Acquiring skills
- Understanding principles and strategies
- Participating regularly
- Becoming fit
- Being responsible
- Experiencing self-satisfaction and interaction with others

In total, these goals mesh nicely with the notion of maximizing enthusiastic participation in physical activities. When the needs of participants are adequately addressed, the ensuing enhancement in participation should enrich any program designed to achieve these or other outcomes.

Implementing Strategies to Maximize Participation

Regardless of the program goals, common sense tells us that any program will be more successful when participants are fully engaged. So how can you select, design, and customize activities that will encourage involvement?

> Any program will be more successful when participants are fully engaged.

For any activity, you have three options. In a previous book, we referred to these options as "keep 'em, dump 'em, or change 'em" (Morris & Stiehl, 1999, p. 4).

- **Keep 'em:** The first option is to continue using the activity in its current form. Some instructors might think that kickball and dodgeball are tried-and-true games for elementary-age children. ("If those games were good enough for the children's parents, they're good enough for the children.") These instructors may believe that the games are fine just as they are. The downside of this perspective is that sometimes tradition trumps suitability. For many people, memories of traditional kickball and dodgeball are fraught with anxiety, fear, and pain. Ironically, those childhood games are now bringing some adults together (e.g., organized kickball leagues in cities, intramural dodgeball teams on college campuses, weekly matches at local health clubs). But in those situations, the people choose to participate, which is a luxury not afforded to children in many physical activity programs. In some instances, an activity may require little, if any, modification. For example, why change a major-league sport if it accommodates the elite athlete? But can we justify the suitability of the elite version for less-skilled players? The "keep 'em" option is suitable only if the activity is appropriate for a particular group and purpose.

- **Dump 'em:** A second option is to cease using the activity altogether. (Some people believe that we must banish all developmentally inappropriate activities to the Hall of Shame.) Consider Duck, Duck, Goose. Certainly, we can find fault in the lack of participation and the possibility of singling out individuals for