From the Editor

What’s the BIG Idea?!

by Steve Stork

This editorial represents a year’s worth of TEPE under my belt. You may recall from the bit of personal history in my first editorial that my entry into the profession was, well, nontraditional. Despite an early lack of direction, I take pride in having lead a full and happy life, both personally and professionally. That may be because I have fun doing what I do. That’s not to say my life is purposeless or frivolous. Quite the contrary, one of the things I take quite seriously is my responsibility to, well, live a life of purpose that has a positive influence on others.

So, I quite often find myself ruminating on what purpose I’m serving and whether or not I’m doing it effectively. It was at one of these times that I attempted to apply backward design (Wiggins & McTighe, 1998) to a Methods course I was teaching. Sure, students were passing the tests and submitting acceptable work, but were they really “getting it”? From which a subsequent question arose, “What is ‘it’?”

Segue to Erickson’s concept-based curriculum and instruction (1998). Not unlike Wiggins & McTighe, Erickson suggests that learning should be based on concepts, large pieces of learning or understanding, rather than small bits of arbitrary and decontextualized facts.

But, what are the concepts, the BIG ideas, in physical education pedagogy?? After much careful deliberation (okay, brainstorming!) I came up with the following. I admit to brainstorming for two reasons: (a) I violated Erickson’s recommendation to keep concepts limited to two or three words, and (b) I don’t want you to think this is an all-inclusive list or that I have somehow prioritized the items. Finally, these are not all original ideas, but I’ve used some long enough that I forget the originator.

Stork’s Leading Concepts of Teaching in Physical Education

- The purpose of physical education is to guide children toward becoming physically active for a lifetime.
- If children choose to play a game, by their own choice, during recess, why is there a need to play the same game in physical education class?
- In most physical education games, who gets the most opportunity for practice: the highly skilled or the low skilled? Who needs practice the most?
- Fun is a component of physical education. It should not be physical education.
- “Fun” is not an instructional or curriculum objective, i.e., we don’t teach children how to have fun. Many would say adults have forgotten how.
- Just because a teacher has “taught” doesn’t mean the child has learned.
- Given a choice, children will choose tasks at which they are maximally challenged but at which they can still be successful.
- Physical education often unfairly promotes sport, a dominant social perspective, to the exclusion of minor or lesser known forms of physical activity.
- Management contributes to instruction, and good instruction contributes to management, but teachers should not confuse management with instruction.
- The unintended consequences of teaching and management practices are often more salient to students than to the intended objectives of the lesson.
- In order to conduct quality physical education, content knowledge is insufficient; teachers must also be developmental specialists.
- Developmentally appropriate behavior is often perceived by the adult as immature and is indeed immature if the adult were to exhibit the behavior.

If you fail and no one sees you fail, Is it any less a failure?
If you succeed and no one sees you succeed, Is it any less a success?
Teaching is about doing the right thing, Whether or not anyone sees it, acknowledges it, or even hears about it.

References
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