

Editor's Message

Good at Everything, Great at Something (Maybe): The Importance of a Diverse Childhood Physical Literacy Experience

Dwayne Sheehan

People often ask me, "What sport did you play when you were young?" This question is asked with a presumption that all physical education teachers are elite-level athletes and that we are defined by a single activity. I certainly enjoyed playing sports as a kid, and that is why I went to the University of Calgary for a bachelor of physical education degree. But I was never an elite-level athlete who had the good fortune, skills or genetics to play at the university level or higher.

When I started high school in 1979, students were encouraged to play a variety of sports, and it was certainly possible to walk into a school tryout and battle for a position on the team. I loved playing football but left the bruising behind at the end of the season. I played hockey, badminton, wrestling, rugby, track and field, and whatever else was available. My school even had a cycling team. Today most high schools still have open tryouts, but the sports club teams and early specializations have changed the process. This editorial is not about

the evil club system. In fact, the club sports system is simply responding to a demand by parents and children. This message is about the importance of always encouraging parents to seek a wide variety of experiences for their children. This is especially true during the most critical years of development that occur prior to the adolescent growth spurt.

In the last issue of *Runner* (Volume 46, Number 2, 2014, pp 19–22), Red Deer Rebels general manager Brent Sutter expressed his opinion about rampant uber-specialization and wondered why the current generation of hockey players is not very athletic. Most Canadians think of hockey when it comes to specialization, because we all know those parents who allow their kids to play hockey every day of the year (while participating in almost nothing else). When I ask parents about their reason for doing this, the answer is always the same: "He or she loves hockey; it's all they want to do!" It's great that a child loves to play hockey (after all, we are Canadians), but I have never met a kid in my 25 years of teaching who wants to play only one sport. Children are naturally curious



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and capable of a variety of amazing skills. If parents provide them with a variety of physical activity experiences like snowshoeing, hiking, skiing, skateboarding, soccer, canoeing, martial arts, dance, gymnastics, swimming, tennis and ultimate, they will definitely find other things they like to do.

Let's face it, the chances of playing elite-level sports is slim at best. Those of you who have accomplished this should be proud. When it comes to the students you teach, the ultimate goal should be to provide them with a diverse and positive physical education experience that develops motor proficiency and self-confidence. The intention is that they will be intrinsically motivated to be active for life. Being good at everything is possible with a varied set of childhood physical activity experiences in school and the community. Being great at something is simply a bonus.

This journal is intended to be part of your personal lifelong learning professional development commitment. HPEC is always interested in knowing what you think and values your professional insights. If you are interested in submitting a guest editorial to this journal, please e-mail it to the editor, Dwayne Sheehan (dpsheehan@mtroyal.ca). As you can see from this submission, there is no need for fancy citations and references to current literature. Simply share your thoughts (in 500 words or less) about our profession and/or the field of health and physical education.