

Student Growth in Physical Education Tracy Krause



Student: “Mr. Krause! I got 9:36 on the mile.”

Me: “Congratulations!”

As physical educators it is often a challenge to motivate all of our students to participate in fitness testing in an authentic and meaningful way. Students know they are expected to show improvement over time on the cardiorespiratory endurance measure (the dreaded mile), and as a result many “sandbag” the test at the start of the year.

How would I know? I have 40-plus other students to keep track of as they run four circles around the track. Knowing they need to “step up their game,” students will increase their intensity for test two at the midterm of the semester. Everyone goes home happy, right? I see improvement on their scores. The student has successfully completed the second test. All is right with the PE world!

The end of the semester is near and it is time to put weeks of cardiorespiratory training to the test. Students arrive for the final “mile” of the semester. They are prepared. They are ready to do their best and for the first time all semester they give it their all. “Mr. Krause! I got 6:19.” Amazing! An improvement of over two minutes! I give the congratulatory “high five” and the student walks away satisfied that they have pulled off the ultimate, if not expected, PE caper. All that hard work must have paid off, right?

It is embarrassing to admit how many years it took, but well into my teaching career I began to ask myself some questions. “Does this scenario really demonstrate student growth?” After all, research shows that an increase in physical testing scores for most students is attributed to the maturation process rather than the training we do in class. How do I create relevance in my students’ approach to physical testing? Why am I physically testing my students to begin with? Do they know why we physically test?

Tracy Krause is a National Board Certified Teacher at Tahoma High School in Maple Valley. For the past twenty-one years he has taught physical education; the last ten teaching in an integrated program called Outdoor Academy. He has been involved in committee work for OSPI, NASPE, AAHPERD and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, having co-chaired the National Board’s recent standards revisions for physical education. He is currently on the SHAPE America committee revising the national standards for pre-service teachers in physical education.



These questions left an uneasy feeling in my professional gut and prodded me towards an answer. What if I looked at an alternative scenario? Could I truly have an impact on student learning? How could I move from my current reality to my preferred vision of physical education? Could I develop a vision that diverts its focus from the fitness data (how many push ups/sit ups/laps a student can do) and targets the elements of physical literacy (movement skills, benefits of exercise, participation, is fit, values physical activity and its relationship to a healthy lifestyle)?

What if my high school students started the semester with the following performance task: Students write a personal fitness plan using everything they have learned from their ten years of physical education experience to this point (PreTest). They present their plan to peers, who are strategically placed in small groups, and get feedback based on a rubric. I then engage my students in a conversation (formative assessment) about why we test ourselves physically and introduce the idea of striving for healthy fitness levels. I make certain students fully understand their grade is in no way impacted by the data they collect during fitness testing.

I then guide them in discovering the importance of finding out how their body reacts to exercise and how they can influence the results. Would this give me a more solid foundation for what my students know and are able to do when it comes to student growth and personalizing their fitness? Armed with information about where my students are, I would now have the ability to make decisions that will impact their learning and support my student growth goal.

What if I set up a monitoring plan that includes a variety of opportunities and strategies for students to demonstrate their knowledge of the FITT principle, the training principles, the health-related components of fitness, and evaluating fitness levels (formative assessment)? Would I begin to see the growth I'm looking for? Would this impact the "student talk" happening in my classroom? Would, for example, my students be able to discuss with a partner how lack of progression leads to diminishing returns, and then share back to the class? I anticipate that some deeper learning would occur and with it my students' attitude toward their physical education.

What if the culminating product of the fitness concepts unit was a new personal fitness plan, assessed using the original rubric, which enabled them to apply their learning? I am getting closer to the answer for my students. Physical testing is important. The results, when achieved using correct protocol and supreme effort, can be linked to scientific research centered on healthy fitness levels. I will continue to use fitness testing to support my students in developing individual goals and fitness plans. However, I will not use it to determine student growth. My hope is that student talk by the end of the semester will reflect the student growth I am looking for. I will look deeper and focus on their learning. I challenge all of us in the health and physical education field to reflect on the needs of our students, push past fitness testing, and determine how we will assess student growth.

Student: "Mr. Krause, I learned how to make a personal fitness plan!"

Me: "Congratulations!"

Watch Tracy's video... <http://tpep-wa.org/student-growth-case-studies>

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253-752-2082
PO Box 7052
Tacoma, WA 98417
www.cstp-wa.org