

## R.E.A.C.H.: A Case for Urban After School Physical Education

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This lecture presents R.E.A.C.H., which is an after-school approach to physical education that integrates common-core aligned literacy standards, fitness education, and character development through a positive youth development sport-based model serving underserved urban communities.

#### **WHAT IS R.E.A.C.H.?**

R.E.A.C.H. (Reflective Educational Approach to Character and Health) is unique in that it teaches physical education through positive youth development and provides a safe place for adolescent youth to cultivate essential life skills. The R.E.A.C.H. curriculum integrates literacy concepts and skills aligned to common-core standards through reflective writing, reading, listening and speaking experiences within a physical education program. In addition, the program teaches fitness concepts and devotes much of its instruction to character development. In short, R.E.A.C.H. supports disadvantaged youth in under resourced urban communities to become self-sufficient by adopting a healthy lifestyle, giving them opportunities to learn in a safe environment and to build a stronger, healthier community.

#### **WHY URBAN AFTER SCHOOL EDUCATION?**

Evidence shows that urban Black and Latino adolescent males are less physically active than their White counterparts (Basch, 2011). While after-school approaches offer a real solution to the current challenge of physical inactivity among many adolescents, availability, cost, transportation, and interest limit many youths' choices during non-school hours (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). Furthermore, current after-school programs often do not incorporate structured physical education that follows an evidence-based curriculum. Other after-school programs simply target academic goals and neglect physical activity all together. There is limited research on the effectiveness of an after-school approach to physical education in an urban context. What is needed is an evidenced-based after-school program for urban adolescents that integrates improvement of academic skills and character development while promoting physical activity.

Studies show that urban physical education (PE) is dominated by a culture of basketball. Urban students typically advocate to play the sport on a daily basis while their teachers often fight against this in order to promote more diversity in the PE curriculum (McCaughy et al., 2006). Instead of fighting against a basketball curriculum in the normal PE class, why not use the passion that students have for the sport to teach through the sport? This study we are referencing took place in a community surrounded by basketball, we would argue that in Southern California the sport of soccer acts in the same way. Using basketball, or soccer, to acquire and sustain the attention of urban youth, all while integrating life skills and other meaningful and authentic learning, has

the potential to be very successful. Physical education should take advantage of the opportunity to not only teach physical fitness, but to also empower students to challenge stereotypes and work on non-violent conflict resolution through a sport curriculum.

## **WHAT IS POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT?**

Positive youth development programs consist of three defining attributes: (a) program goals; (b) program atmosphere and; (c) program activities (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). Programs with this approach do not simply try to keep youth from participating in behaviors that are viewed as un-healthy. The emphasis in positive youth development is on the positive and therefore programs, such as R.E.A.C.H, focus on developing students' competencies and abilities. Roth & Brooks-Gunn (2003) discuss how programs focusing on positive youth development work to empower youth and expose youth to supportive environments where students are able to participate in a range of skill-building activities. Hence, the goals, atmosphere, and activities during R.E.A.C.H. sessions focus on exposing students to a positive environment where they can build skills to better their health, character, literacy, and critical thinking skills.

## **HOW DO WE GET STUDENTS INTERESTED?**

The R.E.A.C.H. program centers on the sport of basketball, a game that is popular among adolescent youth in the under-resourced community served by the program (Harlem, NY). While basketball is not the only physical activity of interest in the community, it is an activity that provides a wonderful opportunity to meet the outcome goals of the program. During the two years of the program's history, the interest in basketball is very apparent. Some research working with physical education teachers in urban environments show that teachers constantly struggle teaching in a culture of basketball due to the popularity of the sport with youth in inner cities. Often times students would not want to do much else than play basketball and it left teachers struggling to find a balance between adding new material to the curriculum and keeping students motivated with basketball (McCaughtry, Barnard, Martin, Shen, & Kulinna, 2006). R.E.A.C.H. embraces the students' love for the sport of basketball to get them involved in the program. The program then relates life skills vocabulary that crosses over into the world of basketball such as balance, culture, and preparation. This instructional content is used to engage youth in discussion and urge them to begin thinking critically and reflectively on their behavior while letting them learn about and participate in the sport they love. For instance, the word "culture" can mean the culture of their home, their country of birth, or basketball culture of using certain terms, wearing certain clothing or believing a certain way. Students are encouraged to discuss the word culture with their peers and explain what the word means to them.

## **WHAT DOES A SESSION LOOK LIKE?**

Each R.E.A.C.H. session has a set structure of routines that students follow. Eventually students can be urged to take more of a leadership role to facilitate the

beginning and end of the sessions. The program is student-centered, and students are eventually asked to come up with their own routines for warm-ups. A typical R.E.A.C.H. session begins with students lining their backpacks along the edge of the gym and turning in their reflections from the previous week. In the beginning of the year, once students have turned in the reflections, instructors lead students in a set of dynamic warm-ups as a team. As students gain more experience in the program this instructor-led warm-up transforms into a student developed 5-minute warm-up where they piece together a personal warm-up from all the skills they have been taught throughout the sessions. These student-led, individual warm-ups focus on what the student wants to focus on that specific day as well as their normal routine for upper and lower body warm-ups. Once students are done with their 5-min warm-ups they focus on basketball-related skills such as form shooting, partner shooting or lay-ups. After the shoot-around, students are gathered in a semi-circle where the instructor leads a 10-minute discussion about the word of the week and facilitates a discussion that relates the word of the week to basketball and their everyday lives. Students are urged to participate and respect other students' opinions and beliefs. During this time a healthy snack is provided (granola bar or fruit) and, when appropriate, discussion is focused on healthy eating habits and educating students on making healthy decisions. After "team-talk," groups go through general basketball drills such as passing or dribbling led by an instructor.

Groups then spread into two stations, one station goes over basketball skills that are chosen by the instructor for the day and are taught in small group settings to maximize learning time. The other group goes to the fitness station, which incorporates different body weight exercises (push-ups, squats, sit-ups), jump ropes, and the use of resistance bands. Some exercises, such as ones using the resistance bands, are incorporated slowly into the workout routine to ensure students understand how to perform the exercises correctly. Fitness station workouts are all selected with the mindset of an urban environment and are chosen so they can be replicated in the homes of the students if they wish to continue working out at home. After each group has been to both stations, the session concludes with a team challenge. In the beginning of the year, when students may not be skilled enough to play a full game, the students' play modified games of basketball. Sessions throughout the year develop students' skills to first play structured 1v1 then 2 v 2 and 3 v 3 to ensure they understand the roles of defense and offense. Once students have developed their skills enough to understand the strategy of the game of basketball the majority of sessions toward the end of the year conclude with 5 v 5 full court basketball with substitutions. Each session ends with a team break announcing the word of the week for the next week.

### **LITERACY INTO PE???**

Students in the R.E.A.C.H. after-school program are encouraged to think critically and reflectively on their behavior over the previous week. This is accomplished through written reflection sheets that students turn in at the beginning of each session. The first ten to fifteen minutes of each R.E.A.C.H. session is dedicated to individual skill routines that each player continually develops over the course of the R.E.A.C.H. program. This time is reserved for students to demonstrate responsibility and initiative under minimal supervision. If for some reason students do not complete the reflection sheet before the

R.E.A.C.H. session, they work with one of the instructors during this time to finish the reflection. Finishing the reflection before the session becomes a responsibility and habit once students understand that the ten to fifteen minutes at the beginning of each session is an extra opportunity to be creative with the basketball and practice the skills that they have learned in previous sessions rather than a task to complete an assignment that they should have completed earlier. Reflections cover various aspects such as a self-evaluation of the students own physical activity during the week, their healthy eating habits, and whether or not they feel they were a positive influence on their community over the past week. Reflections also have a word of the week that students get at the end of the previous session. Participants are asked to define and then use the new word in a sentence relating to school, basketball or their community. This word is then worked into the discussion phase of the session facilitated by the instructor and related to both basketball and life. Words are then worked into the language of the R.E.A.C.H. program with the goal of reinforcing positive language and expanding the students' vocabulary. Weekly responses are read and commented on by the instructors and given back the following week thus enabling instructors to connect with what is really going on with students and to work on their literacy skills. R.E.A.C.H. is an example of an effective approach to integrating an academic subject into an after-school program.

### **WHAT ARE WE PLANNING ON DOING?**

We intend to start an after-school program called R.E.A.C.H in an urban, under resourced, neighborhood in Fullerton, CA. By adding an additional opportunity for students to get bi-weekly physical activity we begin to combat the lack of physical activity opportunities for urban youth. Additionally, by offering this free after school program, youth will get the opportunity to play in a safe environment while reinforcing their literacy development and learning about fitness and a healthy lifestyle. The R.E.A.C.H. program is interest based, so instead of teaching literacy through, for example, Shakespeare or poetry, we find interesting developmentally appropriate sports articles in books and other resources to teach reading comprehension skills that align with the common-core.

By providing a safe and constructive learning environment for urban youth we give opportunities for students to become physically active and learn what it takes to lead a physically active and healthy life. In addition students will have college undergraduate students as role models to reinforce the importance of having a strong character all while reinforcing valuable literacy development through the after school program.

The overall goal of R.E.A.C.H. is to utilize physical education to empower Black and Latino adolescents to become positive members of society. The objectives of the program are to: (a) use quantitative measures to show an increase in participants' physical activity levels; (b) improve students' literacy skills using formative assessments and reflective writing, reading, and comprehensions exercises; (c) teach students fitness and nutrition concepts that they can incorporate into their daily lives to promote a healthy lifestyle; and (d) promote character development and guide youth in making a positive impact on their community.

*R.E.A.C.H. Program Session*

<p><b>Team Talk</b> 4:00 p.m. – 4:15 p.m. (15 minutes)</p>	<p>Participants huddle in gymnasium to discuss the <i>word and thought of the day</i> while enjoying a <i>healthy snack</i>. Guided discussion is led by the instructor and sets the tone for the rest of the session.</p>
<p><b>Warm – Ups</b> 4:17 p.m. – 4:32 p.m. (15 minutes)</p>	<p>Participants go through <i>exercises, stretches and motor skill sequences</i> designed to help them warm-up their bodies and prepare for the session.</p>
<p><b>Discussion</b> 4:34 p.m. – 4:46 p.m. (12 minutes)</p>	<p>Participants further <i>discuss</i> the word of the week and answer specific questions that are specific to basketball, health, and character.</p>
<p><b>Fitness + Basketball Training</b> 4:48 p.m. – 5:13 p.m. (25 minutes)</p>	<p>Participants engage in <i>fitness skills and basketball skills</i>. Participants work in groups and then switch halfway through the allotted time for this component of the program.</p>
<p><b>Skill &amp; Game Challenges</b> 5:15 p.m. – 5:45 p.m. (30 minutes)</p>	<p>Through both <i>competitive and non-competitive game environments</i> participants work with a group of peers to enjoy the game of basketball.</p>
<p><b>Departing Directives</b> 5:47 p.m. – 6:00 p.m. (13 minutes)</p>	<p>Participants talk about <i>important takeaways</i> from the session and remind one another about the <i>word for the following session</i> before breaking the huddle.</p>

Table 2

*R.E.A.C.H. Themes and Words that translate across physical, health and character education*

<u>Word of the Week</u>	<u>Thematic Area of Focus</u>	<u>Aligned PE Standard Outcome</u>
Commitment	Discipline	S4.M2.7 Demonstrates both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation by selecting opportunities to participate in physical activity outside of class.
Value	Excellence	S5.M3.7 Generates positive strategies such as offering suggestions or assistance, leading or following others and providing possible solutions when faced with a group challenge.
Routine	Expectation	S4.M1.8 Accepts responsibility for improving one's own levels of physical activity and fitness.
Purpose	Dedication	S5.M2.7 Identifies positive mental and emotional aspects of participating in a variety of physical activities.
Control	Determination	S3.M2.6 Participates in self-selected physical activity outside of physical education class.
Communicate	Energy	S4.M4.6 Accepts differences among classmates in physical development, maturation, and varying skill levels by providing encouragement and positive feedback.
Rhythm	Discipline	S2.M12.7 Identifies and applies Newton's laws of motion to various dance or movement activities.
Response	Excellence	S1.M6.7 Executes at least one of the following designed to create open space during small-sided game play: pivots, fakes, jab steps.
Vision	Expectation	S3.M16.6 Maintains a physical activity log for at least 2 weeks and reflects on activity levels as documented in the log.
Release	Dedication	S3.M4.7 Participates in a variety of strength and endurance fitness activities such as weight or resistance training.
Stimulus	Determination	S2.M6.7 Transitions from offense to defense or defense to offense by recovering quickly and communicating with teammates.
Power	Energy	S4.M3.8 Provides encouragement and feedback to peers without prompting from the teacher.