Holistic education teaches the child as a whole by going beyond the traditional physical education focus on skill development and fitness to address the challenges faced by many children in urban schools (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics, 2015). This approach addresses the question of what each child needs to learn and work on toward the goal of physical literacy in physical education classes (SHAPE America – Society of Health and Physical Educators, 2014). The purpose of this article is to advocate for a shift in physical education toward teaching the entire child rather than teaching only sport content. It will describe Make-A-Difference: Guard East New York, a current sport-based youth development (SBYD) program that utilizes the holistic teaching approach of teaching for personal and social responsibility (TPSR; Hellison, 2003).
Sport-Based Youth Development Programming

An SBYD program provides positive youth development programming and resources for youth families and the community as a whole. Participation in these SBYD programs promotes healthy development, while also addressing risk factors and preventing problem behaviors (Anthony, Alter, & Jenson, 2009). These programs seek to integrate sport and positive youth-development principles. Hellison’s (2003) TPSR is one holistic teaching approach that can be used in SBYD programs. Its objective is to teach personal and social responsibility to urban youth who are often placed at risk due to circumstances such as poverty, violence, drugs and family problems. Programs that use TPSR focus on the values of respect, effort, self-direction and caring. These values are taught through teaching strategies that focus on integration, empowerment and transfer (Hellison, 2003). Integration involves integrating the teaching of life skills with the physical activity subject matter rather than teaching each in isolation. Empowerment includes instructional strategies based on a gradual shift of responsibility from the program facilitator to the participants. Transfer refers to lessons learned in physical education that transfer to other aspects of children’s lives.

Make-A-Difference: Guard East New York

The East New York communities are known to be unsafe areas. The schools in these communities have high dropout rates and incidents of violence. According to the Citizens’ Committee for Children of New York (n.d.), the dropout rate in East New York schools is 13.5%, which is much higher than in affluent areas such as Park Slopes (8.2%) but also higher than other areas such as Brooklyn (8.9%) and well above the average for all of New York City (9.7%). Students who attend East New York schools do not feel safe and often enter through metal detectors. These schools are also known for having low test scores and high truancy rates.

The Starrett City neighborhood in East New York is one particular community that has been in need of an intervention for school-age children. Make-A-Difference has served that function for some of the local youth. The program is a community-based organization that utilizes the holistic teaching approach and reaches a diverse student population in the neighborhood of Starrett City. Youth development and TPSR are integrated throughout the program to teach inner-city teenagers character development through the skills of swimming and lifesaving. The program follows the standard TPSR lesson format: 1) counseling time, 2) awareness talk, 3) activity, 4) group meeting, and 5) reflection (Hellison, 2003). During counseling time, the facilitators of the program meet and greet all in attendance. This time is to connect with students on a personal level. During the awareness talk, a quick discussion occurs about expectations and intensions. During the activity time, psychomotor skills and levels of responsibility are integrated. At the end of the session, a group meeting is conducted so students can discuss their experiences before private time for reflection.

The main goal of Make-A-Difference is to develop behaviors that would make youth better citizens in their communities while decreasing the drowning rate in the minority population. The racial differential in drowning rates is a nationwide problem. For decades, African Americans and other minorities have had a significantly higher unintentional drowning rate than their Caucasian counterparts (Laosee, Gilchrist, & Rudd, 2012). Fatal drowning rates for African American children ages five to 14 years old are three times higher than for Caucasian children of the same age (Laosee et al., 2012). Participants progress from a learn-to-swim program to Lifeguard Certification. Through the structure of TPSR, students are educated “through the physical,” as physical activity is used as a vehicle by which to teach life skills. This method allows the program to target all three domains of human learning (psychomotor, cognitive and affective) as students concurrently learn water safety skills while considering their own personal and social responsibilities. Given that TPSR is a student-centered approach to teaching, students also learn various managerial strategies (time management, respecting others, respecting self, etc.) that can be transferred to settings outside of the pool. The most beneficial outcome of TPSR and other holistic education approaches is that the students are able to challenge themselves through participation.

There are numerous SBYD programs nationwide, such as Harlem RBI, Hoops and Leaders Basketball Camp, Snowports Outreach Society, and Tenacity. Make-A-Difference is unique because there are not many programs that utilize swimming and lifesaving skills as a vehicle to instill positive youth development ideals. The program is also different in that the participants are challenged with written and practical assessments that focus on the three domains of learning. Also, Make-A-Difference gives the participants an opportunity to develop skills that can help them to achieve employment in the future. Students who progress in their swimming skills and who are ready are given the opportunity to participate in the lifeguard training section of the program. Once certified, the program facilitator helps students find employment at aquatic facilities in the area.

Conclusion and Final Thoughts

To date, the Make-A-Difference program has reached 30 participants. Out of those 30 participants, 10 learned to swim but are still novice swimmers; 15 became certified lifeguards and are working; and five never pursued a lifeguard certification but are advanced swimmers. Throughout the duration of the program these students were at risk for not attending college due to a lack of goal setting, self-respect, respect for others and willingness to participate and put forth effort. All students have made drastic changes in their attitudes and have become model students, citizens and family members. All 30 students are currently attending college.

Without a program like Make-A-Difference, the students could have gotten swept up in common troubles such as gang
violence and drug use that plague the Starrett City neighborhood. Programs like Make-A-Difference do teach psychomotor skills but go beyond that by using physical activity as a vehicle to help children become better people. These programs help break the current barriers that are faced by urban students who live in poverty-, gang- and drug-ridden communities. By teaching the whole child rather than focusing narrowly on skill development, holistic teaching methods, including SBYD and TPSR, can help to improve our communities for the better. Many physical education programs fail to meet all of the SHAPE America (2014) National Standards for physical education because they focus so narrowly on skill development and fitness. If physical educators utilize a holistic approach to education, all five standards can be incorporated fluidly into their lessons.

References

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Submissions Welcome!
Readers are encouraged to send “Advocacy in Action” submissions to column editor K. Andrew R. Richards at advocacy@shapeamerica.org.

The purpose of the Strategies column “Advocacy in Action” is to provide tangible, real world examples of grassroots and national-level advocacy activities taking place in the fields of physical education, health education and physical activity. Submissions should be written in a conversational, practical tone. Columns should be 1,000–1,300 words, or roughly four typed, double-spaced pages.