With the advent of President George W. Bush’s No Child Left Behind Act in 2001 and the associated increases in school standardized testing, many “special classes” (non-mainline subjects including physical education, art, music, technology, science and history/social studies) became victims to a loss in curricular importance (Holmes, 2010). The time required for preparing for standardized tests, which are tied to federal school funding, has left these “special classes” struggling to find footing in the school curriculum. In regards to physical education, most U.S. public schools come nowhere near SHAPE America’s recommended physical education class time standards: 150 weekly minutes for elementary school-age students and 225 weekly minutes for middle/secondary school students (SHAPE America– Society of Health and Physical Educators, 2016). An example of this disparagement can be seen in coastal Georgia public schools. Typically, elementary schools in these Georgian counties dedicate only one day or 50 minutes weekly to physical education. Middle schools in this area have higher weekly contact minutes but only require physical education for one nine-week session (or one third of the year) yearly (Cone & Cone, 1998b).
Despite recent pushes by various entities to increase childhood activity, such as Michelle Obama’s Let’s Move! Active Schools initiative, it is important that physical educators understand that increases in contact minutes are not coming any time soon. Accepting that reality, what alternatives might “special classes” teachers have to increase their contact hours with their students?

One alternative might be curricular integration. Integration or interdisciplinary education is defined as “an educational process in which two or more subject areas are integrated with the goal of fostering enhanced learning in each subject area” (Cone & Cone, 1998a). The second component of this definition is important: “enhancing learning in each subject area.” Cogent integration requires that all involved subjects receive substantive attention. In other words, a subject should not be simply tacked on to another subject in an integrated model without receiving equal focus on the overall outcome. Alleman and Brophy (1993) further supported this equal subject-representation concept when they described the criteria necessary when planning curricular integration. They asserted that two criteria must be met for appropriate integration to occur: 1) Activities should be educationally significant and desirable even if they do not include the integration feature, and 2) activities should foster, rather than disrupt or nullify, the accomplishment of major goals in each subject area.

Optimally, integration projects are created and planned out during grade-level team meetings. These team meetings generally begin in the summer before the school year has started and include all teachers for a given grade level. During these meetings, teachers look at their yearly curriculum and search for subject matter that might blend well with different subject areas. Once any possible connections have been found, teachers begin planning single lessons or group projects with the teachers in the applicable subject areas (edutopia.org, 2016).

Although regular grade-level meetings would be ideal, it is impractical in most public school settings. That fact should not deter teachers, specifically physical education teachers, from trying to find reasonable opportunities for integration. With the use of email or other electronic devices, planning cogent integration across disciplines can be done with relative ease. The following is an example of a possible integrated lesson plan involving physical education and art. This particular lesson was regularly used by the authors of this article and proved to be quite effective.
Dynamic Movement and Action through Gesture Drawing

During this lesson, students learn about movement and gesture drawing through the physical act of gesturing various physical movements and poses. The lesson also takes a comprehensive look at the work of the artist Alberto Giacometti. Both subject areas are equally addressed in the goals and outcomes. During this project, students learn elements and principles of art, how to visually represent movement, and how to effectively perform gesture drawing. Additionally, various movement forms and muscles involved in those movements are addressed.

To begin the lesson, students are assembled in a large circle while standing. Each student is given a drawing wand, which consists of a piece of drawing charcoal attached to a 30-inch dowel. They are also given a large pad of plain paper placed on the floor in front of them while they stand. Each student then writes down an action word on a note card related to a sport, such as “throwing a baseball” or “fencing,” and the words are placed into a bag. This part can be modified to reflect a specific sport or skill that is currently being taught in physical education class. The students are instructed to hold the drawing wand up until otherwise instructed. Each student then takes a turn modeling in the center of the circle. After pulling an action word out of the bag, the student goes into the center of the circle to take a position related to the action on their card. The other students in the group are then instructed to create a timed gesture drawing of the pose they are seeing using the drawing wands while standing. Movement from the students who are drawing comes from the students’ shoulders and arms. Correct vertical posture must be maintained while drawing for proper efficacy. Additionally, students who are sketching are asked to stand to provide a better visual perspective of the movement. Students are required to “capture the action” through quick lines, which also allow good perspective and clear understanding of the proper form of the movement. As previously mentioned, the lesson format also addresses muscles that are involved in the movement, while paying particular attention to the position of the skeletal system and muscle positions. Using the standing posture while drawing requires students to use their whole upper body to create the drawing, not just an isolated wrist movement. Stabilization areas in the core are also utilized. Drawings should be timed to last 30 seconds to four minutes each.

Subject outcomes

Art:
- Creates awareness of proper body posture and movements for drawing gestures
- Identifies the relationships between and among selected elements and principles of art and design, such as line, form, balance and rhythm
- Examines how art and design principles are used by artists to create visual effects

Physical education:
- Teaches proper performance form for a variety of motor movements
- Enhances kinesthetic awareness (body-in-space awareness)
- Serves as a tool to learn anatomical definition (muscles, movements, actions, etc.)

Summary

As curricular time allotments continue to diminish for physical education, it is essential for physical educators to adapt their teaching practices to find more contact time with their students. Integration appears to be a logical option for finding that additional teaching time. With a little planning and perseverance, a cooperative lesson can be planned between one or more other subjects that enhances the physical education curriculum.

References


Nichelle Wilson-Parish (nwilsonp@uark.edu) is a lecturer in the Department of Art at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville, AR; and Anthony Parish is an assistant professor in the Department of Secondary, Adult and Physical Education at Armstrong State University in Savannah, GA.

Submissions Welcome!

Readers are encouraged to send “Theory into Practice” submissions to column editor Anthony Parish at anthony.parish@armstrong.edu.

The purpose of the Strategies column “Theory into Practice” is to distill high quality research into understandable and succinct information and to identify key resources to help teachers and coaches improve professional practice and provide high quality programs. Each column (1,000–1,300 words or roughly four typed, double-spaced pages) summarizes research findings about a timely topic of interest to the readership to enable practitioners to apply research, knowledge and evidence-based practice in physical education and sports.