



## Taking Control of the Future for Health and Physical Education

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I've been thinking a lot lately about something that happened early in my career, when I was first getting involved in the profession at the state level in California.

I was confiding to a friend in the healthcare industry my frustration that physical education was constantly under attack by groups wanting to change Education Code, so their activities, such as marching band, JROTC, cheer and rodeo, could be counted as PE. Seeing I needed some encouragement she told me how, in the Chinese language, the word "crisis" is written with two brush strokes, one representing "danger" and the other, "opportunity."

This really struck a chord with me, because at that point, when confronted with a crisis or challenge, I realized I never looked beyond the threat or danger the crisis presented.

As it turns out, the story about how the Chinese define crisis isn't exactly true. Experts say two characters are indeed used, and the first does mean "danger," but the second means something closer to "change point" than "opportunity."

It doesn't matter. What my friend, Nora, conveyed to me that day, was how we respond to a crisis is a mindset and to look beyond the danger because danger is paralyzing. Instead, see the possibilities. See the opportunity. Take control of the future by using the crisis to focus and energize actions, rather than discourage them.

Thinking back about the past several months, and all the challenges the pandemic has thrown at us, we, as a health and physical education community, should be proud of how we have risen to the occasion and taken control of our future. We have absolutely turned challenge into opportunity time and time again.

Think about it...

March 2020. Pandemic declared. Children sent home. Although we didn't realize it at the time, school as we knew it would cease to exist for over a year and a half. Instantly, 200,000 health and physical education teachers were thrust into a world they weren't prepared for.

What was the danger? The danger would be to do nothing and put our fate in the hands of others. We got a taste of what this would look like when some schools decided our subject

wasn't worth their students' time. Teachers were reassigned, positions cut, classes loaded up and, for many who still had jobs, little or no support was provided.

The opportunity we had, and capitalized on, was to prove health and physical education not only *could* be taught but *should* be taught. Our health and physical education community came together, advocated, shared resources, and provided the professional and emotional support needed to make it through. And now, we're so much stronger for it. Just think about how, across the board, health and physical educators have leveled up in their technical skills, at meeting the social and emotional needs of students, and delivering content in an all-new learning environment.

Another example...the cancellation of in-person conferences.

The danger? For those of us in the business of providing professional development, this was unthinkable. Conferences are what we do. They're the primary way we, state and national organizations, come together and serve our members. It was potentially devastating. Once more, the danger would be to do nothing.

But we didn't. We seized the opportunity and learned how to provide virtual conventions. Across the country, state organizations, as well as SHAPE America, began to provide an all-new kind of experience, and did this while still achieving the many benefits of in-person conferences.

The positives were many. We discovered "anytime, anywhere, on-line professional development" worked extremely well for some and allowed us to reach an entirely new demographic — teachers who were not able to travel to conferences.

We heard from participants how they were able to attend more sessions than ever before, and how they appreciated being able to interact with presenters during their sessions.

We developed innovative features, such as Coffee Talks, Lunch & Learns, and online social activities that turned out to be so popular we will be sure to add them to our professional development repertoire in the future.

There's no denying it...we've come a long way in a short amount of time. So, let's take a minute to congratulate ourselves and feel good about how, we, as a profession stepped up to meet the many crises of the pandemic head on.

Let's also take this opportunity to recognize the efforts of our SHAPE America staff, who have been on full throttle since the pandemic began and have been meeting the needs of members, and the larger health and physical education community in so many ways: the COVID-19 Online Resource Library, the 2020-21 *School Reentry Considerations*, the first ever SHAPE America Virtual National Convention, the Back to School Summit, health. moves. minds.® with its SEL-focused lessons, town halls, webinars, and so much more.

Now, I don't want to burst this feel-good bubble, but we can't be complacent because the pandemic is not done with us yet.

Coming our way is the biggest challenge — and opportunity — of all.

COVID-19 has up-ended education and revealed our current system is broken in many ways. This can't be ignored any longer. Our country is done with kicking the can down the road. Change is coming.

The danger is how this might play out. What will the role of health and physical education be? And even, will there be health and physical education?

We can do nothing and let the chips fall where they may. At best, this will return us to the way things were. But even this is bad news, because, in this scenario, it means we've been left behind.

The opportunity is that THIS is the moment we have been waiting for!

As bad as the pandemic has been, the disruption caused has provided the catalyst needed for drastic change. The kind of change required to raise the profile of health and physical education and earn us a solid and secure place in the core curriculum.

It's a perfect storm for our profession because the health and well-being of students is now top priority as is equity and ensuring all students get what they need to reach their full potential. Our subjects are uniquely positioned to make a major contribution to the achievement of both these goals.

If there ever was a time to take control of our future, it's now.

### **How do we capitalize on this opportunity?**

By looking forward, not backward. By being active, and not passive. By sharing a vision for what health and physical education *could* be and then providing a roadmap for how to get there.

### **What's the vision?**

Quality health and physical education for ALL. Quality programs focus on student learning, they are standards-based, have the goal of health literacy and physical literacy, and are taught in an environment where EVERY child feels safe, supported, participates, and learns.

Make no mistake. All means ALL. We need quality health and physical education for EVERY SINGLE ONE of our nation's 50 million school children.

Don't get me wrong. We DO have world class health and physical education in this country — we see examples of it every day from our SHAPE America Teachers of the Year and other extraordinary teachers. But that's not enough. We need world-class health and physical education for ALL.

### **How do we get there?**

First, we must come together, once more, as a health and physical education community, and speak with one voice, with one powerful message about the benefits of quality health and physical education. Yes, there are *many* benefits, but the *most* powerful is that we develop health literacy and physical literacy and equip *all* students with the skills, knowledge, and attitudes needed to live their best lives.

Then, we roll up our sleeves and get to work providing the leadership and support teachers, schools, and districts need to get there. It can't be business as usual. We must be intentional about the professional development and support provided.

Let's employ some backward design and identify what skills and knowledge teachers need to deliver quality health and physical education. For starters, they're going to need to be competent in their ability to design and deliver standards-based instruction. They'll need to be skilled at employing inclusive teaching practices, and they will need to make sure they are providing meaningful experiences for all students.

There's much work to be done, more than can be described here. But let this be a starting point of the health and physical education community coming together, like never before, to turn this crisis into an opportunity and redefine the role of health and physical education in school.

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