

The Physical Education Hall of Shame.

by Neil F. Williams

The Physical Education Hall of Shame was established to identify certain activity programs or games which, although physically demanding, do not contribute to the development of motor, cognitive, and affective skills of the students. Such meaningless activities have limited physical activity time, promote minimal participation, embarrass students in front of their classmates and are primarily concerned with having fun. Line Soccer, Red Rover, Simon Says, Spud, Tag and Messy Back Yard are examples of such activities.

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Because physical educators are held accountable for providing developmentally appropriate and educationally sound programs (Grineski, 1992; Petersen, 1992; Wikgren, 1992), we should identify practices in physical education which persist but which are not in the students' best interests (Graham, 1992). As professionals, we must reexamine our practices and programs and think critically about what, how, and why we are teaching the children in our care.

The Physical Education Hall of Shame was established (Williams, 1992) to help professionals take a closer look at themselves, to focus on developmentally and programmatically appropriate physical education, and to encourage professionals to strive toward structuring and teaching classes in order to achieve the ultimate goals of physical (motor skills and fitness), cognitive, and affective development of students. Ultimately, students should develop a unity of their minds and bodies to enable them to live as healthy and productive adults in society.

The seven charter inductees from 1992--dodgeball; Duck Duck Goose, Giants, Elves, and Wizards; kickball; Musical Chairs; relay races; Steal the Bacon--are joined in the Hall of Shame by six new, equally deserving members. The major elements of an activity or game which have been identified as criteria for inclusion into the Hall of Shame follow. (To qualify, a game or activity need only possess one of these elements.)

- * Absence of the purported objectives of the activity or game.
- * Potential to embarrass a student in front of the rest of the class.
- * Focus on eliminating students from participation.
- * Overemphasis on and concern about the students having "fun."
- * Lack of emphasis on teaching motor skills and lifetime physical fitness skills.

* Extremely low participation time factors.

* Extremely high likelihood for danger, injury, and harm.

It is impossible to decide which one of the following activities is the worst, so the new inductees are presented in alphabetical order.

Line Soccer

Enhancing and improving students' soccer skills are objectives frequently cited for playing this game, and Line Soccer (also known as Sideline Soccer) does do this to some extent. In each round, teams line up on opposite ends of a court, and the teacher calls out one or two previously assigned numbers. The corresponding players from two teams dart out, attempt to gain control of the soccer ball in the center of the playing area, and have about one minute to try to score a goal by kicking the ball through the "wall" of players remaining at the opposition's goal line. The game can be fast paced and exciting, and on infrequent occasions, will even feature some elements of "good" soccer. Line Soccer, however, violates several of the basic principles of good physical education teaching (Petersen, 1992). Participation time is minimal--players on a 12-person team are on the court only about 16 percent of the time in the best of circumstances. Brown and Grineski (1992) observed that only a small number of players ever interacted with other players or the ball. In one class, three students neither touched the ball nor ran the length of the gymnasium floor. Students are put on display in front of their peers in a pressure situation which also demands highly valued skills and competencies, and this sets them up for potential embarrassment and ridicule. There is also the strong possibility that one of the better players out on the floor will gain control of the ball and kick it toward a student who is ill-equipped to stop it or get out of the way. Line Soccer's siblings, Line (Sideline) Basketball and Line (Sideline) Hockey, also automatically qualify for the Hall of Shame on the basis of close family resemblance.

Messy Back Yard (MBY)

MBY is a misbegotten creation that still seems to show up in variations (most recently in several textbooks and a

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national physical education publication) in the name of developing teamwork and enhancing throwing and catching skills for primary (K-B) children.

Students are divided into two groups, and each side is assigned to one half of a court (i.e., basketball or volleyball) while separated by a net or barrier at mid-court. Each group has 15 to 50 foam discs, Nerf balls, plastic bowling pins, and assorted other objects. On the teacher's signal, the students begin to throw the objects over the net to the other group's side. Students may catch or pick up any object thrown over to their side and throw it back. The action is fast, furious, and borders on the maniacal. The game consists of several rounds and the object is to clean up your "messy back yard" and to have the fewest objects on your side when the round is ended (usually after about a minute) by the teacher's whistle. When the round ends, each team counts all of the objects on its side and the team with fewer objects gets a point for having the "nearer" back yard.

First, can a second grade class accurately count 50 or 60 objects in less than 5 minutes? Actual physical activity is absolutely minimal. Second, because the action is so frenzied, objects continue to fly over the net for at least 15 seconds after the whistle has sounded, rendering the first minute absolutely meaningless. Third, this game is almost completely mindless. Students are told to throw all of the objects back over the net as fast as they can, but actually the best strategy is to collect everything that is thrown over to you and then to wait until one second before the round ends before bombarding your helpless opponents with 100 assorted balls, discs, and bowling pins. But because the teacher almost always ends the round without any warning or regard to how much time has elapsed, actual thinking does not help the players at all and is usually a hindrance. Combine all of the fore-mentioned with the inevitable 200-decibel screaming that goes on in such a game (twice as loud as a Guns N' Roses rock concert), and you have one of the all-time champion Hall of Shame members.

Red Rover

This game is a relic from a time when physical education classes were not coed and in which football and wrestling coaches tried to determine who were the toughest kids in the school. Red Rover, nominated by several people from around the country, is one of those search, maim, and destroy games where one team wins by "capturing" all of its opponents.

Two evenly matched teams face each other across half of a basketball court and take turns calling players "over" from the opposite side. Team A huddles and decides on the player they want to embarrass from Team B. Then

they hold hands to form a long chain and chant, "Red Rover, Red Rover, send Johnny over!" Johnny sizes up the situation across the court, and he looks for either the weakest spot in the chain (is it where those two girls are?) or the place where he thinks he needs to inflict the greatest pain (should he run over that nerd with the glasses, or into the clown who spilled his milk at lunch yesterday?). At this point Johnny takes off at full throttle and attempts to break through or dive under and past the joined hands at the desired point in Team A's chain. If he is unsuccessful, he becomes a member of Team A (he is captured). But if he does break through the enemies' line, he may return to his own team (Team B) with both players whose link (or arms) he broke. Upon his return (or capture), Team B now gets to call over a player from Team A.

In our considerations for the Hall of Shame, we could totally ignore the fact that Red Rover is astonishingly dangerous because it has so many other inappropriate elements which qualify it for enshrinement. Other than standing for 15 minutes and holding hands with each other, there is virtually no physical activity for anyone (even if Johnny got called over and captured every time, he would only be running and crashing for about 3 out of every 45 seconds of game time), and no motor skills whatsoever are taught or reinforced. Apart from the highly specious claim that the game develops teamwork and sportsmanship, Red Rover also does not seem to incorporate any of the major objectives in physical education. Red Rover should "be eliminated not only from the United States, but its territories, the entire North American Continent, the world and the known galaxies" (Benton, 1992).

Simon Says

This elimination game, like other Hall of Shame members Tag and Musical Chairs, has one important element which is missing from the other two: teacher deception. The teacher leads the game by standing and facing all of the students in the class. Ostensibly, the game purports to teach students about their body parts and how to follow directions, but most important, students are taught to listen carefully. Students are to follow the leader's directions at all times, no matter how tricky and deceitful they become. Students are to do whatever movements they are told to do, but only if the command to move is preceded by the key words, "Simon says" (e.g., "Simon says put your hands on your head"). If the teacher does not precede a command to move with "Simon says," then the students are to hold their previous position. Students who are caught moving when they shouldn't, or not moving when or as they should, are eliminated from the game and must sit down until only one student (the "winner") remains in the

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game.

The problems are obvious with this game: early elimination of unskilled players; singling out students for ridicule; playing until there is a "winner"; low participation time factors; and low amounts of fitness-related activity. But the major problem is that the teacher is doing his or her best to deceive and entrap students--and then punish students when they are caught. Psychologically, this may be the rough equivalent of teaching students about the dangers of electricity by jolting them with an electric current if they touch the wrong button. As teachers, we have so much power--to do both good or harm--that we must always honor the faith and trust the students place in us. A game like Simon Says has the potential to do much more harm than good. SPUD

This is a bombardment-type game in which the object is similar to dodgeball: try to hit, hurt, and humiliate another classmate with a thrown object. Call me a spoilsport, but I object to a game in which students serve as human targets for their classmates. SPUD goes by different names, but my favorite is, "I Declare War."

In this game, all the students gather at the center of the playing area, and one of them tosses the ball into the air while calling out the name of a classmate. All of the students run for their lives (for about 4 seconds) except the named student who must catch the ball and then yell, "SPUD!" The running students all freeze and the person with the ball gets to throw it at one of them. The various hits and misses generate letter penalties, and the game is played until someone, or everyone, gets SPUD.

The game has always been promoted as one which develops anaerobic fitness, throwing, and listening skills. However, SPUD generally ends up as a contest among the better athletes in the class who play for the "benefit" of the others. The essence of SPUD for most of the students is lots of squealing punctuated by 4-second sprints every minute or so (a participation time factor of about 6%). There is limited activity, little running, less throwing, but lots of danger as the stronger students throw the ball at the heads of one another in an attempt to give them "letters." There must be better ways to promote running, throwing, and listening skills.

Tag

Tag games, when structured correctly, can be great additions to a physical education curriculum. They can teach motor skills, locomotor patterns, teamwork, strategy, honesty and sportsmanship, and they can help enhance anaerobic fitness levels. However, all too often, tag games are organized as classic elimination games (like Musical

Chairs) in which students supposedly develop their quickness, thinking skills, and fitness.

Under some farfetched apocalyptic premise (e.g., Space Invaders, PAC-man/woman, Mutant Ninja Turtles, Star Wars), one or two students are "it" and run around the playing area trying to capture/mutilate/kill everyone else in the game (the runners). When "it" tags a runner, the runner is now captured/mutilated/killed and out of the game. All of the tagged runners go to a holding area and watch the rest of the game until only one runner remains untagged and becomes the winner. The winner is now the new "it" and the game continues in this fashion for several similar rounds.

What usually happens is that the least skilled or least attentive students are the first to be caught and eliminated, and then they spend the rest of the time it takes to produce a "winner" by sitting on the floor as "losers" with little to do but watch their classmates. Elimination games like Tag or Simon Says are essentially self-defeating, because the students who are least skilled and fit are usually the first to be caught, banished, punished, and embarrassed, and then given almost no opportunity to improve. The next time they play, those students are likely to be the first ones out again.

The average participation time factor for all students in an elimination tag game is about 50 percent (which is not bad), but for some students (the most skilled and fit--and those who need it least of all), participation time is over 90 percent. Meanwhile, for the students who should have the most practice, participation time is probably going to be less than 10 percent. Although some elements of elimination tag games have merit, we need to focus on and implement ways to structure tag games which provide a much greater amount of participation for everyone.

The activities and games listed in the Hall of Shame are patently dangerous, have limited physical activity time, promote minimal participation by the majority of students, are overly concerned with having fun, barely enhance or promote any of our major goals, or single students out for potential embarrassment in front of their classmates. We must eliminate these types of activities and games (and the inappropriate thinking and teaching practices which seem to be mutually inclusive with them) from our curricula and work harder to implement developmentally appropriate physical education programming--programming which promotes enjoyable, challenging, and successful learning for all students (Grineski, 1992)--and securely justify our place in the educational process.

Readers who know of inappropriate teaching practices (e.g., a line of 15 students and one basketball to practice

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lay-ups; naming students as team captains and having them choose sides) that should be inducted into the Physical Education Hall of Shame, should send to the author a brief description and supporting evidence. If enough responses are received, the Physical Education Hall of Shame will be expanded next year to include these inappropriate teaching practices.

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