Tip #842: Physical Literacy in Secondary Learning Environments

Overview

Maintaining student engagement in physical education through secondary school requires teachers to offer programs that are relevant, varied, and responsive to adolescent interests and identities. Students in secondary settings are more likely to remain physically active when they have genuine choice in their activity, when their social connections are supported through sport and recreation, and when the program acknowledges the diverse motivations that drive physical participation. A secondary HPE program that evolves with its students builds the foundation for lifelong physical activity.

Key Teaching Ideas

Secondary teachers can increase engagement by designing programs that offer genuine student choice alongside structured lesson content. Elective structures, student-designed fitness units, and community-connected recreation activities give students a sense of ownership over their physical education experience. Teachers can also use data, asking students about their interests, barriers, and goals, to shape program decisions. The most effective secondary programs are those where students feel that their voice has shaped what they do and how they do it.

Practical Application

- **Student Interest Surveys**: At the start of each semester, survey students about their physical activity interests, barriers, and goals, then use the data to inform unit selection and program design decisions.
- **Elective Activity Rotations**: Offer students a choice of two or three activity options within a unit, allowing them to pursue their area of interest while still meeting the same movement competence outcomes.
- **Student-Designed Fitness Units**: Give senior students the opportunity to design and lead a two-week fitness unit for a younger class, developing leadership, planning, and communication skills through physical activity.
- **Community Recreation Connections**: Partner with local sport and recreation providers to offer students access to activities not available at school, connecting HPE to the broader community and expanding participation options.

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- **Personal Goal-Setting Portfolios**: Students set, monitor, and reflect on personal physical activity goals across a semester, developing self-directed learning skills and a personalised understanding of their own movement development.

Next Steps

Anywhere PD has resources on engaging adolescent learners in HPE and secondary program design. The Active Education Australia website also offers tools for student choice, elective structures, and senior participation pathways.

References and Research

1. Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education (Version 9.0) – Establishes the curriculum expectations for developing movement competence, health literacy, personal and social capability, and lifelong participation in physical activity.
2. Australian Sports Commission. (2019). Australian Physical Literacy Framework – Defines physical literacy as the development of physical, psychological, social and cognitive capabilities that support lifelong participation in physical activity.
3. Mitra, D. L. (2004). The Significance of Students: Can Increasing "Student Voice" in Schools Lead to Gains in Youth Development? – Demonstrates how authentic opportunities for student voice build agency, belonging, competence and meaningful participation in school communities.
4. Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). The "What" and "Why" of Goal Pursuits: Human Needs and the Self-Determination of Behavior – Explains how autonomy, competence and relatedness strengthen intrinsic motivation, engagement and wellbeing.

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