

Using Technology in Physical Education

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Its pre-game and my senior volleyball team sits on the bench waiting for the coach to signal for warm-up. I pause and ask myself when a single white earbud attached to the popular MP3 player became uniform? In the classroom this flagrant display of student-owned technology would rapidly make a nice addition to my drawer of smartphones, iPods, and other electronic gadgets. It seems like a never-ending battle!

I was born this side of 1980 where the home computer became commonplace and kids loved their low resolution video games (think Nintendo®). Technology use in our daily lives is undoubtedly increasing. A 2009 study by Neilson – one of many companies who make a business of watching what we watch and buy – identified that “the average internet user spent an estimated 68 hours (a month) online (both at home and work)”. Let that soak in - more than 2 hours each day on the internet alone. TV was once king of consumer technology in our society. But a 2005 study by JupiterResearch noted the internet’s increasing influence stating that the internet “has the kind of influence that we would have attributed to TV in the past.”

Yet the Internet is only one of many types of technology (think smartphones, iPod®, computer software, tablets, GPS) that are used daily in the lives of teachers, parents and students. As educators, we need to be aware of the different types of technology that are available. Utilizing technology in the classroom may lead to a more engaged class and some students might feel that the lessons we present are more relevant.

I know many of you are thinking that Physical Education does not seem like a likely subject for the use of technology beyond a stopwatch. However, there are many ways to incorporate technology it into your PE classes. Here are some examples that you may want to consider:

- SportFit Canada (sportfitcanada.com) is a unique program that details set-up and correct performance of eight different fitness stations for student participation. Your students will take their results and enter them on the website which provides a personalized certificate suggesting three summer and winter sports. The website will also compare their results to other same-age Canadians who have taken the SportFit challenge.
- The Beep Test (which you can download free from the internet) allows you to use your iPod® to gauge student baseline and progress fitness level.
- Screen short video clips of various movement skills from websites like YouTube®. This is great when introducing a lesser-known sport such as touch football, netball, tchoukball, or cricket. When I introduce my netball unit, I screen video from intosport.com to assist students visualize and comprehend skills such as shooting, passing and defense that are fundamental to the game.
- Send students online to hunt for answers to health and nutrition questions drawn from the Canada’s Food Guide (hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/index-eng.php)
- Track students’ running mileage (google.ca/maps or mapmyrun.com). A few of my students have run nearly 20km since the beginning of this year!

- Government, community and corporate websites can be used as a resource to add interest to a topic or provide lesson plan ideas in the field of PE. Some examples include: electrikids.com and PEcentral.org.
- Heart rate monitors allow students to understand and see in real time how their body responds to exercise. During a PE class you may ask one or more students to wear the heart rate monitor, then download the data and print off and analyze their heart rate variation during the lesson.

Did I hear you say something about “cost per student”? Sure it would be nice to have a SMART Board in every classroom, but as educators with finite resources, we realize that different departments and schools have different budgets. We need to take our focus off what is unattainable and be creative in introducing and using available technology in the classroom. Some of the most effective technology resources I use are free.

A few words of caution. Introducing technology, like introducing a new curriculum or finding “that page” in a new textbook, can take time. Allow time for research, pre-screening of website content, set-up and take-down. Likewise, don’t think that each class requires a YouTube clip. As educators, it is our role to balance the use of technology to maximize educational opportunities and not merely use technology to entertain. After all, showing video clips every class will eventually lose its appeal just as reading from the textbook in every class already has!

In a society that is increasingly dependent on technology, the challenge for teachers is and will continue to be for us to step up to the plate and deliver interesting instruction that both meets learning outcomes and is financially responsible.

References:

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