

Literature Comes to Life: Exploring Movement through Books and Stories AAHPERD Convention, Boston, 2012

Kathy Wagner, 2008 NASPE Elementary Physical Education Teacher of the Year
Wichita Collegiate School, Wichita KS
e-mail - kathywagner@wcsks.com,
school web page www.wcsks.com/wagner.htm

Author, Emilie Buchwald, said, “Children are made readers on the laps of their parents.” While this is true, current research indicates that a child’s ability to retain what he has read can be enhanced when the reading is done in conjunction with physical activity.¹ As physical educators, we have the unique opportunity to put this research into practice by developing programs that creatively combine the love of reading with the joy of physical activity. This can be done as a collaborative effort with classroom teachers and librarians, or as a supplement to a physical education lesson. Programs that combine these two elements provide students with an experience that embraces both physical and cognitive learning.

Children can benefit from the opportunity to engage in a variety of activities that teach physical skills, while at the same time integrating early childhood classroom content areas such as numbers, letters, colors, shapes, or sounds. For example, the book *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom* can be easily integrated into the teaching of the alphabet using a moving alphabet bingo game or a sign language dance; or, *The Itsy Bitsy Spider* can excite children as they prepare to practice an underhand throwing action by rolling spider balls into a cargo net used as a web. In addition to the emphasis on physical and academic skills, children should be encouraged to imagine, create, and cooperate with their peers.

The integration of books and activity is a practice that aligns itself with the NASPE standards. Whether it is working on skill related technique, applying skills to a variety of games, experiencing the joy of learning and applying it outside the classroom, participating in fitness related activities, applying social skills in learning situations, or taking pride in successfully meeting many new challenges, the emphasis on these standards is enhanced when accompanied by that special book selected to correspond with the day’s lesson.

The incorporation of physical activity with literature can be a powerful tool in the repertoire of physical educators in helping children to both learn and retain information in a variety of content areas. Not only do the students benefit directly, but the discussion they have with their parents about the book and activity further reinforces what they have learned and, in a practical sense, acts to impress upon parents and administrators the value of physical education in the broad educational experience.

¹ Castelli and Hillman, *Physical Activity May Strengthen Children’s Ability to Pay Attention*, March, 2009, <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2009/03/0903331183800.htm>