The use of alternative texts in physical education

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By using a variety of texts, physical education teachers can use literacy activities to enhance their classes.

“Who knows something about how to dribble a basketball? Certainly someone knows something. All right then, the first step is to....” For many physical educators, this kind of prompt is what they consider to be student involvement; it is what they regard as the text and content of physical education (PE). This is the “roll out the ball” stigma that permeates many PE classes.

Physical education has been in decline because of the mistaken belief that the body and mind are separate and thus PE does not have much to contribute to mental function (Landers, Maxwell, Butler, & Fagan, 2001). Landers et al. theorized that sports and games present opportunities to develop thinking and reasoning skills because children are naturally inventive (inventing is a high form of thinking) and creative (modifying games to meet circumstances demonstrates a natural creativity). Without adult interference, children formulate rules and strategies, choose sides, and adjudicate disputes. “They learn to cooperate and get along with teammates to optimize team performance, they learn agreed-upon rules and sometimes learn ‘set plays’ of their own creation or out of a play book” (Landers et al., p. 343). Such unstructured activities make students literate in PE as they construct meaning in social contexts. Landers et al. contended that physical educators need to bear in mind this natural inclination of children when planning the PE curriculum; they also suggested activities that can be used to develop children’s multiple intelligences. Skills learned in physical education, they said, “can be generalized beyond physical education and sport examples so that students realize their applicability in other academic subjects and other areas of their lives” (p. 349). PE can then begin to have an impact on students’ lives so they can become lifelong learners and lifelong “movers” (Buell & Whittaker, 2001).

Can PE teachers bring about this restructure in thinking, this transformation in PE teaching and learning? Some PE teachers already in service may require the assistance and mentoring of literacy professionals—reading or language arts teachers in the secondary high schools. From such interaction and collaboration between PE teachers and professionals who have the knowledge and experience with literacy across the curriculum, powerful teams can be created to promote the best learning situations in the subject areas. In addition, those responsible for planning teacher preparation programs at colleges and universities need to begin (or continue) the task of preparing preservice PE teachers to view physical education as a thinking subject and to prepare enriching lessons that integrate alternative texts and activities with that curriculum.

The command-style teaching in physical education, interspersed with periods of student
involvement, has not only stifled creativity in movement but also precluded opportunities and possibilities for making PE a subject with a physical and intellectual component. Modern society’s increasing dependence on electronic entertainment does not help either. Nevertheless, although physical educators cannot change the prevalence of electronic devices, they can strive to make movement, thinking, and activity a meaningful part of students’ lives. To be successful in PE, mind and body must be seen as inseparable.

One main objective in many new PE curricula is to foster the principles of active living in all students. Active living is considered engaging in physical activity as part of a daily routine (Alberta Learning, 2000) and acknowledging the health benefits of such activity (i.e., taking stairs versus using the elevator). Until PE becomes a mindful subject (one where students become involved in the cognitive realm in addition to the physical), physical educators will need to justify and defend their current programs against the stereotypes surrounding PE. We believe, however, that students and PE teachers will discover the subject’s depth using alternative texts to study PE. Through such texts, students can learn how to transact with information from an affective (aesthetic) and cognitive (efferent) stance while using literacy processes as a means of learning the content of PE, and making connections to other disciplines where links exist naturally. When taking an aesthetic stance (Rosenblatt, 1980) feelings are important, as is bringing to the content visual images, associations, family values, individual beliefs and experiences, and the five senses. When taking an efferent stance it is important to set aside personal associations and feelings and focus on the meaning presented by the facts (Rosenblatt). Texts can be anything from a discussion to a musical score, from a film to a piece of sculpture, from a road sign to a magazine article, from a poem to a computer game, and from a painting to a footprint.

**Physical education and content literacy**

In this section we focus on the literature related to developing content literacy in physical education. We review briefly the ways in which educators have attempted to explore the height, depth, and breadth of physical education to date. The terms height, depth, and breadth have been associated with vocabulary development (Russell, 1954) to signify respectively the range or quality, increasing precision or nuance, and multiple meanings acquired in word knowledge. In this article we use the terms in the following way: height—developing a range of skills associated with PE, depth—the increasing understanding of the complexity and interconnectedness of the body of knowledge within PE, breadth—understanding the multiple meanings and the extension of the body of knowledge to other subject areas.

There are several articles in the literature on bringing language into the gymnasium. Sanford-Smith and Hopper (1996) wrote that language arts and PE share common structures and principles. They explained that body movement (in relation to the environment) in physical education is similar to word management (in relation to the topic) in language arts, and strategies (ways to play sports) are similar to strategies (ways to use words) in language arts. Techniques (for developing and refining skills and tactics) in PE are similar to techniques (for manipulating language for a specific purpose, structure, word choice) in language arts.

In a similar manner, language can be extended to include the language of movement and dance. Hanna (2001) highlighted how dance provokes the same brain centers as sign language, using the same coding to create meaning. Steps, gestures, and order are equivalent to words, sentences, and grammar. Just as we can have meaningless words, we can have meaningless movement. Just as one does not speak language, but rather English or Spanish, one does not do dance, but rather classical East Indian or ballet.
More important, dance is rooted in the creative presentation of an idea that is unique to every individual. Dance is personal. Meaning through the language of dance is also created in many ways (Hanna, 2001) including metaphor; actualization (realism); and who does what, when, where, how, and with whom.

Schram (1995) and Griffin and Morgan (1998) promoted literacy in the gym by placing action words at stations to guide students’ activity. They explained how student interaction with words like jump, skip, and twist could become more meaningful to students. Taking this one step further, the students created a deeper understanding of the vocabulary by including these words in a poem (Schram). Griffin and Morgan promoted setting up an alphabet-dribbling course for primary-grade students to extend their language learning into the kinesthetic realm. This principle can be used with a secondary class by increasing the complexity of the course to include higher order sequential patterns (e.g., the way blood flows through the circulatory system or the steps in cardiopulmonary resuscitation). In attempts to aid students’ understanding of physical education, Griffin and Morgan suggested creating individual student dictionaries to collect terms over the duration of the class. For students to generate meaning in PE, these general literacy skills must be focused on acquiring knowledge in specific movements and aspects of sport and fitness (Buell & Whittaker, 2001). Many physical educators consistently think about the how, when, and what of their lessons, but to create meaning is to focus on the why (Sanford-Smith & Hopper, 1996).

If educators create an environment in PE that integrates the content with relevant experiences, students are able to think better from a PE framework. For example, through the use of visual aids accompanied by vocabulary, Moen (1996) was able to teach her students the main function of muscles. A circuit was set up to parallel the human body with anterior muscles on one side of the gym and posterior muscles on the other. At each station, students interacted with a muscle’s name, a picture of its location, and an exercise task performed to work that muscle. Before the class entered the circuit, students discussed muscles and their importance. To reinforce the concept of the heart as the body’s most important muscle, six Heart Smart stations were included in the circuit. Thus, Moen developed meaningful vocabulary and connected it to student lives and activity—an essential aspect for the successful development of active individuals.

The integration of multiple subjects in secondary schooling can be an effective means of capitalizing on similarities in discipline structure and content while developing students’ literacy within a specific subject (Christie, 2000; Gordon, Sheridan, & Paul, 1998). Topic Teamwork (Christie) incorporated the main subjects by identifying an underlying structure in a junior high year. Christie exposed the relationships and connections among the subject areas through a Topic Teamwork approach, and students built a wide base of knowledge across subjects. In this approach, PE was seen as an effective means for teaching concepts in the other subjects.

**Homework in gym?**

Although “the suggestion of homework in PE... implies a commitment to go beyond the psychomotor domain” (Mitchel, Barton, & Stanne, 2000, p. 34), homework can increase motivation and interest by linking school with everyday life (Doucheff, 1996; Mitchel et al., 2000). Homework, if relevant and relatively enjoyable or even fun (and appropriate for the teacher and students), can significantly increase the contact students have with PE content. Homework should involve two realms: physical and mental (Doucheff, 1996; Mitchel et al., 2000). Doucheff presented a wide variety of methods to promote these two realms through “journaling” and writing to record information. He encouraged teachers to promote affective (in our view, aesthetic) responses to activity. “Just acknowledging the affective aspect is an important first step. The development of students’ emotions is critical
to their advancement as total individuals” (p. 19). For cognitive homework, Doucheff suggested observing professional games, responding to articles on a bulletin board, recording current sporting events, and researching athletics. Mitchel et al. set out a progression for cognitive, affective, and psychomotor homework. For example, in the cognitive realm, the preparation phase might consist of reading an article on rules of a sport, the practice phase of completing a teacher-prepared worksheet on rules, and the extension phase of analyzing a live game based on the officiating. In the affective realm, the preparation phase might consist of attending a game and recording good- and poor-sport behavior, the practice phase of using categories from PE class to quantify game behavior, and the extension phase of writing a paper on the implications of one's findings. To enable students to be literate in PE, the how and why of watching a game, reading an article, and analyzing a game as a physical educator needs to be emphasized.

Because many students do not understand the importance of living a physically active lifestyle, more recent elementary school curricula have begun to emphasize creative play through more unstructured activities in what is being called the “new games movement” (Landers et al., 2001). Another movement that is gaining momentum to help counteract this trend of not being active without instructions is the Teaching Games for Understanding Approach to PE. (For more information on this approach visit www.educ.uvic.ca/Faculty/thopper.)

The philosophy of sport

According to Kretchmar (2000), several factors are required to have students connect with physical education. The development of a student’s personal philosophy of sport is one way. A PE teacher should try to refocus students’ philosophy from the win-at-all-cost domain toward valuing fair play and teamwork (Lumpkin & Cunnen, 2001) so that the students desire to be active throughout their lives. While teachers generally acknowledge the importance of moral reasoning to help students decide what is right and wrong, few actually engage students in these decision-making skills (Lumpkin & Cunnen). Critically evaluating the values specific to PE allows students to deal with conflict resolution in an effective, positive manner. To assist in the development of decision-making skills, students need to reflect on what they value and why (in sport, recreation, and life) and whether their behaviors are consistent with their values.

To lead successful and active lives, PE students must learn how to adapt their personal management skills that include goal setting, focusing and refocusing, mental practice and imagery, and relaxation and energizing (Sinclair & Sinclair, 1994). As students become familiar with these skills, they become more independent and self-regulating (Sinclair & Sinclair). These are metacognitive skills that teachers of the discipline use daily, and often teachers assume students understand how they are used. Sherman (1999) suggested keeping an interactive journal to manage and track the success of these mental skills. How effective the journal writing assignment will be depends on students knowing the why before the assignment is presented.

Kretchmar (2000), demonstrated how individuals are moved by activity and how sport can remind students of things that are more important than winning.

If I had to give one single reason for my love of sport it would be this. I love the test of human spirit. I love it when I am defeated but still refuse to die. I love to confront impossible odds. I love to lavish incredible grace on simple plays. I love to experience my heart when it refuses to give in, refuses to panic, seizes the opportunity, exerts itself far beyond capacity. This is why the human race should live! (p. 22, paraphrased from Novak, 1976, pp. 150–151)

Gonzalez (2001) approached PE from an expeditionary framework in which sound constructivist principles guided teacher praxis for developing content literacy: experiencing the
primacy of self-discovery, generating wonderful ideas, experiencing success and failure, collaborating and competing, including a diversity of individuals and ideas, building a connection to the natural world, finding a need for solitude and reflection, encouraging service and compassion, and helping produce lifelong learners.

To strengthen the skills students use, Buell and Whittaker (2001) and Manzo, Manzo, and Estes (2001) encouraged building into lessons the subject-specific thinking skills required in PE. Thus reading to learn, writing to learn, and talking to learn in PE can be used to develop critical thinking, planning and strategizing for success, reflecting on and analyzing performance and synthesizing findings, and questioning. Thus, students learn to use reading and writing for acquiring new content (McKenna & Robinson, 1990) in physical education. For example, after a class discussion about the rules of a game, students could be asked to think about how they feel about the rules, what the rules accomplish, or what the game would look like without them. By promoting critical thinking, a teacher can begin to model the thought processes necessary to succeed in PE: how to read a fitness article for details, determine an article’s merits, diagram a play in basketball or read a play book, scout a player or a team, and discuss a play to determine its usefulness in a game (Buell & Whittaker, 2001). In this way, students acquire the ability to interpret sport and health information to become educated consumers.

**Alternative texts**

In this section we present six examples as the basis for using alternative texts in the physical education classroom. We have selected two printed texts and one visual text for the development of body image and athletic ideals, two printed texts for a camping trip as part of outdoor education, and one visual text for physical exertion. We provide a brief overview of how each could be presented as part of a PE curriculum.

**Body image, athletic ideals, and the role of activity: Junior high**

The visual text we suggest is the statue studied by Michelangelo for paintings in the Sistine Chapel (see Figure 1).

The second text, which follows, is an excerpt from a selection that describes the Spartan civilization.

It was written in the law that every ten days the youth stripped naked should pass in public review before the Ephors [Spartan officials who tested and evaluated Spartan youth on their progress]. Now if they were solid and vigorous, resembling the work of a sculptor or engraver, as the result of the gymnastic exercise [entrenched in their society], praise was accorded them; but if their physique displayed any flabbiness or flaccidity, with fat beginning to appear in rolls because of laziness, they were beaten and punished. (Forbes, 1929, p. 33)

The third text (see Figure 2) is drawn from a selection on the Athenian civilization.

These three complementary texts provide the opportunity to compare philosophies and create a base of knowledge that can be extended into the students’ daily lives. By exploring body
image, body types, perceptions of bodies, and the philosophies about what physical education is, teachers and students can begin to create meaning that will add to relevance in real life.

Outdoor education: High school

The first text in this section comes from a journal article, “Wordless Stories.”

If the words lie silently on a printed page, we create the pictures in our minds, bringing the dialogue to life and giving voices, faces and bodies to the characters. But look here; the story is a picture. Tracks in the soil...the words written on the earth. These marks tell us who made them and when. They tell us what this author was doing, even a little bit of what he was thinking. They tell us where the author was.... They invite us to experience how it feels to be this author. If you look carefully—if you know how to read this story—soon these meanings appear. These are male deer tracks, walking rather slowly, relaxed. We know who, when and what from this one set of prints.... Come along and see and learn the alphabet of nature.

Let rain, sun, and wind add their paragraphs to the story. (Gietz, 2002, p. 18)

Gietz's article presents some of the subtleties of tracking animals and what can be learned through a study of a scene in nature. It includes several pictures and activities that help uncover meaning in the subtleties of tracks. As a text for a high school class before an outing, it can focus student attention on learning the language of the wilderness scene in which they are to participate. The poem “The Hike” by Neil Weiss (1956, p. 71, see Figure 3) is an additional text for the outdoors unit and can add to the discussion (e.g., Morrison, 1965).

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**Figure 2**
Selection on the Athenian civilization

The Greeks gave physical education a respectability that has never since been achieved. They accorded the body equal dignity with the mind. They associated sport with philosophy, music, literature, painting, and particularly with sculpture. They leave to all future civilizations important aesthetic ideas: the idea of harmonised balance of mind and body, of body symmetry, and bodily beauty in repose and in action.

*Note. From Van Dalen & Bennett, 1971, p. 591.*

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**Figure 3**
“The Hike” by Neil Weiss

Clear and high, a mountain.
And my heart sinks
out of custom, but I try
because I am with you.
We keep on going
on a gradual incline
until thighs tingle
and a shiver’s in the spine;
mount steadily,
a taking joy from a difficulty,
each thrust ahead
accomplished mutely—
and approach the top
moving so deliberately,
breath for shortened breath,
each step’s a splendid agony.
But now the mind shines,
sweat freezes, and we
unclasp our hands—the
mountain shakes us very gently.

Physical exertion: High school

R. Taite McKenzie’s masks (Kozar, 1992) can be used in the study and discussion of physical exertion (see Figure 4). However, the masks represent more than a moment in sport. To gain a more complete understanding about the consequences and benefits of activity (as per most PE curricula), the motivation behind activity should be explored. A force—a spirit—is driving this athlete. Through the adoption of different stances (aesthetic or efferent) while interpreting these masks, different meanings result. The physical signs of activity (efferent stance) are an obvious aspect to explore. However, the emotional discussion (aesthetic stance) that can follow has endless potential. The mental side to training is as important as the physical side. These four masks encompass both aspects of athletics with a beautiful harmony. McKenzie’s brilliance is in capturing the pinnacle moments in sport (Kozar, 1992).

Using alternative texts

Body image and the athletic ideal

Using the texts on Spartan and Athenian civilization, a physical educator can begin with a comparison of the Spartans’ extreme views of the body with the views of the Athenian Greeks. The nature of body images today can be explored as a result of this comparison. There is one difference between modern and ancient body image: the statue against which we gauge others and
ourselves. The modern David (described as exhibiting the ideal male proportions), in many cases, is the supermodel for young girls and boys; the physical ideals are often muscle-bound athletes and movie stars. Today’s ephors are peers, parents, media, and even teachers at times, who comment on weight and appearance. Examining the pattern of body image from a historical perspective can be a means to easing into a very sensitive subject, but it can also serve to explain some of the reasons why body image is important to many people.

By taking an efferent stance (here the purpose is to take away content meaning) in responding to the texts on Spartan and Athenian civilization, students can disassociate from their own personal experience and identify the real issues. Then by shifting to the aesthetic stance, self-reflection can begin to uncover students’ personal experiences. Even in body image there exists a base of knowledge to be shared. Information-rich materials are needed to challenge PE students to reach the height, depth, and breadth of meaning. The height, depth, and breadth bear a certain parallelism to the Olympic ideals of *citius*, *altus*, *fortis*—or fast, high, strong.

This is a topic not only for PE but also health, English language arts, and social studies—the opportunities for integration across the curriculum exist. Many new PE curricula state (as did the historical ones) that students will be able to identify different body types and to analyze both media and peer influence on body image. In a similar manner, most English language arts curricula require students to become media literate by learning to analyze critically the influence media have on their body image. The height, depth, and breadth bear a certain parallelism to the Olympic ideals of *citius*, *altus*, *fortis*—or fast, high, strong.

Higher level and critical thinking can also be promoted in guided discussions (Manzo et al., 2001). Questions are the mainstay of a good discussion, and good questions about body image, for example, go beyond asking students what they already know. Teachers need to challenge the depth of students’ knowledge to widen and heighten it. It is not possible to predict all the ways to use questions in PE because the discussion creates a cycle of “what’s next”—the Socratic cycle of questions to questions. In the Socratic method students explore questions that arise in the answers to previous questions, thus requiring a deeper level of connection to the discipline. However, according to Manzo et al. many students stop asking questions because many discussion moments fail to produce anything meaningful for them.

Inviting students to explore the depth of body image is accompanied by a responsibility to present current information to combat the epidemic of eating disorders. To ensure students do not use the information about athletic ideal in body image to justify a potentially life-threatening condition (anorexia nervosa or bulimia) it is imperative to help students (especially young females) recognize what constitutes a healthy body image. Table 1 explains the different types of bodies using Olympic athletes as examples. It also provides key information about why some individuals cannot be compared to the media-driven North American standard. With the wealth of resources available, physical educators can turn to commercials, music lyrics, webpages, and even children’s books to explore issues that arise. The analysis of facts and acknowledgment of the efferent component can lead to an appreciation of the bodies we live with day to day, and maybe even respect for them.

The texts presented to explore body image offer a diverse opportunity for students to explore physical-education ideas through writing and thinking. Taking on different stances (aesthetic or efferent) has the power to create entirely different meanings in these texts and delves further into their implications for and connections to students’ daily lives. For example, students can be asked to reflect on the different emphasis the Spartans and Athenians placed on fitness and activity and how these differences affected life within those societies. Students should reflect on how
different their own lives might be if they were subjected to the Spartan or Athenian philosophy of fitness. This is just a starting point to build upon.

**Outdoor education**

We address separately two texts for use in outdoor education. The first, “Wordless Stories,” is quite long. The excerpt in an earlier section, however, provides a taste of its content. Beyond that excerpt, this text gives specific strategies on how to interpret animal tracks in the wild and in urban areas, but it then links these tools to their underlying theories. Each tool is a direct response to a physical movement, large or small, or the psychological state of the animal. An analysis (under teacher guidance) can provide a direct link between a student’s cognition and the physical response at a macrolevel and microlevel.

With many curricula now focusing on active living, students need to be taught what to do and why. They can begin to think and learn for themselves, to read the signs of nature, and to promote an “ever active” generation (Alberta Learning, 2000). As with previous texts, students can be involved in writing-to-learn activities that explore their own ideas (Gonzalez, 2001). Collaboration should also be encouraged because groups are essential for survival in the outdoors.

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**Table 1**

**Body type comparison**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Body type</th>
<th>Qualities</th>
<th>Things to consider</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| Ectomorph | • Thin boned and naturally light for your height  
    Jessica Chase  
    Canadian Olympic synchronized swimmer  
    • Muscles are light and lean and you have trouble gaining muscle mass  
    • Have a high metabolism and seem to eat a lot for your size  | • Your delicate frame means that your joints and bones are fragile  
    • Your metabolism makes it difficult to keep on weight  
    • Often excel at endurance sports  | • (Be cautious of being too light) |
| Mesomorph | • Muscular and can look fit without much effort  
    Lori Dupuis  
    Canadian Olympic women’s hockey team  
    • Shoulders are about the same width as hips  
    • Can gain and lose weight easily | • Due to muscular weight, distance sports may cause stress on joints and balance may be affected  
    • (Your ability to gain weight means you have to be careful about the types of activity you engage in) |
| Endomorph | • Have heavy bones  
    Tina McDonald  
    Discus thrower  
    Canadian track and field team  
    • Have a soft body and a more rounded figure  
    • Can gain muscle easily and are naturally buoyant  
    • Often heavy for your height | • You are a natural body builder  
    • Running sports can put stress on joints due to weight  | • (Due to heavy structure, weight targets must be realistic) |

*Note: Summarized from Guy (2002).*
The second text is the poem “The Hike” (Weiss, 1956). Content literacy is about teaching students to converse with a text first independently and then under teacher guidance. In an initial reading, a reader gets a feeling for a piece of poetry. However, when a particular stance is identified for text interpretation by the teacher, questions arise to further the connection between reader and literature. Questions lead to answers and, many times, more questions. This poem explores far more than the physiological outcomes of hiking; it delves into the spiritual and emotional side of the experience. The spirit of the activity is what ultimately drives hikers to retreat to the mountains; it is the peace, the air, and the experience of eating a gourmet backpacker’s lunch “on top of the world.” Hiking is about finding a place to live within ourselves.

To promote active living (and the pursuit of active living), activity should be connected with daily life. “The Hike” creates a picture of what to expect when hiking and begins to crack the surface of what underlies the experience—the topography. The following is an activity for use by high school teachers to challenge students to extract meaning from Neil Weiss’s poem.

- Read the poem again, but this time focus on the physical events that the author experiences. At what point of the hike do the events occur? What does the author see or come across that can be easily described?
- Now read the poem a third time but try to see the events as if they were a movie, playing out each scene that is described. Ask yourself, have I experienced a similar sensation? Think about the relationship between the characters mentioned in the poem. Are there two people, or is this a spiritual journey for the author?

After consciously changing the initial stance, “connect” to the poem in a different way. Schram (1995) mentioned creating vocabulary from action words to which students were exposed in physical education. This was an attempt to develop vocabulary but to do so in isolation. The activity disconnected the words and meanings from what is essential in PE—namely, the experience. After reading a poem and critically reflecting on what the movement vocabulary meant to them, we believe that students will then be able to write their own stories and poems related to a physical activity. The following are examples of movement vocabulary from “The Hike.”

until thighs tingle
shiver’s in the spine
moving so deliberately
breath for shortened breath
splendid agony
mind shines
sweat freezes
the mountain shakes us very gently

A similar activity was described by Gordon et al. (1998, pp. 228–231) for using a poem about basketball in a lesson that integrated language arts, health, and the visual arts with physical education. These methods connect meaning to experience, to other subject areas or disciplines, to skill development, to performance, and to appreciation and assessment. This experiential connection is what Hanna (2001) identified as the creative force behind the language of dance.

“The Hike” offers many opportunities to discuss vocabulary within a movement experience, both before and after the activity. The phrases from it can be used in journal entries, student poetry, discussions, or vocabulary activities to create meaning. The combined use of “Wordless Stories” and “The Hike” in physical education—supported with the development of student strategies for interpreting, analyzing, and questioning the content—has the potential to promote a respect for physical activity as an integral part of a healthy, active lifestyle.
Physical exertion

The visual representation of physical exertion in the Masks of Facial Expression (Figure 4) can be used to promote both specific and general PE outcomes. In Athenian society, sculpture was a powerful form of communication. As a text, sculpture can incorporate the physical, emotional, and social aspects of PE, as well as aspects of proportion, aesthetics, and form in relation to physical activity. As an art form, sculpture integrates the dimensions that are often lacking in PE: sight, touch, imagination, and analysis beyond physical skills. Sculpture cannot take the place of quality instruction, but it can significantly enrich the PE environment. The sculptor, R. Teate McKenzie, was a medical doctor who became an advocate for physical education. With the detail in his work, McKenzie’s goal was to capture the spirit of a moment in sport (Kozar, 1992). We are seldom able to freeze athletes in action or to analyze their physical, mental, or emotional experiences (although the latest technology is changing this). By incorporating McKenzie’s sculpture; in-depth discussions; and explorations of participation, exertion, physiology, and psychology, we can invite students to enter the topography of PE. Questions such as the following might initiate or sustain a discussion: What do you think the first athlete in the series is thinking? Can you tell he loves what he is doing? What would drive individuals to put themselves through this expression? At first glance, many students may just see four faces. When we question whether this text is “just sculpture,” however, we ask students to reach to a different level in their understanding.

The study of the content of the Masks of Facial Expression can be extended to further create meaning by taking digital photographs of students at the beginning of a run, at the halfway point, at the end, and 10 minutes after it. From those pictures students could analyze the changes they observe, compare them to the masks, describe the changes in terms of physiology, put a heart rate to “that specific look,” write about how they felt in each photo, and identify the warning signs of physical exertion. This activity is bound only by the creativity and sense of wonder of the teacher and the students.

A variety of supplementary texts (e.g., some drawn from magazines or journals, athletic contests, or autobiographies) can be used to extend students’ understanding of fitness. Such texts should be visually rich and informational to hold student interest. The teacher can adapt the lesson, depending on where the discussion or student writing based on the sculpture takes the class. For example, a prereading discussion on an article posted on a bulletin board might be guided by questions to invite students to think in depth about a topic in PE: What makes you physically tired? What makes your breathing extremely shallow? Have you ever been dizzy from exercise? How do people become fit? What role does exertion play in physical fitness? How have people tried to become fit in the past?

A new attitude

The complexity of the body of knowledge within physical education deserves to be explored and appreciated, and it needs to be presented to students so that they cannot look away. Otherwise the status quo of teaching skills, drills, and surface emotional thrills will survive. For PE to reach its educational potential, secondary school literacy educators and physical educators together need to challenge this status quo to inspire physically active students. The use of alternative texts in PE is one way to do this.

A commitment to improving student involvement within the discipline of physical education is likely to make many physical educators uncomfortable because it implies a commitment beyond the psychomotor (adapted from Mitchel et al., 2000). Socrates said, “I cannot teach anybody anything, I can only make them think.” If that holds true, physical education has to continue to evolve. In the history of PE, curriculum has made clear the need to promote the thinking styles necessary to analyze movement and the
principles of physical activity. Significant changes in content literacy praxis have been slow to reach the PE classroom and have often not been in depth in effort. It is time to open the “topography of the landscape” (Jardine, Clifford, & Friesen, 2002) to reach the height, depth, and breadth of information this discipline is capable of supporting. The current additions of language and language arts, visual art, homework, and journals are encouraging. Nonetheless, for PE to evolve and promote a respect for the tradition of human movement, physical educators must challenge what they believe is at the heart of the subject. They need to develop a new attitude toward movement (Kretchmar, 2000) and an understanding of the basic tenets underpinning content literacy. A good start would be to use alternative texts in their teaching and to begin thinking about physical education in the way the Athenians did.

REFERENCES