**Service learning in Physical Education**

Way back when I was a coach - volleyball, basketball and track, after 23 years of getting up before/at the break of dawn on Saturdays during the school year, I resigned from coaching. What next? Well, being the “forever tomboy” all my life, I lived in mortal fear of that “duties as assigned” clause in our contracts. My fears evolved around being assigned to do the dance team or cheerleaders. No disrespect intended, but neither are my deal. A former colleague approached me one day and asked me if I would be interested in being the Key Club sponsor. My reaction was, “What’s that?” After a brief explanation, I replied, “Sure! I’ll do that,”. For those of you who don’t know, Key Club is the world’s largest youth service organization, sponsored by Kiwanis, an adult world service club. Thus began my experience, now going on 25 years, with service.

Why service in PE, you may be asking? Well, if you are not incorporating it into your program, you are missing a golden opportunity to introduce/teach your students about being an integral part of their community.

Think about your program. What are things you can easily incorporate into your program to make your school, neighborhood, community a better/nicer place to live?

The first thing that comes to mind for me is trash pickup. You want kids to be proud of their school. Let’s start with making it look great. Kids also learn that they, as young people, can make a difference by just doing small acts. They are outside, getting fresh air, bending over, moving their bodies. Afterwards you can decompress by talking about what they just did, how it makes the school look better, how they feel about themselves, etc. etc.

Brainstorm with your students about other service projects they can do for the school, their community, and each other. Kids are full of great ideas and when you include them in planning a project, you also have their “buy in” for what you are doing.

“Back in the day,” we adults received a citizenship grade. Wouldn’t service learning projects help teach the kids about what being a good citizen means?

Do you have something you would like to raise funds for for your gym or playground? Typically, big dollar items are an impossibility, especially now that money is tight. Use your older kids to help plan for a project for a fund drive to raise the money for whatever it is you need. In my years with Key Club our club raised thousands of dollars for various projects. I always told them, “Many hands make work light.” Another favorite saying was, “How do you eat an elephant?” One bite at a time! Break your project down into little “doable” pieces and things can come together quickly. When a project is complete, no matter how big or how small, kids end up feeling really good about themselves. They are not afraid to tackle a large project.

Over the past 25 years I have been utterly amazed as I have worked with Key Club kids on numerous projects. They have never ceased to amaze me. Kids who feel good about themselves are not afraid to become involved in their community and to reach out to others in need. Physical Education class is an easy fit for you and for your students.

Gay Hughes - retired