



s there a place for fitness and sports in the Adventist concept of balanced education? The answer should be a resounding *Yes!* Physical development should form one side of the equilateral triangle with which Ellen White defined true education: "the harmonious development of the physical, the mental, and the spiritual powers."¹

Let's look first at the value of sports. We live in a world in which sports has deep cultural roots. We must recognize this when we plan our sports programs. Sports is a part of the world of play, which includes many creative activities such as art, music, drama, and movement.

"Sports teaches us lessons in human limits. Because sport offers no hiding places, it also teaches honesty and authenticity. In short, it teaches us something about personal wholeness and integrity. If we give it the respect and attention it deserves, it teaches us something about joy."² For sport to teach us these lessons, we must help our students learn how, why, and when to play.

As Michael Novak states in his book, *The Joy of Sport*, "Play is the essence of freedom. Play is the fundamental structure of the human mind. The mind at play, the body at play—these furnish our imaginations with the highest achievements of beauty the human race attains."³ There should be as much beauty experienced in the perfect golf shot or a slam-dunk in basketball as in a great painting or classical selection performed by a famous orchestra. In fact, art forms are related to sport. As early physical educator Luther Gulick said, "There is a progression in play, from simple to complex coordinations. Certain kinds of play precede others. The fundamental instincts never cease, but the form of their expression varies."⁴

We must realize that a person's play life is as important as any other part of his or her life because of the enriching and meaningful experiences to be gained from the play world of sports, art, music, and

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drama. The satisfaction one person derives from playing a game of volleyball can parallel the satisfaction another derives from creating an oil painting or playing the piano. Many forms of creative play should be taught in our schools: art, music, drama, and physical education.

In the past few years physical fitness has become a major component of physical education classes as well as a part of many adults' life-styles. But Seventh-day Adventists have known for nearly a century the value of fitness through the writings of Ellen G. White.

The whole body is designed for action; and unless the physical powers are kept in health by active exercise, the mental powers cannot long be used to their highest capacity.⁵

Vigorous exercise the pupils must have.⁶

Teach the students that right living depends on right thinking, and that physical activity is essential to purity of thought.⁷

Benefits of Fitness

What kind of educational results can you expect if your students achieve a higher level of fitness? First, a healthy, fit body will enable each of them to use his or her God-given talents to the maximum. They will be better able to fulfill Paul's admonition in 1 Corinthians 10:31: "Whatever you do, eating or drinking or anything else, everything should be done to bring glory to God" (Phillips).⁸ Some of the benefits of exercise and fitness include:

1. Exercisers are significantly less tense, depressed, fatigued, confused, and more vigorous than non-exercisers.⁹

2. Several studies of high school and college students have shown that those who are more physically fit consistently earn better grades. This may be due to the fact that they are more alert and receptive.¹⁰ A Florida study found that fitness scores were more significant in determining nursing state board results than were candidates' grade point averages.¹¹

Good health and physical vitality enhance intellectual vitality and thus ensure greater academic achievement. A fit student will be more productive, more vigorous, and live a more rewarding life.¹²

3. Your students will be healthier and more efficient, with fewer days missed from school due to illness.¹³

4. Your students will be motivated

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to adopt a healthier life-style that includes better nutrition, ideal body weight, and resistance to alcohol and drug abuse.¹⁴

5. Your students' quality of life will improve, and they will feel and live better.¹⁵ Being able to say "I feel great," could be one of the best reasons for exercise.

Teachers, too, will achieve the same benefits in their own lives if they conscientiously follow an exercise and fitness program.

There is little doubt that the physical education profession has made enormous contributions to American life and thought through its emphasis on physical fitness. Probably the single most important aspect of fitness is the circulo-respiratory efficiency gained through good exercise programs. However, this requires more than five or ten minutes of calisthenics in a twice-weekly physical education class. For fitness to be meaningful and lasting, we must find ways to help students and faculty to incorporate the maintenance of health into their life-style.

How can schools help students (and faculty) achieve a high level of fitness? They should provide 20 to 30 minutes of vigorous exercise daily for each student (teachers should participate too!). This exercise should increase the heart rate to at least 60 percent of its predicted maximum.¹⁶ Activities that best achieve this level of exertion include running, brisk walking, circuit training, aerobic exercise to music, swimming, racquetball, basketball, floor hockey, or any combination of these activities.

The physical education program should be promoted in a positive way, emphasizing that "It is more fun being fit than unfit; it's more fun being healthy than unhealthy; it's more fun to be skilled in physical activities than to be unskilled."¹⁷

Getting Started

A successful physical education and fitness program will require some organization and planning. This will include the following:

- Obtaining proper equipment and supplies
- Making sure that adequate facilities are available
- Planning a variety of activities so that each student will find several that appeal to him or her

- Scheduling classes so that all students can participate (the last period of the day is a good time, as students will not need to take extra time to shower and change)

- Hiring well-trained personnel, or enabling available teaching staff to attend workshops and in-service education

- Teaching students about the proper clothing for exercise, how to measure their heart rates, and what types of exercise are most beneficial.

The work required to set up an efficient, smoothly operated physical education program is well worth the effort.

Training children to exercise is vital to their future health. In this respect, we as a nation don't do a very good job of bringing up our children. Physical fitness is widely rejected by the younger generation. In terms of national health, this is clearly an emergency situation.

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Early parental teaching of the value of exercise would be a most effective counter measure.¹⁸ This challenge is also ours as teachers.

Outreach Potential

Physical education programs and classes also provide opportunities for students to witness to the community about Christian life-styles. Positive outreach and public-relations campaigns can give your physical education program the support that it needs from parents and school personnel alike.

How can you and your students witness to others about the Christian life-style? There are many possibilities for sharing with parents, friends, and the community. Here are a few suggestions:

1. After setting up your fitness program, ask the students, as one of their

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homework assignments, to exercise with their parents and family members two or three times a week. Walking is an excellent family activity, and offers additional benefits in socialization and togetherness.

2. Use gymnastics as a means of outreach. Students might put on a demonstration for a local high school or junior high basketball game at halftime; run a gymnastic workshop or clinic at your school; put on demonstrations for home and school meetings or local service clubs and schools; or participate in a concert with the band and choir. Tumbling programs are popular with every age group.

3. Have your students write a script and create puppets for a show on various aspects of health and fitness to be given at local public schools and service organizations. Areas of health that might be covered include exercise, good sportsmanship, smoking, nutrition, hygiene, alcohol, and drugs. This would be an ideal project for elementary students to develop for their peers in local public schools, as well as for daycare centers and Sabbath school.

4. Involve your students and teachers in health fairs at shopping centers, malls, or hospitals. Although health-related agencies offer a variety of booths at such fairs, I have never seen one promoting school fitness programs. Safety-related issues in sports and exercise might also offer an idea for a booth.

5. Schedule sports weekends when academy students travel to a college or academy campus for workshops, fellowship, games, and meetings dealing with sports, competition, and the Christian life.

6. Offer awards for students who achieve certain levels of fitness. The American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance and the President's Council on Youth Fitness both promote fitness at the elementary and secondary levels through tests and awards. An awards

assembly might be held to honor students and classes that reach the required criteria. Certificates or medals may be awarded for special merit. Don't forget to supply photos and news releases about these achievements to local newspapers.

7. Use interscholastic sports as an avenue to witness about the values of Christianity. A number of our academies and colleges now have intermural sports programs, with basketball being most popular. For some students sports excellence is a God-given talent that they should develop, as Solomon directed, "with all your might" (NIV).¹⁹ Such students can

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cultivate their physical abilities through involvement with team sports.

As schools form teams to participate in intercollegiate sports, they need to develop a philosophy that defines sport as Christianity in action. Guidelines for players, coaches, and spectators should be established. These guidelines should include the areas of sportsmanship, appropriate attitudes, socialization, and other topics that help each player and team become "a sermon in athletic shoes."

While schools will differ in the specific ways they witness through sports, each should seek to find ways that Christian athletics can function within Christian standards and ideals. Many teams have prayer or a devotional before each game. Some schools schedule postgame socials when players can share a testimony

or devotional book with members of the other team.

8. Schedule health-screening clinics where students assist doctors and nurses with a variety of assessments and tests such as weight, heart age, blood pressure, pulse, cholesterol, and diabetes.

9. Conduct sports days when several academies or schools play together. Teams should combine students from all of the schools. In planning such days, consider sports such as coed volleyball and softball, as well as men's and women's basketball.

Conclusion

As administrators, physical education instructors, and multigrade teachers we have a magnificent opportunity—and challenge—to implement good physical education programs for our students. As we re-establish the balance between head, hand, and heart in our education we can help our young people to see how fitness and sports can enhance their lives and contribute to their Christian witness. □

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

¹ Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1903), p. 13.

² Michael Novak, *The Joy of Sport* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1976), p. 43.

³ Daryl Siedentop, *Physical Education—Introductory Analysis* (Dubuque, Iowa: W. D. Brown Co., 1980), p. 257.

⁴ James F. Fixx, *The Complete Book of Running* (New York: Random House, 1977), pp. 20, 21.

⁵ *Education*, p. 207.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

⁸ The text credited to Phillips is from *The New Testament in Modern English* © J. B. Phillips. Used by permission of The Macmillan Company.

⁹ Bruce A. Tuckman, "Brighter Days," *Runners World* (November 1986), pp. 37, 38.

¹⁰ Kenneth H. Cooper, *The New Aerobics* (New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1970), p. 145.

¹¹ Dr. Kenneth H. Cooper, in a speech given for the governor's conference on physical fitness, Austin, Texas, October 1982.

¹² Werner W. K. Hoeger, *Lifetime Physical Fitness and Wellness* (Dubuque, Iowa: W. C. Brown Co., 1986), pp. 55, 56.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Maximum heart rate can be calculated by deducting the person's age from 220.

¹⁷ "Fitness for Life: Aerobics at Oral Roberts University," *Journal of Health, Physical Education, and Recreation* (January 1978), p. 37.

¹⁸ Cooper, *The New Aerobics*, p. 143.

¹⁹ Ecclesiastes 9:10. From *Holy Bible: New International Version*. Copyright © 1978 by the New York International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Bible Publishers.