Summary

The first quarter of last year 54% of my third hour failed their physical education class. Girls averaged 17 days not dressed while boys averaged six days throughout the quarter. I am concerned that this is not only affecting their grade at the junior high, but it is setting a pattern for their lack of participation in high school. Some of the girls who failed class were physically active outside of the school setting. One would wonder why a student would avoid a physical education class, or refuse to participate, when the student doesn’t dislike physical activity.

Much of the curriculum for the girls, prior to Title IX, focused on “dance, fitness, and cooperative games” (Ennis, 1998). Although sports were included, they were at a “slower pace and intensity”, with “most games relaxed, half-speed, and focused on enjoyment” (Ennis, 1998). With the implementation of Title IX, boys and girls are required to be in the same physical education class. As some stronger, more dominant boys play sports, some girls are intimidated, and just try to stay out of the way. Even girls who are athletically skilled, and would dominate girls’ games, find it difficult to compete on the same level with the boys. Those girls less skilled find it even more troublesome to participate.

In our physical education classes, we offer “free choice” days throughout the quarter. Often, for some of the boys, this is an opportunity to play basketball with their friends. The girls, who are not particularly motivated by what is offered, end up not dressing or doing the bare minimum during class. It is always a struggle to keep the girls involved while a few active boys control the majority of the floor.

An additional problem is “the general rejection of physical activities from the aesthetic category on the basis that the boys, in particular, would reject the subject if an aesthetic activity were to be involved” (MacDonald & Brooker, 1997). Many of our boys don’t want to participate
in tae-bo, yoga, dance or other activities that they perceive as aesthetic. On the other hand, when “females perceive an activity to be for males, they are unlikely to see themselves as competent in that activity, and therefore unlikely to exert effort” (Solomon, Lee, Belcher, Harrison, & Wells, 2003). Many of our girls don’t want to play hockey, football, or other sports they perceive as masculine.

It is imperative that physical education teachers develop programs in which boys and girls have equal opportunities to thrive. This does not dictate that the program need be the same to be equal. There are varied interests in a gym that has 60 to 90 students participating at one time, and it is the responsibility of the teachers to see that those varied interests are addressed, and to provide a variety of learning activities.

Last semester, I asked my students to respond anonymously to questions concerning our physical education class. Responses showed that the curriculum was undoubtedly a major problem for the students. However, the opinions about what should be covered in the curriculum were as varied as the number of the students responding. The ideal solution would be to offer electives for the physical education requirement. Students could sign up for the class they would like to learn about, or the activity which they would enjoy doing. This is the ideal but not very practical at the junior high level. Their responses showed that the best solution would be to make the curriculum as diverse as possible, and let the students experience as many different forms of activity as feasible throughout the quarter. With 60 to 90 students in the gym at one time, it is improbable that they will all like what is planned for each day anyway.

According to Carlson (1995), when students had choices then participation was more enjoyable. Since enjoyment can be an incentive to participate, why not incorporate a style that allows choice in the curriculum. In addition, when students are provided with opportunities to make choices, “they are more apt to be motivated” (Prusak, Treasure, Darst, & Pangrazi, 2004). Koka and Hein (2003) found “that when people are intrinsically motivated to exercise, they will more likely be physically active for long periods in their life”. It seems only natural that
increasing student motivation to exercise for fitness should be one of our goals as physical education teachers.

I have established that too many students are failing physical education class. In addition, three times more girls are failing than boys. I need to address the girls’ interests and provide alternatives to sport programs to entice them into participating more often. Besides addressing the curriculum, I need to incorporate a system of choice whenever possible in the daily activities to increase enjoyment and motivation.

For my final project I went on a search to find activities for adolescents, looking in particular for activities that were not sport-related, to involve girls in our physical education program. Although we have 60 to 90 students in the gym at one time, we have a curtain that can be used to divide the gym in half. In addition to that, on days when the weather is accommodating, one group can go outside. Since there are generally two, and sometimes three, teachers in the gym during one period, lowering the curtain and going outside makes it possible to provide options or choices for students on certain days.

I’m not planning on having single-sex physical education classes nor am I planning on eliminating sports from our program. I wanted to find non-sport activities to be offered as a choice. The following pages are a result of that search.