

Text Reflection 1:
Part II, teaching to the National Health Education Standards

As a new health teacher, the transition to skills-based health education has been both exciting and overwhelming. I knew that overly-detailed, content-saturated classes that involved a lot of memorization were not the most effective way to help students make healthy choices but, until this course, I lacked the knowledge and resources to design a skills-based curriculum. Fortunately, as Benes and Alperin explore seven of the national standards in Part II of their text, they provide ample support for teachers who hope to emphasize skills in their health classes.

Perhaps the most valuable take-away from the text's deep dive into each standard is that every skill can be approached in a consistent, deliberate, and formulaic way. By applying the steps of the skill development model as Benes and Alperin present them, teachers can avoid "reinventing the wheel" with each skill and ensure that every skill is approached step by step and considered thoroughly. The "skill introduction" section of each chapter provides important reminders to educators about the key elements of the different skills—for example, that personal responsibility and self-awareness are critical in developing advocacy skills. In addition, the skill cues offer a useful template that teachers can build on when designing skill units. Another benefit to following the approach laid out in the text is that it builds a consistent, reliable structure and rhythm to health education. In such a broad field that does not have a clear progression the way math or reading do, it can be easy for health classes to become a jumble of random topics. By utilizing the skill development model for each unit, teachers can take a more strategic approach, with students growing in their ability to follow skill cues, analyze models, and practice their skills as the year progresses.

I intend to incorporate what I learned in this section by redesigning my curriculum for next year to utilize the skills-based approach. Throughout Part II of the text, Benes and Alperin do a nice job highlighting ways that teachers can be flexible and creative with their classes, while also offering some very helpful and concrete "dos" and "don'ts." For example, I plan to structure my units next year in the same order they are presented in the text because I believe the authors make a strong case for how each skill builds upon the next. Similarly, instead of choosing performance indicators based only upon my comfort level, interests, or perception of student needs, I plan to review each chapter of this section to make special note of where the authors suggest choosing just one or two indicators and where they point out that working on every indicator is critical for students to gain proficiency in the skill.

Perhaps the most exciting element of the skills-based approach to health education is that the skills can be transferred to have a positive impact on every aspect of students' well-being. For example, communication skills honed in health class can help a student resolve a conflict with a friend or advocate for themselves with another teacher. Helping students to develop the skills in the National Health Education Standards has enormous potential to improve behavior and climate within schools. When students learn to recognize and access valid information, understand their positive and negative influences, speak assertively and respectfully, make healthy decisions, set health-enhancing goals, practice healthy behaviors, and advocate for themselves and others, they will drive a culture of responsibility and well-being within the school. Ultimately, after I have had some practice teaching the

health skills, I hope to work with other teachers to educate them about the health standards and adopt a shared model for discussing each skill with students. Over time, if school staff can agree on the importance of teaching and developing these skills, I believe we will have an incredible opportunity to improve student health in all its dimensions and provide relevant, life-long lessons to all students.