



# Physical Education: Bodies and People

## What if PE helped students understand how they are made?

Dave taught PE. He wanted his students to understand, through the teaching and learning that happened in his exercise class, that we are whole people and that what we do with our bodies affects our minds, our emotions, and our spirits.

“Over the week I set up a range of activities for different ages, abilities, and tastes in exercise. I had these at different stations around the gym. Students had to choose three—for example, dance, a ball game, and walking—to try during the class. I tried to give as much choice as possible so that everyone could find some exercise that they enjoyed. I wanted to set up a fun atmosphere to get as much active participation as possible, so I had dance music playing as they came in.

“Before the end of the class, we got together and discussed how exercise affects our spirits, minds, and emotions. If we are emotionally upset, our bodies can feel heavy. Good news can have the opposite effect. Exercise can make us feel better emotionally and help us to think clearly. Spiritually, we can be affected by what is going on in our minds, bodies, and emotions. If a person has a relationship with God and feels ‘down,’ there is not always something spiritually wrong; sometimes it’s just lack of sleep or exercise! Keeping our bodies fit is part of looking after ourselves emotionally, spiritually, and mentally.”

## What's going on here?

Dave saw his PE lesson as a way of helping students see themselves in a holistic way without divorcing what they did with their bodies from the rest of their being.

He engaged students in focusing on connections, experiencing enjoyment, and reflecting on their experience (activities and plenary discussion).

He reshaped his practice by changing the layout of the room, by the specific atmosphere he created, and by the questions he asked (music, allowing choice, making connections).

## What does this have to do with faith, hope, and love?

People are not just bodies or just minds or just spirits; they are all three intricately bound together. What we do in one area affects the others. The Bible recognizes this when it says that a heart at peace results in a healthy body. Faith, hope, and love can never be just spiritual; they always involve the whole person. Love is love for the whole person, not just for their “spiritual” welfare. Hope is hope for the whole person now, not just for some spiritual existence in heaven. Faith must be translated into action—something we do and live as whole people. We hurt or help whole people.

## What difference does this make?

By highlighting the link between our bodies, emotions, minds, and spirits, Dave helped his students to see themselves holistically and opened up the possibility of a more balanced view of living.

## Where could we go from here?

The integrated nature of humanity can be highlighted in a range of subjects such as science, PE, and religion classes. A description of people as just spirits is as inadequate as a description of people as just bodies. That is why sex, for instance, is never just about what we do with our bodies, and thus these connections can also be explored in health class and sex ed.

## Digging deeper

The Bible shows God caring about people's bodies as well as their minds and spirits: he provides food (Acts 14:17) and challenges people to think (Proverbs 3:13) as well as to be concerned about spiritual welfare. He created bodies and declared this part of his creation "very good." God took on human flesh in Jesus (Colossians 2:9), and Jesus knew human thoughts and emotions (Heb 4:15-16). Jesus healed damaged bodies, minds, and spirits as part of his ministry (Luke 4:16-19). The Christian hope for the future is a renewed earth full of people with new bodies (1 Corinthians 15:44). The Bible both is positive toward the body and also recognizes that the body is not now as God originally created it.

Sometimes the New Testament sounds as if God is against the body when it talks of "renouncing the flesh" (Romans 8:13). "Flesh" is a term sometimes used in the Bible to describe an attitude of opposition to God or going away from him, rather than describing the body itself. It is used to describe that which leads or tempts people away from God. Our bodies, minds, and emotions can either bring us closer to God or lead in the opposite direction. One aspect is not inherently more godly or "fleshly" than the other; all are good and made by God; all are fallen and not now as God intended; all can be redeemed.

**Next:** Addressing Fears

What if physical education helped ...

