



# Physical Education: Addressing Fears

## What if physical education helped students to address their fears?

Elise taught PE, and it came to her attention that some of the girls dreaded changing in the locker rooms. Gym class met only twice a week, but it created anxiety in some students who were shy and self-conscious. Elise felt they were not going to progress as well in PE if they dreaded it every week.

"I decided to bring this out in the open, so I devoted part of a session to it. I started by sharing the results of a poll where getting changed for PE was ranked as the most dreaded thing when a range of students were surveyed. I felt this would assure students that they were not alone in feeling this way.

"I ran it as a formal session to begin with, in order to make it easier for the students to cope. I created fictional web posts on this issue, making up names but drawing on real situations and feelings. I did not want to tackle it directly through having the students share, because I felt some of them would be too embarrassed.

"I asked the girls for strategies in this situation and suggestions as to how we could better honor one another and trust one another. We came up with some guidelines that respected people's privacy. We also talked about how hurtful negative comments about how others look can be. I emphasized that we needed to tackle this together in order to be a learning community where people could trust each other and help each other to feel secure. It was not a problem for only some individuals to bear.

"I talked to the school guidance counselor, and she ran some sessions on self-image and how we think of our bodies at the same time."

## What's going on here?

Elise saw her students in a holistic way; in gym class, their emotions and anxieties mattered, not just their bodies.

She engaged them in listening attentively to a presentation and connecting it to their own concerns, in considering how they could help to make changes that could also help others, and in making connections to another topic (self-image).

Elise reshaped her practice by using a resource to create a focus (survey), planning the interaction process (initially formal, relating to the teacher rather than each other, then collaborative and actively involving students in change), making connections across the curriculum, and making space for students to reflect on how respect and dignity could be maintained and put this into practice.

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

Elise's concern for her students was an expression of love, and her intervention encouraged her students to think in practical ways about what it might mean to love one another. She saw them as whole beings: body and soul, not just bodies. The Bible sometimes refers to people as "body and soul" or "body, soul, and spirit," with soul and spirit including the will, emotions and thoughts, and our relationship to God (1 Thessalonians 5:23, Psalms 31:9). The Bible is not precise in its terms, but whatever terms are used, the different aspects of us as persons are intricately combined; what affects one part affects others. Dread can affect us physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

## What difference does it make?

Although dreading changing is common, it is not always acknowledged. It makes a difference to students just to have concerns acknowledged and taken seriously. Having fears alleviated by thinking through strategies can help, even if the situation can't be solved completely. Focusing on solving the problem together can lead to valuable lessons about interdependence and community.

## Where could we go from here?

Images of physical beauty and how these change can be followed up in art. How the mind, spirit, emotions, and body are all connected can be covered in science (e.g., things

that affect heart rate), in food technology (different aspects of diet), and in Bible class (fasting, and use of the body and senses in worship). A focus on the group of learners taking responsibility for behaviors that help others to learn can be pursued across the curriculum.

## Digging deeper

Part of the problem about locker rooms in PE had to do with how the students saw themselves. Our view of ourselves is bound up with how we see ourselves, how others see us, and how God sees us. We are not isolated individuals but part of a web of relationships.

God looks at the heart and knows everything about each person ([Psalm 44:21](#)). God has no illusions about people, but carries on loving them.

*Almighty God, unto Whom all hearts be open, all desires known, and from Whom no secrets are hid ... Book of Common Prayer, 1662*

Then there is the way we are perceived by others. Others are not always right, and sometimes their perceptions of us are discouraging, yet they can also be a source for honest appraisal and for encouragement.

*O wad some Power the giftie gie us, [Oh, would that some power gave us the gift,]  
To see ourself as ithers see us! [To see ourselves as others see us!]  
Robert Burns*

Finally, there is how we perceive ourselves. We need humility rather than pride or low self-esteem. Humility is realistic assessment of ourselves and an honoring of others. Humility about our body image means being able to see ourselves as we really are ([Romans 12:3](#)).

The Bible talks of the body as the “temple” of the Holy Spirit, so it should be cared for ([1 Corinthians 6:19-20](#)). When it comes to body image, the Bible acknowledges beauty: the body is important, and most of us care about how we look. However, the Bible puts the emphasis on beauty of character ([1 Peter 3:3-4](#)) rather than on good looks.



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