Students Reaching their Full Potential

What if you could know, without any doubt, whether your students were reaching their full potential in PE class?

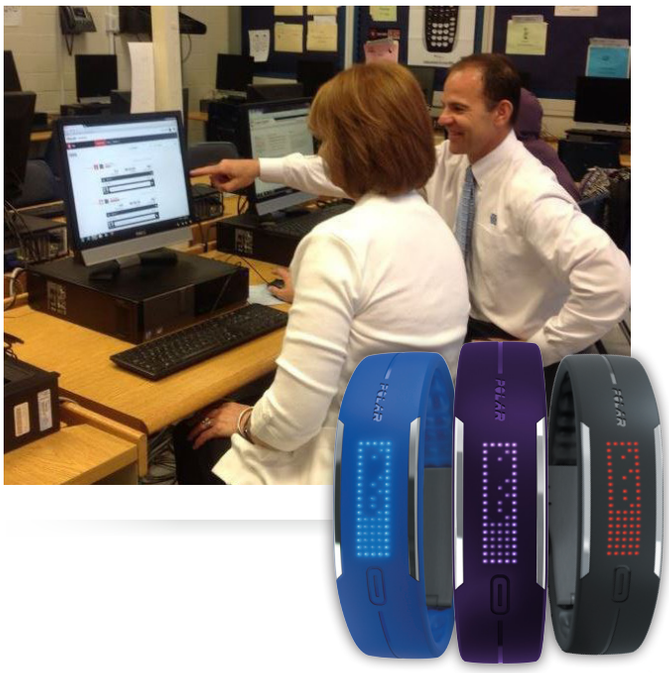
What if you could use real-time physiological data to better motivate them?

And what if you could use that same data to enhance your school's PE curriculum?

Well, you can do that and more by implementing Polar products into your PE program.

One of the biggest challenges for any PE instructor is teaching, grading, and addressing the needs of all students even though they have different abilities and fitness levels. According to PE Teacher Jan Combs at Makai Middle School in Oahu, HI, the Polar H7 Bluetooth® Smart heart rate sensor and Polar GoFit app give her and her students an objective means to measure their performance.

"That's the best thing ever," said Combs, who uses the technology with her 150 seventh and eighth grade students. "They don't feel like they have to compare themselves to the next person. If they are running a mile it's not about who finishes first or last; it's about running to their own abilities. Polar offers [the students] comfort and safety."



The Polar GoFit app displays all heart rates in color-coded boxes on a smartboard, so every student has immediate feedback about his/her performance. Red and orange boxes indicate students working at near full potential, and blue or green boxes show those students who need to push themselves harder. In Combs' class, for every 10 minutes the students are in their target zone, they earn a coin.

"The kids love the coins," said Combs, who recently challenged the students at the start of class to remain in their target heart rate zone for 30 minutes. "Some students will see they are at 28 minutes and if they do two more minutes of intense exercise they'll earn another coin, so they beg me to keep going."

On days when class is held outside, Combs monitors the students' progress on an iPad since the H7s sensor can transmit up to 75 yards away. Regardless of location, Combs saves time at the end of every class to talk about their results, which include total time exercising, time spent in each heart rate zone, calories burned, and heart rate as a percentage of maximum.

Another challenge for PE teachers is holding students accountable for their performance in class. This is a critical task for Cobb Virtual Academy (CVA) PE instructors, who monitor the activity and progress of about 200 high school students in Marietta, GA, each semester via the online Personal Fitness course.

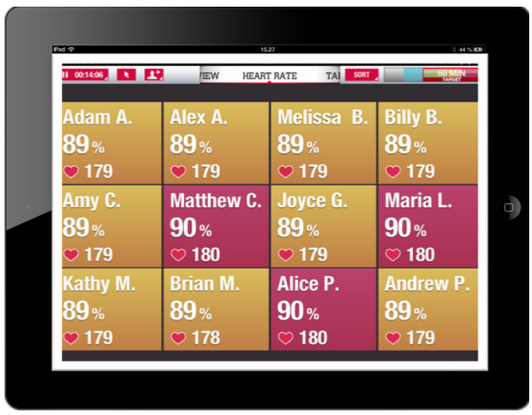
According to Brian Devore, CVA's content supervisor for Health & PE, the students use the H7 monitor with the Polar Loop, which displays heart rate and calories burned just like the Polar GoFit app. When worn without the H7, the Loop functions like an accelerometer, tracking steps, calories burned, and accumulated active time like the Polar Active.

At the start of the course, Devore and the PE teachers distribute the Polar products at a campus pre-fitness night, where they teach the students how to sync the sensors with the Polar Flow app that stores their data. They also provide the students with a catalog of workouts.

During the semester, the PE teachers provide online instruction about cardiovascular health and lifetime fitness.

"The students understand the concepts between their cardiovascular health and their heart rates and how those work together," said Devore. "They also understand that they have to work out at a certain level to gain some physical benefit from it."

One of the biggest benefits of Polar technology is the impact it has on students. "Polar technology does a great job of holding students accountable for actually doing their workouts," said Devore. "It also holds them accountable for their personal fitness."



Real-time Physiological Data That Motivates

Polar GoFit app has provided Lauren Stewart, a PE instructor at K-8 Heath School in Brookline, MA, with the physiological data she needs to have constructive conversations with her middle-school-age students about reaching their full potential. Recently, Stewart had a breakthrough with an 8th grader who liked PE, even though it was difficult for her.

According to Stewart, the class' goal was to be at 70-90 percent of maximum heart rate for 20 minutes. When they reviewed the data at the end of class, Stewart noticed that the class averaged 26 minutes in their zone. This particular girl, though, had only reached the target for eight minutes, having spent much of the time at only 40 percent of her target heart rate.

"I talked to her about the difference between her goal and her performance, we reviewed the data, and she realized she had more to give," said Stewart. "I was able to push her in a way where she'd feel really good about herself."

During the next PE class, the girl reached her target zone goal. "When she hit that 20-minute mark, she raised her hand up and shouted: "Yes!" Stewart said. "Later she told me she was proud of herself."

Middle school students aren't the only ones who benefit from Polar technology at Brookline. Each day, Stewart's 3rd graders wear Polar Active wrist accelerometers, which measures students' movements, calories, and total exercise time. The Active has an animated figure display that encourages the kids to reach the recommended daily 60 minutes of physical activity.

"My third graders are buzzing about this," said Stewart, who wears the Active along with the classroom teachers, student teacher, and math specialist. In fact, Stewart and the math specialist plan to use the kids' data to teach graphing skills that are part of the Common Core measurement and data standards. "Polar does this automatically for you, but we'll have the kids make their own charts each day."

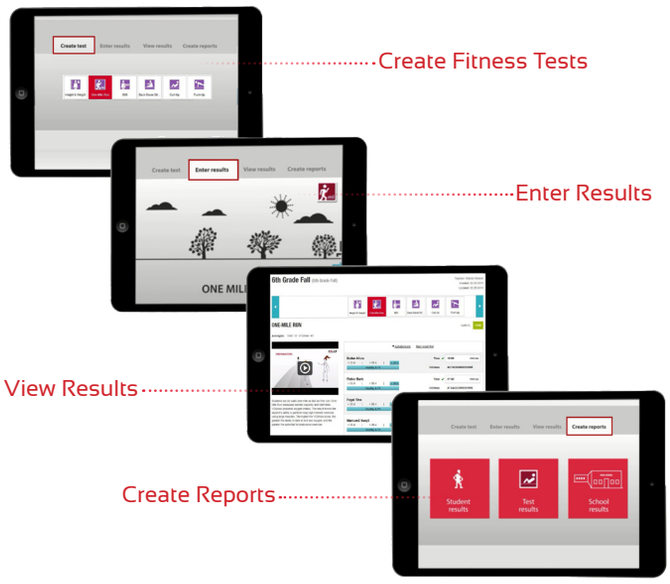
According to Devore, CVA teachers like Polar technology because real-time data allows them to provide students with valuable feedback about their workouts—almost like a personal-fitness coach would. "We can teach them about the impact exercise has on their bodies," Devore said. "The data, along with the concepts we teach, also stimulate some of the less active students to do a little better job and be more mindful of healthy practices for themselves."

Enhancing the School's PE Curriculum

While Polar data takes the guesswork out of grading, it also provides teachers with the means to enhance their curriculum.

"I've improved my instruction in a positive way after reviewing the heart rate data," said Stewart. "I can tell if an activity isn't the best when the entire class struggles to reach the target zone, so I'll adjust my goals for the next class. I'm also starting to know which stations in our Exercise Lab will enable the students to reach certain zones."

Combs has noticed the data helps her evaluate the activities, manage her equipment better, and explain the rules succinctly, leaving plenty of time for the students to reach their goal during the 60-minute class. "As an educator, I also like how the technology opens up inquisition," she said. "Some kids ask why they have to cool down. I tell them to watch their heart rate and when they reach a certain number then they can pick it up again. That's empowering for them."



Polar GoFit Fitness Assesment

The new Polar GoFit Fitness Assessment software, allows teachers to create custom tests that track students' fitness levels with not only heart rate data, but also body composition, flexibility, and biometric data. Teachers can record and evaluate their students' fitness while guiding them to sustain a healthy lifestyle.

A final, less obvious benefit that teachers like about the Polar products is the validity the technology brings to their profession. "Everyone is fighting for time in the school day," noted Combs. "If we can show that we are an absolutely essential part of our students' day, then we'll gain the trust and support of our students and their parents. We're not just playing games in PE, we're professionals using the best technology to give us the best."

Learn more:
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