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The 4 Cs of Teaching At-Risk Youth

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to assist educators in creating an environment that is safe and conducive to learning for at-risk students through implementation of the 4 Cs (caring, choices, commitment, and challenges). The 4 Cs can provide a framework for educators in providing suggestions on how to engage and meet the needs of all students, including those at-risk, while creating an emotionally safe environment that facilitates cooperation, responsibility, motivation, and respect for self and others.

At-risk youth is a term to describe children that live in negative environments such as underserved children or adolescents living in dysfunctional families and those living with violence, crime, and/or drugs. Usually they are considered to be school dropouts, students with behavior problems, or students who do not fit in with school or society for various reasons (Cross, 2002; Martinek & Hellison, 1998). Educators need to be reminded, however, that when children do not see hope for leading a better life, have a limited sense of control and belonging, or are unsure of their future or themselves, their ability to make positive and health-enhancing decisions is compromised (Hellison, Cutforth, Kallusky, Martinek, Parker, & Stiehl, 2000). Stiehl (1993) advised that physical education programs can not expect to be successful if they do not support the cultural and social context of students. Therefore, educators need to keep in mind that some students do not consider getting good grades,

conforming to school policy, and staying out of trouble important to their lives, especially when they are living in violence or the fear of violence (Knop, Tannehill, & O'Sullivan, 2001; Martinek & Hellison, 1998). This article can be used to assist all educators, and especially physical educators, in creating an environment that is safe and conducive to learning for at-risk students.

Physical education has the ability to develop and reinforce social skills, conflict resolution, leadership skills, and personal responsibility (Knop, Tannehill, & O'Sullivan, 2001; Martinek & Hellison, 1998; Parker, Kallusky, & Hellison, 1999). Teachers need to develop a rapport with students, develop a fair accountability system which aids in defining appropriate student behavior, provide continuous supervision, and, with students' input, establish class rules to create an environment for active participation of at-risk youths (Knop, Tannehill, & O'Sullivan, 2001). Teachers also need to be role models

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in respecting their students, following through on their word, and providing opportunities for students to observe responsible behavior. All of these

characteristics are included in the 4 Cs (caring, choices, commitment, and challenge) for teaching at-risk youth (See Table 1).

Table 1. The 4 Cs to Teaching at Risk Youth.

4 Cs	Teaching Strategies	Example
Caring	- Individualized attention	- A hand shake and saying, "Hi my name is ---, what is your name?" - Knowing student's name.
	- Listening to students.	- Have an understanding of the student's perceptions.
	- Provide activities that are meaningful.	- Cooperative and team building activities.
Choices	- Provide an environment where students can make choices.	- Allow students to remove themselves from an activity to prevent inappropriate behavior. - Allow students to choose activities. - Allow students to create activities and rules to activities.
Commitment	- Following through on your word (teachers and students)	- Rules that are made for the class or an activity must be implemented and equitable among all students.
	- Positive Feedback	- Acknowledging what the student does correctly.
Challenges	- Provide an environment that challenges students.	- Provide opportunities for students to improve activities they do not enjoy. - Provide the opportunity for students to challenge themselves.

Example of Implementing the 4 Cs into Physical Education

The following example outlines how the 4 Cs for teaching at-risk youth can be integrated into any activity. By focusing on the meaning of the 4 Cs (caring, choices, commitment, and challenge), an activity or task can engage at-risk youth. In this example the focus is on activities that

enhance students' health-related fitness. Health-related fitness incorporates five components of fitness, cardiorespiratory endurance, muscular strength and endurance, flexibility, and body composition. Once students have a basic understanding of concepts and activities that aid in improving their overall health-related fitness, the instructor provides students the

opportunity to design fitness stations cards individually as well as in groups. The fitness stations cards should include explanations and pictures of exercise or physical activity the students have learned in classes that promote their health-related fitness components. This can be accomplished by brainstorming fitness exercises and activities the students enjoy, then allowing them to create their own station cards. The compiled station cards can then be used to create a variety of fitness stations for the students to choose to complete. The station cards can also be compiled to create a fitness log that incorporates the names of all the students' fitness stations cards on one sheet of paper; this would allow the students to then record the activities they completed.

Once the station cards and fitness log are created, the students begin to participate in the station activities and the 4 Cs are incorporated throughout their fitness stations.

How to integrate caring:

- Physical educators can use the fitness log that was developed by the students to emphasize the importance of being physically active.
- Physical educators can provide an environment where every student feels safe to work at his or her own pace to match the appropriate fitness level.
- Physical educators can provide students with the confidence and knowledge base to create their own fitness plan and promote life long activity.

How to integrate choices:

- Students can decide to work individual, with a partner or in a small group of three.

- Students decide which of the exercises and activities they would like to perform, but must choose no less than three exercises.
- Students decide how many repetitions for each activity they would like to perform, but must choose no less than two repetitions.
- Students decide that, if they do not want to participate, they must create or modify an activity to meet their needs but the activity must be fitness related.

How to integrate commitment:

- Students agree to record a daily fitness log and sign off stating they performed the exercises.
- Students are to obtain a teacher's signature after completing the exercises. The teacher's signature signifies they trust the student completed the logged activities.
- Students are to set goals with the teacher's assistance for improvement throughout the semester.

How to integrate challenges:

- Students can decide to perform more than three exercises.
- Students can decide to perform more than two repetitions.
- Students can decide to increase the amount of exercise and repetitions daily.
- Students can decide which health related components of fitness they want to focus on daily.

Conclusion

The 4 Cs (caring, choices, commitment, and challenges) can provide a framework for all educators, and especially physical educators, for engaging and meeting the needs of all students, while, at the same time, creating an emotionally safe

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environment that facilitates cooperation, responsibility, motivation, and respect for self and others (Hellison, 1998). What seems to be forgotten is that everyone is unique and has different life experiences. As teachers, we must remember that everyone is not “dealt a good hand”. The at-risk children we teach will either request “to fold” because they do not see any hope for a future or request a “re-deal” and try to make the best of what they have and improve themselves. Therefore, as physical educators, we must provide students with a good deck of cards that always provides them with a “full house”. The 4 Cs can aid in dealing students that “full house”.

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