

# Learning to Throw in Physical Education Class: Part 2

## The Results

by Mark Manross

In Part 1 (*TEPE*, Vol. 11, No. 1) of this three-part series, I described how I went about collecting data from fourth- and fifth-grade students concerning their thoughts, feelings, and knowledge about the overhand throw. In particular, I wanted to discover if they thought throwing was an important skill to learn, where and from whom they said they learned to throw the most, if they knew how to articulate the correct throwing form, and if they had any thoughts about how they were learning (or not learning) how to throw in their physical education programs. To obtain insights about these (and other) questions, students from two very different physical education programs were interviewed. This article begins to share some of the findings as a result of these interviews. Before sharing the findings, I review the setting and procedures.

### Brief Review of Methodology and Participants

A total of 54 students were interviewed from two schools. Twenty-six students were from a school in which they were involved in a physical education program that used the Skill Theme approach. This approach advocates students practicing individual skills such as throwing, kicking, and striking. The other 28 students were from a program identified as traditional in nature. The approach used by this teacher had students involved in lead up games in "units" that eventually progressed to full-sided, regulation games (e.g., basketball, football).

Students were interviewed in pairs during their physical education classes at their respective schools. (For a more thorough description, see Part 1 of this series published in the January 2000 issue of *TEPE*.)

### Findings

After numerous readings of the student interviews, six assertions (i.e., themes) emerged that provide the framework for this and the last article in this series. These were formed because a majority of the children at both schools shared similar thoughts or feelings regarding a certain question or topic. The first three assertions are: (a) All of the students

**2** The second in a three-part series examining the way children learn a basic motor skill.

agreed that throwing is an important skill to learn; (b) children felt that practicing alone and/or with a friend is the best way to learn to throw; and (c) the children understood what was helpful (or not helpful) in their physical education classes.

#### Assertion #1: All of the students agreed that throwing is an important skill to learn.

When asked if the skill of throwing is important to learn, almost all of the interviewed students at both schools responded with a resounding *yes*. However, their reasons for this answer varied.

One stated reason was that it enabled the students to participate in a lot of different games or sports. Frank said, "It is important to learn to throw because in almost all sports you have to

throw." Brian added, "If you don't know how to throw, you can't play sports." Being on some kind of sports team was important to many of the students regardless of skill proficiency or gender. They agreed you have to be able to throw well to be a part of any team. Adam articulated that he wanted to become a better thrower so he could play basketball and volleyball and a lot of other "ball" games. "I just wanna be a better thrower, so maybe one day I can be on a team," he stated. Although many of them talked about the importance of throwing well in the context of organized sports, some talked about how important throwing was for participation in other, informal throwing games. Todd stated, "Throwing can be something to do for fun. Like, not organized baseball, but like football with a lot of friends. Like baseball in the streets."

A second reason the students thought it was important to learn to throw was to avoid being embarrassed when playing games that involved throwing.

Throwing well allowed them to be successful and thereby avoid disappointing their teammates.

*Sandy: Well, the pitcher has to pitch the ball, and if they don't know how to throw the ball, you are in trouble.*

*Researcher: What kind of trouble?*

*Sandy: You won't be able to pitch, and everybody gets down on you.*

Although they related many stories of poor throwers letting others down during organized games and sports, they discussed these feelings in the context of physical education class as well.

*Researcher: You get picked on in physical education class?*

*Both: Yeah.*



**Brian:** People get picked on if you can't throw—there is this one boy, he always can't throw the football, and others say, "What in the world is wrong with you?"

**Richard:** Yeah, he can't seem to get his grip down, and when he throws it just goes all over the place.

**Researcher:** Have you ever been picked on because you couldn't throw?

**Richard:** Yep. If I'm playing football, and I don't throw a ball well, they get on me.

A discussion with Carl about War Ball in his physical education class illustrates this as well.

**Carl:** There is this girl. She will always give the ball to me because she doesn't want to get out.

**Researcher:** Why does she do that?

**Carl:** Maybe she doesn't want to be called a "weenie." Sometimes she will stand back in the corner, and she will get out on purpose.

Being embarrassed during any type of game play was not fun for them, but succeeding because of well developed skills made them feel good. Several children noted that if you had the prerequisite skill proficiency for any sport, you could feel good about yourself.

**Erica:** You have more fun in sports if you know how to throw. You just feel prouder.

**Researcher:** Explain that to me.

**Erica:** I play soccer. I feel good if I'm dribbling up the soccer field and then I make a goal. So, dribbling helps me make a goal, and then I feel better that I know how to dribble.

The third and last reason they thought it was important to learn how to throw was so they could teach their own children how to throw. This certainly was an interesting and unexpected answer. Erica and Jane's comments reflect what several of their classmates expressed.

**Researcher:** Are you going to use throwing when you are older?

**Jane:** Yeah.

**Researcher:** How? Why?

**Jane:** Well, I would like to teach my kids how to throw properly.

**Erica:** If they went to a certain school, and they wouldn't teach them the right way, then they wouldn't get their correct form.

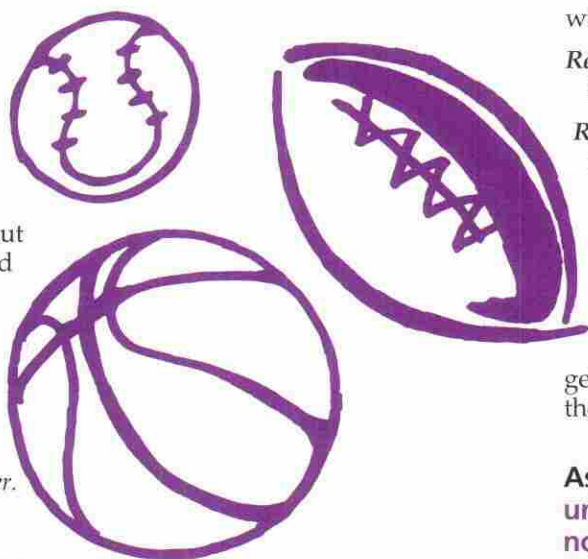
**Jane:** If they were 5, and they wouldn't go to

school yet, and they played T-ball, and they didn't know how to throw, then we could teach them.

## **Assertion #2: Children felt that practicing alone and/or with a friend is the best way to learn to throw.**

All of the children interviewed certainly were in agreement that "practicing" was the best way to get better at throwing. Sandy's reply was typical to my question asking them to tell me how they would go about improving their throwing skills.

**Researcher:** If you wanted to be a really good thrower, how would you go about it?



**Sandy:** Practice.

**Researcher:** What do you mean by practice? What would you do?

**Sandy:** Practice every day because practice makes perfect.

Interestingly, the students said the best way to practice was either alone or with a friend or two. Only one student said playing games was the best way to get better at throwing. The most popular way was to practice by themselves. Holly said, "You get a ball at the mall, you go home, and then you side, step, and turn and make sure you don't break a window when you are throwing against the wall." Sherri told me she got better at throwing by "practicing at her house with a ball, just throwing it at the wall." Mark improved his throwing for his T-ball team in this manner as well.

It was my first year of T-ball, and I had a real weak arm, and I couldn't throw, so I went home, and I got this tennis ball, and I got my glove, and I just kept on throwing the ball up against the wall.

This type of answer was even given when I asked them to give suggestions as to how "poor" throwers could improve their throwing skills. Amy's response was to "have them throw a softball to a wall." Other children suggested throwing with a friend or throwing alone at targets in the yard. A few of them even mentioned that someone should show them how to throw. They suggested that a coach, a parent, or a friend do this. The children did not suggest the physical educator as evidenced by this conversation I had with Randy.

**Researcher:** How do we get poor throwers to be good throwers?

**Randy:** Try to get them out everyday like for 15 to 20 minutes until they get tired of practicing, and show them how to throw.

**Researcher:** Who needs to show them?

**Randy:** Parents, friends, their coach.

Practicing throwing by yourself or with a friend was the best way to get better at throwing according to these students.

## **Assertion #3: The children understood what was helpful (or not helpful) in their physical education classes.**

The children provided some fascinating insights about how they were learning (or not learning) throwing in their physical education classes. Although many children were content with the throwing activities in physical education class, many voiced concerns about some of the things they believed should be changed. These proposed class changes, in their estimation, would help them learn more about throwing and, therefore, physical education class would be more fun.

Children at Eckland (traditional approach) identified lack of time to learn how to throw to be a problem. Several said they used much of their physical education time playing throwing games and mentioned their dislike for this. They stated they would have enjoyed receiving more throwing instruction and practice. When asked if



they talked about how to throw in their gym class, Tommy said, "Nope, not since I have been here. I have been here since Kindergarten, and they haven't taught us about throwing." Other children expressed similar thoughts. Jeff, Matt, and Carl were all asked if their physical educator spent time in physical education class teaching them how to throw. All three responded *no*. Lucy also said she hadn't learned much about throwing in her traditional gym class.

**Researcher:** Where would you learn how to throw at school?

**Lucy:** Physical education teacher.

**Researcher:** Have you learned to throw from your physical education teacher?

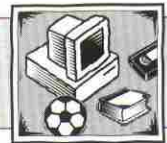
**Lucy:** No, but I guess you could.

In addition to game play not being helpful to children at Eckland, students also expressed boredom with playing throwing games such as War Ball and Sideline Basketball. Some children were especially irritated at having to play War Ball on a daily or weekly basis. Linda expressed her irritation by stating, "I'm really getting tired of War Ball because we play it every Friday."

These two concerns (boredom and lack of time devoted to learning more about throwing) led several of the children into discussions about suggested changes to their classes. The children's suggested changes were almost all the same—change the structure of the class to include more throwing practice time, and cut down on the amount of time devoted to throwing games. To accomplish this, children suggested spending time at the beginning of class practicing throwing and the remainder of the class playing a game that used the skill of throwing.

Interestingly, the children at Pendelton (skill theme approach) wanted similar changes made to their program. In particular, they wanted more interesting activities, and those who offered alternatives provided the same solution as the children at Eckland. However, they were reacting to the opposite problem: They wanted less throwing practice and more throwing game play. Mary and Joshua discussed the lack of game playing time in their physical education class.

Visit the Human Kinetics Web Site at:  
<http://www.humankinetics.com>



**Researcher:** Do you play games in gym class?

**Mary:** No, we just work on the skills. Like we throw, but we never play a game, so we can't use our skills in a game.

**Researcher:** So you don't get to play games like baseball?

**Joshua:** In all of the 6 years I have been here, we have not played baseball or basketball once.

One of the main reasons they wanted to play games was because of the boredom they associated with the large amount of skill practicing they did in class.

The Pendelton children's proposed cure for this problem was identical to the solution prescribed by the children at Eckland—practice throwing at the beginning of class and then play a game that involved throwing. However, unlike the children at Eckland, the children at Pendelton discussed the possible implications these changes would have for some of their classmates. For example, Mary and Joshua were both vocal about their desire to play more games in class, but they were the first to admit that this change may pose problems for some of their classmates. After both mentioned an eagerness to play a game of baseball in lieu of a normal "practice" class, they balked for a minute to think about the ramifications of their wish. Joshua said, "I know why we can't play—because some of the people (classmates) in here don't know how to throw, and they don't have a glove in the first place." Mary agreed by stating, "Playing a game does take time, and we only have 30 minutes and it takes 5 to 10 minutes to get organized in teams, so we'd need more like a hour for class."

As you can see, the children at both schools were very cognizant of what was going on in their physical education classes. Their suggestions for improvement of the classes is to strike a balance between practice and game play.

## Conclusion

These three assertions revealed the "universal thoughts" of the children interviewed at both schools. The next and last article of this series shares the remaining three assertions. These assertions emerged because of the vastly different thoughts and feelings the children had to share about what they knew about the mechanics of the overhand throw, and their opinions about how and where they were learning these techniques. Did the children at Eckland (traditional program) or Pendelton (skill theme program) know more about the mechanics of the overhand throw? To whom did the children give the most credit for teaching them the overhand throw? Did their physical educators make the list?

Stay tuned for the details to these and other insights in Part 3 of this series.

*Mark Manross is the Executive Editor of the award-winning website, PE Central <[pe.central.vt.edu](http://pe.central.vt.edu)>. Among his other accomplishments, Mark received the Outstanding Doctoral Student Award at Virginia Tech last year and has authored a number of articles for TEPE. To view the entire thesis from which this article was derived, go to <<http://www.chre.vt.edu/dfour>>. **Gepe***



**Quality Physical Education:**

**America's Best  
Health Insurance**