13 for 13-Year-Olds

9 Respect the genres.
When I had my own classroom, my library was organized by genre; I did not use the Dewey decimal system because I’ve found that teens want to go right to the genre that they love, whether it’s realistic fiction or mysteries. That’s not a bad thing. A knowledge of genre helps readers navigate text because you know what to expect. With folktales, for example, you know to expect a moral or lesson. In addition, genre helps with writing. So often I hear teachers tell kids, “Write a short story,” but the students don’t know how a short story works. When you teach genre, it’s like teaching them. “When you write a short story, you can think about what you want to say. And I write. And then I’ll say, “You’ve got such good ideas. Can you put two more down for me?” I always try to stay aware of the need to build their self-confidence and self-esteem. It’s fragile at this age.

12 Have kids share recommendations with one another.
Every month, my students share a book of their choice with the entire class. It takes two or three minutes, so if you have 20 kids, you take two class periods. It’s worthwhile because peer recommendations are so motivating. I also have a wall covered with construction paper, and if students love a book and want to recommend it, they can record the title and author on the wall, write a few words, and sign their names. It’s a fun challenge for them to go and read the board for suggestions. Finally, when I bring new books into my classroom, I book-talk them and put them in a very visible place. I might say, “Joshua, this book is for you. It’s all about World War II. You’re a World War II buff. Read it and then pass it on to somebody else.” It’s all about respecting students’ tastes, giving them choice, and helping them to develop a personal reading life.

13 Don’t ask kids to do things you wouldn’t do yourself.
I always tell teachers, “Think of yourself. What do you like to do?” I told one teacher who was going to do that to bring me her journal, and that ended that assignment. We’re teaching children for life, not just for our classroom. So if I wouldn’t want to do something I find another assignment. And I ask for feedback from my students, too. Trust them, because they are the ones who really can give you the answers.

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The New Phys Ed.
Dodgeball is passe; schools are teaching lifelong fitness. By Ron Schachter

It’s not unusual for kids to hoke or skateboard before school and then count down the minutes until they get to play video games after school. But what would you think of including skateboarding or Wii in the school day? That’s just what a growing number of physical education teachers are doing, in an attempt to make exercise more engaging—and lifelong—for elementary and middle school students. A new generation of P.E. classes is introducing youngsters to everything from step aerobics and yoga to inline skating and mountain biking.
Experts agree that these approaches to exercise provide an attractive alternative to team sports and stay with students long after they leave school. “The newer physical education, which you will see more and more of in schools, focuses on personal challenges rather than team competition,” explains Stephen Cone, a professor of health and exercise science at Rowan University in Glassboro, New Jersey. “And it provides skills that students can take with them to have a healthy life.”

The change from the traditional P.E. diet of dodgeball,
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P.E. on Wheels
Coleman’s not the only teacher putting kids on a roll. At Benjamin Franklin Middle School in Teaneck, New Jersey, physical education teacher Carol Ann Chiesa introduced inline skating to her students 14 years ago. With a $30,000 grant from the National Association for Sport and Physical Education, Chiesa acquired 40 pairs of skates in different sizes and the requisite pads and helmets.

The school’s 300 fifth and sixth graders skate during three-week P.E. units in the fall and between the more conventional units Chiesa teaches. “I ask them, ‘On a scale of one to ten, of all the things you do in gym, which do you like best?’ and they’ll say, ‘I like skateboarding.’”

That won’t be the case, Coleman figures, with the individual sports—inline skating, ice skating, and skateboard, among them—that he’s added to the curriculum. “Ninety-five percent of our kids have never touched a skateboard before,” Coleman says. “But they’ve picked it up really well!”

For the past three years, the school’s third and fourth graders have donned protective helmets, as well as knee, wrist, and elbow pads, and hopped onto skateboards that have stickier wheels to grip the gym floor without causing any damage.

Coleman launched the program with a $5,000 grant, purchasing equipment and materials from Colorado-based Skate Pass, which offers a curriculum covering everything from learning how to fall to turning correctly and even hosts a certification program for teachers.

Exercising during TV
While advanced gym equipment can be costly, some schools are finding less expensive ways to deliver lifelong physical education. At Alamo Elementary School in Otsego, Michigan, Kyle Uramkin’s classes have taken the electronic route by making use of Wii Sports and Wii Fitness activities.

These interactive video games allow users to participate in sports by moving their arms, legs, and bodies in simulated tennis and bowling matches, aerobics sessions, and fitness courses. Uramkin usually sets up four or five stations featuring different sports, through which the 25 students in his physical education classes rotate.

He projects the interactive programs for some activities—such as step aerobics—on a large screen in the gym for the entire class to follow.

The students get a workout, Uramkin notes, and something more: “Kids who might have been hesitating to participate or weren’t giving a hundred percent really take to it,” he says, adding that the “exergaming” program has even reached students’ homes. “I’ve had parents come in and say, ‘We’re thinking about getting one! That’s not just extending the physical activity of the kid, but who knows, maybe the parent will get more active.’

Stretch Breaks
There’s also the growing conviction in some schools that physical activity belongs in the classroom. At French Road Elementary School in Brighton, New York, most of the teachers lead their classes in yoga breaks throughout the day. Those teachers have received a three-hour, after-school training from a certified yoga instructor.

French Road assistant principal Carolyn Rainbow, who introduced the yoga-in-the-classroom initiative three years ago, also provides materials from Indiana-based YogaKids International.
The New P.E.

including cards that show different yoga positions. “A teacher can pull out a pose to help children focus, get energy, or just relax,” explains Rabidoux, who has also created a series of online videos in which French Road teachers and their yoga instructor demonstrate those poses.

Some classrooms even have a yoga station, where individual students can go over, consult a card, and assume a pose. “It gives them a positive way of focusing instead of yelling out or acting out,” Rabidoux says.

Fifth-grade French Road teacher Lara Liu says she uses yoga with her students regularly. “It energizes them after lunch and helps them focus before tests,” she says. “I also use it as a transition piece, to get them on the same page and looking at me before we move on.”

That transition can be as simple as Liu calling out, “Give me a five.” In response, students raise their arms releasing one finger at a time as they take a long breath, and do the reverse as they breathe out. One of their favorites, Liu continues, is called the Volcano, in which they place their palms together at their chest, breathe in deeply, and then “explode” as they exhale, raising their hands over their heads then returning them to their sides.

Good Results Educators who’ve taken advantage of the new P.E. are more than happy with the results. “Kids are really incorporating yoga into who they are,” says Rabidoux, who tells the story of one student recently stuck in an elevator during a visit to New York City. While the adults surrounding her were starting to panic, the youngest took some yoga breaths to calm herself down.

“More teachers are recognizing that students cannot sit for very long and are putting in short movement breaks,” adds Theresa Cone, an assistant professor of health and exercise science at Rowan University, who together with her husband, Stephen, has coauthored several books on new approaches to physical education. “I had one student teacher who convinced the entire school to stop every afternoon and do two minutes of exercise,” she recalls, explaining that the student teacher delivered instructions for simple movements over the school’s intercom: “The teachers and students loved it.”

Cone also insists that the same movements—such as twisting side to side, circling arms, reaching up and down, marching forward and backward—can be practiced in any classroom by students standing next to their desks. She also suggests having small groups of students take turns devising and leading a one-minute activity break every day. “The results will be pleasantly surprising,” she promises, “and they’ll be using the 21st-century skills of collaboration, problem solving, and creativity.”

Schools to the Rescue

Educators are finding ways to make the lives of poor students and their families better every day. By Samantha Cleaver

When Theresa Kiger arrived at Roy Clark Elementary in Tulsa, Oklahoma, as the assistant principal in 2001, she met teachers who were paying students’ electric bills. In December, the hallways were jammed with teacher-bought gifts, from hand-me-down bikes to new mattresses.

“Teachers understood that basic needs had to be met,” says Kiger, “but there was no way to take care of those needs… and teach math and reading.” In 2002, Kiger took over as principal and began to re-envision how the school could serve families. She partnered with the University of Oklahoma and converted a lounge into a health clinic. A full-time behavioral health therapist was hired to address students’ emotional needs.

Now, a community service coordinator connects families with resources like energy assistance.

Schools connecting families with community services isn’t a new idea. “Teachers have to take care of kids who need a lot, in addition to being their teacher.”

A community school’s doors are open nights, weekends, and summers for meals, classes, and enrichment programs. Students who have a headache or toothache may be referred to an on-site health clinic. Once a week, families may pick up prepared meals. Parents come to school to attend adult education classes. The ultimate goal, though, is to impact student achievement. “As a partner,” says Jane Quinn, director of Alignment Nashville, which unites community services with public schools, “and kids have a lot of issues. Teachers have to take care of kids who need a lot, in addition to being their teacher.”

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Since 1999, community schools have expanded to 49 states and Washington, D.C. Districts from Evanston, Indiana, to Oakland, California, are focusing reforms around the community school

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