

What I Learned When My Students Began Jumping Rope

By now the outcry has been heard and confirmed: Children [need recess](#) or other forms of physical activity to thrive in school.

But I could have told you that. As a veteran teacher, I stumbled on this fact in my own classroom quite by accident.

Years ago my students took the required, but now defunct, [President's Challenge physical fitness test](#). Most teachers left the requirement to the P.E. staff. One year, however, I was informed that most of my fifth grade students had failed the test.

I took that personally. I was an athlete at age 10. MY students would not flunk the physical education test. But what could I do?

Eventually I found an article about a school system which had its students jumping rope every day. "Why not try this?" I asked myself. So off to the hardware store I went to purchase about 120 feet of clothesline. Returning home, I cut 25 "jumping ropes," one for each of my students.

From that point on, my students and I jumped rope one minute each day before returning to the classroom after the noon recess. We added another minute every week following until we reached five minutes.

Did it work?

The answer was a resounding yes when it came to the President's Challenge. Every student passed it the following spring.

But something else happened that was even more impressive.

Through the jump roping regimen, one boy had an incredibly difficult time getting the rope over his head and jumping over it. His eyes were misaligned and I'm sure that influenced his lack of coordination. Nevertheless, he tried every day with the others.

This same boy was very bright, but had horrible penmanship. However, this began to improve over time.

One afternoon I called him to my desk to congratulate him on his handwriting. He responded by saying, "Well, the only reason I think this happened is because of jumping rope. I believe my brain has re-patterned itself."

Could this kind of program be done today? Even though recess is rising in popularity, we have eliminated many other avenues for fitness, including less outside time, no Red Rover, and no Dodge Ball. Have we gone so far in protecting kids that we are cheating them of self-confidence, physical improvement, better motor skills, and maybe even better academic results?

Perhaps it's time to get out the jump ropes.

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