



Dance: Character-building through aerobics

An aerobics course taught by Michelle Olson, Brigham Young University Dance Department (1997)

Course Design:

In keeping with the value placed by this particular university on religious spirituality across the curriculum, Michelle Olson makes character-building the focus of her aerobics classes. Typical aerobics courses instruct students on the particulars of physical fitness, including exercise and nutrition. In addition to training her students in aerobics, however, Olson seeks to strengthen her students' religious faith, to help them discover their individual potential, and to encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning.

At the beginning of each term, Olson gives her students their first assignment: to set some long-term and short-term goals, related to aerobics or to any other aspect of their lives. During the semester, student meet with their instructor to discuss progress on the personal goals. This enables Olson to know her students as individuals and to encourage them as a friend. The class also encourages students to assume leadership roles. Students work with a partner to plan and teach an original aerobics routine to the class. The teamwork allows students to work cooperatively with each other and to take responsibility for their own learning. The course enable students to enhance their character by examining "fitness" holistically, as it applies to their physical and spiritual lives.

Higher Level Learning:

By prompting students to consciously reevaluate their approach to physical health and spiritual growth and to take an active part in their learning about both (**Connecting, Learning**), Olson's course guides students toward a better understanding of their present selves (**Self**) and of how and why they should work towards strengthening their physical and spiritual health and that of others (**Caring, Others.**)

Active Learning:

Olson models the leadership skills that she expects from her students (**Observing.**) The students, in turn, have the opportunity both to plan their own routines (**Doing**) and to take part in the routines of others (**Observing.**) The students in the course begin to discuss and share an understanding of the importance of physical

fitness to religious spirituality (**Dialogue with Others.**) Setting individual goals within the context of shared goals strengthens student belief in the significance of cooperative character-building in all life activities, even aerobics (**Dialogue with Self.**)

Olson, M. (Fall 1997). Building Character in the Classroom. Brigham Young University, Provo, UT. Focus on Faculty, 6, 3-4.