



MAKING FITNESS FUN!

**TEACHING VIRTUAL
FITNESS & BUILDING
RELATIONAL
CONNECTION: A
PROFESSIONAL
REFLECTION ON THE
INTERACTIVE FOR LIFE
APPROACH**

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**WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE INFORMATION?
WEBSITE: [HTTPS://FUNCTION2FLOW.CA/](https://function2flow.ca/)
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The [InterActive Function2Flow \(IAF2F\) Model](#) has inspired me to introduce fitness activities in my secondary Health & Physical Education classes in ways that enhance social emotional connection through movement. In turn, I have noticed a difference in students' outlook toward fitness and movement, where they exhibit positive attitudes and seek out the opportunity to create movement activities themselves that prioritize partner interaction. My goal is to inspire enriched virtual experiences for students engaging in fitness activities that are relational and responsive to curricular outcomes.

As a direct result of the Covid-19 pandemic, people have spent more and more time at home, on a screen, lacking personal interconnection. As health and physical educators, we must actively work to build relational connections through a variety of strategies in order to facilitate more engaging lessons. Finding a sense of togetherness while apart is imperative in maintaining a healthy relationship with your body, with others, and with movement.

Within the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, I was presented the opportunity to teach a virtual section of grade 9 girls' physical education. At first this seemed to be a daunting task, given the foundation of physical education is rooted in physical participation and physically interacting with others. My previous struggles in online learning were centered around challenges in getting students to interpersonally interact with myself and their peers through engaging verbally and with their cameras on.

I began to investigate various factors and strategies that would aid in my ability to facilitate a meaningful educational experience in a virtual setting and quickly began to realize there were limited resources and literature available in the early stages of the pandemic. I then began to consider what factors contribute to the creation of meaningful experiences and discovered the importance of promoting joy in movement through fun, engaging activities (Beni, 2018). Knowing this, I sought out how to facilitate these outcomes in a virtual setting and landed on the framework presented by the InterActive for Life Project. This project looks to shift the mindset and preconceived attitudes people construct in relation to movement and experiences within physical activity. It does this by inviting people depart from the predominance of individualistic ways of conceiving and teaching movement and making a shift toward life sensations related to relational connection, joy, and happiness in movement (Lloyd & Smith, 2022). The sensations of life associated to movement and connection with others through engaging in physical activity is the principal motivator behind this project, prioritizing InterActive Functions, Forms, Feelings and Flows of moving purposefully, playfully, and expressively with others (Lloyd & Smith, 2022).

Why Implement IA4L Framework?

When I started to implement relational interactivities from the Function2Flow website I discovered that they:

- Make a difference in the lives of the everyday person through changing the way we think and interact
- Increase relational connections which also boost socio-emotional learning
- Tie positive feelings to movement and the motivation to be active
- Boost communication through movement and physical cues based on feeling and flow
- Deeply align with the Ontario HPE curricular expectations and the shift we are beginning to see in health and physical education

I realized that before diving straight into a program with high expectations of participation and relational engagement, a foundation needed to be laid that set the tone for learning. One activity that really aided in getting everyone comfortable upfront was [Guess the Copycat](#). Within this virtual interactivity, one member of the group is elected to start a movement of their choosing that the remainder of the participants must copy. The leader will attempt to seamlessly change the movement throughout the duration of the game, while another chosen member of the group, identified as the ‘detective’, whose responsibility is to guess who the leader is.

Initially, I chose to utilize breakout rooms in groups to complete this activity to provide students the opportunity to get to know a few people at a time in a less intimidating setting when compared to a whole group stage. I assigned roles for the first round to help get them started and popped in and out of all the rooms to ensure students were understanding the task at hand, as well as to get myself involved with all students by jumping into their game.

Throughout this activity, students were instructed to attempt to incorporate a variety of fitness activities such as planks, push-ups, and squats in a synchronous way as a group to prevent the detective from guessing the copycat. They were encouraged to get creative and explore ways to thread their movements together in creative ways. I experienced one group that really leaned into the Interactive Four F’s (InterActive Function, Form, Feeling, and Flow). Students had the opportunity to explore InterActive Function initially through evaluating what ones’ ready to interact position was and look-fors within alignment, tone, and tension to help them seamlessly follow the leader. Students elevated their game play through the InterActive Form component as they began to explore the space and the different ways their bodies can twist and turn within that space. Once in this groove, students noted they were able to develop a sensation of feeling and flow where they were able to inherently interpret where the leader would take the movement next, allowing them to understand how to interpret subtle cues of force, timing, and predictable movements.

As a whole group, this game naturally led itself into a consolidation conversation generated by students surrounding strategy of how they can alter tempo, effort qualities, levels, and flow to work together to find more success in the game. This is a prime example of where we can see the development of critical thinking skills in students as they needed to make choices regarding their movement. As educators, we want to facilitate the development of critical thinking skills across every single subject area. If for example, we choose to simply show a video for students to follow along to, they mindlessly mimic the movements they see instead of developing their ability to think, create, and make decisions about how to move their bodies. By engaging students in activities that require this higher level of thinking, we not only engage them in more meaningful movement, but we also encourage students to associate positive feelings toward fitness activities. Through motivating students to move through means that place emphasis on connection and pure joy of movement, we can create students who grow up to be self-starters who move because they want to, not because they have to.

Interactive Function2Flow Analysis of the Guess the Copycat

InterActive Function

- Understanding posture positions and tell signs for transitioning to a different position
- Signs that indicate one is ready to interact and complete a rep of a movement (eye contact, body language, etc.)

InterActive Form

- Understand how making minor changes in twists, angles, and turns of the body can help the leader subtly cue a change in movement
- Consider the role of levels in your movement and gradual changes aid in success within the game

InterActive Feeling

- Emphasis on timing, force, and effort qualities behind movements
 - Understand how these can convey feeling to others

InterActive Flow

- Understanding how teammates can communicate their feelings and next movement through physical expression in their posture, position, or gestures
- This allows the experience of connection that enables them to move together and anticipate the next movement

Here are some tips for Building Relationships in a Virtual Setting:

- Get to know your learners
- Profile cards, small/large group work & discussions.
- Allow a social time, even if it is for a few minutes, to allow students to make connections with each other and you.
- Get creative and think outside of the box.
- Adapt and build off of resources outlined below. Many are set up and suitable for virtual settings.
- This allows teachers to tie their content and desired outcomes that propose learning as fun.
- Breakout rooms
 - Keep breakout groups small, i.e., a maximum of about 4 to make it less intimidating for students.
- Look for opportunities to put cameras on.
- Make students feel comfortable with this by leading by example and starting with ice breaker activities that allow students to get to know each other.

Through the implementation of various games and activities interwoven into my daily lessons that worked to build relational connection, I was

able to establish a strong rapport with and between students, enhancing their experience within and beyond the classroom. Allowing and facilitating a shift from 'me to we' when engaged in fitness activities, challenges students to build their personal fitness with another person. This allows fitness to become playful in a more game like manner that strays away from the quantitative aspect often promoted in personal fitness activities, shifting to a more relational one (For more ideas see "THE INTER-ACTIVE FOR LIFE PROJECT - Episode 7: Relational Fitness in Physical Education" at

<https://vimeo.com/667067193>.

By the end of my time with this class, students were eager and expressing genuine interest in how to enrol in physical education classes for their upcoming school year. Some students indicated that they had never enjoyed physical education class prior to this experience and had a newfound appreciation for being active as a direct result of the interactive experience they had and the relationships they built.

Making fitness fun can be a challenge. However, through my successful implementation of various interactivities, students experienced fitness in ways where giggles and laughter masked the fact that they were working out. Once students experience these positive feelings with movement, it results in them associating those feelings with being active and moving with others.

Steps to a More Interactive Class

- Focus on feel good activities that are performed with others
- Exercise with a buddy or group of people
- Try something new
- Find moments to enjoy small bursts of activity
- Consider the role of body breaks for DPA in other classes beyond physical education

How do Students Benefit?

- Building critical thinking
- If they have to follow along with something mindlessly, they don't think. Give them the power to create, think and make decisions
- Aligns with the Ontario HPE Curriculum, allowing students to achieve ministry approved outcomes
- Form, flow, and bodily awareness
- Build body awareness via connection and proprioceptive movements guided by feeling
- Increased challenges and form and feeling increases the challenge
- Students have the opportunity to consider tactical strategies across all interactivities
- There is always something different to try, allowing teachers to present interactivities that appeal to all students

In this digital world we find ourselves in, it has become increasingly more difficult to engage students in meaningful, interactive fitness education. The aim of the InterActive for Life project is to help educators discover new ways to increase relational connection within the physical education classroom, both in person and online, as it supports holistic development that better sets up the next generation of learners through developing critical thinking skills and socio-emotional skills. Through sharing my personal success with this framework, it is my hope to encourage educators to work towards achieving similar goals within the scope of their own practice.

Games to try!

& More found on the [Resource Guide](#) page of our website

Bibliography

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