

What's not to like? There's music, movement and an opportunity for spontaneity and improvisation. It's called Drum Fitness and the Royster Middle School students are jumping into it this week in their PE classes that moved outside to the Medicine Shoppe parking lot across from the school. As "Brown Sugar" or "Tonight's Going to be a Good Night" blares from speakers, the students pound out the beat by alternately striking their drum sticks together, pounding the large fitball in front of them or that of their neighbor, the bucket below the fitball and even the ground. At the same time, they're elevating their heart rate and getting a workout.

"They need to develop good habits now," said Royster PE teacher Teri Lund. In PE classes today, it isn't so much teaching the students how to throw a ball but getting them to move so when they turn 80 they can climb a flight of stairs while carrying two sacks of groceries.

Lund added Drum Fitness to her physical education curriculum at Royster after receiving a \$700 grant from KAHPERD that enabled her to purchase the equipment to teach it. Over the summer she introduced it to senior citizens by holding classes at Royster and with third graders at the elementary school.

Drum Fitness is more than standing in front of the fitness ball and striking it with drum sticks. While keeping up the beat, they are moving from side to side pounding the balls on either side of them, doing deep knee bends to strike the bucket below and rising to knock their sticks together overhead.

The middle schoolers laughed at Lund's "old people's playlist" but she deliberately chose songs that kept up a beat of 128 per minute.

"For the older people, I encourage the cross lateral movement for balance and lateral balance," the lack of which leads to most falls, Lund said. The exercises are more like brain gym activities.

Cross lateral movements, when arms or legs cross from one side of the body to the other, also benefits students.

"Anytime we cross the midline we're forcing both sides of the brain to communicate," Lund said.

Brain research has shown that such movement allows electrical impulses and information to pass freely between the sides of the brain, which affects physical coordination as well as cerebral activities such as learning language and reading.

"When you cross your midline in exercise, you get a boost in brain alertness, creativity and memory," said Alison Beaver, a certified health educator whose focus is health education and promotion.

On top of that, it's fun.

"You always have to search for new ideas to get kids to buy into your program" Lund said. "There are always kids who are not into PE, but they might be into drums." On Tuesday some of the band students pulled their fitness balls closer together to bang out a group rhythm.

The positive reaction from the middle school students is growing.

When she decided to take the exercise outside Tuesday "the kids were excited," Lund said. "It was really fun."

One of the kids told another, "It's like we're on Oprah."

The outdoor exercise turned into a "community event" the first day when an unexpected breeze dislodged the balls from their buckets and they began rolling down the street towards the former Murray Hill School.

Lund had gone inside to get her students and discovered the fitballs missing when she returned.

"They caught the road or the sidewalk and just kept going," she said.

Fortunately, a man in a pickup pulled up and asked if he could help. Lund didn't hesitate.

"You could back your truck up and we can load it (all) up," she said. He even fished a couple of the balls from the drainage ditch before hauling it all back to the parking lot on Main.

Though she couldn't recall the man's name, Lund said she is "so grateful."