

Kiski Area, New Zealand pupils swap ideas

By Mary Ann Thomas
Staff writer

Pounding out a New Zealand chant with rhythm sticks never was typical for a gym class, but it is now at two Kiski Area elementary schools.

Gym teacher Gerry Cernicky has developed an informal exchange program with a school in Reporoa, New Zealand. Both schools have been sharing artwork and information.

They have exchanged physical education activities and started a pen pal club.

"I want the kids to keep up with the people in the United States and the world," Cernicky said. Cernicky found a New Zealand teacher, Rex Wood, on the Internet, initiated from a "virtual track meet."

Now, about 80 sixth-graders at Weinels and Allegheny Township elementary schools are doing what other sixth-graders do in New Zealand: Play with Naori rhythm sticks, foot-long wooden sticks and what is called a poi ball — a red and white striped rope with a Wiffle ball at the end. It makes a good jump rope for group jumping.

Education

"They're different from us and what we do here," said Megan Freedline, 11. "It's fun to learn about other people and their activities."

"It teaches us how they act," Monique Sonner, 13, said.

Cernicky has set up a pen pal exchange between his pupils and their counterparts in New Zealand.

Some pupils sent messages by way of e-mail through Cernicky, while others have sent mail the standard way.

But this is not exchange for exchange sake, or even a one-time shot. Cernicky wants to introduce the Naori rhythm sticks to other grades. And the sticks aren't just for fun; playing them develops coordination.

"Two hits, toss, toss," Cernicky said to his class. The pupils got the two hits together in perfect unison but during the "toss, toss" portion, the sticks start to fall.

"When we do that stick clapping — it's difficult because you have to stop and think what

you're doing," Natalie Briscoe, 12, said.

"You have to be real coordinated to do it," Krista Goch, 12, said.

The New Zealand pupils engage in activities that require more coordination than what some in Kiski are used to, said Ed Falk, 11.

Both schools are checking each others' scores for the President's physical fitness test.

"It's fun to compare scores with people who live miles and miles away," Alexandra Hessom, 12, said.

The two groups are still testing — situps, pullups, a 50-yard dash, a 600-yard run and a shuttle run. Cernicky expects the New Zealand group will have more endurance because of its activities.

To pass gym class, New Zealand pupils have to complete a triathlon: Bicycle a mile, jog a mile and run a mile.

Kiski Area pupils might end up with more upper body strength because of basketball, baseball and basketball, Cernicky said.

Beside the competition, the pupils in both countries are genuinely curious about one another.

"I want the kids to keep up with the people in the United States and the world."

Gerry Cernicky,
Kiski Area gym teacher

What could an American youngster want to know about a counterpart 10,000 miles away in New Zealand?

"I'd like to know what their hobbies are, what their summer is like, what their school is like," said Emily Logan, 12, who has written to a New Zealand student and is waiting for a response.

Falk got correspondence from New Zealand. "They asked how school is in the USA and what we do for fun," Falk said.

When Kiski Area sixth-graders finish their studies, they will have the opportunity to establish relations with New Zealand.

"It's up to the kids," Cernicky said.