

Episode 50 | Eden Levinson Pt. 1

Sarah Smith 0:10

Hello and welcome back to Discover Stories on Re-Imagine Radio. I'm Sarah Smith, your host of the podcast and a student intern at the Vancouver Adapted Music Society. Today, joining me, is Eden Levinson. Eden is the coordinator of physical literacy development at the Pacific Institute for Sport Education. Just before we get into our conversation, though, it's important to take a moment to acknowledge the land on which we are fortunate to host this podcast. This is the unceded and ancestral territory of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Nations, and has been stewarded by them since time immemorial.

Vancouver is located on territory that was never ceded or given up to the crown by these Peoples. The term unceded acknowledges the dispossession of the land and the inherent rights that Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh hold to the territory. The term serves as a reminder that these peoples have never left their territories and will always retain their jurisdiction and relationships with the land. Eden Levinson, welcome to Discover Stories.

Eden Levinson 1:23

Thanks for having me.

Sarah Smith 1:24

Thank you for coming. Happy to have you here. Just to start off, could you maybe introduce yourself and tell us a little bit about you?

Eden Levinson 1:32

Yeah, so my name is Eden. I'm the coordinator of physical literacy development at PISE. I've actually been involved in the organization for about seven years. I started when I was in university, and I have a recreation and health education background from the University of Victoria.

Sarah Smith 1:50

Cool, so lots of experience in the field. Could you tell us what PISE is, also? Just to break that down a little bit.

Eden Levinson 1:58

So PISE is the Pacific Institute for Sport Education. We actually recently renamed, we used to be Pacific Institute for Sport Excellence. So we changed to education because we just

thought it better captured all the work we do instead of just that excellence profile. So yeah, we do a lot of work. We house a lot of different things, we're part of the Camosun College campus as well, and we have their sports school here. We offer some high performance programs. We have a classic weight room fitness area with strength and conditioning. And then my job is within the kids and youth department. So all kids and youth programs fall in my realm.

Sarah Smith 2:41

That's awesome. Sounds very interesting. PISE does a lot of different things as well. Looping back to your role, you said you're the coordinator of physical literacy development. Could you first tell us what the term physical literacy means?

Eden Levinson 2:57

Yes. Okay, so I'll start with the textbook definition of physical literacy. So it's the confidence, competence and motivation to participate in a wide variety of physical activity in order to be active for life. So it's not necessarily a checkpoint. It's something that we can always work towards, and it can start at any age. So because I work with kids and youth, I'm starting that like fundamental area. But if you know you miss out on exposure to sport and physical activity as a kid, it's not too late to develop your physical literacy as an adult. So my focus is those fundamental movement skills, so anything from running, jumping, wheeling, throwing, catching, skipping, galloping, all those really basic movements that then translate into complex movement patterns, or even sports specific patterns down the road people choose to specialize in.

Sarah Smith 3:51

Very cool, very cool. And I like the way that you say that it's not like an end goal. It's sort of a continual almost like a mindset. I get the sense.

Eden Levinson 4:01

Yes, absolutely. And the goal is that we are creating these like healthy, active communities, and we all know the benefits of participating in physical activity, so we just want to increase our motivation and our confidence to do that, so that you know later on in life if you're doing something or maybe you're asked to join a sport league that maybe you've never tried before you have the confidence to do so, and it's not as scary or intimidating of a decision.

Sarah Smith 4:30

Lovely. I love that very like and a very inclusive sort of mindset, it seems like.

Eden Levinson 4:36

Yes, absolutely.

Sarah Smith 4:37

Nice. And when you're going through that list of sort of basic or fundamental movement skills for sport. You know, I think you listed some things like jumping, running, wheeling, skipping, etc. I'm wondering how much integration there is of like adapted sport in sort of the fundamentals of this physical literacy as an outlook.

Eden Levinson 5:01

Yeah. So adapted sport is, of course, like art of physical activity, and always, because PISE in general, we're not coming from like a sport entity to teach specific sports necessarily. All of our introduction to these skills is usually through, like fun games and activities so kind of smaller scale, so all the things you would do before it would transition into a sport. So we modify our activities. We either use equipment that's similar or equipment that's more adapted, and we also introduce wheeling as a skill. So we do have some wheelchair programs. We also have a fleet of wheelchairs that we take into schools and our summer camps and some of our programs as well to introduce that skill to kids who either are using that skill but they don't have peers that are using that skill or just to expose them to something that lot of kids have either never been able to really see or ask questions about or even participate in.

Sarah Smith 6:02

Very cool. So in this instance, when you're talking about wheelchairs and like that, exposure sort of giving the opportunity for able-bodied kids to try an adapted sport and experience it and sort of have that familiarity.

Eden Levinson 6:17

Yeah, absolutely, it's exactly that. Often, when we go into schools too, we introduce it with like the lens of para sports. And kids often know what the Olympics are, but don't know what para sports are. So we have that opportunity to educate them on sports that they are less familiar with because they don't get as much exposure, maybe in the school system or within their sports clubs, and we're able to share a little bit about that, and then, like, run them through some of those movements, show them what it's like, the differences and stuff like that as well.

Sarah Smith 6:53

Wow, that's awesome. I love that. I'm thinking about when, you know, I was in grade school quite a while ago, but I don't think we really had exposure like that. And so, you know, I grew up not knowing a lot about adapted sport and para sport. And so I think that's really cool.

Eden Levinson 7:08

Yeah, for sure. And I'm the exact same. I think my biggest exposure to, like, diverse abilities and different types of sports really came through my work with PISE and, you know, learning that there's, like, so much more out there than, you know, your classic sports that you see, which is like soccer and baseball and basketball, for instance, there's just way more opportunity and there's way more options. We just don't always learn about them.

Sarah Smith 7:36

Yeah, absolutely. I love that sort of looping back to your role, the coordinator of physical literacy development. Can you tell us what your role is and like, what you do on a day-to-day?

Eden Levinson 7:49

Yeah. So I always say my job changes seasonally, and it really does. So I oversee all of our kids and youth programs during the school year that looks very different than the summer. We do a lot of external programs. So very few programs actually happen at PISE. We're often in the school district or after school programs. And then I'm also doing any like kind of, like special new programs that we're doing, or projects, or like, the implementation of like different services. So a large part of my role right now is focusing on our summer inclusion service, which is the opportunity to provide one on one support to families. So in the past, we've relied on external organizations to provide one on one support to kids, but just acts as an additional barrier to families, because now they're going through PISE to register for summer camp, and then another organization to register for one on one support, and then that organization is then pairing the kid and then connecting back to PISE. So there's some complications there and then, as well, they just don't always have the staff capacity to offer maybe more than one or two weeks of support. So by offering it internally, we're able to offer more support. We are able to have a little bit more quality control as well and quality assurance, and we're just kind of reducing all the hoops that families already have to jump through. Anyways. So that's a really exciting project. We offered it for the first time last summer, and we're growing it this summer.

Sarah Smith 9:28

Very cool. Yeah, it sounds like that reduces a lot of the complications and sort of complexities that were involved before, when you were sort of outsourcing that.

Eden Levinson 9:38

Yeah, exactly. And it just reduces, like the burden on parents who already are managing so much, and especially with funding too. And there's some changes with funding for kids that are attending camp programs, but they're managing their funding, and they're managing their support workers and where their kids are able to go and where that is they're going to have the best experience that's going to include them in the best possible way. So there's so much that they're already juggling that adding that extra step can definitely feel like a lot. So I can empathize with families, because camp is a pretty extensive part of their life, and it's a lot of childcare, and there's a high need for it, but not always a lot of opportunity or access.

Sarah Smith 10:25

Yeah. Sounds that sounds like a really great sort of intervention, or like a shuffle that you guys are able to do that that's fantastic. Speaking of the summer camps, can you tell us what sort of summer camps PISE offers? Yeah?

Eden Levinson 10:40

So our camps are all focused on those fundamental movement skills, they're five day day camp, typical kind of hours. We offer it for age ranges from three all the way up to, I believe, 15 years. Because we actually have some youth camps as well. And we also offer cycling camps. So all of our camps are open to everyone, so they are inclusive by nature. And we try to have inclusive programming so that we can find ways to include all types of kids and youth. And it can either be more of that generic games and activities camp, or if you have kids that are really interested in biking, or we often have parents that don't have the skill set to teach the kid how to ride a bike, then they can register for our cycling camps as well.

Sarah Smith 11:31

Very cool. So a really wide range, sort of depending on what folks are looking for.

Eden Levinson 11:36

Yeah, exactly. And it's actually really cool too. There is a loaner system here in Victoria, where you can borrow adapted cycling equipment as well. And so we do have some participants that attend our cycling camp on adapted bicycles or trike style bikes, which is really cool as well. So it increases opportunity there.

Sarah Smith 12:00

Yeah, that's fantastic to have both the programming and the equipment available, because I think that that can be a really big barrier as well. And sometimes those that equipment or those bikes can be really, really expensive. So having, like, a loaner program or having that available is a really good option.

Eden Levinson 12:18

Yeah, absolutely. And it is very expensive.

Sarah Smith 12:21

Yeah, definitely. If you don't have exposure, or haven't had to go and research any of that equipment, it definitely is very costly. So I think that's a great way to sort of reduce barriers for folks to try those activities.

Eden Levinson 12:42

Yeah.

Sarah Smith 12:43

Yeah, that's fantastic. And you mentioned earlier as well that you had a fleet of wheelchairs. Can you tell me about those?

Eden Levinson 12:52

Yeah, so we have a fleet of about 10 kids sport wheelchairs. So they'd be like the type of wheelchair that you would most commonly see in a sport like wheelchair basketball. So they're pretty simple in terms of the frame and whatnot, and they don't have any extra equipment attachments to them. So they're pretty simple. We have a trailer. We tow them around the city, which is really cool. We've done a few school visits recently, actually, this year already. So we've been at two schools. We have some plans to go to a few more. With most of these school visits, we're visiting them because there's a student at the school who either uses a wheelchair or is going to undergo a surgery that's going to require them to use a wheelchair. So it can be really cool for that child to either use a wheelchair for the first time with us in this like fun PE setting where they're just playing games and activities, or for again, for a peer that already uses a wheelchair or a power chair to then get to see all their peers learning and playing just like them as well.

Sarah Smith 14:01

That's really cool. I love that, and I think that also would help a lot with sort of like stigma and inclusivity, because I know that at least when I was again, I'm commenting on when I was younger, but students at school around me who had disabilities were often excluded

from things partially by, you know, things like bullying, but also by design and not having accessible, you know, equipment for sports and programs like this that you're talking about. And so I think it's really cool that you're introducing that to their peers and their friends as well to, sort of, I mean, I would hope at least, and I would sort of assume that that might help to reduce the stigma a bit and change kids mindsets a little bit towards these things, because I think sometimes that can be a pretty big challenge as well.

Eden Levinson 14:49

For sure, and that's such a key piece of the program as well. So as much as we're going to play fun games, activities and it is really cool, regardless if you're a wheelchair user or not, but also to have like that little education portion and debrief and see what all the students notice about it, especially with sport wheelchairs, to just by design, they typically can't fit through like a single doorway, so most gym doorways have a double door that opens to them. But for instance, if you're an athlete and you have a sport wheelchair, you would have to transfer into a different wheelchair in order to, you know, exit the gym or go to the bathroom. And so teaching kids at a very young age about the built environment and how it's not necessarily built for everyone is really cool. And you just see all these like, little light bulbs going off, and they have these really unique questions of how they're connecting the dots. It was actually really cool. I was at a school recently, and I think the student was in Grade Two, and they connected the dot about how movie theatres, the accessible seating is at the very bottom, but how their favorite spot to watch movies at the very top, and that they didn't think it was fair. And so it's interesting to have these conversations and see these little shift in perspectives, and all of a sudden they're noticing all these things that they've probably never talked about or haven't had anyone reflect on with them. So it's really cool to have those conversations and to guide that conversation. And I feel like every time a kid has this new thought, I learn something as well because I didn't think about in the same perspective as a child, which is really awesome.

Sarah Smith 16:33

Wow. Yeah. I mean, at what Grade Two is like, you're seven or eight years old, I think that's really, really fantastic to start sort of seeing these things around you in the built environment, that if you are an able-bodied person, you might not necessarily think of, or you haven't had to think about. So I think that's really great, especially at that age to be sort of putting in that that type of awareness is really, really valuable.