

of time in cafés because I've always got my laptop with me and it means I can do an hour or two of work while sipping my macchiato. But for me the research isn't work. I'd do it even without being paid. As long as I have enough money to keep our household going and keep Sue happy, I'd do exactly what I'm doing now for nothing. I always do the coaching for nothing, because I know distance runners don't get the big bucks, and I'd do the research for nothing too.

What work inspires you most?

Definitely the LOOK study and its consequences. LOOK stands for Lifestyle Of Our Kids and is running in Canberra, where we're tracking participants from age eight to 80. It began in 2005, with 850 kids aged eight. We're assessing their happiness, their health, and their well-being right through, both psychologically and physically. We look at their physical activity and nutrition, the lot.

It's the biggest and most comprehensive study in this area and known around the world and we've had more than 40 papers published in international journals. The purpose is to look at the effect of early physical education on kids and we check the function of the heart, their bones, their blood, their mind, their attitudes to things, with 10 different research teams working on the project.

What have you found so far?

Our research shows that students exposed to physical education (PE) in primary school had better bone development and a reduced



■ Professor Telford coaches marathon running competitors.

risk of type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease. We also found that kids who'd spent more time involved in PE went into high school with better NAPLAN scores. This was a surprise to some people, who'd thought that spending time inside with the books would improve scores, yet it seems that spending time outside, engaged in physical activity, actually helps more.

We're now working on a "physical literacy" project that aims to raise the importance of physical activity in primary schools, and to make it easier for general classroom teachers to teach PE. That's important because primary schools in the ACT can't afford a specialised PE teacher so right now we're running a

trial whereby one specialist PE teacher is shared among eight schools and their job is to teach the teachers. That's currently happening in Victoria and our research suggests that initiatives like this could seriously improve public health and we hope they're adopted nationally.

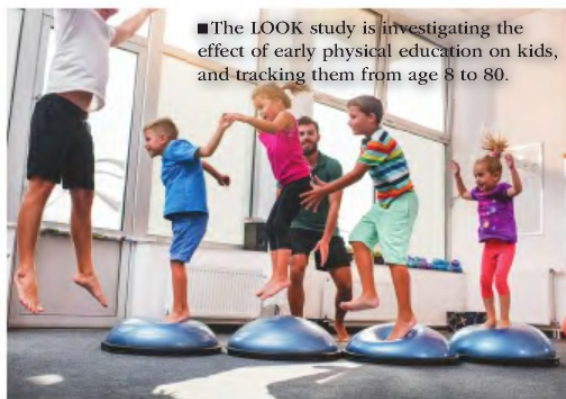
On a lighter note, what is something people wouldn't know about you?

Yes, speaking of notes, I don't think many people know how much I love music. At one stage I thought of becoming a concert pianist. I went right through to grade 6 with the piano but eventually realised I'd never be as good as I wanted to be and that's why I didn't go on with it. Oh, and football and cricket dragged me away.

What does the future hold for Professor Dick Telford?

I'd like to keep coaching and producing Olympic athletes, but my major interest is to continue with research that will motivate children to become more physically active and to be healthier and happier. I'd then like to actually prove that with top-level, world-class research from the University of Canberra. We could then use that to convince education departments to improve the delivery of physical education, and to increase physical activity in primary schools. Achieving that would be like having one of my athletes win a gold medal in the Commonwealth Games. Or the Olympics.

BY THOMAS MCCOY



■ The LOOK study is investigating the effect of early physical education on kids, and tracking them from age 8 to 80.



■ Professor Telford has been a tireless advocate for increased physical activity.

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