



Effective Classroom Management in Physical Education: *Strategies for Beginning Teachers*

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Classroom management is often a big concern for beginning teachers. Beginning teachers worry about how they will uphold the same level of classroom management as veteran teachers. Frequently they worry about pleasing the students so that they will want to participate in their lessons. Often their biggest concern is how the students will behave and how to distribute the discipline when necessary. This approach is reactionary, akin to a referee calling fouls on players in a game (Graham, Holt/Hale, & Parker, 2013). According to Graham et al. (2013), a positive learning environment should be developed with a philosophy of “maintaining ap-

propriate behavior.” To this end, beginning teachers are faced with a tough task. These teachers must develop strategies that help to create an environment that is positive and conducive to learning — specifically, strategies that allow for a high amount of activity time coupled with clear and concise instructional segments. Learn-

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ing to be efficient as a new teacher in a new environment can be a challenge, but it can make all the difference in accomplishing one's goals and feeling successful.

Efficient use of time in physical education classes is critical given the limited amount of physical education that children receive in schools today. So it stands to reason that physical education teachers feel pressured to deliver as much physical activity as possible. Researchers have found that one third (Cousineau & Luke, 1990) or more (Kelder et al., 2003) of class time is spent on instructional and/or management tasks. Rink (2014) stated that it is surprising that only about one third of the time in physical education class is allocated to student activity. While these statistics vary, they indicate that there is an inefficient use of time by physical education teachers in their classes. Other studies have examined management plans that focus on minimizing transitions (Dawson-Rodrigues, Lavay, Butt, & Lacourse, 1997) and cueing exceptional students on activity changes (Rosenkoetter & Fowler, 1986). Adopting strategies for transitions will improve efficiency.

Another study looked at how teachers' classroom management has changed over time (Garrahy, Cothran, & Kulinna, 2002). Despite the importance of classroom management, little information

is available about how teachers gain and use knowledge about management in their classrooms. Garrahy et al. (2002) found that learning to manage one's own classroom as part of a teacher's developmental process was influenced by personal and contextual forces. The beginning teachers believed strongly in their wisdom of practice and the wisdom of other colleagues' practice and not the wisdom from their teacher education programs (Garrahy et al., 2002).

It is during the developmental process for beginning teachers, both preservice and induction, that strategies for classroom management should be introduced and implemented. It is at this time when the support of a supervisor, a cooperating teacher, or mentor teacher can help with observation, analysis and reflection. During this time a beginning teacher can also practice the strategies learned from their physical education teacher education program or colleagues that they may end up utilizing for an entire career. A philosophy of classroom management coupled with a good managerial task system (Graham et al., 2013) must be fortified during these formative years.

Wong and Wong (2009) declared that an important characteristic of an effective teacher is that of being an extremely good classroom manager. Classroom management can be defined as all of the things that a teacher does to organize students, space, time and materials so that student learning can take place (Wong & Wong, 2009). A well-managed classroom has a task system of protocols and routines that structure the environment and maximize time for learning. According to Rink (2014), management is important because good managers can solicit and maintain student engagement in the content of the lesson. This puts the teacher in the position to maintain appropriate behavior by creating a positive environment for learning. The focus of physical educators today is to maximize students' activity time and eliminate unwanted management time (Rink, 2014). Wong and Wong (2009) posited that classroom management overarches everything in the curriculum.

Because of all this, the purpose of this article is to share some classroom management strategies for beginning teachers that can be useful to get started and lead to more productive and successful learning experiences for students. Equipment protocols, classroom procedures, routines, and how to deal with inappropriate behaviors are all strategies that will be discussed.

Gaining the Attention of Students

The importance of capturing the students' attention so that they can see and hear instruction is critical. There are a variety of factors that can affect a learner's ability to be attentive. Difficulties with acoustics (Ryan & Mendel, 2010) and other visual distractions in the teaching space can make it difficult for both the teacher and the students. Using signaling, cues, rhythms, signs, symbols or actions are ways to help gain the attention of students.

Signaling is the most obvious way to gain students' attention. Rink (2014) stated that the teacher must have established signals and procedures with students when they want their attention. It should also be noted that background noise, or extraneous classroom noise, can mask the teacher's voice and render it inaudible,

affecting students' ability to learn (Ryan, Grube, & Mokgwathi, 2010).

Simple Stop/Start Cues. Using audible cues such as a whistle or music (Harms & Ryan, 2012), or verbal cues such as “stop/go” or “freeze,” can be an easy way to get the attention of students. Audible cues such as a whistle or the stopping and starting of music would be more appropriate for large areas and large classes. Verbal cues are most appropriate with smaller groups of students. Often teachers use a system as follows: “Stop” means stop, set down any equipment and look at the teacher. This signal indicates to the students that the teacher will be providing more or new instruction. “Freeze” means stop and look at the teacher for some clarification or refinement. Finally, “Go” indicates that students may proceed with the task.

Rhythms. Rhythmic signals are great ways to gain attention. Typically, this strategy can be used to gain the attention of a talkative group, maybe at the start of class for the set induction, or at closure or when students are lining up to exit the gym. Clapping, snapping and/or stomping patterns are the most common methods. Starting with a loud sound first and progressing to a softer sound as attention is gained can get the students quiet quickly. A pattern such as clap-clap, stomp-stomp, snap-snap can get progressively quieter — finishing with rubbing the hands together softly has all of the students attentive and quiet.

Signs, Symbols and Actions. Some teachers find that signs, symbols and/or actions can be useful in gaining the attention of their students. For example, the quiet sign is often a gesture made with the hand like a “peace sign” held above the head or one finger over the lips to indicate quiet. A more creative example is the use of different-colored scarves. The teacher can hold up one color to indicate a laugh. All of the children respond with a laugh, and then when the teacher puts the scarf away, they become quiet. Other color commands can include humming or clapping; other sounds can be added, too. Some actions with verbal commands can be utilized as well. The teacher can simply begin to say and perform by touching “head, shoulders, knees, toes, hips, elbows, wrist, and nose.” Before long the students are doing these actions along with the teacher. Calling out “A-tten-tion!” military style can be fun, and when students respond by looking forward with a salute, the teacher has their attention.

For younger learners, puppets and emotion signs can be useful, too. Children will fixate on the puppet quickly and listen to its voice as instructions are given. Utilizing emotion signs, such as happy and sad, will catch the students' eye, and they will begin to perform the emotions displayed on the signs. At this time directions can be given quickly when all of the children are looking at the teacher. That strategy is best used at the start of class.

Each of these signs, symbols or actions catch the attention of the students; teaching them that they mean quiet, eyes on the teacher, and listen is an important part of implementing these strategies.

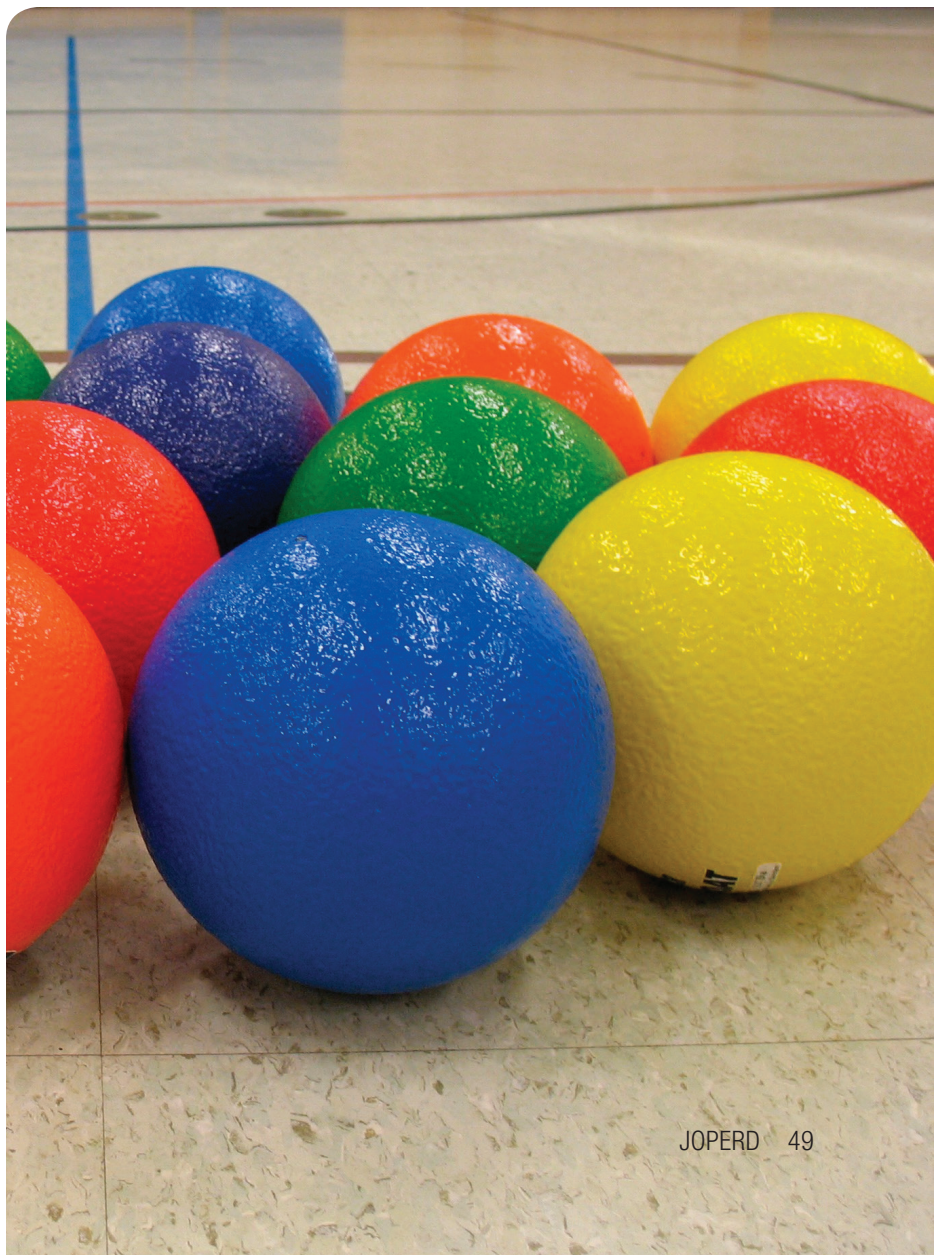
Establishing Equipment Protocols

Protocols for equipment distribution and return can help a teacher save time and ensure that students can access equipment safely and in an orderly fashion. One

common way in which teachers lose control is the inefficient use of time (Rink, 2014). This most often occurs as students wait for equipment to be set up or distributed. Pangrazi (2016) recommended that equipment be distributed as rapidly as possible.

Equipment Distribution and Return. The distribution and return of equipment can be handled in a few ways. Placing equipment around the perimeter of the teaching space allows students to go, on command, to the nearest piece of equipment and begin an assigned task. Equipment can be placed in several locations so that small groups can access it. This is a useful strategy for teachers who utilize squads as a grouping strategy. Extending this idea, teachers can assign squad leaders to get the equipment and distribute it to their group. Nonetheless, equipment should be out of the equipment room and out of any containers to make access quick and easy. Finally, if equipment can be set up in advance of the class and will not be a distraction at the start of class, then it should be placed in the location where it will be used. When the equipment is no longer needed or the class is finished, the students can simply return it to the location where they found it. Utilizing students to “re-set” the equipment for the next class is something that will save time and energy for the teacher.

Managing Equipment within the Lesson. Often students are distracted by the equipment that they are using when the teacher stops the class to extend or refine the task or to transition to a new



task. First and foremost, being clear and concise with instructions will keep breaks in the activity short and will allow students to get back on task quickly. Simple strategies for what to do with equipment during longer bouts of instruction are to have the students set the equipment on the floor. Some teachers have employed an “out-of-sight, out-of-mind” logic by having the student step over the equipment so that it is on the floor behind them and they can focus on the instruction. Some fun variations might include having students hold the ball on top their head or put the bean bag in their pocket. Having a simple strategy for managing equipment is important to eliminate distractions for both the students and the teacher.

Developing Classroom Procedures and Routines

Developing procedures and routines that will remain constant throughout each class period and throughout the school year is important. Children appreciate the sense of security (Pangrazi, 2016) that structure and regular routines can bring to any teaching setting. The establishment of class routines and rules will hold students accountable on a day-to-day basis (Rink, 2014).

Grouping Strategies. Teachers should have several ways to quickly group students for activities. One of the best methods for grouping is to develop regular squads. Teachers can utilize squads of four to six students with a rotating leader each day. Squads provide a level of organization that the teacher does not have to manage. Squad leaders can provide the teacher with attendance information along with leading the group in fitness routines and retrieving and returning equipment. Groups can be formed quickly by the teacher if squads are named (by colors, letters, etc.) or numbered. By calling out the names of the squads and pointing to a location in the gym, students can be quickly assembled for activity. Squad leaders can also lead students in exiting the gym.

Finding ways to pair students without wasting time is an important aspect of classroom management. A smart transition will minimize off-task behavior and maximize student activity time. There are probably as many ways to group students as there are students in the classroom. With all of the choices available, consider the following: (1) Is grouping based on ability more desirable for a given activity? (2) Do you want students to have some say in their group selection? What will you do if a student is not selected? (3) Is it important to you that students learn to work cooperatively with all of their peers in the class no matter their skill level? These three questions will help the teacher to determine how best to group students.

Beyond squads or “counting off,” there are other excellent ideas for efficient student grouping. To maximize time on task, utilizing equipment to determine partners or groups is a quick and relatively easy method (e.g., all of the students with the blue jump ropes begin at Station 1, red jump ropes go to Station 2). Preparing partners/groups in advance is another great strategy. Posting “partner lists” in the gym or locker room that students can see before class removes some of the anxiety and wasted time from group selection during class. Also, allowing students to self-select their partners or groups within a timeframe is also very effective (e.g., “You have 15 seconds to find a group of four and stand on the blue line”). Finally, consider using apps such as Team Shake. Classroom management apps can manage random group selection or groups based on various criteria set by the teacher.

Entering the Gym. Students must enter the gym in a safe and organized manner. Teachers should establish a routine that is both efficient and orderly. One way to minimize time when entering the gym is to provide written instructions on the door that the students see as they enter. Sometimes pictures can be helpful in showing what the teacher wants the students to do. By attending to posted instructions before entering the gym, students are immediately engaged and are focused on a task right away. These instructions can range from simply coming into the gym and sitting down with their squads to wait for instruction, to coming into the gym and beginning an activity instantly. The important thing is to have a routine and to engage the students quickly.

Exiting the Gym. Teachers need a swift exit strategy for lining up and leaving the gym. This is often a time-consuming process, but there are several simple functions that can increase efficiency. Designating a line on the gym floor that is near the exit allows students to be dismissed quickly to the charge of their classroom teacher, or to be taken quickly back to their classroom by the physical education teacher. Getting children to this designated line can sometimes be chaotic, so it is suggested that the children are dismissed by squads directly from the last task or activity. If utilizing squads, squad leaders can still assist in equipment return while the remainder of the squad lines up at the designated area. Finally, provide closure to the lesson at the designated line-up area. This can dramatically reduce the time it would normally take to send the students to their squad areas for closure and then to the designated line-up area. Having closure while the students are in line allows the teacher to more efficiently anchor important concepts covered in the lesson.

Other Procedures. It is impossible to identify each and every necessary managerial function in any given gymnasium, but here are a few common problems that occur regularly enough to merit a mention. The creative strategies listed next provide a means for efficiently handling these sometimes time-consuming issues that arise during class.

1. Often, students will ask if they may use the bathroom or get a drink of water during class. This, in turn, can cause a landslide of additional requests by other students. It is difficult to determine whether the request is warranted, or if the student is looking for a diversion from the lesson. Developing a procedure for this type of behavior can often head off such requests during a lesson.

2. Some kindergarten children come to school not able to tie their own shoes. This sometimes persists for quite some time into the school year and sometimes into the next. One solution is to create a place out of the way in the gym where students can go to get assistance tying their shoes. This prevents children from stopping anywhere during the activity and thus causing a hazard to other children who are moving during the class activity. It also alerts the teacher that a child needs assistance. The teacher can move to this “sneaker station” to assist the child, or another child can assist as well. This area can also serve as a designated place for any children to stop and tie their shoes in an “out-of-the-way” safe place.

3. Incessant questioning by students can really bog down any teacher’s task presentation. Lots of questions can indicate problems in a teacher’s clarity of communication, or they can simply be the result of inquisitive students caught up in the extraneous details of the task. Checking for understating is an important pedagogical behavior, as explained by Rink (2014). Teachers should continue to check the students’ understanding by asking questions after a demonstration or asking students to demonstrate what they are



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trying to do. Going beyond asking “Does everyone understand?” is important. Using both low- and high-order questions helps to challenge the student to extend and deepen their understanding. Follow-up questions from the students is where the trouble lies. The authors of the SPARK curriculum provided a suggestion for handling this problem, called the “rule of 80/20.” Rosengard, McKenzie and Short (2000) suggested that 80 percent of the students understand what to do after a task presentation. The idea is to get these students started and moving, and then provide the other 20 percent with more information or allowing them to observe other children doing the task (Rosengard et al., 2000). Use the rule of 80/20 to head off unnecessary questions and get students engaged in the task quickly.

Minimizing Inappropriate Behaviors

Graham et al. (2013) stated that ignoring inappropriate behaviors is a strategy that can increase appropriate behavior when the problem is a minor concern. Some behaviors become more problematic and thus need attention. Some of these general disruptions occur when the children are still and waiting for instruction for the next task, and they include talking, spinning on the floor, and unnecessary touching of students and equipment.

General Disruptions. There are many benign ways to deal with general disruptions without further interrupting a lesson. A teacher

can learn to use body language or develop “the look.” This can often be enough to send a cue to the student so as to say, “What you are doing is not acceptable, and I would like for you to stop this behavior now.” Another strategy is to cut the shape of a hand out of cardboard, color it, and attach it with Velcro to a ruler. This is a great visual cue for an individual or a class to remind them to raise their hand or to keep their hands to themselves, depending on how the teacher presents the cue. If there is excessive talking or noise in the class, the start of a group clap, snap and pat followed by a quiet signal can bring the group back to center and quiet things down. When a teacher is teaching and circulating about the classroom, he or she can use simple strategies such as touching a student’s shoulder as a means of quietly asking them to stop what they are doing. Occasionally, it may be necessary to pull a student aside and talk one-on-one to determine what the cause of his or her behavior is and to make a mutual decision as to how it will be handled.

Other Disruptions. Once again, it is impossible to identify each and every necessary managerial function in any given gymnasium, but here are a few common negative behaviors that warrant a teacher’s attention and occur regularly enough to necessitate a strategy.

1. Invariably, students will have conflict during a physical education class. For all conflicts, short of a physical altercation, a simple strategy to make the students solve the problem serves the

teacher and the students of the class best. Setting a meeting place in the gym to work out problems can be a way to allow the students in conflict to sit down and settle their differences without taking much of the teacher's attention and, consequently, the students' class time. This does not only serve to minimize the distraction of a conflict for the class, it allows the students to work out their own problems. It is surprising how quickly students will solve most problems when they get to the "Meeting Place." Students should report back to the teacher their agreement before they return to activity. This allows the teacher to have a final say, and it gives the students some valuable experience in conflict resolution. There will be times when the teacher will need to mediate, such as with primary-grade children who may need some help with ideas for a resolution to their conflict.

2. Tattling can be a pet peeve for most teachers. This behavior occurs a great deal in the primary grades but can continue into the upper-elementary grades. The "Tattle Tree" is one way to curb this problem. A large tree is cut out of cardboard and placed on the wall. There are small pockets cut into various places of the tree large enough to insert a small piece of paper. Whenever the urge to tattle arises, students are invited to write the infraction down on a slip of paper and to put it on the tattle tree. The teacher can check this later and thus minimize any disruptions to the class. Another creative idea for younger children is to leave an old cellphone in an accessible place. When a child needs to "tell on someone," they can go to the phone and leave a message. The teacher can check the messages later. Most often this additional step of writing down the offense or leaving a message becomes bothersome to the tattler, and the behavior subsides. They usually decide that it is not worth the trouble. These strategies work well with lower grades. Chronic tattlers must be dealt with one-on-one. Beginning teachers should note that some schools and classrooms have protocols for tattling. Further, it is critically important to note that students should not be discouraged from telling an adult about larger issues related to emotional and physical safety.

Conclusion

According to Rink (2014), class management is an ongoing process that must be constantly maintained. A teacher should be persistent and consistent with signaling, equipment protocols, and other routines. Student teachers can be taught these new management routines, and they should be encouraged to practice them. Once expectations are set and student teachers are clear on

procedures, then they can maximize their time for activity and for learning. There is some truth in the adage from veteran teachers who say, "If you don't have control, then you can't teach." The bottom line is that when preservice teachers are in the public schools practicing their teaching skills, they need to practice their management skills, too. The more they practice the strategies, the more comfortable they will get, and these strategies will become part of the ecology of their gym and their lessons will become more productive.

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