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Our Top 12 “Key Instructional Elements”
That Help to Build an Excellent Lesson and High Quality Physical Education Program

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One of the most fundamental issues in teaching, arguably the biggest, is discovering the most effective lesson elements for each group of learners. This includes a solid curriculum, performance objectives, age-appropriate pedagogical ingredients, ability-level activities and assessments focused on measuring learning to create a great lesson. When these elements are blended artistically with a variety of classroom management skills, necessary equipment, instructional support resources, behavior management rules and high expectations in a nurturing environment, the teacher has created the best possible learning atmosphere for each individual student.

Instructionally, in physical education, it is also important for the teacher to come to the realization that the delivery system is critical. As a direct result of the learner needing to grasp the psychomotor nature of a skill performance, along with the intellectual understanding of how and when the skill is best performed, one teaching-style does not fit all learners or circumstances. The teaching style must match-up with the learning style of the students. The characteristics that make each student an individual who is a unique person also help to define them as a learner. Understanding the students and how each individual best learns takes a great deal of effort by the teacher. The same four primary factors that impact cognitive learning in the classroom, which are readiness, reinforcement, motivation, and individual differences, also influence the way students acquire skills in the psychomotor domain of the gymnasium.

Teaching methodology and instructional delivery are not the only characteristics that influence how competently and successfully students learn. Each lesson is a very intricate series of events, with very specific performance objectives. It is with a vision of where instruction is directed, created by the objectives, that starts long before the students make their way into the gymnasium for physical activity. Teachers must have a solid grasp of all the instructional skills that keep students focused on the task and away from the distractions that lead to off-task behaviors.

Below, the authors have identified twelve important instructional elements for teachers to incorporate into the development, presentation and evaluation of their lessons. Teachers, new as well as experienced, should consider the impact of each of these instructional elements in order to present the best learning experience for their students and strengthen their physical education program.

These twelve effective instructional concepts, when included in the development of a physical education lesson, will strengthen the presentations made to your students:

1. Teachers are responsible for planning each lesson and being pro-active toward the daily activities you intend to use.

Comprehensive, high quality physical education programs begin with unit and lesson plans that are developed on a series of sequential skill based physical activities. Each highly effective lesson starts with a solid plan based on instructional objectives, thoughtful presentation with instructional cues, a whole-part-whole demonstration that emphasizes each of the three phases (backswing; skill execution; follow through) of the skill, and skill performance assessment. A comprehensive plan template will also include an opportunity to engage both national content standards along with the respective state standard in each lesson. Consideration should also be given during the planning effort to include facility preparation, safety concerns, checking for student understanding, learning activity “task sheets”, instructional support materials, teachable moments, ability based modifications, lesson closure and community resources that encourage students to use lesson content outside of school. While plans are for teachers, and should be designed to serve the needs of students, there are countless formats with different configurations and bits of information that shape a lesson.

2. Teachers must present instruction using a variety of styles that match the many different ways that students learn.

Muska Mosston (1994) identified the Spectrum of Teaching Styles that defines eleven distinct teaching methods. Each has very specific characteristics that explain the decision making process that exists between teacher and student during each of three phases of a lesson (pre-impact; impact; post impact). While each is identified as a separate engagement, two or more can be incorporated in the same lesson to reach different learners. More common, teachers blend teaching styles to create a hybrid in an effort to maximize effectiveness of the teaching process. It is important for teachers to understand their learners and select a teaching style that will impact the most learners both effectively and efficiently.

The use of technology has greatly impacted these teaching styles and the way in which each is delivered. Another very important factor with technology is the resources available at the click-of-a-button. One additional element of instruction that teachers must be aware of and use are the different instructional models. Presentations such as Sport Education Model, Peer Teaching Model, Tactical Games Model, Inquiry Teaching Model, Cooperative Learning Model, Personalized System for Instruction and Direct Instruction Model each provide a very unique approach to the teaching-learning process.
3. Physical education teachers who are enthusiastic about working with students in a physical activity setting should continually encourage and find positive ways to motivate students.

One of the clear elements of classroom research that is easily transferred into the gymnasium is that students learn and retain more when the course is rigorous. Teachers who are excited about their subject and embrace an atmosphere that is respectful and sensitive to student needs have students who achieve more. Teachers who display a sense of caring about their students also work to provide a physically and emotionally safe learning environment.

4. Teachers should know and adhere to the “NASPE” Appropriate Practices document, along with other position statements and professional guidelines, while in the process of creating and delivering physical education lessons.

The National Association for Sport and Physical Education is a professional organization with the mission “to enhance knowledge, improve professional practice and increase support for high quality physical education, sport, and physical activity through research, development of standards, and dissemination of information.” There are over thirty documents that address appropriate practices, assessment, instruction, national standards, and professional guidelines. These documents are created by physical educators to identify “Best Practices” and set superior standards for both programs and instruction in an effort to assist all physical educators achieve a high quality physical education program.

These documents include:

- Differences between Physical Education and Physical Activity, 2005.
- Appropriate Use of Instructional Technology in Physical Education, 2009
- Physical Activity Used as Punishment and/or Behavior Management, 2010

Each of these documents offers instructional guidelines to support the development of lessons that create a sound instructional environment where students feel both physically and emotionally safe. While each addresses physical education instruction in a little bit different way, each makes a significant contribution to building a high quality physical education program.

5. Teachers must understand and apply the motor learning concepts that facilitate students learning during the activity (guided practice) phase of the lesson.

The teaching provided during physical activity classes must adhere to solid instructional practices along with the many factors that influence learning and the acquisition of a skill. Among these aspects are the most fundamental motor learning concepts which include:

- Students must understand the task based upon the teachers explanation, demonstration and performance feedback. Practice sessions should be organized to promote optimal conditions for learning with maximum opportunity to practice the skill.
- Teachers who express high performance expectations have a positive impact on student achievement levels.
- Feedback is essential for learning.
- Concepts and skills learned during one activity session can facilitate learning and strengthen performance in another session if the teacher can transfer the learning experience.
- Teachers must be clear when developing their lessons as well as when presenting their learning activities and drills to emphasize control or speed.
- When learners understand the task, grasp how it can be used and can process self-analysis during practice, the skill can be mastered.
- Positive reinforcement will significantly influence the teaching-learning process.

There are a multitude of factors that can have an influence on the teaching-learning process. Learning styles, individual differences, motor skills experience, social occurrences and economic background each has an impact on the learning of skills. Teachers must take into consideration each factor to eliminate distractions and maximize those factors that have a positive impact on acquiring motor skills.
6. Teachers must be accountable for what they are teaching but, more importantly, what students are learning as measured by assessment.

When developing an instructional vision, teachers need to identify those performance objectives for students to achieve at the end of instruction. As lessons progress, assessment can be used to monitor student learning and provide evidence of teacher effectiveness. While different types of assessment are administered at different times in the instructional process, assessment is an ongoing process that supports learning. Each of the fourteen reasons for conducting assessment brings accountability to the teaching-learning process for teachers and students.

- produces student assessment information on performance
- produces teacher assessment information on instructional effectiveness
- Assessment can be used to identify student needs.
- Formative assessment measures previously learned knowledge and skills and creates a starting point for instruction.
- Assessment can be used to measure student progress toward performance goals.
- A task sheet type assessment can help to provide the instructional cues to help strengthen instruction.
- Summative assessment is a final measure of what has been learned.
- Assessment can be used as motivation, positive reinforcement and a positive means to build self-confidence.
- Assessment results can be used as a monitoring device for students to create an opportunity to reflect on responses.
- Assessment can be used by teachers to focus student learning activities on “Key Instructional Components” in a unit.
- Assessment can be used to justify ability level placements.
- Assessment can be used to measure teaching effectiveness and identify those areas that need to be re-taught.
- Assessment can be used by teachers to diagnose student special needs.
- Assessment can be used to provide teaching-learning information to support the decision making process by teachers.
- Assessment establishes clear evidence of teacher effectiveness toward established curricular outcomes.
- Assessment can measure teacher achievement of instructional goals.

Once curricular outcomes have been identified during the development process, various assessments can be used to monitor the teaching-learning process. Evidence from the different assessments brings accountability to what teachers do by monitoring student progress and a summary of what has been learned by each student.

7. Teachers must develop a method of frequent parent communication that is clear about the vision for achievement and how progress toward the goals is moving toward success.

Notes home from the teacher sometimes are informative, but many times they never reach the intended target until the event has passed. In schools today, there are much more effective methods of getting the message to everyone in the community. Electronic mail, Principal’s electronic newsletters and message boards in front of the building reach many more people in a timely way. Grade level e-lists, internet “groups”, newsgroups, district webpage postings and other types of LISTSERV all support a move forward in today’s world of communication.

One message that must be clear is that it is important to keep parents, other faculty, administration, Board of Education and the community aware of upcoming events and activities. It is important that physical education be the topic of discussion for any group even without the dinner table question: What did you do at school today?

8. Teachers must, as a matter of practice, set and convey high performance expectations for student achievement and develop activities to ensure each individual will find success.

Conveying high expectations in a supportive and positive way is a very powerful tool to help students achieve. It has long been an accepted outcome of education that schools that emphasize clear expectations for academic success, and support faculty efforts, do better than those schools that do not express the expectation. While most of the work that provides the evidence is from the classroom, the “I know you can do it” concept works well in the physical activity setting.

9. Teachers who are passionate about physical education should demonstrate those leadership qualities that will attract, encourage, invite and entice students to be involved in physical activity for a lifetime.

Displaying energy in the classroom along with an infectious enthusiasm for the subject sends a message to students that this topic is worth the time it takes to learn. Teachers who have that passion for the subject and can demonstrate a love for being involved in physical activity are more likely to draw others into the world of activity. When designing activities, create fun activities that lead to success and then celebrate with everyone who is involved. When activity starts as a steppingstone to achievement and the learning becomes fun in a nurturing gymnasium, the passionate teacher will inspire students to be engaged.

10. Teachers who are devoted to their student’s success should create opportunities to stress those “teachable moments” that focus on character development, where traits like honesty, reliability, respect, self-control, trustworthiness, caring, cooperation, self-confidence and helpfulness are praised and reinforced.

While physical activity, physical fitness activities and sport skills are a major focus for physical education lessons, sometimes it is the small moment that students remember. A “teachable moment” provides an opportunity to recognize students for what has been achieved. It is a moment selected by a teacher when the students are in that most impressionable zone and a well chosen word will make a big difference in the teaching-learning process. This can be accomplished by a spontaneous comment or it can be a planned part of an instructional phase of the lesson. It can be used to transition into another phase of the lesson or as an opportunity to refocus the class.
11. Teachers who strive to provide strong instructional experiences for students regularly add to and update their content knowledge through focused professional development.

There are many different approaches for a school or district to update professional skills of the instructional staff. Successful organizations have a plan that many times is organized by a leadership group that represents the faculty. In creating a plan to respond to needs of the instructional staff, a budget is necessary along with identifying resources and facilities.

A plan would include:
- Develop a process to solicit suggestions and implement ideas.
- Develop a budget to fund the in-service development program.
- Conduct an analysis of needs for the staff, expertise, what can be offered vs. what is needed.
- Identify local, community and regional resources.
- Develop a plan to inform faculty of offerings.
- Develop a process for implementation.
- Evaluate effectiveness of the in-service program development.
- Develop a plan to record all activities— including an analysis of positive and negatives along with attendance for each session.

As content knowledge, innovations, instructional delivery, student learning, learning climate, classroom management and assessment are the major areas for teacher growth, these are areas that need recognition from the leadership group. Teachers need to be lifelong learners, who listen to and can observe the needs of those they serve and lead by example (walk-the-walk).

12. Teachers who care about the growth and development of their students get to know their students and in the process develop a strong student-teacher relationship.

Physical education teachers need to be strong advocates for physical activity and the healthful benefits of each of the components of physical fitness. Teachers must be able to “see” and “feel” the needs of all the students they teach. Each student must feel that the physical education teacher understands who they are and is able to offer challenges that lead to success. It is the authors’ observation that students will offer more effort to achieve when they feel a teacher cares and wants them to do well.

Physical education teachers must develop their own instructional style that incorporates each of the key instructional elements presented in this document. When learning activities are planned, they must be interesting, authentic, focused on performance/learning objectives and designed to help students find success. It is important that teachers do not get lazy and make 5th grade basketball exactly as it was in 4th grade and the same as it was in 3rd grade, which is just a scaled-down version of the high school program. Time and concentrated effort must be devoted to planning the presentation of age-appropriate activities that are supported by interesting practice opportunities. They must be sequential in nature along with aimed at the full range of ability levels of the students, together with the special needs students who are “included” in the class. The “roll-out-the-ball-and-play” method where there is no instructional objective, teaching is limited, practice opportunities for those who need it the most are very limited and no performance feedback is provided would fit into the Physical Education Lesson “Hall of Shame.” This is not being a physical educator but merely a recess activity supervisor.

Teachers must make the subject of their lesson challenging and relevant so students see their achievement as well as the need to learn the skill. As elements of the unit and overall lessons, teachers must include both school and non-school resources that students can use, expressing an interest and desire to engage in physical activity while also strengthening skills learned in class. This type of extra-curricular engagement can fortify family involvement along with building community networks fostering physical activity.

Teachers must show a passion for what they do in service to students. Physical education teachers should lead-by-example when the opportunity to be physically active presents itself. Physical education teachers should be interested and care about the students and their lives as they are there to serve student physical activity needs. Although these attributes do not fall under any instructional or pedagogical category, they are essential to be a successful teacher. You must develop a professional attitude that clearly demonstrates to students that you care about them and their development of a healthy life-style that includes physical activity.

Teachers, new and experienced, must convey to students, parents, faculty, school administrators and community members that physical education is important and that you are working to create a high quality program that deserves respect.
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