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2021-11-10

The Effects of the PE Teacher Knowing and Using Student Names in PE Class: A Qualitative Investigation

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Abstract

We have each been given a name. With this given name we are known among our families, friends and other associates. Our name becomes an integral part of our identity. A common and important place where a person is addressed by name is in educational school settings, more specifically in a school setting, including in physical education (PE) classes. The physical education setting offers many opportunities for teachers and students to use student names. The purpose of this study was to investigate the use of PE teachers using their student's given name, along with how it affects students. For this study 278 junior high school students (165 males & 113 females) were surveyed regarding teachers using student names in PE class. The results from this study found that junior high PE students liked when their PE teacher used their name, that their PE teacher used the first name when they were being spoken to. From these results, it is hoped that PE teachers seriously consider this aspect of pedagogy of using student names as they interact with their students.

24 The following scenarios could easily play out in a physical education (PE) class.

25 *Scenario One:* Students have been put into groups of four and assigned to go to a specific station

26 in the gym set up for the students to work on a specific volleyball skill. One group of students

27 becomes off-task with the skills they are to work on. From across the gym the PE teacher

28 observes the off-task behaviors the students are exhibiting. The PE teacher proceeds to yell

29 across the gym, “Hey, you knuckleheads, stop messing around, and get back to what you have

30 been asked to do!” The look on the group of student’s faces is embarrassment and disbelief. A

31 second scenario goes like this. *Scenario Two:* A 9th grade class has just completed game play in

32 a basketball unit. As the class comes to an end a couple student’s help collect equipment and

33 jerseys used by the students during class activities. As the students return the equipment, the PE

34 teacher says to one of the students, “Sally, I was watching you play today with your teammates,

35 and I saw you make some great passes to your teammates today that led to points. You do a

36 good job getting all of your teammates involved in the game.” Sally responds with a big smile

37 on her face and thanks the PE teacher for her words. Of the two scenarios the second one

38 illustrates the PE teacher using the students’ name. The simple exchange in the second scenario,

39 which included the teacher using the students name, communicated to the student that their PE

40 teacher knows her students’ name: in this case the student responded positively to the PE

41 teachers’ comments. Students want and like it when their PE teacher knows their name (Barney

42 & Christenson, 2012; Prusak, Vincent, & Pangrazi, 2005 & Petray-Rowcliffe, Lavay, Williams,

43 & Hakim-Butt, 2002).

44 While research specifically on PE teachers using student names is, at best limited, there is

45 research dealing with the topic of teachers using student names. From a broader educational

46 setting, Smith and Malec (1995) studied college professors using student names in sociology

47 classes and the effects it had on the students. The researchers concluded that the sociology
48 professors worked hard to learn and know their students' names. These professors felt that when
49 they used student names that their students participated more in class discussions and activities.
50 Thus, enhancing student learning from the class materials and assignments. Research conducted
51 in PE has also been limited in regard to PE teachers using student names. While research
52 regarding PE teachers use of student names has been limited, Barney (2005) studied the types of
53 interactions student teachers had with students during their elementary physical education
54 student teaching experience. In this study, student teachers were observed twice, once shortly
55 after the cooperating teacher had given full control of their classes to the student teacher (about
56 three weeks into the student teaching experience) and again toward the end of the student
57 teaching experience (during the fourteenth or fifteenth week of the student teaching). During
58 each observation, the researcher recorded the interactions between student teacher and students
59 to provide a better picture of these interactions, the student teacher wore a wireless microphone.
60 All interactions were later coded. It was found that student teachers in this study gave ample
61 instructions, and feedback and also had students engaged in activity throughout the lessons. One
62 last observation was that student teachers very seldom addressed their students by their names in
63 both lessons observed. On average student teachers would use student names five times during a
64 30-minute lesson. With such few instances of student teachers using student names, the
65 researcher observed that when the student teacher did use student names that students appeared
66 more than ready to do what was asked of them and appeared to appreciate the PE teacher
67 acknowledging them by using their name.

68 Another component in the PE setting when PE teachers use student names is during the
69 act of giving feedback to a student. Pangrazi (2007) discussed two types of feedback PE

70 teachers give to students, general and specific. General feedback can be such phrases as “Good
71 job”, “Way to go”, and “Don’t do that.” General feedback can be either positive or negative, it
72 doesn’t specify a behavior and vaguely informs the student how they performed the skill. One
73 element that separates specific feedback from general feedback is the use of student names. For
74 example, the PE teacher says, “John, your pass to your teammate was good, because it allowed
75 them to score the basket.” When PE teachers use first names, they are personalizing the
76 feedback, thus directing to the proper individual. Obviously, specific feedback also provides
77 more detailed information to students regarding their performance or behavior; however, the use
78 of student names is considered an essential element for effective, specific feedback.

79 The practitioner literature has referenced teachers using student names as a tool for
80 classroom management. Briggs (2013) stated, “Names are important. When a teacher uses a
81 student’s name it creates a contractual obligation: “I know who you are, you matter to me and
82 this is what I expect” (p. 14). Pangrazi and Beighle (2013) likewise feel that learning and
83 knowing student names is an effective method of classroom management. It goes a long way
84 stating a students’ name instead of the PE teacher saying, “Hey you!” when the PE teacher is
85 addressing a student. With the paucity of research concerning PE teachers using student names,
86 researching this topic can reinforce K-12 PE teachers the importance of using student names.

87 The nature of teachers using student names could be considered an element of showing
88 care towards students or caring on the teachers’ part. Research has found that PE teachers that
89 create an environment of caring have the potential of positively affecting student’s attitudes and
90 experiences towards physical education and being physically active throughout life. (Gane-
91 Overway & Guivernau, 2014 & Larson & Silverman, 2005). Caring in an educational setting has
92 been defined as “a set of relational practices that foster mutual recognition and realization,

93 growth, development, protection, empowerment, and human community, culture, and
94 possibility” (Gordon, Benner, & Nodding, 1996, p.13). Gano-Overway and Guivernau (2014)
95 explored how caring PE teachers, as identified by their students, described their experiences of
96 caring in their PE class. For this study three female and three male middle school PE teachers
97 were interviewed regarding their perceptions and opinions of being caring PE teachers, for the
98 purpose of affecting their students PE experience. After the interviews were analyzed, three
99 interview themes emerged: a) being in relation, b) creating and inclusive and accepting
100 classroom and c) empowering students. One of the talking points in the *Being in Relation* theme
101 from the PE teachers was developing relationships with their students by getting to know their
102 students. Specifically, they mentioned that by knowing and using the students’ names was a
103 wonderful way to develop a relationship. The knowing of student names “show you care about
104 the student” and “that they are important.” These types of results are positive and encouraging
105 for K-12 PE teachers. Yet, because of the limited research dealing with PE teachers knowing
106 and using student names, this study seeks to add to the body of research in this area. Thus, the
107 purpose of this study was to investigate PE teachers using student names and how it effects
108 students.

109 **Methods**

110 **Participants**

111 For this study 278 junior high school students (165 males & 113 females; 96 seventh
112 graders, 77 eighth graders, and 105 ninth graders) from two junior high schools located in the
113 intermountain west participated in this study. The participants were 11 to 15 years of age.

114 **Instrumentation**

115 Based on the literature dealing with teachers using student names, a 13-statement survey
116 was developed (See Table 1), which assessed using a YES/NO scale. Additionally, students
117 were asked to explain their answers to three survey statements (3, 5, & 10). The concluding
118 section of the survey addressed demographics. To establish content validity, five junior high
119 aged students, not involved in the study, and two Physical Education Teacher Education faculty
120 read through the survey questions, to ensure clarity and understanding of the instrument for the
121 intended population. The survey was then pilot tested on 12 nonparticipant junior high aged
122 students and was found suitable to its proposed purposes.

123 **Procedures**

124 Permission from the university Institution Review Board (IRB), the school district and
125 the PE teachers, parent consent and student assent were secured. A week after collecting consent
126 and assent the researchers returned to the schools and administered the survey. The researchers
127 explained the survey to the students and explained that if they did not want to take the survey it
128 would not negatively affect their grade in the PE class. After the surveys were completed by the
129 students the researchers collected the surveys for analysis. Ninety-eight percent of the student
130 enrollment in the PE classes took the survey.

131 **Data Analysis**

132 The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics in the Statistical Package for the
133 Social Sciences (SPSS) 26.0 program. Percentages were used to reflect the student's responses
134 for each item being analyzed. The qualitative data analysis comprised of a thematic content
135 analysis of the student's short answers. The researchers read and re-read the data until common
136 themes were evident for each survey question that asked the students to respond (Mueller &
137 Skamp, 2003).

138

Results

139 The data was analyzed for both male and female participants responses to the survey (See
140 Table 2). Statement five asked the participants if they feel it is important that their PE teacher
141 knows their name. Both male (76%) and female (96%) students feel it is important to them that
142 their PE teacher know their name. More specifically, statement one asked the participants if
143 their PE teacher knows their first name. Many of the participants (97% males & 98% females)
144 stated that their PE teacher did know their first name. When asked if the PE teacher knowing
145 their name made them feel more encouraged to participate in class activities (statement three),
146 78% of male and 88% of female students indicated it did. From a classroom management
147 perspective, a majority of students (81% males, 84% females) of the participants had experiences
148 when their PE teacher used their name for discipline reasons, as well as for giving praise (91%
149 males, 95% females). When, if the PE teacher knew the students name, students felt their PE
150 teacher cared about them, 86% of male students and 96% of female students felt it did. Finally,
151 participants were asked if their PE teacher knew their name when they are seen outside of the PE
152 class (the mall, grocery store, or in the halls of the school). Overwhelmingly, students said this
153 was the case (90% males and for the females 94%).

154 Short open-ended answers for three survey questions provided qualitative data for this
155 study. Here participants were asked to explain their yes/no answer. Statement three asked the
156 participants to explain their answer regarding whether their PE teacher states their name if, they
157 were more encouraged to participate in class activities. A female participant stated, “It makes
158 me want to participate and makes me feel included.” Another female participant said, “It makes
159 me want to be in my PE class.” A male participant said, “Because he knows me, I am willing to
160 participate.” For statement five the participants were asked if they feel it is important that their

161 PE teacher knows their name. A female participant stated, “My real name is Majorie and I go by
162 Scout, and she makes sure to call me by my preferred name. I like that.” Another female
163 participant explained, “I enjoy hearing my name it makes me feel important.” A male participant
164 said, “It shows respect to the students.” Another male student said, “I am a twin. He doesn’t
165 confuse me. He knows my name.” Finally, statement ten asked the participants if their PE
166 teacher knowing their name shows that they care about the students. A male participant stated,
167 “He cares enough to not call me ‘kid’”. Another male participant expressed, “By remembering
168 my name, it shows that he knows about me and cares.” A female participant indicated, “I feel
169 like I matter enough for her to know my name.” Another female participant simply stated, “She
170 knows I exist.”

171 **Discussion**

172 The purpose of this study was to investigate PE teachers using student names and how it
173 affects students. It was felt from the participants that when their PE teacher uses their name in
174 all interactions that they appreciate it, they like it, that the PE teacher cares for them and overall,
175 makes the PE experience positive. Student’s like hearing their PE teacher use their name
176 (Prusak, Vincent & Pangrazi, 2005; Roessing, Frey, & Storm-Fink, 2006 & Larson & Silverman,
177 2005). Why is this important? The results of this study found that both male and female
178 participants were encouraged to participate in class activities when their PE teacher said their
179 name. The literature has concurred with this effect of using student names (Petray-Rowcliffe,
180 Lavay, Williams, & Hakim-Butt, 2002). Much good can come from this. When students are
181 engaged in class activities there is a better opportunity for learning to take place (Barney, 2005).
182 Students learn skills which result in increased confidence in their ability to successfully
183 participate. Another point of PE teachers using student names in their interactions with their

184 students is that they are being respectful to the student. From this study, a male participant
185 stated, “Because it shows respect to the students.” This solidifies in the students’ mind that
186 while the PE teacher is the authority figure in their relationship respect can and should be shown
187 to students. If the PE teacher uses nicknames with the student, this sends a message of
188 casualness between the PE teacher and the students (Briggs, 2013). While different from a
189 nickname, a finding from this study is that students appreciate when PE teacher use their
190 preferred name.

191 A second finding from this study was that using student names is a good management
192 tool for PE teachers. Pangrazi and Beighle (2013) have stated that effective classroom
193 management requires learning the names of your students. From this study, many of the
194 participants stated that their PE teacher uses their name when they were disciplined for
195 misbehavior. From participant responses one participant stated, “When she calls me out, she
196 uses my name.” Another participant said, “When I have been disciplined, she calls me by my
197 name and not ‘that girl.’ In the practitioner literature Hichwa (1998) gave examples of using
198 student names in management situations. For example, “Billy, I need you to hold the ball still”
199 or “Joey, I need your full attention.” These brief examples illustrate the PE teacher using the
200 student’s name to let the student know they are being spoken to regarding classroom
201 management. Williams (1995) feels that when a PE teacher uses the students name it can
202 quickly get their attention to address the misbehavior that has or is going on.

203 One last observation from this study was how the participants felt with the use of student
204 names by their PE teacher was a method to communicate that they cared for them. Results from
205 this study by many of the participants felt that this was indeed, the case. Participants responded
206 to this statement by saying, “I feel like I matter enough for her to know my name”, and “By

207 remembering my name, it states that they know about me and care.” The literature agrees with
208 these findings. For example, Prusak, Vincent, and Pangrazi (2005) state that using student
209 names reminds students that they are important to the teacher. Larson and Silverman (2005)
210 found that when a teacher cares for their students it has the potential to influence positively their
211 self-esteem, self-confidence and are more motivated to participate in class activities.

212 **Study Implications**

213 This study identified certain aspects of PE teachers using student names and how it
214 affects the students. The authors believe that the results of this study can yield positive results
215 with their students. PE teachers typically have 35 to 40 students in each class, and if multiplied
216 by eight classes, a PE teacher will have 280 to 320 student names to learn and use in their
217 interactions with the students. This may seem daunting, yet with effort from the PE teacher,
218 student names can be learned. PE teachers may not consider how much good can come from
219 them using student names in their interactions. Yet, the results from this study strengthen this
220 notion of PE teachers using student names as good pedagogy. Participants in this study clearly
221 felt that when the PE teacher uses student names, it impacts desire to participate and make the
222 students overall PE experience a positive experience. From a PE teachers’ perspective, when
223 they use student names in a management situation the student knows they are being addressed
224 and asked to correct their misbehavior. There is no question or uncertainty who the PE teacher is
225 talking to. Typically, when a PE teacher disciplines a student by using their name, the PE
226 teacher can correct and in the process be respectful towards the student without embarrassing
227 them. Given that there is little research in this area that is specific to PE teachers, it was
228 encouraging to note that the students in these PE classes felt their teachers used student names
229 and were able to communicate the impact this had on their PE experience. This gives hope that

230 there is transference between other non-PE specific areas of teacher preparation and development
231 that is positively impacting the work of PE teachers.

232 **Study Limitations**

233 The participants from this study came from one geographical region of the United States.
234 In addition, the participants were divided into classes that were either all male or all female.

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299 Table 1
300 Student Name Survey

301 The following survey questions will ask you about your PE teacher knowing your first name in class, and
302 during games and activities. You will circle and/or respond from your experiences you have had with
303 your PE teacher using or not using your name. Thank you for participating in this survey.
304
305

- 306
307 1. Does your PE teacher know your first name?
308 **Yes No**
309
- 310 2. Does your PE teacher know you by a nickname or your first name?
311 **First Name Nickname**
312
- 313 3. When your PE teacher states your name in class, are you more encouraged to participate in
314 the class activity. Please explain your answer.
315 **Yes No**
316
- 317 4. If your PE teacher forgets your name, do you remind him/her of your name?
318 **Yes No**
319
- 320 5. Do you feel it is important that your PE teacher knows your name? Please explain your
321 answer.
322 **Yes No**
323
324
- 325 6. If your PE teacher disciplines you, does he/she use your name?
326 **Yes No**
327
328
- 329 7. Does your PE teacher use your name when he/she gives you praise?
330 **Yes No**
331
- 332 8. Do you feel you are important to your PE teacher when he/she uses your name?
333 **Yes No**
334
- 335 9. When your PE teacher knows your name, is it easier to approach him/her when you have a
336 question or concern?
337 **Yes No**
338
- 339 10. If your PE teacher knows your name, do you feel he/she cares about you? Please explain
340 your answer.
341 **Yes No**
342
- 343 11. When you see or talk to your PE teacher outside of your PE class (at the mall, store, or in the
344 halls at school), does he/she know your name?
345 **Yes No**
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12. Generally, do you feel your PE teacher knows a majority of the student's names in your PE class?

Yes **No**

13. If your PE teacher knows your name, does that affect your PE class experiences and activities/games you play in class?

Yes **No**

Grade: 7th____ 8th ____ 9th ____

Male _____ Female ____

396 Table 2
 397 Results from the Student Name Survey

		Yes		No	
		Male	Female	Male	Female
401					
402	1. Does your PE teacher	99%	98%	1%	2%
403	know your first name?				
404					
405	2. Does your PE teacher	87%	80%	13%	20%
406	know you by a nickname?				
407					
408	3. When your PE teacher	78%	88%	22%	12%
409	states your name in class,				
410	are you more encouraged				
411	to participate in class				
412	activities?				
413					
414	4. If your PE teacher forgets	63%	74%	37%	26%
415	your name, do you remind				
416	him/her of your name?				
417					
418	5. Do you feel it is important	76%	96%	24%	4%
419	that your PE teacher knows				
420	your name?				
421					
422	6. If your PE teacher disciplines	81%	84%	19%	16%
423	you, does he/she use your				
424	name?				
425					
426	7. Does your PE teacher use	91%	95%	9%	5%
427	your name when he/she				
428	gives your praise?				
429					
430	8. Do you feel you are important	71%	90%	29%	10%
431	to your PE teacher when he/she				
432	uses your name?				
433					
434	9. When your PE teacher knows	90%	96%	10%	4%
435	your name, is it easier to				
436	approach him/her when you				
437	have a question or concern?				
438					
439	10. If your PE teacher knows your	86%	96%	14%	4%
440	name do you feel he/she cares				
441	about you?				

442 Table 2 continued
 443 Results from the Student Name Survey

	Yes		No	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
447				
448	90%	94%	10%	6%
449				
450				
451				
452				
453	98%	97%	2%	3%
454				
455				
456				
457				
458	69%	83%	33%	17%
459				
460				
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462				