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

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# 1 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.
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The following scenarios could easily play out in a physical education (PE) class. Scenario One: Students have been put into groups of four and assigned to go to a specific station in the gym set up for the students to work on a specific volleyball skill. One group of students becomes off-task with the skills they are to work on. From across the gym the PE teacher observes the off-task behaviors the students are exhibiting. The PE teacher proceeds to yell across the gym, "Hey, you knuckleheads, stop messing around, and get back to what you have been asked to do!" The look on the group of student's faces is embarrassment and unbelief. A second scenario goes like this. Scenario Two: A 9th grade class has just completed game play in a basketball unit. As the class comes to an end a couple student's help collect equipment and jerseys used by the students during class activities. As the students return the equipment, the PE teacher says to one of the students, "Sally, I was watching you play today with your teammates, and I saw you make some great passes to your teammates today that led to points. You do a good job getting all of your teammates involved in the game." Sally responds with a big smile on her face and thanks the PE teacher for her words. Of the two scenarios the second one illustrates the PE teacher using the students' name. The simple exchange in the second scenario, which included the teacher using the students name, communicated to the student that their PE teacher knows her students' name: in this case the student responded positively to the PE teachers' comments. Students want and like it when their PE teacher knows their name (Barney & Christenson, 2012; Prusak, Vincent, & Pangrazi, 2005 & Petray-Rowcliffe, Lavay, Williams, & Hakim-Butt, 2002). While research specifically on PE teachers using student names is, at best limited, there is

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While research specifically on PE teachers using student names is, at best limited, there is research dealing with the topic of teachers using student names. From a broader educational setting, Smith and Malec (1995) studied college professors using student names in sociology

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

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

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

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

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

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

109 Methods

## **Participants**

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

#### Instrumentation

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

#### **Procedures**

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

## **Data Analysis**

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

138 Results

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

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

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

171 Discussion

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

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

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

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

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

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## **Study Implications**

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

there is transference between other non-PE specific areas of teacher preparation and development that is positively impacting the work of PE teachers. **Study Limitations** The participants from this study came from one geographical region of the United States. In addition, the participants were divided into classes that were either all male or all female. 

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

2. Does your PE teacher know you by a nickname or your first name?

First Name Nickname

1. Does your PE teacher know your first name?

3. When your PE teacher states your name in class, are you more encouraged to participate in the class activity. Please explain your answer.

Yes No

Yes

4. If your PE teacher forgets your name, do you remind him/her of your name?

Yes No

5. Do you feel it is important that your PE teacher knows your name? Please explain your answer.

Yes No

6. If your PE teacher disciplines you, does he/she use your name?

Yes No

7. Does your PE teacher use your name when he/she gives you praise?

Yes No

8. Do you feel you are important to your PE teacher when he/she uses your name?

Yes No

9. When your PE teacher knows your name, is it easier to approach him/her when you have a question or concern?

Yes No

10. If your PE teacher knows your name, do you feel he/she cares about you? Please explain your answer.

Yes No

11. When you see or talk to your PE teacher outside of your PE class (at the mall, store, or in the halls at school), does he/she know your name?

Yes No

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Table 2 Results from the Student Name Survey

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10001	s from the Student Name Survey				
		Yes Male	Female	No Male	Female
1.	Does your PE teacher know your first name?	99%	98%	1%	2%
2.	Does your PE teacher know you by a nickname?	87%	80%	13%	20%
3.	When your PE teacher states your name in class, are you more encouraged to participate in class activities?	78%	88%	22%	12%
4.	If your PE teacher forgets your name, do you remind him/her of your name?	63%	74%	37%	26%
5.	Do you feel it is important that your PE teacher knows your name?	76%	96%	24%	4%
6.	If your PE teacher disciplines you, does he/she use your name?	81%	84%	19%	16%
7.	Does your PE teacher use your name when he/she gives your praise?	91%	95%	9%	5%
8.	Do you feel you are important to your PE teacher when he/she uses your name?	71%	90%	29%	10%
9.	When your PE teacher knows your name, is it easier to approach him/her when you have a question or concern?	90%	96%	10%	4%
10	. If your PE teacher knows your name do you feel he/she cares about you?	86%	96%	14%	4%

Table 2 continued
Results from the Student Name Survey

<u> </u>				
	Yes Male	Female	No Male	Female
11. When you see or talk to your PE teacher outside of your PE class (mall, store or in the halls), does he/she know your name?	90%	94%	10%	6%
12. Generally, do you feel your PE teacher know a majority of the students' names in your PE class	98%	97%	2%	3%
13. If your PE teacher knows our name, does that affect your PE class experience and activities/games you play in class?	69%	83%	33%	17%