



Helping New Teachers Liven Up Physical Education

by Amanda Stewart and Steve Elliott

Do your students sometimes move too slowly in your physical education class? Have you ever felt frustrated when you sense they haven't given their best? If the answers are yes, ask yourself if your students are having fun. This article offers strategies to help beginner physical education teachers increase the tempo of their classes. Most of these ideas are applicable to any physical education setting and grade level. After incorporating some of these strategies into daily lesson plans beginner teachers should see an increase in student energy levels and skill improvement.

Music

Crank up the music and be *with it!* Music is often under-used in physical education. Music that students enjoy raises the fun level of a class, and increases their desire to move. It may require that the teacher keep up with the latest hits and screen for appropriate lyrics, but playing the latest music lets students know that you are not out of touch with their world. Having a teacher who is *with it* has been linked to increased rates of student on-task behavior and student achievement in physical education (Johnston, 1995).

Themes

Holidays, patriotic, and commemorative days offer an opportunity to combine lessons with current themes. Rather than thinking of special days as a distraction, use them to your advantage. A 12-minute run can become the Turkey Trot during the Thanksgiving season; a cardio circuit can become Heart Bingo in the month of February. Warming up to *Take me out to the ball game* during the World Series is sure to enliven students. Initiate special dress up classes. For example, the day before spring break set up volleyball, 3 on 3 scoop ball, limbo and hopscotch stations. Play beach music and invite students to wear Hawaiian shirts. Integrating themes into physical education classes is not only fun for students, but educates those in the school community about different cultural celebrations. When using holiday or ethnic themes, make an effort to represent the entire school population, and be sure to clear those activities with your administrator.

Renaming Games, Equipment and Drills

Another way to increase the energy and fun level in physical education classes is to rename equipment,

games and drills. A magic sponge ball sounds like more fun than a playground ball, and a Hershey kiss sounds like more fun than a triceps push-up. By being creative you can add mystery and newness to the ordinary. Have students make up new games and label the rules and equipment with words they have made up, or invite them to make up names for established physical education units and equipment.

Alter Traditional Effective Exercises

No matter how much students enjoy and appreciate the benefits of exercise, they will appreciate variety. There are many options that make traditional push-ups more fun. Partnering students during fitness regimes encourages cooperation and promotes a positive learning environment. For example, when doing push-ups with a partner, Partner A does a push-up with a tennis ball tucked neatly under his/her chin. Meanwhile, Partner B counts the push-ups, provides encouragement, and recovers the tennis ball when it slips away from beneath Partner A's chin.

Groupings

It is never fun to be chosen last, and you should not allow students to pick

their own partner or team in culminating activities. However, this does not mean that students cannot occasionally be paired or grouped with friends. Advance grouping takes careful thought and planning. Challenge students at the beginning of the term to behave in ways that will make you, the teacher, want to pair or group them up with friends from time to time. Post team group lists prior to classes. To add interest to grouping, make up fun names for them that will amuse students.

Tactics

Students will run from the locker room to the gym faster if you begin with an instant activity. The activity should not always be running laps or jumping rope for a count. You need to put some variety into it. When beginning classes with a game, have a wipe board with instructions so you do not have to repeat objectives and rules over and over. Encourage students to look for instructions on the board as soon as they leave the locker room. Stand by the board so that you can direct students to their specific groups (A, B, C, etc.). If an activity is well received, you may want to use it for more than one day but not more than a week. An activity that is not a big hit should be put aside. Another tactic is to allow students (if time permits) a few more minutes to finish a game or play out a tiebreaker during the next class day. Students will always appreciate an opportunity to finish out a game that has been started.

Permit Choices

Let students choose activities or drills for skill development. Although collecting opinions and ideas from students may take extra effort, changes made to lessons as a result of student input can create a fun environment. Students are more open to activities they enjoy, and you will be amazed at how much students will want to keep moving when their suggestions for physical activities are acted upon.

Humor and Smiles

A smile and humor goes a long way. The ability to laugh at oneself in various situations creates a warm atmosphere in which to learn. Students feed off of an energetic teacher, and as a result put forth more effort. We need to remind ourselves to be upbeat and enthusiastic prior to entering the gym. It is not always easy, but the effort pays off. Students can sense the teacher's mood and react accordingly.

Integrate Technology

These days, students are motivated by technology. They are comfortable with technology and find it fun! Using pedometers, heart rate monitors and assigning tasks that require the use of computers helps students think about and monitor their own performance. Technology also allows you, the teacher, to make more authentic assessments. Grouping, combined with technology, allows students to have fun while working in pairs or small groups. For example, during a heart monitor lesson, assign students to run with a partner for 15-minutes. Instruct them to stay within their target heart zone while carrying on a conversation at the same time. The result is that students will view running as beneficial *and* fun, while you will have immediate data on students' progress. Pedometers also liven up classes. It is not uncommon to see students so focused on improving their step count that they are observed running in place while the teacher is giving instruction, or hopping up and down as they wait to turn in equipment.

Give Positive Reinforcement

Taking time to tell students you appreciate their abilities, positive attitude, and efforts toward improvement goes a long way. Consider writing a note of appreciation when a student has shown extra effort, or inform the parents when a student has achieved a specific skill. Take time to pass on positive feedback to a student's other teach-

ers, and ask them to compliment the student on what s/he has achieved. Such positive reinforcements let students know that you care and appreciate their efforts.

References

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