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ROUTINES FOR THE PROACTIVE MANAGEMENT OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION LESSONS

Review by Steven Tan



William Oh

INTRODUCTION

Learning cannot take place in an atmosphere of chaos. As physical educators, we should be the designers and managers of the physical activity setting and learning environment. Many times, we may be tempted to blame our students for off-task or inappropriate behaviour and respond with punishment. However, frequent student misbehaviours may be a function of poor management practices, such as students waiting incessantly during attendance taking, or not distributing equipment effectively for skill practice.

Because teachers are more likely to encounter disruptive behaviour during

organisation and management periods than instruction or activity time (Rink, 1993; Siedentop, 1991), teachers should be proactive and effectively plan how they want students to handle these events. The use of routines can help make events run more smoothly and to maximise the opportunity to engage students in physical activity.

Routines are predetermined procedures established by teachers for dealing with frequently occurring situations in the physical education setting. Therefore, routines allow students to accomplish certain tasks within a lesson in specific ways. The goal of establishing routines with students is to let them know what the

expected behaviour is so that they are more likely to behave appropriately. The use of routines, therefore, helps to minimise or eliminate potential disruptions or delays to the lesson resulting from disorderly behaviours. This article highlights some of the research evidence describing the use of routines in the effective management of behaviours in physical education classes. It also suggests several routines for use by physical education teachers and provides guidelines for teaching them to students.

REVIEW OF RESEARCH

Numerous studies of effective teaching and classroom management by physical education specialists confirm the importance of establishing routines in class. (Fink & Siedentop, 1989; Nelson, Lee, Ashy, & Howell, 1988; Oslin, 1996; O'Sullivan & Dyson, 1994; Perron & Downey, 1997). Although these studies were conducted at primary and secondary levels, findings were relatively consistent.

The study of routines and expectations of physical education teachers has been limited to two studies in the primary school setting. Nelson et al.(1988) studied three expert physical education specialists during the first five classes at the start of the year. They reported each teacher introduced the majority of routines on the first day of class. These routines dealt mainly with managerial concerns such as formations, questioning, and starting and stopping activities. As the class proceeded, specific, positive feedback was provided. By the fifth lesson, all classes appeared to be running smoothly and most students learned to comply with the routines. At this stage, the focus of feedback shifted to specific reprimands to the few students who were still noncompliant. When observed again

at the end of the first semester, the teachers were still using similar routines established at the start of the year.

Fink & Siedentop (1989) examined the development of managerial routines and expectations by seven *effective* primary physical education teachers during the beginning of the year. The results revealed that there were strong similarities between these teachers and the practices of effective classroom teachers (Emmer, Evertson, & Anderson, 1980; Leinhardt, Weidman, & Hammond, 1987). These physical education teachers described routines clearly, provided students with opportunities to practice them, prompted appropriate student behaviours, and reinforced students for compliance.

O'Sullivan & Dyson (1994) studied 11 secondary school physical education teachers who set up rules, routines, and expectations at the start of the school year. These teachers did not perceive major discipline problems in their classes, and this perception was supported by the small incidents of off-task behaviours observed in their classes. They were observed giving a great deal of attention and time to the management of routines and appropriate behaviours at the beginning of the school year. In fact, these teachers saw appropriate procedures and expectations as important curricular content and carefully taught and thoroughly reinforced them with the students.

In another study, Oslin (1996) investigated the use of routines as organising features within secondary school physical education environments. All six teachers were observed to give clear demonstrations of appropriate and inappropriate performance of routines, as well as specific consequences

for non-compliance. Effective methods of applying routines included frequent interactions with students, in which explicit information regarding appropriate performance was provided. Maintenance of routines appeared to be dependent upon immediate and consistent application of consequences for noncompliance, prompts, and praise for compliance.

Perron & Downey's (1997) study described the management techniques used by secondary physical education teachers. Most of the eight experienced teachers used well-established routines and expectations as part of their management techniques. Students were familiar with the routines and knew the consequence of any breach of the regulations.

TEACHING ROUTINES

Although a number of routines used by teachers were similar in these research studies, the method of presentation varied frequently. Some teachers taught routines directly, whereas others provided practice activities to demonstrate and maintain routines. Overall, effective and expert physical education teachers were found to be more systematic and thorough in the way they established, taught, and implemented routines. For example, they:

- taught students the routine (i.e., explained the purpose and demonstrated good examples of appropriate and inappropriate responses) during the first few class periods;
- subsequently provided numerous opportunities for students to practise these routines;
- often prompted students with positive and specific feedback when first teaching the routines;
- reinforced by praising students frequently those who followed the routines correctly;
- used consequences on students who were still noncompliant when the majority of students had learnt the routine.

CONCLUSION

Routines will vary according to school expectations and policies, teacher philosophies, student maturity, and different content areas. For example, primary school specialists often teach and use concepts of self and general space to young learners throughout the educational gymnastics or movement education programmes. As such, appropriate ways for students to be in personal space, or seek out general space would be taught as routines. Other teachers would choose to add elements to routines to make them more holistic. For example, some teachers add directions about equipment to the 'attention/quiet' routine when students are in a basketball unit. When the signal is given to gain students' attention, students not only stop their activity, become quiet, and face the teacher, but also place the ball down near the feet.

Almost all PE teachers have routines in their classes. Not all, however, actively teach them or have routines well established. Therefore, routines are of little value unless students learn and accept them. It is important that routines are carefully taught to students early during the first few weeks of a school year so that they

know what is expected of them before patterns of inappropriate behaviour develop. Young learners will need practice and constant reinforcement. Older students usually have established routines that teachers may want to modify. In both cases,

teachers must share and make explicit their expectations of students in physical education classes, and ensure they consistently enforce routines which result in effective learning outcomes.



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Directing students to put equipment away.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING

Routines for Different Situations and Tasks

PE teachers have to anticipate student behaviours in the physical education setting. They must then decide on the stipulated ways of how they want students to conduct themselves in different situations and tasks. As such, routines have to be taught for all aspects of student behaviour that tend to recur frequently in classes. The following list highlights some of the more common routines that can be used in physical education.

1. *Quickly assemble students at a designated location so that attendance can be taken.*

For example: after changing into proper PE attire, ask students to assemble at the assembly area within 5 minutes. Students sit in rows in one of the assigned 8 groups, comprising approximately 5 students.

2. *Take student attendance in an efficient way.*

For example: ask group leaders to check attendance and report the names of absent students in their respective groups to the teacher.

3. *Organise a warm-up activity.*

Engage students in a specific warm-up without teacher prompting or supervision. This routine should be structured in such a way so as to free the teacher to deal with late arrivals and non participants (e.g., students who are feeling unwell or without PE attire).

For example: ask students to run around the activity area 3 times followed by stretching and endurance exercises led by rotating group leaders.

4. *Request students to reassemble.*

Gather students at a designated location and into a predetermined formation when directed.

For example: use two short bursts of the whistle to gather students in a semi-circle formation around the teacher. The inner students sit or squat down and the back students stand.

5. *Attract attention of students.*

Demand an immediate halt to an activity or bring to a close what students are doing.

For example: use one long whistle burst to signal students to stop their activity, become quiet, and face the teacher. If students have equipment, they are to stop using it immediately.

6. *Have students appropriately obtain or put away equipment.*

For example: at a given verbal command direct "Go" group leaders to collect or return the equipment.

7. *Keep medically unfit and injured students aware of what's happening in the lesson.*

Gather excused students around the teacher to still follow the lesson, particularly when the teacher is demonstrating and explaining a skill. These students can assist the teacher in helping to collect and put the equipment away while the other students are doing their warm-up activities.

8. *Give signals for dismissal.*

Inform students when to leave student the activity area and prepare for the next scheduled activity (e.g., classroom, canteen, assembly hall).

For example: after the group leaders have returned all the equipment, give a verbal signal for students to leave.



Attracting students' attention.

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