**Practice the 3M’s of Quality Teaching:**

**Management, Movement, and Maintenance**

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Effective class management skills characterize quality teaching. Effective teachers take guidance from these assumptions: that teaching is a profession, that students are in school to learn, and that the teacher's challenge is to promote learning. These assumptions imply a responsibility to a range of students, both those who accept instruction and those who do not. Teachers must maintain faith that students who have not yet found success will eventually do so. Instructing the majority of children in a class is relatively easy but making appreciable gains among low-aptitude and indifferent students is the mark of an effective teacher.

**Class Management Skills**

Class management skills are a prerequisite to effective instruction. Moving and organizing students quickly and efficiently requires comprehension of various techniques coupled with student acceptance of those techniques. Observers of the teaching process agree that if a class is unmanageable, it is unteachable. Teaching management skills should not be viewed as a negative or punishing proposition. Most students and teachers enjoy a learning environment that is organized, efficient, and allows a maximum amount of class time to be devoted to learning skills.

Class management skills should be taught to students in a manner similar to physical skill teaching. All skills need to be learned through practice and repetition until they become second nature. If teachers view class management skills in this light, they will have more empathy for students who do not perform well. Just as students make mistakes when performing physical skills, they will sometimes perform management skill incorrectly. A simple statement to the effect, "It appears that you forgot how to freeze quickly, let's practice," is much more positive than indicting a class for its carelessness and disinterest. One final thought; motor skills are practiced many times over without perfection ever being reached. In similar fashion, class management skills must be practiced many times while understanding that students will not always achieve perfection in this area.

**From Instruction to Activity**

A major goal of teachers is to have all students listen to directions prior to activity. The instructions should be specific and as clear as possible. A teacher who talks longer than 30 seconds during any single instructional episode will find a class beginning to lose interest. For this reason, teachers should alternate short instructional episodes with periods of activity. Too often, teachers sit students down and explain long and involved technical points of skill performance. In a series of points, most people remember only the first and last. This should help teachers understand that students will only be able to integrate and concentrate on one or two points during skill practice. Minimizing the amount of instructional content will reduce the length of an instructional episode and eliminate student frustration from having to remember an excessive amount of material.

Tell students "when before what." This implies telling the class when to perform an activity before stating what the activity is. An effective way to implement "when before what" is to signal starting an activity by using keywords. Keywords could be "Begin!" or "Start!" or the school nickname. Instructions are implemented by a statement similar to "When I say Sun Devils [school nickname], I'd like you to...." Another common example is "When I say Go! I want you to find a partner and practice tossing and catching." Any number of keywords can be used to encourage youngsters to listen to the entire set of instructions. Since the keyword is not given until all directions have been issued, students cannot begin until they hear the selected keyword.

**Stopping the Class**

A consistent signal should be established for stopping the class. It does not matter what the signal is, as long as it always means the same thing. Using an audio signal (such as a whistle blast) and a visual signal (raising the hand overhead) is effective, since some youngsters may not hear the audio signal if they are engrossed in activity. Whereas a loud audio signal is used to stop a class, a voice command should always be used to start the class (see keywords above). Regardless of the signal used to indicate a stop, it is best to select a different signal than the one used to start the class. If children do not respond to the signal to stop, the procedure must be practiced. Asking a class to freeze on signal is effective practice. As children become more effective at stopping, their responses should be reinforced. Too often teachers reinforce skill performance but, fail to reinforce management behavior. If it is not reinforced regularly, it will not be performed by the class. To evaluate class effectiveness in responding to the stop signal, time the latency of the response to the signal. If a class takes longer than 5 seconds to freeze and get ready for the next command, stopping and listening should be practiced.

Expect 100% cooperation when asking students are asked to stop, look, and listen. If some students stop and listen and others do not, class morale soon degenerates. Students begin to wonder why they have to stop but other students don't. Scan the class to see if all students are attentive and ready to respond to the next set of directions. If a teacher settles for less than full attention, students will fulfill those expectations.

**Organizing Students into Groups and Formations**

Effective teaching demands quick division of students into teachable groups. Simple activities can be used to accomplish this in an enjoyable and rapid fashion. For example, the activity **Toe to Toe** can be used to teach children to quickly find partners. The goal of the game is to get toe to toe with a partner as fast as possible. Other challenges can be to get foot to foot or look into the eyes of a partner. Students without a partner are instructed to go to the center of the teaching area (marked by a cone or spot) immediately and find someone else without a partner. This gives students a place to find a partner, as opposed to feeling unwanted while running around the area looking. Emphasis should be placed on rapid selection of the nearest person to keep children from looking for a favorite friend or telling someone that "they are not wanted" as a partner. If students insist on staying near a friend, t tell the class to move throughout the area and find a different partner each time "back to back" is called.

Another effective activity for arranging students in groups of a selected size is **Whistle Mixer**. When the whistle is blown a certain number of times, students form groups corresponding to the number of whistles and sit down to signify that they have the correct number in their group. Students who are left out go to the center of the area and find the needed number of members. Once this skill is mastered, students move quickly into proper-sized groups depending on the number of signals. Hand signals can also be used to show the size of the groups to be made.

To divide a class into two equal groups, have students get toe to toe with a partner. One partner sits down while the other remains standing. Those standing are asked to go to one area, after which those sitting are then moved to the desired space. Getting into groups is a skill that needs to be learned and practiced on a regular basis.

Other suggestions for finding partners are to ask students to find a partner wearing the same color, with a birthday during the same month, with a phone number that has two similar numbers in it, and so on. To arrange students in equal‑sized groups, the instructor can place an equal number of different colored beanbags or hoops on the floor. Students are asked to move throughout the area. On signal, they sit on a beanbag. All students with a red beanbag are in the same group, green beanbags make up another group, and so on.

**Fall-in** is an effective technique for moving a class into a single‑file line or circle is to have students run randomly throughout the area until a signal is given. On signal, while continuing to move, students move to the perimeter of the area and fall in line behind someone until a circle is formed. This exercise can be done while students are running, jogging, skipping, or walking. As long as students continue to move behind another person, the circle will form automatically. The teacher or a student leader then leads the line into a desired formation or position.

Another method of moving a class into formation is to ask students to get in various formations without talking. They can offer visual signals but cannot ask someone verbally to move. Two groups can be used to compete against one another to see which forms the desired formation fastest. Hold up a desired shape drawn on a large card to signal the desired formation. Young students can learn to visualize various shapes through this technique.

**Using Equipment**

The first and most important guideline when using equipment such as balls, hoops, jump ropes, and the like is that every youngster must have a piece for personal use. When large equipment or apparatus is used, as many stations or groups as possible should be established. For a class of 25, six benches, mats, or jumping boxes should be the minimum amount of equipment available so students have only a short wait in line. One way to avoid standing and waiting for a turn is to use return activities. When using this approach, students are asked to perform a task or tasks on their return to the end of the line.

Instructors must demonstrate the proper method of using equipment. Youngsters should learn to get a piece of equipment and work with it in an acceptable fashion. Equipment should always be placed in the same (home) position when the class is called to attention. For example, beanbags might be placed on the floor, balls placed between the feet, and jump ropes folded and placed behind the neck. Home positioning equipment avoids the problem of youngsters striking one another with the equipment, dropping it, or practicing activities when they should be listening. Positioning the equipment out of the student's hands is usually preferable.

Equipment should be distributed to students as rapidly as possible. When students wait for a piece of equipment, time is wasted. Often, teachers assign student leaders to get the equipment for a squad. This means that only the leaders are assigned a task, while other students sit and wait (and may become discipline problems). The easiest and fastest method is to have the leaders place the equipment around the perimeter of the area. On signal youngsters move to a piece of equipment and begin practicing immediately. The reverse procedure can be used for putting equipment away. This contrasts with the practice of placing the equipment in a bag and telling students to "run and get a ball." This approach often results in youngsters being knocked down and bruised. The child who first picks up a piece of equipment is entitled to retain possession of it. Others should respect this right and not attempt to take the piece away from the individual. This principle also holds for space possession. The child who first steps inside a hoop, on a mat, or into any designated space is entitled to occupy that space.

**Following are brief descriptions of some of the techniques that were used:**

**“Freeze” Signal:**

Clearly, students participating in physical activity, be it indoors or out, will be noisier than students sitting at desks in a classroom. Further, students participating in activity are moving and getting attention consistently without a concrete signal for attention is difficult. For these reasons and others that are unique to managing children in activity, a consistent signal should be used for stopping students and getting attention. Teachers should choose a “freeze” signal with which they feel comfortable. Some signals for “freeze” include a whistle, tambourine and verbal command. The key to a successful “freeze” signal however is consistency. The same signal should be used every time students are expected to “freeze.” Further, the teacher should wait until students successfully complete the “freeze” (about 5-seconds) before proceeding with instructions. If students are not “freezing” within the expected time, then teachers should practice the skill until they are satisfied with the results.

**“Go” Signal:**

Not unlike a consistent signal for “freeze,” teachers should establish a consistent signal for when students should begin activity. If a signal is not established for telling students when it is acceptable to begin activity, then students will make this choice on there own. In this case, usually students choose to be active beforethe teacher expects them to be active. To eliminate this problem, establish a simple signal for when to begin activity. My signal for students is “Go.” Students know (because I constantly remind them) that they do not begin activity until the signal “Go” is given.

**When before What:**

Related to the “Go” signal is a technique that allows teachers to make sure that students wait until all instructions are given before beginning activity. This technique is called “When before What.” Teachers tell students when they will be allowed to begin activity before they are told what to do. Here is an example: “When I say “Go” I would like you to skip.” This simple statement cues students to wait for the “Go” signal before they begin skipping. This technique too must be practiced until all students wait for the signal to begin activity.

**Toe-to-toe:**

Toe-to-toe is a technique for quickly and effectively pairing students. Students are moved around and quickly assume the “freeze” position when prompted. When all students successfully “freeze,” the teacher gives the verbal command “toe-to-toe.” Students then quickly move to the person who is closest to them and they stand to-to-toe. Children are not allowed to run across the room to search for a friend with whom to partner. Instead, they must choose the person closest to them. Any student without a partner will quickly move to the center of the teaching area with his/her hand in the air. Other students without partners will meet there and will partner up. If there is an odd number of students, then the teacher will meet the student without a partner in the center of the teaching area and will quickly place that student in a group. Again, this technique must be practiced until students successfully get to-to-toe with the person closest to them.

**Dividing the class into equal halves:**

Once students are paired (toe-to-toe), then one partner is asked to place a hand on his/her own shoulder (any cue can be used here, placing a hand on the shoulder is just one example). Once this is done, the teacher can divide the class into two equal groups (assuming an even number of students). The teacher instructs students with their hand on their shoulder to line up on one line and instructs the remaining students to line up on another. Viola, the class has been divided into two equal groups quickly and efficiently.

**Handling Equipment:**

Equipment is often used in physical education class. When equipment is not handled properly, a lot of time can be lost. Too often teachers place equipment in a single area and students must waste time fighting to get equipment. Further, it is often the students who are least cooperative with equipment who set the pace for physical education classes. In order to remedy these problems, equipment should be dispersed around the teaching area and students should always be given something to do with equipment before they are asked to get or replace equipment.

**Freezing with Equipment:**

When students are asked to “freeze” with equipment, a “home base” should be determined for the equipment. This technique is used so that students will not be placed in a situation where they can make a choice to listen to instructions or play with equipment. Most often students will make a choice to play with equipment when it is in their hands. Who can blame them? Therefore, students should have a “home base” for equipment (e.g., between the feet) so that on every “freeze” they will place equipment in “home base” and will not be tempted to fiddle with it.

**Forming Circles:**

Circle formations are often used in physical education classes. A simple technique for getting students into circle formations is “Fall in.” This technique to forming circles uses movement to form the circle. Students are asked to move around the teaching area and on the command “fall in” they move to the center of the teaching area and form a circle while continuing to move. Students make sure that they have one student in front of them and another behind them and work on keeping equal spacing as they move.

##### **Model desired behavior:**

Perhaps one of the most effective ways to give instruction and to motivate students is to model behaviors in which you wish your students to participate. This means that when you ask students to jog or walk or skip, that you should model these activities for them. Of course it is not critical that the teacher be proficient at all activities to be modeled. In fact, many students are motivated to attempt activities when they see the teacher model an activity at which he/she is not proficient.

**Reinforcement:**

As with any behavior, management behavior that is reinforced is more likely to continue. For this reason, teachers should reinforce management behaviors that they wish their students to continue. Many times physical education teachers reinforce skill, but they do not reinforce behavior. Teachers should give positive specific feedback when students “freeze” consistently or when they wait for the “Go” signal before they begin activity. Positively reinforcing students who exhibit desired behavior will also help to motivate students who are not exhibiting desired behavior.