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Classic Basics: Enhancing Self-Regulatory Behaviors in Early Childhood PE

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“Play is often talked about as if it were a relief from serious learning. But for children play is serious learning. Play is really the work of childhood.” Fred Rogers

“Research provides more and more evidence of the positive effects that well-developed play has on various areas of child development, such as children’s social skills, emerging mathematical ability, mastery of early literacy concepts, and self-regulation.” Elena Bodrova and Deborah Leong

Abstract: This session will focus on a developmental essential of any early childhood educational setting – the life skill of focus and self-control. A variety of limited movement management techniques for use with young children (PreK-Grade 2) in a physical education setting will be presented to not only educate and reinforce this early childhood life skill, but for use in maintaining an effective developmentally appropriate teaching environment for this age group.

Introduction

Play is a significant part of a child’s early experiences and is a primary vehicle for learning. It is part of an all-encompassing developmental process. Through positive play experiences, children learn about themselves and the world around them. It is evident that the psychomotor, cognitive, and affective domains of a young child are greatly influenced through an active learning environment. Play and quality movement experiences provided through structured and unstructured activities encourages a joy of moving and a feeling of confidence within a young child’s being. Movement experiences for the

PreK-Grade 2 child must be of a personal nature. It is important that physical education teachers be concerned about providing a stimulating, active environment with plenty of opportunities to explore and discover learning through the most natural option – movement.

“As children, our reward for play is strong because we need it to help generate a rapidly developing brain.” **Stuart Brown**

In her book, *Mind in the Making*, Ellen Galinsky discusses the seven essential “life skills” that children must have to be successful in life. Those skills are:

1. Focus and Self-Control
2. Perspective Taking
3. Communicating
4. Making Connections
5. Critical Thinking
6. Taking on Challenges
7. Self-Directed, Engaged Learning

As she states: *“It is clear that there is information that children need to learn – facts, figures, concepts, insights, and understandings. But we have neglected something that is equally essential - children need life skills.”* (p.1)

Galinsky cites three important points about these seven life skills that teachers need to acknowledge and address in their classes with young children. (p.3)

1. They are as Important for them as well as us as adults: *“. . . in fact, we have to practice them ourselves to promote them in our children. That’s why we call them life skills.”*
2. *“We don’t need expensive programs, materials, or equipment to promote these skills. We can promote them in everyday ways through the everyday fun things we do with children.”*
3. *“It is never too late to help children learn these life skills, no matter what their ages.”*

The first essential life skill is focus and self-control. According to Galinsky, children need to be able to focus in order to function in their environment. They need to determine what is important and to pay attention to this, despite many distractions. Focus is one of the essential skills we need to promote in our children. Through it and self-control comes the ability to pay attention, remember the rules, and inhibit one’s initial response to achieve a larger goal – which in many cases is learning to about oneself, others, and the world we live in. Positive and appropriate learning experiences do much to help a child to achieve success, not only now, but later in life.

Positive and Personalized Physical Education Experiences for Young Children

As the title of this presentation suggests – *Classic Basics: Enhancing Self-Regulatory Behaviors in Early Childhood PE* – well-designed physical education classes are a natural learning environment for young children to develop the life skill of focus and self-control. The key concept that physical education employs is this endeavor is what our whole mission is – learning by motion. Play is active, it is physical, it is intellectual, it is social, it is emotional. Play is the way in which children learn most effectively.

The intent of this presentation is to show how we can use a variety of movement-oriented management techniques for use in a physical education setting with young children to not only educate and reinforce this early childhood life skill of focus and self-control, but for use in maintaining an effective developmentally appropriate teaching environment for this age group (PreK-Grade 2).

A movement experience for a child must be designed to enhance the total development of the child. It must be personal in nature, varied in experiences, success-oriented, and above all, safe in conductance. Children, 3-8 years of age, are going through some critical periods of physical, mental, emotional, and social development. Realistically, a physical education teacher does not have a great deal of time to focus individual attention on each child; therefore, the teacher needs to make every effort to insure that our group activities have an enjoyable, enlightening, encouraging, and informal atmosphere for participation. In order to achieve these objectives, we must utilize developmentally appropriate class management practices to insure maximum activity.

In the physical education class, we must establish a routine of management that children feel comfortable in being themselves and feeling safe to explore movement opportunities. Our class routine should “cover” entering and leaving the gym, transitions within class activities, and self-control within each activity. Managing in motion with movement-oriented strategies is a natural for the PreK-Grade 2 child.

Entering the Gym – Stop, Look and Listen

Each day, we re-establish Stop, Look and Listen

STOP moving.

LOOK for the teacher.

LISTEN for the next instructions.

Be Ready to **MOVE** again.

We re-establish routine each day with starting and stopping. Each movement sequence we present in class is preceded with two reminders for the children – *Where to Go* and *What to Do* when *we get there*. As we enter the gym each time, our first instructions are *Where and What*. The first class period we introduce two concepts that will be our Stop, Look, and Listen for the rest of the year: Spots and Freeze.

SPOTS

Spots become our Where to Go. Spots may be tape marks, pieces of paper, bean bags, hoops, any object placed on the floor as a designation point for each child. They are arranged to allow each child room in which to move in their own space. At the door, the teacher tells the children to “*find a spot to stand on*” – the action standing on is our - *What to Do*. This becomes their personal spot for the class period. Once each child has found a spot to stand one, we are ready for the Freeze concept.

FREEZE

Freeze is the word we use for Stop, Look and Listen. Now that we are on our personal spots, we are ready to play “Freeze.” With young children, much of our movement is imaginative and creative. This approach is emphasized and encouraged through a questioning method which helps us in understanding just how much young children already know about a concept and if they can interpret it in a bodily expression. Use the following sequence in establishing the “Freeze” concept:

1. Simply ask the question, “*Can someone show me how your body would look if it was a frozen popsicle?*” Usually there are one or two precocious children who will show you a body posture imitating that frozen popsicle.
2. Please Compliment those children who can immediately show that posture. Then, ask the other children if they “copy” that child’s body. Again compliment the children who can do this.
3. This posture becomes our “Freeze” posture for the class. Ask the children: “When I call out ‘Freeze,’ show me how your body would like a frozen popsicle.” Do this several times to insure they understand what to do when you say the word “Freeze.” This becomes our stopping signal – *Stop, Look and Listen* - whenever we need it in class. We practice and use it every class period.

Transition Between Class Activities

Transitions between class activities can be helpers or killers. During a physical education class, there will times where we will not only change to another activity but we also move to another place in the gym. As teachers, we must have an organized plan as to *what is next and where we need to be next*. As a veteran teacher told me once, “If you don’t have a plan for the children, they will make up their own plan and you probably won’t like it.” *Transition means change*. If we have a variety of activities in our classes (which we should with young children), change is a natural element of our class management. Change is a constant element in the school setting. As teachers, we need:

(1) to be continually looking ahead as to what is next in our planned lesson and where it will take place,

(2) to be ready to set the children up for any planned tempo change such as going from an active to a passive environment or vice versa,

(3) to be set to move the class to a different location within an environment – from one side of the room to another,

(4) to be cognizant of any changing in the organizational structure such as moving from a circle to a line or going from a seated to a standing position.

Children are recognized as active beings. Therefore movement or physical activity are great tools for helping them to develop focus and self-control in a learning environment and to become successful in school and other environments where restraint and attention is warranted. Movement is a natural and effective way to manage and guide children in developing personal focus and self-control necessary for life.

Session Agenda and Topics

How Young Children Learn

The Importance of Play

Managing with Movement

Stop Look and Listen – Spots and Freeze

Transition Strategies Using Movement

Motion Strategies to develop Focus and Self-Control Skills

Listening – I See, Clapping, Sounds

Imagining – See Me Be Me, Mirrors, Ralph the Rag, The Sneak

Fine Motor Skills – Paper Clap, Spider

Social Awareness – Busy Bee, Help Your Neighbor

Lining Up – Feet to Seat, One at a Time, Follow a Line

In Line – Split Finger, The Count, Hand Signals, Signing

Conclusion

Resources

American Sign Language Websites

Basic ASL: First 100 Signs

<http://lifeprint.com/asl101/pages-layout/concepts.htm>

Signing Savvy

<http://www.signingsavvy.com/browse-letter>

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Brown, Stuart. *Play: How it Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul*. New York, NY: Penguin Group, 2009.

http://nifplay.org/about_us.html

Galinsky, Ellen. *Mind in the Making: The Seven Essential Life Skills Every Child Needs*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2010.

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