

SIGNET Physical Education: Maximizing Physical Activity
Through the Use of Management Strategies

An Article Critique

Rebecca S. Gohs

Eureka College

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Author Note

Rebecca S. Gohs, Department of Kinesiology, Teacher Certification Program, Eureka
College

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In the article, *FRIG'N Physical Education: Management Strategies to Maximize Physical Activity*, Beighle and Erwin present a strong case for the importance of utilizing management strategies to increase student engagement in “physical activity for at least 50 percent of each physical education lesson” (p. 16). However, the term “lesson” does not carry the same meaning as the term “class time” as used in the NASPE Guidelines (2009, p. 14) and Healthy People 2010 (p. 27) report. Additionally, the acronym the authors chose to help readers recall the management strategies weakens the foothold on professionalism that physical educators are striving for within the larger field of education.

The term lesson can be understood to mean only the activity, or stated another way, the main content of the class period. For example, this author is currently in an on-going conversation with a teacher-candidate who is defending the rule that the teacher will wait until the class is silent and still before beginning the lesson. This comes from an unfortunate observation experience that the student recently had. Indeed it is important to have the students' attention before talking; however, waiting, in this case, is aligned closer with wasting time. Professors of pre-service teachers must help students understand Focus Area 22, Goal 10 of the Healthy People 2010 report that aims to "increase the proportion of adolescents who spend at least 50 percent of school physical education class time being physically active" (p. 27). Class time is a more universally understood term referring to the time in between bells; while the term lesson is not as singularly defined.

Beighle and Erwin's (2013) purpose for writing the article is to identify class management as the reason for not achieving the goal of student engagement in physical

education and to “suggest strategies for maximizing physical activity while ensuring that all domains of learning are addressed in a quality physical education lesson” (p. 16). In this endeavor, they are quite successful. Seasoned Physical Educators will agree with the value of freezing students before talking, retrieving equipment in an efficient manner, grouping students quickly, and nurturing appropriate behavior in students.

The acronym used by Beighle and Erwin (2013) spells a word that is used in urban culture to replace a more common curse word (Mercunium, 2003). To maintain and increase professionalism in the field, it is necessary to propose a replacement acronym that includes the management strategies of Beighle and Erwin and adds a fifth strategy—transition. The element of transition is passed over quickly in their explanations of retrieving equipment and grouping students. Management strategies for times of transition are valuable to increasing student engagement in Physical Education. Transition certainly deserves its own letter in the revised acronym—SIGNET.

SIGNET Physical Education invokes a strong emotion of pride as the word refers to one’s seal, stamp, or signature. This acronym represents the following management strategies: start and stop signals, instructing students, grouping students, nurturing appropriate behavior, equipment, and transitions.

Start and stop signals such as whistles, raising of the teacher’s hand, or a rhythmic clapping pattern keep learners safe and gain their attention prior to instruction. Metzler reminds teachers that these audible, silent, or combination signals must remain consistent to facilitate student understanding (2011). Not all signals must freeze students as Beighle and Erwin (2013) describe, some may prompt the student to start an activity. This signal is just as important to increasing student engagement in physical activity as the stop or freeze signal.

Instructing students is most effective in short amounts of time with frequent opportunities for practice of progressively more complex skills (Beighle & Erwin, 2013). Additionally, when the value and relevance of instruction is given to the students, they are more likely to be engaged in active listening which leads to active participation. Teachers commonly refer to this as the set induction or gaining momentum (Metzler, 2011). Mention of instruction without mention of cues, guides, and feedback is like ice cream without chocolate. Cues, guides and feedback enhance learning by providing “pieces of information communicated before,” (Metzler, 2011, p. 118) during, and after practice, respectively. There are endless possibilities for how to instruct students so that they maximize their physical activity during class time.

Grouping students can be a time consuming process that prevents students from being active—the very goal of PE. The grouping method described by Beighle and Erwin (2013) in which students pair themselves and then follow the teacher’s instruction for one of them to raise their hand and then form a large group of those students who are raising their hands is clever; however, after the first time this strategy is used, the students are quick to catch on and partner up with someone they do not want on their team. When teams need to be equal in skill, it is always best to plan ahead and write out the teams prior to class. If the teacher is looking for teams to be of the social nature, then allowing them to find a partner and stay with their partner as the teacher forms larger teams of partners is advisable. For any count off method, the teacher should organize the students in a line prior to notifying the class that they will be getting into teams. For example, after running a lap, students can be instructed to remain in the finishing order while they walk a cool-down lap or told to get on the base line to do warm-up drills. With the students already on the base line, the teacher can simply ask the students to take a step forward or a step backward; all those on the same side of the line are a team.

Nurturing appropriate behavior often takes time away from the activity. Beighle and Erwin explain how to effectively establish rules with a sequence of lesser to greater consequences, including a “time-out with the child choosing when to return to the activity” (2013, p. 17). They also advise “that the sequence of consequences start over at the halfway point in the lesson” (Beighle & Erwin, 2013, p. 17) if the class is longer than 30 minutes. Beighle and Erwin (2013) have a clear understanding of the delicate balance it requires to nurture appropriate behavior while maximizing physical activity of all students.

Equipment can easily be a distraction to students during instruction time, an implement that is used incorrectly, and a time waster when it must be retrieved. For each problem that equipment poses, there are ample strategies to maximize the physical activity of students. Teachers should arrange the equipment in such a way that it is easy to access, but not highly visible to students during instruction time. For example, loose equipment can be tucked in a corner with a field hockey net around it. The teacher can quickly move the net and kick the loose balls to students scattered in open space. If possible, the equipment should be dispersed evenly around the gym (Beighle & Erwin, 2013) on equipment racks. When instruction calls for the use of equipment, students should be instructed how to listen and pay attention to demonstrations without the incorrect use of the equipment. This can be done by instructing the students to have two points of contact (one above and one below the waist) on the bat while listening. This makes it difficult for students to swing the bat. Students should always hustle when retrieving equipment that has gone out of play (Beighle & Erwin, 2013) and for those who cannot retrieve equipment quickly a backstop or net should be used (Block, 2000).

Transition time between activities must be quick and efficient in order to maximize the physical activity of students. Beighle and Erwin noted in their explanation of equipment retrieval

that “students should be encouraged to hustle... and given a task to engage in” (2013, p. 16) upon their return to maximize physical activity. Likewise, they advise that if students without a partner make it to the center of the gym quickly, they can earn the privilege of choosing their own partner rather than the teacher choosing for them (Beighle & Erwin, 2013). When transitioning to the closure part of the lesson plan, students should be directed to put away equipment first and then move to a central location (Metzler, 2011). It is most helpful to use start and stop signals to facilitate the movement between activities. Elementary teachers are well-loved for their use of music during times of transition. The tempo of the music can motivate students to move quickly or to slow down and move with more care. Animal walks can also provide creative ways for students to move from one station to another in a controlled manner.

Time is the teachers’ most precious commodity and not one second of it should be wasted on inactivity during physical education class. Professionals, rookies and veterans alike, are encouraged to read and apply the management strategies of Beighle and Erwin (2013). Their ingenuity and creativity certainly caught the attention of this regular JOPERD reader.

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FRIG'N Physical Education: Management Strategies to Maximize Physical Activity

Aaron Beighle
Heather E. Erwin

The health and cognitive benefits of regular physical activity are well established (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010; Strong et al., 2005). However, the physical activity levels of children remain low (Troiano et al., 2008). To address this deficit, schools have been identified as an ideal location for physical activity promotion. Ideally, physical education class will serve as the foundation, and the physical educator will lead the efforts (Castelli & Beighle, 2007). For the physical educator to advocate credibly for physical activity throughout the school day (e.g., activity breaks), it is essential to maximize physical activity levels during physical education. It is recommended that students engage in physical activity for at least 50 percent of each physical education lesson (National Association for Sport and Physical Education, 2009; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2000). This goal is difficult to attain if students are sitting or standing in line for long periods of time during instruction, while activities are set up, or while other management tasks are addressed.

This article will suggest strategies for maximizing physical activity while ensuring that all domains of learning are addressed in a quality physical education lesson. These strategies are designed to guarantee an efficient, active, and positive educational experience for all students. With some modifications, these strategies can be implemented throughout P-12 physical education.

Efficient instruction that maximizes physical activity can be characterized with the acronym FRIG'N, which stands for *freezing*

students, *retrieving* equipment, *instructing* students, *grouping* students, and *nurturing* appropriate behavior. These procedures and routines should be practiced often so that they become automatic during physical education.

Freezing students promotes efficient transitions and increased safety. The teacher should establish a consistent start signal for the students (e.g., "Go!") and a consistent stop signal for the students (e.g., "Freeze!"). The signals should differ so as not to confuse students. Establishing a freeze position, such as hands on knees or hands on shoulders, is recommended. Freezing should be introduced during the first lesson of the school year and practiced two to three times at the beginning of each lesson throughout the year to serve as a reminder to the students of what the teacher expects. All students should be expected to stop within three seconds of the stop signal.

Retrieving equipment should be a well-organized procedure. The teacher should have all equipment accessible to the students and ready for activity. One way to do this is to place the equipment along the perimeter of the activity area so that students, for example, need not wait in line to retrieve a ball out of a bag. Teachers need to tell the students to refrain from picking up equipment until directed to do so and to specify what they are allowed to do with the equipment once they get it. Students should be encouraged to hustle to retrieve equipment and given a task to engage in once the equipment is retrieved. This encourages them to retrieve the equipment quickly and may reduce inappropriate use of equipment.

Instructing students is most effective in bouts of 30 seconds or less. Students struggle to focus on verbal instructions for long periods of time. Thus, giving instructions in short bouts increases the likelihood that students will listen and also increases activity. Rather than provide a bout of instruction that lasts two minutes, four shorter bouts dispersed between practice times are more efficient for physical activity and will improve instructional effectiveness. It is suggested that a physical educator provide information on cues, rules, or other knowledge in small pieces, progressing from simple to complex and eventually piecing it all together for the "whole" picture. For example, the teacher can quickly describe and demonstrate a "T" for the throw and have students practice. Then he can freeze them, describe and demonstrate the "L," and have them practice. Next he can freeze them and challenge them to focus on stepping with opposition, building upon the "T" and "L" with the arms. After the students practice, the teacher freezes them, discusses the follow-through, and shows what a complete throw looks like, addressing all four cues. Then students practice again. Each time the students are practicing, the teacher walks around giving individual feedback and personal challenges to students.

Grouping students should be a quick transition from one activity to the next. A number of methods have been shown to be most efficient in physical education. To put students in pairs, the teacher should instruct students to find a partner and stand toe-to-toe (or elbow-to-elbow or knee-to-knee). Any students who cannot find a

partner should meet in the middle. If they hustle to the middle, they may choose a group of three. If not, the teacher selects the groups of three. For two equal teams, the teacher first has students get into pairs. Then she instructs one person from each pair to raise a hand. All those with hands raised go to one line or area. All those without hands raised go to another line or area. For groups of three, four, or more, the teacher instructs students to get into groups of X. Similar to the pairs procedure, students who cannot find a group should hustle to the middle, where the teacher can quickly form groups. Finally, for three equal teams, the teacher has the students form groups of three. Then he asks one person in each group to raise a hand. That person hustles to a designated area. Then he asks the next person to raise a hand. That person moves to a different designated area. The last person moves to a third designated area. Three teams have now been formed. This can be repeated for other numbers of teams as well.

Nurturing appropriate behavior is an important goal when working with youths in any setting. In physical education, teaching students personal and social responsibility skills is essential for maintaining a safe learning environment. However, strategies for teaching these skills must be efficient, so as not to interfere with physical activity.

The first step for teaching appropriate behavior is to establish three to five concise and positively phrased rules such as "Respect yourself and others." Next, appropriate consequences for unacceptable behavior are necessary. For example, one sequence of consequences might be as follows: first offense, a quiet warning; second offense, time-out with the child choosing when to return to the activity; and for a third offense, time-out for the remainder of the class. If the class lasts longer than

30 minutes, it is advocated that the sequence of consequences start over at the halfway point in the lesson. In other words, if the lesson is 40 minutes long, at the 20-minute point everyone starts over with a clean slate. A common argument against this sequence is that, if physical education is trying to maximize physical activity, time-out is counterproductive. While this might be true, a counterargument is that it is more important to teach students to be better human beings and follow rules than it is to get them five more minutes of activity during that lesson. From the experience of the authors, when students enjoy physical education, the cases of students spending time in time-out during physical education are minimal after the first week of school, mostly because the students *want* to be engaged in the class.

How consequences are delivered also affects the tone of the class and the activity level of students during physical education. When needed, consequences should be delivered privately while the rest of the class is engaged in an activity. The following steps describe how this can take place:

1. The teacher observes Fabiola talking while she is giving instructions.
2. The teacher stops the bout of instruction and says, "Let's try skipping again."
3. As the students begin skipping, the teacher moves alongside Fabiola and says, "Fabiola, talking while I am talking is not respectful. That's a warning."
4. The teacher moves away, freezes the class and continues with instruction.

These steps can be completed in less than 15 seconds, while the students are active. This approach is far better than calling out a child in front of the class, which could result in humiliating the student, precipitating an argument with the student (which a teacher can never win), or creating other nega-

tive situations. If the consequence is a time-out and the student refuses to go, the teacher can simply ask the student again and then remind her that they will need to talk after class if she continues to make poor choices. If time-out is not deemed appropriate, a point system can be used, with students losing points each time they demonstrate unacceptable behavior.

One indicator of quality physical education is the percentage of time that students are engaged in physical activity during a lesson. The FRIG'N strategies presented here are intended to help teachers maximize physical activity while teaching the necessary content in physical education in a safe, fun environment.

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Aaron Beighle and Heather E. Erwin are associate professors in the Department of Kinesiology and Health Promotion at the University of Kentucky, in Lexington, KY 40506-0219.