

TEACHING LARGE CLASS SIZES IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION GUIDELINES AND STRATEGIES

The National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) recommends that the size of physical education class be consistent with those of other subject areas (e.g. 1:25, 1:30, 1:35) for safe and effective instruction. When students with special needs are included in regular physical education classes, their placement should not cause an appropriate class size to be exceeded. Without a doubt, many physical education teachers today face class sizes larger than this (40+ students is not uncommon) and other similar situations like multiple classes sharing one activity space. This document was prepared to assist NASPE workshop participants and physical educators to work with this difficult situation while advocating for recommended class size.

LARGE CLASS SIZE – CONSEQUENCES

As class size increases above recommended levels, safe and effective instruction may become compromised. This can manifest itself in many ways such as:

- Decreased instructional time due to management issues
- Insufficient amounts of equipment and activity space
- Decreased practice opportunities resulting in a slower rate of learning
- Decreased student time spent in activity during class
- Decreased ability of teacher to provide individualized instruction
- Increased risk of student injury
- Increased opportunity for “off task” behavior of students

STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING WITH LARGE CLASS SIZES

- Even in the face of adversity, physical education teachers must always provide the best possible instruction. For teachers faced with challenges such as large class size and sharing of activity space, the following list of recommended teaching methods and strategies can help minimize some of the challenges that may be typical with large classes. Some strategies may be more effective with older students than with younger ones.

SMALL GROUP WORK

- Students are put into small groups to work on a concept, skill, and/or task. This teaching strategy helps to foster teamwork and respect and gives students ownership of the skill and responsibility for their own learning. An example is use of the Jig- Saw teaching method to teach a line dance. Divide the dance into parts and put each part on an individual poster. Number each poster so that it will be easier to assign. Divide the class into small groups. Assign a part of the dance to each group member. Each individual in the group will learn his/her part of the dance and then reassemble into the original group and teach it to their group. This process allows each group member to share in the responsibility of learning the dance.

COOPERATIVE LEARNING

- Students work cooperatively as a group to reach a consensus and structure their learning experience. Cooperative learning is a key component of Adventure Education classes. For older students, a good example of cooperative learning is the use of tarps in class. Tarp activities help promote cooperation and problem solving; additional modifications allow students with disabilities to participate. Divide the class into small groups and assign each group to a tarp. Issue various challenges to the groups such as performing a task without stepping off the tarp, turning it over, folding it in half, making a diamond shape or triangle, or instructing the students to use their bodies to cover as much of the tarp as possible.

PEER TEACHING/COACHING

- Students exhibit leadership skills and skill knowledge to help one another learn by completing peer assessments. For example, students can be used as peers to assist small groups in learning skills, and students can be partnered for assessment tasks involving checklists. All levels of students can be taught and expected to do peer teaching/coaching. As a note, be cautious about intervening—speak to the “student” through the assigned “teacher.”

STATION WORK

- Students move through a series of stations that are set up for different tasks. There are innumerable station ideas such as skills, fitness, assessment, video, research, strategies, etc. Incorporate assessment stations or “next step” stations so that a group who has mastered an objective can move onto the next skill. Students should maintain written personal records that may include task sheets and performance statistics.

SMALL-SIDED GAMES

- This teaching strategy uses a smaller number of players and a smaller playing area than a regulation game. This strategy can be applied to many sports, such as basketball, soccer, and volleyball, and allows for more participation and practice by each student.

INDIVIDUALIZED INSTRUCTION

- Pre-assess and identify student placement in an established sequence of learning tasks in which students can progress at an individual pace with assessment for mastery before moving to the next task. This procedure automatically arranges students in small groups, moving to a variety of tasks, each of which may require different equipment and space. Individual instruction is an excellent way for students to assume responsibility for their own learning.

CLASS PROJECTS

- Students are divided into groups to participate in activity/instruction or to work on projects. This may require multiple instructors and the use of multiple facilities within the school. Teaching assistants may be available to accompany students away from the physical education area. For example, half of the class may be in the gymnasium while half is in the media center or computer lab working on a project for their physical education portfolio.

ASSESSMENT

- To facilitate effective student assessment, utilize strategies in addition to direct teacher observation such as:
 - Videotape performance and evaluate them after class or let the students self-evaluate.
 - Increase the use of task sheets to keep students on task and accountable.
 - Use peer evaluation (one student is active and the other is observing/assessing).
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