

Building a sports curriculum

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How does one go about bridging the gap between the syllabus for physical education and the actual execution of it during the games period? Nidhi Tiwari tell us how we can develop a sports curriculum and shares with us a sample lesson plan to get us started.

Rajesh, a tough looking 38-year-old physical education (PE) teacher, stands firm and tries to extend his gaze across the dusty playground on a sunny morning in an upwardly mobile school in West Delhi. A class of 40 students (grade eight) has their games period. Out of 40, about 28 students have reached the playground. Of the remaining 12, eight have had to stay back in their classroom to complete their class work in math, two complain of a stomach ache and the other two have certificates from their parents that they should not be forced to go out of the class for a sports period due to health reasons. He tries to get the class to play a game of basketball. The boys are thrilled; but a few girls choose to play badminton. And the next 25 minutes pass uneventfully. Rajesh blows the whistle and the students walk back to class. Some sweaty and reluctant, but a majority thrilled to reach out to the shade so that they get a respite from the morning sun and their games period.

Rajesh was a hockey player in his youth, is a sportsman at heart and becoming a PE teacher was his first career choice. He had achieved that, but today after 10 years of work as a PE teacher, he admits silently that he feels a handicap.



I ask Rajesh, “Is this your everyday routine? Are students always given a choice or do you have a certain plan for each period?” Rajesh doesn’t hesitate. He says “It’s a blessing that students actually come for their games period. Many times they miss the period as other subject teachers want the games period. When they manage to come, students also want some change and relaxation, so I give them a free choice to play what they want. If I had my way, I would have liked to see that every student compulsorily plays.”

Having studied Outdoor Education and being a steadfast advocate for including physical activity as part of the curriculum, Rajesh’s plight bothers me. It makes me introspect about our approach to sports education in India. Some quick questions arise – who is responsible for the attitude/approach to games or sports in this school? Is it Rajesh’s or the students’ fault that they take their games period for granted? Are the school leadership, other teachers, and mindsets of students, parents in any way responsible? Why does Rajesh seem to have a low self-esteem as the PE teacher? Can’t we assist him in any way so that he feels more empowered as a PE teacher? I wonder. The answer to this I believe is an empowered sports curriculum for the school.

World-over, physical education has always been an integral part of every curriculum. Most philosophies have acknowledged that the mind and body are innately linked and therefore physical education is important for a healthy mind. But what was perhaps missing in Rajesh’s case was a strong curriculum at the school level.

I would like to focus the rest of the article on developing a strong sports curriculum for the school. A curriculum that is consistent with research on child development, child psychology and overall growth and development of the child. And one that compares with curricular standards world-wide.

The curriculum will need to clearly detail the content, attainment levels (or learning goals), lesson plans for implementation on a daily basis during the games period and needs an assessment framework that allows students to improve and develop skills over the years. The curriculum must also aim to build the self-esteem of students and enable them to lead happy, healthy and active lives.

With this as the aim, grade specific attainment levels for various activities may be defined. While the NCERT has released a long syllabus for physical education from grades 1 to 10, the gap between the syllabus in the document and the actual games period is perhaps the handicap that Rajesh was talking about – “How do I go about doing it?”

Here is where a detailed curriculum document comes into the picture.

Focus areas



Finding focus areas grade-wise will be the first step. For example, the focus for grades 1 to 3 must be – body awareness and basic movements such as running, jumping, hopping, skipping, and catching with an emphasis on building agility and developing balance. Students at this age also need to be introduced to team games so that they develop basic skills to tackle, defend and work together.

For grades 4 to 6, the focus areas should progress to coordinated and combined movements from basic movements in isolation (prevalent in early years). At this stage students are often introduced to games like football, handball, badminton, hockey, etc., where the focus is not only on aerobic physical activity but also on developing skills for attacking and defending or tactics in general. The curriculum also focuses on activities to build strength, flexibility, greater control. At this age, the curriculum also needs to give space for students who wish to pursue professional training in sports.

An important point to be noted here, world-over students at this age are also introduced to various adventure activities so that students are able to challenge themselves in uncertain environments thereby revealing to them an inner dimension of the self. These could be hiking, basics of rock climbing, map and compass navigation, low ropes courses, etc. In India, however, schools tend to be more conservative. But there is a strong case in point to let students explore beyond their school environments as their awareness of self is slowly increasing in these years – the beginnings of identity, character, and personality. Another definitive feature of these years is the ability of the student to reflect on self-performance and work towards improving it.

For students in grades 6 to 8, the curricular focus areas must shift from basic movements to higher degree of mental ability. For example, developing stronger tactics of playing opponents in team and individual sports, challenging one-self to push perceived thresholds, strengthening technique and skill in sports, short backpacking expeditions to demonstrate courage, leadership, compassion, responsibility for self and team members, etc. Students must be encouraged to critically assess performance at this stage; therefore the curriculum must provide options wherein students work on their abilities and are able to see and visualize self-growth.

Defining attainment levels and lesson plans

Irrespective of the focus areas, spelling out the accurate attainment levels is important. For example, attainment level at the end of grade one could be – students will be able to run short distances, do a minimum of 20 jumping jacks at a time, complete minimum of 10 continuous skips on a skipping rope, demonstrate good communication skills during a team game, etc.

With these attainment levels, the idea is to help students develop this ability over a period of one year. Then is it about getting them to do skipping, jumping, running in every period as exercises? The answer is a loud NO!

Creating interesting and fun lesson plans to facilitate this development is the key. To build lesson plans for PE, calculating the total number of periods allotted for PE in every grade would be the first step. Then dividing those periods into smaller sets to focus on specific skills is the way forward. For example, let us analyze the PE period split in a leading school.

Grade 3 had 100 PE periods in total. The school's vision was to include a range of sports – indoor, outdoor, adventure, professional training in specific sports, etc. They had divided 98 periods into 4 sets: 50 periods were allotted for team games, 25 periods for adventure activities, and 25 periods were offered to students as part of the electives section – students could choose to learn one particular sport – tennis, football, badminton, cricket, basketball, etc.

In the above case, lesson plans would need to be created for all 100 periods; 50 lesson plans for team games, the periods for adventure activities could be clubbed – students could be taken on 3-4 day outdoor trips, and sets of 15 lesson plans each could be created for elective sports to teach technique and skills for the particular game. But the key is to have a plan for each period.

Options for team games could be many; but these games need to be marked against the focus skills for the grade (like running, jumping, catching, etc.) such that overall all skills are covered.

The lesson plans are essentially guides for PE teachers and help the school ensure that all students receive similar or consistent instruction from a varying set of PE teachers. Therefore, this is the most important task PE teachers need to undertake for the long-term betterment of the quality of physical education in the school. Please see the sample in this article for your reference to create a lesson plan.

I would like to draw your attention to one particular aspect in the sample lesson plan – i.e., the closure of every PE period. Students need to necessarily reflect on their behaviour with respect to team spirit, character, their physical skills, etc., on the playing field. This reflection is critical without which the ultimate aim of character development will not be fulfilled. It is the responsibility of PE teachers to ensure that there is a structured way to do this. Circle time at the end of a games period is a great tool to do this.

Way forward

There is enough evidence to prove that a planned curriculum for physical education is much better placed to achieve the goals for the domain. Identifying focus areas, defining



attainment levels, mapping focus areas against the number of lessons and ensuring that all focus areas and skills are covered and creating detailed lesson plans for the teachers to follow is the only way forward that I see. Given that there is so much variance in calibre, training, interest and motivation level of teachers, having a standardized document will at least ensure that the nature of the subject is preserved.



Sample Lesson Plan for primary level

Crows and cranes

Lesson objective: At the end of this lesson, students will be able to listen well, respond with quickness, cooperate with their friends and dodge well.

Skills addressed: running, team skills – listening, agility.

Time: 40 minutes

Materials Required: None

Instructions:

Teacher Observation

- Lead students to the football field.
- Ask students to count in 2s and divide the class into halves.
- Name one team as Crows and the other as Cranes.
- Designate goal lines for both teams.
- Ask both groups to line up at the center of the field facing each other along the center line.
- Stand between the lines and tell them:
 - o You will be calling out a name – either Crows or Cranes.
 - o When you call out a name, that team has to run towards their goal. They will be chased by the opponent team.
 - o Those who get caught will have to join the opponent team.
- Begin the game and continue to play for the next 20 minutes.
- After the game, ask students to circle up.
- Ask them to give you a thumbs up or thumbs down to the following questions which you will ask:
 - o Did you enjoy the game?
 - o Did you feel you were quick enough?
- Let them share briefly about:
 - o When were they getting caught? Was it easy or hard?
 - o Did they believe that they were quicker than usual during the game?
- Take note of students:
 - o Who were getting caught easily
 - o Who were not listening to instructions, were too eager to react, jumped the gun
 - o Who blamed others when they got caught
 - o Who lost their cool during the game.
- Observe their behaviour in the next lesson, if it does not improve, you might want to call them out and have a one-on-one chat to explain what you observed and ask them to think about it.

Adapted from content on www.innovativeclassroom.com.

References

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Category: Classroom Resources

Subject: Sports and Physical Education

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Grade/Standard: Early Childhood Education

Class 1-2

Class 3-5

Class 6-8

Class 9-10

Class 11-12

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