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Winter 1-2013

## Are your S's in effect? Ensuring culturally responsive physical education environments

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### Recommended Citation

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27 *Sight: The first effect*

28           What students see before they enter the classroom or gymnasium is impactful for the quality of  
29 the physical education experience. Vision is a means for conducting the basic activities of life and  
30 provides a portal to language and numerous tasks and physical activity processes. Visual learners as noted  
31 by Jensen (1997) tend to comprise the primary demographic of students in our classes. Further reflection  
32 on this observation holds particular significance for how our classes should look. Probst (1974) noted  
33 that upon entry, individuals of diverse groups assess educational environments using these three  
34 questions:

35 -Can this place be mine or adjusted to me?

36 -Can I produce results here?

37 -Can I relate and get along with others who are here?

38           Students while negotiating these questions according to Shade, Kelly, and Oberg (1997) accept  
39 the environment initially based on whether pictures, symbols and other visual representations remind  
40 them of their homes, communities, and values (p. 43). Particularly for Native American learners who  
41 have been suggested to learn best by these means (Bland, 1975; Bryant, 1986; Foreman, 1991; Gilliland,  
42 1999; Kleinfeld & Nelson, 1991; Pewewardy, 1999; Ross, 1989; Tafoya, 1989; Wilcox, 1996), this is  
43 especially important. Murals, collages, or reflective wall pieces (RWP's) can be utilized as methods by  
44 which to showcase diversity among these students and others in physical education classes.

45           Collages and reflective wall pieces can be used by diverse learners to express thoughts, feelings,  
46 and attitudes related to physical activity. A practical use of this artwork involves first supervising students  
47 as they cut pictures related to sport and physical activity from magazines and newspapers, and  
48 subsequently require them to mount their individual picture(s) on poster board. The teacher's next task is  
49 to pose questions such as "Why is this activity important to you?" or "Why do you think this particular  
50 sport has significance in a particular group's culture?" The students respond on a notecard and put it  
51 underneath his or her picture. This simple task, in which all can participate, helps to foster an appreciation

52 of the similarities of differences among students in the class. As these works are completed, they should  
53 be posted in common areas for all students to see.

54 ***Sound: The second effect***

55         The effect of sound and the impact on diverse learners is another important aspect of promoting  
56 culturally responsive physical education environments. Coupled with students who may best learn via  
57 auditory or verbal means, recent classroom changes have left many teachers with non-English proficient  
58 learners who may spend a great deal of time initially shuffling from class to class. Currently, there are  
59 more than 180 different language groups represented by students in schools (Shore, 2001), with these  
60 learners postulated to represent 25% of the total student population in 2026 (Garcia, 2000). Thus, sound  
61 and language use helps break down barriers to participation for learners who are from non-English  
62 speaking backgrounds.

63         After non-English speaking learners' needs are assessed with the assistance of ELL (English  
64 Language Learner) programs, methods should be utilized to ease these students' transition into class  
65 activities. Teaching key words and phrases used in the physical education classroom is an important first  
66 step because it shows these students there is a program in place that helps foster their success. It can also  
67 be helpful for a non-native English speaker to be paired with a student who has mastery of the language.  
68 Care must be taken so that non-native speakers' languages are not devalued, but fostered through  
69 bilingual efforts. Atay and Kurt (2006) along with Smlkin and Suina (1996), espouse that students have  
70 greater academic success when language is valued because they are allowed to draw on a larger source of  
71 background schemata.

72         Inattention to considerations for students who have difficulty in verbal communication as a result  
73 of a static or temporary disorder can be detrimental. Literature (Brinton & Fujiki, 1993, 2000; Davis,  
74 2001; Hummel & Prizant, 1993) has indicated that students with communication disorders tend to display  
75 lower feelings of self-concept, which impacts the frequency and quality of social interactions they engage  
76 in. According to the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), more than six million  
77 children ages 3–21 received services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in

78 2002 (ASHA, 2008). Of this demographic, more than 20 percent of these children were assisted due to  
79 speech and language disorders, a percentage which did not include children who had communication  
80 problems due to trauma, introversion, shyness, or prior undisclosed mental and physical abuse.

81 Students who cannot audibly communicate words, phrases, and dialogue are placed at a  
82 disadvantage if teachers lack an appreciation for the impact of nonverbal instruction. While sign language  
83 has been proven to be effective in engaging inaudible learners, many physical educators are not versed in  
84 this method of speech. Lue (2001) categorized four additional means of nonverbal instruction which can  
85 aid teachers:

- 86 1) *Prosody* - patterns of speech such as pitch, duration, loudness and rhythm
- 87 2) *Kinesics* - visual signals sent by the body to the receiver
- 88 3) *Proxemics* - the distance of interpersonal and social space
- 89 4) *Paralanguage* - the production of sounds that are verbal, but nonverbal.

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91 Classified as one of Gardner's (1993) multiple intelligences, the sound of music fosters an  
92 appreciation of diverse learners. Employed appropriately in class, music can stimulate the brain and form  
93 connections between the body and mind, while prompting memory and improving gait and coordination  
94 (Archer, 2007). Music which reflects the diverse cultures of students played during the beginning of class  
95 or during transitional activities is an integral part of the learning experience. Musical involvement can  
96 also include the use of instruments, which can lead to a discussion on how these instruments have  
97 contributed to cultural groups represented in the class (Figure 2).

98 Tripp, Rizzo and Webbert (2007) espouse that cultural storytelling helps create and accommodate  
99 diversity, where every member of the physical education community can feel a sense of connection and  
100 belonging. Including a wide variety of books exploring different cultures makes the learning environment  
101 more inclusive for all (Anderson, 2002). It also makes it more likely that all students will have  
102 opportunities to find narratives that are meaningful and relative to them. As stories are told, students need  
103 to be given time to reflect upon the impact of these narratives on their peers. Particularly for African

104 American and Hispanic students, the oral tradition of storytelling provides an additional means of self-  
105 expression rooted in the cultural upbringing of many of these learners (Carter-Black, 2007; Tileston,  
106 2004). A listing of books which can be used in the physical education classroom is found in Figure 3.

107 ***Symbolism: The third effect***

108 Symbolic representation is a final consideration in creating culturally responsive physical  
109 education environments. If used correctly, symbolism can reinforce positive ideas and constructive  
110 behaviors, as well as empower students. It is seldom that the transmission of these ideas is apparent at  
111 first glance, making it important for the physical educator to make a genuine effort to ensure that what is  
112 visually seen or heard in the classroom is truly representative of an inclusive atmosphere.

113 Essentially, inquiry on what is found in physical education environments and how artifacts and  
114 sounds are interpreted by our learners are topics worthy of exploration. Posters of individuals engaged in  
115 athletic pursuits are frequently found on the walls of many physical education classes. While this is a  
116 valid means of assisting in the promotion of physical activity, the perspectives of all groups being  
117 represented needs evaluation. For instance, when reflecting on visual representations of posters and wall  
118 art hung in our classes, particular attention should be focused on the ratio of male to females. The  
119 occurrence of more males than females on these representations could inadvertently communicate to  
120 females in the class that male participation in physical education is valued, while female participation is  
121 accepted but not equally on par.

122 Additionally, focusing on the effect of symbolism in the makeup of our physical education  
123 environments has cultural ramifications. While an initial step in expressing culture in our classes should  
124 be to introduce content as appropriate to meet the needs of the diverse learners in our classes, far too often  
125 music, dance, or rhythm based lessons are chosen as the only vehicle by which this content is provided.  
126 When the value of these activities is diminished due to overuse, stereotypes such as Latinos and African  
127 Americans having a “natural predisposition to perform well in rhythm and dance related activities” can be  
128 perpetuated.

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### Conclusion

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Attention to providing culturally responsive environments shows a commitment to diversity and allows for an education that is conducive to lifelong physical activity. Regardless of ability or background, students from different cultural groups who see aspects of their life demonstrated in the routines and procedures of the physical education environment have an instant investment in the overall goals of the class. The failure to address cultural differences within these environments, combined with inadequate preparation in teacher training, may very well lead to a host of negative repercussions.

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225 Document Reproduction Service No. ED 401 543)
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**Figure 1. Various components of nonverbal instruction in physical education contexts**

Component	Examples in the physical education environment
<p><i>Prosody</i>- refers to the rhythmic pattern of speech such as pitch, duration, and intonation. Prosodic features carry meaning and may serve to confirm or contradict the spoken language. Problems in this area can include inappropriate responses and use of variations in pitch, duration, loudness and rhythm.</p>	<p>Placing emphasis on a certain word when giving feedback on appropriate routines to students:</p> <p><i>Correct</i></p> <p>Teacher: “Guys, I really think we can do better with putting up our equipment. Remember to place the paddles back in the bin, next to the closet.”</p> <p><i>Misinterpretation</i></p> <p>Teacher: “Guys, I <i>really</i> think we can do better with putting up our equipment. Remember to place the <b>PADDLES</b>, back in the <b>BIN</b>, next to the <b>CLOSET</b>.”</p> <p><i>The latter statement could be interpreted by students as demeaning, based primarily on the method and emphasis on key words in the instructional phrase.</i></p>

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<p><b>Proxemics</b>-represents measurable distances between people as they interact in interpersonal and social space. These distances can be described as intimate, personal, social, or public. Problems occur with inappropriate actions or misinterpreted meanings.</p>	<p>Being aware of cultural considerations in teaching students:</p> <p><i>Scenario:</i></p> <p>Mr. Reynolds has begun a golf lesson which focuses on putting. As he walks around to assist students, he stops at Mai Sue, a Hmong student who is having trouble keeping her head down on the ball during her follow-through. He watches a few strokes and places his hand upon her head and encourages her to keep her head down. After a few strokes with his hand on her head, Mr. Reynolds steps away to watch her continue without his assistance, and is puzzled when Mai Sue continues to look down at the ground without any movement.</p> <p><i>Comment:</i></p> <p><i>Unbeknownst to Mr. Reynolds, Mai Sue's traditional Hmong culture discourages individuals placing hands upon the head, as it is believed to be the place that a person's soul resides. In this and similar situations, it is best to always ask permission, because interpersonal and social space is interpreted differently among individuals and cultures.</i></p>
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<p><b>Kinesics</b>- describes the visual signals sent to the receiver (student) by the body, utilizing any part of the body or the body as a whole. Kinesics assumes that all movements of the body have meaning. Problems can occur if the visual signals are misinterpreted by the student or if the message sent by the visual signal fails to match the verbal message sent.</p>	<p>Reminding students about appropriate signals used to being a routine.</p> <p><i>Correct</i></p> <p>Ms. Larkin speaks to her kindergarten class who is sitting in a circle in the middle of the gym on the first day of class. She discusses the difference between general space and self- space, demonstrating to students that the signal for finding self-space in the gym is her stretching her arms out wide. The students watch, stand up when prompted, and imitate her to demonstrate their understanding of this concept.</p> <p><i>Misinterpretation</i></p> <p>Brett, a new student in Ms. Larkin's class who has arrived the second week of school, gathers with the rest of his classmates in the middle of the circle in the gym. Ms. Larkin upon seeing that they are attentive, smiles at her students and stretches her arms out wide. The students get up and find their own self-space. Brett however, walks up to Ms. Larkin and hugs her. His classmates giggle.</p> <p><i>Given that Brett is a new student in class and has no knowledge of the routines in place. Ms. Larkin could have assessed (by asking for a demonstration) whether students' remembered how to find personal space.</i></p>
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<p><b>Paralanguage</b>-refers to the production of sounds which are vocal, but nonverbal and can include sighs, muttering words, increased rate of speech, crying and laughing. These sounds are not articulated into speech or words, but can modify meaning and convey emotion such as anger, joy, sadness, and fear. Problems again occur with misinterpreted meanings.</p>	<p>Speaking and instructing to benefit all learners:</p> <p><i>Scenario:</i></p> <p>Jennifer is a new student teacher instructing badminton to a small group in a gym. One of the members of the group is Tim, who is hearing impaired and sits clustered behind his classmates near an empty whiteboard. Jennifer glances at the clock and hastily finishes pointing out the parts of a racket before asking students to partner up and practice hitting shuttles to one another. Tim and Ben (who has in one hand a racket and in the other several shuttles) walk up to Jennifer. Tim holds out his racket with an inquisitive look on his face. Jennifer as she chews her gum smiles and responds tersely, telling Tim that she “can’t be his partner, because she has to teach.” Jennifer begins to walk away to the rest of the students, motioning to Tim and Ben to hurry. The two students look at one another and shake their heads as they follow the student teacher.</p> <p><i>Comment:</i></p> <p><i>Jennifer should be cognizant of arranging her group so that everyone is able to see her instruction. She should utilize the whiteboard or captioned videos in order to address new terminology or illustrate important parts of the racket. Her instruction should be deliberate, clear, unhurried and unobstructed (i.e., gum), as this can be difficult for students who lip-read to do so. Jennifer’s facial expressions could convey mixed messages. Each students’ attention should be gained before giving instruction and students should be asked clarification questions to assess learning. Interpreters and peer helpers if deemed necessary can be used.</i></p>
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Adapted from Lue (2001), *A Survey of Communication Disorders for the Classroom Teacher*

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**Figure 2. Selected instruments and their cultural uses**

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**Gong****Drums****Bells**

<p>Historically, in Asian families, the gong was an attribute of wealth and served as a status symbol.</p> <p>In China, the gong is used in religious ceremonies, state processions, marriages and other festivals.</p>	<p>Drums in Sri Lanka, date back over 2,500 years and have been used for communication between the government and the people. The talking drums used in many African cultures can imitate the inflections and pitch variations of a spoken language and are used for communicating over great distances.</p>	<p>Many farms in Scandinavia had a small bell-tower resting on the top of the barn. The bell in the tower was used to call the workers from the field at the end of the day's work. Additionally, "singing bells" are in wide use in many parts of Tibet and Nepal for the purposes of meditation.</p>
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277 **Figure 3. Books which can be used to promote culturally responsive outcomes in physical education**

<i>Teammates</i> : Peter Golenbock and Paul Bacon (1980)
<i>We Are the Ship: The Story of Negro League Baseball</i> : Kadir Nelson (2008)
<i>Winners Never Quit!</i> Mia Hamm and Carol Thompson (2004)
<i>Sixteen Years in Sixteen Seconds: The Sammy Lee Story</i> : Paula Yoo and Dom Lee (2004)
<i>Soccer Game (Un Partido de Futbol)</i> : Grace Maccarone and Meredith Johnson (1998)
<i>Bravo, Tavo!</i> : Brian Meunier and Perky Edgerton (2007)
<i>Wilma Unlimited: How Wilma Rudolph Became the World's Fastest Woman</i> : Kathleen Krull and David Diaz (2000)

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