

Coaches are Teachers Too

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Educators and teachers agree that while academic development is an essential part of the education process, the development of social skills, team spirit, and tolerance are equally important elements in the holistic development of a child. After all, the aim of schooling and the process of education are to produce citizens who would contribute in meaningful and resourceful ways to the progress of our society. With this outlook in mind, more and more schools are finding ways to increase students' participation in extra-curricular and/or co-curricular activities, with the expectation that such activities will aid in moulding students' personality and targeting students' abilities in areas not covered by "pure academics." Sporting activities like cricket, football, badminton, and table tennis are among the more common extra/co-curricular activities available in many schools and many students find it relaxing and enjoyable to participate in them.

Students register and become members of different clubs at their schools in order to train and participate in a variety of school-based activities such as sports day and inter-school competitions. In addition, physical education teachers and coaches in many schools further encourage their students to get involved in sporting clubs and organizations outside of the school environment. They explain to them that such affiliations will not only provide them with greater exposure in the specific activity but that they will also facilitate social development and interactivity. Many of these organisations engage in fairly strict programmes of practice training and playing, and it can be refreshing to see young boys and girls from primary and secondary schools out on a field, in different age groups, enjoying themselves tossing balls and practising fielding and batting skills.

Like teachers of academic subjects, it is extremely important that coaches and physical education teachers are well trained, both in the discipline and in pedagogy, because, after all, they too are teachers of our students. In a school setting, however, it is even more critical for coaches to realise that they are working with young children, many of whom are at impressionable periods in their lives where issues of self-esteem and image matter to them, especially in the company of their peers.

The theoretical component of physical education involves a high level of cognitive demand, which students often experience in a classroom setting. However, the practical component is largely psychomotor, and students' skills and competencies in this component are often developed on the field and assessed in a more subjective way by their ability to catch, kick, or hit a ball, for example.

Literature on the psychological aspects and benefits of physical education suggest that the interaction between the coach or physical education teacher and the students, especially on the field/court, can have significant psychological impact on students. Verbal comments in the form of positive or negative reinforcements are taken at face value and students often use these to gauge their abilities on the field

and to question their rank in the particular activity. The literature also speaks of unpredictability in respect of psychomotor skills, and so it is quite possible for a student who is deemed a good batsman to score zero or for someone regarded as a good fieldsman to drop a catch occasionally.

The important question, however, is how does a coach or physical education teacher react/respond when the occasional slip-up occurs? The kind of response is often related to whether the instructor sees himself/herself as a teacher, a coach, or both. A teacher might understand that a student will not always make a perfect score—that is an accepted part of the teaching/learning process. An instructor who sees himself as both a coach and a teacher might indicate, perhaps in a firm but encouraging tone, to the student that he or she needs to be more focused and the instructor may provide other opportunities in the training session for the student to “redeem” himself/herself.

However, when a child who normally catches a ball drops a catch, in what is an occasional slip-up, and he is shouted at in the presence of his peers and told something like: “you cannot play cricket and no more throws for you,” it shows that the PE teacher/coach does not understand the possible psychological impact on the student and his role as a teacher/mentor. Such responses point to the need for more pedagogical training for PE personnel in the education system in order for them to fully appreciate their total responsibility for the well-being of the students in their care.

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