

PEDAGOGY

Effects of the PE Teacher Knowing and Using Student Names in PE Class: A Qualitative Investigation

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Abstract

We have each been given a name. With this given name, we are known among our families, friends, and other associates. Our name becomes an integral part of our identity. A common and important place where a person is addressed by name is the educational setting, more specifically a school setting, including physical education (PE) classes. The PE setting offers many opportunities for teachers and students to use student names. The purpose of this study was to investigate the use of PE teachers using each student's given name, along with the effect of this use on students. For this study, 278 junior high school students (165 males, 113 females) were surveyed regarding teachers using student names in PE class. This study found that junior high PE students liked when their PE teacher knew and used their name in PE class. From these results, it is hoped that PE teachers seriously consider this aspect of pedagogy of using student names as they interact with their students.

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These scenarios can easily play out in a physical education (PE) class:

- *Scenario 1:* Students are put into groups of four and assigned to go to a specific station in the gym set up for the students to work on a specific volleyball skill. One group of students becomes off-task with the skills they are to work on. From across the gym, the PE teacher observes the students' off-task behaviors. The PE teacher proceeds to yell across the gym, "Hey, you knuckleheads, stop messing around, and get back to what you have been asked to do!" The group of students look on with faces of embarrassment and disbelief.
- *Scenario 2:* A ninth-grade class just completed game play in a basketball unit. As the class comes to an end, a couple students help collect equipment and jerseys used by the students during class activities. While the students return the equipment, the PE teacher says to one of the students, "Sally, I was watching you play today with your teammates, and I saw you make some great passes to your teammates that led to points. You do a good job getting all of your teammates involved in the game." Sally responds with a big smile on her face and thanks the PE teacher for her words.

Of the two scenarios, the second illustrates the PE teacher using the student's name. The simple exchange in the second scenario, which includes the teacher using the student's name, communicates to the student that their PE teacher knows her student's name. In this case, the student responds positively to the PE teacher's comments. Students want and like it when their PE teacher knows their name (Barney & Christenson, 2012; Petray-Rowcliffe et al., 2002; Prusak et al., 2005).

While research on specifically PE teachers using student names has been, at best, limited, some research has examined the topic of teachers using student names. From a broader educational setting, Smith and Malec (1995) studied college professors using student names in sociology classes and the effects it had on the students. The researchers concluded the sociology professors worked hard to learn and know their students' names. These professors felt that when they used student names, their students participated more in

class discussions and activities. Thus, this enhanced student learning from the class materials and assignments. Research conducted in PE has also been limited in regard to PE teachers using student names. While research regarding PE teachers use of student names has been limited, Barney (2005) studied the types of interactions student teachers had with students during their elementary PE student teaching experience. In this study, student teachers were observed twice, once shortly after the cooperating teacher had given full control of their classes to the student teacher (about 3 weeks into the student teaching experience) and again toward the end of the student teaching experience (during the 14th or 15th week of the student teaching). During each observation, the researcher recorded the interactions between student teacher and students. This provided a better picture of these interactions. The student teacher wore a wireless microphone while data were collected. All interactions were later coded. Barney found that student teachers in this study gave ample instructions and feedback and also engaged students in activity throughout the lessons. One last observation was student teachers seldom addressed their students by their names in both lessons observed. On average, student teachers used student names five times during a 30-min lesson. Barney observed that with such few instances of student teachers using student names, when the student teacher did use student names, the students appeared more than ready to do what was asked of them and appeared to appreciate the PE teacher acknowledging them by using their name.

Another component in the PE setting when PE teachers use student names is during the act of giving feedback to a student. Two types of feedback PE teachers give to students are general and specific (Pangrazi, 2007). General feedback includes phrases such as “Good job,” “Way to go,” and “Don’t do that.” General feedback is either positive or negative; it does not specify a behavior and vaguely informs the student of their performance of the skill. One element separating specific feedback from general feedback is the use of student names. For example, the PE teacher says, “John, your pass to your teammate was good, because it allowed them to score the basket.” When PE teachers use first names, they are personalizing the feedback, thus directing to the proper individual. Obviously, specific feedback also provides more detailed information to students regarding their

performance or behavior; however, the use of student names is an essential element for effective, specific feedback.

The practitioner literature has referenced teachers using student names as a tool for classroom management. According to Briggs (2013), “Names are important. When a teacher uses a student’s name it creates a contractual obligation: ‘I know who you are, you matter to me and this is what I expect’” (p. 14). Likewise, learning and knowing student names is an effective method of classroom management (Pangrazi & Beighle, 2013). It goes a long way stating a student’s name instead of the PE teacher saying “Hey you!” when addressing a student. With the paucity of research concerning PE teachers using student names, researching this topic can reinforce K–12 PE teachers the importance of using student names.

Teachers using student names is an element of showing care toward students or caring on the teacher’s part. PE teachers who create an environment of caring have the potential of positively affecting students’ attitudes and experiences toward PE and being physically active throughout life (Gano-Overway & Guivernau, 2014; Larson & Silverman, 2005). Caring in an educational setting is “a set of relational practices that foster mutual recognition and realization, growth, development, protection, empowerment, and human community, culture, and possibility” (Gordon et al., 1996, p.13). Gano-Overway and Guivernau (2014) explored how caring PE teachers, as identified by their students, described their experiences of caring in their PE class. For this study, three female and three male middle school PE teachers were interviewed regarding their perceptions and opinions of being caring PE teachers, for the purpose of affecting their students’ PE experience. After the interviews were analyzed, three interview themes emerged: (a) being in relation, (b) creating an inclusive and accepting classroom, and (c) empowering students. One of the talking points in the “being in relation” theme from the PE teachers was developing relationships with their students by getting to know their students. Specifically, they mentioned that knowing and using the students’ names was a wonderful way to develop a relationship. The knowing of student names “[shows the teacher cares] about the student” and “that [the students] are important” (p. 273). These types of results are positive and encouraging for K–12 PE teachers. Yet,

because of the limited research on PE teachers knowing and using student names, this study seeks to add to the body of research in this area. Thus, the purpose of this study was to investigate PE teachers using student names and the effect of this on students.

Method

Participants

For this study, 278 junior high school students (165 males, 113 females; 96 seventh graders, 77 eighth graders, 105 ninth graders) from two junior high schools located in the Intermountain West participated in this study. The participants were 11 to 15 years of age.

Instrumentation

A 13-statement survey was developed on the basis of the literature on teachers using student names (Table 1). This survey used a yes/no scale. Additionally, students were asked to explain their answers to three survey statements (3, 5, & 10). The concluding section of the survey addressed demographics. Content validity was established when five junior high-aged students not involved in the study and two PE teacher education faculty read through the survey questions. This ensured clarity and understanding of the instrument for the intended population. The survey was then pilot tested on 12 nonparticipant junior high-aged students and was found suitable to its proposed purposes.

Procedures

Permission from the university Institution Review Board (IRB), the school district, and the PE teachers was secured, and parents consented and student assented to the study. A week after collecting consent and assent, we returned to the schools and administered the survey. We explained the survey to the students and explained that if they did not want to take the survey, it would not negatively affect their grade in the PE class. After the surveys were completed by the students, we collected the surveys for analysis. Ninety-eight percent of the students enrolled in the PE classes took the survey.

Table 1

Student Name Survey

The following survey questions will ask you about your PE teacher knowing your first name in class and during games and activities. You will circle and/or respond from your experiences you have had with your PE teacher using or not using your name. Thank you for participating in this survey.

1. Does your PE teacher know your first name?

Yes **No**

2. Does your PE teacher know you by a nickname or your first name?

First Name **Nickname**

3. When your PE teacher states your name in class, are you more encouraged to participate in the class activity. Please explain your answer.

Yes **No**

4. If your PE teacher forgets your name, do you remind him/her of your name?

Yes **No**

5. Do you feel it is important that your PE teacher knows your name? Please explain your answer.

Yes **No**

6. If your PE teacher disciplines you, does he/she use your name?

Yes **No**

7. Does your PE teacher use your name when he/she gives you praise?

Yes **No**

8. Do you feel you are important to your PE teacher when he/she uses your name?

Yes **No**

9. When your PE teacher knows your name, is it easier to approach him/her when you have a question or concern?

Yes **No**

Table 1 (cont.)

10. If your PE teacher knows your name, do you feel he/she cares about you? Please explain your answer.

Yes

No

11. When you see or talk to your PE teacher outside of your PE class (at the mall, at a store, or in the halls at school), does he/she know your name?

Yes

No

12. Generally, do you feel your PE teacher knows a majority of the students' names in your PE class?

Yes

No

13. If your PE teacher knows your name, does that affect your PE class experiences and activities/games you play in class?

Yes

No

Grade: 7th ___ 8th ___ 9th ___

Male _____ Female _____

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed with descriptive statistics in the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 26.0 program. Percentages were used for the students' responses for each item being analyzed. The qualitative data analysis comprised a thematic content analysis of the students' short answers. We read and reread the data until common themes were evident for each survey question that asked the students to respond (Mueller & Skamp, 2003).

Results

The data were analyzed for male and female participants' responses to the survey (Table 2). Statement 5 asked the participants if they felt it was important that their PE teacher knew their name. Both male (76%) and female (96%) students felt it was important to them that their PE teacher knew their name. More specifically, Statement 1 asked the participants if their PE teacher knew their first name. Many of the participants (97% males, 98% females) stated that their PE teacher knew their first name. When asked if the PE

teacher knowing their name made them feel more encouraged to participate in class activities (statement three), 78% of male and 88% of female students indicated it did. From a classroom management perspective, a majority of students (81% males, 84% females) had experiences when their PE teacher used their name for discipline reasons, as well as for giving praise (91% males, 95% females). When the PE teacher knew the student's name, 86% of male students and 96% of female students felt their teacher cared about them. Finally, participants were asked if their PE teacher knew their name outside of the PE class (the mall, the grocery store, or the halls of the school). Overwhelmingly, students said this was the case (90% males, 94% females).

Table 2
Results From the Student Name Survey

Question	Yes		No	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
1. Does your PE teacher know your first name?	99%	98%	1%	2%
2. Does your PE teacher know you by a nickname?	87%	80%	13%	20%
3. When your PE teacher states your name in class, are you more encouraged to participate in class activities?	78%	88%	22%	12%
4. If your PE teacher forgets your name, do you remind him/her of your name?	63%	74%	37%	26%
5. Do you feel it is important that your PE teacher knows your name?	76%	96%	24%	4%
6. If your PE teacher disciplines you, does he/she use your name?	81%	84%	19%	16%
7. Does your PE teacher use your name when he/she gives your praise?	91%	95%	9%	5%

Table 2 (cont.)

Question	Yes		No	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
8. Do you feel you are important to your PE teacher when he/she uses your name?	71%	90%	29%	10%
9. When your PE teacher knows your name, is it easier to approach him/her when you have a question or concern?	90%	96%	10%	4%
10. If your PE teacher knows your name, do you feel he/she cares about you?	86%	96%	14%	4%
11. When you see or talk to your PE teacher outside of your PE class (mall, store, or halls), does he/she know your name?	90%	94%	10%	6%
12. Generally, do you feel your PE teacher knows a majority of the students' names in your PE class?	98%	97%	2%	3%
13. If your PE teacher knows your name, does that affect your PE class experience and activities/games you play in class?	69%	83%	33%	17%

Short open-ended answers for three survey questions provided qualitative data for this study. Participants were asked to explain their yes/no answer. Statement 3 asked the participants to explain their answer regarding if they were more encouraged to participate in class activities when their PE teacher stated their name. A female participant stated, "It makes me want to participate and makes me feel included." Another female participant said, "It makes me want to be in my PE class." A male participant said, "Because he knows me, I am willing to participate." For Statement 5, the participants were asked if they felt it was important that their PE teacher knew their name. A female participant stated, "My real name is Majorie and I go by Scout, and she makes sure to call me by my preferred

name. I like that.” Another female participant explained, “I enjoy hearing my name. It makes me feel important.” A male participant said, “It shows respect to the students.” Another male student said, “I am a twin. He doesn’t confuse me. He knows my name.” Finally, Statement 10 asked the participants if their PE teacher knowing their name showed that the teacher cared about the students. A male participant stated, “He cares enough to not call me ‘kid.’” Another male participant expressed, “By remembering my name, it shows that he knows about me and cares.” A female participant indicated, “I feel like I matter enough for her to know my name.” Another female participant simply stated, “She knows I exist.”

Discussion

This study’s investigation of PE teachers using student names and the effect of this on students is revealing. It shows that when PE teachers use students’ names, in all interactions, the students appreciate it and like it. The PE teachers use of names also shows their care for the students and, overall, makes the PE experience positive. Students like hearing their PE teacher use their name (Larson & Silverman, 2005; Prusak et al., 2005; Roessing et al., 2006). Why is this important? The results of this study show that both male participants and female participants feel encouragement to participate in class activities when their PE teacher says their name. The literature concurs with this effect of the use of student names (Petray-Rowcliffe et al., 2002). Much good can come from this. When students are engaged in class activities, there is a better opportunity for learning (Barney, 2005). Students learn skills that result in increased confidence in their ability to participate successfully. Another point of PE teachers using student names in their interactions with their students is that they are being respectful to the student. Respect solidifies in the student’s mind that while the PE teacher is the authority figure in their relationship, respect can and should be shown to students. If the PE teacher uses nicknames with the student, this sends a message of casualness between the PE teacher and the students (Briggs, 2013). While different from a nickname, a finding from this study is that students appreciate when PE teachers use their preferred name.

A second finding from this study is using student names is a good management tool for PE teachers. Effective classroom management requires learning the names of students (Pangrazi & Beighle, 2013).

In this study, the participant responses reveal PE teachers' use of student names for disciplinary reasons, for example, "When she calls me out, she uses my name" and "When I have been disciplined, she calls me by my name and not 'that girl.'" Examples of using student names in management situations from the practitioner literature (Hichwa, 1998) include "Billy, I need you to hold the ball still" and "Joey, I need your full attention." These brief examples illustrate the PE teacher using the student's name to let the student know they are being spoken to regarding classroom management. When a PE teacher uses the student's name, it can quickly get their attention to address the misbehavior (Williams, 1995).

One last observation from this study, the PE teacher's use of student names is a method for the teacher to communicate their care for the students. Results from this study show that students feel this is indeed the case. Participant responses to this statement include "I feel like I matter enough for her to know my name" and "By remembering my name, it states that they know about me and care." The literature agrees with these findings. The teacher's use of students' names reminds students they are important to the teacher (Prusak et al., 2005). When a teacher cares for their students, it has the potential to influence positively their self-esteem and self-confidence and students are more motivated to participate in class activities (Larson & Silverman, 2005).

Study Implications

This study identifies certain aspects of PE teachers using student names and the effect of this on students. We believe the results of this study can yield positive results with students. PE teachers typically have 35 to 40 students in each class, and if this is multiplied by eight classes, a PE teacher has 280 to 320 students' names to learn and use in their interactions with the students. This may seem daunting, yet with effort the PE teacher can learn students' names. PE teachers may not consider how much good can come from their use of students' names in their interactions. Yet the results from this study strengthen this notion of PE teachers using student names as good pedagogy. Participants in this study clearly feel that when the PE teacher uses students' names, it impacts desire to participate and makes the students' overall PE experience positive. From a PE teachers' perspective, when they use students' names in a management

situation, the student knows they are being addressed and asked to correct their misbehavior. There is no question or uncertainty to whom the PE teacher is talking. Typically, when a PE teacher disciplines a student by using their name, the PE teacher can correct and in the process be respectful toward the student without embarrassing them. Given there is little research in this area specific to PE teachers, it is encouraging that the students in these PE classes feel their teachers use students' names and that they can communicate the effect of this on their PE experience. This gives hope that there is transference between other non-PE specific areas of teacher preparation and development that is positively affecting the work of PE teachers.

Study Limitations

The participants from this study came from one geographical region of the United States. In addition, the participants were divided into classes that were either all male or all female.

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