

Survive and Thrive as a **Physical Educator**



*Strategies FOR
THE First Year
AND Beyond*

Alisa R. James

Survive and Thrive as a Physical Educator

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*STRATEGIES FOR THE
FIRST YEAR AND BEYOND*

ALISA R. JAMES

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To my family, for their support and belief in me.

Preface

Welcome to the gymnasium and to the profession of physical educator. For years you have been in the role of a student, working to complete assignments, working with professors and in-service teachers, and learning what it takes to be a skillful physical education teacher. Now, as you enter the gymnasium as the teacher, you will design and deliver those assignments, work with diverse students and teachers, and continue your education as a professional.

If you are like most beginning teachers, you are experiencing both excitement and fear. You have a good idea of what you and your students are supposed to do; however, you are unsure of how successful you will be as a teacher. For example, how will you handle discipline issues? How will you motivate students? Will the students cooperate with you and engage in your planned learning tasks?

There is no reason to fear. Everyone has these questions—and many other questions—when they begin a teaching career. Teaching physical education is hard work. On a given day, you may find that one class is engaged in the lesson and is excited to participate, while the same lesson fails miserably in the next class. Even veteran teachers experience days when they are frustrated and do not know what to do—and other days when they are able to motivate students to learn and participate in physical education.

Your initial years of teaching physical education can be extremely challenging. You might feel overwhelmed by the daily pressures of planning and assessing, dealing with behavior issues, and meeting the individual needs of your students. These pressures can be exhausting and may at times leave you questioning if you really want to be a teacher.

As an associate professor in a large PETE (physical education teacher education) program at a comprehensive college, I have clearly seen that student teachers and new teachers need support and advice in order to become skilled physical education teachers. New teachers face several challenges, including limited support from the university as well as minimal supervision and mentoring.

The purpose of *Survive and Thrive as a Physical Educator: Strategies for the First Year and Beyond* is twofold. First, the book serves as a resource

that helps beginning teachers successfully transfer what they learned in college to the setting in which they teach physical education. Second, the book provides information and useful resources that beginning teachers did not learn about as part of their undergraduate preparation; this information is essential in helping teachers succeed as physical educators.

The book is divided into two parts. Part I, composed of five chapters, is dedicated to helping beginning teachers take what they learned in college and transfer it to their teaching setting. Chapter 1 discusses strategies that will help you fit in and become an active and contributing member of the school community. Chapter 2 contains ideas for the beginning of the school year, from organizing the gymnasium to setting goals for the first week of school. Chapter 3 focuses on the task of creating lesson and unit plans. It provides you with guidelines for planning effective lessons and units, as well as ideas for delivering effective instruction for all students. Chapter 4 describes how to assess and evaluate student progress, and it addresses grading in physical education. Chapter 5 focuses on classroom and behavior management, which is a major concern for beginning teachers. The chapter describes the process of establishing the learning environment as well as developing rules, routines, and expectations. In addition, it discusses techniques for promoting good behavior along with consequences that may be used to address misbehavior.

Part II of the book focuses on things that beginning teachers may not have learned in college but are nevertheless crucial to their success in teaching physical education. Chapter 6 covers methods that can be used to motivate students in physical education. Various types of motivation are discussed as well as specific strategies for motivating students in physical education. Chapter 7 explores diversity in the physical education classroom and how this diversity affects physical education. Chapter 8 illustrates the importance of understanding how schools socialize beginning teachers, and it presents strategies for dealing with the effects of socialization. In addition, the chapter discusses teacher burnout and what you can do to alleviate the effects of burnout. Chapter 9 offers suggestions for developing relationships with parents and guardians, and it describes how to communicate with them in a positive manner. Chapter 10 focuses on the importance of professional development and how it can help you become an effective teacher.

Each chapter contains several useful resources, including templates ranging from sample assessments to sample letters that can be sent home to parents. Note that while the templates included in the book can be photocopied, I encourage you to modify them to fit your specific teaching situation or to create your own. You will find the following resources grouped at the end of their respective chapters.

- ▶ Resource 1.1 Assessment of Community Members
- ▶ Resource 1.2 Checklist for Physical Activity Resources in the Community
- ▶ Resource 2.1 Checklist for Personal Employment Folder
- ▶ Resource 2.2 School and District Roster
- ▶ Resource 2.3 Equipment Inventory and Assessment
- ▶ Resource 2.4 Facilities Assessment
- ▶ Resource 2.5 Substitute Teacher Feedback Form
- ▶ Resource 2.6 Sample “Get to Know You” Questionnaire
- ▶ Resource 3.1 Sample Unit Planning Template
- ▶ Resource 3.2 Sample Lesson Planning Form
- ▶ Resource 3.3 Sample Task Sheet
- ▶ Resource 4.1 Throwing Checklist
- ▶ Resource 4.2 Rating Scale for Throwing
- ▶ Resource 4.3 Three-Level Rubric for Throwing
- ▶ Resource 4.4 Assessment Plan for Middle School Volleyball
- ▶ Resource 5.1 Discipline Log Template
- ▶ Resource 5.2 Classroom Management Plan Template
- ▶ Resource 5.3 Behavior Contract Template
- ▶ Resource 6.1 Sport of the Month Award Certificate
- ▶ Resource 6.2 Sample Activity Interest Survey
- ▶ Resource 7.1 Assessment: Who Am I?
- ▶ Resource 7.2 Assessment: Who Are My Students?
- ▶ Resource 8.1 Actions to Help You Adopt a Content-Innovative or Role-Innovative Orientation to School Socialization
- ▶ Resource 8.2 Plan for Preventing Burnout
- ▶ Resource 9.1 Sample Beginning-of-School Letter to Parents (Elementary School)
- ▶ Resource 9.2 Sample Beginning-of-School Letter to Parents (High School)
- ▶ Resource 9.3 Survey to Be Included in Beginning-of-School Letter
- ▶ Resource 9.4 Caught Doing Something Good in Physical Education Report
- ▶ Resource 9.5 Sample Parent–Teacher Conference Letter
- ▶ Resource 9.6 Parent–Teacher Conference Note-Taking Form
- ▶ Resource 10.1 Graphic Organizer for Short-Term Goal Setting
- ▶ Resource 10.2 Graphic Organizer for Long-Term Goal Setting

In addition, each chapter has questions that will help you reflect on the content in regard to your teaching practice.

The book also includes two appendixes that are beneficial for beginning teachers. Appendix A provides answers to frequently asked questions ranging from how to prepare for a substitute teacher to questions about the tenure process. Appendix B identifies a variety of resources, including print and electronic resources as well as equipment suppliers.

This book was written to serve as a guide to help new teachers not only survive but also thrive as physical education teachers. I hope that you find the book informative and useful in helping you to become a skillful physical educator who continues to be passionate about teaching.

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PART I

**Skills
to Help
You Survive**

Your First Job as a Physical Educator— Now What?



A beginning physical education teacher will encounter many challenges. One of your first challenges is to avoid being overwhelmed by the numerous responsibilities that come with the profession. In addition to the tasks that come with the job, you will likely face additional stress related to the transition from student to professional. Fortunately, by taking some specific steps, you can make this transition easier and be on your way to becoming a successful physical educator. This chapter discusses those steps and covers issues such as learning about the school district and community, becoming familiar with policies and procedures, and developing relationships with your colleagues in the school.

School District, School, and Community

The first step is to learn as much as you can about the school district, the school, and the community in which you will be teaching.

First, you need to become acquainted with your school district and the school in which you will be working. Visit your assigned school and spend time exploring its layout. Examine the facilities and equipment that are available for physical education. Some schools have excellent facilities for teaching as well as an abundance of equipment; however, that might not be the case in the school where you are teaching. Some schools do not have any outdoor space, while others may not have enough equipment for you to teach in a manner that maximizes participation. In my first teaching assignment, I taught in a space that was not only the gym but also the cafeteria. It was a decently sized space, but the floor was tiled, and the cafeteria tables were folded into the wall; the tables were precariously held in place by wire, which gave me pause each time a child got close or a ball hit a table. The point is that you should know the space and equipment available to you for teaching and should plan your program accordingly.

The Internet is a helpful tool for gaining information about your school and the school district. Be sure to investigate the school district's website as well as the website for your particular school. While examining the websites, look specifically for web pages dedicated to physical education. Significant information regarding the curriculum and policies for physical education can often be found on these pages.

In addition to learning about the school and the district, you should spend time in the community to get a feel for the people who live there. Make an effort to learn about the points of pride, recreational activities, businesses, and opportunities for physical activity that exist in the community. Another way to gain an understanding of the community is to visit websites that give information about the area. A great website

for finding information about any community in the United States is www.epodunk.com. The website provides valuable information such as median income of residents, educational level of residents, school enrollment, and parks and recreational opportunities in the community. As you research the school and the community, try to gain information about the ethnic and cultural backgrounds and values of students and their parents. Also try to determine the socioeconomic status of the students' families. Resource 1.1 is a questionnaire that will help you assess important aspects of the community in which you teach. Resource 1.2 enables you to identify physical activity opportunities in the community.

Policies and Procedures

Once you have become familiar with your school, school district, and community, the next step is to examine the policies and procedures of the district and school. At the start of the year, you will be barraged with a lot of information regarding policies and procedures, and you will be expected to learn this information in a short period of time. District policies are policies that apply to all teachers, staff, and students in the district. School policies apply to the teachers, staff, and students in a particular school. Most school districts provide new teachers with an employee handbook that explains the policies and procedures for the school and district in detail.

You need to understand district- and schoolwide policies and procedures because they affect your school life and your success as a teacher. For example, make sure you understand the district policies concerning physical education curriculum, district grading procedures, tenure policies, staff evaluation policies and procedures, emergency school closing procedures, and reporting periods for grades and progress reports. You must seek clarification of policies and procedures that you do not understand; otherwise, you risk making mistakes that could have an impact on your effectiveness as a teacher or your chances of being evaluated in a favorable manner. Here are several types of policies and procedures that you need to know:

- ▶ Policies concerning teacher arrival and dismissal times
- ▶ Policies regarding expected dress for teachers
- ▶ Code of discipline for students
- ▶ Policies for acceptable student behavior
- ▶ Consequences for inappropriate student behavior
- ▶ Lesson plan format and review procedures

- ▶ Teacher duties and responsibilities (recess, bus, and so on)
- ▶ Student attendance procedures
- ▶ How to call for a substitute
- ▶ How to handle student injuries
- ▶ Emergency procedures (fire, tornado, school intruder)

Professional Relationships

When you are trying to learn the policies and procedures at your school, one valuable source of information is your professional colleagues. Set aside time to get to know your colleagues and develop professional relationships with them. Your colleagues include teaching faculty, school administrators, and support staff. They are valuable resources and will be instrumental in helping you through the first few years of teaching. Try to meet your colleagues and spend time getting to know them by asking questions and seeking advice about effective teaching.

Teaching Faculty

Developing professional relationships with other teachers in your building is vital to your success as a beginning teacher. All teachers, not only physical education teachers, can help you understand the school as a workplace and can provide valuable information regarding students, parents, administrators, and the community at large.

In my own experience as a beginning teacher, many teaching colleagues had an influence on my success as a teacher; however, one teacher in particular helped me understand my students and their families. This teacher also helped me understand the influence that the community and certain students' home situations had on the performance and behavior of the students. Mrs. Jones was a music teacher at my school and was a very successful teacher. The students respected and trusted her. The countless hours I spent in conversations with her and observing her interactions with students had a great impact on my teaching style and how I interacted with students.

Administrators

The administrators in your building will typically be principals or assistant principals. These administrators are the instructional leaders of the school, and they can help you with a variety of concerns related to instruction, classroom management, and professional development. At the beginning of the school year, one important task for you to undertake is to meet with the school principal. In this meeting, you should



► Ask questions of other teachers to learn more about your school's policies and procedures.

confirm your teaching schedule and other school responsibilities—such as homeroom, study hall, bus, lunch, recess duty, and safety patrol.

During this meeting, you should ask about the school's expectations and norms. Some of these expectations and norms will be explained in the teacher handbook; however, you must be sure to ask questions about any expectations that are not clear. In addition, ask about the principal's perspectives on the successful delivery of instruction. Also try to find out the principal's beliefs about the role that physical education plays in the overall education of students. Don't be intimidated about meeting with the principal at the beginning of the year. Although administrators are often short on time and overwhelmed with a variety of tasks, their responsibilities include guiding and assisting new teachers in the school.

The director of physical education is an administrator who may not be located in your building; however, you should meet with this administrator to discuss his or her expectations of physical education teachers. You can also clarify any questions you may have about the district's physical education curriculum or instructional and assessment practices. If the director of physical education is not located in your