

Standards-Based Activities for Elementary Physical Education

by Felicia Greer and Jenelle N. Gilbert



The number of overweight and obese youth has been increasing dramatically in recent decades, and there is no sign the trend is ending (Ogden, Flegal, Carroll, & Johnson, 2002). Many factors have been suggested as causes, including decreased physical activity, more television viewing, and larger portion sizes. Exercise behaviors and attitudes developed at an early age, such as in elementary school, lay the groundwork for a lifetime of exercise involvement or, sadly, a lifetime of physical inactivity. Therefore, physical education programs may be a potentially important channel through which physical activity and fitness can be promoted (Carter, 2002).

Toward this end, the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) published the National Standards for Physical Education (NASPE, 2004). The purpose of the standards is to provide criteria for what students should know and be able to do as a result of a quality physical education program. However, multiple-subject elementary classroom teachers receive very little training in physical education and, therefore, may not be aware of the NASPE National Standards. In fact, only 50% of states require newly hired elementary level teachers to have some training in physical education (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2000). Thus, the lack of specialized training for multiple-subject elementary classroom teachers hinders the quality of physical education they can offer to their

students. Limited financial resources and lack of equipment also contribute to this problem. The purpose of this article is to suggest developmentally appropriate physical activities that elementary classroom teachers can use to deliver quality physical education instruction to their students. The activities presented rely on minimal equipment and were chosen based on their ease of use, high level of student engagement, and direct relation to the National Standards.

The activities selected relate to six main areas: quick movement activities, low organized activities, cooperative activities, fitness activities, partner activities, and small group activities. The format for each section includes an introductory paragraph with information that explains the category as well as a justification for why it was chosen and when/how it can be used. Please note that the activities are not mutually exclusive. For example, Balloon Bucket, an activity chosen for Partner Activities, also has elements of cooperation. A cross-curricular component for lower elementary (K-2) and upper elementary (grades 3-5) students within each of the six areas has also been included. Finally, additional resources are identified within each section. These supplementary activities were chosen based on their simple procedures and their potentially high movement component.

At first glance it seems incongruous to publish an article directed at classroom teachers in a journal that serves physical education teachers. However, the activities suggested by the authors, along with links to the National Standards, should be of value to anyone interested in quality physical education, whether delivered by specialists or classroom teachers. And, the authors make a good point: there are too few resources for classroom teachers who find themselves responsible for the physical domain in the absence, or even reduction, of formal physical education in their schools. This article might serve several purposes for TEPE readers: (a) The activities, being appropriate for limited equipment and space, might be used on days when the gym is not available; (b) This information could be passed along to teachers in schools that lack a formal physical education program; (c) The information can be copied to your classroom colleagues to help them develop a more accurate perception of the value of physical education. Enjoy! —Editor

Quick Movement Activities

Quick movement activities involve minimal equipment and set-up. This makes them great choices for the beginning of the lesson when the teacher wants to get students participating right away or when the teacher needs to organize equipment for later in the lesson. Quick movement activities could also be used when the teacher needs to pull out small groups of students for fitness testing or to observe and make assessments of their skill performance.

Corners (adapted from *Four Corner Warm-up* by Landy & Landy, 1993)

Required Equipment: 4 cones, 4 folders, 4 signs with a list of movement instructions (see Figure 1 for an example)

Optional Equipment: CD/CD Player, class roster taped to wall, container with pencils for approximately half of the class

Concepts/Skills Emphasized: Jumping (tuck knee jumps, long jumping, etc.), Running, Skipping, Galloping, Lunging, Crab Walk, etc.

Procedure

- Place a cone in each corner. Place a folder with an attached movement list over each cone so the students can see the directions as they approach the cone.
- Spread students out around the outside of the marked area in a square or rectangle.



Cone #1

- Tuck knee jumps
- Run with high knees
- Long jump
- Jog

Cone #2

- Crabwalk
- Line jumping
- Sliding (facing in) – get low!
- Lunging

Cone #3

- Tuck knee jumps
- Run with high knees
- Long jump
- Jog

Cone #4

- Crabwalk
- Line jumping
- Sliding (facing out) – get low!
- Lunging

- Students perform the first activity on the list during their first lap. For the second lap, students perform activity #2 on the list, etc.

Things to Consider

- Increase or decrease the distance between the four corners according to the students' level of fitness.
- Remind students about proper jumping and landing form. Encourage correct execution of the skills. This minimizes the potential for injuries.
- Use contemporary, upbeat music to help motivate students during their laps and increase the fun factor. The music may also be used as Stop and Go signals.
- Stress that the activity is not a race. Rather, encourage students to start at any spot around the activity area and continue for a designated time (e.g., 5 minutes or the length of a song).
- For lower elementary level students, emphasize cross-curricular content by requiring students to count and record the number of jumps between specific cones. Tape a large roster sheet to the wall and place a container of pencils nearby to facilitate the recording process.
- To extend the activity to upper elementary students, have them calculate the mean distance of each long jump. These are obvious math integrations.

Sample Performance Outcomes

- "Travels forward and sideways, changing directions quickly in response to a signal or obstacle using a variety of locomotor skills" (Standard 1 – K-2).
- "Jumps vertically to a height of 9 inches and lands using mature form" (e.g., stands, crouches with arms back and weight on toes, lifts off with hands high, lands on both feet; Standard 1 – grades 3-5).

Other Recommended Quick Movement Activities

- *Overhand Throwing on the Run* (Landy & Landy, 1992a, p. 203).
- *Stop and Go* (Foster, Hartinger, & Smith, 1992, p. 47)
- *Bean Bag Surprise* (<http://www.pecentral.org/lessonideas/searchlessonideas.asp>)

FIGURE 1 Sample movement instruction lists for Corners (Quick Movement Activity)

Low Organized Activities

Low organized activities have few or simple rules and require little or no equipment. Use low organized activities as an aerobic warm-up. Low organized activities may also be used within a PE lesson as an opportunity to practice specific skills.

Hug and Hum Tag (adapted from Orlick, 1982)

Required Equipment: 3 or more soft pieces of equipment (e.g., jerseys, juggling scarves, bandanas)

Optional Equipment: CD/CD Player

Concepts/Skills Emphasized: Chasing, Dodging, Fleeing, Traveling (running, walking, leaping, sliding, galloping, skipping, etc.), Cooperation

Procedure

- Disperse students throughout the activity area.
- Students take their resting heart rate at the carotid artery.
- Choose three or more players to be *It*. Give each of the *Its* a soft piece of equipment to hold (see equipment list) to signify that they are taggers.
- On Go, the *Its* chase the rest of the players, attempting to tag them. *Fleers* become *safe* from being tagged if they link arms with another player. However, they are only allowed to stay linked for as long as they can hum on one breath. As soon as they have to take a breath, they must unlink arms and rejoin the other fleers, becoming eligible to be tagged.
- After several minutes, direct the students to take their heart rate at the carotid artery. Engage them in a discussion about the difference between their resting and exercise heart rates.

Things to Consider

- Emphasize appropriate tagging (i.e., a one-handed gentle touch on the upper back or shoulder).
- Institute a three-second rule for tagging. Allow an *It* to chase any particular fleer for a maximum of three seconds.
- If certain taggers have difficulty catching their peers, stop the game and change all the taggers. This avoids singling out less successful *Its*.
- Change the locomotor pattern often to include skipping, galloping, sliding, leaping, etc.
- Use contemporary, upbeat music to help motivate students to maintain a quick pace while chasing or fleeing. The music may also be used as Stop and Go signals.
- Emphasize cross-curricular content by giving the students alternate tasks to complete while linked.

For example, require younger children to recite the alphabet or a specific multiplication table, rather than just hum. Or, require upper elementary children to share brief bios or fun facts about famous historical figures (e.g., Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, Jr., etc.).

Sample Performance Outcomes

- "Explains that warm-up prepares the body for physical activity" (Standard 2—K-2).
- "Describes how heart rate is used to monitor exercise intensity" (Standard 2—3-5)

Other Recommended Low Organized Activities

- *Artful Dodger* (Landy & Landy, 1992a, p. 9)
- *Bottoms Up* (Dieden, 1995, p. 11).
- *Hokey Pokey Aerobics* (<http://www.pecentral.org/lessonideas/searchresults.asp>).

Cooperative Activities

Inappropriate competition can decrease performance for unskilled students and beginners (Rink, 2002). For this reason, we highly encourage teachers to include cooperative activities in the physical education program. When students participate in cooperative learning experiences they (a) learn to share and empathize with others, (b) have a heightened sense of self-esteem, (c) feel satisfied with their contributions to the group, and (d) enjoy the game without fear of failing (Orlick, 1978, 1982).

Cooperative activities can be used throughout the physical education curriculum. However, they may be especially important at the beginning of the school year or after extended breaks (e.g., Thanksgiving, Christmas, Spring break), or whenever the teacher is trying to create (or recreate) a positive and supportive classroom climate.

Juice Can Slide

Required Equipment: For each group of 4 or 5 students, the following are required: an elastic band with 4 or 5 pieces of yarn tied to it (each piece of yarn is approximately 2 feet long), 5 or 6 empty juice cans of equal size

Optional Equipment: 2 Hula Hoops for each group, CD/CD Player

Concepts/Skills Emphasized: Cooperation, Problem Solving, Traveling

Procedure

- Assemble juice can structures (using 5 or 6 cans

each) at one end of the activity area. There should be one juice can structure for each group of 4 or 5 students. (If hula hoops are being used, each structure should be assembled in its own hoop.)

- Divide students into groups of 4 or 5.
- Give each group an elastic band—yarn instrument.
- Instruct students to “break-down” their juice can structure, move the cans, and reassemble the structure on the opposite end of the activity area using only their elastic band—yarn instrument. (If hula hoops are being used, reassemble the structures in other hoops already placed in the reassembly area.)

Things to Consider

- Any beverage cans may be used for this activity, but given the importance of modeling, juice cans (as opposed to soda cans) are recommended.
- Students might be challenged to assemble their own juice can structures at the beginning of the activity.
- Once the activity has started, students may use only the elastic band—yarn instrument to move the cans (even if they are tipped over). They can never touch the cans with their hands, arms, or other body parts.
- You may want to institute a rule that only one juice can may be carried at a time.
- Emphasize that the activity is not a race. If groups finish early, instruct them to encourage their classmates. They may also share techniques that helped them to be successful with the remaining groups.
- Using contemporary, upbeat music helps the students stay engaged with the task when they experience difficulties. The music may also be used as Stop and Go signals.

Emphasize cross-curricular content by having lower elementary students identify fruits and vegetables that start with particular letters (e.g., “How many fruits and vegetables can you name that begin with the letter *a*?”). Or, require upper elementary students to research the nutritional information of fruit juices compared to various types of sodas. These suggestions represent a natural progression if juice cans (e.g., V-8, apple juice, orange juice, etc.) are used for the activity.

Sample Performance Outcomes

- “Participates in a variety of activities that involve manipulation of objects in and outside of physical education class” (e.g., tossing ball, juggling). (Standard 3 – K-2)
- “Chooses to participate in structured and purposeful activity.” (Standard 3 – grades 3-5)

Other Recommended Cooperative Activities

- *Collective Blanket Ball* (Orlick, 1978, pp. 52-53).

- *Tug of Peace* (Orlick, 1978, p. 15).
- *Monsters, Inc.* (<http://www.pecentral.org/lessonideas/searchlessonideas.asp>)

Fitness Activities

National Standard #4 states that students should achieve and maintain a health-enhancing level of physical fitness (NASPE, 2004). So, along with skill development, a primary goal of every elementary physical education program should be improving students’ fitness levels. The challenge for teachers is to come up with unique and fun fitness activities that develop strength, cardiorespiratory endurance, and flexibility. Early exposure to these activities helps students succeed in the ubiquitous fitness tests conducted in elementary schools nationwide. More important, however, is laying the groundwork for a lifetime of healthy physical fitness. Therefore, students should be provided engaging opportunities to improve their fitness, as well as age-appropriate information related to the positive health benefits of regular exercise in most, if not all, physical education lessons.

Pass, Chase, Get Fit!

Required Equipment: Beanbags (yarnball, paperball, etc.) for half the class

Optional Equipment: CD/CD Player, class roster taped to wall, container with pencils for approximately half the class

Concepts/Skills Emphasized: Catching, Chasing, Dodging, Fleeing, Throwing, and Fitness Test skills (emphasize abdominal crunches, trunk lift, sit and reach, etc.)

Procedure

- Disperse students throughout the general space in pairs, each pair having one beanbag, yarn ball, or other similar object.
- On Go, students travel about the general space in their pairs while throwing and catching the beanbag back and forth.
- On the command to Chase, students having or receiving the beanbag chase their partner, attempting to tag them in an allotted time. (Provide a brief chase time, approximately 10 seconds.)
- After students have been tagged, or the chase time has expired, the “winner” within each pairing chooses a fitness activity to perform for about 30 seconds. The activities are to come from a category designated by the teacher. For example, if the teacher calls out Strength, students might choose to do abdominal crunches, push-ups, or a static trunk lift. For Flexibility, students could

choose to do a hamstring or shoulder stretch. The "winner" selects the task, but both students perform it.

Things to Consider

- This activity requires students have a clear grasp of the concept of general space and personal space. Prior practice traveling as individuals and/or pairs in a dynamic environment will make this activity safer and more effective.
- Throwing the beanbag, etc. at each other should be prohibited.
- Emphasize appropriate tagging (i.e., a one-handed gentle touch on the upper back or shoulder).
- Do not designate flexibility exercises until the students are well warmed up. Warming up the muscles prior to stretching decreases the likelihood of injury.
- If students begin to avoid certain activities, provide a checklist of desirable tasks and emphasize that they may only choose an activity twice.
- To help prepare students for fitness testing, emphasize related fitness tasks. For example, use flexibility exercises, such as the hamstring stretch to prepare students for the back saver sit and reach test, which measures flexibility of the hamstrings and lower back muscles.
- Use contemporary, upbeat music to help motivate students to maintain an energetic pace while chasing or fleeing and doing strength exercises. This might be alternated with slower music for times when students are performing stretches.
- For young students, emphasize cross-curricular content by having students record the number of exercises they complete in each 30-second period. Tape a large roster sheet to the wall to facilitate the process. As in the *Corners* activity, have upper elementary students calculate mean scores, or the number of seconds it takes to complete a particular exercise.

Sample Performance Outcomes

- "Participates in a variety of games that increase breathing and heart rate" (Standard 4—K-2).
- "Engages in appropriate physical activity that results in the development of cardiorespiratory endurance" (Standard 4—grades 3-5).

Other Recommended Fitness Activities

- *10 Minute Workouts 1-5* (Landy & Landy, 1992b, pp. 35-39).
- *Figure Eight Fitness* (Foster, Hartinger, & Smith, 1992, p. 35).
- *Musical Hoops* (<http://www.pecentral.org/lessonideas/searchresults.asp>)

Partner Activities

Partner activities require coordination and cooperation between the participants, working together to achieve success in tasks.

Balloon Bucket (adapted from Orlick, 1978)

Required Equipment: Balloons for half the class (plus a few extras)

Optional Equipment: CD/CD Player, Hula Hoops

Skills Emphasized: Dodging, Traveling (running, walking, leaping, sliding, galloping, skipping, etc.), Volleying

Procedure

- Disperse students throughout the general space in pairs, each pair with a balloon.
- On Go, students travel about the general space in their pairs while volleying the balloon back and forth.
- On a signal, the students attempt to *score a basket*. One student volleys the balloon through the partner's arms (i.e., hold arms in a circle with fingertips touching in front of the stomach).
- If using hula hoops, scatter them about the general space. Partners volley their balloon back and forth. *Baskets* can be attempted at any time. A score occurs when one student picks up a hoop and the other student volleys the balloon through it.
- Once the balloon passes through the "basket," whether arms or hoop, challenge students to volley it back up prior to touching the floor. Then continue the partner volleying.

Things to Consider

- As noted above, Balloon Bucket is safe and effective only after students have had sufficient practice respecting everyone's self-space within a dynamic environment.
- To minimize management time, inflate the balloons prior to class. Elementary school children often have difficulty blowing up and tying their own balloons.
- If students are given the task of preparing their own balloons, be prepared to assist asthmatic students.
- Have extra balloons available for when, not if, balloons break.
- Balloons of all the same color may be desirable for some tasks. However, using balloons of various colors allows the class to be divided into groups.
- During Balloon Bucket, change the locomotor pattern often to include skipping, galloping, sliding, leaping, etc.

- Challenge students by requiring them to use only the nondominant arm/hand when volleying. Or, require that the balloon alternate between partners, with each person touching it only once per pass.
- To avoid injury while using hula hoops, encourage the students to avoid stepping on them.
- To emphasize cross-curricular content for young children, designate specific body parts to use when volleying the balloon back (e.g., hand, upper leg, etc.). Apply this to upper elementary students by having them name a specific bone (e.g., humerus, femur, etc.) for their partner to use when volleying.

Sample Performance Outcomes

- “Uses equipment and space safely and properly” (Standard 5—K-2).
- “Cooperates with all class members by taking turns and sharing equipment” (Standard 5—grades 3-5).

Other Recommended Partner Activities

- *Breakaway Fitness* (Foster, Hartinger, & Smith, 1992, p. 31).
- *Easy Linkin—Partners* (Orlick, 1978, p. 12).
- *Follow the Leader Throw and Catch* (<http://www.pecentral.org/lessonideas/searchlessonideas.asp>)

Small Group Activities

A disturbing trend in physical education at every level is growing class sizes. Large numbers of students in the physical education class limit what can realistically be accomplished. While we encourage elementary classroom and physical education teachers to push for class sizes in physical education that are on par with other academic subjects, teachers must find ways to effectively teach until the class size issue is resolved. The use of small groups can help teachers offer meaningful learning experiences to their students and provide effective feedback on a timely basis. To use small groups effectively, have the entire class participate in the same activity simultaneously, but in small groups. (This approach is used in the Conga Line below.) Stations and task sheets, where students engage in a variety of tasks individually but all groups complete all the tasks by the end of the class, are other effective small group approaches.

Conga Line (adapted from Landy & Landy, 1993)

Required Equipment: Noisemaker (e.g., drum, tambourine, bells, kazoo)

Optional Equipment: CD/CD Player

Skills Emphasized: Traveling (running, walking, leaping, sliding, galloping, skipping, etc.), and Rhythmic and Creative Movement

Procedure

- Divide students into groups of 5-6 students each.
- Each group has a leader. The rest of the group stands behind the leader, similar to common “follow the leader” games. The students are not touching each other.
- On a signal, each group travels around the activity area. The leader chooses and demonstrates a rhythmic or creative move. The rest of the group follows the leader while mimicking the movement. A noisemaker or music can be used to provide a rhythmical background for the movements.
- After about 15-20 seconds, call out “Change.” The leaders go to the back of their own line. The second student, now the new leader, chooses and demonstrates a different rhythmic or creative move for the rest of the group to mimic.
- This process continues long enough for each student to have multiple attempts as leader.

Things to Consider

- Watch for students who may be uncomfortable; move them through the leader position quickly.
- Avoid describing the activity as a “dance.” This term causes anxiety for some students who feel uncomfortable dancing. Instead, emphasize terminology such as *rhythmic* or *creative* movement.
- Suggest to students who can’t think of a movement to do when leading that they can just walk or march around the gym. Providing such options further alleviates anxiety that some students feel about rhythmic and creative movement.
- For safety reasons, discourage students from twirling in circles when leading.
- Students will engage more and have more fun if current, upbeat music is played.
- Emphasize cross-curricular content by using music from different cultures the students may be studying (e.g., music from the Hispanic, Hmong, or African-American cultures).

Sample Performance Outcomes

- “Willingly tries new movements and skills” (Standard 6—K-2).
- “Develops a dance sequence (or game) that is personally interesting” (Standard 6—grades 3-5)

Other Recommended Small Group Activities

- *Group Math* (Kotnour, 1990, p. 12).
- *One, Two, Three Dragon* (Morris & Stiehl, 1999, pp. 110-111).


- *Survivors* (<http://www.pecentral.org/lessonideas/searchlessonideas.asp>)

For each of the activities suggested, there are various adaptations that can be made to the equipment. For example, if playground balls are not available, use paper balls (crumple up an 8.5" x 11" sheet of paper) or yarn balls. It is also important to keep in mind that while some of the activities require preparation time and planning, in many cases, the same materials can be used for multiple activities.

In conclusion, the purpose of this article was to provide elementary classroom teachers with developmentally appropriate activities they can use to deliver quality physical education instruction to their students. These particular activities were chosen because of their practicality, simplicity (i.e., minimal equipment and instructions required), emphasis on movement and direct relation to the National Standards. We hope elementary classroom teachers will find these activities educational, fun, and engaging – we are sure that their **students** will!

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