Exemplary Instruction Commentary: Physical Education

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1. Lessons shown in video

The video clips capture Lesson 1, the first lesson in the lesson segment, marking the first day of students’ Lacrosse unit. Lesson 1 is titled “Lacrosse-Introduction, safety & grip, cradle, scoop”. Lesson 1 introduces students to Lacrosse through the central focus, which aims to develop competencies in the psychomotor, cognitive and affective domains through partner and group practice activities. Students are introduced to the unit’s central focus, the lesson’s learning target and participate in three learning activities, which help students practice and combine fundamental skills and strategies needed to play Lacrosse. This lesson contains three formative assessments and one self-assessment to conclude the lesson.

2. Promoting a positive environment

In video clip 2 at 5:06 students are about to begin learning activity 2, which facilitates the development of students’ scooping skills. Students have not yet practiced this skill but have observed a visual demonstration paired with verbal cues. Before allowing partners to begin the activity, this clip shows me selecting a student volunteer, Saundra, to demonstrate the activity in front of the class. Saundra is a shy and reserved senior who has trouble staying engaged in learning activities due to a lower level of physical fitness and an apathetic attitude towards physical activities. I chose Saundra to demonstrate this skill for her peers for two reasons: to help engage Saundra in the upcoming learning activity so that she felt motivated and empowered by her participation to do well with her partner, but also to model acceptable behaviors between students during partner activities. By reminding Saundra as she walked in front of the students “it doesn’t matter if you get it” I communicated to her and the class that perfection is not the expectation. I modeled respect for Saundra by supporting her choice to come in front of the class and my demeanor made her feel supported. By choosing Saundra as my volunteer, I attempted to establish the understanding that you do not have to have an athletic background to be successful at this activity. Saundra successfully scooped up the ball on her first try in this clip at 5:46, motivating students with varied needs and backgrounds to engage in this learning activity.

Physical and emotional safety

In video clip 1 from 2:30-7:25 I introduce safety guidelines and expectations for the Lacrosse unit, providing students with rules and expectations on how they can play safely throughout learning activities. This clip shows primarily direct instruction where I discuss a combination of safety rules and expectations using written explanations on PowerPoint slides and visual demonstrations to help establish a physically safe learning environment. At 3:02 an important safety guideline is introduced, players are not allowed to make stick-to-stick contact with their peers. I chose to use a student volunteer, Colt, to demonstrate a potential situation that I anticipated could occur in a group activity. By modeling inappropriate behavior before beginning our learning activities, I have provided students with a concrete example how they can help create a physically safe learning environment.

Later in this clip from 4:48-5:50, I discuss expectations of student interaction to provide students with guidelines that will help create an emotionally safe learning environment. I encourage students to communicate with each other, respectfully, by offering each other advice and feedback on their progress. By giving students the responsibility to support their peers’ development through supportive feedback, students become active participants of their learning progress while holding each other accountable to be safe and to stay on task.

Lastly, from 5:50-6:20, I explain to students that the grading for this unit will not be based on success but on participation. I chose to clarify this in front of the class to communicate that failure is acceptable and what was more
important in each of our learning activities was participation over perfection. This helps establish a trusting and supportive environment for all levels of learners.

3. Engaging students in learning

In video clip 1 from 0:44-2:30 the central focus is introduced and broken down for the Lacrosse unit. Here I explain what is expected of students to know or be able to do by the end of the unit and how we will measure their progress. At 1:40 students engage in understanding why the central focus and learning targets are important. By sharing three reasons Lacrosse can benefit student development of psychomotor, cognitive and affective competencies (in student friendly language) students begin to develop an understanding and respect for the activities ahead. At 1:40 students are exposed to how Lacrosse is an activity that will help develop their psychomotor competencies by strengthening their cardiorespiratory endurance, a component of fitness they have learned previously in the semester. At 2:07 students are exposed to how Lacrosse will help develop affective competencies through teamwork and communication. At 2:19 students are exposed to how Lacrosse will help develop their cognitive competencies through offensive and defensive skills and strategies.

At the end of this lesson, students apply their understanding of the learning target during a structured self-assessment. This is not captured in either video clip, but is described in the lesson segment and displayed in Instructional Materials 1.3. During this self-assessment, three personal statements reflecting different levels of achievement are presented on a PowerPoint slide and on a whiteboard, read aloud to increase comprehension. Students are given a post-it note to anonymously assess themselves on the whiteboard by sticking it underneath the statement that best fits them (see Instructional Materials 1.4). This assessment acts as both a time for students to express their understanding of the learning target as well as a time for self-reflection on their progress towards the learning target.

Following the self-assessment, in video clip 3, I asked three students to discuss their understanding of the learning target. At: 15 I ask the students to reflect on the three skills we practiced for the day. Colt, Neil and Roger collectively list “scoop, cradle and grip” correctly recalling all of the skills from the learning target. Roger goes on to explain that without these basic fundamentals of the game, he would not be able to play it. His use of the word “fundamental” demonstrates his understanding of the essential skills focused on in Lesson 1. After discussing what skill was the most challenging for them, I asked where they assessed their skill level using their post-it note during the previous self-assessment. All three students felt that they were between 50% and 90% in regards to accuracy of grip, cradle and scoop development. This clip demonstrates students eliciting their understanding of why the learning target was important and also shows their confidence in methods in measuring their progress towards achieving the learning target.

In Lesson 4, which is not included in the lesson segment and was not filmed, students were given a formal written assessment which elicited their understanding of the learning targets through psychomotor skill demonstrations, self-assessment scoring charts and short answer questions testing the development of cognitive and affective competencies strengthened throughout learning activities. This assessment is attached in the Assessment file of Task 1 and discussed in Task 3.

Engaging students across domains

In learning activity 1 students practice cradling, the second skill from the Lesson 1 learning target. In video clip 2 from 3:34-5:02 students individually practice cradling at three different speeds, strengthening a fundamental skill needed to effectively participate in Lacrosse. This learning activity was designed to help students develop competencies in the psychomotor domain by focusing on their coordination, speed, dexterity and manipulation. In cradling the Lacrosse ball down and back across the court at varying speeds, students are exercising many of these simultaneously. While students are practicing this skill individually, they are practicing in a group environment. I chose to contain this learning activity on the smaller side of the gym so that students had enough space to play safely but were close enough to their peers to interact, increasing their level of engagement in the task. I also chose to pace this learning activity by directing students to practice their cradling skill at three different speeds: walking, jogging and sprinting. Increasing the speed at which the skill must be performed in a group environment typically increases students’ motivation to perform well, in turn
maintaining engagement. This maintained level of engagement is expressed through students’ facial expressions, interactions with each other, as well as their increased speed by the end of the activity.

In learning activity 2 students practice scooping, the third skill from the learning target. In video clip 2 from 6:28-10:42 students pair up and practice scooping up ground balls with a partner, strengthening a fundamental skill needed to effectively participate in Lacrosse. This learning activity was designed to help students develop competencies in the psychomotor domain by focusing on their coordination, manipulation and speed. The learning activity also helped students develop competencies in the affective domain by developing strong teamwork skills such as listening, positive interaction, responsibility, self-awareness and cooperation. Partnering students up during practice activities helps maintain engagement for two reasons. First, a partner’s participation directly affects their partner’s performance, which helps to hold both students accountable during the task since they need each other to remain engaged to succeed. Second, when students work in partners, they develop a sense of urgency to accomplish the task unlike when working individually. This clip shows students cooperating with each other, listening to as they count how many ground balls were successfully picked up, actively engaged in the development of psychomotor and affective competencies.

To maintain engagement in both learning activities, I circulate the room offering formative feedback to students who need additional visual and verbal cues and prompts to assist in skill development. By constantly moving around the gym during partner practice time, students remain engaged and attentive as they listen and adjust in response to verbal cues and prompts.

Transitions that maximize engagement

In video clip 2 from 10:23-12:00, students transition from learning activity 2 to learning activity 3. To maintain student engagement when transitioning from one learning activity to the next, I chose to announce a countdown to students so they were aware the current activity was about to end. At 10:24, I announce to the class they have 30 more seconds to complete the current task, giving students a final opportunity to attempt the skill. At 10:43 I direct the students to stop and meet me in the center of the room for directions on the next activity, “Lacrosse Tag”. This gives students a clear idea of where and how they should transition. I asked the students to surround me in the center of the room so that each student had a clear view of the upcoming demonstration. I attempted to maintain students’ engagement by speaking loudly, containing the instructional area where they could observe the next activity’s demonstration while creating a clear view of instruction. This transition into the center of the room is a routine the students are familiar with. In previous units in class, the center of the room is used as a meeting point between learning activities to gain clarification or directions on the next task. This routine minimizes time spent between activities by maximizing the transition effectively.

4. Improving competency

Monitoring performance

In video clip 2 from 6:28-8:15 I begin actively monitoring students’ performance to assist in strengthening their psychomotor and affective competencies. In this activity, students are practicing scooping up ground balls with their partner, attempting to successfully capture 9 out of 10 balls. Students have already received verbal and visual directions on how to perform this skill appropriately. At 6:45, I publically ask Andrey to adjust his delivery and roll it to his partner Roger instead of using his Lacrosse stick pocket to underhand toss. While this instruction had previously been announced, I chose to use Andrey’s error as an example for the class to learn from immediately since it is a common mistake when just beginning to practice the skill. This adjustment in delivery increased the accuracy of the exchange between him and his partner, increasing the opportunities to practice the skill. At 7:15, I approached Neila after observing her scoop and coached her to readjust her grip. I visually demonstrated how to switch Neila’s grip from dominant hand on top to dominant hand on bottom, making it easier for her to maneuver the Lacrosse stick in this activity. By privately coaching Neila to switch her grip, she attempted the next ground ball in a better position and was successful.

Modifying or extending activities
In video clip 2, as students begin practicing scooping in learning activity 2, I observe that some students may need to modify or extend the learning task in order to be successful. The majority of students had grasped the concept of scooping, successfully capturing most of their ground balls; but there were still some students that needed an adjustment in their set-up. At 7:42, after observing a gap between students’ skill levels in scooping techniques, I publically suggest three universal ways students can modify/extend the learning task. First, I suggest increasing or decreasing the speed at which partners were delivering ground balls. For those students who are still challenged by this task, a slower moving ground ball allows them more time to react and prepare to scoop. Also, a slower moving ball is easier to control. For those students who mastered this skill quickly and need more of a challenge, increasing the speed of the ground ball will decrease the amount of time a student has to react. Also, a faster moving ground ball is harder to control. Second, I suggested changing the direction of the ground ball. Meaning, for those students looking to extend the learning task, their partners could begin delivering ground balls from an angle to make scooping more challenging. Conversely, for those students in need of a modification, they could ensure ground balls were being delivered from straight in front of them, making balls easier to scoop up. Third, I suggested shortening or extending the distance between students and their partner. The task is easier the closer partners stand in relation to each other: as students master the skill they can increase the distance between them. In the video clip I refer to these options as “modifying up or modifying down”. By announcing these universal modifications to the whole class, each student can adjust their learning task to their individual learning level, while feeling safe and supported.

Representations to make activities comprehensible

Later in the clip during learning activity 3 when students are practicing scooping up ground balls with a partner, I demonstrate the three learned skills from the lesson to a student who came late to class. At 8:42, Jimena and I partner up to practice scooping, though she has not had time to practice grip or cradle. Since the learning activity is almost over, I chose to quickly visually demonstrate the three movements needed in this activity (grip, cradle and scoop) to Jimena with limited verbal explanation since she is an ELL student. I stand next to Jimena when explaining dominant hand in proper grip and scooping mechanics so that she can model my movements without needing to process the language yet. Jimena is a very quiet and shy student due to her language difficulties. While she is still developing her speaking skills, she understands English very well. I chose to demonstrate these skills privately and fairly quietly with Jimena so she did not feel embarrassed by receiving individual attention. Before beginning our partner practice, at 9:44, I ask Jimena to demonstrate her scoop once for me so that I can modify it if necessary. After observing that she understands the basic mechanics, we participate in a short scooping activity before moving onto learning activity 3.

Dealing with misconceptions

Combined verbal and visual demonstrations are utilized to model appropriate and inappropriate movements throughout Lesson 1. In clip 1 from 4:11-4:57, while discussing common mistakes in Lacrosse, I demonstrate two examples of incorrect skill development patterns to reinforce the guideline that students cannot use their hands or feet to attain possession of the ball. During my demonstration of these two common mistakes, I attempt to present them in a lighthearted style so that students understand it is a widely observed error many people make when first beginning to using the equipment. I explain to students that because many of us have a background in more traditional sports that allow throwing and kicking objects to control them, we have developed automatic responses that will be hard to disrupt in some of the learning tasks. By modeling two of these automatic responses, I am attempting to prepare students to begin forming new habits when they participate in the learning activities.

5. Analysis of teaching

To better support student learning of the central focus, I would adjust the speed of instruction, offer levels within learning tasks to support the diversity of learners and increase the amount of practice time provided for students.

After analyzing the video clips from Lesson 1, adjusting the speed at which instruction is delivered would be the primary adjustment I would make. Because class periods are condensed to 45-minute blocks in high school P.E., it can be a challenge to present the amount of content needed to succeed at a learning target. Rather than progressing through all
of the planned content at a fast pace, it would suit the population of learners better to instead reduce the amount of content covered. In these clips, my instruction is delivered fairly quickly to the students to minimize direct instruction and maximize active practice time. Analyzing how quickly concepts are presented motivates me to speak slower and spend more time on content presented so that students with IEPs or receiving ELL services have fair opportunities to absorb the content before being asked to apply it and demonstrate it. Speaking slower during direct instruction and spending more time to gauge student comprehension will benefit the students by allowing them ample time to process content, but also benefits the teacher by providing evidence of whether the students understanding is developing appropriately.

Offering more opportunities to modify/extend the learning tasks is another adjustment I would make to ensure that the diverse population of learners is challenged appropriately. After analyzing student participation in learning activity 2 where students practiced scooping up ground balls, it was evident that some students completed this task very quickly, while others needed more time. While I did offer modifications for those students who needed assistance in succeeding at the task, those students who mastered the skill quickly needed more of a challenge. This observation motivates me to offer an add-on activity to those students who finished early, so that they could continue developing their skill set during the allotted practice time. By offering add-on’s individually to those students on an as-needed basis, all students’ development levels would be better respected.

Finally, after analyzing how students combined learned skills in learning activities 1 and 2 and applied them to “Lacrosse Tag” in learning activity 3, I was alerted to the fact that many students need more practice time before being immersed in a competitive group setting. Students’ cradling and scooping skills varied enough that the activity felt disorganized.

Changes for improvement

The three adjustments I would make to improve student learning, as described above, are delivering instruction slower, offering levels within learning tasks and increasing the amount of practice time provided.

Delivering instruction at a slower pace would assist all students in absorbing content more efficiently. While the periods are shorter in high school, which is makes it more challenging to cover more content, it is more important that students gain enough exposure to the content at a steady pace so they can apply knowledge in practice activities. This adjustment is necessary due to the diverse population of learners in the classroom. ELL students and students with IEPs especially absorb content better when it is delivered in manageable chunks. One of Robert Marzano’s nine instructional strategies that could assist in ensuring content is delivered at an appropriate pace is through summarizing (Marzano, 2001). By asking students to summarize content, they have the opportunity to analyze essential components and put it into their own words. Asking students to summarize content presented in Lesson 1 would provide students with an opportunity to clarify anything that is unclear. For example, in video clip 1 from 0:00-1:15 students observe a visual demonstration of how to properly scoop a Lacrosse ball. In this demonstration, students are also shown how not to scoop a Lacrosse ball through a demonstration of a common mistake. To check for student understanding before asking students to apply their knowledge from that short demonstration, Marzano’s instructional strategy of summarizing could have been implemented. Following the demonstration, asking students to get in groups of three and summarize three key components of scooping could provide them with the opportunity to analyze and discuss what content was essential from the demonstration that they can apply to the next learning activity.

Offering levels within learning tasks is another adjustment that will enhance student learning. The diverse population of learners in class develop at different speeds, making it necessary to offer modifications for students with IEPs that limit full participation as well as for students receiving ELL services so that they have equal opportunities to understand and practice learning tasks. Amongst the diverse population of learners are students who master skills more quickly than others or perhaps who have an athletic background. These students should also receive an adjustment to the learning task so that their Zone of Proximal Development is being maximized. While I prepared students to scale or extend the learning task in learning activity 2 of this lesson, adding a new level to this skill would have increased student learning and maintained engagement. For example, I suggested that students who felt confident in their scooping skills can increase the distance between themselves and their partner, throw faster ground balls or change the direction from which they were delivering them. All three of these adjustments were options to scale the learning task. For example, in
video clip 2 at 9:41 you can see two female students who have already completed their learning task and are ready for the next activity (wearing a red shirt and a blue shirt). I announce that the class has another two minutes to practice and they continue to practice their ground balls for additional time, successfully scooping almost each attempt. By adding a new level to this learning task such as “students must cradle the ball after each successful scoop”, faster learners like these students who finished early would remain engaged in the learning task. Creating more opportunities such as these in other learning tasks could increase student learning and maintain engagement for this particular advanced population of students.

Providing students with more time to practice each skill is another adjustment I would make to instruction in this lesson. The amount of time students had to practice each skill was not long enough for the majority of students to apply it in a competitive group setting by learning activity 3. By lengthening the amount of time students are given to practice each skill and adding more levels, students would feel better prepared to combine and apply what they have learned in a new activity. In order to extend practice time allotted for each skill, learning activity 3 could be relocated to the next lesson. This allows for a more natural pace for skill development honoring all levels of learners and does not force the application of new content on the same day.