

SPORTS PROGRAM: CHECKLIST

PLAYING TO "EXPRESS" RATHER THAN TO "IMPRESS"

"Hi, I'm excited that you are planning to try out the Sports Program process for yourself! I hope you have gone through the pack and enjoyed seeing the videos.

I invite you to use this quick at a glance checklist as a reference to ensure that you do not miss out on any of the key ingredients! It's really very simple to execute, and here are some things that I keep in mind during the process. Feel free to innovate, translate and implement the way you want. And I would love to know how you have done it. Do share your experience".

- Niall Walsh

BEFORE

SETTING THE TONE

- ❑ Gather students in a **neutral classroom space** outside of the traditional sport arena and get students to engage in a task that emphasizes only the attributes requiring **speed and strength**.
- ❑ After the activity, engage the students in a **challenging dialogue** around their own participation in the activity. Find out and discuss student **assumptions and beliefs** about sports.
- ❑ **Prepare questions** in advance to ask the students based upon the context of your school. For example, in a co-education school, keep in mind that gender-based assumptions will likely be important beliefs to challenge and discuss. Some ways to lead the discussion can be towards questioning the idea of the importance of **always winning versus the importance of enjoying together** as a group and improving in every session.
- ❑ After breaking down the assumptions and highlighting to students a **different vision of sports**, have them put forward the **words or values** that they would like to define their sports curriculum. For certain words on the board, question the students as to **why** they have chosen that word and how that could be **demonstrated** through the year.
- ❑ Make this visible by getting the students to write it on the board. It is very important that this actually comes from the students themselves as only then they will buy into the program. This becomes a **contract of shared values** that the school sports teacher can refer to throughout the academic year.
- ❑ **Test run this experiment** with the teacher team to see some of the issues and assumptions that exist in your specific school in relation to sports.
- ❑ Once the students map out the type of values and atmosphere they want to create in the sports program, outline to them the **structure** of how it will all work. Explain your role as the **lead coach**,

the **role of student coaches** and how they will be elected, and how these regular sessions will build up towards the sports day and in particular the picking of captains. Another very important thing is to establish with the students the **qualities that a great coach possesses**, and develop some kind of excitement in the students to look forward to this opportunity.

DURING

THE THREE KEY STEPS

KEY 1 | Coaching Sessions (Build Leadership)

- The first few coaching sessions can be led by the **school Sports teacher**.
- **Establish the theme** of the session (for example, Communication, Respect or Perseverance, etc.) and connect it back to a value that was established in the tone setting session.
- Ensure that the students see that the activities as part of the sports session are all **relevant to this theme** and not just random physical exercises.
- Begin with a **short ice breaker** activity related to the theme, then **two small drills** that build skills necessary for the final game, before giving students the opportunity to **trial these skills** within a team-based scenario.
- During the sessions, provide **encouragement and appreciation** to the students who are exhibiting the qualities stressed in the theme. For example, this might mean the focus is not only on sporting excellent but also on helping the students see examples of things like **effort, inclusivity or sportsmanship**. Maybe someone has really supported and encouraged a teammate after they have made a mistake, or congratulated an opponent player for a great shot, or even remained calm and composed after their team is losing in the game.
- **Discourage aggressive and over-competitive behavior** at an early stage. Classic examples of this are things like shouting at teammates and blaming them for something that has gone wrong, questioning and arguing with the referee, not including people who are less inclined towards sports.
- After each drill and particularly before and after the final game, bring the group together for a very **quick 1-2 minutes dialogue**. Appreciate the students exhibiting the values of inclusivity and leadership, and encourage other students to appreciate and explain how they noticed another peer demonstrating this behavior.
- At the end of the session, ask students who would like to **volunteer** to lead the next session for their peers. If more than two students volunteer, you, as a coach facilitate a discussion with the class to decide who deserves it the most based on their attitude and effort in that session.
- Once they have been **elected**, ask the chosen students to **plan in detail** for the next session.
- Meet the two students chosen the next day to **discuss their initial plans** for the upcoming session. Give the students the planning template which will help them plan the session and then explain the things they need to keep in mind as a coach. Encourage the students to try to come up with both **innovative games as well as drills and energizers** (*this could be a new game altogether or it could be simply tweaking certain elements of an existing game*)

- Throughout the week, meet the students a few more times until they have a viable plan for the session and ensure they fill the **planning template**. Realize that this is an important investment in the **student's leadership abilities**, so make sure to provide the students with the right amount of **challenge and support**. Do not plan for them but ensure that the students are helped with the logistics, and they have thought through the overall goals of the session.
- During the session itself, provide help to the students only when necessary and **stay observant** for assessing the students regarding their leadership style. For example, keep an eye on the clock to ensure that the drills end on time, and pay close attention to how clearly the drills are being explained and demonstrated. A big part of the student coaches' growth comes from the **feedback** you give them after the session, so closely observe things like their **body language, their presence, their energy, their ability to facilitate the dialogues, how well they worked with their co-coach**, etc.
- **Running reflective dialogue** is probably the part of the session students find toughest, so be prepared to assist them in this in between drills and at the end of the game.
- More **scaffolding** may be needed for younger students. The teacher may have to assist in ensuring that the students have the **concentration, attention and respect** of their peers. For example, students may not be listening during the explanation of the skills, may question the authority of the student coach, or may not respect the student referee, etc.
- After the session, have the traditional reflection on the session, but also use it as an opportunity for the class to **appreciate the student coaches**.
- The coach then tells the class that he will take the next session and the process continues **alternating** like this.
- As soon as possible after the session, the coach sits for 10 minutes to ask the student coaches to reflect on what went well and what could be improved. Then it is very important that the coach gives the students **very specific feedback** on observations of particular moments and instances in the session, as this really helps them to learn and grow.

KEY 2 | Specific Sports Activity (Build Skills)

- While the students are pushed physically in the regular coaching sessions, these sessions provide an opportunity for interested students to develop skills and play that sport at a higher level. Try and encourage everyone to **pick at least one sport** as this will help develop their fitness as well as give them a sense of **belonging** to a particular team.
- The **morning sports and activities** period can be a time when students can choose from and play a sport they enjoy the most (e.g., basketball, football, cricket, yoga, zumba, etc.) and are **coached by experts** in this area.
- This also becomes an opportunity for those students to represent the school and play in **competitive sport tournaments**.

KEY 3 | Sports Day (Build Inclusion) Key Stage Wide 'Squads' sports

- The 'Squads Sports Days' are a **culmination** of the sports program, as an opportunity to celebrate the sense of community and engage in some **healthy and fun competition!**

POINTS TO REMEMBER

- The aim for the Sports Day is to create an **atmosphere of inclusivity** by having a wide variety of activities and elements that allow different squads to earn points for their team.
- Ensure that everyone (including the teachers) participates by bringing in their **specific skills** (artist, dance, costume design, gameplay, author, etc.)
- Traditionally popular games like football, cricket and basketball are to be included, but also more **innovative and gender balanced games** which are more likely to be inclusive and level the playing field.
- Give points for **dance offs, costume design, speech writing, chants, fair play and logo design, etc.** to ensure that all kinds of talent and ability are needed to compete in the sports day, thus making **every student valued and included.**
- **Announce the names of the captains and managers** of each squad at a morning assembly and ensure that this is seen as a big honor and the **rationale** for each captain chosen should be explained very clearly.
- The captains then have the opportunity to **choose their squads** (each of about 20 students) that are **mixed in terms of grade, age and ability.**
- This picking process is very important as it is critical that each captain gives valid (**skill based and interpersonal**) **reasons** why they are choosing each squad member, to help make sure that everyone feels included and valued in the group.
- Ensure that the squads will be relatively equal by creating categories that the different captains choose from such as '**Brilliant Designers**', '**Most Improved Team Players**', '**Great Speech Writers**' as well as **traditional ones** such as '**Football Stars**', etc.
- Bring all the students together for a **group assembly** where the tone is set for the entire sports day, where the **theme is announced** which helps to make each sports day unique and helps teams build their identity. Some examples of previous themes are Cartoons, TV shows, Animals, Marvel Universe etc. Alongside the theme, **the motto for the sports day** should also be co-created with the students, for example 'play to express, not to impress'.
- Give students time over the coming days to plan for and develop their **team's identity**, come up with great **chants and costumes**, and to choose which students will participate in which sports.
- **Teachers** will also be a part of the squad during this process and they should participate as if they were equal to students. Make sure that the teachers included in the group do not take over but rather act as **role models** to help to motivate their team and assist their captain in developing leadership qualities.



- The purpose of providing this time (two or three hours per day for three/four days) ensures that the team has a **chance to bond** and also that perhaps the less traditionally sporty people have a **chance to shine** in the creative activities before the sports themselves have even begun.

On the Day of the event

- The entrance of all teams at the **opening ceremony** is an important moment in the sports day and it allows the tone to be set for the sense of **fun, camaraderie and celebration** that is to be focused on throughout the day.
- When the sports day finally begins ensure that the **energy levels** are maintained throughout the day, and also that the values spoken about in the buildup are **focused on, appreciated and re-emphasized** throughout the day.
- The **full participation of teachers** (male and female) who are not typically sporty is also critical as it helps provide a good example to those students who otherwise may not be interested to put in efforts on the sports field.

AFTER

REFLECTIONS

- Throughout the Sports Day and particularly at the closing ceremony, there should also be opportunities for squads, individual students and teachers to **reflect on the day and appreciate** people who exhibited the values of inclusivity and fair play.
- Get the **school leader and/or principal** to be part of these **final dialogues**, so that even they can see the students in a new light and bring forward the spirit developed in the sports day.

SOME IMPORTANT TIPS FOR THE PROGRAM AS A WHOLE

- During the **Tone Setting session**, ensure that the students are not able to predict that they are part of a 'social experiment' and that the task you choose taps into their competitive instincts so that their **natural tendencies emerge**.
- For the Student-Led coaching sessions, in the first month, the younger students (who are newly introduced to the coaching sessions) may require **mentoring and hands on support** before they can lead sessions independently. This can be done by you as the sports teacher, along with a student buddy from an older class, say a grade 11 or 12 student (who already has had a lot of practice with the coaching program over the years).
- The **central theme** of any coaching session needs to be that of **fair play, respect, inclusivity and sportsmanship** within the team (irrespective of the game played).

- During the Student-Led coaching sessions, the **school sports teacher** themselves can be observed in these sessions by a **head of department or school leader**, to ensure that there is the **right balance** between student leadership and classroom organization. It is absolutely vital that the sports teacher does not simply see this as an opportunity to take a back seat, but rather that they seek to build leadership capabilities among their students, and keep **productive dialogue** at the heart of the sports program.
- For the Sports Day, the captains chosen should **represent the very best of the values** that have been co-created at the start of the year, and should NOT be chosen based solely on sporting ability.