GYMNASTICS AT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - GYMNASICS GALA

Authors: Pauline Isinger, Anja Birkel
Translation: Philipp Salscheider, Philipp Hählke

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Idea

The Pfarrer-Bechtel elementary school in Mendig developed an innovative framework to provide students with an incomparable gymnastics experience. The initial idea was to design a framework which maximizes the time of exercising for all students and to offer a setup which can be mastered by groups of all ages. Experience has shown that most lessons fail because of the time needed to build up all the apparatuses and equipment. Keeping this in mind, the aim was to set up all apparatuses at the beginning of the day and to remove them after the event. Due to the diverse character of gymnastics, the first step was to select appropriate pieces of gymnastic apparatuses. Thus, the traditional elements high bar, floor, parallel bars, balance beam and vault were chosen.

The following aspects must be considered:
  o Can all elements be mastered by groups of all ages?
  o Which apparatuses are available?
  o How many students are involved?
  o Can the gym be used?

With the aim of maximizing the time of exercising, various areas of the facility were used simultaneously. In this context, students, who were not practicing gymnastics, used the climbing area of the gym. As an additional benefit, students increase their body tension.

Framework

Having overcome certain issues, the Pfarrer-Bechtel elementary school managed to develop a diverse and student-friendly framework which meets the requirements of the curriculum. Because the attractive setup appeals to groups of all ages, the event can be repeated each year. Based on the framework, a short-term as well as a long-term plan can be established. Therefore, the aim for first- and second-graders is to get used to gymnastics and the apparatuses. In the following two years, they are provided with more complex elements. This is a playful learning experience for students on a reoccurring basis. Focusing on a new element, each event helps to establish a solid movement foundation. On top of that, students learn to be creative and get out of their comfort zone. Moreover, the framework provides a holistic approach leading to independence and responsible behavior.
Team-teaching

The framework allows advanced students to take the role of a counselor. That is, they help first- and second-graders and act as a role model. This leads to a variety of elements as well as high movement quality.

Goal

The goal of each event is a presentation of gymnastic elements, a gymnastics gala. Therefore, students present their skills in front of other students, their families and friends. The gala is divided in two parts: First- and second-graders start the presentation with a display of their individual choreographies. Next, advanced students present a group choreography.

Setup

In this framework the following apparatuses were chosen: high bar, balance beam, vaulting box and floor:

- 1x lane of gymnastic mats close to a wall (8 mats)
- 2x high bars with 4x gym mats
- 2x parallel bars with 2x small vaulting boxes each for mount
- 1x balance beam with 1x small vaulting box for mount, 4x gym mats for safety, 1 soft floor mat for dismount
- 3x vaulting boxes (different levels) with a vaulting board and a soft floor mat each

A designated group of 14 fourth graders sets up the apparatuses prior to the gala and removes them after the event. This setup team is a great enrichment for the school’s community. The following link leads to an article about the gymnastics gala published by a local newspaper:

http://www.blick-aktuell.de/Mendig/Turngala-war-ein-voller-Erfolg-116926.html

The setup team has the following pros:

- Efficient and practiced setup and removal of the apparatuses
- First- and second-graders can use apparatuses they could not set up themselves
- Responsibility and diligence are rewarded by respect from their peers
Methodical considerations

As already mentioned, all elements are adapted to the age groups. On top of that, students are provided with an individual practice plan which helps them to learn new movements. You can find the full practice plan on work sheet 1. ► 1

Warm-up

All grades do the same warm-up. The first exercise is a so-called ‘mirror-game’. Therefore, groups of four students work together. One student, the train driver, leads the groups and the rest follow. It is the train driver's responsibility to organise a full body warm-up for the other train members. ► 1

This warm-up method can only be used if the train driver runs at an appropriate pace, not leaving anyone behind. Alternatively, everybody can do an individual warm-up as offered for grades one and two. ► 2

When the music stops, all students do a strength exercise. Students find these strength exercises on work sheets which are distributed all around the gym. Several strength exercises can be found on work sheet 2. ► 2

Practice phase

After the warm-up students can practice gymnastic elements and use the apparatuses. Therefore, two different methods are applied: Grade one and two focus on individual choreographies. The students have ten minutes to practice at each apparatus before changing stations. During the practice phase music is played. When the music stops, students change stations.

Presentation 1

After one to two weeks there is a first presentation. The intention is to present without being afraid of failing. The students learn to handle criticism and to adopt their presentation to the given feedback. The other students learn to give productive feedback.
Preparation

Warm-up

To be prepared for the gymnastic elements, students need to warm up. However, the warm-up is not as important at elementary school level. The young age of the students allows them to perform well without a thorough warm-up. Therefore, the warm-up only lasts five to seven minutes and consists of running mixed with strength exercises. The combination of exercises aims to prepare the entire body for the upcoming movements. Here, practicing body tension is essential.

Presentation 1

The first presentation is the only phase in which all classmates take part. They are given the chance to give feedback and support their classmates. However, the feedback is structured. Therefore, a grading sheet is provided from grade 1.

The systematic grading sheet covers all gymnastic apparatuses. Each apparatus is divided into three different categories according to their degree of difficulty. The students can gain points for each apparatus: The easiest degree of difficulty counts for 3 points, the intermediate for 5 points and the most difficult category for 7 points. Within the grading system students can gain between zero and three points for an element depending on execution (0 points = bad execution, 3 points = perfect execution). Thus, each student can gain points according to his personal ability. Additional points can be achieved by an outstanding choreography.

Due to a lack of time, only a few students out of grade one and two perform their presentation. However, at least two students should present their choreography at each apparatus. It is important for the students to learn to evaluate themselves.

In grade three and four all groups present their choreography. This is important because the focus is not only on movement quality but also on group dynamics. Thus, groups can compare their choreographies and learn to evaluate themselves. Commonly, groups feel insecure about their choreography and ask for a second teacher. This is because entertaining the audience at the gala is a challenging task.
Gymnastics gala

Because all parents were invited to the gymnastics gala, students felt very nervous. However, the students were eager to present their choreographies and did not feel like being under an enormous amount of pressure.

Presentation

First, grade one and two presented what they had learned during the past six weeks. From each class one female and one male student qualified to present and shine at the gala. Afterwards, all groups from grade three and four presented their choreographies and earned standing ovations. At the end of the gala, students were honored with a ceremony. Principal Matthias Jaklen and vice-principal Daniel Busch handed out chocolate to the winners.

Presentation ceremony
Tips

In the context of the cooperation with the Pfarrer-Bechter elementary school in Mendig I was asked to consider tips and suggestions for the improvement of the gymnastics gala. Some suggestions are explained in the following:

Music

During the warm-up music is played. The stopping of the music is the signal for the strength exercises. This concept could also be used during the practice phase. Consequence: When the music plays, students practice. When the music stops, students change stations.

What it implies

- More focus
  - Because of the music, conversations are reduced during the practice phase. On top of that, students who practice are not bothered by conversations of their classmates.
  - Inspiration for choreography:
    - The melody or rhythm of a song can contribute to the choreography or a change of elements.
  - Better communication:
    - Music provides a rhythm for the choreography and a signal for start and stop

- Atmosphere
  - Music creates a pleasant and stimulating atmosphere during practice and during the gala. During the gala music signals the start and the end of a presentation. For the gala a DJ should be appointed. This can be a trustworthy parent or teacher.

Announcement and closure

Because first and second graders were so nervous, they often started their choreography without waiting for the audiences’ full attention. All students should get full attention because their choreographies are worth being seen. For that reason, students should be taught to announce their choreography by raising their hand for three seconds. This is also the signal for the DJ to start the music. The same ritual is performed to signal the closure of the presentation. At the same time the student knows that the presentation is over. Alternative rituals are also possible (see picture).
Poster group choreography

I noticed that it is hard for grades three and four to develop a group choreography. They might feel insecure because they do not know any criteria for the group choreography. Posters outlining different criteria for the choreography can help students to evaluate their presentation. Because of the posters, students do not need to bring any sheets to the gym. ► 4

Poster movement criteria

Since the presentations are evaluated, movement criteria should be familiar. A simple summary of these criteria helps students to improve their presentation. However, this is only to remind students of what they already know about the gymnastic elements.
### Practice plan gymnastics gala
#### Element categories grade 3 – 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>3 Points</th>
<th>5 Points</th>
<th>7 Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vault</strong></td>
<td>Tucked turn over vaulting box (3) both sides or Tucked turn onto vaulting box (4)</td>
<td>Tucked turn over vaulting box (4) both sides or Tucked turn onto vaulting box (5)</td>
<td>Tucked turn over vaulting box (5) both sides</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Balance beam</strong></td>
<td>Balance one full length + Jumping front leg change, Standing scale (one side) and Dismount jump</td>
<td>Balance one full length + Jumping front leg change, Standing scale (both sides) and Dismount tuck jump</td>
<td>Balance one full length + Jumping front leg change, Standing scale (both sides) and turn in deep squat position and Dismount with cartwheel turn</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Parallel bars</strong></td>
<td>„Bear walk“ and „spider walk“ or Dismount swing to side</td>
<td>Seated swings back and forth or Dismount swings to both sides</td>
<td>Seated swings back and forth or Swings, roll forward, dismount swings to both sides</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>High bar</strong></td>
<td>Chin-up hold (8 sec.) or roll forward</td>
<td>Assisted mount and roll forward</td>
<td>mount or roll backward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Floor</strong></td>
<td>Crawling handstand (5m)</td>
<td>Handstand wall-assisted or Free handstand w/o assistance or cartwheel or cartwheel turn</td>
<td>Handstand wall-assisted on a bench or Free handstand forward roll</td>
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</table>
Warm-up poster

The table
Take this position!
Keep your knees, hips and chest straight.
Squeeze your glutes!

The ramp
Take this position!
Keep your knees, hips and chest straight.
Push your hips forward, Squeeze your glutes!

The board
Take this position.
Keep your knees, hips and chest straight.
Squeeze your glutes!
Assessment sheet

Apparatus score

Name: __________________________________________________________
Class: __________
Points: __________

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>5 Points</th>
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<tr>
<td>Balance beam</td>
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<tr>
<td>Floor</td>
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Result: __________________________________________________________
Assessment: _____________________________________________________
Content and criteria of a good group choreography

Content

- Min. 4 different gymnastic elements
- Each group member performs min. 1 contact element (e.g. assistance)
- Each group member changes position at least once
- Overall duration: 40 sec – 1:30 min.
- ONLY apparatuses

Keep in mind

1. Are movements synchronous or asynchronous (on purpose)? *(creativity)*

2. Is our routine dynamic and smooth? Is there any confusion during our routine? *(preparation)*

3. Does everybody know what to do at any given moment? *(mute communication)*

4. Do we perform interesting and sensational elements? *(courage, creativity)*

5. Do we finish with our best element last? *(suspense)*

6. Is everybody involved when someone performs an individual element? *(teamwork)*

7. Are all elements executed well? *(esthetics)*

8. Do we integrate action-packed elements into our routine? *(dynamics)*

9. Does everybody contribute? *(cooperation)*

10. Do we assist each other? *(safety)*

11. Do we have an appealing ending? *(final arrangement)*
List of references

Illustrations / images

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Creator</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All pictures</td>
<td>Pauline Isinger, students and teachers from Pfarrer-Pechtel elementary school</td>
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Royalty free scores

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<tr>
<th>Videos</th>
<th>Title from KNSU musicstudio</th>
<th>Artist/composer</th>
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<tr>
<td>6-7, 25</td>
<td>Sweet song</td>
<td>Marcin brzozowski</td>
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<tr>
<td>8-24, 26-27, 32</td>
<td>Concerns</td>
<td>Akajules</td>
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<td>28-29</td>
<td>Battle of Xieses</td>
<td>Razvan Veina</td>
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<td>Time to funk</td>
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Videos

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Creators of the article

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Counselor</th>
<th>Institution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anja Birkel, Pauline Isinger / Students of Education Translator: Philipp Salscheider, Philipp Hählke / Students of Education</td>
<td>Minnich, Marlis</td>
<td>Department of Sport Sciences, University of Koblenz- Landau, Campus Koblenz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jaklen, Matthias</td>
<td>Principal and PE teacher (Pfarrer-Pechtel elementary school/ Mendig</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>