

SUPPLEMENT FOR COACHES OF ELEMENTARY STUDENTS

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I. PURPOSE OF THIS SUPPLEMENT:

This supplement is for Public Achievement coaches working with grades 1-5. It is intended to be used with Building Words, Transforming Lives, Making History: A Guide to Public Achievement (hereafter known as the Green Book). The Green Book is aimed at college level readers and works well in situating the coach in the theoretical and historical basis for Public Achievement. The Green Book offers tools for coaches working with students; this supplement is intended to add to a coach's tool kit. Coaches are encouraged to draw upon support from fellow coaches, teachers and Public Achievement staff. Working with students in the lower elementary grades presents unique challenges. This supplement offers coaches ideas, background, and resources for working with a group of young, energetic elementary school children.

You have signed up to do something amazing and instrumental in teaching democracy to the next generation. By working with students in grades 1-5, a coach is able to lay concrete groundwork for lifelong active citizenship. There is an old adage that states, "You never understand something until you try to teach it to someone else." Working with younger students allows both students and coaches to explore what democracy, citizenship, respect, diversity, and all the other PA core concepts mean to themselves.

II. UNDERSTANDING YOUR GROUP MEMBERS

Do you remember being ten years old? Can you remember what you were able to do and what you simply had not learned yet? Elementary students are amazingly creative and resourceful, yet you will find that there are tasks that adults take for granted that an elementary student is in the process of learning.

Individual Abilities

In order for a group to work together, the coach should know each team member's strengths and weaknesses as well as some basic information about their background. A simple way to alienate a group member is to assume that everyone has a mom or dad. Know that some students might always ride a bus and not have a car. Others may not have seen the same movies, read the same books, and listened to the same music as a coach would assume elementary students have. Again if you make assumptions about your group someone is likely to be alienated.

Reading and Writing in Elementary School

While we all wish we could help a student learn to read better or write more effectively these are not the primary reasons that you are coaching in PA. Instead, you should familiarize yourself with what your team members are capable of due to the shortened period that most PA coaches have with their teams. Maximize your time with your group and get the most out of each meeting.

Reading

Students' reading level varies greatly in elementary school. It is important for a coach to get to know each student's abilities before getting too involved in the group's project. You should assess your team members' abilities. However, avoid making these seem like a test. Try to assess abilities within the context of the group's activities (such as getting to know you games).

Participation in the assessment makes the activity a team event and not a test. Here are some suggestions:

- Have students write and read something about themselves to you or the group
- Have students work in pairs and listen as they read to each other
- Have them make a list of their favorite things (or something related directly to the project) and have them read them out loud

Writing

Much like reading, writing ability is varied. You should assess how well your students can write. You can also assess writing ability through the getting to know you activities. Often writing and reading can be assessed together.

- Have students write down their name and information on a note card
- Assign student to groups and have them present their ideas to the whole group

III. BEHAVIOR: SO YOUR GROUP IS OUT OF CONTROL

The most common concern of new coaches working with elementary students is behavior. Will the students listen to what I have to say? How do I deal with a student who is acting up in meetings? What are acceptable consequences for a student's behavior? In this section, we look at some causes of behavior problems as well as ways to prevent behavior issues.

There is a fine line that a coach must walk when working with students. Many of the coaches want to be friends with their group; they want to be viewed as their "buddy." This may be a nice idea, but it will not help you or your team members in working on your project if you have no authority in the group. You are not a teacher, but the coach is the adult in the group. Therefore, you must be able to take control when activities are not productive or when problems occur.

Place yourself in the students' position: Your parents or guardians control (at least to some degree) what you eat and wear. They control when you talk to people on the phone, when you go to bed, and if you get money to go do something fun. Your teachers control your days, the lunch staff gives you food, and the playground is governed by supervision. You do not make many decisions on your own.

Now there is a group of people standing in front of you saying that you actually do have power; that you, as an elementary student, are able to make significant changes in the world. This can be quite a shock to students; students typically don't know what to do when they are given power. Therefore it is up to the coach to be a steady guide for the group while facilitating the group's progress. With this in mind, it is important to establish the discipline and your authority immediately in the first meeting.

Frustration can be the biggest factor in behavior problems

Frustration typically leads to one of two things:

1. Withdrawing from activity and lack of interest in doing the work. Why would a kid (or an adult) want to continue with something that is next to impossible for them to do?
2. More commonly, frustration with an activity or group assignment leads to a behavior problem.

By realizing that the source of behavior problems might be the student's abilities, you can work together to find a solution to the problem.

On Physical Consequences

One team of second graders was developing the list of consequences for breaking the rules they established. One team member suggested that students be required to do push-ups if they broke rules. All of the other students agreed to this consequence and so it was implemented into the group's charter of rules and consequences.

In this scenario the group was developing the rules and corresponding consequences and everyone seemed in agreement on the push-ups as a consequence. However, the problem is that this kind of consequence involves physical action as the result of a student's behavior. It treads in the gray area surrounding what does and does not constitute corporal punishment.

In Public Achievement, consequences that involves physical punishment (running laps, push-ups, sitting on the wall) should not be used. In addition to legal and ethical problems, corporal punishment is an illogical consequence for actions in team members. Coaches should use logical consequences in order to create a connection between the undesired behavior and the result.

The purpose of Public Achievement is to create citizens who are educated, active, and aggressive in changing the problems in their communities. By allowing physical punishment to occur, a coach is sending the wrong message about what public work constitutes. While the students might genuinely enjoy running around the track when they have done something against their rules, it is up to the coach to steer them away from such consequences towards more appropriate consequences for the action.

Logical Consequences

In Positive Discipline, Jane Nelson, Ed.D. suggests that the three R's of logical consequences are: related, respectful, and reasonable.

Logical Consequences are:

1. Consequences that follow directly from the rules that are broken.
2. Thoughtful responses to the student's behavior instead of reactions on the spot.
Therefore, consequences are developed before the student's behavior takes place and not at the moment of behavior problems.
3. Sequential- they are built upon with what is typically called a warning system. When the student reaches the top, they are removed entirely from the work in PA (for the day or the entire time depending upon the behavior).
4. Time sensitive- they are used only in the time when the behavior is carried out. Most consequences do not continue to the next meeting. Therefore, every student begins the meetings with a clean slate, so to speak.

Simply put, logical consequences are like cause and effect. When a ball is hit, it rolls. When a team member violates a rule, the punishment should be connected to the rule that was broken.

The fact that *punishments* are now called *consequences* in today's schools is not a result of political correctness. It acknowledges the power of language in shaping a child's response to rules. A consequence is seen as a natural reaction to the rule that was broken. A punishment is used to stop the behavior without connecting back to the reason for the rule in the first place.

Example of Logical Consequences:

Act: A student refuses to participate in the group's work.

Logical Consequence: The student is given a task to work on alone, without group help.

This demonstrates to students that working with a group give certain benefits. By refusing to work with the group, the team member is given work to do alone. Help from team members should not be allowed during the consequence time. The student will then see how working alone can be frustrating and difficult. And it makes sense in their head that the next time the group does something, it would benefit them to work with the group instead of doing everything on their own.

IV. WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A COACH

Coaches help young people design and carry out projects that may not have been done before. Coaches must take on different roles in different situations. Twelve elements of coaching are defined in the Green Book (p. 47-52). Coaches working with elementary students should be clear in defining their role to the students.

Define Your Role to Your Team Members

1. Give examples of how your work is different than the work of the teacher or mentors. For example, you will do work too!
2. In a group, you will not be making all the decisions. Decisions will be made through democratic means.
3. A coach's decision on some things can be overruled. Students cannot overrule teachers in decision of curriculum.
4. Open disagreement is encouraged when it is conducted in proper ways. Students who respectfully represent their opinion will be rewarded for their courage to be honest.
5. Team members, not just the coach, will hold each other accountable every meeting. In most classrooms, teachers students accountable for their homework. In PA, if a student doesn't do their work, the group is let down and can impose consequences for their actions. In a classroom, this is rarely the case since homework is an individual activity.

Defining Your Role for Yourself

During the first few meetings the coach role is often more prominent. As the group progresses and builds on their understanding of what Public Achievement is and how to do public work, the coach can become more of an equal participant in the process, allowing the students to lead. HOWEVER, this is not the case in the first few meetings! As the coach you will lay the groundwork for successful team action and you will need to think through these issues (See the First Day and Running a Meeting). While you cannot control all aspects of the group, as the coach, you must lay down the structures necessary to achieve a working public space. One key component of providing this structure is establishing what your role is in the process.

Self-reflection is an important part of Public Achievement both for the coaches and the students. In order to teach students how to self-reflect, you should be familiar with the process. Therefore, working through these questions before starting or in the first few weeks can help the team work!

- What is your working style?
- What does your ideal meeting look like?
- How will you deal with issues of behavior on the first few meetings?
- What are the goals for the first few meetings?

Coaches must strike a balance between being the person in charge and allowing others to take the reins. It can be difficult, and may never be perfect – grappling with power is something that is key in public work. By knowing your expectations and presenting them to the students, you establish a mode of interaction. You share what you want and they share what they want. Then you work together.

Hidden record

Imagine that you are playing a game. But you don't know any of the rules or the purpose of the game. Every time you do something wrong you are reprimanded, but no one tells you exactly what you did wrong. Learning the game becomes a process of trial and error. If you do not discover the rules, you give up on the game!

In this scenario, the game is Public Achievement, and the rule maker is the coach. Coaches have certain expectations for their group, but often these expectations are never presented to the group. This is called the Hidden Record – where a coach records their own rules for PA. Rules might be as simple as; “I want every meeting to begin on time. When the meeting is delayed I get frustrated.” Or, “When students do not look at the other person talking, I assume they are not paying attention.” The simplest way to prevent behavior and other issues in PA is to lay our Hidden Record out for the team on the first day. It does not have to be all of your expectations, but if you feel something is vital to the success of the group, tell your team members and explain why it is important. That way you are establishing some ground rules for the group. (This is also a great exercise for the team members to engage in once the group has continued).

Ideal Meetings

Meetings are occasions for conflict and learning. By mapping out your ideal meeting you will better understand your role in PA and will further expose parts of your Hidden Record. Thinking about and responding to these questions will help you discover what type of leader you are. Now you must begin to reconcile what you expect to happen in your group with the difficult task of setting up your group members to succeed in participatory democracy.

To begin mapping out your ideal Public Achievement meeting, answer these questions:

1. Are you all sitting on the floor or around a table?
2. Where are the writing materials?
3. What does the team do in these meetings?
4. How is something accomplished?
5. How are decisions made?
6. Who leads the meetings?
7. Is there rotating leadership?

After you think about the answers to the questions, you should see if your ideas are in line with the principles of Public Achievement. In PA meetings, the team members and coach should eventually share responsibility for leading the group, directing projects, and working together to complete the project.

The coach's job is to guide the group, help them set realistic goals, make thoughtful decisions, organize their work, and help them be prepared when they act in public. Getting team members to be able to lead the group doesn't just happen by magic. Working through these questions will help you frame your expectations for the reality of the messy work of democracy.

V. THE FIRST DAY (S):

The first day of Public Achievement is much like a first day of school. New school, new classmates, unknown structure and high expectations. As a coach for PA, you might feel excited or apprehensive about the upcoming experience and the students are likely to be feeling the same way. Here are a few suggestions on how to make the first few meetings successful for both the team members and the coach.

1. Start working on one or two concepts
2. Establish rules and consequences
3. Play getting to know you games
4. Learn team members names
5. Establish routines – run the first meeting the way you want other meetings to run
6. Use the “honeymoon” period to establish expectations

Suggestion 1: Choose one or two concepts to start working with the students

The language abilities of younger students may be limited, but they can learn the concepts in Public Achievement and incorporate them into their every day experiences. Younger students need to build their understanding of concepts and take more time to comprehend them.

Therefore, in the first meeting, working on one concept instead of introducing several or all of the concepts will be most effective.

While a coach may begin with any of the concepts, starting with one that connects directly to the team’s issue or an activity is often the easiest for students to grasp. For example, during the first two meetings you will establish rules for meetings. The concept of democracy works well while making the rules. The coach can incorporate acts of participating in democracy (such as voting to establish agreement on the rules or the team name) which teaches students that group work includes compromise and fair decision processes.

When introducing a concept, use visual representations, even if it is a sign that says, “Democracy” or “Politics”. Visual representations can also connect what the students are doing with larger efforts and public work. **Make the connections explicit!**

Suggestion 2: Establish rules and consequences as soon as possible

1. It is a great activity to introduce student to a variety of concepts in PA.
2. All public work has rules and consequences even if they are not explicitly stated.
3. Meetings run smoothly when group members are invested in the process. When students develop the rules, they have established the norms of interaction themselves. Therefore, they cannot claim to have the rules imposed upon them.
4. Being tough on following rules and enforcing consequences from the beginning is much easier than trying to become more strict as the time goes on.
5. Establishing and enforcing consequences are instrumental in getting work accomplished. Team members have told us that they appreciate a coach who keeps them on task, because they want a successful project. To finish a project, all group members must be invested in the process and be held accountable for their actions.

Suggestion 3: Include getting to know you activities.

1. By beginning the process of getting to know your group members on the first meeting you establish that each member should know each other.
2. Ice-breakers establish bonds between group members.
3. Knowing each others names is essential to getting work done. You should know all your students' names by the second meeting. It shows the students you care about them.
4. Public work should be FUN! Ice-breakers establish a fun atmosphere while meeting a goal. It isn't mindless entertainment. It has a purpose.

See the additional list of Ice Breakers in the appendix section of this manual or the Green Book for further suggestions.

Suggestion 4: Develop a way to remember students' names

Regardless of your style (using name tags or not), you will need to know the students names and they will need to know yours. Play a name game, use nametags, or come up with another idea.

Suggestion 5: Establish routines

Routines are an effective way to foster team interaction and appropriate behavior. Explain that each meeting, starting with the first day, will follow a certain format. A typical meeting structure (agenda) can be found in the Green Book. Here is another example.

SAMPLE AGENDA

9:00-9:10: Check in.

Ask the group how their week went or ask each student to pick one word to describe their mood for the day. It is good to know where everyone is before beginning. Clear up any issues for the past meeting. Discuss the agenda and the day's core concept.

9:10-9:30: Game or activity.

Play a game and connect it to the team's issue or a core concept. One suggestion: Telephone. Student's love this. They practice listening to each other talk.

9:30-9:50: New work.

This is where you work on the next steps in your project. Assign tasks for the next meeting.

9:50-10:00: Reflection

Evaluate the meeting, help students to name what they did and what they learned.

Ending with reflection teaches an important skill. Each time we think about our work it becomes more concrete. By reflecting you help students realize the meaning of their work. Teaching students to think about their actions, the actions of others, and the work we are doing results in more meaningful work in the next sessions since they know they will be asked to think about what they did. Start this on your first meeting and always do it.

Suggestion 6: Use the honeymoon period to establish the kind of meeting you want.

1. The honeymoon period (the time when students are still a little apprehensive and therefore will not act up) is usually short in elementary school. Remember, students will be excited about Public Achievement and want it to go well.
2. Establish rules and consequences during this time.
3. Be clear about what PA is and always remind them what you are doing and why.

VI. SCHOOL AND LARGER COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

An important difference that can be highlighted is how PA, unlike other activities, is done by working with all different kinds of people. By focusing on other agents in the power map, PA expands the students' understanding of interests. This is an enormously powerful activity. However, make specific differences between *community service* and *public work*. Students will often see projects as being done for the community without including themselves into the equations. This is especially true for students who have had limited experience with the concepts used in PA.

The rule is the younger the student is the more the coach must work to make the concepts concrete and the activities meaningful at their level. Students in younger grades have limited experiences and smaller vocabularies. Developmentally, they are able to comprehend less complex ideas and concepts. This does not limit the work of Public Achievement. Instead it is an example of how the models of PA can be used in any situation and with any group. The key to working with younger students is **modifications**. Modifications must be made according to the students' grade, developmental level (regardless of grade), racial/economic background, geographical setting, and their experience with public work.

VII. A TEACHER'S LIFE

If you have been a teacher you know that the job is one of the most rewarding and difficult careers. Teachers are constantly under pressure from administrators, school districts, national standards, parents, and other community members.

Depending on the school district, some teachers are responsible for more than instruction. They might be part-time administrators, lunch monitors, coaches, committee members, or any other assignment along with their instruction responsibilities. Be aware of the responsibilities that your group members' teachers have.

Ask teachers for help. They are an integral part of the PA process and can be your best resource about the school and the kids. Be aware that their time is precious, but this should not limit your interaction with them.

Here are a few suggestions for working with the classroom teachers

- Introduce yourself the first day.
- Try to set up a time to meet with the teacher if you have detailed questions.
- Understand if the teacher is not immediately able to assist you.

VIII. TOOLKIT

Activate Prior Knowledge:

Activating prior knowledge means using the team members' own experiences to develop their understanding of the concepts. When using this strategy, there are several issues to be aware of.

Know your student's background. It is easy to assume that everyone has had similar experiences growing up. Let the students guide you – you will learn from them as much as they learn from you! General factors to keep in mind are:

- Is it an urban, suburban, or rural school district? The school's location can help frame the ways in which you approach the group.
- What is the racial makeup of the area, school, and team? One of the core concepts is diversity; therefore, as a coach you are demonstrating the importance of diversity by acknowledging the differences in backgrounds and experiences.
- What are the economic backgrounds of the school? This is a sensitive issue and you do not need to ask for in-depth economic analysis. However, knowing if your students come from working class background versus upper class is extremely important in knowing what examples to use. Ask your students for examples before offering up your own.

Build on Concepts Learned:

In the first few meetings you should pick a few concepts and work with them. Trying to do all the concepts in the first meeting will result in frustrated team members and an overworked coach! This is a process, not a race, so take cues from the group and develop the pace based upon the group's needs and level.

One way to introduce the concepts is to present all the concepts briefly and have the students pick out the ones that they A) have some knowledge of or B) want to learn more about. With this method you are demonstrating democratic learning practices and the expectation that students take responsibility for their own learning.

In their classroom lessons, students rarely determine what to study (as this is increasingly controlled by the state and the national government). Alternatively, in Public Achievement the team is responsible for determining the project and carrying it through; therefore, it stands to reason that they should also determine which concepts they want to work with first!

Modifications

Modifications to the activities and concepts presented in the "Building Words" handbook may be necessary as many of them were written with older students in mind. Adjustments can be as simple as allowing more time for answers to questions, otherwise known as sufficient wait time, to assigning the group's tasks based upon the assessment of their writing and reading abilities.

Sufficient Wait Time:

Typically, adults expect a question to be answered almost immediately, since that is frequently expected of adults. However, the younger the student, the more time is needed to allow all the members to sufficiently comprehend the question and develop an answer. One simple way to allow sufficient wait time: count to five or seven in your head before calling on a student. This

will encourage those students who don't answer immediately to think of a response, instead of only hearing from the person whose hand flies up immediately. Also, it encourages members to develop stronger answers and formulate more detailed responses. Teaching students that it isn't the fastest response but the most thoughtful that is best will make a large impact on the group.

Planned Questions:

In preparing your agendas and materials for your group's meetings, an good way to "plant seeds" in the minds of your group is to develop questions before you arrive. This activity can be as simple or detailed as time will allow, but the results of preparing questions are staggering for both the coach and the group members!

Here are some suggestions on asking thoughtful questions during a group meeting.

Suggestion: Avoid simple yes or no questions.

Explanation:

Yes and no questions are called closed questions. They do not offer much room to probe deeper. A student feel that answering yes or no is the end of the discussion on a certain topic if the coach only presents questions in this way.

Examples:

Closed- Are you happy with the school's uniform policy?

Open- What are the benefits of the school's uniform policy? What are the disadvantages?

Suggestion: Build questions off of a student's response to the previous answer.

Explanation:

By incorporating the responses of other students into your next set of questions, a coach shows students that she or he is listening, and that their responses are valid and useful.

Example:

Coach: What are the benefits to the school uniform policy?

Team Member: We all look the same so when we leave school, our teachers can see us easily.

Coach: Since the teachers use school uniforms to keep track of kids on field trips, can we identify who else might be interested in keeping us safe on field trips?

In this set of questioning, the coach used an answer about school uniforms to expand the issue from the school environment to the community. This will allow the students to work on power-mapping and examining other interests besides their own (i.e. parents, business owners, police officers, etc...)

One to One's

Getting to know each team member is essential to working together as a group. As the outsider in the school, you should establish familiarity with each of the students in your group. One of the easiest ways to do this is to talk to each of the students individually. For this to be effective, it is important to talk to the students within the first few weeks. In addition to breaking the ice between you and the group members, One to One's are a great way to assess the students' abilities, needs, background and show team members that you are interested by listening to them.

To do these individual meetings, consider coming to school at a time other than Public Achievement time. Ask teachers if you can come in during lunch or at a different time. This will allow you to spend time with the students without taking away precious group time.

Some suggestions for a smooth interview process.

- Meet with every team member
- Plan ahead: know what questions you want to ask
- Explain the purpose and process of your one to one meetings to your group before conducting the interviews.
- Avoid simple yes and no questions (or closed questions). Ask the students open ended questions that allow them to elaborate. Use phrases like, "Tell me about..." instead of "Do you..." (which leads to a yes or no answer).

Set up appointments

When doing Public Achievement work, check school policies before contacting stakeholders in the larger community. This will help ensure the safety of the students and is a good way to keep school personnel informed about your team's project. Depending upon the project, your team may need to meet with the vice principal or principal. Meeting with the principal can bring your project to the forefront of the principal's mind and show the students that their opinions matter to the adults in their school. The suggestions here can also be used for meetings outside the school system (with police officers, business owners, community leaders etc...)

- Set up appointments in advance
- Lay out specific goals that you want to accomplish with the meeting
- Role-play with your team members what their behavior and actions should be in the meeting (for some members this will be the first experience with this kind of meeting)
- Have the team members do most of the talking.
- Ask the principal (or other community member) for their input on the project
- Have a student/s follow up with the principal (or community member)
- THANK THEM FOR THEIR TIME!!!

By working with the school personnel you demonstrate public work within the school.