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The 'Good!', the 'Great!' and the 'Brilliant!': exclamations and teacher artwork in volleyball teaching

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ABSTRACT

Background: Physical education (PE) research has contributed to learning-based perspectives on the why, what and how of teaching PE. Within this context, ball games have been criticized for reflecting the traditional sport discourse, which is not always conducive to a PE curriculum that focuses on equity and movement capability. Furthermore, research highlights the complexity of the teacher's role in the gym, where clear and simple communication should clarify learning objectives and support enhanced student engagement. This article seeks to reinterpret a frequently observed behaviour in the teaching of ball games, namely teachers' common use of exclamations like 'good!', 'great!' or 'brilliant!'

Purpose: This article aims to (1) describe and explain how teacher exclamations during a volleyball lesson are pertinent to the teacher's and students' creation of purposeful contexts, and (2) identify how the use of exclamations can be conducive to students learning specific PE content and aesthetics during a volleyball lesson. This article adopts a transactional perspective of teaching, framing it as a creative action that shapes the learning environment.

Method: The data consist of video recordings of volleyball lessons in Year 9. A video-ethnographic approach enables an in-depth analysis of teacher-student transactions throughout a full PE lesson. In addition to a fixed camera view of the gym, a wireless GoPro camera attached to the teacher provided a unique perspective, capturing the nuances of the teacher's verbal and non-verbal communication.

Findings: The findings reveal that exclamations are not merely expressions of encouragement but integral to creating a cohesive and purposeful learning environment. Exclamations serve as confirmations of students' actions and operate at individual, local and general levels to address diverse student needs. This helps students remain attuned to the flow of the lesson and contributes to the accumulation of meaning.


Conclusions: By reinterpreting a frequently observed behaviour in

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PE teaching, namely teachers' common use of exclamations, this analysis demonstrates that such exclamations can be important tools in the art of PE teaching and learning. Through voice, tone and timing, the teacher calls into existence an experience from multiple and durational educational transactions, guiding students towards 'the good play' rather than 'the competitive play'.

Impact statement

This study redefines the pedagogical role of teacher exclamations in PE by demonstrating their capacity to shape purposeful and aesthetic learning contexts. It also supports practitioners in recognizing students' rhythmic engagement when learning ball games.

Introduction

Over the past two decades, research in physical education (PE) has contributed to more learning-oriented perspectives on the why, what and how of teaching PE (Casey, Good-year, and Armour 2017; Larsson 2021). This shift has broadened the field to include movement learning (Barker, Bergentoft, and Nyberg 2017), studies of meaningful PE (e.g. Beni, Fletcher, and Ni Chróinín 2018), aesthetic experience (Maivorsdotter and Lundvall 2009) and mindfulness (Martin and Ergas 2016). Within this evolving landscape, classical pragmatism (Andersson, Garrison, and Östman 2018; Quennerstedt, Öhman, and Öhman 2011) and phenomenological perspectives (Brown and Payne 2009; Stolz 2013) have been particularly influential in analysing, for example, meaning-making processes (O'Connor 2019) and the way purposeful contexts are staged in PE through transactions between teachers, students and their actions in ongoing events (Andersson and Risberg 2019; Quennerstedt, Öhman, and Öhman 2011). Different analytical frameworks based on these philosophical traditions have helped illuminate how teachers and students co-create learning environments through embodied action and interactions (Amade-Escot and Sullivan 2007; Loquet and Ranganathan 2010; Ward and Quennerstedt 2015). This perspective has broadened our view of PE, not least by putting an analytical focus on the students and contributing didactical relevant concepts to understand ball games (Mustell, Geidne, and Barker 2024), movement cultures (Ward and Quennerstedt 2016) and assessment approaches (Tolgfors et al. 2025) in PE. However, the field is relatively sparse on empirical studies offering insights into the expressive, spontaneous and affective dimensions of teacher communication. In addressing these dimensions, this article draws on John Dewey's concept of aesthetics to explore a less examined but pedagogically significant phenomenon: teacher exclamations in PE ball games.

Teachers value creative autonomy and seek to use it to connect with students and make a meaningful difference (Lortie 1975/2002). This desire involves not only instructional competence but also creative, artistic self-expression and a sense of how to create aesthetic consummatory experiences in the classroom. We argue that in PE, such experiences are likely to emerge through spontaneous verbal expressions. Exclamations such as

‘great serve’, ‘brilliant hit’ or ‘nice jump’ can have the capacity to punctuate the flow of activity and contribute to the aesthetics and emotional tone of the activity.

Our interest in teacher exclamations emerged from an earlier study of physical education lessons, where we observed a rich pattern of teacher exclamations during ball games. These utterances, often delivered in the heat of the activity, are typically intelligible to those immersed in the activity. Thus, rather than treating them as peripheral or merely as cheering, we propose that they constitute a teaching artform, potentially contributing to meaningful student experiences of ball games.

PE ball games have been criticized for reproducing the traditional sport discourse, which is not always conducive to a PE curriculum focusing on equity and movement capability (Kirk 2010; Mustell 2025). This also aligns with scholarly critique suggesting that researchers, teachers and policymakers must challenge their assumptions of what PE can and should be (Casey and Kirk 2020; Evans 2004). Acknowledging these perspectives, we treat teacher exclamations as integral to the lived experience of PE (Hastie et al. 2025), and we approach them as part of a broader communicative repertoire through which teachers support students’ actions and stage purposeful contexts in ball games. Therefore, this article mainly aims to analyse teachers’ exclamations in depth, focusing on their educational outcomes for students. To do so, we will further contextualize our study in relation to empirical research about teacher communication.

Background

Teacher communication with students during practical lessons in PE has been studied from various perspectives, often focusing on how teachers motivate, guide and support students in active learning environments (e.g. Roberts, Newcombe and Davids 2019; Vasconcellos et al. 2020). This section outlines how observation studies on PE lessons in the gym have described and explained teacher communication in the form of exclamations.

Existing literature has provided valuable insights into teacher communication, particularly in relation to making learning objectives explicit. For example, Redelius, Quennerstedt, and Öhman (2015) found that teachers often struggle to communicate learning goals in ball games, which are typically associated with competitive sports. This tension between sport logic and educational aims in PE makes it difficult for teachers to clarify what students are supposed to learn. In contrast, dance activities or physiologically oriented tasks (e.g. heart rate monitoring) were more conducive to a clear communication of objectives.

Larsson and Nyberg (2017) showed that teachers often prioritize student movement over the quality of movement, suggesting that being active is valued even when it is not tied to specific learning outcomes. Similarly, Öhman and Quennerstedt (2008) identified cheering and encouragement, such as ‘go faster!’ or ‘try again!’, as part of a governmental logic that emphasizes physical activity over knowledge acquisition. More recent studies echo these findings, noting that PE teachers frequently struggle to articulate what students are supposed to learn (Modell and Gerdin 2022), especially in ball games (Hovdal et al. 2023). While these studies focus primarily on direct teaching behaviour, including observable actions aimed at instruction, other research has highlighted the importance of indirect teaching behaviour. According to Jung and Choi (2016),

indirect teaching behaviour encompasses tone of voice and intonation, facial expressions, encouragement and other expressive forms that help create a supportive learning environment. Teacher exclamations in PE often fall within these expressive categories, particularly tone and encouragement. Namely, teaching PE involves not only what is said or done (content) but also how and when the teacher communicates through tone of voice. Yoon and Armour (2016) further emphasized the complexity of linking specific teaching behaviours to student learning outcomes, noting that both direct and indirect teaching behaviours contribute to educational experiences in nuanced ways. This complexity is especially relevant in PE, where embodied interaction and emotional engagement are central to the learning process.

Recent research has also explored how teacher communication can support students' well-being. Teraoka and Kirk (2024) highlighted the importance of personalized and recurrent feedback during lessons, while Aelterman et al. (2019) noted that feedback can provide structure to the lesson and bring confidence to the students. Similarly, De Meester et al. (2020) showed how teacher communication can foster feelings of competence, safety and self-esteem. Furthermore, Hastie et al. (2025) report that student interaction where teammates consistently encourage one and another, regardless of performance, help shape meaningful sport education experiences.

Despite these contributions on how PE teachers and sport pedagogues communicate to students and participants, much of the literature remains focused on either instructional clarity or general motivational strategies. What is often missing is a deeper understanding of how expressive, artistic forms of teacher communication contribute to the aesthetic dimensions of learning in PE. Drawing on this context, this article has a dual purpose: (1) to describe and explain how teacher exclamations during a volleyball lesson are pertinent to the teacher's and students' creation of purposeful contexts and (2) to identify how the use of exclamations can be conducive to students' learning specific PE content and developing aesthetic sensibilities during a volleyball lesson. Thus the article contributes to the field by illuminating the richness of experiences in PE teaching and learning. Drawing on John Dewey's *transactionalism* and his call to begin an analysis with the situation as a whole (Garrison, Öhman, and Östman 2022), we will in the next section develop the concept of *aesthetic experience* and explain how it relates to the art of teaching PE (e.g. Quennerstedt 2019).

Theoretical framework

This study draws on John Dewey's concept of *aesthetics*, which he developed most notably in *Art as Experience* (1934/1980). For Dewey, aesthetics is not limited to art or beauty in a traditional sense. Instead, it refers to the quality of experience – that is, how individuals engage with their environment in meaningful, emotionally and intellectually fulfilling ways. In Dewey's view, aesthetic experience is the culmination of organism–environment transactions, where action, emotion and reflection come together into a unified, consummatory whole. Building on this, Garrison (2010) argues that teaching is an aesthetic and ethical endeavour: 'Teachers desire to call into existence the good of their practice. That is the good of their students. To call into existence the good of their students they must, reciprocally, desire to call into existence their own good' (73). In other words, teaching is not just about delivering content but also about creating

conditions for sharing meaningful experiences between teacher and student. Accordingly, teaching is a form of creative action, where the teacher actively shapes the learning environment to bring about aesthetic sensibilities and meaning. Employing Dewey's aesthetic in this way, Garrison refers to teaching as a 'creative calling; it is poetry in the archaic Greek sense of *poesis*, that is, calling something into existence' (2010, xv). In the context of teaching ball games in PE, this means that teachers cannot simply instruct students in techniques or rules. Rather, they must stage purposeful contexts by creating, or pointing out, moments where students can engage aesthetically and emotionally in their responses to what unfolds during an activity. When teachers succeed in this, students are more likely to experience PE content through an aesthetic process. By connecting Dewey's concept of aesthetics to the art of teaching, Garrison (2010) helps us understand that even micro-actions by teachers, such as exclamations, are vital to how certain qualities of experience can be called into existence and potentially function as part of staging purposeful contexts for students. In this way, aesthetics refers to the structure and quality of experience, not to visual or technical perfection. Thus we view aesthetics as inseparable from the creative calling that Garrison argued constitutes educational acts.

Alexander (2013) also places the aesthetic experience at the centre of educational practice. He argues that the most important thing happening in education is that participants engage on an aesthetic psychological level. Similar to Garrison (2010), Alexander (2013) uses Dewey's concept of experience to explain how learning involves emotional and symbolic participation. To analyse how aesthetic experiences potentially emerge in PE lessons through teachers' exclamations, we must identify those moments when students and teachers co-create a learning environment that feels purposeful and complete. Dewey called such moments 'consummatory experiences', referring to moments when the parts of an activity come together into a meaningful whole. Alexander describes it in the following way:

Culture gives us at birth an inherited world of symbolic meanings within which we gradually begin to take part. The process of meaning, too, is rhythmic, involving speaker and hearer, and, as a process, involves the possibility of development toward an integrative closure, a type of experience that Dewey came to call 'consummatory'. (2016, 61)

In our example of PE, 'culture' refers to the shared practices of teaching and learning ball games, and the 'process of meaning' is the teacher's guidance that helps students move toward a consummation of the chain of activities. The latter includes exclamations. Referring to Garrison (2010), we argue that PE teachers can potentially use exclamations to call educational particularities (e.g. 'great serve!') into existence, as well as helping students to stay attuned to the flow of the lesson and contributing to the accumulation of meaning. This theoretical explanation of a PE teacher potentially calling something into existence by means of aesthetic experience requires us not treat aesthetics as the beauty of a well-played game or technical skill. Instead, guided by Garrison's and Alexander's treatment of Dewey's aesthetics, we use aesthetics as a research strategy to identify how teacher–student–environment transactions create purposeful learning contexts. Tracing these transactions reveals how students and teachers move toward integrative closure, that is, a shared sense of fulfilment. Another important point in this context is that a consummatory experience is not merely a certain feeling of delight. Rather, a

consummatory experience is an immediate, fulfilling, qualitative experience that is had in relation to a certain purpose. As this article emphasizes the perspective of the PE teacher and teaching as an artform, we follow Alexander by framing the consummatory experience in this context in artistic terms:

The meaning of a work of art is its very capacity to generate an experience. Experience does not simply randomly expand; it must expand so that it fuses. In this sense, while there is development in an experience, it must always be development of the substance of the work. Form, or the organization of the substance, must be a constant gathering together as well as an opening up. (Alexander 1987, 241)

For teaching to generate such fused experiences, it must become an artform, and the teacher must act with the sensitivity and responsiveness of an artist. Dewey's example of a painter illustrates this: 'A painter must consciously undergo the effect of his every brush stroke or he will not be aware of what he is doing and where his work is going' (1934, quoted in Alexander 2016, 206). In this sense, PE teachers are artists working with students' experiences as their medium. However, these experiences must be co-created by both teachers and students. When these shared experiences are shaped in ways that allow students to reach aesthetic fulfilment, they become artworks.

Following Dewey's transactional principle that 'what exists, co-exists', Alexander (1987) suggests that we begin with a 'whole' situation to recognize aesthetic experience in educational settings.

Each phase or moment must be grasped as a phase or part of a larger whole; the sense of the whole must be present in the part. While in most experiences the unifying qualitative sense of the whole, which ultimately constitutes the horizon of meaning, is left tacit, in an experience this is consciously apprehended and realized so that the sense of the experience is the presence of its meaning, felt as a guiding, trolling qualitative unity pervading all the various parts in their variety. (Alexander 1987, 201)

In our case, exclamations like 'good!', 'great!' and 'brilliant!' represent what is present and common in PE teaching and are therefore seen as parts of a larger whole in which teachers and students stage purposeful contexts. These exclamations can potentially also shape the purposeful contexts that define the lesson. The teacher's artistic work becomes visible when these exclamations creatively bring experiences into being, forming 'a guiding, trolling qualitative unity' (Alexander 1987, 201).

In conclusion, by applying Dewey's aesthetics to PE teachers' work in teaching ball games, we explained that a consummatory experience in PE refers to a moment in which students engage not just technically in activities but also emotionally through a felt sense of purpose and unity. Furthermore, teachers' creative calling involves staging moments where students can respond aesthetically to what unfolds in the lesson. In this way, micro-actions such as exclamations can help teachers to work with students' experiences in ways that bind together the substance of the lesson into a coherent and purposeful whole.

Method

The empirical material used in this article was originally collected as part of a broader research project aimed at generating knowledge about students' learning of practical,

embodied knowledge in the school subjects of physical education and health. This article presents a re-analysis of selected material from that project, focusing specifically on teacher exclamations during a volleyball lesson. Using a video-ethnographic approach (Heath et al. 2010), we observed two classes at a medium-sized municipal secondary school over five school terms. Around 50 lessons were recorded during the project. The project adhered to the general ethical guidelines outlined by the Swedish Research Council (2017). Only teachers and students who provided informed consent were recorded. During the video-ethnographic fieldwork, priority was given to getting to know the students and building trust over time. Accordingly, the data collection process included procedural consent, and there was an ongoing dialogue between the researchers and students throughout the study and in relation to each individual lesson.

In addition to the use of stationary recording equipment, a wireless GoPro camera with a built-in microphone was attached to the teacher's chest (e.g. Andersson and Risberg 2018; Andersson and Risberg 2019; Chalfen 2014). This setup enabled the capture of both visual and auditory data from the teacher's perspective. One advantage of using video recordings is the ability to replay sequences multiple times, facilitating detailed and varied forms of analysis (e.g. Goldman 2007). Another advantage is the potential to revisit and reinterpret the material.

In one of the recorded PE volleyball sessions, we noticed the teacher frequently calling out positive exclamations such as 'good', 'great' and 'brilliant'. For example, the teacher might follow a student's play with an enthusiastic 'great!' The frequent use of such exclamations prompted us to identify and count them. In a 60-minute lesson, expressions like 'good', 'great' and 'brilliant' were recorded 228 times, with an average of four per minute. Our initial impression was that these exclamations resembled the 'cheering and chanting' typical of sports events, so we dismissed them as analytically insignificant. However, two years later, we re-analysed the recordings and carefully examined the volleyball lesson. This first step of re-analysis led us to identify the lesson as a specific educational setting worthy of deeper exploration.

In the second phase of analysis, we conducted monthly meetings over the course of a year, each lasting approximately two hours. Between meetings, we engaged in individual review sessions where each researcher independently studied the video material. Our analysis began with basic questions: 'What do we see?', 'What do we hear?' and 'How can we understand this?' These questions guided our focus toward the positive exclamations that appeared frequently throughout the lesson.

The observed volleyball lesson began with the teacher introducing the general aims of the session to the class then showing them a short video of a volleyball game. This was succeeded by a warm-up, after which the teacher explained and demonstrated the volley and bump techniques with a student. Students then practised in pairs; thereafter, they performed three pair-to-pair sequences of volley and bump. The teacher conducted a joint briefing with the class, which was followed by individual serve practice. Finally, the class was divided into four teams for gameplay, and the lesson concluded with a reflective group debriefing.

Teacher exclamations occurred in all phases of the lesson except the initial introduction – from the warm-up and pair practice to gameplay and the final debriefing. To visualize the distribution of teacher exclamations, we created a bar chart summarizing the

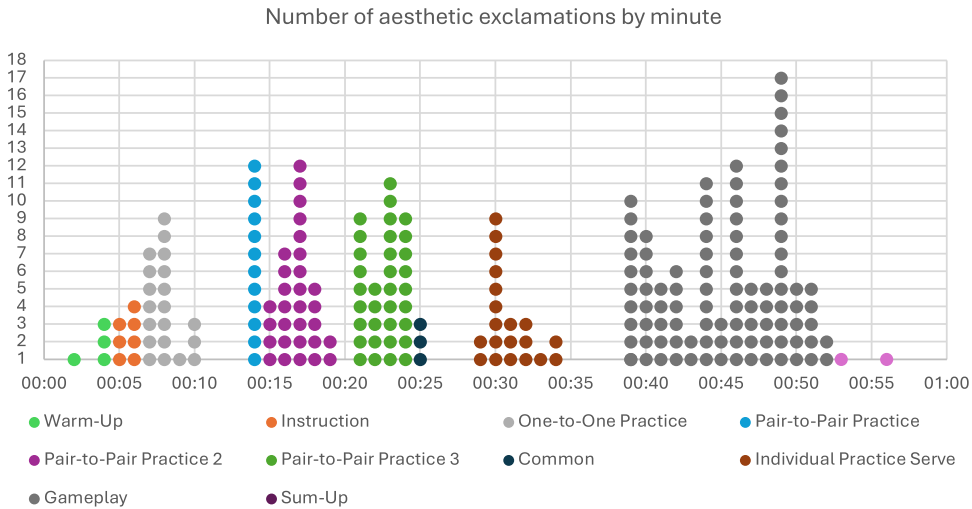


Figure 1. Number of aesthetic exclamations by minute.

number of exclamations per minute (Figure 1). The y -axis represents the count per minute, while the x -axis shows the timeline. Each exclamation is marked as a dot and colour-coded by activity type.

The teacher used four exclamations during the warm-up and seven during the instructional phase. As the lesson progressed into the pair practice and the three pair-to-pair sequences, the number of exclamations increased (20, 12, 30 and 34, respectively). The highest number, 96 exclamations, occurred during the game phase, where students played in teams on two courts. This pattern raised the question of how we should understand these exclamations. To answer it, we developed the theoretical framework explained above, which views aesthetics as part of the teacher's creative and expressive role in shaping educational experiences. In doing so, we aimed to create 'meaningful coherence' (Tracy 2010) by connecting theory, data and an analytical focus on how qualities of experience may be called into existence by the teacher. Thus the theoretical concepts were chosen in accordance with what we saw and heard in the recordings.

Through close observation, we noticed that the teacher's exclamations were not random. They seemed to be part of a rhythmic and dynamic teaching practice, varying in timing, frequency and direction. Some were announced to the whole class, others directed at individuals. Some were general, while others were clearly linked to specific visible actions. These patterns lead us to conclude that the exclamations were not just personal quirks. Rather, they were part of a deliberate pedagogical practice that potentially gave meaning to the students' activities.

In the next section, we present our findings through thick descriptions, detailing the lesson with a narrative explanation supported by graphs, figures and transcripts.

Findings

The findings are presented in near-chronological order, following the structure of the volleyball lesson, from practice activities in the beginning to full gameplay in the

second half of the lesson. The analysis revealed three key findings: (1) the function of ‘great!’, illustrating that exclamations are part of a larger pedagogical structure; (2) the dynamics of this larger structure, explaining the function of ‘great!’ at an individual, local and general level; and (3) the path of ‘great!’, illustrating how exclamations supports student actions through creative calling during gameplay.

The function of ‘great!’ and its larger structure

For an exclamation like ‘great!’ to have pedagogical value, students must perceive it as relevant to their actions. In other words, the exclamation must bring something into existence, and it must connect to what is happening in the moment. The observed teacher exclamations were not isolated but tied to specific participants and activities, as shown in [Figure 1](#). Only by considering this context were we able to understand the teacher’s expressive practice as a form of pedagogical artistry and specify that something is called into existence.

Throughout the lesson, the teacher used a relatively traditional approach, making real-time judgments about student progress and expressing them through exclamations. We began by analysing the use of ‘great!’ during the practice sequences and found that these exclamations were related to local situations where the teacher responded to student actions. [Table 1](#) presents a brief extract from the first part of the lesson, illustrating how ‘great!’ was used in context.

Table 1. Extract of the volleyball lesson instruction.

Instruction

Part 1

T: I want to borrow Oscar. Can you stand there in front of me, Oscar? Come closer! Come closer so you can see. We will practice volley, bump. We will have a game across the net and practice serves today. And we will play at the end. Does that sound ok?

Class: yes.

T: Volley. What did we say about fingers, Christine?

K: Like that?

T: A lot of fingers, yeah.

T: At what height, Louise?

L: Forehead height.

T: Forehead height, yeah.

T: And if it’s lower, I will use another hit. What, Casper?

C: Bump.

T: Bump, yes.

[After this introduction, the teacher demonstrates a volley with one of the students, Oscar.]

Part 2

T: Forehead height all the time. [Passes the ball to Oscar]

O: [Oscar returns the ball by volley at forehead height]

T: **Great**

T: A lot of fingers around the ball. [Passes the ball to Oscar]

O: [Oscar returns the ball with a volley and a lot of fingers]

T: **Great**

T: Work with the feet the whole time. [Passes the ball to Oscar]

O: [Oscar returns the ball with a volley]

T: Because if I do that [Passes the ball to Oscar]

T: I will have time to receive the balls.

O: [Oscar returns the ball with a volley]

T: **Great**

In the first part of the transcript, the teacher engaged in a question–answer–confirmation sequence with three students: Christine, Louise and Casper. This three-turn structure is well established in classroom research as a typical form of pedagogical discourse. Rather than analysing each turn as a separate move, we focused on how these turns are transactionally interrelated, that is, how each one shaped and responded to the others. From a transactional perspective, the three-turn structure is not simply a sequence of (1) teacher question, (2) student response and (3) teacher evaluation. Instead, the turns are interrelated. With this structure in mind, we moved to the second part of the transcript, where the teacher demonstrated volleying with a student, Oscar. Here, the teacher used the exclamation ‘great!’ three times (marked in bold). Using the lens of the three-turn structure, we interpreted the first two exclamations as closely tied to the teacher’s instructions, such as ‘forehead height’ and ‘lots of fingers’, and to the student’s responsive actions. The exclamation ‘great!’ served both as a confirmation that the student returned the ball correctly and as recognition that the student followed the teacher’s instruction about how to return the ball (i.e. at ‘forehead height’). That is, ‘great!’, when analysed as a third turn, signifies that the teacher recognized the student’s response as an aesthetic accomplishment and as an action aligned with the educative aims of the practice. The teacher and the student are both part of a demonstration of an overarching pedagogical practice. In the first part of the transcript, the teacher announced something for all the students to see and then practice (such as volleys, bumps and serves). This is the purpose to which the actions in the transcript relate. In this purposeful context, the teacher’s calling was inseparable from the students’ embodied expressions. In transaction with the students, within the three-turn structure, the teacher also made public consummations in the gym by using exclamations like ‘good!’, ‘great!’ and ‘brilliant!’. By acknowledging these consummations publicly through such exclamations, the teacher pointed to the possible features of the purposeful context. Employing Dewey’s account of aesthetic experience, we argue that when the teacher and students expand their experience by ‘gathering together’ the substance of their work, exclamations can call something into existence: what exists co-exists and what is called into existence is co-called into existence.

The three-turn structure we found recurrent in the observed volleyball teaching in PE can then be modelled in the following way (Figure 2).

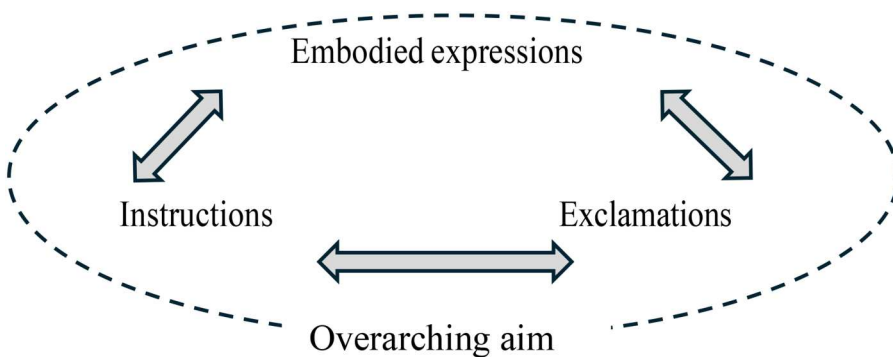


Figure 2. The three-turn structure.

The exclamations of ‘great!’ recurrently function as part of a broader three-turn structure. In contrast to purely verbal responses, many of the observed responses in PE were frequently performed as embodied expressions. In this context, an exclamation such as ‘great!’ is not an aesthetic expression per se. However, as a summation of a series of actions within a staged and purposeful context, it contributes to the aesthetic quality of a shared work. The appraisal ‘great!’ highlights the student’s actions as an aesthetic accomplishment.

The dynamics of instruction–expression–exclamations

To gain a deeper understanding of the three-turn structure, we examined some characteristics that highlight its dynamic use. In the volleyball lesson, we found that each practice sequence (volleys and bumps in pairs, volleys and bumps in pair-to-pair practice, serves) was introduced by the teacher, and then, by walking around the gym from location to location, she supplemented the instruction with further comments: ‘a lot of fingers around the ball!’, ‘high and nice balls!’, ‘look at the ball!’ and ‘at forehead height!’. Sometimes, such instructions were given at a general level, as an extension of the overarching aim. At other times, the instructions were directed at a more personal level, while the teacher was walking among the students. By observing the teacher’s movements and closely examining the character of the instructions, we identified three different levels of instruction: general, local and individual. Furthermore, at each instructional level, the exclamations were also identified at similarly distinct levels, resulting in six relations (Figure 3).

The instructions were sometimes delivered in a general way by the teacher. These instructions occurred during the general introduction, when the teacher was already addressing the whole class, and during practice, when the teacher shouted with an omni-directional call such as ‘a lot of fingers around the ball!’. Such instructions were directed at all students, as the class was treated as a single unit, and the exclamation ‘great!’ related to all students collectively. For instance, when the whole class was gathered in front of the teacher after a certain practice or during a warm-up, the teacher exclaimed ‘good work!’. In these instances, the three-turn structure had a general-to-general relation. However, ‘great!’ was also directed to a single group or pairs of students during practice. For example, when passing a pair of students who were passing the ball nicely between each other and keeping it high, ‘great!’ was heard as directed at them both in relation to the general instruction ‘high and nice balls’. In such cases, the three-turn structure had a general-to-local relation. Finally, the exclamation ‘great!’ also referred

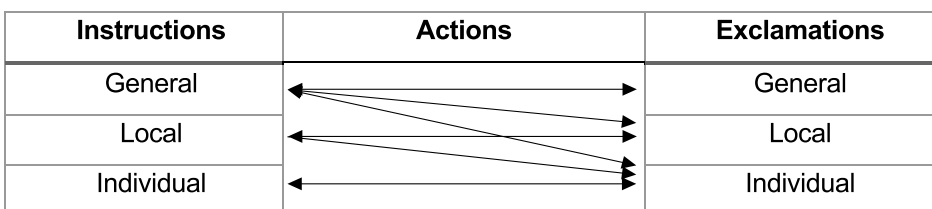


Figure 3. Three-turn structure relations.

to a single student's embodied expression of the general instruction. Apart from an obviously individual call, such as 'good, Liza!', the teacher constructed variation through proximity to the students or through voice and timing characteristics. For example, when the teacher called out 'a lot of fingers' as a general instruction and then came close to a student working nicely and smoothly with her fingers doing volleys, we identified the teacher's timing of 'great!' in relation to the student's volley as a general-to-individual construct. As shown in [Figure 3](#), the seemingly same exclamations, such as 'good', can be part of different transactional relationships depending on the context of the general call. We argue that these exclamations are different ways in which the teacher and students gathered the substance of their work.

Furthermore, depending on the teacher's voice, place/space, and call direction and on the students' actions, the instructions were locally directed at a small group, a pair of students, or an individual student. For example, the teacher approached a pair of students who were passing the ball quite low between them and called out 'high and nice balls' as an instruction directed specifically at them. Here, two different three-turn structure relations were part of the transaction. When the students changed their way of passing the ball, the teacher's 'great!' was directed at both students: as a local-local relation. When 'great!' was exclaimed with close timing to one of the student's volleys, it constituted more of a local-individual construct. Finally, when it comes to individual instruction initiation, we only found assessments such as 'good' to be part of an individual-individual relation. For example, when the teacher instructed a student on how to make a serve, a 'great!' exclamation after the serve was heard as directed at that student.

Hitherto, we have described how exclamations directly followed actions. However, the turns in the three-turn structure were not always connected as immediate consequences of each other. Both embodied expressions and exclamations were at times suspended, occurring with a 'gap' between the instructions and the embodied expressions they referred to. For example, during gameplay, the teacher sometimes withheld an exclamation until the ball was dead or the distance to a specific student was narrowed. Moreover, the transactional relation between instructions, actions and exclamations also means that a given instruction has a tentative function. As such, the instructions are readily available for future educational transactions during the lesson. Following a transactional analysis of the PE lesson's instruction-action-exclamation structure distributed in time, we found that instructions could be understood as a background to which both students and the teacher could refer to embodied expressions and exclamations throughout the lesson. This is further described and explained in the last section of our findings.

The path of 'great!' in a whole activity

Building on our analyses of the function of 'great!' and the exclamations as part of a larger structure, we now focus on the gameplay, which was the most intense sequence of the lesson.

Playing a game is a more complex activity for the students than for the teacher. Although playing volleyball is generally more difficult than practising volleys and bumps as isolated parts of the game, in the observed volleyball lesson, the instructions were less prominent during the game compared to the practices. On the other hand, the game sequence contained 96 exclamations. However, this does not mean there are

96 separate instruction–action–exclamation chains to analyse; it would have been impossible to accomplish even a remotely meaningful game for the teacher and the students if these exclamations had occurred as third turns in 96 separate instruction–action–exclamation chains. We also need to stay true to our former analytical conclusions: the instruction–action–exclamation structure represents a unity of dynamic teacher–student work to be recognized in terms of something being called into existence. In other words, these 96 exclamations cannot be brushed away as expressions of the teacher’s personal taste or inclination to shout or as sport discourse behaviour. Their occurrence and use should be understood in relation to the number of instructions given, as well as in relation to the overarching aim. To do so, we used the short extract below for analysis (Table 2).

Table 2. Extract of the context of exclamations.

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The extract shows several points of interest in connection to aesthetics, education and the three-turn structure of instruction–action–exclamation. First, the instruction that ‘a good play’ is more valuable than ‘to win’ serves as a general reminder of the desired quality of the situation for all students: although the volleys, bumps and serves practised earlier in the lesson can be used with the aim of winning, they can also contribute to a good play. At this stage of developing volleyball skills, a good play provides more opportunities for practice than a win-oriented play and is therefore coherent with an educative practice. Additionally, the teacher’s instruction implies that even if a team or student does not win, they can still experience a valuable quality of volleyball through a good play. That is, their embodied expression can still be ‘great!’. This feature of the teacher’s instruction is central to the educative practice of playing volleyball and should be understood as a further staging of a purposeful context, alongside previous instructions such as ‘lots of fingers’ and ‘high balls’ and the announcement that students will practise game-play. Again, we understand instructions as part of staging a purposeful context to which both the students and the teacher can refer embodied expressions and exclamations throughout the lesson.

The educative and tentative aspects of the larger structure, to which we consider ‘great!’ exclamations to belong, became considerably more evident in how the three failures captured in the transcript were handled. Alexia failed her serve, Oscar failed his receiving bump and Rachel failed to remember the rule of not touching the ball with her feet. Despite these failures and the lack of instructions indicating these actions as desirable, we observed positive exclamations. Intuitively, this would seem to contradict our previous analytical conclusions that the exclamations were related to instructions and actions. However, in the cases of Oscar and Rachel, the teacher added explanations for her positive exclamations: Oscar’s action was pointed out as ‘right’ because he had the ‘right idea and thinking’. The teacher’s ‘go, go, go’ preceding Rachel’s action (to hit the ball with her feet) became an instruction when it was followed up with exclamations such as ‘good Rachel’ and ‘well fought’, which referred to her ‘fighting spirit’. Explained in line with how Garrison (2010) conceptualizes teaching as an artform, we argue that both examples show that the teacher can call into existence an experience from multiple and durational educational transactions.

In this last part, we have shown that by pointing out the qualities of situations – by creating a ‘peculiarly satisfying sense of unity’ in relation to presumably wrong consequences of the students’ actions – the teacher not only made a confirmational move but also gathered together the substance of the work to expand the students’ experiences. Examples of the substance of work could include encouraging the practice of returning a ball (‘forehead height’), recognizing the students’ responses as aesthetic accomplishments, and valuing ‘the good play’. The teacher’s creative calling became visible in her ways of binding these and other parts that form the substance of the work (e.g. the overarching aim of the lesson) together by making exclamations functional (having direct timing), contextual (pointing to a specific situation) and relational (creating a reference).

Conclusion

The overall aim of this article was to reinterpret PE teachers’ common use of exclamations such as ‘good!’, ‘great!’ or ‘brilliant!’ in their lessons. Guided by Dewey’s

aesthetics and video-ethnography, our analysis revealed that such exclamations are important tools in the art of PE teaching. This was evident when the teacher, by using her voice, tone and timing, guided the students towards ‘the good play’, as opposed to ‘the competitive play’. Distinctive for ‘the good play’ was the possibility to take part in the lesson in meaningful ways through shared experiences, rather than winning a game. In this example, and in the other examples displaying the transactional specificities in volleyball teaching, experiences are creatively called into existence by means of exclamations. Such creative calling requires the teacher to be sensitive and responsive to how students relate to the purposeful context that is staged in volleyball teaching.

Previous research has shown that PE teachers often have difficulty articulating what students are supposed to learn when it comes to ball games (Hovdal et al. 2023), that teachers are lacking in their narratives about the qualities of students’ bodily movement (Larsson and Nyberg 2017), and that teacher exclamations such as ‘go faster!’ have a tendency to prioritize the students’ physical activity rather than providing relevant knowledge (Redelius et al. 2015). In contrast, we have identified teacher exclamations as functional (having direct timing), contextual (pointing to a specific situation) and relational (creating a reference).

Our first aim was to describe and explain how teacher exclamations during a volleyball lesson are pertinent to the teacher’s and students’ creation of purposeful contexts. This was evident on individual, local and general levels. We also strived to identify the details of a specific aesthetic during a volleyball lesson. This aesthetic became evident in how the teacher used exclamations to gather together the substance of the work. For instance, in a three-turn structure, the exclamation ‘great!’ was used to confirm the student’s action (volley) in relation to the instruction (to pass). We argue that when the teacher and students rely on each other to co-create the material *in* which they work and when such transactional materials are also sculptured in ways that allow students consummate them as aesthetic experiences, teaching becomes an artform.

Our second aim was to identify how the use of exclamations can support students in learning specific PE content and developing aesthetic sensibilities during a volleyball lesson. In relation to previous research, such as Vasconcellos (2020), our findings suggest that brief utterances and exclamations should not be reduced to mere motivational cues or techniques in PE. Instead, if approached as part of a distinct PE aesthetic, these utterances can be included in the broader pedagogical vision promoted by scholars such as Evans (2004), Kirk (2010), and Quennerstedt (2019) – that is, a vision that encourages us to expand our imagination of what physical education can be.

However, our theoretical framework does not imply that exclamations always carry educational significance. On the contrary, research has shown that PE teachers require robust didactical ideals and clearly defined purposes to foster meaningful learning through communication with students (Hastie et al. 2025). There is also the challenge of addressing students’ cultural and sporting habitus (Evans 2004), as well as the sport-specific logics that ball games often reproduce (Mustell 2025; Ward and Quennerstedt 2016). Despite these challenges, the field of PE research would benefit from a philosophical grounding in how to interpret and analyse purposeful teacher actions as an artform. Such a foundation would help educational researchers identify the qualitative aspects of experience that teachers and students must attend to in order to learn

within a meaningful PE environment (Beni, Fletcher and Ni Chróinín 2018). It would also allow researchers to evaluate instructional and motivational techniques in terms of the aesthetic value they may offer.

In relation to movement culture and what Ward and Quennerstedt (2016) describe as 'looks-like-sports', the art of volleyball teaching includes efforts to call into existence certain qualities of experience that are not always represented within the sport discourse of ball games. In connection with PE research focused on movement learning and movement exploration (Barker et al. 2017), this study contributes findings that suggest teaching ball games within the context of PE can potentially include pedagogical tools for cultivating aesthetic sensibilities. In addition, according to previous observational studies that have examined the motivational, purpose-clarifying and governmental functions of PE through communication in the gym (Öhman and Quennerstedt 2008), our results show that exclamations may operate on different transactional levels (individual, local and general) while the teacher simultaneously seeks to bind together students' varied experiences into coherent and aesthetic wholes.

The art of teaching, as defined through our Deweyan perspective, involves calling aesthetic experience into existence. This can be achieved through volleyball teaching, although it requires careful navigation of the balance between indirect and direct teaching behaviour, as well as critical awareness of how sport logics, gender norms, and sporting habitus shape which aesthetics, values and forms of knowledge are privileged in PE teaching and learning.

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