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Question: I have been charged with purchasing equipment for a new school. Any suggestions on what to purchase? – Mr. R.

Answer:

Dear Mr. R.,

I know this seems overwhelming to you right now. Once you get started and on your way, you will be very excited and see how fun this process is!

I remember my first year when I was asked to order hockey equipment with which to teach Floor Hockey, my favorite sport! The equipment came, and I was so happy to share it with my classes. One problem, I ordered the wrong kind. I ordered hockey sticks meant for fifth graders and under, and I was using it with middle school students at the K-8 school in which I taught. Ooops. It was no wonder the sticks kept snapping in half, and I had to send them back continuously to be replaced. Hopefully the information below will help you avoid my mistake.

To help guide you with your purchase, you are going to want to consult a couple of resources and people. First, I suggest referencing your curriculum to see what units you have to teach. This will help give you a general guideline of the kind of equipment you will need. The second place to reference will be your school or county's bid list. This is where you see what companies you can purchase from at the lowest prices. In addition, this tells you what equipment is already approved by your county. Third, contact any other P.E. teachers to see what their inventory has to gain ideas of what may be appropriate. Lastly, consider the source from where your money is coming. Schools and districts have different procedures on what you can purchase with money from certain sources and how to process the purchases. Once you know all this information, you can move forward with picking your equipment. Below are some more guidelines on choosing appropriate equipment.

Consider Variety – Pick equipment that you can use for a variety of situations. For example, if you purchase playground balls, you can use that to teach a variety of skills from striking to kicking. This will keep your cost down and flexibility up when teaching, especially if you are teaching in a situation where some equipment just will not work.

Consider Organization – As you purchase equipment, remember you will need ways to store and carry it around. Be sure to purchase storage bins, racks, mesh backs, push carts, and the like. Also, consider that your equipment can help you with your class organization. For example, by having equipment in different colors, you can use that to organize groups by colors. Think about how you can keep your equipment and classes organized with what you purchase.

Consider Size/Age Appropriateness – Make sure to purchase items in different sizes and targeted for different ages. For example, there is a difference between a size 4 and size 5 soccer ball and for whom you use it. Plus, equipment you use for a Kindergarten class will vary from what is appropriate for a fifth grade class. Keep this in mind as you make your decision or you may wind up pulling your hair later as you try to teach your little ones to dribble with regular size balls. Also, in this category, evaluate your need for oversized equipment such as earth balls, large beach balls, etc. You may find them good for alternative activities such as team challenges.

Consider Adaptive Needs - As we know, we must meet our learners where they are. So, consider purchasing equipment for adaptive P.E. purposes. This might include T's used in T ball to strike a ball off of, a device to hold a soccer ball suspended from the air for kicking, or oversized equipment. Even if you wind up not needing this equipment all the time, you can still use it in a variety of other situations.

Consider Quality – Some equipment one would expect to break over time. It is usual for wear and tear to occur over the life of equipment. But little considerations can make a big difference over time. For example, no kink hula hoops will last longer with less bend, and gator skin balls are going to be tougher and hold up longer than foam balls. Sometimes money well spent is really well spent.

Consider Safety - Choose equipment that will maximize safety. Yes, some equipment like basketballs may be hard and can cause injury. However by purchasing soft and forgiving materials, you will have a much safer environment when teaching. Gymnastic mats are one example because they can be used to cover dangerous or hard surfaces.

Consider Amount – Try to order enough for a class set of each type of equipment. This makes sure every child has their own item to use. In addition, order a few extra to have when something breaks. This will help you when you are in the middle of a lesson and one of the 30 balls you have goes over a fence. You will be able to say, “Here you go Johnny, here is another ball for you.”

Integrate – Bean bags come with numbers on them, balls with letters, and other equipment with character statements. There are a variety of options with equipment to integrate with most subject areas. I would include these in your purchase. This will help build the whole child, even if the whole child does not know it is being built.

Anticipate – You are going to have small needs down the road when you will not have money and will need something. Consider this now. For example, you may want to have field paint ready for your field days or whistles for special events. Think of the details.

Think Outside of the Ball – So you have to teach throwing, and you think of your usual ball, beanbag, scarf, or the line. Boring. Kids have seen this 100 times. Think differently. How much more fun would class be if you used rubber chickens or frogs? And what about using mini parachutes instead of one big parachute, or even balls with hand placement markers on them for guiding students in how to hold them? How about

directional arrows to mark pathways? Take a look at the catalogs and some of the cooler stuff they have, and think big!

Ask your question by emailing me at charles.silberman@gmail.com. You can also follow me on [Twitter](#) (@ThePeGuy) or ask your question there!