



Physical Education: Teams and Individuals

What if celebrating a goal were about acknowledging others?

Kate ran her elementary school soccer team in her role as PE specialist. She was unhappy with the way players celebrated goals, and felt they often were copying what they saw in the media. She wanted her team to think about goal scoring as a way of acknowledging team effort, not just as a time for individuals to take the limelight for themselves.

“Instead of having one of our usual team practices, I got the team together and showed several video clips of players in professional teams scoring and celebrating goals, without showing what had led up to the goal. I asked the class to predict how the goal had been set up. Then I showed the longer clip. We talked about goals being team work, and discussed ways of celebrating goals that acknowledge the role of other people in the team. We made up routines that the students enjoyed and were comfortable with.

“Then I looked at my own behavior—at what I responded to when I commented on, criticized, or rewarded student play. I realized my own responses were largely responding to individual behavior I was unhappy with, or picking out individual effort. I introduced a new reward structure that acknowledged players working together.”

What's going on here?

Kate saw soccer as part of character development and seeking others' good. Goal scoring was not enough.

She intentionally engaged students in discussing and reflecting on behaviour around goal scoring in a way that focused on working together (the session with video clips).

She reshaped her practice by examining her teaching habits around rewards (creating a different reward structure) and by using video clips and discussion to focus students on the lesson's aim.

What does this have to do with faith, hope, and love?

We tend to put the focus on our wants and needs, and see ourselves in competition with others for everything from material goods to attention. This often arises from insecurity and focusing more on being loved than on loving others. The Apostle Paul described love as “not self-seeking.” Trusting others to praise us rather than drawing attention to ourselves can be an expression of faith that we are cared for. It is a conscious step away from self.

What difference does it make?

Kate took action on her unease and decided to tackle it even though this meant changing her own behavior. She took action not by nagging students but by changing her own practices and involving students in reshaping their practices.

Where could we go from here?

The same approach could be applied to other parts of sports where the teacher may feel that unhelpful behavior has been copied or that too much focus is being placed on winning or self-promotion.


Digging deeper

For Christians, security in the love of God means that we do not have to be in competition with others; there is enough of God’s love to go around. People do not have to draw attention to themselves inappropriately, because God knows each one of us (Luke 12:17).

The change in how goal scoring was celebrated was an acknowledgement of others, rather than drawing all the attention to oneself. This is an unselfish act. Jesus taught radical selflessness (Mark 12:30-31, Matthew 6:24). He ranked loving others as second only to loving God. He told people to treat others as they would want to be treated and to love others as they love themselves (Mark 12:28-31). Selflessness is not about self-hatred

or neglect; it is treating other people with dignity as God's children and attending to their needs. The Apostle Paul talks about pleasing others rather than ourselves in order to build up other people ([Romans 15:2](#); [Philippians 2:4](#)).

This "dying to self" is something that happens with the help of the Holy Spirit. It is not a one-time act, but a daily process. Self is not lost in the process; it is strengthened. Many Christians testify that there is a strange inversion at work: when we focus on God and others, we find ourselves ([Matthew 16:25](#)).



What the earliest Christians were struck by, and what they returned to again and again, was that in Jesus they had seen (and the stories testified of this to those who had not seen) a way of being human which nobody had ever imagined before. This was a way of generosity and forgiveness, a way of self-emptying and a determination to put everyone else's needs first. N. T. Wright



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