My Thoughts on Using Exercise Balls for Student Chairs

Thoughts from The Teacher Geek

1. **The best way to obtain some is through grants.**
   They’re moderately expensive – around $20-$25 each – but don’t let that deter you. Start with 2-3, perhaps out of your supply budget. That way, you can do a “pilot” in your classroom. Then, when your pilot is successful, your administrator might be inclined to include some in the budget for the following year. If that’s not an option, try for PTA/PTO grants. If your district has an educational foundation, try that route. Some states, towns, and cities offer grants for student fitness and/or education. Edutopia.org has an extremely helpful page that lists many national (USA) resources for grant funding. Keep in mind, you don’t need a proposal in the $1000’s of dollars. Many foundations will award small grants (often called mini-grants). Finally, there’s DonorsChoose.org – a favorite place for direct-giving of small projects.

1A. **Order the right size balls.**
   Meaning, don’t do what I did, and order a pre-school-sized ball for a second grader (whoopsie!). Here’s a helpful size chart (scroll to the middle – it’s on the right). As you are browsing, something to consider is that there are ones with and without “feet” (the feet keep them from rolling around). I had ones without feet and they worked fine – they could be lightly wedged under desks when not in use. Also, select the ones that are “burst-proof”. Here is a site [http://www.bindependent.com/homp/bi/bindep/store/aisles/exercise/activekids.htm] (which I do not necessarily endorse, they just seem to have a good selection) to give you an idea of what’s out there.

2. **Introduce the balls to the class through a lesson.**
   Gather everyone on the rug, and make the introduction. Explain that they aren’t toys, but that they will help us sit up straight, have strong core muscles, and maybe even help us focus. Model how to sit on the ball correctly (feet flat on the floor at 10 o’clock and 2 o’clock, back straight) and how, while sitting, you can very lightly bounce and swivel while you are working, without leaning. Give every child a chance to sit on the ball for a few seconds. Explain where and when they can sit on the balls (in my class, it was during seat work and rug time, not during circle time or centers). The students will be curious as to who gets the balls at what time. So…

3. **Explain the rotation schedule.**
   I only had 2 balls for 18 students. I made 2 lists: One list had just 4 names on it, (names of students that the school psychologist and I agreed upon would get the most benefit from the balls). The other list had all the other students’ names. My schedule was that 2 students would get the ball for the whole school day, and the next day, it would be the next students on each of the list – basically a high rotation and a low rotation. I did not necessarily make the list apparent – I made a small sign with velcro spots on it, and each day I would put they next students’ names on it. (Sorry, I didn’t take a photo!) But I laminated the list on the back of the sign, and soon enough many students were figuring out that some students got to sit on the ball more frequently

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**EXERCISE BALL SIZE CHART**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ball Diameter</th>
<th>User’s Height</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30 cm. or 14”</td>
<td>Toddlers aged 1-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42 cm. or 16”</td>
<td>Under 4’ 10”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 cm. or 21”</td>
<td>4’ 11” - 5’4”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 cm. or 25”</td>
<td>5’ 5” - 5’11”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75 cm. or 29”</td>
<td>6’ and taller</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
than others. This came up during Morning Meeting, and I simply said that this was the schedule that Mr. L (the school psychologist) and I had come up with. Since Mr. L is a rock star in my school, the students didn’t question it again.

4. The Rules for the Balls
In my class, sitting on the ball is a privilege, not a given. If a student used the ball inappropriately, the ball immediately goes to the next person on the rotation list. For instance, throwing or dribbling the ball was a no-no. Bouncing so high that your bottom left the ball was also kiboshed (I had a hand signal for when the bouncing was on the verge of that point — a palm-down wave). Continually sitting in an unsafe manner (I had a couple that tried out criss-cross-applesauce legs on it…that would be no, and no) was also grounds for losing your turn. I should also mention that students didn’t have to sit on the ball if they did not want to – occasionally this happened. When the students realized, after a witnessing the handful of times that the rules were tested, that I was serious about the consequences, I had absolutely no problems!

5. Cleaning and storing tips
The student on the ball at the end of the day was responsible for using a cleaning wipe to wipe the surface of the ball. In my class, chairs got placed upside-down on desks at the end of the day, and the ball was placed inside the legs of the chair.
Once we got the rules and routines down, they became a normal and accepted part of the class. I’m changing schools this year, and I hope to incorporate the balls again – and maybe even get one for my desk. I’m sure I left something out so if you have any questions, let me know in the comments and I’ll be happy to answer them. If you’ve used them in your classroom, please share any tips and tricks you have up your sleeve!

Taken from: