

The Zinman College of Physical Education and Sport Sciences at the Wingate Institute

A UNIQUE PHYSICAL EDUCATION CURRICULUM - SUPPORTING CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

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Introduction

This study emphasized the uniqueness of physical education (PE) as a constructive context in which students are presented with practice opportunities, enabling them to improve learning and social skills. Specifically, it examined the contribution of a physical education program in improving classroom management and students' behavior. Movement and games are a context for a behavior change, rather than a cause for a change. There is no direct link between the involvement in physical activity and the acquisition of values, learning skills and behavioral competencies. Such a context enables teachers and clinicians to design a challenging learning content and atmosphere for their students. It also provides them with a well-planned constructive feedback. This model offers a simulation of classroom and real life situations, pre-planned and programmed for achieving educational goals.

Participants and Setting

Three students in a special education school in Central Israel, and their classmates, participated in the study. The school accommodated 70 students with severe behavior problems having a psychiatric and learning disability background. Students' potential and functioning level was low and they were characterized by adaptation difficulties, low self-esteem and very poor arithmetic and reading abilities. The age range of students in the school was 6-15 and they were arranged in 9 classes accommodating 6-10 students each. Each class had a teacher and an assistant, supported by didactical and psychological advisors. The school offered a variety of alternative experiences for the students, with a comprehensive physical education (PE) program for all.

Target classes and students were selected by the school staff. Three classes were first selected by the school principal, based on a short questionnaire identifying behavior difficulties for each class. The principal identified three classes with the most severe difficulties. Three students were then selected by the teacher for each class, based on a questionnaire identifying behavior difficulties. Each teacher identified the three students who had most behavior difficulties and had a negative influence on the performance of other students in the class. Out of the three students one was selected for each class by the researcher, based on observations identifying frequency of inappropriate behavior and learning time.

Target Behaviors, Data Collection, & Reliability

Two dependent variables were measured in the classroom and during the PE experiences: problem behavior and learning. Problem behaviors were: talking without permission (verbal behavior to self or others that was not related to learning tasks and had not been approved by the teacher), verbal violence (cursing, threatening, using offensive language), screaming (raising the voice volume beyond normal), physical violence (hitting, kicking, inappropriate touching), property destruction (throwing, breaking, scratching, damaging), and leaving learning position / classroom without permission. Learning was defined as engagement in tasks assigned by the teacher without being involved in problem behavior. Target behaviors were recorded by trained observers using observation forms adapted for this study. Event recording was used to collect data on the rate of problem behaviors for the target students and other students in their classes. Time sampling was used to record learning time. Interobserver agreement data were collected by independent trained observers for at least 40% of all sessions during the baseline, intervention and follow-up phases. Mean agreement score was 90% (range, 85% - 100%).



Intervention & Experimental Design

Procedures for the study included:

1. Selecting target classes and target students according to recommendation of staff members and data collected.
2. Collecting baseline data for the target classes and for the target students.
3. Collecting data in the target classes while the target students were not present, and when they participated in the lesson.
4. Pinpointing target behaviors for each target student according to baseline classroom observations.
5. Conducting a behavioral diagnosis in the context of physical activity, in order to determine how the intervention will be carried out.
6. Implementing a gradual intervention outside the classroom, in the physical education context, with each one of the target students.
7. Supporting behavior change in class and guiding the class staff.
8. Follow-up.

Intervention included a series of physical education “scripts” in which students experienced frustrating situations, analogous to those occurring in class.

The scripts difficulty level and the complexity of the scripts were increased gradually, while keeping a high success level and continuous feedback. Each practice lasted 1-2 hours and was implemented at least 4 times per week.

A multiple baseline design across students was used to assess the intervention effect on students' and classes' performance.

Results

Results showed improvement in the behavior of all target students during the individual physical education intervention

- There was an improvement in the behavior of all the target students in the parent class.
- There was an improvement in climate in all three classes.
- There was an improvement in the Learning Time in two out of the three classes.
- In all three classes there was a decrease in the number of behavior problems among the students.
- The program encouraged the target students, and they had cooperated willingly.
- The physical education activities were adjusted easily to the behavioral needs of the students.
- The program had brought upon a feeling of success among the target students, their classmates and the teachers.

Conclusions

1. Behavior difficulties and triggers for inappropriate behavior may be diagnosed through PE scripts.
2. Students may improve self-control and learning skills through a PE experience, adapted to their needs (simulation scripts).
3. The PE context encouraged the students, and they had cooperated willingly.
4. The gradual implementation of the program in the classrooms, with the PE teachers' presence and fadeout, supported the behavior improvement of the target student and the increase in class learning time.
5. Target students improved their classroom behavior but failed to improve learning (due to learning difficulties). Special learning support should be provided in conjunction with the behavioral program.
6. The program had brought upon a feeling of success among the target students, the rest of the classmates and the teachers. Teachers had a "second wind" in assuming responsibility for the target students' learning. They also felt better about challenging the class as a learning unit.