

Character Development and Team Building in PE
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Abstract

Children are living examples of their environment. They are the seeds of our future and with every life experience they are gaining nourishment in the form of meaning, reasoning, and clarity of the world around them. These experiences aid in the development of their points of view and the mindsets they take on as individuals, shaping their character and contributing to the development of their personalities. Teachers can play a key role in providing avenues for students to discover themselves in a healthy atmosphere, with purposeful instruction, and the support of their peers.

This action research analyzes how one class of 8th grade students interact socially during PE class, how those interactions are affecting the learning environment, and how purposeful instructional strategies in character development via group processes, and team-building activities will affect those interactions and the overall learning environment.

The researcher of this project drew from her studies in Project Adventure, experiential learning, brain research, and further research from literature resources, in order to accurately gain data. The researcher presents many practical activities and elements that are applicable with any learning environment that do make a change in student interaction and awareness.

Table of Contents

Abstract-----

Chapter 1----- Introduction

Chapter 2-----The Problem or Issue

Chapter 3-----The Goal of the Action Research Project

Chapter 3 Part 2-----Literature Search

Chapter 4-----Action Plan

Chapter 5-----Results and Next Steps

Work Cited-----

Appendix A-----Project Adventure Activities

Appendix B-----Observation Journal/Significant Moments Log

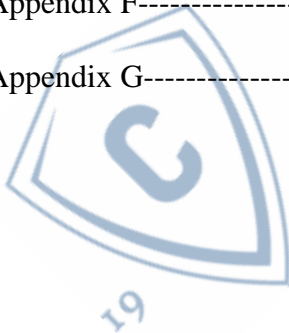
Appendix C-----General Physical Education Student Survey

Appendix D-----Survey Results Graphs

Appendix E-----Cornerstone Consulting and Evaluation LLC CREE Life/Social
Skills Student Survey and Results

Appendix F-----Daily Journal

Appendix G-----Student Reflections



Action Research Proposal

Chapter One ---Introduction

Children are living examples of their environment. They are the seeds of the future and with every life experience they are gaining nourishment in the form of meaning, reasoning, and clarity of the world around them. These experiences aid in the development of their points of view and the mindsets they take on as individuals, shaping their character and contributing to the development of their personalities.

With a population of over 55,000, Jasper is the second largest city in Jones County. Jasper lies between two rolling rivers in the heart of the Echo Valley in western Main and is only a 10-minute drive from a major university city. Jasper is a popular choice for statewide events, due to its convenient location on Interstate 232, halfway between the coast and the mountains. Jasper hosts a growing number of businesses, as it transitions from a resource-based economy to medical services and high-tech industries.

The community of Jasper has accepted many changes as it has transitioned from deep roots in the timber industry to a diversified economy by attracting national and international firms. This community is very supportive of its school which can be seen by the fact that they recently passed a bond that was approved in every single precinct by 13%. The Community of Jasper has a foundation called The Jasper Education Foundation. This organization works toward enhancing the education of all Jasper Public School students by providing financial support and community involvement. It is an extra resource to draw from, especially in terms of supporting teachers and their difficult professions.

CHARACTER AND TEAM BUILDING IN PE 5

Jasper School District has 16 K-5 schools with its teachers averaging 14.2 years of experience and 63.7% of those teachers having a master's degree or higher. There are also seven middle schools and three high schools in this district, along with one alternative school and a school for young parents. This school district is led by a nationally recognized superintendent and the exemplary administrative leadership trickles down into the individual schools, making this a fantastic district to work and learn in. The district wide free and reduced lunch is at about 56% based on the 2006 statistics and this district is growing in terms of multiculturalism. As of now, population of the Jasper School District, based on ethnicity, consists of about 75% white, 18% Hispanic 3% Native American, 2% African American and 2% Asian.

Out of the seven middle schools in this district, Hudson middle school draws from mostly middle class families or higher because of the cut off boundary. This school draws from a location within the city limits that has a grave difference in the cost of living. The majority of the housing this school draws from is located on a very popular river and limits many families from being able to live in this jurisdiction, leaving them to choose other areas, which feed into different schools.

Hudson Middle School has high levels of parent support and involvement. At a recent parent night for the beginning of the school year there was such a good turn out that the gym was standing room only. Hudson middle school has an average attendance of 94.4% compared to the district average with 92.1% and state attendance at 93.3%. Hudson has about 539 students, 30 teachers with an average of 10.5 years of experience. The student population consists of about 2% American Indian, 2% Asian, 1% black, 3% Hispanic, and 91% white. There are about 25% of Hudson's students on free and

reduced lunch, which is significantly lower than the surrounding schools with an average of 58%. There is not a large ESL population, with only 0.5% of Students in ESL Programs. The facility is old, going on its 54th year of service.

The PE facilities are minimal but as years go on improvements are being made with the help of the community. This school has one regular sized gym, a cafeteria and a small classroom that contains a rock wall. This class room is used for PE classes as well as health classes. Having only three locations for instruction to take place makes it quite difficult on rainy days when all 4 PE classes 6th-8th grade are participating at the same time.

The researcher is a certified K-12 PE and health teacher in her first year of teaching in her own classroom. The researcher has first hand experience in team building activities and group processes, and is eager to see the effect her teaching practices will have on her students. During this action research, the researcher worked independently in her classroom, implementing purposeful instructional strategies, facilitating student's interactions, and analyzing their interpersonal interactions, leadership, and character growth/development. The researcher analyzed how her 8th grade students interact socially during her PE class, how those interactions were affecting the learning environment, and how purposeful instructional strategies in character development via group processes, and team-building activities affected those interactions and the overall learning environment.

The researcher drew from her studies in Project Adventure, experiential learning, brain research, and further research from literature resources, in order to accurately gain data for analysis, as part of this action research.

The researcher is curious as to how her 5th Period students interacted together during the social setting of her PE class and how purposeful instructional strategies in character development via group processes, and team-building activities had an affect on those interactions.



Action Research Proposal

Chapter Two – The Problem or Issue

Middle school is a time of self-discovery for many students. It is a big transition in life, a time of physical growth, emotional and social maturity, and a time of influence whether it is positive or negative. The researcher has been a witness to the mixed messages middle school students give each other and adding to this is the insecurities these youth possess leading to overreactions to comments made by their peers or even over a simple look or gesture. The researcher has seen her students immature and at times, belittling social interactions. These aspects play a part in influencing and developing one's character in the stage of adolescence, which has inspired the researcher to question in more depth, how her 8th grade students interact socially during her PE class, how those interactions are effecting the learning environment, and how purposeful instructional strategies in character development via group processes, and team-building activities effected those interactions and the overall learning environment.

A spark has been ignited in the researchers study of adolescent interaction to find avenues to create observable moments to analyze and come to an understanding of the not so easily observable characteristics of student's character and interpersonal skills. In this stage of adolescence the development and growth of ones character is heavily influenced and moldable. Understanding the social interactions of adolescent youth is important aspect to creating a positive social/experiential learning community. We not only live in a social world, but also adolescence is a time when social interaction is a major component of daily life.

When educators fail to nurture the development of interpersonal skills, the functioning portions of the educational setting will soon be torn apart and learning will be at a minimum. As Kessler once said, “If the fires that innately burn inside youths are not intentionally and lovingly added to the hearth of community, they will burn down the structures of culture, just to feel the warmth” (Kessler, 2000, P. 135). In other words, students will tear each other apart trying desperately to fill the voids in their lives raising havoc in the learning community.

Through this action research the researcher gained knowledge of creating opportunities for her students to be valued because “Young people cannot develop a sense of their own value unless they have opportunities to be of value to others” (Kessler, 2000, P. 71). Once students have a sense of self worth and the classroom learning environment becomes safe for each individual's point of view, “students begin to reveal fundamental differences of opinion, values, and beliefs. This can take a long time with some of today's youth who are broken, disruptive, and fearful of feelings. If a group can reach a stage of genuine intimacy, airing their differences and allow students to develop an open mind and a broader perspective essential in our highly diverse society” (Kessler, 2000, P. 24).

Middle school students are in a place in their lives where they are trying to recognize who they are, what they are about, and where they belong. Teachers can play a key role in providing avenues for students to discover themselves in a healthy atmosphere with the support of their peers. “...How we respond to our students' striving can determine whether we undercut self-worth or encourage a transcendent moment” (Kessler, 2000, P. 120).

Literature Review

Within the social setting of the researchers PE class, the researcher has observed destructive behavior in forms of put downs, sarcastic and devaluing remarks along with negative body language and dysfunctional communication where students have little to no regard for how their actions and or words may influence others feelings. These negative student behaviors are disrupting the learning environment, causing the researchers students to become insecure, frustrated, and intimidated by their classmates, and it has resulted in a lack of motivation and desire for students to take an active part in class activities.

During this action research, the researcher worked independently in her classroom to implement purposeful instructional strategies, facilitate student's interactions, and analyze their interpersonal exchanges, leadership abilities, and character growth/development. The researcher's question that was analyzed was how her 8th grade students interact socially during her PE class, how those interactions are affecting the learning environment, and how purposeful instructional strategies in character development via group processes, and team-building activities will affect those interactions and the overall learning environment.

In this literature review, elements of brain based research, social interactions, character development, and different aspects of learning environments, will be discussed. Suggestions on how to create a healthy social/experiential learning environment will also be touched upon.

It is true to say that "education fails when it neglects school as a form of community life" (Dewey, 1934, p. 216). The classroom is a community and the growth

and development of student's cognitive, affective and interpersonal skills are heavily influenced in and by this community. Children are changing—in ways that tell us much about ourselves as a society and these changes are reflected not just in the violent extremes of teenage behavior that is filling the media, but in the everyday speech and actions of younger children as well (Lickona, 1991). Adolescence is a time when boundaries and expectations need to be established and character directed. This is a pivotal time in their education that must be taken full advantage of.

Brain research

“Student brains spend approximately 10,000 hours in the social environment of schools” (Jensen, 2005, p. 95), which makes it almost a necessity to influence this social interaction as much as possible in order to provide a more productive, and supportive learning environment.

Adolescent students are at a time in their lives where they are making life changing decisions on the way to becoming independent individuals. The adolescent brain may be greatly equip in many aspects of cognitive function, but when considering the part of the brain that relates to judgment and considering all ramifications in the decision making process, the brain is still very underdeveloped.

The area of the brain that is critical for sophisticated social cognition matures slowly and often does not reach complete maturity until well into the teens and 20's (Durstun, 2001). This means that students must be taught the importance of proper social skills, informed of expectations and continually guided along their journey.

Social interactions

“The social experience is a brain –changing experience, and it can be either positive or negative, depending to a large degree on how schools and teachers orchestrate it” (Jensen, 2005 p 100). When blended into the curriculum, teaching social skills takes little extra time. There may be significant payoff results in terms of efficiency: fewer disruptions, more camaraderie, and better overall feelings about learning. (Jensen 2005)

“Social cognition is the processing of information that leads to the accurate processing of the dispositions and intentions of others” (Brothers, 2000 p. 368). Acquiring appropriate social skills requires that children have the ability to understand the concept of social skills, translate the concept into actions, and monitor his/her ability to achieve social cognition and social competence (Mize, 1995, found in Odgen, 2003). Children who show socially competent behavior also show high degree of peer acceptance (Dodge, 2004, Price, 1994). Adolescent and teen students are more interested in approval, autonomy, and discovery. These tendencies can be either a nightmare for a school or a delight, depending on how well they are managed...for example; many teens will not exercise unless their friends do (Winters, Petosa, Charlton, 2003).

Researchers have found that social isolation is just as devastating a health risk factor as is smoking or high blood pressure (House, Landis, & Umberson, 1988), and as Eric Jensen once stated, “social contact has significant and broad-based effects” (p. 96). School-age kids are extremely social, and many perceptive educators are taking advantage of this reality through the smart use of cooperative learning (Jensen, 2005). The need to establish social cognition through group interactions so that these cooperative learning processes are successful and create growth and camaraderie among the learning community is important (Jensen, 2005). Students spend so many hours of

their lives in school and if we believe that school is about the “whole person,” the social experience must be considered, understood, and addressed (Jensen, 2005).

“Stress plays a role in many social interactions, including so-called “flocking” behaviors in which adolescents or teens form groups for social comfort, camaraderie, or protection” (Jensen, 2005, p 98). When students are taught how to move outside their comfort zone and learn to work with their peers of all kinds, there is a better atmosphere for academic learning and students are no longer preoccupied by worries about peer rejection and abuse (Lickona, 1991).

The learning atmosphere in Physical Education

The learning atmosphere of physical education is experiential, social, cooperative and individual all at once. According to Forgan and Jones, “Experiential social-skills activities help develop an atmosphere of acceptance, where students are willing to take risks, share, discuss, and problem-solve together.” (2002, p. 52) It is an ideal that students will be all accepting, willing to take risks, share, discuss and problem-solve together, but in order to get to this point one must understand the many aspects of each of these tasks and the appropriate classroom atmosphere must be established. “Classroom atmosphere needs 3 conditions: students know each other, respect, affirm, and care about each other, and feel membership in and responsibility to the group” (Lickona 1991 p. 100).

Students must be taught in a progressive manner how to effectively communicate with each other, how to be a leader and a team player, they must be taught the many roles

of team players and understand that every individual has an equally important role in contributing to group success.

According to Sullivan, Teachers should always be ready to commend the class and individuals on their teamwork, honesty, respect of others abilities, and trust in others. (2007). The purpose of this action research is to establish these conditions as part of the PE learning community and in order to do so, the researcher must understand each of these components, the elements that play a part in each, and whether or not they are established and functioning efficiently and effectively. Teachers must establish a learning environment where students are pushed to find commonalities with classmates as opposed to what separated them from each other, (Cain, 2003). “If the right atmosphere is created, these students will serve as role models for character values, and they might have a greater impact than they are currently having” (Bulach, 1999, p. 209). Also, the more students know about each other, the less likely they are to hurt each other (Cain, 2003).

“To succeed in teaching respect and responsibility, teachers must make the development of a classroom moral community a central educational objective. Children learn morality by living it. They need to be a community to interact, form relationships, work out problems, grow as a group, and learn directly, from their first-hand social experience, lessons about fair play, cooperation, forgiveness, and respect for the worth and dignity of every individual. The need for this kind of positive social interaction in school is greater than ever because so many children aren’t getting it outside of school” (Lickona, 1991, p.90).

Character education is described as “any deliberate approach by which school personnel, often in conjunction with parents and community members, . . . help children and youth become caring, principled, and responsible” (Williams, 2000, p. 32).

Character consists of operative values. As those values develop, they become virtues, causing behaviors to be consistent with values (Lickona, 1991). Character describes a person’s organized set of beliefs and values that influence actions related to ethical decisions. Values are general ideas individuals hold that determine their behavior (Burrett, & Rusank, 1993). As Wagner stated it, “Character must be caught rather than taught” (1996, p. 149).

Physical education has matured beyond just teaching to the psychomotor domain and now, according to state standards, includes the cognitive and affective domains as well. “In fact, the affective domain which includes emotions and moral character components, both individual and civic, is just as important as the psycho-motor domain in the gymnasium” (Sullivan 2006, p.86).

“Learning in the affective domain in P.E. means that students learn such concepts as sportsmanship, fair play, respect for others, respect for equipment, self-control, responsibility, & motivation” (Holt, Hannon, 2006 p. 11), all important aspects of character/values education.

Many aspects that influence student learning, social interactions, and development of personal character have been discussed through this literature. Each of these aspects must be further analyzed and understood in the context of the researchers PE class setting in order to accurately gain the knowledge of how the aspects of the class dynamics are functioning and how the implementation of purposeful instructional strategies in

character development via group processes, and team-building activities will affect those interactions and the overall learning environment. As stated by Mary Ellen Bafumo, “A great deal of the difference between classrooms that function and those that function well can be traced back to their level of community.” (2006). Education isn't just about reading, writing and arithmetic. It's also about life, citizenship and the value of being a good person. And when a school teaches these things, and plants the seeds of the future students will have tools to work with as life becomes more complicated and responsibilities become overwhelming, and a child's world -- and perhaps the world around us -- will begin to change. As Theodore Roosevelt once said, "To educate a person in mind and not in morals is to educate a menace to society" (USA Today, 2007, p. 13).



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Action Research Proposal

Chapter Three—The Goal of the Action Research Project

During this action research, the researcher worked independently in her classroom to implement purposeful instructional strategies, facilitate student's interactions, and analyze their interpersonal exchanges, leadership, and character growth/development. The researcher's question to be analyzed is how her 8th grade students interact socially during her PE class, how those interactions are affecting the learning environment, and how purposeful instructional strategies in character development via group processes, and team-building activities will affect those interactions and the overall learning environment.

After meeting with the building principal and getting permission to conduct this action research project, the researcher used four primary methods of data gathering. These methods consisted of survey/questionnaires, observation, personal interviews, and class reflections/debriefings.

The first means of data gathering was a questionnaire to gain the student's perspectives on the learning atmosphere of their PE class, their attitudes about PE, and for the students to identify any problems or areas interfering with their learning and ability to efficiently function together as a community of learners.

Other tools that were used to gather information were researcher observations during PE class time, The researcher observed the entire class for the duration of the research project by using detailed notes taken on any positive and negative gestures and

social interactions between students, also to establish any clicks and or excluded students. Once this data was analyzed and the main issues arose out of the data results, those aspects were further addressed and analyzed. Personal interviews were used to gain a deeper understanding of interpersonal issues students are facing that play a part in their ability to learn and feel comfortable in their learning community. The researcher also gained an understanding of her students needs via this interview process and how to address those needs to create a more positive and comfortable learning community. The student surveys were also used to gain information regarding preferences of likes and dislikes on class activities, group work, and daily routines. The survey also covered how students act and react in giving situations within the learning environment.

As the solution the researcher has chosen the use of reflections and debriefings to identify areas of growth, success, struggles, and means of celebrating those successes and constructively implementing an improvement plan for the areas of struggle.

“A teacher in a respectful classroom notices the interactions between students and does not tolerate harassment or social exclusion” (wessler, 2003, found in Miller & Pedro, 2006, p. 296) The outcomes of this action research project will contribute greatly to further instruction by providing areas to address and the means of addressing those areas when creating a positive social and experiential learning atmosphere free of harassment and social exclusion. The researcher desires to create a learning atmosphere where students support each other through struggles, celebrate and build each other up and accept each other’s strengths and weaknesses. This action research was a test to indicate whether or not the implementation of purposeful instructional strategies in

character development via group processes, and team-building activities as part of a Project Adventure curriculum will have a lasting affect.



Action Research Proposal

Chapter Four - Action Plan

The goal of this action research project was to gain a deeper understanding of interpersonal issues student are facing that play a part in their ability to learn and feel comfortable in their learning community. The researcher analyzed how her 8th grade students interact socially during her PE class, how those interactions are affecting the learning environment, and how purposeful instructional strategies in character development, via group processes, and team-building activities, affected those interactions and the overall learning environment. In this chapter, the researcher will explore specific strategies and a plan for implementing character building, creating a positive learning community, and increasing students' class participation.

Jensen in 2005 stated "...in the midst of gossip-ridden, physically active, emotionally sensitive, and highly social environment" (p.35) it becomes almost impossible for quality learning to take place. This issue of creating a learning atmosphere that is conducive to learning and motivates students to take an active role in their learning has been addressed in many books and research articles.

This world is such a social place yet it seems that the importance of providing the skills necessary to interact in this social world is not a pressing issue in education. Communication is the root of everything, weather it is written expression, spoken, or presented through body language or art. As communication occurs, understanding, insight, perspective, and in many cases realizations are gained, that would otherwise be

left in the dark. In creating a learning atmosphere where students can work in the zone of Proximal Development, the gap between what is known and what can be known becomes connected (Riddle, 1999). It is time for a change and “If schools continue to resist structural change, students will be ill prepared for the world they will live in” (p. 3). Riddle goes on to say that with high expectations, proper modeling, and a lot of patience, organized social interaction among students will be successful and lead to grand achievements.

In the specific setting of the researcher’s PE class, the following possible solutions may have solved the issue being explored in this project. First, maintaining the status quo, second, implementing a character education program as part of the curriculum, and lastly the use of Project Adventure as a supplement to the existing curriculum, including the use of purposeful grouping of students to create mixed ability groupings and to move students out of their cliques/social groups will aid in more diverse student interactions. These interactions will provide opportunities for students to move outside their comfort zones get to know their classmates and learn to work with different people to reach a common goal.

The first possible solution to maintain the status quo and hope for things to change on their own would be the least beneficial in this research study. Many elements that play a role in creating and maintaining a healthy and productive learning environment are nonexistent and are causing the dysfunction the researcher has been observing among her students. The researchers’ students need guidance; they need to be taught certain behavioral and interpersonal skills that could otherwise not be achieved if maintaining the status quo was the solution to this issue. Also, It would be difficult to obtain any data and

determine a cause if change were to occur over time. What if there was no change? What if the aspects being analyzed worsened? With this as a possible solution, the researcher would not be able to achieve any deeper understanding, therefore, maintaining the status quo is an unacceptable solution and the researcher rejects it as possible implementation into this action research.

Another possible solution is to use a character education program such as Character Counts. The Character Counts program centers on ethical decision-making in the context of the six pillars of character: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship. These six pillars, or values, are incorporated into all aspects of the students' school life, including content areas, playground activities, and cafeteria behavior. This program also provides a special program for gyms, and for coaches (Skaggs, Bodenhorn, 2006).

The Character Counts program for gyms is called, Gold Medal Children's Activity Centers (GMCACs) and the program certifies a commitment to provide a safe and fun child-centered environment stressing fitness, self-confidence, life skills and the physical, social and moral development of children. This sounds great until one is required to come up with the funding to pay the \$100 initiation fee plus \$50 per month there after ("Character counts", 2007).

Other downfalls to using this as a possible solution, besides having to adopt the program as a school, is that any teachers that choose to implement the program would have to go through a three-day training before implementation could occur, which costs not only money but also time, both being scarce commodities. This program also requires the purchasing of materials and, after in-depth analysis of this character

education program, and due to the costly effects of implementing it; the researcher rejects this program as a possible solution to her action research.

A third possible solution is the use of team building and problem solving activities in Project Adventure to promote team work, goal setting, communication skills and leadership skills can be a possible solution. A curriculum with a foundation in Project Adventure as part of character education in the classroom is backed up by new educational research showing lasting benefits to students from this form of learning (Kessler, 2000).

Project Adventure is an international nonprofit organization with roots in physical education over 30 years deep. The goal of project adventure is to make adventure accessible to people of all abilities and adaptable to many different circumstances. Project Adventure's first program was implemented in a 10th grade PE class in 1971 and physical education continues to be the core of Project Adventure's work, with well over 2500 school-based physical education adoptions around the globe (Panicucci, 2002).

Project Adventure activities present students with an array of unique experiences that are both challenging and fun. Through the participation and even the observation of these activities, students will be able to identify, work through, and work with individual differences, similarities, and abilities, leading to the development of character and achieving both group and personal goals. They will be challenged to do things they never thought possible or that they thought would be a simple task, which resulted in a very complex and challenging one. At times, these challenges will leave participants on the

brink of both success and failure, but will always provide significant opportunities to learn from (Demas, 2000).

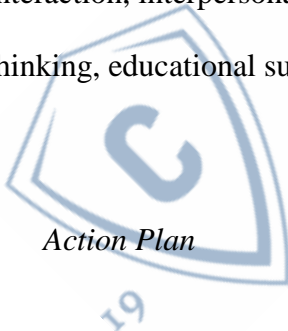
Project Adventure Challenges are slightly different from ordinary PE activities. When presented with a challenge, participants are given a briefing, which is to provide instructions, non-negotiable safety information, and guidelines. Also in the briefing there is some shared information like goal setting, clarification of rules and expectations, and setting the stage for the task(s) to be achieved. In project adventure challenges, it is not revealed how to accomplish each task, nor are any pointers or clues given to the participants, only guidelines are given. This leaves room for diversity and creativity in achieving the challenge and opportunity for growth in leadership abilities, communication skills, and problem solving strategies. It helps in creating an atmosphere that is student-directed, which is one of the ultimate goals in education, and it aids in developing intrinsic motivation and the desire to achieve something independently and/or as a group working together as a team.

Project adventure programs can be easily tied to many concepts in educational psychology. To narrow the focus the researcher has found correlations directly related to the educational theories of Maslow, Gardner, and Bloom. Maslow's concept of hierarchy of needs is established in the fundamental make up of the adventure based learning atmosphere that must be intact for each experience to take place successfully. This atmosphere fulfills the physiological, safety, and social needs of the individual student in order for them to achieve self-esteem and fulfillment or in other words self-actualization. This in turn leads to higher-level learning and learning retention.

Gardner's Multiple Intelligences theory plays a significant role in the project adventure challenges by providing experiences for students of all intelligences to participate and achieve a level of growth and development that is suitable for them.

Lastly, Blooms taxonomy is presented in the process of participating in individual activities/adventures, evaluating ones experience and performance, and developing alternative means of achievement, improvements, and implementations of skills learned into other life experiences.

The experience provided by Project Adventure tied into physical education will leave an everlasting bank of knowledge and skill to draw from as student move on through life. The mind is connected to the muscle and the muscle is controlled by the mind. This leads to the assumption that to be truly physically educated there is more entailed than knowing how to work out the body and stretch the muscles. "Amazingly, the part of the brain that processes movement is the same part of the brain that processes learning" (Jensen, 2005, p. 61). If movement concepts can be imbedded in social interaction, interpersonal communication, problem solving, goal setting, and higher-level thinking, educational success can and will be achieved.



Action Plan

The action plan in implementing the researcher's solution will move in a progressive manner starting in January, of 2008 and ending in June 2008.

The following timeline has been established in order to successfully conduct this action research project.

January

- Week One- The researcher will receive permission from her administrator to conduct her action research project, and prepare data collecting materials.
- Week Two- Implement pre-solution surveys and interviews, and analyze learning environment factors that are a detriment.
- Week Three- Analyze survey results and organize that data to be compared to post-solution data.

February of 2008-May of 2008

- Administer Project Adventure Program.
- Implement post-solution surveys and interviews, and analyze learning environment factors that may have changed, developed, or dissipated.

June of 2008

- Analyze and compare data
- Find the meaning in my action research data, as is what does the data show, what is important in the data and why is it important, also what can be learned from this action research.

In following the timeline for implementation of the possible solution of project adventure into the researcher's curriculum, she first started by approaching her school

administration in setting this program into motion and explain the program in depth. Next the researcher showed how each adventure activity to be utilized relates to the standards. And, lastly, the researcher indicated that the implementation of these activities would be as a supplement to the already established PE curriculum. The researcher also emphasized that it is a pivotal time in the development of her adolescent student's personalities and social skills and emphasize the positive role project adventure could play in this stage of their lives.

The next step in conducting this research was the collection of baseline data. This was done via surveys, personal interviews and student's reflection journals. The researcher also took detailed notes of the learning environment and student's behavior, indicating the role of both the student and the teacher. The surveys given were based on the following aspects: character traits, conflict resolution, communication styles, responsibility, respect, and safety.

After baseline data was collected the researcher organized that data and analyzed it for key points to focus on in order to implement change, progression, or to establish new aspects when conducting the project adventure solution.

In this implementation, as part of the researchers action research in character development it was important for the researcher to first establish some important aspects which make up the three cornerstones of a Project Adventure Program. The first aspect is the Full Value Contract. This contract is created by the participants and recognizes the purpose of the group and holds group members accountable in creating an emotionally and physically safe learning environment (Panicucci, 2002). An example of a middle school contract could look something like this:

- Be Here: Be on time, present mentally, physically and emotionally throughout the class.
- Be Safe: Follow all safety procedures and be aware and sensitive to the impact of what you say and do.
- Be Honest: Share your thoughts and opinions openly and honestly, in a constructive manner, always being sensitive to each other's feelings.
- Let Go and Move On: Evaluate the situation, find the areas to improve upon, areas of success, and move on, taking with you only the aspects that will help you succeed.
- Achieve Goals: Be a team player, stretch yourself, and follow the full value contract.

The second and equally important aspect of a Project Adventure Program is Challenge by Choice. When engaging in the activities presented, challenge by choice is recognized and honored. Challenge by Choice is the concepts that a student will challenge themselves and participate fully in each experience even if the activity may pose a different level or type of challenge, keeping in mind the goal of the group and of each individual. This means of participation creates a student-led atmosphere and places the group members in charge of finding ways to contribute to the group's efforts while also seeking value in the experience for themselves (Rohnk, 1989). Challenge by Choice creates a supportive and caring atmosphere where students are more apt to go outside their comfort zones because students are able to recognize individual needs and provide what is needed. It creates opportunities for learning how to set goals that lead to growth

but not pain or anxiety. Success is not about who goes further or does the most, but how much each person chooses to push him or herself and go beyond their personal limitations.

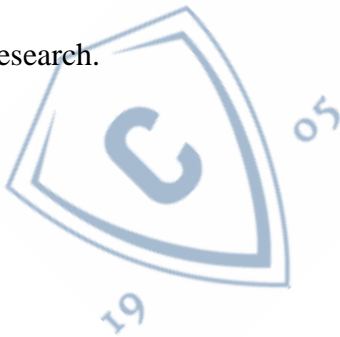
In order for the concept of Challenge by Choice to be used, there must be some level of achievement standard set, or in other word there must be a goal. Setting goals establishes parameters for each individual and for the group, as a whole so there is a level of expectation that one must push themselves to. Throughout this curriculum and throughout a student's educational experience, there will be many goals set, achieved, and reevaluated. Goal setting before the activities is very beneficial because it helps individuals clarify what they are doing during the activity and what they will carry away from it (Rohnk, 1998).

The last aspect and third corner stone of a project adventure program is the experiential learning cycle. The experiential learning cycle is the process of going through a challenge and experiencing all that it has to offer emotionally, physically, socially, and intellectually. Next is analyzing the experience, then learning from the analysis of the experience, and lastly applying the elements learned. Ultimately, as the instructor, the researcher's job was to help her students transfer their learning back into their daily lives by helping them draw parallels between their experiences with this adventure based PE program and the challenges they face in their everyday lives.

In order to fully incorporate all aspects of project adventure, and complete the experiential learning cycle, there must be a closing/debriefing. The closing/debriefing is a time of reflection where students give and receive feedback regarding their success and struggles on each activity. Their performance improvements are measured and

recognized, new strategies are presented, and feelings are expressed and processed. This reflection time is essential for students to learn how to step back from their experience and recognize what they did, what they can learn, and how it can be applied to other life experiences and or further adventure challenges. Debriefing challenges help the process become a more meaningful experience for the group and it provides the time to discuss their perception and conflicts in a safe setting as opposed to with each other in the hall or one on one with the instructor (Rohnk, 1998). This time of debriefing provided great opportunities to take notes on how and what this program is providing the researchers students on a daily basis.

Once the Project Adventure Program was implemented and processed, the researcher collected post-data using the same instruments that were utilized in the pre-solution data collecting. That data was then combined with the information collected throughout the implementation of this program, which allowed the researcher to analyze the key factors that this program provided and be able to indicate whether or not a solution was achieved and with what aspects of this solution did and did not contribute to the purpose of this research.



Action Research Project

Chapter Five – Results and Next Steps

In January 2008, the researcher began her data collection in response to her action research question inquiring how her 8th grade students interact socially during her PE class, how those interactions are affecting the learning environment, and how purposeful instructional strategies in character development via group processes, and team-building activities will affect those interactions and the overall learning environment.

The researcher set her action research project into motion, by first proposing her plan to the building supervisor, who then granted his permission and support. Next, she informed her students of the project, not disclosing the reason for the project, only that it was part of a masters degree requirement and that they will be partaking in different PE activities for 9 weeks, if willing to participate, knowing that their names and personal information would be confidential and never mentioned in the report. After the researcher gained her students written consent to partake in the alternative PE activities, she then began her baseline data collection methods by administering two written surveys (Appendix C & E), and observing students participation and social interaction in the regular PE setting.

The base line data that the researcher collected prior to the proposed solution, presented general knowledge about student's opinions and mindsets, before any changes were implemented into the normal physical education class. They also helped reveal how her students felt about topics pertaining to social interaction amongst their classmates, and their attitudes, performance, and desires pertaining to their current PE class. This baseline data allowed the researcher to analyze where her student's thoughts and

behaviors were, pertaining to her PE class setting. The data from the PE survey (Appendix C) revealed that her students were not overly excited about PE, with 25% strongly agreeing and 37% agreeing they get off task a lot in PE. The survey showed that the students definitely did not trust each other, resulting in 62% disagreeing that they could trust the people in their PE class, and or have respect for each other, with 19% feeling strongly about not being accepted and 43% agreeing that they don't feel accepted by the people in their PE class. Also, 50% of the researchers students disagreed that their PE class brings them closer to their peers, and no sense of unity was revealed within the group, with 44% disagreeing that they worked together as a team, and 53% agreeing that they are uncomfortable with the students in their class.

Based on this baseline data, the researcher then set out to work towards improving students mind sets and the unity of her PE class to improve the leaning environment via alternative PE activities involving purposeful instructional strategies in character development via group processes, and team-building activities. The researcher used several means of data collection during the implementation of her proposed solution in order to collect the data necessary to answer her action research question.

Through the implementation and observation of purposeful instructional strategies via group processes, and team-building activities/challenges, the researcher was able to work through different activities, purposefully grouping students and providing minimal information when presenting them with challenges, to foster teamwork, problem solving, and for them to utilize each other in order to be successful in each challenge. The researcher recorded information pertaining to the activity at hand, using an observation journal, in combination with a significant moment's log (Appendix B) and a

daily journal (Appendix F), which mostly kept track of tasks and presented a schedule of events throughout the duration of the action research project. The researcher also collected student reflections (Appendix G) to show progress being made.

Observation

The researcher observed the students every day in her physical education class. The researcher developed an observation form in the form of a significant moment log and an observation journal (Appendix B) that she could record data during specific activities and activity debriefings. The researchers goal was to observe how her students interacted with each other, if, and or how these purposeful activities changed the learning environment and her students' social interactions. In the observation journal, the researcher documented how the students interacted with each other, if the activity was a success and if not, what factors played into that lack of success, and if the students were meeting their goals that they set as individuals and as a group. The researcher made informal assessments on each 8th grade student in terms of their attitude, desire/drive, ability to collaborate with their classmates, and lastly any significant changes that may have occurred with their social interaction during PE class and how those interactions are effecting the learning environment, whether still in a negative way or not.

To sum up the observations made during this project and pertaining to the goal of this project, it was evident that the use of purposeful grouping of students, requiring them to work together with different people on different challenges did help them to get to know each other, respect each others differences, and identify each other strengths. The progress towards improving the learning environment in the researchers PE class via the use of Project Adventure Activities was very slow. It took a lot of patience, failures,

heated discussions, epiphanies, and productive reflecting on behavior, attitudes, successes, and failures to gain growth in communication between each other, the ability to problem solve and work together to achieve a common goal, and to see the bigger picture that each challenge represents, relating it to everyday life and the decisions each student faces on a daily basis, outside of the PE class. As a facilitator of these activities, the researcher also learned a lot. The researcher had to take a back seat in many instances when students were working through challenges. The researcher would normally have broken things down and provided the meaning or lesson to be learned rather than having the students figure it out on their own, and/or as a group. It was difficult for the researcher to take on this role but in the long run it was very powerful, even if it meant that the students had to fail a few times before succeeding. Students did learn to trust each other which could be seen in their ability to rely on each other, take an active role in the challenges they were faced with, and partake in productive debriefings without insulting, blaming, or arguing with each other, or opting out of the discussion all together. It was amazing to watch the growth of students' ability to communicate with each other, brainstorm when trying to meet a challenge and work together to set goals and achieve them.

The results from the implementation of the Project Adventure activities can not only be seen in more detail, through the observation journal, but also through the analysis of the post survey in relation to the pre Project Adventure survey. Some highlights reveal that 43% of the researchers students strongly agree and 38% agree that they are now comfortable working with the students in their PE class. 63% agree and 19% strongly

agree that they now feel accepted by their peers in this class, and 43% strongly agree and 38% agree that their PE class has brought them closer to their classmates.

Pre & Post Survey Assessment

Along with the observation and data collection during activities and group work, The last instrument used to capture data was a PE survey (Appendix C) I created, using the Likert scale, with a scale of strongly agree (1), agree (2), disagree (3), strongly disagree (4), and for a different section of the survey the scale was always (1), frequently (2), sometimes (3), and never (4). The researcher asked her eighth grade class to take a few minutes to fill out the survey during one of her PE classes, rather than having to dress down and do the scheduled PE routine. All sixteen students from this class were able to participate in the survey giving the researcher a 100 percent return rate. The researcher administered this survey in order to assess her students on their attitudes, actions, and interactions in their PE class, the researcher used a survey that she developed, asking questions that required the students to answer how frequently they performed certain social actions/interactions, and their level of agreement on topics pertaining to their desires, attitudes, contributions towards their PE class.

The results for this survey (Appendix C) were very helpful for the researcher to make meaningful and purposeful change in her PE program in implementing the Project Adventure activities. After compiling the data from the survey, the researcher found that there is a definite lack of respect between her students, and a low desire to put much effort into PE class. The researcher learned that change does need to occur in the PE

learning atmosphere to foster character growth, respect for each other, and a desire to participate in PE class that is conducive to learning.

Lastly, she administered this same baseline PE survey (Appendix C) at the end of the action research, in order to gain data driven documentation of any change in her student's thoughts and or behavior once partaking in the action research project.

The researcher assessed her students in January and again in April to see if any change in their attitudes toward PE and their classmates. To analyze the data derived from these surveys, the researcher created a pie graph to show what percentage of her classes answer a certain way pertaining to each survey question (Appendix D) that could be compared to the post project solution survey graphs for the same question to note any change.

When the researcher re-assessed the students again in June she found that her student's survey answers became more unified on most topics and increased in all areas, mostly significantly in terms of feeling that their class could work together with a result of 44% agreeing and 19% strongly agreeing. 56% agreed and 19% strongly agreed that their PE class showed how similar they are to their peers and the level of respect for each other increased tremendously.

Alternative Physical Education Activities

The primary instrument used to collect data in this action research was done so through the use of Project Adventure Activities (Appendix A). These activities require the use of problem solving, teamwork, productive communication, and moving outside ones comfort zone. These activities/challenges were presented in a somewhat sequential

manner, starting with the establishment of a full value contract (part of Appendix A), which the students created, the explanation and understanding of challenge by choice, and then implementation of activities that eased students out of their comfort zones and allowed them to present themselves and get to know each other in a safe atmosphere, next they were presented with challenges that progressed in difficulty and level of group interaction/contributions. Some activities focused strongly on communication, others on problem solving, and every challenge involved teamwork.

Each activity used is explained, analyzed, and assessed via observations (Appendix B) and student reflections (Appendix G). The researcher realizes the importance of documentation and being able to record student's thoughts and reflections. In the processes involved with administering the Project Adventure Activities and being able to debrief to gain perspective, growth and understanding, the researcher was only able to obtain 1 student reflection from her students, pertaining to the balloon trolley activity. The researcher recognizes that she should have assigned a reflection journal with probing questions that the students should have been required to complete, but was unable to do so because of lack of time for each class period. The only way to get the reflection journals done from the students would have been to assign them for homework, which was feasible, but not done as part of this project. Data gained from these activities was drawn from the researchers observations and whole group discussions/debriefings in which the researcher took notes during.

(pre)Cornerstone (Life/Social Skills Student Survey)

This survey (Appendix E) was used only to gain baseline data, to evaluate the population being tested in this action research project. Using the Likert scale, of almost never (1), rarely (2), sometimes (3), often (4), and almost always (5) for questions 1-23 and completely disagree (1), somewhat disagree (2), not sure (3), somewhat agree (4), and completely agree (5) for questions 24-43, and 69-75, this survey asked questions to see what kind of students the researcher would be dealing with. It asked questions regarding to responsibility, citizenship, organization, dedication, respect, and problem solving. As mentioned before, this survey was used only to gain baseline data. The survey results revealed very unison results. In almost every question the results were only about 5 to 7 percentages off from each answer. The questions that weighed heavy in one or two area pertained to students talking to their teacher to see if they are doing well in their PE class. 24% said almost never and 57% said sometimes, showing that their grade in this class is not a huge priority. In other questions the majority of the answers were in the sometimes category, especially when pertaining to helping someone do the right thing, or speaking up when someone is bullied. It is the researchers goal to move the result of sometimes too often and almost always, feeling that sometimes is not enough. The researcher found it odd that 43% of her students felt that the unpopular students get picked on yet 43% also said they are willing to share with others even if they are not friends. So they will pick on each other but still work together. This survey also showed that these students do not care if their friends cheat, resulting in 43% almost always not caring, and 38% often not caring. This was very evident in many activities where students just wanted to get through the activity even if they had to cheat to be the first done.

Summary

After conducting the research, the researcher found that there are some definite changes that she wanted to make to her physical education program and hopes to implement these changes school wide. She would like to create either a unit or dedicate one day per week for project adventure concepts and activities, believing that students will gain priceless experiences and look forward to these activities with excitement. The researcher would also like to seek out grants to write, in order fund the PE program for the purchasing of Project Adventure equipment and resources, and to send PE staff members to a Project Adventure training and learn how to properly facilitate these nontraditional activities.

The researcher solidified that many of the concepts taught in the physical education setting are applicable to real life situations and with proper administration and guidance, a difference can be made in students self esteems, attitudes towards others and their ability to move outside their comfort zones and become problem solvers and productive team members.

While participating in her observation of the students in this research project, the researcher discovered that with proper implementation, and follow through, students can be great leaders, problem solvers, teachers, motivators, and a positive influence on the learning environment. Students must be taught how to interact, perform, and contribute to the learning atmosphere and it is the teachers role to establish those expectations, parameters, and goals.

The researcher would like to see her students perform as leaders and problem solvers in their other classes and influence their peers in becoming more accepting of others and respectful of those that are different from them.

Suggestions for Further Study

Upon completion of the three-month study, the researcher has concluded that there are still areas to improve upon in creating a classroom that is productively conducive for all students to learn, grow, socialize and excel in. The journey in coaxing students out of their comfort zones and helping them to see their hidden talents and establish new talents takes time, one of the many things that is quite lacking in the educational setting.

The researcher focused her research on one particular 8th grade PE class; she did not include other middle school grades, and or students, or the elementary and high school physical education students. The researcher did not focus on any other 8th grade classes to see if they too were experiencing the same social interactions and lack of desire to partake in PE. The researcher could include all of the 8th grade PE classes to see if the same significant change would occur, although this process would take an immense amount of time and more resources for many of the activities done in this project are most productive in small groups.

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