

ARTICLE REVIEWED

Evaluation of a School-Community Linked Physical Activity Intervention Targeting 7- to 12-Year-Olds: A Sociocultural Perspective

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THE PROBLEM:

School-based physical activity interventions have been known for integrating multicomponent approaches to improve health among youth and adolescents. Physical activity before, during, and after school are some examples of when physical activity interventions can take place. Although these multicomponent physical activity interventions promote various ways for students to exercise, the rate at which these interventions determine behavioral change is unclear.

It is important to note that culture plays a large role in being physically active. Thus, exploring cultural norms and community readiness toward school-based physical activity interventions is warranted from both a physical fitness and physical literacy perspective.



Research Summary:

A school-community physical activity intervention was implemented among 596 students ages 7-12 across 57 urban elementary schools. A total of 19 classroom teachers also participated in the intervention. The intervention had three purposes: 1) increase physical literacy; 2) increase physical activity levels and physical fitness; and 3) reduce obesity. All students completed the FitnessGram® battery and filled out the Physical Activity Questionnaire for Children and Children's Attitudes Toward Physical Activity inventory. Approximately 32% of students were overweight or obese in the beginning of the study. Students were split up into two groups: one group was called the control school (128 students) and the other group was called the intervention schools (468 students). The intervention schools were provided with circuit training equipment (child-size gym equipment) and the control school was not. Additionally, a handful of staff and students participated in interviews that focused on their perceptions of the school-community physical activity intervention.



Conclusion:

Students in the control school increased their body fat by 1.8% when compared to the intervention schools. By the end of the school-community physical activity intervention, students from both groups had increased their physical activity levels; however, students in the control school showed little improvement in their attitudes toward physical activity. When it came to gender, girls had more positive attitudes toward physical activity from a cathartic and aesthetic standpoint, than boys. In addition, the control school showed positive improvements in aerobic capacity and push-ups. Overall, there were no effects on attitude or physical health outcomes in the intervention schools compared to the control school. Upon analyzing the interview data, the researchers discovered three themes: 1) creating a meaningful space for students to be physically active; 2) sustaining participation among students in and outside of school; and 3) student engagement with physical activity. The researchers also concluded that the classroom teachers lacked the necessary training and self-efficacy to deliver the physical activities to their students. Teachers also noted that there was a lack of communication between the school's intervention and the parents, resulting in a lack of physical activity reinforcement out in the community. On the other hand, students had positive responses regarding the physical activity intervention. Overall, students liked participating in circuit training sessions because of the small group atmosphere. Students also said that they would participate in the intervention again, if offered.

Key Takeaway:

Physical activity behaviors become consistent if the physical activity is relevant and authentic in multiple, meaningful social spaces that students occupy. However, gaining parental support and exercising out in the community were two factors lacking among students in this study, thus there was no behavioral change in physical activity levels transferred from school to community. For school-community physical activity interventions to succeed, teacher and parental support are of the utmost importance. From a sociocultural perspective, situatedness played a role in the school and community culture as well. That is, the location of the school, size of the school, facilities, equipment, and community all played a critical role in physical activity participation among students. When implementing a school-community physical activity intervention, it is important to take on a sociocultural approach because it takes into account school and community-level interactions. After all, if we want students to be physically active citizens, they need to be movers in their community and beyond.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- World Health Organization: Health Promoting Schools – https://www.who.int/health-topics/health-promoting-schools#tab=tab_1