

ARTICLE REVIEWED

Teachers' Perspectives on Creating an Inclusive Climate in Middle School Physical Education for Overweight Students

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THE PROBLEM:

Middle school can be a challenging time for students. These pubescent years often include an evolution of physical features, such as oily complexion, weight gain, and growth spurts. Sadly, students going through these changes often become victims of bullying, name calling, and even violence. It is critical that middle school students are surrounded by supportive faculty and staff to help them through these challenging times. Promoting a positive school climate through social and emotional learning opportunities would be one idea to help counteract bullying — especially toward overweight and obese students. Fortunately, physical education is a prime subject area that can help foster a positive social and emotional climate on campus. In doing so, students are asked to work on their personal and social responsibility skills through physical activity.



Research Summary:

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of middle school physical education teachers on their social-oriented approaches to including overweight and obese students. Nine middle school physical educators were recruited to participate in this study. Years of teaching experience ranged from 7-38 years. The nine middle school physical educators were interviewed, observed, and asked to share important teacher documents with the research team. Interviews centered around philosophies, safety policies related to a positive school environment, and perceptions of students.

Conclusion:

It was discovered that the nine middle school physical educators' philosophies toward inclusion of overweight and obese students were reflective of their teaching beliefs. For example, physical educators who used a traditional approach to teaching aimed to create a prosocial climate by using inclusive strategies when teaching psychomotor skills. This approach attempted to include students unnoticeably, so as to avoid embarrassment. A second approach that was used to include overweight and obese students was the personal and social development approach. It was found that the more supportive the school climate and principal were, the more likely the physical educators were to confidently respond to misbehavior. Some physical education teachers, for example, enacted a no tolerance policy for bullying in their gymnasium.

Key Takeaway:

School policies that focus on character development may help to decrease bullying in physical education. In addition to teaching students about personal and social responsibility in physical education, the physical educator can enact a school-wide proactive program (i.e., inclusion, prosocial behavior). Other options to get overweight and obese students comfortably involved in physical activity in physical education and school might include creating and promoting a character education program or creating no bullying clubs. The more supportive physical education teachers are of their students and the changes they are going through, the more likely personal and social responsibility skills will be enforced throughout the physical education curricula.