Perceptions and Practices of Adapted Physical Educators on the Teaching of Social Skills

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The purpose of this study was to determine adapted physical educators' perceptions and practices about teaching social skills to students with disabilities. A questionnaire based on Bandura’s social learning theory concept of modeling was developed and mailed to an entire frame of 426 adapted physical education teachers in the state of Ohio. Face and content validity as well as test/retest reliability (0.89) were established. Of those that were surveyed, 53% (225 teachers; 148 females and 77 males) responded. Results indicate that 93% (209) believe it is important to explicitly teach social skills in PE; however, 60% (135) expressed not feeling properly prepared to teach them. Teachers with more than 20 years of teaching experience were more likely to actually teach social skills. When compared with other teachers with less years teaching, however, they identified a greater need for training in the teaching of social skills. Results are discussed relative to teacher preparation and practices as well as social skills taught for general education and community integration.

Social skills are defined by Sheridan (2000) as learned behaviors that are necessary for students to get along successfully with others in a majority of situations, including school and community settings, thus enabling them to achieve social competence. Unfortunately, children and youth with disabilities, especially those with intellectual, emotional, and various learning disabilities as well as those with autism spectrum disorders often demonstrate deficits in social competence (Cartledge & Milburn, 1978; Gresham, Sungai, & Horner, 2001; Kavale & Mostert, 2004), which can have profound effects on their success for community integration (Huang & Cuvo, 1997; Lane, Carter, Pierson, & Glaser, 2006). In fact, inadequate social skills have been found to be a defining characteristic of students with intellectual disabilities (American Association on Mental Retardation, 1992). Furthermore, social skill deficits are exhibited in children and youth with disabilities, regardless of cultural or linguistic contexts.
Social Skills in Physical Education

(Cartledge & Loe, 2001; Cartledge, Gardner, & Ford, 2009). This is particularly important especially for those who teach children from countries other than the United States.

Previous studies have identified social skill areas that are important for success in school classrooms (Lane, Givner, & Pierson, 2004; Lane, Pierson, & Givner, 2003; Meier, DiPerna, & Oster, 2006). Each of these studies found that general education teachers (elementary, middle, and high school) believe that students need to possess social skills in the areas of cooperation, self-control, and assertion to be successful in school. Of the three areas, they believe cooperation and self-control to be more important than assertiveness. So, according to the results of these studies, children and youth with disabilities need to learn and exhibit social skills, especially in the areas of cooperation and self-control to be effectively included into general education classrooms.

Kolb and Hanley-Maxwell (2003) ascertained views of what parents perceive are critical social skills for their children with disabilities. Findings indicate that while parents agree academic performance is important, they want their children to develop social skills in two major areas: (a) interpersonal and intrapersonal skills, which include skills such as communicating, listening, and discerning and (b) moral development, including development in character, empathy, and perseverance/motivation. The majority of parents also identified the development of positive relationships and friendships as important.

For children and youth with disabilities, the lack of appropriate social skills exhibited in physical education and sport can lead to the lack of interaction and finally rejection by classmates without disabilities (Moore, Cartledge, & Heckman 1995; Place & Hodge, 2001; Sherrill 2003). Block (2007) states that because of its unique instructional setting, physical education offers opportunities for social acceptance and interaction between students with and without disabilities. And, when individuals with disabilities have the opportunity to engage in appropriate recreation and leisure activities, they increase their chances for community success (Demchak, 1994). This is especially true in European countries where community setting club sports are popular.

Many educators assume that students develop social skills as a by product of participating in physical education and sports. Buchanan (2001), Hellison (2003), as well as Bloom and Smith (1996) state that teachers and coaches cannot assume that students will improve levels of self responsibility and moral development by participating in physical education without careful planning and instruction. In a paper examining inclusive physical education from a social construction framework, Grenier (2007) asserts that what teachers say and do directly impacts the experiences and behaviors of their students with disabilities. According to Mary, Alexandra, and Kimon (2007), a positive relationship exists between physical education teachers’ verbal aggressiveness and students’ antisocial fair play behaviors. That is, if physical education teachers wish to have students exhibit appropriate behaviors, teachers must model appropriate behaviors.

Over the years, a number of curricular models have emerged, emphasizing social skill development in physical education. Two of the most popular models are Fair Play in Instruction, emanating from the Sport Education Model (Siedentop, Hastie, & van der Mars, 2004), and Teaching Responsibility Through Physical Activity (Hastie & Buchanan, 2000; Hellison, 2003); however, these models
do not specifically address students with disabilities. Rather, they focus on children without disabilities or those who are at-risk.

Gresham (1982) affirms that social skill instruction can help children to interact, be accepted by peers, and imitate appropriate behaviors. Studies have demonstrated that appropriate social behaviors improve when interventions are implemented (Balderson & Sharpe, 2005; Hastie & Sharpe, 1999; Leblanc & Matson, 1995; Moore et al., 1995; Vidoni, 2003).

Balderson and Sharpe (2005) examined the effects of two instructional treatments (personal accountability and personal responsibility) on elementary-age, urban, at-risk physical education students on selected off task and positive social behaviors. Both treatments were effective for changing all managerial, off-task, and positive social measures. Personal responsibility instruction (taking greater responsibility by promoting the understanding of the implications of behaviors in situational contexts) was particularly effective with more complex social behaviors and conflict resolution.

Scholars agree that social skill development is an important aspect of physical education and sport, especially as it relates to students with disabilities (Buchanan, 2001; Hellison, 2003; Huang & Cuvo, 1997; Sherrill, 2003). Moore et al. (1995) studied three ninth grade male students with emotional or behavioral disorders and taught them social modeling, behavior rehearsal, and behavior transfer for game related social skills. Specific behaviors consisted of appropriate (a) peer reaction, (b) reactions to losing, and (c) reactions to winning. Results showed that students improved their game related social skills.

To our knowledge it is yet to be determined the extent to which adapted physical education specialists actually plan and teach social skills. Because social skills are not explicitly stated in the IDEIA definition of physical education (U.S. Department of Education, 2004), it can be assumed that adapted physical education specialists in particular, may not plan and directly teach social skills to students with disabilities. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to obtain the perceptions and practices of adapted physical educators regarding the teaching of social skills to children with disabilities.

Method

Participants

A sample frame \(n = 426; 260\) females, \(166\) males) of all physical educators holding the State of Ohio approved Endorsement Certificate in Adapted Physical Education (APE) and currently teaching students with disabilities was obtained from the Ohio Department of Education. In the state of Ohio, the APE Endorsement Certificate has been offered since 1988. This endorsement is an add-on to physical education licensure. To obtain and APE Endorsement Certificate, teachers must first hold Ohio physical education licensure. The study received approval from the authors’ institutional research review board.
Instrumentation

A questionnaire was developed and content validated (Perception of Adapted Physical Educators Teaching Social Skills—PAPETSS) to ascertain the perceptions and practices of adapted physical education teachers relative to social skills. The questionnaire was based on one previously developed and validated by Walker et al. (1983) for school age children with disabilities. Our questionnaire was developed (parts one and two) on one of the main tenants of Bandura’s Social Learning Theory (1977). That is, individuals especially children, imitate or copy modeled behaviors from personally observing others, the environment, or media. This type of learning has numerous social implications within a school context (Ormrod, 1999); however, we never explicitly constructed the survey to test either the theory or its components.

To establish face and content validity a four member panel of experts (three university faculty, two in APE and one in special education, and one adapted physical education teacher) reviewed the questionnaire and provided written feedback relative to the appropriateness of the instrument. Changes were made based on panel feedback. Questionnaire test-retest reliability was then established using a Spearman correlation procedure (0.89). The test-retest procedure was performed over a 2-week interval on 11 adapted physical educators who did not participate in the actual survey study.

The questionnaire consisted of three parts. The first part consisted of questions eliciting Likert-type responses to determine teachers’ perceptions and beliefs and the application of social skills in physical education. These questions consisted of the extent to which respondents (a) believe it is important to teach social skills to students with disabilities in physical education, (b) had taught social skills in their physical education classes, (c) included social skills objectives into lesson planning, and (d) believed that social skills should be part of the physical education curriculum. Information was also obtained to determine the degree to which respondents were prepared to teach social skills. This information consisted of (a) their opinions on whether their teacher preparation programs provided them with the necessary knowledge and skills for teaching social skills and (b) the degree to which they needed additional professional preparation in the area of teaching social skills in physical education to students with disabilities. Open ended responses were obtained for a better understanding of the results and consisted of their opinions as to whether social skills should be part of the physical education curriculum.

Part two of the questionnaire consisted of a social skills checklist list to determine what skills are important to teach and what skills teachers taught or had taught. The checklist was composed of specific skills identified under four general areas: (a) interaction, (b) getting along, (c) making and maintaining friends, and (d) coping with situations. The third part of the instrument consisted of demographic information related to professional preparation and teaching experience. The information consisted of (a) gender, (b) academic degrees, (c) concentration, (d) whether they possessed the APE Endorsement Certificate, (e) whether they
held APENS Certification, (f) total years of teaching experience, (g) total years teaching students with disabilities, (h) the disabling conditions exhibited by their students, and (i) school setting.

**Design and Procedures**

This study followed a modified version of the survey method described by Salant and Dillman (1994) and followed survey guidelines as described by Porretta, Kozub, and Lisboa (2000). A postal mailing consisting of a cover letter explaining the purpose of the study, the survey instrument, and a self-addressed stamped envelope was sent to the entire frame of teachers. After a period of three weeks, a second complete mailing was sent to those who did not respond to the first mailing. For the purpose of confidentiality, questionnaires were coded.

Nonresponders (those who do not return completed questionnaires) can negatively affect validity of results. Therefore, one must attempt to reduce nonresponse error. To enhance the validity of our results we addressed nonresponse error (Salant & Dillman, 1994; Miller & Smith, 1983). A common method is to directly contact a sample of nonresponders to determine their responses to a reduced set of questions; however, this was not possible for this study. Therefore, we used an alternate method as described by Miller and Smith (1983) in which early responders were compared with late responders. According to Miller and Smith (1983), late responders are often similar to nonresponders. For example, when comparing early and late responders on the question, “what is the degree to which you believe it is important to teach social skills,” 93.6% of the early responders and 88.5% of late responders replied that it is extremely important to teach social skills. Following our descriptive statistical analysis of six additional questions, no identifiable differences were found between early and late responders. Thus, we believe that nonresponders, had they responded, would have provided information similar to respondents, thus enhancing the validity of our findings.

**Data Analyses**

Both, descriptive and inferential statistics were used. Descriptive statistics included frequencies and percentages. Chi-squared tests were conducted to test independence between categorical variables (e.g., yes/no responses). Ordinal logistic regression analyses with a cumulative logit model were used to obtain greater insight into items that produced ordinal data (e.g., all the time, most of the time, sometimes and none of the time; Agresti, 2002). The regression with a cumulative logit model was used to predict the probability that a respondent would reply at a given level or lower. It detects differences between groups through a cumulative probability of response. For example, one may use this model to determine whether gender differences exist in rating the degree (extremely important, important, somewhat important, and not important) to which it is important to teach social skills to students with disabilities by combining response categories such as “extremely important” and “important” into one category for analysis. A significance level of $p \leq .10$ was used for all statistical analyses and regarded by Sutlive and Ulrich (1998) as an appropriate significance level for field based research.
Results and Discussion

Descriptive Results

A total of 225 teachers (148 females and 77 males), or 53% of the original frame, returned completed questionnaires after two postal mailings. All returned questionnaires were used for the analysis. Demographic data of the respondents relative to gender, years of overall teaching experience, and years of teaching students with disabilities are illustrated in Table 1.

Teaching Experience. In reference to years of overall teaching experience, 63% (141) of the respondents have taught over 15 years. These results reflect that a majority of the teachers surveyed possess a significant number of teaching years and are thus considered veteran teachers. Teachers were also asked to report the number of years they taught students with disabilities. Results indicate that 63% (141) of the respondents have taught students with disabilities for over 10 years. Again, these results indicate that at a majority of the respondents had a significant number of years teaching students with disabilities.

Job Demographics. Seventy-six percent (170) of the respondents reported working in public schools only, 2% (4) in specialized schools only, and 1% (3) in private schools only. Twenty-one percent (48) reported working in some combination of the above settings. A specialized school is a setting where students with disabilities are educated in a segregated environment. The State School for the Blind in Ohio is such an example. Because so many respondents teach in public schools, it can be assumed that the vast majority of students with disabilities in Ohio are educated in more integrated (inclusive) environments.

Table 1 Frequency and Percentage of Selected Teaching Experience Variables of Female and Male Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Years of Teaching</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1–5</td>
<td>9 (4%)</td>
<td>7 (3%)</td>
<td>16 (7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6–10</td>
<td>25 (11%)</td>
<td>14 (6%)</td>
<td>39 (17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11–15</td>
<td>16 (7%)</td>
<td>11 (5%)</td>
<td>27 (12%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16–20</td>
<td>26 (12%)</td>
<td>10 (4%)</td>
<td>36 (16%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More</td>
<td>72 (32%)</td>
<td>33 (15%)</td>
<td>105 (47%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Years of Teaching Students with Disabilities</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1–5</td>
<td>18 (8%)</td>
<td>9 (4%)</td>
<td>27 (12%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6–10</td>
<td>29 (13%)</td>
<td>19 (8%)</td>
<td>48 (21%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11–15</td>
<td>19 (9%)</td>
<td>15 (7%)</td>
<td>34 (15%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16–20</td>
<td>27 (12%)</td>
<td>12 (5%)</td>
<td>39 (17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More</td>
<td>51 (23%)</td>
<td>17 (8%)</td>
<td>68 (30%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>2 (1%)</td>
<td>3 (1%)</td>
<td>5 (2%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Preparation. All of the respondents possessed Ohio teacher licensure in physical education. And of the 225 respondents, 86% (194) reported earning a State approved Endorsement Certificate in APE, 79% or (178) completed an APE specialization as part of their degree programs, and 11% (25) had earned APENS National Certification. The state approved Endorsement Certificate Program is offered at a number of colleges/universities within Ohio. According to state regulations, all adapted physical education specialists who teach students with disabilities in noninclusive settings (e.g., a class or group of students with disabilities) in either a public school or specialized school must possess the state approved Endorsement Certificate. Those who do not hold the certificate, and teach in these settings must be working toward completing it.

When asked to respond to questions pertaining to professional preparation, 60% or 135 of the respondents expressed not feeling properly prepared to teach social skills. And, 54% or 122 expressed the need for more professional training. So, while the vast majority of respondents are considered fully qualified to teach students with disabilities in the State of Ohio, they still do not feel competent teaching social skills. These results seem to indicate that professional preparation programs in adapted physical education, at least in Ohio, do not focus on the teaching of social skills to the extent that professionals feel competent to explicitly teach them. While not directly queried about it, respondents might not believe they are as qualified as other educators (e.g., especially special educators) in teaching social skills. So, while the majority of adapted physical education teachers agree that it is important to teach social skills, they express not feeling prepared to do so. Lavay, French, and Henderson (2006) state that too often, graduates from physical education teacher preparation programs do not possess the necessary knowledge and practices to promote the development of responsible behaviors and social skills in the physical education classroom. They state that preservice physical educators graduate from these programs with a lack of necessary behavior management skills. This may be the case in Ohio.

Importance of Teaching Social Skills. Respondents who believed that it is important to teach social skills to children with disabilities in physical education numbered 93% (209). And, 92% (204) believe that social skills should be included in the physical education curriculum for students with disabilities. These overwhelming percentages show teacher agreement on the importance of teaching social skills to students with disabilities. These results are in line with the belief that students with disabilities, especially those with mental, emotional, and/or learning disabilities often demonstrate deficits in social competence and are in need of direct social skill instruction (Gresham, Sungai, & Horner, 2001; Leblanc & Matson, 1995). According to a number of authors, physical education is a most appropriate setting for this to be accomplished (Hellison, 1990a, 1990b, 2003; McHugh, 1995; Sherrill, 2003; Vidoni, 2003).

When asked what they believe the primary purpose of teaching social skills to be, 57% (125) of the teachers stated that it was to help students become socially competent, 38% (83) to help students to improve their interpersonal skills, 4% (8) to learn how to behave in the classroom, and 1% (2) to be a better student in physical education. These teachers view the teaching of social skills as extending well beyond the gymnasium, classroom, and school, and this view may be why few
social skills are explicitly taught in physical education. If those skills are not directly related to performance in the physical education setting, then respondents may also not feel compelled to teach social skills. They may view the teaching of those social skills under the purview of the special education teacher. According to various authorities, a relationship exists between lack of professional preparation and why teachers do not explicitly teach social skills. Buchanan (2001), Hellison (2003), and Bloom and Smith (1996) suggest that many educators believe that the learning of social skills occurs by participating in physical education and sport without direct planning and instruction. This line of thought has been aligned with general physical education teachers and not adapted physical education specialists, however.

When asked if they teach or have ever taught social skills during their physical education classes, 84% (187) of the respondents expressed that they have most or all of the time. Further, when asked if they include social skills as part of their written class objectives, 73% (160) of the respondents reported that they do sometimes or not at all. So, while respondents teach or have taught social skills most or all of the time, they do not have written objectives for them. We did not pose a follow-up question as to why. It may be because (a) they do not feel competent to teach social skills or (b) they might believe that it is better left to the special educator to do so. As stated previously, the definition of physical education included in the original Education for All Handicapped Childrens’ Act of 1975 and all subsequent reauthorizations identify the components of physical and motor fitness, fundamental motor skills, skills in aquatics, and skills used in individual, group games, and sports. So, it stands to reason that physical education teachers of students with disabilities have typically included objectives focusing on physical and motor components rather than social components.

**Social Skills Taught in Physical Education.** Of those who do teach social skills (either explicitly planned or not planned), Table 2 reports the frequencies and percentages of social skills that respondents typically teach. Specific social skills were categorized into four general areas: (a) Interactions, (b) Getting Along, (c) Making and Maintaining Friends, and (d) Coping. The responses under each of the four general areas in Table 2 are reported from highest to lowest.

Across the four general areas the skills receiving a percentage of 80% or higher were (a) following teacher directions and classroom rules, (b) listening when someone is talking, (c) sharing, (d) taking turns, (e) using appropriate language, (f) helping others, (g) using appropriate gestures and physical contact, and (h) teaching coping skills when events do not go the way as planned. All of the five skills under the general area of Getting Along received a percentage of 80% or higher. While none of the three skills under the general area of Making and Maintaining Friends were higher than 79%. While a majority of respondents (79%) indicate the importance of making and maintaining friends, other social skills were more important. These results support those by Kolb and Hanley-Maxwell (2003) who found that in addition to communication, listening, and discerning, a majority of parents of children with disabilities believed that the development of positive relationships and friendships were important.

Of the eight skills receiving a percentage of 80% or higher, seven can be considered to extend beyond the educational setting in general, and physical
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Skills</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interaction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Following teachers directions/ classroom rules</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening when someone talks to you (teacher, friend, peers)</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintain eye contact</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of appropriate tone of voice</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answering (saying something after someone talks to you)</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making sense (talking about the same thing)</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiating conversation</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustaining a conversation</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting Along</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing—equipment, experiences from their cultural groups</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking turns and respect personal space</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of appropriate language—(respect every student regarding ability level, disability or cultural background)</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping others when needed—peer tutors, assist student with disability if needed</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate gestures and physical contact</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making and maintaining friends</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complimenting others</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate grooming (wash hands, face, wear clean clothes)</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smiling appropriately Coping</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
Social Skills in Physical Education

education setting in particular. These are (a) listening, (b) taking turns, (c) sharing, (d) use of appropriate language, (e) helping others, (f) using appropriate gestures and physical contact, and (g) coping. These results are in line with the findings regarding the primary purposes of teaching social skills. When the highest two purposes were combined, 95% (208) of the respondents believe the purposes of teaching social skills are to help students become (a) socially competent and (b) improve interpersonal skills. These results are similar to those found by Lane et al., (2003) and Meier et al., (2006). In the Meier et al., study elementary teachers were surveyed and in the Lane et al. study, elementary, middle, and high school teachers were surveyed regarding the expectations of student behaviors they believed important for school success. Teachers in both studies and across all levels viewed the general areas of cooperation and self-control as more important than assertion. The cooperation area consisted of items such as (a) listening, (b) following directions, and (c) using free time in an acceptable way, whereas the self-control area consisted of items such as (a) getting along with people who are different, (b) responding appropriately when pushed or hit, (c) responding appropriately when teased, (d) receiving criticism well, and (e) controlling temper in conflict situations. Thus, the adapted physical education respondents who reported teaching social skills were, in general, teaching those identified by general education teachers as important for school success.

### Inferential Results

A number of analyses were conducted to determine the independence between personal characteristics or predictor variables (gender, completion of a concentration / specialization, holding APENS certification, and teaching experience) and response variables (importance of teaching social skills, frequency of social skills taught, whether teacher preparation programs provided knowledge and skills to teach social skills, and need for additional preparation).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Skills</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When things do not go right (as you wanted)</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate expression of feeling (anger, happiness, etc.)</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When someone teases</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When someone praises you</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When someone says no (find another way to play)</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When someone tries to hurt you</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When things go well</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Table 2 (continued)
Using teaching experience as a predictor variable it was found that respondents with more than 20 years of teaching were significantly more apt to explicitly teach social skills as opposed to teachers with 20 years or less of experience, $\chi^2 (1, N = 223) = 7.39, p = 0.007$. The positive effect estimate, $\beta = 0.700$ suggests that for those with more than 20 years of teaching experience, the estimated odds of the frequency of teaching social skills are 2.013 times the estimated odds of those with teaching experience less than or equal to 20 years. In other words, teachers with more than 20 years of experience have greater odds of teaching social skills than teachers with less than 20 years of experience.

While more currently trained respondents (five or less years) felt that their training programs provided them with the knowledge and skills, those with more than 11 years of experience reported a need for additional preparation in the teaching of social skills, $\chi^2 (2, N = 223) = 7.01, p = 0.03$. The positive effect estimate, $\beta = 0.888$ suggests that the estimated odds of the need for additional preparation in the area of teaching social skills for teaching experience less than 11 years are 2.432 times the estimated odds for teaching experience greater than 16 years. In other words, teachers with less than 11 years of experience have greater odds of citing a need for additional preparation than teachers with more than 16 years of experience. Therefore, while teachers with more than 20 years experience were more likely to explicitly teach social skills, they were also more likely (11 or more years of experience) to identify the need for additional training. It seems that as these teachers explicitly taught social skills they realized that greater competence/training was needed.

Again, using teaching experience as a predictor variable it was found that respondents with five years or less of teaching experience were significantly more apt to report that teacher preparation programs provided the knowledge and skills to teach social skills than those with 6 or more years of teaching, $\chi^2 (4, N = 223) = 9.527, p = 0.05$. The positive effect estimate, $\beta = 1.629$ suggests that the estimated odds of teacher preparation programs providing respondents with less than six years with the knowledge and skills to teach social skills is 5.012 times the estimated odds for those with teaching experience with more than five years. In other words, teachers with less than six years of experience have much higher odds of saying that teacher preparation programs provide the knowledge and skills to teach social skills than those with more than five years of teaching experience.

These results could be attributed to current physical education teacher preparation programs that may now include knowledge and skills in the teaching of behavior management and social competence principles. For example, there are a number of teaching models in physical education that emphasize social competence (Hellison, 2003; Siedentop et al., 2004). The Sport Education Model by Siedentop et al. (2004) provides goals for appropriate sport behaviors through fair play which include (a) participate fully and responsibly, (b) give your best effort, (c) respect the rights and feelings of opponents, (d) be a good sport, and (e) be helpful and not harmful. The Teaching Responsibility through Physical Activity Model by Hellison (2003) fosters personal and social responsibility through physical activity. While we do not have data to support such a claim, both the Sport Education and the Teaching Responsibility Through Physical Activity Models are now used individually or in combination in selected PETE programs in Ohio. It is
assumed that programs offering these models have improved teachers’ perceptions of teaching social behaviors in physical education.

In addition, more authors are now writing about appropriate social interactions of students with disabilities than ever before (Block, 2007; Hodge, Yahiku, Murata, & Von Vange, 2003; Lavay, French, & Henderson, 2007; Sherrill, 2003). For example, current adapted physical education textbooks (e.g., Auxter, Pyfer, & Huettig, 2005; Block, 2007; Sherrill, 2004; Winnick, 2005) include information on social skills. While the Block (2007) and Winnick (2005) texts approach social skills from a behavior management perspective, Sherrill (2004) provides specific information relative to enhancing social competence through the use of various social skills curriculums (e.g., the Hellison Curriculum). These textbooks are typically used in today’s teacher preparation programs.

The overall results of the three previous analyses on the one hand indicate that newer teachers (five or less years of teaching) feel that they possess the knowledge and skills to teach social skills. Those same teachers, however, were less inclined to actually teach social skills. And, teachers with greater experience who explicitly taught social skills were also more inclined to indicate they were in need of additional training. One would have assumed that the newer teachers possessing the knowledge and skills to teach social skills would have actually done so, and those with less formal preparation in teaching social skills would not explicitly teach those skills; however, this was not the case. Superficially, these results are counterintuitive. According to Rink (2006) regardless of initial preparation, one of the most difficult activities of beginning teachers is managing students as well as the teaching environment. New teachers, when faced with complex issues or discipline problems, typically revert to simplistic content in what Rovengo (1994) refers to as “a curricular safety zone.” Curricular content behaviors refer directly to movement activities (as specified in IDEIA’s definition of physical education), whereas social behaviors contribute to learning by only creating the conditions for it to take place (Rink, 2006). Therefore, experienced teachers may be more inclined to teach outside of their “curricular safety zone.” We are at a loss to further explain these conflicting results without collecting additional data on respondents.

Finally, teaching experience was again used as the predictor variable on the importance of teaching social skills. The analysis was not significant indicating that all teachers who responded to the survey, regardless of years teaching, are of the opinion that social skill teaching is important, \( \chi^2 (8, N = 223), = 6.12, p = 0.633 \). No analyses utilizing gender as the predictor variable were found to be significant. As such, findings indicate that both females and males have similar opinions regarding (a) the importance of teaching social skills, \( \chi^2 (3, N = 223), = 4.03, p = 0.257 \); (b) the frequency of social skills taught, \( \chi^2 (3, N = 223), = 5.47, p = 0.140 \); (c) whether teacher preparation programs provided knowledge and skills to teach social skills, \( \chi^2 (1, N = 223), = 0.007, p = 0.787 \); and (d) the need for additional preparation, \( \chi^2 (1, N = 223), = 0.010, p = 0.919 \). Finally, no other analyses using specialization or endorsement as predictor variables were found to be significant. Based on our data, completing a concentration or possessing a State approved Endorsement Certificate in APE does not influence teachers’ perceptions about the teaching of social skills.
Implications

Based on our findings, adapted physical education teachers in Ohio recognize the importance of teaching social skills to students with disabilities regardless of gender and teaching experience. Those with more experience tend to explicitly teach social skills, and the social skills taught are similar to those that general education teachers deem necessary for students to be successful (Lane et al., 2003; Lane et al., 2004; Meier et al., 2006). This fact is encouraging because the goal, whenever possible, is to educate children with disabilities in the least restrictive environment (both school and community settings). Physical education is a unique instructional setting for students with and without disabilities to acquire and demonstrate the social skills needed to be effectively integrated into society (Block, 2007).

Limitations

While we believe our results are representative of other adapted physical teachers across the country, this study was limited to credentialed adapted physical education teachers in Ohio who responded to the survey. Furthermore, the results obtained in this study were limited to the types of questions asked within the context of Bandura’s social learning theory (1977).

Recommendations

Because results are based on the responses of credentialed adapted physical education teacher from only one state within the U.S., it is recommended that additional survey studies be conducted to determine if credentialed adapted physical education teachers in other states and in other countries hold similar views on the teaching of social skills to children with disabilities. In this study, 84% (187) of the respondents indicated that they taught social skills most or all of the time; however, we did not obtain information on how social skills were taught. Therefore, future research should examine the specific instructional practices used by adapted physical education specialists to teach social skills. Obtaining this type of information may lead to the establishment of “best practices” in the teaching of social skills to children with disabilities within physical activity settings.

References


