Testing a Self-Determination Theory-Based Intervention in Physical Education

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Considering the major health concern of declining physical activity levels in adolescents, theory-based interventions are an important addition to the research literature. Physical Education (PE) classes provide a valuable context to test such interventions as nearly all children and adolescents can be reached. Specifically, students' motivation in PE classes has been frequently associated with important psychological and behavioural outcomes. Using Self-determination theory as its framework, the present study examined a workshop-based intervention that targeted PE teachers' use of three motivational strategies that have been empirically and theoretically linked to the promotion of self-determined motivation in students: support for students' autonomy, provision of structure in lessons, and interpersonal involvement. In their normal PE classes, 86 students were taught for seven weeks by teachers who had taken part in a two hour workshop that aimed to facilitate their support of autonomy, provision of structure and use of interpersonal involvement (intervention group). Additionally, 95 students were taught by teachers using their normal teaching style (control group). Pre- and post-intervention measures of students' perceptions of teachers' use of the three motivational strategies, their motivational regulations in PE, their attitudes towards leisure-time physical activity and their self-reported physical activity were obtained for both groups. Repeated measures analyses of variance revealed significant increases in student reports of teachers' interpersonal involvement (F = 7.06; df = 179, 1; p < .01), identified regulation (F = 4.55; df = 169, 1; p < .05), introjected regulation (F = 6.79; df = 169, 1; p < .05), and students attitudes towards leisure-time physical activity (F = 3.98; df = 171, 1; p < .05) in the intervention group only. Hierarchical regression analyses indicated that increases in perceived levels of teacher interpersonal involvement explained a significant amount of unique variance in students post-intervention identified and introjected regulation (β = .27, p < .01 and β = .32, p < .01, respectively). Contrastingly, increases in perceptions of autonomy support and provision of structure did not explain significant amounts of unique variance. These findings outline the potential importance of providing an interpersonally involved PE climate. In particular, students taught by PE teachers who build meaningful relationships with students (i.e., are interpersonally involved) may be more likely to value their engagement in PE and have a more positive attitude towards leisure-time physical activity. However, reasons for participating in PE such as guilt may also be facilitated. The lack of significant increases in perceived autonomy support and provision of structure in the intervention group may highlight potential caveats associated with teacher-based interventions communicating to students.

Keywords: Physical Education, Motivation, Teaching

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