

Middle School Students' Perspectives on Three Teaching Strategies

What Was the Question?

In order to maximize student achievement, teachers must use a variety of teaching strategies. Cothran and Kulinna (2006) discuss the wide range of instructional approaches available to teachers. The most widely used and accepted styles (strategies) in physical education come from Mossten's spectrum of teaching (Mossten & Ashworth, 2002). The researchers wanted to know how student perspectives would contribute to current research on teaching strategies. Do teachers and students hold differing views of what constitutes good teaching? Cothran and Kulinna believe that understanding middle school students' perspectives on teaching strategies can potentially increase student learning. Additionally, teachers would be better informed about the benefits and limitations of the various teaching strategies, so they could incorporate them into their own teaching.

What Was Done?

The participants in this study were 70 middle school students (26 males and 44 females) ranging in age from 11 to 14 years. The researchers developed three short scenarios about each teaching strategy (peer, direct, and inquiry). The scenarios were based on a basketball unit because it was assumed to be a unit that most students would have experienced. The students were interviewed and told that the researchers were only interested in what they thought about the different ways of teaching. A three-panel illustration of each scenario was developed and shown to the students during the interview process. Students heard the scenarios, viewed the illustrations, and were then asked to describe their thoughts

on each of the three teaching strategies. At the end of the interview, the students were asked to rank order the three strategies and explain why they ranked them in that order.

What Was Found?

First, rank-order results showed no statistical significance, indicating that there was no underlying order to the rankings. The direct style was rated as the best, followed by peer and inquiry. The interview results indicated that students saw the three strategies differently. A variety of perspectives on the three strategies were reported. Students reported that the peer-teaching strategy provided the most amount of fun and allowed them to practice without being singled out or embarrassed. There were concerns that peers may not be the most knowledgeable (as compared to the teacher); however, the fun factor ultimately outweighed those concerns.

The direct-teaching strategy was perceived as providing the most learning for students, because they viewed the teacher as having the most knowledge. It was not a good strategy for low-skilled students, however. These students would feel embarrassed and not have fun because they could not perform the skill properly.

Some students felt the inquiry strategy was good because they could work at their own pace, whereas others believed that low-skilled students would feel left out if they could not do what others were doing. Students believed it was a fun strategy because they were active, but they also believed that not much learning was taking place. There were concerns that the inquiry strategy was not a good way to teach physical education, because students may not know

how to do the skill properly and would then practice it incorrectly.

What Does the Study Mean?

Understanding the thoughts and perspectives of middle school physical education students can help teachers understand which teaching strategies are most preferred. The findings were consistent with other research in that having fun and working with friends rated near the top of students' goals for learning. The authors recommend that teachers take the time to think about how they can promote student learning without the strong reliance on the teacher as the sole source of knowledge. They suggest using a variety of student-centered teaching strategies such as inclusion, guided discovery, and divergent discovery to encourage independent thinking among students.

References

- Cothran, D. J., & Kulinna, P. H. (2006). Students' perspectives on direct, peer and inquiry teaching strategies. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education, 25*, 166-181.
- Mosston, M., & Ashworth, S. (2002). *Teaching physical education* (5th ed.) New York: Benjamin Cummings.
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Submissions Welcome!

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