

Antecedents and Consequences of PE Teachers' Motivational Strategies: A Self-determination Theory Perspective

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Background

An important context that may have great potential to promote youth physical activity is the Physical Education (PE) class since, unlike competitive sport; it ostensibly strives to encompass virtually all children. In order to promote sensible and healthy physical activity through PE it is important to consider how motivating PE classes are for students, as motivation has been empirically linked to important consequences, such as the intention to be physically active and leisure-time physical activity behaviour (e.g., Hagger, Chatzisarantis, Culverhouse, & Biddle, 2003).

An important factor to consider in the PE class motivational environment is the motivational strategies used by the teacher. Much research evidence indicating which teaching strategies may be adaptive exists, however, teachers do not always use the most appropriate strategies in their teaching (Reeve, 2002). With this in mind, an exploration into why this discrepancy between empirical suggestions and actual teaching practice sometimes occurs seems worthy. Moreover, the mechanisms by which teacher motivational strategies impact upon student motivation and behaviour require investigation.

Research Questions

The studies presented explored contextual and personal factors associated with PE teachers' motivational strategies towards students and the motivational mechanisms behind these relationships. Additionally, the consequences of teachers' motivational strategies, student psychological need satisfaction and self-determination were investigated.

Methods

A range of qualitative, quantitative, cross-sectional and longitudinal designs were employed to explore these aims.

Frame

Using various theoretical frameworks, extensive discussion has occurred concerning how teachers can influence student motivation in PE. One theory that has received significant attention over the last three decades is self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Self-determination theorists hypothesise that behaviour can be explained by the extent to which fundamental psychological needs for autonomy (self-governance of one's behaviour), competence (the desire for effectiveness within the environment) and relatedness (the feeling of connectedness to the social milieu) are satisfied or thwarted (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Satisfying these needs is assumed to lead to self-determined, adaptive motivation towards a given activity and positive cognitive, affective and behavioural consequences. The studies presented focus on three general types of motivational strategy that have been proposed to support students' psychological needs: Autonomy support, provision of structure, and interpersonal involvement. Autonomy support can be considered as a variety of teacher behaviours (e.g., acknowledging students' perspective, providing a rationale for an activity) that enhance students' feelings of volition and promote a perceived internal locus of causality (Reeve, Nix, & Hamm, 2003). Structure refers to the amount and quality of information given to the students regarding teacher expectations, consequences of the students' behaviour, and how students can achieve desired

outcomes (Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Involvement is the degree of interest and emotional support shown by the teacher to the student (Connell & Wellborn, 1991).

Research findings

The purpose of the first study was to provide an in-depth analysis of how the PE teaching context influences teachers' motivational strategies towards students. Semi-structured interviews revealed that the teachers perceived that an emphasis on student assessment and the time constraints associated with PE lessons often compelled them to use teaching strategies which conflicted with their beliefs about the most appropriate ways to motivate students. The teachers' own performance evaluations and pressure to conform to other teachers' methods also influenced the teachers' motivational strategies, but these influences were often congruent with their teaching beliefs. Additionally, the teachers discussed how perceived cultural norms associated with the teacher-student relationship impacted upon their chosen motivational strategies. These cultural norms were reported by different teachers as either in line, or in conflict with their teaching beliefs. Finally, the influence of the teachers' perceptions of their students helped produce strategies that were congruent with their beliefs, but often different to empirically suggested strategies.

Study two expanded on these findings by supporting a motivational model in which perceived job pressure, perceptions of student motivation, and teachers' autonomous orientation predicted teachers' psychological need satisfaction, which, in turn positively influenced their self-determination to teach. Lastly, teachers' self-determination predicted the use of autonomy support, structure, and interpersonal involvement.

In study three, multilevel regression analyses revealed that students' perceptions of teacher autonomy support, structure, and involvement positively predicted their own self-determination in PE, and these relationships were mediated by their reported satisfaction of autonomy and competence. Weaker relationships between teachers' self-report of their own motivational strategies and student outcomes were reported. Indeed, teacher and student perceptions of teachers' autonomy support and structure were uncorrelated, and perceptions of involvement were only weakly correlated.

In study four, multilevel growth models revealed that changes in students' competence need satisfaction and self-determined motivation over a school term were the most consistent facilitators of students' effort in PE, exercise intentions and leisure-time physical activity behaviour.

To summarise, contextual job pressures emanating from the school system can result in lower quality teacher motivation, and these pressures can indirectly effect the students by leading the teachers to use less adaptive motivational strategies in the PE class. This is important as motivational strategies, such as autonomy support, structure and involvement are related to student psychological need satisfaction, adaptive motivation, effort in PE, as well as leisure-time physical activity intentions and behaviour.