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IMPLEMENTING SPORT FOR PEACE PRINCIPLES WITH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENT LEADERS

Lawrence GERSTEIN, Lindsey BLOM, Alisha SINK, Akanimo AKPAN

Implementing Sport for Peace Principles with Elementary School Student Leaders

Lawrence GERSTEIN[1], Lindsey BLOM[2], Alisha SINK[3], Akanimo AKPAN[4]

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to create a program for elementary school student leaders in the United States (U.S.) that utilized sport and physical activity as teaching tools for developing positive values, social competencies, and sportspersonship related to peaceful living. Participants were male and female students from the Midwest of the U.S. that were 4th and 5th graders. Data was collected both prior to and at the close of the program via a sportspersonship survey and a conflict resolution scale. The trend in the data supported the hypotheses that the "Sport for Peace" program would yield positive outcomes in relation to increasing participants' use of functional conflict resolution skills, and their respect for the social conventions found in sport, respect for others while engaging in physical activity, and respect and concern for their opponent. The findings support continued efforts in the fields of sport for peace and positive youth development.

Keywords: youth; sport for peace; peaceful living; physical activity; conflict resolution.

[1] Ball State University, Center for Peace & Conflict Studies, Muncie, IN 47306, USA. E-mail: lgerstein@bsu.edu

[2] Ball State University, School of Physical Education, Sport, & Exercise Science, Muncie, Indiana 47306, USA. E-mail: lcblom@bsu.edu

[3] Ball State University, School of Physical Education, Sport, & Exercise Science, Muncie, Indiana 47306, USA. E-mail: amsink@bsu.edu

[4] Ball State University, School of Physical Education, Sport, & Exercise Science, Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana 47306, USA. E-mail: adakpan@bsu.edu

Introduction

During the 2005-2006 academic year, approximately 38% of public schools notified police of at least one incident of violence, with the average of about 29 violent crimes per 1000 students (Department of Education [DOE], 2008). This violence resulted in more than 60% of children being exposed to violence directly or indirectly at school (Finkelhor *et al.*, 2009). While the rates of school-associated student homicides have decreased since the early 1990's, approximately 1.5 million nonfatal crimes are committed against students each year at school (CDC, 2008). Many of these nonfatal crimes stem from bullying. On an annual basis, about a third of students report being bullied during the school year (DOE, 2008). The attitudes about bullying are telling; of eighth graders surveyed, many reported that "bullying is sometimes fun to do," 20% see no problem with bullying, and 23% reported they feel good when they hit someone (Virginia Youth Violence Project, as cited in Dinkes, Kemp, & Baum, 2009). When asked about teasing or aggressive behavior, 59% of eighth graders, 56% of seventh graders, and 46% of 6th graders reported that they were teased about the way they looked.

Crimes committed by adolescents in and out of school have been found to occur most often during transition times (i.e. before & after school & during lunch), as well as the beginning of each semester (Anderson *et al.*, 2001; CDC, 2001). The aggressors of these acts have been found to be more likely to also get into fights out of school, vandalize property, skip school, and drop out of school (Olweus, 1993), and they have been found to experience anger, anxiety, and depression (Chan, Fung, & Gerstein, 2013; Fung, Gerstein, Chan, & Engebretson, In Press) and a lack of empathy for others (Fung, *et al.*).

As alarming as these previously mentioned school-related statistics might be, a few more points need to be considered. First, although not always a major problem, minor aggressive behavior (e.g. teasing, taunting, harassing) can detract from the normal school day on a consistent basis by distracting teachers, administrators, support staff, social workers and police from their normal duties. These distractions result in the use of school resources that include time, energy, and money. Furthermore, these incidents serve to undermine the school climate because, for the victims, school violence results in visible and non-visible injuries that can lead to an array of negative health outcomes (CDC, 2010). Students who feel unsafe at school or on the way to or from school have been shown to miss full days of class, leave early, and experience depression and anxiety (CDC, 2010).

Schools and other structured social settings have been found to be the best avenues for implementing violence and anger management programs because of the daily contact that students have with the material presented to them, and continual feedback that can be given to them about their actions by respected adults (Mehas, Boling, & Sobieniak, 1998; Schwartz, 2001). Furthermore, these

programs are most effective when they have the support and cooperation of teachers, administrators, and other school-related personnel. The more individuals in each school who have conflict management skills and are promoting peaceful living, the more likely they are to see the "warning signals" that many perpetrators have been shown to exhibit (Anderson *et al*., 2001).

In addition to the traditional forms of delivering conflict management (e.g., classroom lectures, videos, scare tactics), sport and physical activity can be used as a proactive intervention for positive peace aimed at the interpersonal, inter-group, and international levels (Christie, Tint, Wagner, & Winter, 2008). Positive peace involves actively challenging environments and societal norms that foster inequities to prevent further cycles of violence and conflict (Christie *et al*., 2008). More specifically, sport can be used to promote contact between persons from opposing communities, connect individuals who are marginalized and vulnerable, encourage children to attend school, and foster safe places where sensitive issues can be discussed (May & Phelan, 2005). Examples of worldwide community-based sport for peace initiatives include: a program in Somalia where peaceful conflict resolution skills are taught while conducting sport training, and "Open Fun Football Schools" which are training camps that are designed to bring children together from countries such as Bosnia, Serbia, and Montenegro, while em-phasizing team spirit and bridging ethnic and religious divides (United Nations, 2003). These types of programs have been shown to foster a shared sense of responsibility for development and participation, an improved sense of trust and respect, a sense of community among diverse individuals, and/or pro-social behaviors (e.g., Bonta & Goodway, 1996; Ennis *et al*., 1999; Hellison, Martinek, & Cutforth, 1996; Wells, Ellis, Paisley, & Arthur-Banning, 2005). It should be noted, however, that none of these programs involved teaching elementary school children conflict resolution skills.

Therefore, the primary emphasis of this project was to establish a program for elementary school student leaders in the U.S. using sport and physical activity as a strategy to develop social competencies, positive values, and sportspersonship related to peaceful living. Intermingled with the sport activities offered in this program was an empirically-supported curriculum adapted from the Indianapolis Peace Learning Center (PLC), the Center for Peace and Conflict Studies (CPCS), and the PRIDE anger management and conflict resolution program (Watson, Blom, & Parker, 2002) to bring anger and violence to the forefront of the dis-cussion and the development of functional skills. The program curriculum was designed around cognitive-relaxation coping and social skills training (Deffen-bacher, Lynch, Oetting, & Kemper, 1996), peace education, principles and fin-dings from sport psychology, and lessons learned from a previous sport for peace pilot grant for elementary school children administered by the first two authors of this article. It was expected that the revised curriculum discussed in this article would provide the young elementary school children with ways to effectively

deal with many challenging issues and situations on a daily basis in school and in both informal and formal physical activity settings.

More specifically, we expected participants to report an improvement in sports-personship behaviors, particularly more skills and knowledge about how they could resolve conflict and effectively cooperate and communicate with others off and on the playing field. We also anticipated that it would be more likely for students to (a) follow appropriate social norms while engaging in physical activity, and (b) follow the rules of the designated physical activity, and respect others when engaged in physical activity. Moreover, we expected students would be less likely to use psychological or physical violence to respond to conflict, and more likely to report using empathy and Satyagraha as conflict resolution strategies.

Methodology

Participants

Elementary students from two east central Indiana schools were chosen by their respective School Counselors and Physical Education Instructors to take part in the program. A total of 28 children (15 boys and 13 girls) participated from the beginning to the end. The total included 14 Caucasian children, 12 African-American children, and two mixed race children. An examination of demographic data revealed 21 individuals who played sports, whether within the context of school, outside of the school context, or both. Seven individuals did not participate in any sports at all. To be eligible for the program, children needed to be in the 4th or 5th grade at the time of participation, be available to attend the entire duration of the program, and to have acquired permission from a parent or guardian via a signature on their consent form. The participants also signed assent forms to indicate comprehension of the study parameters.

Procedure

The School Counselor and Physical Education Instructor at each school were asked to select an equal number of male and female students for this program from the 4th and 5th grades. The two lead authors instructed these professionals to select students that demonstrated leadership, defined as their ability to motivate and influence their peers towards a common goal. Moreover, the selected students were expected to demonstrate the ability to facilitate social interaction, show sensitivity, and convey social competence. The professionals were further told not to choose students because of their GPA or other academic specific behaviors, but rather to select them based on predictable behaviors of leadership like low social anxiety, higher levels of relationship-maintenance ability, lower levels of revenge focus, and positive self-perceptions (Scharf & Mayseless, 2009). Lastly, the

School Counselor and Physical Education Instructor were asked to make sure there were an equal number of positive and negative group leaders. After eligible students were identified, letters were then sent to the parents/guardians of these children to request their permission to have their child participate in the program. Prior to conducting the program, approval was secured from the university's Institutional Review Board.

The aim of having an equal number of positive and negative group leaders was successful, as approximately half of the program participants were viewed by the School Counselor and Physical Education Instructor as positive group leaders in their school, while the other half were considered negative group leaders. By design, all of the university staff involved in leading this program had no knowledge of the leadership status of the participants.

The Program

The curriculum was based on developmental (e.g., cognitive, emotional, physical, social), social learning, and peace education principles and strategies, and also materials from the PLC, CPCS, and the PRIDE programs. Our program focused on teaching students how to live peacefully through personal responsibility, personal values, and service to others. Cognitive-relaxation coping skills training was imbedded in the curriculum to target the use of self-monitoring of anger and relaxation techniques were employed to facilitate cognitive-attitude change and increase emotional control skills. Additionally, social skills training was included to teach students ways to reduce their expressions of anger, improve their interpersonal communication, and change their anger expression styles with the goal of behaving with less anger and violence.

The program was delivered in the gymnasium, at an outside playing field, and in classrooms at the respective school locations. During the course of the program, the children participated in a series of one-hour sessions that occurred after school, twice per week for eight-weeks in duration. On different days, eleven male and female graduate students enrolled in either a master's degree program in counseling or sport psychology served as the program co-leaders.

Each program session involved structured sport activities (20-25 minutes), group discussion time (15-20 minutes), and journaling time (5 minutes; students documenting what they had learned and reflecting on their experiences), with 5-10 minutes of transition time. Each session targeted a particular topic related to nonviolence or peace (e.g., understanding anger, emotion regulation, active listening, perspective taking, empathy, respect, problem solving, team building, group leadership, cooperation and collaboration, patience, cultural understanding, positive sportsmanship, being a good winner and loser, promoting inclusion on the playground, social skills). The sessions combined didactic and experiential activities performed alone, in pairs, and in smaller and larger groups. Examples of the

structured sport activities included red light/green light, flag tag, Rob the Roost, crab soccer, relay races, four-square, and small-sided soccer. Different types of balls, Frisbees, rubber scooters, shuttlecocks, foam racquetball paddles, rubber chickens, soccer cones, and goals were used in the sessions. It should be noted that the physical activities were predominantly cooperative by design. Group discussion time included skits, drawing, painting, leadership activities, and content related to the topic of the day.

Instrumentation

Assessments included a demographic measure, sportspersonship survey, and a conflict resolution scale. The instruments were administered by the graduate student co-leaders at the beginning of the eight-week program and at the end of the program.

The *Multidimensional Sportspersonship Orientation Scale* (MSOS; Vallerand, Bričre, Blanchard, & Provencher, 1997) was used to measure students' sportspersonship attitudes. The scale includes twenty-five items used to assess individuals' respect for social conventions of sport, rules and officials, commitment toward sport participation, respect and concern for the opponent, and negative approach toward the practice of sport. A 5-point Likert scale accompanies each item. For the purposes of this project, the items were modified to reflect informal and formal physical activity settings and the children's reading levels. Vallerand *et al.* (1997) reported construct validity and reliability for the MSOS.

The *Teenage Nonviolence Test* (TNT; Mayton, Weedman, Sonnen, Grubb, & Hirose, 1999) was used to assess students' conflict resolution skills. This scale was designed to elicit information on teenagers stated tendencies toward nonviolence. Each item on the TNT is accompanied by a 4-point Likert scale. Based on a factor analytic study, Gerstein, Mayton, Hutchison, and Kirkpatrick (2014) determined that 37 TNT items best fit the data loading on three factors: Physical and Psychological Violence, Empathy, and Satyagraha. For this project, some items were reworded to reflect a 4th grade reading ability. Evidence for the construct validity and reliability of the TNT has been reported (Gerstein *et al.*, 2013; Mayton *et al.*, 1999).

Results

As shown in *Table 1*, the mean scores for two of the three subscales of the TNT and one of the five subscales of the MSOS changed in the expected direction from pre- to post-test. It should be noted that given the small sample size, it was inappropriate to conduct any type of statistical analysis. Therefore, one must be cautious about drawing any firm conclusions based on the obtained results.

Table 1: Pre to Post Test Mean Scores on the Teenage Nonviolence Test and Multidimensional Sportspersonship Orientations Scale

Variable	Pre-Test Mn	Post-Test Mn	Direction of Change
TNT Physical and Psychological Violence[1]	2.5	2.8	Positive
TNT Empathy[1]	3.1	2.9	Negative
TNT Satyagraha[1]	2.4	2.6	Positive
MSOS Respect Social Conventions[2,3]	4.3	4.3	No change
MSOS Respect Rules & Officials[2,3]	4.6	4.6	No change
MSOS Respect Own Commitment to Sport[2,3]	4.5	4.5	No change
MSOS Respect & Concern for Opponent[2,3]	3.6	4.2	Positive
MSOS Negative Approach Toward Sport[4]	2.0	2.6	Negative

Note. TNT = Teenage Nonviolence Test; MSOS = Multidimensional Sportspersonship Orientations Scale (MSOS-25). [1]The higher the mean score, the greater use of this strategy to resolve conflict (scores can range from 1-4). [2]Scores can range from 1 to 5. [3]The higher the mean score, the greater use of this sportspersonship strategy. [4]The lower the mean score, the greater use of this sportspersonship strategy.

Discussion

Though we were unable to conduct statistical analyses to test our predictions, the trend in the data we gathered seems to suggest that the "sport for peace" program discussed in this article yielded a positive outcome in relation to increasing participants' use of functional conflict resolution skills. As a result of attending the program, as predicted, the student participants appeared even less likely to use physical or psychological violence to deal with conflict, and they were more inclined to report using Satyagraha (insistence on truth) as a conflict resolution strategy (Gerstein *et al.*, 2013; Mayton *et al.*, 1999). It is unclear, however, why they did not employ empathy more often after completing the program. In fact, their empathy scores at pre and post-test were very low suggesting that this was not a frequently employed behavior at all by the students.

The results involving the sportspersonship behaviors were somewhat consistent with our expectations and suggested that our program was effective, in some respects, in terms of improving these behaviors. As predicted, participation in our program did increase students' likelihood of following appropriate social norms while engaging in physical activity. They conveyed greater respect for the social conventions found in sport (e.g., shaking hands after the game, recognizing the good performance of the opponent, and being a good loser), more respect for others while engaging in physical activity, and greater respect and concern for their opponent (lending one's equipment to the opponent, agreeing to play even if the opponent is late ꞔrather than winning by defaultꞔ, and refusing to take advantage of an injured opponent).

Surprisingly, however, taking part in the program did not, as we had predicted, positively influence students' respect for their own commitment to sport (showing up and working hard during all practices and games, and acknowledging one's mistakes and trying to improve), and their respect for the officials or the rules of designated physical activities. Perhaps, these findings reflect the fact that before starting the program our student participants reported they were already quite respectful of the rules, officials, and their own commitment to sport. Why students' scores linked with the Negative Approach Toward Sport subscale (takes a win-at-all-costs approach toward playing, shows a temper after having made a mistake, and competes for individual prizes and trophies) increased instead of decreased as predicted after completing the program is unclear at this time.

The use of sport to teach a host of life skills including conflict resolution to young children is fairly unique in the field of peace studies. There is very little literature on this topic and there have been few presentations at professional conferences. Given their developmental stage in life, we believe that engaging elementary school students in physical activities is an appropriate strategy to teach these skills (May & Phelan, 2005). In fact, it might be a more effective approach than classroom didactic lessons, a comparison yet to be investigated (Christie *et al*., 2008). The results of our preliminary investigation, however, seem to suggest that involving U.S. elementary school children in a "sports for peace program" can improve their conflict resolution skills (Watson, Blom, & Parker, 2002). We hope the students that participated in our program also will have a significant impact on increasing the peace and reducing the conflict among their peers at their school and in their communities.

Limitations

There were various limitations in this study. First, the sample size of the study precluded statistical analysis and weakened the external validity of the obtained results. With 28 participants combined in the two *Sport for Peace* initiatives, it was inappropriate to conduct inferential statistics.

Second, the demographics of the sample were not representative of the general population in the United States or elsewhere. Within the sample used in this study, 50 percent were Caucasian, around 43 percent were African-American, and about seven percent were of mixed race. These percentages are not an accurate re-presentation of the general population of children in the United States or around the world.

Future Research

In conclusion, our results offer some insight to guide future research and applications by professionals interested in investigating and using sport and the

specific activities employed in this project to teach children, for example, conflict resolution, leadership, and social skills. With further research in the U.S. and in other countries it may be possible to better understand how engaging elementary school students in certain physical activities might lead to their development and use of functional and positive skills to resolve disputes peacefully and successfully.

Acknowledgements

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