

Help! Class out of Control

THIS MATERIAL MAY BE
PROTECTED BY
COPYRIGHT LAW
(TITLE 17, U.S. CODE)

Barry Lavay

For the past 15 years lack of student discipline and the decline of student interest have been cited by the annual Gallup surveys as two of the major problems in the public schools. (Elam, 1983). Most physical educators would agree that for learning to occur specific steps to remediate behavior problems and promote student interest must be available.

No easy solutions to either problem exists. In recent years a variety of behavior management strategies and programs have been successfully incorporated into classroom settings (Gardner, 1978). Physical educators, however, have been reluctant to accept these procedures as a solution to the problem (Loovis, 1980; Presbie & Brown, 1977; Siedentop, 1983).

Justification of Behavior Management

A lack of proper training in behavior management procedures is one reason often cited for physical educator's reluctance to incorporate these strategies with student instruction. Dunn and French (1982, p. 43), stated:

"Physical educators are seldom taught how to competently manage the behavior problems with which they are frequently confronted. The emphasis in their training is primarily on educational and psychological principles without sufficient attention to the practical use of the behavior management principles in the physical education setting."

This lack of training may be caused by physical educator's misconceptions about the use of behavior management systems with their teaching. Such misconceptions include the following: (a) a misinterpretation of behavior management terminology among

From: Kansas Association of Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance, 1985, 53 (2), 29-31.

professionals; (b) the attitude that these techniques are dehumanizing; (c) the belief that the application of reinforcement is merely bribery which in turn leads to the assumption that once the behavior is reinforced, the student will perform the desired behavior only for the reward; and (d) the assumption that the administration of reinforcers will become financially too expensive for the teacher's budget. To give the physical educator a clearer picture of how behavior management has been effectively incorporated into the physical education program each of these misconceptions deserves special attention.

A lack of the proper understanding of terms such as behavior management, behavior modification, and operant conditioning has led to terminology being used interchangeably, causing confusion among practitioners and professionals alike. These terms are defined as follows:

"Behavior management encompasses all of the strategies that the physical educator utilizes to develop effective and appropriate student behavior...Presently, the most effective behavior management strategy used in the school setting is behavior modification. The purpose of this specific strategy is to elicit a behavior...Respondent and operant conditioning are two basic forms of behavior modification...Operant conditioning involves the use of consequences to increase the probability that a behavior will be strengthened, maintained, or weakened." (Dunn & French, 1982, p. 45).

Many physical educators believe that behavior management programs are dehumanizing and mechanistic, associating these practices with the laboratory research conducted by animal psychologists. However, few physical educators would disagree that an organized and well-taught physical education program is a basic educational need of all children. Therefore, the profession must continuously explore effective teaching strategies to assure that the learning of each student does occur. Behavior management involves exact systematic observation and measurement (Wehman, 1977). When these principles are systematically applied in a

positive manner, they allow the physical educator to more effectively communicate student needs to other teachers, administrators, and parents.

The application of reinforcers to students during instruction doesn't have to mean bribery. A definite difference does exist between bribery and reinforcement. Bribery being defined as the illegal use of rewards or gifts to corrupt the conduct of an individual while reinforcement is designed to change a behavior in such a manner that the student will improve (Kazdin, 1980). When properly administered, reinforcers are an accepted part of everyday life. In fact, how many teachers would continue to work and stay on the job if they were not paid?

Many physical educators fear that once the reinforcement is administered, the individual will only perform the desired behavior for that reward or the desired behavior change will last only for the duration of the particular program. The termination of a reinforcement program does not necessarily mean extinction of the new behavior:

"Changing an individual's behavior sometimes produces noticeable changes of how others in the person's environment respond to him. Even when extrinsic reinforcers are withdrawn, the reactions of others to the person whose behavior was changed may maintain the recently acquired behavior." (Kazdin, 1980, p. 58).

Finally, for reinforcers to be effectively applied, they need not be expensive. Rewarding students with extrinsic reinforcers such as edibles, toys, and money can reach high costs to the teacher's budget. However, the use of tangible reinforcers is not the only means of student reinforcement available to the physical educator. The physical educator setting usually contains readily available reinforcers in the form of equipment and games; such reinforcers add no extra cost to the budget (Allen & Iwata, 1980; McKenzie, 1979).

For instance, the Premack principle is a management system that can be used to reinforce student behavior or performance. This principle is defined simply as a more preferred behavior or activity

the student enjoys is received contingent when the student's perform a less preferred behavior (Jansma, 1978). For example, the teacher might state at the beginning of the class, "All students who participate in and successfully complete the warm-up exercise program [the less preferred behavior] at the beginning of class may play 5 minutes on the scooter boards [the more preferred behavior] at the end of class."

Program Application

The following are a few of the teaching strategies that physical educators can use to effectively incorporate behavior management strategies into their classes. These techniques are merely suggestions; the teacher must consider student needs as well as program goals and objectives.

1. With proper planning, behavior problems can be prevented before they begin. Before students enter the class the teacher should structure the gymnasium to alleviate behavior problems from occurring. For example, carpet squares, lilly pads, or hula hoops can be given to each student and used as their personal space while involved in movement activities. It is also important to give each student his or her own piece of equipment during an activity to keep the students busy and most likely out of trouble.
2. In any management system the teacher must first identify the particular student behavior to be increased, maintained, or alleviated. This is defined as the target behavior, and this particular behavior must always be observable and measureable (White & Haring, 1980). The student may possess a number of behavior problems; however, at first the teacher should attend to one behavior at a time, choosing the most obvious one.
3. Implementing a new management system into the program may not work immediately. The teacher must be patient. At first certain students will want to test the new system and the teacher's consistency.

4. Develop a plan that is consistent and direct. For example, allow only those students who meet the specific criterion of performing all warm-up exercises to be reinforced with five minutes of play on a minitrampoline at the end of class.
5. Make class rules simple and clear so students know what is expected of them. Posting rules in the locker room or gymnasium will help to serve as a reminder to students.
6. Evaluate the management program periodically to determine if the target behavior is being correctly identified and progress is being made. The "A-B-C Analysis" [antecedent - behavior - consequence] is one method that can be used (French & Jansma, 1978). For example, the teacher says, "Line up for attendance [antecedent] the first student to be in his or her designated area and quiet [behavior] will be chosen to lead warm-up exercises" [consequence].
7. Individualize the behavior management systems to meet the specific needs of the class and each student. The teacher can not assume that one particular management system or reinforcer will work effectively with all students. Reinforcer preference can be determined by observing the student during activity, talking with the student's classroom teacher or parents, who usually know the student best; or by simply asking the student.
8. Proper timing of certain strategies such as the application of the reinforcer is extremely important. For example, a student may need to be reinforced immediately upon performing the new target behavior. Later, an interval schedule of reinforcers can be introduced with the student earning one point toward a reinforcer for every two minutes the student is on task in a ten minute soccer lesson. When possible, the behavior management program should be explained to the student.

9. Incorporate the behavior management system in a positive manner; students should never be made to run laps or exercises as a punishment in order to decrease inappropriate behavior. For example, having students earn points toward a reinforcer rather than taking points away will enable the students to feel responsible for their actions.
10. Involve students in their own behavior management programs by allowing them to select class rules or determine the particular reinforcers to be used. Students who have input into the system will feel more responsible for and compliant with the management program being used.

In physical education, alternative teaching strategies are needed with students who are undisciplined and seem disinterested. In the past many physical educators have been reluctant to accept behavior management as a justifiable teaching strategy. However, controlling student discipline and promoting interest in physical education, exists to physical educators able to systematically incorporate behavior management programs in their teaching. In short, behavior management is simply good teaching!

References

1. Allen, L. A., & Iwata, B. A. (1980). Reinforcing exercise maintainance: Using existing high-rate activities. Behavior Modification, 4, 337-354.
2. Dunn, J. M., & French, R. W. (1982). Operant conditioning: A tool for special physical educators in the 1980's. Exceptional Education Quarterly, 3, 42-53.
3. Elam, S. M. (1983). The Gallup education surveys: Impressions of a poll watcher. Phi Delta Kappan, 65, 26-32.
4. French, R., & Jansma, P. (July, 1978). Behavior Management. Unpublished Manuscript, University of Utah.

5. Gardner, W. I. (1978). Children with learning and behavioral problems: A behavior management approach. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
6. Jansma, P. (1978). Operant conditioning principles applied to disturbed male adolescents by a physical educator. American Corrective Therapy Journal, 32, 71-78.
7. Kazdin, A. E. (1980). Behavior modification in applied settings. Homewood, IL: The Dorsey Press.
8. Loovis, M. E. (1980). Behavior modification: Its application in physical education/motor development with children of special needs. American Corrective Therapy Journal, 34, 19-24.
9. McKenzie, T. L. (1979). Token economy research: A review for the physical educator. Motor Skills: Theory into Practice, 3, 102-114.
10. Presbie, R. J., & Brown, P. L. (1977). Physical education: The behavior modification approach. Washington, DC: National Education Association.
11. Siedentop, D. (1983). Developing teaching skills in physical education. Palo Alto, CA: Mayfield.
12. Wehman, P. (1977). Helping the mentally retarded acquire play skills: A behavioral approach. Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas.
13. White O. R., & Haring, N. G. (1980). Exceptional teaching. Columbus, OH: Charles E. Merrill.