The ecology of cooperative learning in a high school physical education programme

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to describe and interpret the ecology of cooperative learning as an instructional model in two high school physical education classes. One eighth grade (year 9) and one eleventh grade (year 12) class and their teacher were observed during a ten-lesson team handball unit. The following research questions framed the study (a) What were the curricular and organizational characteristics of the handball units? (b) How was the content organized and presented through the instructional tasks? and (c) What were the students' motor responses during the physical education content? A modified version of the task structure observational instrument was used to systematically observe 20 physical education classes (Siedentop, 1994). The ecological analysis demonstrated that both classes had low management time, high engagement time, and a large number of refinements tasks. Students in both classes performed a high number of opportunities to respond in both practice and game situations. Much of the accountability for student performance in managerial and instructional tasks was embedded within the cooperative learning tasks. In addition, the student social system contributed to work in the managerial and instructional task system. Cognitive tasks, which appeared in every lesson, contributed to the students' understanding of the content and contributed to their selection and implementation of appropriate skills and strategies in the games. Cooperative Learning appears to be a viable instructional model for teaching quality high school physical education.

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encouraging pupils to take part in a wide variety of physical activities can have many additional benefits for pupils – co-operation in group
situations, acceptance of success and failure, concepts of working hard and ‘fair play’ and an appreciation of the skills and attributes of
others. During the Renaissance, the revival of learning led to a renewed interest, particularly in Italy. The school policy should identify
what should be assessed in physical education and outline ways in which this assessment can be undertaken in a manageable way. More
direct cooperative learning methods consist of very specific and well-defined techniques that teachers can learn in a few minutes and apply
immediately. Teachers are trained to use direct procedures in a lock-step way that is the same in all situations. (p.5) While direct
cooporative learning methods are rather easily taught to and incorporated by teachers, these methods do not seem to offer a great amount
of flexibility. Over the years, cooperative learning has been a highly researched topic in education. Over the last quarter century,
cooporative learning strategies have arrived as a popular option to traditional instruction due to the positive influence on student esteem,
performance, and on-task behavior (Mills & Durden, 1992).