



Viability of university service learning to support movement integration in elementary classrooms: Perspectives of teachers, university students, and course instructors

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HIGHLIGHTS

- Three themes emerged real-world context, learning embedded in a social context, and scaffolding.
- Classroom-based SL experiences can facilitate learning to integrate movement.
- Classroom-based SL experiences can provide positive experiences for all stakeholders.
- Mutual benefits is an important element of instructional design.

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the views of elementary classroom teachers (CTs), preservice CTs (PCTs), and course instructors who were involved with a university course that drew upon principles of constructivism and SL to prepare preservice CTs to use MI. Focus groups were thematically analyzed using constant comparison techniques to identify perceived successes and challenges of the course. Findings centered on three major themes, including real-world context, learning embedded in a social context, and scaffolding. This study adds to the emerging research base on school-university partnerships to support both preservice and inservice educational initiatives to generate and sustain physically active school communities.

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The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (USDHHS, 2008) recommends that school-aged youth accumulate at least 60 min of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (PA) daily. However, many children and adolescents are not meeting this guideline (Troiano et al., 2008). It is suggested that schools have an existing infrastructure that allows for virtually all youth to engage in PA and

recommends a whole-of-school approach to PA promotion that affords PA engagement in multiple contexts before, during, and after school (Institute of Medicine [IOM], 2013). A leading example of a whole-of-school approach to PA promotion is the comprehensive school physical activity program (CSPAP) model, (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2013), which consists of five components: (a) physical education, (b) PA during school, (c) PA before and after school, (d) staff involvement, and (e) family and community engagement.

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1. Movement integration

Movement integration (MI) in general education classrooms is a widely recommended strategy for increasing PA during school beyond physical education (CDC, 2013; IOM, 2013). MI is defined as incorporating PA, at any level of intensity, into general education classrooms during normal classroom time (Webster, Beets, Weaver, Vazou, & Russ, 2015). In the elementary school setting, the support of the classroom teacher (CT) is vital to helping children accumulate 60 min of PA each day. For instance, in the United States, only five states (Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, New Jersey, and Oregon) and the District of Columbia require the nationally recommended 150 min per week of physical education (SHAPE America, 2016). MI can occur during routine transitions, as part of academic lessons, or during breaks between lessons (Webster, Beets, et al., 2015). Examples of MI include (a) non-teacher directed transitions (students are allowed to move around the classroom on their own), (b) teacher-directed transitions, (c) non-academic teacher-directed movement breaks, (d) academic-infused teacher-directed movement breaks, and (e) technology-led teacher-infused transitions or movement breaks (e.g., Go Noodle or YouTube videos; Russ et al., 2016).

In intervention studies, MI has been shown to increase moderate-to-vigorous PA (Bartholomew & Jowers, 2011; Beighle, Erwin, Beets, Morgan, & Masurier, 2010; Erwin, Beighle, Morgan, & Noland, 2011; Goh et al., 2014; Mahar et al., 2006), decrease sedentary time (Salmon et al., 2005), improve on-task behavior (Mahar, 2011; Mahar et al., 2006), enhance cognitive function (Donnelly & Lambourne, 2011; Howie, Newman-Norlund, & Pate, 2014), increase standardized test scores (Vazou & Smiley-Oyen, 2014), increase enjoyment (Donnelly et al., 2009; Howie et al., 2014; Vazou, Gavrilou, Mamelaki, Papanastasiou, & Sioumala, 2012) and increase perceived competence in the classroom (Vazou et al., 2012). Small bouts of MI (i.e., 10 min or less) in the classroom have been found to increase students' PA to moderate intensity levels (Stewart, Dennison, Kohl, & Doyle, 2004). Moreover, students' overall step-counts increased during the school day as a result of teacher incorporated MI activities (Erwin et al., 2011).

2. Service-learning to support movement integration

Despite the benefits of MI to children's PA and school performance, research has shown that elementary CTs perceive numerous barriers to using MI, especially limited time to plan/implement PA opportunities (Webster, Beets et al., 2015; Webster, Russ, Vazou, Goh, & Erwin, 2015). In certain cases, it may therefore be an unrealistic expectation for classroom teachers to use MI without assistance from external service providers. Service-learning (SL) is a recommended strategy to aid classroom teachers and other school professionals in implementing PA opportunities within a CSPAP (Webster, Russ et al., 2015). University settings could offer a particularly useful platform to implement this strategy, as university programs, including teacher education programs, have increasingly incorporated SL over the past 20 years (Blodgett, 2017). SL in the context of university programming is defined as "[integrating] academic material, relevant community-based service activities, and critical reflection in a reciprocal partnership that engages students, faculty/staff, and community members to achieve academic, civic, and personal learning objectives as well as to achieve public purposes" (Bringle & Clayton, 2012, p. 105).

SL through university programming has been successfully implemented in various health promotion contexts (Carson & Raguse, 2014; Rosencranz, 2012). Several of these initiatives have focused on youth PA promotion and have resulted in a wide range

of positive outcomes for those receiving the support of service learners, such as increased enjoyment among elementary children during school-based recess (Butcher & Hall, 1998) and increased motor learning, cooperation, teamwork, and positive adult relationships in underserved youth (Galvan & Parker, 2011). Additionally, preservice physical education students gained content knowledge, established protocol techniques, and experienced an enhanced awareness of cultural competence (Galvan & Parker, 2011). SL in undergraduate curricula has been shown to enhance students' understanding the relevance of course content, positively influence student and faculty attitudes, encourage support for community initiatives, and increase volunteerism (Eyler, Giles, Stenson, & Gray, 2001; Hesser, 1995; Wechsler & Fogel, 1995).

3. Constructivist approach to learning and teaching

The main tenet of constructivism as a theory of learning is that knowledge is created from experience and used to support new learning. Constructivism as a theoretical framework finds its strongest roots in the work of Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky. Piaget stressed biological/psychological mechanisms of learning, while Vygotsky focused on social factors that influenced learning (Phillips, 1995). Yet, both scholars were fundamentally concerned with how individual learners construct knowledge. Rovigno and Dolly (2006) summarized the contributions of Piaget and Vygotsky as follows:

In the application of both Piaget's and Vygotsky's theoretical models, the teacher is viewed as a facilitator who helps students learn new knowledge by creating positive learning environments that take into account the child's prior knowledge, experience, developmental level, and culture. (p. 244)

Constructivist views of learning position the student as a central agent in the learning process (Bruner, 1960; Dewey, 1916; Piaget, 1970). From this perspective, students do not acquire knowledge but rather, actively construct it by developing connections between new subject matter content and prior knowledge/experience. These connections allow students to make sense of new information in ways that are more personal to them and to develop academic content that is personally meaningful. Accordingly, constructivist-based teaching approaches attempt to develop links between what is taught and what is learned by providing reflection opportunities for students to develop content knowledge (Beck & Kosnik, 2006). Previous research demonstrates that the application of constructivist-guided teaching and field experiences in teacher education can support the process of learning to teach (Beck & Kosnik, 2006). However, studies have not investigated constructivist-guided coursework and SL experiences as possible mechanisms to facilitate preservice CTs' (PCTs') learning about MI. Examining PCTs' constructivist-guided MI planning and implementation experiences applied to real world elementary classrooms can yield valuable insights about the processes involved with learning to use MI. Constructivist-guided field experiences may be critical to helping PCTs identify effective strategies to implement movement in actual elementary school classrooms.

4. Purpose of the study

According to the U.S. National Physical Activity Plan, requiring preservice and continuing education in MI for elementary classroom teachers is a key strategy for providing youth with access to high quality, CSPAP programming (www.nationalphysicalactivityplan.org). Preservice teacher training presents an especially important setting for change, as teachers'

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