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PEDAGOGY

Physical Education Professionals Developing Life Skills in Children Affected by Poverty

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Abstract

Physical education (PE) professionals must believe that all students can learn, and they should equip themselves with the knowledge and expertise to instruct each student effectively. This article focuses on the effect that a PE teacher can have on the lives of students who come from low socioeconomic status (SES) households. It provides PE teachers with specific ideas and examples of how to teach life skills effectively within the PE setting to marginalized children affected by poverty. PE teachers often must intentionally influence the development of life skills, and some feel that practitioners are responsible for implementing ways to encourage that development. Personal and interpersonal skills are essential developmental factors that can be influenced through PE. This article highlights ways of incorporating proper affective assessments, developing a growth mind-set, and giving exposure to specific PE curricular models that focus on life skill growth. Finally, it provides a practitioner's example to further elucidate the effect that intentional life skill instruction may have on students of low SES.

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Although physical education (PE) has been recognized to produce positive benefits in the development of the whole child, educational systems around the world challenge its significance (Ewing, Gano-Overway, Branta, & Seefeldt, 2002). Children from low socioeconomic status (SES) households tend to be exposed to more stressors than their affluent counterparts are, and this increased exposure may lead to developmental delays in achievement (Jensen, 2009). Educators must strive to bridge the achievement gap and create a learning platform through which students can achieve success not only in the classroom, but also outside of school in the "real world." Educators within this environment should passionately pursue ways to help low SES children overcome the by-products of stressors such as hopelessness, depression, and suicide (Woan, Lin, & Auerswald, 2013). In the educational setting, the stressors that students have to overcome are linked to 50% of all absences (Johnston-Brooks, Lewis, Evans, & Whalen, 1998), along with a reduction in memory and creative ability (Lupien, King, Meaney, & McEwen, 2001). Students in this demographic may also display a reduction in cognitive ability due to these stressors (Jensen, 2009).

Luckily, physical activity (PA) has been shown to reduce ailments of stressors significantly (Guszkowska, 2004). PA can increase academic outcomes (Pellegrini & Bohn, 2005), help those plagued by anxiety and depression (Guszkowska, 2004), and reduce behavioral problems (Newman, 2005). For example, with a sample of fourth grade students, Jarrett et al. (1998) found that 60% of these students (including children suffering from attention deficit disorder) worked more and fidgeted less when they received at least 15 min/day of PA, which translated to a 5% increase in on-task classroom participation.

Role of a PE Teacher

PE can influence the development of interpersonal skills (i.e., social skills, respect, leadership, and communication) and personal skills (i.e., organization, discipline, self-reliance, goal setting, managing performance outcomes, and motivation), all of which are important life skills associated with success (Jones & Lavallee, 2009). This article focuses on the potential effects that a PE teacher can

have on the lives of students who come from low SES households. It provides PE teachers with specific ideas and examples of how to teach life skills effectively within a PE setting to children affected by poverty. PE teachers who aim to enhance the life skills of students who come from poverty may use this article as a resource tool. This article discusses instructional and behavior management strategies, life-skill-related PE curricular models, and a practitioner's perspective with accompanying block plan that lists sample activities and assessments aimed at enhancing affective learning outcomes for these students.

First, however, it is important to distinguish the difference between PA and PE. *PE* and *PA* are terms that some people incorrectly use interchangeably. PE involves PA, but the main focus of PA is performing exercise, burning calories, and achieving or maintaining fitness. However, PE should not be confused with recess, intramurals, or recreational endeavors (Ballard et al., 2005). A quality PE program has certified PE teachers who provide developmentally appropriate standards-based programs centered on individual student needs while incorporating appropriate instruction, meaningful content, and ongoing assessments (Ballard et al., 2005).

Assessment

Schools incorporate assessments into educational curriculums to ensure that students are learning. An effective PE teacher assesses all three learning domains (i.e., psychomotor, cognitive, and affective) that embody the development of the whole student. Table 1 defines these domains. Life skill development is most associated with the affective domain; it establishes the appropriate qualities that a student must show to have personal and interpersonal skills that may assist in leading a successful life. Teachers who assess the affective domain demonstrate to students that respecting others, appropriate social interaction, and self-expression are important life skills (Lund & Veal, 2013). Table 2 defines various affective behaviors and identifies actions that are acceptable and unacceptable in relation to each behavior.

Table 1
Defined Learning Domains for Physical Education

Learning domain	Types of learning
Psychomotor	Performing motor skills, movement, physical activity, physical fitness
Cognitive	Knowing and understanding tactics, strategies, problem solving, rules, skills, player positions, and key elements of performance
Affective	Exhibiting positive personal and social behaviors (e.g., teamwork, fair play) and personal attitudes (e.g., valuing physical activity)

Note. Adapted from *Assessment-Driven Instruction in Physical Education: A Standards-Based Approach to Promoting and Documenting Learning,* by J. Lund and M. L. Veal, 2013, Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

Table 2
Elements of Affective Behavior

Affective domain element	Element definition	Element presence behavior indicators	Element absence behavior indicators
Effort	Works on task to the best of ability; disregarding others' performance	Does one's best; tries hard; engaged at all times; willing to work hard to improve one's own skills	Does not fully participate and shows no willingness to perform task
Teamwork	Works cooperatively with others to accomplish a common goal	Helps others succeed; listens to and respects ideas from teammates; encourages others on the team	Rejects the suggestions of others; plays for self instead of team; argues with others on team
Fair Play (Sports-personship)	Plays within the rules and shows respect toward others	Shows courtesy to others; shows dignity whether winning or losing; compliments others; accepts decisions of the official	Calls a play incorrectly to gain advantage; gloats when the winner; complains if the loser; argues with officials

Table 2 (cont.)

Affective domain element	Element definition	Element presence behavior indicators	Element absence behavior indicators
Caring for Others	Helps others; is nice and polite to others	Invites people to join one's group; helps someone when they are acquiring new skills; allows all to participate in activities	Socially isolates others; intentionally tries to hurt someone when committing fouls; doesn't apologize for negative actions
Self-Control	Controls emotions and actions without being told by others	Remains calm even in stressful situations; keeps hands to self	Plays with aggression to the point of being destructive; talks while others are talking
Accepting the Decisions of Others	Supports the judgments of those in authority	Accepts a call by the official; follows the wishes of the team captain; when appropriate, compromises to come to common agreement	Is rude to others to get own way; refuses to participate when not getting own way; complains incessantly
Treating Others With Respect	Demonstrates good manners and polite behavior	Listens when the teacher is talking; appreciates the efforts of others; waits for one's turn; listens to others	Calls others out for unintentional errors; makes fun of others; bullies others

Note. Adapted from *Assessment-Driven Instruction in Physical Education: A Standards-Based Approach to Promoting and Documenting Learning,* by J. Lund and M. L. Veal, 2013, Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

Appropriate Instruction

The way content is delivered will certainly affect the desired learning outcomes. Oftentimes, students who live in an inner-city (i.e., urban) setting come from low SES households. In a qualitative study investigating PE teachers' perceptions of the challenges affecting their urban elementary PE environment, teachers perceived insufficient instructional resources, implementing culturally relevant pedagogy, dealing with community violence, integrating more games into the curriculum, and teaching in a culture of basketball as their major challenges (McCaughtry, Barnard, Martin, Shen, & Kulinna, 2006). Knop, Tannehill, and O'Sullivan (2001) suggested three strategies for motivating urban youth in PE: (1) create trust through content and delivery (i.e., include activities that allow for active involvement and success with strong class rules and supervision), (2) create a sense of community (i.e., value and support students as they reach toward a common goal through cooperation and mutual respect), and (3) create multiple ways for students to demonstrate progress (i.e., several assessment and accountability strategies). Table 3 provides Jensen's (2009) action steps for a practitioner to follow when teaching impoverished youth, with direct examples of how to incorporate them into instruction.

Teacher development of a growth mind-set. In layman's terms, people who have a *fixed* mind-set believe that the "cards" dealt in life must be played in that order and that they cannot do anything about it. Conversely, people with a *growth* mind-set believe that they can change or rearrange the stack to produce the best possible outcome. Moreover, people with a growth mind-set believe in resilience and overcoming adversity by formulating new and inventive ways to reach success. Exposure to heightened stress can lead to an increased sense of detachment, helplessness, and a fixed mind-set (Dweck, 2014; Jensen, 2009). Individuals are not stuck with a fixed mind-set; intelligence, along with other traits, can be learned (Blackwell, Trzesniewski, & Dweck, 2007). Moreover, the introduction of a growth mind-set environment into a classroom can veer students from a state of hopelessness to a potential of improved self-efficacy. Table 4 displays examples of fixed versus growth mind-set characteristics. PE teachers should aim to instill a growth mind-set in their students.

Table 3
Action Steps for Practitioners Instructing Students of Poverty

Action	Description	Application
Embody Respect	Demonstrate respect for the students, the rules, and for self	Give respect to students first
		Avoid directives ("Do this right now!")
		Stay calm
		Model the process of adult thinking
Embed Social Skills	Develop age-appropriate strategies that strengthen social and emotional skills	Meet and greet skills (smile, handshake, eye contact)
		Embed social skills into classroom management
Be Inclusive	Make the classroom feel like a community	Refer to the school as "our school" and "our class"
		Thank students for the small things

Note. Adapted from *Teaching With Poverty in Mind: What Being Poor Does to Kids' Brains and What Schools Can Do About It,* by E. Jensen, 2009, Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Table 4
Growth Versus Fixed Mind-Set Characteristics

Growth mind-set characteristics		Fixed mind-set characteristics
Learn from criticism (negative feedback)	vs.	Negative self-talk
Takes on challenges and risk	vs.	Not willing to try a task out of comfort zone
Celebrates progress	vs.	Focus on obstacles rather than solutions
Value effort (not only the result)	vs.	Learned helplessness

Students may start to believe that they can develop their abilities when emerged in a growth mind-set environment. This is important for students of low SES backgrounds, who gain a sense of hope from understanding these concepts. The practice of instilling a growth mind-set behavior takes intentional efforts on behalf of the instructor. Students should understand that abilities can grow through hard work. Learning a growth mind-set transforms the meaning of effort and difficulty for students. It is important for instructors to praise wisely. In other words, teachers should praise the process, not the outcome accomplishments (Dweck, 2014). If students engage deeply and effectively in a learning process, positive natural by-products often occur. When students learn the value of the ingredients for success (i.e., strategies, ideas, focus, perseverance, etc.), they will be able to apply them when life's obstacles become difficult (Dweck, 2014).

Curricular Models

Several PE curricular models lend themselves to affective domain learning and teaching life skills. It is not the intent of the authors to describe each fully, but rather to provide brief descriptions, noting how each model relates to life skill development. Table 5 reveals prime affective components of the adventure education, cooperative learning, sport education, and personal and social responsibility models.

Table 5
Affective Curricular Concepts

Self-discovery	Problem solving
Honesty	Goal setting
Teamwork	Fair play
Trust	Decision making
Responsibility	Social skills
Positive risk taking	Critical thinking
Cooperative dialogue	Self-reliance
Adherence to rules	Coping skills
Confidence building	Respect for self and others
Communication	Life skills

Adventure education involves activities that encourage holistic student involvement (i.e., physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development) that can influence life skills and help students meet learning objectives (Dyson & Sutherland, 2015). In this model, the emphasis is on the "process" of the activity rather than the outcome, with students engaging in an atmosphere of self-expression, trust, problem solving, and challenge (Dyson & Sutherland, 2015). In a study of the outcomes of an adventure-based education curriculum in PE focusing on social and emotional development with two elementary schools comprising students of low SES status, the third and fifth grade students who were interviewed ($n = 29$) reported cooperating with others, challenging themselves, taking risks, having fun, and learning motor skills—all aims of a quality PE program (Dyson, 1995). Certainly, these are also aims of life skill development.

Likewise, cooperative learning provides an instructional format in which students work together in small, structured groups to master the content of the lesson (Metzler, 2011). In terms of youth development, it is important for students to be able to work cooperatively because society values teamwork that promotes collaboration and cohesiveness across many life situations (Trent, 2007). The cooperative learning model involves the instructor facilitating deliberately established groups in continuous group interaction, interdependence among group members, individual accountability, and overt attention to the development of life skills (Metzler, 2011). Students must take initiative and use critical thinking skills to achieve tasks that are presented to them, and they must also be able to present their ideas to a group, which fosters better communication skills.

Next, the sport education model has been used to develop important social skills in marginalized groups, or those who come from disadvantaged backgrounds (i.e., low SES households). Students are assigned "duty" roles (e.g., coaches, officials, scorekeepers, trainers, administrators, media personnel) and experience sport education's prime features of seasons, affiliation, formal competition, record keeping, festivity, and a culminating event (Metzler, 2011). In 2002, the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) put together a task force that took the sport education model to developing countries to promote health, education, and development for youth. The sport education model helps PE teachers to engage students in holistic team experiences, with the entire class striving to

achieve an authentic sport experience and developing life skills in the process.

Last, originating from Don Hellison, the personal and social responsibility curricular model does not dichotomize responsibility and physical activity, but centers on teaching PE content while intentionally providing students opportunities to practice and learn how to take responsibility for themselves and others (Metzler, 2011). This student-centered model focuses on the PE teacher including all students, encouraging and using student input, providing students choices, permitting students to practice making choices, and incorporating student reflections about these choices (Parker & Stiehl, 2015).

Implementation of curricular models. The aforementioned curricular models may better produce the desired life skills if the instructor incorporates appropriate sequencing. For example, according to Trent (2007), when implementing the adventure games or cooperative games approach, the teacher should attempt to follow the following order: (1) perform icebreakers (i.e., activities during which individuals become acquainted); (2) lead unorthodox activities (i.e., silly game) to help the group feel comfortable and foster a fun, supportive atmosphere; (3) implement trusting/spotting activities (e.g., trust falls); and (4) perform activities that involve initiatives of life skills (i.e., cooperation, communication, etc.). In addition, the teacher should think of appropriate formal and informal assessment questions that engage the students and increase higher order thinking and transference into everyday life. Also, the teacher should consider developing a philosophy that focuses on enriching the development of the whole child.

In the PE setting, a teacher could place students into leadership roles or allow peer teaching of skills to ensure that they are intentionally impacting the affective learning domain (Gould & Voelker, 2012). PE teachers should always be observant of appropriate behavior and provide positive feedback and reinforcement when it occurs. In addition, teachers should take advantage of teachable moments and model appropriate life skills (Gould & Voelker, 2012).

It is important to remember that sometimes children gain more from these curricular models by contributing an idea or when their group listens to them. This may entail the teacher acting more as a facilitator through taking a less authoritative role. Additionally, chil-

dren that are oftentimes more physically skilled may find themselves in roles that they are unfamiliar within these curricular models and may call on their teammates for help. It is possible for these students to grow by simply experiencing the process of team building.

A Practitioner's Case Study: Implementing Cooperative Games in Second Grade PE

The second author is a master's of arts in PE student who put these strategies to practical use during a field experience in an elementary PE methods course. The following is a description of how he introduced a six-lesson cooperative games unit to a second grade class. Of the 18 students, only 14 completed the pre- and postassessment. Of the 14 students, five were ESOL (English to speakers of other languages) students. The class was from an urban Title I school located in South Carolina. This school is the poorest within the district, with 85% of the students eligible for free or reduced lunch.

The focus of the unit was life skill development through cooperative games. Sample lesson content, sequencing, and affective assessments are provided, along with pre- and posttest data. Table 6 shows the block plan that was used to instruct the class. The Society of Health and Physical Educators (SHAPE America, 2014) national K–12 physical education standards state that "the physically literate individual exhibits responsible personal and social behavior that respects self and others" (p. 12). Related to this standard, the block plan had four specific affective aims: *By the end of the unit, the student will be able to* (1) show that they can work cooperatively with others to complete assigned PE tasks, (2) show that they can treat others with respect during physical activities, (3) demonstrate a willingness to share equipment with everyone in the group, and (4) demonstrate safe play and control during physical activities.

To assess and determine if the learning outcomes of the unit were met, the instructor gave the same pre- and posttest self-evaluation to the students. Table 7 shows the affective self-assessment that was used, which was adapted from Spark (2009). The students ranked themselves honestly in six affective categories (compliments others, shows concern for others' feelings, works with others toward a common goal, shares equipment with others, plays safely and under control, and listens to instructions). They gave each category a numerical value with 5 being *all of the time,* 3 being *most of the time,* and 1 being *some of the time.*

Table 6
Practitioner's Block Plan

DAY 1	DAY 2
Focus: Spatial awareness and cooperative games introduction **Instant Activity:** Dynamic warm-up **Learning Experiences:** 1. Snowball fight (Multimedia A, 2011) 2. Make the shape (Vasily, 2012) 3. Over under (Gates, 2008) **Preassessment:** Affective student self-assessment (see Table 7)	**Focus:** Levels and pathways **Instant Activity:** Line tag (PHYSEDGAMES, n.d.-b) **Learning Experiences:** 1. Traveling with a partner in a Hula-Hoop to gather objects and complete various fitness challenges **Assessment:** Exit slip (teamwork, communication)
DAY 3	**DAY 4**
Focus: Pathways **Instant Activity:** Fitness square **Learning Experiences:** 1. Hula-Hoop elimination (Freeman-Loftis, 2010) 2. Triangle tag (Bell, 2001) **Assessment:** Teacher questioning (teamwork game strategies)	**Focus:** Pathways **Instant Activity:** Dynamic warm-up **Learning Experiences:** 1. Frogs and ants (Weiss, 2001) 2. Team collection relay **Assessment:** Teacher questioning (complimenting others)
DAY 5	**DAY 6**
Focus: Pathways **Instant Activity:** Line tag **Learning Experiences:** 1. Team memory (PHYSEDGAMES, n.d.-c) **Assessment:** Teacher checklist (effort, respect, positive language)	**Focus:** Relationships with objects and people **Instant Activity:** Get your trash off my yard (Decker, 2001) **Learning Experiences:** 1. Critter dash (PHYSEDGAMES, n.d.-a) 2. Pass the Hula-Hoop (Freeman-Loftis, 2010) **Postassessment:** Same as Day 1

Table 7
Affective Student Self-Assessment

Category	All of the time (5)	Most of the time (3)	Some of the time (1)
I listened to instructions.			
I played safely and under control.			
I shared equipment with others			
I worked with others toward a common goal.			
I showed concern for others' feelings.			
I complimented others.			

Note. Adapted from Cooperative All-Star Self-Check, by Spark, 2009 (http://www.sparkpe.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/Cooperative_Assessments.pdf).

Table 8 shows the pre- and posttest results for the class. There was improvement in all of the assessment categories across the class (76.3% increase), along with improvement in individual student scores in all cases except for one (i.e., Student 10). In addition, there was an overall positive self-reported development in each category, with the largest improvement being made in the students' ability to compliment others (62.5% increase). Although there are obvious drawbacks to utilizing self-report assessments (i.e., the students may not be truthful), and although it is undetermined if these effects will last, the data show that the cooperative games unit led to improvements in each of the categories. It appeared that direct instruction in an effort to have the students compliment each other and work collaboratively during the activities led to large improvement spikes in the "compliment others" and "work with others toward a common goal" categories.

Practitioner's Reflection

With the completion of this unit, many thoughts come to mind. Many PE units tend to be seasonal, meaning that they often correspond with a particular activity or sport that students can participate in outside of class at that time (e.g., basketball during winter). This cooperative games unit did not relate to any particular seasonal

Table 8
Pre–Post Affective Self-Assessment Results (n = 14)

	Listen to instructions		Play safely and under control		Share equipment with others		Work with others toward a common goal		Show concern for others feelings		Compliment others		Student totals	
Student	**Pre**	**Post**	**Pre**	**Post**	**Pre**	**Post**	**Pre**	**Post**	**Pre**	**Post**	**Pre**	**Post**	**Pre**	**Post**
1	1	5	5	5	5	5	1	5	1	5	5	5	**18**	**30**
2	5	5	1	1	3	3	1	1	5	5	3	5	**18**	**20**
3	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	**30**	**30**
4	3	5	1	5	5	5	3	5	1	5	5	5	**18**	**30**
5	3	5	5	5	5	5	1	3	5	5	3	5	**22**	**28**
6	3	5	1	3	5	5	3	1	5	5	1	5	**18**	**24**
7	5	5	3	5	5	5	5	3	1	5	5	5	**24**	**28**
8	5	5	5	5	5	5	3	3	5	5	1	5	**24**	**26**
9	3	3	5	5	5	5	3	3	5	5	5	3	**26**	**26**
10	3	3	5	5	5	5	3	3	5	3	3	5	**24**	**22**
11	1	1	1	3	1	3	1	5	1	1	1	3	**6**	**18**
12	3	1	3	3	1	5	1	5	1	1	1	5	**10**	**18**
13	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	1	3	**26**	**30**
14	1	5	1	1	1	5	1	5	1	3	1	5	**6**	**24**
Class Totals	**46**	**58**	**46**	**56**	**56**	**66**	**36**	**52**	**46**	**58**	**40**	**64**	**270**	**354**

sport. However, because cooperation and team-building activities can embody every sport, the prime time to incorporate this unit may be at the beginning of the school year. If done at this time, it sets a tone for student interaction, student conduct, and self-efficacy for the rest of the year.

The focus of the unit activities was to help students develop group cooperation, trust, communication, and problem-solving skills. Throughout the activities, the students enhanced their personal development and were challenged as individuals to face their own perceived limitations. Students exhibited teamwork by working, playing, and accomplishing goals together. This was a lot harder to achieve than it first appeared.

An instructor must be able to gauge the interest level of the class for these activities. Students may become disinterested if activities are not physically taxing and rely heavily on complex problem solving. Students who are used to more PA during PE may become anxious. Remember that students are still in need of getting the recommended amount of PA during a lesson. SHAPE America (2015) asserts that a PE teacher should engage students in moderate to vigorous PA during at least 50% of class time. Instant physical activities such as tagging games at the beginning of the lesson help to ensure that those standards are being met. Finally, the teacher should be enthusiastic and define the importance of the unit to help students "buy in" to what is being taught.

Conclusion

Building life skills is particularly important for students of low SES. PE provides fertile ground to develop life skills in this population. Through participation in sport, young people can learn key values such as honesty, teamwork, fair play, respect for themselves and others, and adherence to rules (Ewing et al., 2002). Intentional teaching of life skills in PE may have a positive effect not only on how students behave in sports and games, but also on how they carry themselves in their community. Life skill development in PE may lead to positive affective learning that may pay dividends that last a lifetime.

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