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## ORIGINAL

### BEHAVIOURS THAT DISTURB THE EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION CLASSES

### LAS CONDUCTAS QUE ALTERAN LA CONVIVENCIA EN LAS CLASES DE EDUCACIÓN FÍSICA

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#### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper was to identify and compare the perception of those behaviours that disturb the environment in physical education classes among students and teachers in the province of Toledo. For this, 86 teachers and 447 students in compulsory secondary education completed the Spanish adaptation of a survey that describes 59 misbehaviours which may arise in classes from the mildest to the most serious. The analysis of variance of the results suggests clear discrepancies in the perception of students and teachers regarding the frequency with which the two groups identify misbehaviour in class. The

descriptive findings also reveal that "distracting or disturbing others" dominates the learning environment in class, and that both groups identify mild and moderate misbehaviour as the most frequent form of bad behaviour in class.

**KEY WORDS:** Physical education, misbehaviour, perception, educational environment, secondary education

## RESUMEN

El objetivo de este artículo es identificar y comparar la percepción de las conductas que alteran la convivencia en las clases de educación física entre alumnado y profesorado de la provincia de Toledo. Para ello 86 docentes y 447 discentes de educación secundaria obligatoria participaron en el estudio y completaron la adaptación española de un instrumento que describe 59 conductas inadecuadas que pueden surgir en las clases, desde las más leves hasta las más graves. Los resultados sugieren que existe desacuerdo entre la percepción de alumnado y profesorado en cuanto a la frecuencia con la que se identifican las conductas de indisciplina en el transcurso de las clases. Los descriptivos revelan también que las conductas disruptivas, presiden el ambiente de aprendizaje en las clases, y las conductas de indisciplina leves y moderadas se perciben como las que se producen con más frecuencia en las sesiones.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Educación física, disciplina, percepción, enseñanza secundaria, ambiente escolar.

## INTRODUCTION

Disciplinary problems, currently known as 'problems in the educational environment', include various behaviours that can have different origins, aspects, and consequences. Their most salient feature is the fact that they destabilise the daily educational environment in the classroom, obstructing, or even preventing teachers from achieving the learning and teaching goals sought through the educational process.

The control of misbehaviours has traditionally been linked to authoritarian models, technological educational paradigms, and behaviourist psychological models. Currently, it is linked to a dynamic discipline concept which highlights the positive, instrumental, and functional nature of this school discipline; therefore, its main purpose is to create the most favourable conditions for optimising the learning processes, for the students' personal development, and for improving relationships among teachers and students.

These problems occur in physical education (PE) classes in similar proportions to other subjects (Siedentop, 1991; White & Bailey 1990), despite the fact that they take place in a more open, less structured atmosphere and that they involve a high level of interaction between teachers and students (Larson &

Silverman, 2005). Misbehaviour in PE classes causes serious problems as it prevents the functioning of the class, reduces student learning times, and distracts the teacher (Del Villar, 2001; Fernández-Balboa, 1990), and it may cause teacher stress, burnout, and dissatisfaction (Fejgin, Talmor & Erlich, 2005).

In the area of physical education, studies about behavioural problems were initially descriptive (Lavay, 1986; Vogler, Fenstermacher & Bishop, 1982), and they focused specifically on controlling behaviour in therapeutical programmes for special physical education (Funabiki, Edney & Myers, 1982; Vogler & French, 1983).

Later, there was more in-depth research on disciplinary problems by presenting different strategies for the control of inappropriate behaviour and conflict resolution in PE classes. Additionally, both origin and cause were analysed, as well as the factors that lead to their emergence, keeping as a frame of reference the different disciplinary classifications, from behaviourist models (Downing, Keating & Bennett, 2005; Johnson, 1999), ecological models (Goyette, Dore & Dion, 2000; Supaporn, Dodd & Griffin, 2003), models based on personal and social responsibility (Hellison, 1995; Ennins, 1999), and the application of achievement goal theory to explain inappropriate behaviours in students (Spray & Wang, 2001; Moreno, Alonso, Martínez & Cervelló, 2005).

On the other hand, studies concerning disciplinary problems in general education and especially in physical education settings, look deeper at the different kinds of misbehaviour arising in the sessions from the point of view of those involved with these problems in the educational process (McCormack, 1997; Johnson & Fullwood, 2006), and they make a list of the types of behaviour within categories that fit into different classifying criteria.

Pieron (1999) divides conflictive behaviour into four categories: task-related, teacher-related, classmate-related, and exempt student-related. Other classifications respond to the severity of their nature (Vogler & Bishop, 1990; Kulinna, Cohtran & Regualos, 2003) or to the degree of disturbance they provoke in class (Goyette, Dore & Dion, 2000). Some studies have focused on the perception of the teachers (Kulinna, Cohtran & Regualos 2006). These authors establish the kinds of conflictive behaviour perceived by the teacher and they group them into aggressive behaviour, illegal or harmful behaviour, low engagement, fails to follow direction, poor self management, complaints, disrespect and not following instructions.

Despite the many classifications, it is demonstrated that researchers always refer to the same kinds of behaviour. Nevertheless, each teacher has a different view of the line that separates inappropriate and tolerable behaviour as well as a different level of tolerance towards aberrant behaviour; thus, differences have been detected in the perception of behaviour problems, according to different variables affecting teachers. (Siedentop, 1998:145).

A more in-depth evaluation of the points of agreement and discrepancy between teachers and students has been done (Cothran & Ennis, 1997; Cothran & Kulinna, 2007; Supaporn *et al.*, 2003), both quantitatively and qualitatively, and differences have been found both in behaviour identification and in the strategies that teachers and students perceive and apply for their control. Teachers insist on the presence of some behaviour which disturbs the class environment which is not recognized by the students, and, in other cases, these kinds of behaviour take place when the teachers are absent or simply when the students try to hide their behaviour from the teachers (Hastie & Siedentop, 1999).

The way teachers and students perceive and represent disciplinary problems is one of the clues to explaining the real meaning of discipline and how it is applied in the classroom (Gotzen, 2006). This way, the analysis of the perceptions of both groups can solve one of the first questions that is posed when facing the conflicts that emerge in PE classes: which behaviours are regarded as inappropriate and how often they are perceived by teachers and students, which is the first step to react in a proper, coherent way to that kind of behaviour. This way, we will be able to adopt a consensus about what we consider tolerable behaviour, and to the possible measures which can be adopted, so as to contribute to the improvement in the teacher's skills concerning classroom management.

Ultimately, a better understanding of the perception that both teachers and students have about misbehaviour in the classroom will lead to more effective ways to maintain control and discipline in educational settings (Ishee, 2004). Discrepancies between teacher and student perceptions are a valid explanation for disciplinary problems and underscore the need for studies such as this one as a prerequisite for diagnosing situations in PE classes.

## Objective

The purpose of this survey is to analyse the frequency of inappropriate behaviours that teachers and students perceive in physical education class. The comparison between the perceptions of students and teachers will provide information on the current Spanish educational situation, which is an essential prerequisite for future interventions.

## METHOD

### *Sample and procedure*

The sample of this study was taken from a population of state-funded secondary school students and teachers in the province of Toledo. The teachers' sample consisted of 86 (N=86) participants, including both male (n=65) and female (n=21) physical education teachers. Participants were

chosen from selected schools to ensure a significant, stratified cross-sample. The student sample consisted of 447 participants (N=447), 218 male students and 229 female students in the province of Toledo, who were enrolled in compulsory secondary education (110 in their first year; 124 in their second year; 108 in their third year and 105 in their fourth year). Students were between the ages of 12 and 16 years ( $M=14.27$   $SD=1.61$ ). Selected schools were contacted through the headmaster's office and the physical education department chair.

Required consent was given to develop research. The questionnaires were administered and analysed by using version 15.0 of the statistical software package SPSS.

### *Instrument*

The Spanish cross-cultural adaptation of the 'Physical education classroom management instrument' was used (Díaz & Esteban, 2010) following the protocols established by Carretero-Dios and Pérez (2007). This questionnaire was developed to identify the perceptions of inappropriate behaviours in students both from their point of view (Kulinna *et al.*, 2003) and from their teachers' (Kulinna *et al.*, 2006). The Spanish adaptation of this instrument consists of 59 items distributed into 6 scales ('aggressive', 'low engagement or irresponsibility', 'illegal or harmful behaviour', 'fails to follow directions', 'distracts or disturbs others', and 'poor self management'), which reflect inappropriate behaviours that may be seen in PE classes. Teachers and students were asked to note down the frequency with which they perceived these behaviours in PE class, employing a Likert-type scale with scoring range from one (never) to five (always). Cronbach's alpha was calculated for the sample and a total reliability score of 0.95 was found, with the following values for each individual scale: 'aggressive': 0.91, 'low engagement or irresponsibility': 0.88, 'fails to follow directions': 0.82, 'illegal or harmful behaviour': 0.74, 'distract or disturb others': 0.71, and 'poor self management': 0.58.

## **RESULTS**

### *Data analysis*

Analyses of normality and homoscedasticity were done to test the suitability of using analysis of variance in the different variables in the study. The corresponding analyses of variance were carried out in order to compare perceptions of teachers and students to each behaviour described in the questionnaire, their frequency, and degree.

### *Comparison between the perceptions of behaviours by students and teachers.*

The results obtained when comparing the behaviours perceived by teachers and students show a clear discrepancy between the two samples. The analysis

of variance reveals significant differences in the perception of all the scales measured in this instrument (aggressive:  $F=9.62$   $p<.01$ ; low engagement or irresponsibility:  $F= 34.36$ ,  $p<.001$ ; fails to follow directions:  $F=31.09$ ,  $p<.001$ ; distracts or disturbs others,  $F=9.43$ ,  $p<.01$ ; poor self-management:  $F=51.56$ ,  $p<.001$ ), with the exception of 'illegal or harmful behaviour' ( $F= 2.31$ ,  $p<.05$ ) (Table I).

**Table I.** Factors in which behaviours are grouped. ANOVA, mean and standard deviation for teachers and students.

	F	Sig.	M teachers	SD	M students	SD
Aggressive **	9.62	.002	2.22	.42	1.97	.74
Low engagement or irresponsibility ***	34.36	.000	2.71	.52	2.20	.77
Fails to follow directions ***	31.09	.000	2.72	.58	2.24	.75
Illegal or harmful behaviour	2.31	.129	1.39	.32	1.52	.57
Distracts or disturbs others **	9.43	.002	3.19	.50	2.93	.81
Poor self-management ***	51.56	.000	2.52	.47	1.93	.79

$p<0.001$ \*\*\*

$p<0.01$ \*\*

$p<0.05$ \*

Also, among the five most common behaviours perceived by students and teachers there are only two that coincide — 'talking' and 'forms cliques'. When comparing the behaviours viewed as less common in class, the results indicate that teachers and students coincide in four of the five least common behaviours, with a lack of agreement for behaviours such as 'drug use' and 'displaying gang symbols' in which teacher and student results differ (Table II).

**Table II.** Comparison of the five most and least common behaviours identified by teachers and students

Most common behaviours			Least common behaviours		
Students		Teachers	Students		Teachers
Talks	1st	Talks	Brings weapons to class	1st	Sexual harassment
Laughs	2nd	Does not pay attention	Drug use	2nd	Does not participate because of pregnancy
Forms cliques	3rd	Forms cliques	Does not participate because of pregnancy	3rd	Brings weapons to class
Gum chewing	4th	Whines	Sexual harassment	4th	Smokes
Tattles	5th	Gum chewing	Smokes	5th	Displays gang symbols

The teachers observe all behaviours listed in the questionnaire more often except for 'bringing weapons to class', 'sexual harassment', 'displaying gang symbols', and 'smoking', with statistically significant differences in 42 of the 59 behaviours described in the questionnaire. The discrepancy between the perceptions of teachers and students with regard to the frequency of occurrence in PE classes is manifested in behaviours such as being 'lazy' ( $F= 23.77$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), 'not paying attention' ( $F= 47.75$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), 'not following directions' ( $F= 45.96$   $p<0.001$ ), 'late assignments' ( $F= 27.87$   $p<0.001$ ). As far as the 11 behaviours that are considered serious are concerned, there are statistically significant differences in the perception of students and teachers in the items 'fighting' ( $F= 5.42$   $p<0.05$ ), and 'bullying' ( $F= 9.48$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), which the teachers observe more often than students (Table III).

**Table III.** Perceptions by teachers and students (ANOVA).

ANOVA	ANOVA		M		M	
	F	SIG.	TEACHER	SD	STUDENT	SD
Swearing/cursing **	18.24	.000	3.17	.75	2.66	1.07
Fighting *	5.42	.020	1.87	.71	1.65	.81
Misses/late for class **	7.12	.008	2.92	.93	2.58	1.11
Smoking*	5.32	.021	1.23	.54	1.53	1.15
Bullying**	9.48	.002	1.53	.73	1.36	.70
Arguing**	14.20	.000	1.81	.74	1.51	.86
Forgetting gym clothes**	7.11	.008	2.92	.72	2.44	1.13
Interrupting**	10.08	.002	2.59	.88	2.26	1.10
Does not pay attention***	47.75	.000	3.07	.79	2.64	1.19
Does not take care of equipment**	8.74	.003	3.42	.77	2.55	1.11
Does not follow directions***	45.96	.000	2.58	.81	2.20	1.14
Lies***	13.70	.000	2.91	.74	2.13	1.00
Brings weapons to class**	7.76	.006	2.64	.75	2.14	1.21
Temper tantrums***	12.31	.000	1.08	.38	1.33	.79
Showing off***	21.16	.000	2.23	.58	1.83	1.03
Poor self image***	60.51	.000	2.67	.74	2.05	1.21
Makes funs of another student*	5.91	.015	2.83	.68	1.90	1.06
Pretends to be sick**	11.24	.001	2.88	.82	2.54	1.23
Acts shy and withdrawn***	13.25	.000	3.35	.71	3.02	1.34
Always asks to have instructions repeated**	10.62	.001	2.75	.68	2.27	1.19
Clings to teacher***	14.71	.000	2.59	.77	2.18	1.11
Does not participate**	5.00	.026	2.64	.70	2.14	1.87
Late assignments***	27.84	.000	2.47	.79	2.17	1.19
Leaving the group during activity**	6.70	.010	2.28	.71	1.98	1.04
Cheating***	16.35	.000	2.59	.72	2.07	1.14
Whining***	13.13	.000	3.32	.77	2.56	1.90
Displays gang symbols***	13.59	.000	1.33	.56	1.81	1.18
Using menstrual period to not participate***	18.31	.000	2.81	.93	2.17	1.32
Poor sportmanship***	22.88	.000	2.86	.77	2.19	1.23
Sexual harassment**	7.10	.008	1.22	.41	1.52	1.02
Drug use***	14.19	.000	1.09	.29	1.53	1.05
Lazy***	23.77	.000	3.20	.79	2.48	1.31
Attention-seeking***	31.32	.000	3.05	.77	2.25	1.26
Keeps others from working***	13.15	.000	2.55	.83	2.07	1.18
Talks back**	7.83	.005	2.51	.70	2.13	1.18
Dirty gym clothes***	13.12	.000	2.09	.70	1.66	1.06

p<0.001\*\*\*

p<0.01\*\*

p<0.05\*

## DISCUSSION

The behaviours perceived in PE classes do not appear to differentiate from those found in surveys of behaviours identified in classrooms (Borg, 1998; Borg & Falzon, 1990; Wheldall & Merrett, 1988) and in PE classes (Cothran & Kulinna, 2007; McCormark, 1997; Supaporn, 2000; Vogler & Bishop, 1990). On the other hand, the survey by Houghton, Wheldall and Merrett (1988) that found that physical education and art teachers reported few management and control problems in their classes.

The search for similar and different elements regarding disciplinary problems in the international arena may contribute to the understanding of the factors causing or preventing their emergence and to the design of strategies based on the prevention of these problems, which are within the task development of every teacher.

'Talking' is considered by both students and teachers as the most common misbehaviour in class. Kiriaco and Humphrey (1988) obtained similar results and pointed out that behaviours under the 'distracts or disturbs others' dominated teachers' perceptions of class problems. Anderson and Merret (1997) arrived at the same conclusion in their survey about teachers' perceptions in British schools: 'talking out of turn' was considered the most disruptive behaviour by teachers. This result coincides with the studies carried out by McCormark (1997), Kulinna et al., (2006), Cothran and Kulinna (2007), and Pieron and Emont (1988), in which such behaviour was the most often reported in PE classes.

When comparing the results obtained from teachers and students, discrepancies are found. The results indicate that students perceived moderate and mild misbehaviour with high frequency though with significantly lower frequency than teachers.

The results are in accordance with the Spanish Ombudsman's Reports (2000, 2007) on violence in secondary schools, as well as with other authors (McCormark, 1997; Kulinna *et al.*, 2006; Supaporn *et al.*, 2003; Cothran & Kulinna, 2007) in which moderate and mild misbehaviour rules the learning environment in PE classes. We note that students perceived all inappropriate behaviours described in the questionnaire less often than teachers (except for 'smoking', 'sexual harassment', and 'displaying gang symbols') and these results coincide with those found in previous studies (Badía, 2002; Gotzen, Castelló, Genovard & Badía, 2003, Kulinna *et al.*, 2003, Kulinna *et al.*, 2006; Psûnder, 2005), where the discrepancy between teachers and students was noteworthy.

The results also show that some misbehaviour that is classified as serious are not perceived by teachers. These are the only items that are reported more often by students than by teachers. This serious misbehaviour includes 'smoking' ( $M=1.51$ ;  $M=1.28$ ), 'displaying gang symbols' ( $M=1.81$ ;  $M=1.46$ ) and 'sexual harassment' ( $M=1.52$ ;  $M=1.15$ ). The relative infrequency of more

serious behaviours ( $M=1.88$   $SD=1.10$  students;  $M=2.15$   $SD=0.97$  teachers) is in contrast with the importance given to them by the media and the social alarm they generate. The results would be in line with those of the Spanish Ombudsman's Report (2007) that shows that the frequency of occurrence reported by directors of studies is similar to the statements of witnesses of abuse.

An analysis of the cases reveals that students perceived situations of 'sexual harassment' as occurring "always" or "frequently" among peers, which means that a higher percentage of students ( $M=1.52$   $SD=0.41$ ) than teachers ( $M=1.22$   $SD=1.02$ ) observe these situations, whereas the latter rarely or never observe this behaviour. In this sense, the ability of certain students to hide certain behaviours from teachers should be highlighted (Hastie & Siedentop, 1999; Tousignant & Siedentop, 1983).

With regard to the identification of the different behaviours, the analysis of the data shows that, although there is no clear level of agreement when it comes to identifying the most common and uncommon individual behaviours in class, both students ( $M=2.93$ ) and teachers ( $M=3.37$ ) coincided in generically identifying that 'distracts or disturbs others' rule the learning environment of the class, followed by 'fails to follow directions' ( $M=2.24$ ;  $M=2.95$ ) and 'low engagement or irresponsibility' ( $M=2.20$ ;  $M=2.85$ ). In last place was 'illegal or harmful behaviour', identified as such by both students ( $M=1.52$ ) and teachers ( $M=1.50$ ).

## CONCLUSIONS

Both teachers and students identify all of the behaviours described, from the mildest to the most serious, as having occurred at some point of their experience.

The discrepancy between the perceptions of teachers and students is seen. Students appear not to recognise behaviours that disturb the normal classroom environment as problematic, particularly those behaviours that affect their responsibility as students. They also report a lower incidence of those behaviours that systematically break the teaching-learning process, preventing them from reaching proposed educational goals, with academic consequences affecting the school performance of all students as well as teachers' professional self-esteem. Results seem to show that students do not identify some behaviours as inappropriate or do not consider that their acts can be reproached, which can be explained, in some cases, as a consequence of their misconception about PE classes.

On the other hand, the subtle disagreement in the identification of different behaviours which are considered serious and which the students identify more frequently, mean that strategies have to be proposed to identify these behaviours in class. Nevertheless, the relative infrequency with which these

behaviours are perceived in class demonstrates that, often, news media have overstated the problem, creating social alarm, although this does not seem to coincide with the reality faced every day by students and teachers in schools. Currently, the Spanish education law is seeking: the implementation of action protocols against mistreatment among peers, teacher and student awareness of the severity of these behaviours, the need to take action regarding them, and the creation of committees and educational environment plans for all schools. These measures may have contributed to the low frequency of the kind of behaviour found in this survey, compared to the results obtained by Kulinna *et al.* (2006) and Cothran and Kulinna (2007), in which the frequency with which students and teachers identified these behaviours was far higher.

To conclude, these results demonstrate that students and teachers do not interpret what happens in class in the same way. If the teaching-learning process is truly understood as an interaction between those who participate in it, the discrepancies found in this survey in the way that reality is understood by participants could constitute an explanation of some of the problems that are observed on a daily basis. On the other hand, the results offer a area of work in which the goal would be to achieve not only higher levels of discipline in the classrooms but also to establish higher levels of consistency among what is identified by the different parties involved. It would also include establishing the basis for further intervention, as it is not possible to begin improvement processes if there is no consensus among participants regarding behaviours that disrupt the normal learning process; this would be the starting point for a successful and, specifically, preventative intervention in accordance with the current concept of dynamic discipline.

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