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Brain Blasters: A Pilot Study Designed To Enhance the

Utilization Of Classroom Physical Activity

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Abstract

Utilizing classroom physical activity (PA) resources is one method to increase PA and has been found to improve on-task behavior as well as academic performance. Based on surveys/interviews with teachers in the Omaha metro a pilot program entitled “Brain Blasters” was developed. The program focused on increasing teachers’ knowledge of classroom PA resources and ways to overcome reported barriers for utilizing PA in their classrooms. The pilot was executed in two elementary classrooms in the Omaha metro area. The pilot consisted of identifying a PA champion within each school to promote the program, conducting a 45-minute training, sending weekly resource e-mails and providing resources in teachers’ school mailboxes. The evaluation consisted of quantitative and qualitative measures. Results found teachers had a positive view of the project and the majority found the resources to be helpful. Future classroom PA promotion efforts should work with school personnel to identify the best methods for delivering resources to each particular school.

Introduction

Individual classroom PA resources have shown to be effective in improving on-task behavior, academic outcomes, and overall PA in elementary aged children. However, teachers may not be aware of the numerous free or low-cost resources available. Given teachers report time as a barrier to implementing and learning about classroom PA, gaining an understanding of how to best promote these resources could increase teachers’ knowledge and improve their utilization of classroom PA. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to develop a program to enhance the use of classroom PA.

Methods

- The pilot was developed based on survey/interview feedback from area teachers in five school districts.
- The pilot was tested in two elementary schools in the Omaha metro area.
- The pilot involved identifying a PA champion, conducting a 45-minute training, and providing classroom PA resources.

Methods Continued

- After the pilot’s completion all teachers (n=16) participated in a follow-up evaluation survey and a sample of teachers (n=6) took part in a brief follow-up interview.
- Resources included weekly e-mails highlighting the latest research and recommendations surrounding PA implementation, classroom mailbox “resources of the week”, videos of surrounding area teachers implementing classroom PA, infographics highlighting key research at the local and national level, and weekly updates on a Facebook page.

Results

Results of the follow-up evaluation survey are provided in Table 1. A majority (81.3%) noted the weekly emails (81.3%), mailbox materials (73.3%), and videos (68.8%) were useful. A third of the teachers though stated time inhibited their ability to either view or utilize them. When asked what the most effective Brain Blaster resource was, 50% answered “GoNoodle” (online short interactive activities). One teacher noted, “I’ve had GoNoodle since last year but...I just used it off and on...I’m using it more this year, especially since we did this project.” When asked which method of receiving resources was most useful answers varied. The top method was the videos (37.5%) followed by the e-mails (32%) and receiving resources in their mailbox (25% each). Three teachers reported they did not use any of the resources due to lack of time. When comparing survey results between schools, school #1 felt videos, e-mails, and mailbox resources were equally effective; however, school#2 felt the videos were most effective.

Table 1. Survey Results

I found this resource effective..	n	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree
E-mails	16	81.3%	18.7%	
Facebook page	16	18.7%	68.8%	12.5%
Brain Blaster of the Week Videos	15	68.8%	31.2%	
Mailbox resources	15	73.3%	26.7%	

Six teachers took part in a follow-up interview. All teachers noted some degree of improvement in their use of classroom PA during the project. When asked about the barriers to implementing classroom PA all six teachers agreed that lack of time kept them from being able to utilize the weekly resources as effectively as they might have liked to.

Results Continued

One teacher commented,
There is just so much, and I just don’t think about it. Ya know, you are so busy teaching and unless purposefully maybe putting it into your plans that “I need to take a break right now”, you’re going to forget.

Another teacher expressed how she overcame the barrier of time:
...well I really like when it fits into my curriculum...like now I’ve got some videos of kids dancing, but, at the same time they’re . skip counting by eights, so they’ve got the skips counts and they’re dancing with it and so they’re getting all the movement, the activity, and it’s just reinforcing multiplication tables and division tables by eight.

Interestingly, one teacher noted she would like to feel more support from district administration regarding classroom PA.
You know principals, it’s a trickle-down effect, they are put under a lot of pressure by their bosses...and then all that pressure comes down to us. And so, if we could get support from you know your superintendents and your curriculum writers, to see the value in it, I think that would be powerful.

Discussion

Overall, the post program surveys and interviews showed that a majority of teachers had a positive view of the project and felt the resources were useful. The best method for disseminating resources though was unclear. When looking at results by school, responses within school #1 differed between videos, e-mails, and mailbox resources but at school #2 teachers primarily thought the videos were the most useful. Importantly, few people perceived the Facebook page as useful. It appears the best method for sharing existing resources varies. Future classroom PA promotion efforts should work with school personnel to identify the best method for delivering resources for each particular school.

