



The TARGET Approach to Motivating Students

An Introduction

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Few physical education teachers would claim they did not want their students to be successful; the inherent goal of all effective teachers is to promote success. Unfortunately, even the most effective teacher can fail to achieve this goal. Often this scenario is attributed to a students' lack of motivation, and frequently this is accurate. As a result, researchers have begun to determine those factors that increase student motivation and learning in physical education.

Over the last decade, researchers in physical education have turned to several theories to address these motivation concerns. Although several theories have been explored, Achievement Goal Theory (Nicholls, 1984) has emerged as a prominent theory for effective interventions in fostering student motivation. Therefore, the purpose of this feature introduction is to introduce achievement goal theory to teachers, describe teaching methods based on achievement goal theory, and to briefly describe potential concerns teachers face when establishing a task-involved motivational climate.

Achievement Goal Theory

Classroom researchers have used achievement goal theory for investigating student motivation for more than two decades (e.g., Ames & Archer, 1988; Nicholls 1984, 1989), and more recently in physical education (e.g., Solmon, 1996; Treasure, 1997). Although the roots of achievement goal theory can be traced over several decades, Nicholls work (1984, 1989) advanced the theory toward educational researchers. According to Nicholls (1989), achievement goal orientations are determined by how individuals conceive the concepts of effort and ability. While most adults can easily define the difference between effort and ability, perceptions of success during achievement settings (e.g., sport or physical education classrooms) can connect or separate these two concepts. Whether an individual mentally connects effort and ability,



or separates them during achievement settings, will determine whether a *task* or *ego* orientation is adopted.

Task-Orientation

Some students in physical education will judge their ability to perform in a self-referenced manner, hence maintaining their perspective that effort and ability are connected (Nicholls & Miller, 1984). These individuals are described as being task-oriented. Students that have this conception of ability and effort tend to feel successful when they give more effort toward performance. Moreover, these individuals tend to pursue more challenging tasks, as easily performed tasks are perceived as less beneficial toward skill improvement, performance, or overall ability (Jagacinski & Nicholls, 1987). It has also been shown that individuals with a task-orientation adopt deep learning strategies (Nolen, 1988), increase persistence at a task (Elliot & Dweck, 1988), and have a preference for challenging tasks (Ames & Archer, 1988) while involved in achievement settings.

Ego-Orientation

In contrast to task-oriented students, individuals with ego-orientations become self-consciously concerned with displaying ability and do not recognize a strong

relationship between effort and ability. Thus, ego-oriented students often perceive themselves as less capable when more effort is required to reach competence levels others have attained (Jagacinski & Nicholls, 1987). As a result, ego-oriented individuals tend to compare themselves in performance, determining their success relative to others' achievements at the task. Further, individuals with an ego-orientation usually exhibit poor behaviors in the classroom, experiencing negative feelings when not quickly successful (Jagacinski & Nicholls, 1987), avoid challenging tasks, and fail to persist as long as task-oriented students (Elliot & Dweck, 1988).

Motivational Climates

While achievement goal theory describes why students might perform a certain way in physical education, it was not until Ames (1992a, 1992b) completed work on the development of motivational climates that achievement goal theory was very useful for most teachers. Ames' (1992a, 1992b) work, however, has now given us a clear strategy for influencing student motivation in physical education.

Ames (1992a, 1992b) claimed that motivational climates focusing on self-improvement and skill learning foster a task-orientation. Motivational climates

TABLE 1—TARGET Principles Used to Create Task- or Ego Involving Motivational Climates

TARGET Component	Task-Involving	Ego-Involving
Task	Students are given different tasks and assignments to complete. They may set their own short-term realistic goals.	All students attempt the same task and focus on the same assignment. The instructor determines the goals for the students.
Authority	Students choose the task they want to complete, are given the opportunity to set up their own equipment or tests, and are allowed to monitor and evaluate their own performance.	The instructor makes all decisions about what the student will learn, sets up all the equipment and tasks, and performs all student evaluations.
Rewards	Recognition of progress/accomplishment is kept private between instructor and student. Students have equal opportunity to receive rewards that are focused on each student's self-worth.	Recognition of student progress/accomplishment is made public, and rewards are given for superior performances.
Grouping	Students work on individual tasks or in small cooperative groups. Grouping is flexible and heterogeneous.	An entire class or squad works on one task as the students or students are grouped according to their ability.
Evaluation	Evaluation is self-referenced and based on personal improvement. Progress is judged on the basis of individual objectives, participation and effort. Assessment is kept private between instructor and student.	Evaluation is norm-referenced or rank ordered. The instructor makes assessment public and determines the objectives for the student.
Time	Time limits for assignments and improvement are flexible. Students help to schedule timelines for improvement.	The instructor gives strict time limits for all students to complete assignments and established timelines for improvement.

focusing on peer performances and comparisons of others' ability foster an ego-orientation. Moreover, Ames described that what teachers say and do is what creates a more task-involved or ego-involved climate. Working from this perspective, Ames described six factors that teachers have control over when they teach: (a) the *task* they ask their students to perform, (b) the amount of *authority* they allow their students to have, (c) the way *rewards* are given to students, (d) the way students are *grouped*, (e) how students are *evaluated*, and (f) the amount of *time* they allow students to complete a task. The acronym for each of these components is TARGET; the TARGET principles guide the approach in creating motivational climates being task-involving or ego-involving. These climates have been shown to influence student task- or ego-orientations in physical education (e.g., Todorovich & Curtner-Smith, 2002, 2003; Solmon, 1996). Table 1 describes the general principles that teachers use to create task-involving and ego-involving motivational climates using the TARGET approach.

It is important for teachers to know that if they use the TARGET approach, each of the principles should be met. That is, teachers should not develop climates that have partly ego-involving components and partly task-involving components. It is difficult for students to receive enough cues to become task- or ego-oriented if conflicting cues are present within the learning environment.

Teacher Concerns

Although teachers have the ability to develop climates fostering task-involving or ego-involving motivations, a task-involving climate is preferred because of the positive influence on student persistence and learning (e.g., Duda, 1996). Unfortunately, inspection of the principles that teachers use while fostering a task-involving climate may be uncomfortable for some teachers. Due to factors like allowing students to make choices, and latitude toward activity tasks, a loss of control may be perceived. However, the benefits of creating task-involving motivational climates should supercede this fear and make the process and effort worthwhile.

The following articles address some of the major concerns that teachers have expressed with the development of task-involving motivational climates. First, evaluation within a task-involving climate is addressed and teachers are provided with a specific approach, program practice sheets, as a tool for assessing students in this environment. Second, teachers are often concerned about student behavior regardless of the teaching approach used, and teachers new to developing task-involved climates may be particularly concerned about student behavior. Thus, we address the

issue of student behavior by comparing the TARGET principles and behavioral management approaches used in the physical education classroom. Next, safety is a concern of most teachers that precedes most things that teachers do. Many teachers are concerned that when students are allowed more authority that it will increase the likelihood of unsafe behaviors. Hence, the feature includes an article on safety issues pertaining to using the TARGET approach. Finally, physical education has not hidden from the call for school accountability at national and state levels. In response, national and state standards have been written to define what students should know in physical education. Teachers who are diligently working to help their students meet these standards may be reluctant to adopt new teaching approaches. An article addressing state standards through the development of a task-involving motivational climate is presented to help teachers feel confident that task climates will help promote these goals.

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