

Exploring the impact of "option teaching" in physical education on the social skills of youth

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Abstract: *This paper discusses the impact of option teaching on youth social skills in physical education classes and the origin and development of this research. The following conclusions are drawn from the existing practical research and theoretical analysis: (1) option teaching can actively promote the development of students' social skills in physical education courses; (2) in promoting the development of students' social skills, the unique curriculum organization of option teaching increases the mobility among students and implements the "student-centered" concept in physical education courses. (2) In promoting the development of students' social skills, the unique curriculum organization of option teaching increases the mobility among students and implements the concept of "student-centered" in physical education courses, so it has more advantages than other teaching methods and teaching modes.*

Keywords: *option teaching, adolescents, socialization*

1. Origin of the study

Physical activity has been known to promote physical and mental health for a long time, but research targeting adolescents has only gradually entered the limelight since the late 1980s, with school sports being the main site of such research since adolescent children spend most of their learning and life in school. Initial studies focused on the effects of physical activity on mental health, such as Chen Wenjun's view that school sports are an important way to promote students' mental health [1]. And among various types of adolescent mental health problems, the population of autism has grown dramatically worldwide and has become an important obstacle threatening the healthy physical and mental growth of adolescents. Therefore, some scholars since the 21st century have hoped to promote the development of social skills of autistic individuals through physical activity interventions, thus alleviating the harm caused by autism to adolescents. Several studies have shown that children with autism are further disadvantaged by their limited opportunities to participate in physical activities [2]. Dan Yujin studied the communication behaviors of two children with autism in a 6-month sports intervention and found that they both showed significant improvements in their communication behaviors, leading to the conclusion that sports interventions have a facilitative effect on the communication behaviors of some children with autism [3]. It has been suggested that participation in physical activity allows children with autism to experience fun activities with their peers and to develop key interpersonal skills [4]. In addition, some findings suggest that some benefits from physical activity are related to mental and psychological well-being; for example, physical activity improves mental health and allows children with autism to build self-esteem and display positive attitudes [5].

The effectiveness of physical activity interventions on the development of social skills in children with autism and the increasing interest in the coordinated physical and mental development of students along with the progress of society has led researchers to wonder whether physical activity can also affect the social skills of normal adolescents. Aikawa defines socialization as the process of interaction and communication with others in which we use a number of verbal or non-verbal skills to help us understand them and reach potential goals, thus developing many relevant interpersonal behaviors. Throughout the processing, we can also understand and control our emotions, enabling us to interact smoothly and comfortably with anyone on any subject [6]. According to Aikawa's definition it is possible to distill socio-emotional skills as an important factor influencing socialization, and physical activity promotes the expression of this factor in the areas of interpersonal relationships, self-efficacy and emotional control [7, 8], and the positive development of these areas implies an improvement in socio-emotional skills, which, of course, can ultimately be reflected in an improvement in social skills. Thus, many researchers have indirectly discussed the effects of physical activity on social competence through physical activity interventions that monitor variables such as interpersonal relationships, self-efficacy, and emotional

control. For example, gendron administered a questionnaire to 185 adolescents aged 12-14 years, divided into two groups based on the results of the survey, more and less physically active, and compared data on the corresponding performance of social skills between the two groups, finding that students who participated in sports more frequently were more positive in their performance in interpersonal relationships and self-efficacy, supporting the direct correlation between previous physical activity and improved social skills, self-esteem and self-efficacy findings of the study [9]. Another study from Germany conducted a systematic physical activity intervention with preschool children. The study was conducted in three phases, including two quantitative surveys (phase 1 and 2 of the study) and an ethnographic observation (phase 3 of the study), based on a combination of cross-validation and complementation of the generated data, triangulating different methods. The results suggest that a systematic physical activity program can enhance children's self-efficacy, help improve their social skills, and reduce the burden on teachers [10].

However, not all studies support a positive correlation between the two, and some studies also indicate that interpersonal relationships are significantly better among adolescents who engage in lower intensity physical activity than those who engage in moderate to high intensity physical activity, and that physical activity time is negatively correlated with interpersonal relationships [11]. The conclusion may seem abrupt, but there is a validity to it. Considering that a part of negative emotions inevitably occurs during adolescents' participation in physical activities, adolescents' emotion management and regulation abilities are weak, and once they choose the wrong way to vent their negative emotions, the effect on the development of social skills will be counterproductive. The negative emotion factor cannot be ignored in real life, but it has not been given much attention in many studies. Overall, the mainstream research today supports the idea that physical activity promotes social skills development in adolescents. Some researchers hold the preconceived view that there must be a positive correlation between the two, and some studies ignore some important factors in actual research. These research flaws do not greatly affect the rationality of the findings, but largely violate the objective veracity of the experiment. Therefore, these research flaws are urgently needed to be addressed today. Of course more studies are more credible, and the research design and methods are improving day by day, which have reference value for further in-depth research in the future.

2. The introduction of option teaching

Along with the deepening of research, the types and organization of physical activities have been further differentiated. In the soil of school sports, physical education classes are naturally the "main focus" of physical activity research, and on top of that, different types of sports and different modes of teaching physical education classes have been studied. As a result, "option teaching", which promotes student mobility on campus, has successfully attracted the attention of many scholars. As the name implies, "option teaching" can be understood as a form of instructional organization that allows for the selection of programs. There is no clear definition in the academia and school sports field. According to Xiao Jianzhong, option teaching is a form of physical education classroom teaching that breaks the boundaries of classes and grades when organizing physical education classroom teaching, and students independently choose the sports they want to learn according to their interests and strengths, and reorganize classes according to sports [12]. Qiu Shihai, from the point of view of overall human development, believes that "option teaching" is a new model that can stimulate students to participate in physical exercise actively, happily, and independently, based on the completion of comprehensive physical training and the organization of a certain type (group) of physical exercises according to students' interests and strengths [13]. The guiding idea of physical education is "human-centeredness". Liu Chunxia [14], who also emphasizes "autonomy", believes that "option teaching" is accompanied by "students as the main body, teachers as the leading body" and "health as the first". The "option teaching" was gradually formed with the establishment of the ideas of "students as the main body and teachers as the leading body" and "health first". After reading the different definitions of "option teaching" in the related literature, this paper defines the concept as follows: "option teaching" refers to taking students' interests as the starting point, ensuring physical development as the basis, respecting students' athletic strengths and freedom of movement, meeting their athletic needs, and not being confined to their own sports. It is a form of physical education that does not adhere to the traditional administrative class organization, physical education content and teaching methods, and enables students to stimulate their own learning autonomy and enthusiasm with the guidance and help of teachers, systematically master one or two basic techniques and skills, cultivate their awareness of lifelong physical education, and lay the foundation for their overall development.

As early as 1985, some scholars began to experiment with "option teaching" in physical education

classes, and the concept of "option teaching" nowadays was mainly formed in the "Guideline for Teaching Physical Education Courses in General Higher Education Institutions" in 2002. Behind the policy document, "option teaching" in physical education classes is also supported by psychological theories. Ge [15] introduced Bruner's interpretation of the importance of interest and learning as the theoretical basis of option teaching. The core idea is that as children grow older, along with various factors, their individual interests gradually tend to move from a relatively wide distribution to a center, while high school students are not yet finished concentrating their interests at their age and still subjectively have the will to switch items. Therefore, it is a more appropriate time to implement option teaching in physical education classes at the primary and secondary school level. As the birthplace of "option teaching", colleges and universities naturally have their own reason for existence. Chen and Li [16] cited the "Theory of Planned Behavior" from sports psychology, which states that a person's intention to participate in a sport depends to a large extent on his or her expectations and plans for the sport, which directly leads to the extent to which the participant will try and work for the sport. This expectation, combined with one's own perceptions, creates a sense of subjective control in physical activity, making it clear whether it is worthwhile to choose to participate in physical activity and exercise. The implementation of "option teaching" in physical education classes can motivate students to learn a particular skill and choose a sport that matches their subjective sense of control according to their personal interests.

3. The effect of option teaching on youth social skills

Physical activity can be effective in promoting the development of adolescent social skills, but positive changes in adolescent social skills are not an inevitable consequence of children and adolescents' participation in physical education or competitive sports [17]. Physical education teachers and coaches play an important role in structuring the teaching and learning environment, and good teaching strategies and environments can lead to positive outcomes. For example, thanks to the change in the organization of the physical education curriculum, option teaching breaks the constraints of the previous physical education curriculum, changing the traditional administrative class format and expanding the socialization of students, thus allowing them to make new friends from different classes and majors. At the same time, students can further expand their social circle in school by taking advantage of the teamwork of sports activities, especially team sports [18]. It is worth noting that option teaching not only offers the possibility of developing social skills of children and adolescents, but also the interest-oriented form of class organization is an inevitable factor in the development of their good social relationships. In his analysis of the inevitability of "option teaching" in university physical education classes, Liu Lingyu [19] mentioned that "option teaching" has a natural advantage over traditional physical education models in that it can enhance horizontal communication among students. These exchanges are based on similar interests, so the interpersonal atmosphere in the class is bound to be more harmonious, which also promotes the development of personalities. The increased lateral communication between students due to similar interests contributes to the improvement of their social skills and is extremely beneficial in building their self-confidence. Hu [20] found a significant change in the factor of interpersonal relationships after one academic year of "option teaching" intervention. He explained this change by the fact that common interests significantly shortened the distance between college students, and that the bond of the chosen sport facilitated the establishment and development of new interpersonal relationships. At the same time, the programs set up mostly have the color of teamwork, and long-term practice in these programs can cultivate students' sense of solidarity and cooperation and interpersonal skills.

4. Analysis of option teaching characteristics

The above research has revealed some connection between the two to a certain extent, but what is the uniqueness of option teaching in this aspect? It is a question worth thinking about. In terms of teaching ideology, the implementation of option teaching in physical education class follows the teaching concept of "student as the main body". Once upon a time, there was a strange phenomenon in China's school physical education, that is, students like physical activities, but do not like physical education classes. In recent years, people have gradually realized that the boring teaching content, fixed teaching form and old teaching methods are only the surface reasons for this problem, but the deeper reason is that students are not valued in physical education, their teaching status is not guaranteed, and their inner demands cannot be recognized. Although the idea of "student-centered" teaching has entered the field of school sports for a long time, it has been difficult to make substantial progress due to the lack of corresponding teaching models. With the idea of "health first", "option teaching" has come into being, which makes this problem

solved. The "student-centered" approach to physical education can be beneficial to social development. For example, students' words, actions and daily performance may become the basis for others' evaluation and measurement, especially the group practice and mutual help used in physical education can promote the formation of collectivism, and students' interpersonal skills can be subconsciously improved in the learning process. Having good interpersonal relationships for students can both strengthen self-confidence in learning and facilitate the mastery of motor skills, and can make each student an object of observation by others and thus fully affirm their self-worth. Considered from the perspective of social norms, students as subjects in physical education, under the active guidance of teachers, regulate their motor behavior according to the established content and rules as well as sports ethical standards, and gradually develop a sense of obligation and responsibility [21], thus becoming a stably functioning group. In other words, the concept of "student-centered" teaching attaches more importance to the cultivation of students' moral and rule consciousness, so that students in the ivory tower can successfully integrate into society in the future. Chinese scholar Ye Lan proposed that "education originates from human interaction", which means that education itself has a social gene, and option teaching, as a relatively new form of teaching in the physical education classroom, is bound to be an effective way to facilitate the formation and development of students' social skills in physical education activities.

Compared with the traditional physical education model, the biggest highlight of option teaching is the innovation in the organization of the curriculum. The composition of the teaching classes depends entirely on the students, reflecting the respect of physical education for the diversity and autonomy of students' sports interests. Although breaking the shackles of administrative classes and forming new classes brings new challenges to the school's curriculum management, it provides a valuable opportunity for students to expand their social circles and develop their social skills. In the long run, this is a new experiment that will do more good than harm. Nowadays, primary and secondary school students are under a lot of academic pressure and focus mainly on exams at all levels, while teachers and parents often neglect the "social health" of students. Students are limited by their narrow social circles and the careful care of teachers and parents, so some social problems are difficult to be detected, but once they enter the university, students with hidden social problems face a different external environment and a series of social problems such as mental health and careless friendships erupt. With the guidance of similar sports interests among different students, option teaching can help them learn to cooperate and get along with strangers in a subtle way while experiencing the joy of sports. On the one hand, it enables introverted students to overcome their social fears, and on the other hand, it can accumulate social experience and make students really feel the emotional experience of "a thousand glasses of wine with a friend" in the textbook. The implementation of physical education options not only follows the purpose of "interest-oriented", but also, from the perspective of its evolution, can be supplemented by similar means as tiered teaching, so that "teaching according to ability". The differences among students are a problem that cannot be avoided in "option teaching". The outgoing and cheerful students can meet more students through option teaching, satisfy their social needs and gain a sense of achievement, while the introverted students may be shy, afraid and uncomfortable with the new learning environment. For these students, option teaching is undoubtedly both an opportunity and a challenge for the development of their social skills. At this point, it is particularly important for physical education teachers to provide reasonable guidance and to adopt diversified tiered teaching methods for students with different personality characteristics. Of course, tiered teaching applies not only to students' personality psychology, but also to their motor genes, acquired basic skill mastery, physical fitness reserve and basic motor knowledge mastery. According to Yan Hongjie [22], tiered teaching refers to the implementation of the method of "tiered by ability, tiered by standard, tiered by material, tiered by need, and tiered by test" to reduce the polarization of students and to develop students. He also proposes that only the "leveling" method can be used to develop students' individual strengths and optimize the teaching process. At the same time, he also suggested that only by implementing the idea of "stratification" in the whole process of "option teaching" can we adapt to the individual differences of students and teach them according to their abilities.

5. Summary

From the initial study of physical activity on the social skills of children with autism, the study has evolved to explore the link between physical education options and students' social skills. In the process, a large number of studies have shown that physical activity is beneficial to adolescent mental health and that the implementation of option teaching in physical education classes can develop students' social skills. In the face of the contemporary problem of social incompetence among primary and secondary school students, the implementation of option teaching in physical education classes can, under limited conditions and using students' interest in sports as a medium, improve to some extent the social

psychological barriers and master social skills of some students. In terms of students' personality development and social skills development, the reason why option teaching stands out among many physical education modes is not only its embodiment of the "student-centered" teaching concept, but also its bold attempt to reform the curriculum, using a new form of curriculum organization and exploring a teaching method that better meets the requirements of students' overall physical and mental development. It is also a bold attempt to reform the curriculum, to use a new form of curriculum organization, and to explore a new way of teaching that is more in line with the requirements of students' physical and mental development.

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