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Can the TGfU model affect the moral disengagement of children with social, emotional, and mental health needs in physical education?

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Abstract: Using the teaching games for understanding model (TGfU) as an intervention strategy, this study intended to establish whether it could affect the moral disengagement (MD) levels of students / participants with special educational needs and disabilities; (SEND) by enhancing their positive behaviours in physical education (PE). The study focused on male students (n = 12) aged 13-14 years old who all had a range of different SEND conditions and they were taught within a special school setting in the UK. The intervention activity focussed on the sport of Indoor Hockey and this was taught by an experienced Teacher of PE over a period of six-weeks. The study used several qualitative approaches to collect and analyse the data. For example, the students completed two questionnaires and the teacher-researcher gathered field notes over the course of the intervention period. The data collection methods which were used to triangulate the results were an adapted qualitative 'Physical Education Classroom Instrument', an instrument called the 'Moral Disengagement tool in Physical Education' (MDPE), which was specifically designed for the use within a physical education setting and the teacher-researcher field notes. In conclusion the results from study show that by implementing MD minimisation strategies such as the TGfU model, can reduce students' misbehaviours in PE lessons focussed on games such as Indoor Hockey and also moral disengagment minimisation strategies can help reduce the misbehaviours of students in PE with SEND.

Keywords: Students, Special needs, Teaching, Misbehaviour.

About the Authors

Mr. Damien Dimmick is an experienced Lead Teacher of Physical Education with a passion for teaching children and young people who have special and complex additional needs. Mr. Dimmick holds an MA in Education from the University of Worcester in the UK.

1. Introduction

Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) is a general term used to define a range of different special education needs or disabilities (SEND) children and young people (CYP) may have at any one time. The UK SEND Code of Practice 2015 defines SEND as a child or young person who has a learning difficulty or disability which calls for special additional provision to be made for them. The term originated in the 2015 UK SEND Code of Practice (SEND CoP) and replaced the term SEBD (Social, Emotional & Behaviour Difficulties). The SEND CoP (2015) recognised the link between behaviour and mental health issues in children and defined SEMH as a special educational need for some children for the first time. It went on to state that "children demonstrating these needs often struggle to regulate their emotions and have difficulty responding to everyday challenges" and this is where the research idea came from for this original study. The participants in this research were all identified as have additional

needs and demonstrating a need to regulate their emotions in a more controlled situation (SEND CoP, 2015).

Voelkl (1997) defined disengaged students in physical education (PE) as those who were "emotionally or physically withdrawn from their PE lessons". The study discovered that there were increased engagement levels in disengaged female participants across a number of psychosocial mechanisms such as their mental, physical and emotional levels when there was a greater structure placed on the teaching of PE. However, this study was undertaken in a mainstream setting, with female participants. This study aimed to determine that there are additional misbehaviours shown by students who have SEMH and to apply the teaching games for understanding model (TGfU) to examine whether it can positively impact the moral disengagement of male participants in a SEND special school setting.

Moral disengagement was first identified by Bandura (1991) and it was defined as a "psychological mechanism that can explain the misbehaviours of individuals" (Kavussanu, 2008). Bandura's (1991) social cognitive theory identified a number of factors such as the consequences of someone's actions, in defining behaviour as an ethical issue. Some students in PE can show levels of moral disengagement because they do not have the ability to act morally correctly due to their additional mental health needs and therefore show lower levels of expected conduct and poor levels of self-regulation. Bandura (1999) further studied the psychological reasons leading to moral disengagement and he identified eight triggers or mechanisms to identify misbehaviours in PE.

However, in a study by Boardley and Kavussanu (2007) they noted that behaviours displayed in sports settings should be included in any research so the levels of moral disengagement in a sports context can be examined. They developed a six-dimensional model of moral disengagement for use in sports settings and for this study, it was a shorter version of this model first designed by Boardley & Kavussanu (2007) and then further refined by Pan and Hsu (2017) which was adopted as it was more specific to the context of physical education. Pan and Hsu (2018) examined the six different factors and developed a tool called "Moral Disengagement in Physical Education" (MDPE), which was specifically designed for the use within a school / college physical educational setting.

The MDPE model basically left out the factor of 'dehumanization' as it was felt that this factor did not apply to the context of PE, but the remaining five factors which were retained were "conduct re-construal, advantageous comparison, non-responsibility, distortion of consequences, and the attribution of blame". Pan and Hsu, (2018) highlighted that PE students mainly use two factors from the model which were advantageous comparison (comparing one's negative behaviours, to behaviours that are more severe in nature to make the former behaviours seem less harmful) and non-responsibility (diffusing or displacing one's responsibility to others) in the mechanisms of MD to justify their misbehaviors.

Therefore, the current study wanted to show that a TGfU models-based approach could reduce and minimise the participants MD mechanisms of advantageous comparison and non-responsibility. There have been a number of research studies which report that moral disengagement can positively predict challenging misbehaviors in sport, such as "cheating, aggression, fouls, and using illegal substances" (Boardley and Grix, 2014; Boardley and Kavussanu 2007 and Hodge and Lonsdale, 2011) Also there have been no previous studies which focus on whether moral disengagement (MD) can positively predict antisocial behaviours in a PE context with children who have special educational needs (SEN) and this is what makes this study unique.

The TGfU model was created by Bunker and Thorpe (1986) to focus on the integration of tactics and skills into games played in PE lessons. The TGfU model suggests the use of games for understanding in PE, as they encourage students to think about the best ways to overcome limitations by situating skill learning in a specific activity context such as a 1 vs 1 drill within the game of Indoor Hockey. Renshaw (2016) also went on to state that the TGfU model is designed to focus on the students learning in game situations in terms of understanding the game plays, tactical awareness, decision-making processes, and the execution of specific skills.

The teaching games for understanding (TGfU) model was identified as an intervention tool to support the disengagement of PE students because it has been widely researched and found to positively impact the social responsibility and positive behaviours of students without SEN (Dyson *et al.,* 2021), but as of yet has this model has not been applied to MD in an SEN setting with children and young people (CYP) who have additional needs. In a study by Dyson *et al.,*

(2021) they discovered that using a models-based approach was invaluable in helping the students accomplish important outcomes, such as positive behaviours and reducing levels of disengagement.

In another models-based study by Hellison (2011) discovered that by using a models-based approach in PE assumes that students' misbehaviours such as talking, shouting out, or even bullying another person in the same class would decrease by increasing students' positive behaviours such as teamwork and cooperation. Previous research by Ennis *et al.,* (1997) highlighted that this disengagement in PE originated from the students' perception of the environment as "boring, irrelevant, and meaningless". Furthermore, in another study by Ennis (2000) she states that it is often the low skilled students and additionally, girls, who disengage or refuse to participate in PE more than the boys. As there were no girls who participated in this study this is an area of development for a future study.

Also, for example, Mandigo and Corlett (2010) mentioned the intent of using the TGfU approach as one that encourages students to create a positive relationship with their peers. Lloyd & Smith (2010) highlighted that the "inherent joy and delight" experienced by the participants in their study was due to using the TGfU model in their games and sport lessons. This also aligns with Azzartio & Ennis' (2003) findings, that the TGfU model allowed for 'social growth' among the participants as some disengaged students described feeling as though they belonged more to their PE lessons throughout the TGfU unit. It was the aim of the teacher-researcher to create a positive learning environment, however this was not the main focus of this study, and another follow-up research project should look at this aspect of MD.

Butler (2006a) stated that TGfU model creates an environment that enhances the learning of independence and social responsibility through sporting values such as tolerance, respect, and the acceptance of others. As suggested by Singleton (2009), the TGfU model encourages students to adapt and interpret situations throughout a PE lesson learning tactical awareness and strategic phases of play allowing them to mentally understand what is needed to be successful. Regarding the current study the TGfU model has been widely analysed and researched as having a positive impact on young people, but until this study there had been no previous studies focusing on children with special needs and whether the model could impact their moral disengagement.

Turner and Martinek (1999) described the structure of a TGfU lesson in stages. They suggested that the lesson starts with the teacher setting up of the game, then the teacher observes some form of play or time practicing and then the teacher and students investigate the tactical problems and potential solutions. Next the teacher observes the game and only intervenes to promote the necessary skills and tactics to improve the performance levels of the students who are not as confident as their peers. It was the aim of the teacher-researcher in this study to follow the approach as suggested by Turner and Martinek (1999) to determine whether the model and the stages mentioned above could lead to an improvement on the levels of moral disengagement shown by the students with special needs. The teacher-researcher focused on following the TGfU model precisely and used a tactical game-based approach throughout the lessons.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Setting

An 11-16 special secondary school in the North-East of England was selected to participate in the study. The study protocol was approved by the Academy Trust CEO and the ethics standards were those stipulated by the British Educational Research Association (BERA). The participating secondary school is a small-sized school with approximately 125 students on roll. It is in a semi-urban area and is a sponsor led academy. The teacher-researcher gained parental consent from all participating students' families prior to starting the study and also the usual safeguarding arrangements were in place as this study took place in a school setting. From the outset of the study the teacher-researcher was open with the students about his role as both a teacher and as a researcher and everyone who took part in the study was able to actively play a role in the lessons.

2.2 Participants

All of the student / participants in this study were kept anonymous and no personal information was shared in this study. None of these students has been taught using the TGfU model in their PE lessons before and each class had two 45-minute PE lessons per week. The teacher-researcher who participated in the study was male in his early 40s and had over 15

years of PE teaching experience. The teacher-researcher had prior knowledge and experience of applying the TGfU model to a range of students with different abilities and all of the participants in this study were male and the age range from between 13-14 years of age. Therefore, this could be a potential limitation of the study that none of the participants were female and that only boys who had some experience of playing Indoor Hockey might have helped to enhance some of the results.

2.3 Procedure

The six-week, twelve-lesson TGfU intervention was based on one teaching unit of Indoor Hockey. Each lesson followed a similar format, typically starting with 5-10 minutes of a warm-up and introduction, followed by 30-35 minutes of game-based learning and a 5–10-minute cool-down and a review session. During the practice phases, the teacher-researcher initially demonstrated and explained the Indoor Hockey games and then introduced the students to tactical challenges to assess whether they were able to apply some of the skills / tactics the teacher-researcher had demonstrated or whether there was a further need to break these down into smaller skills or drills and focus on improving the weaknesses of game play. There were twelve (n = 12) students selected at random to take part in the study and they all had been medically diagnosed with a learning disability and these varied from some students being on the Autism Spectrum to others who had issues such as Dyslexia and ADHD. As suggested by Sandelowski (1995), the teacher-researcher aimed for a minimum of ten participants, ensuring that the population of student participants was sufficient to provide reliable results and valid conclusions.

2.4 Analysis

An adapted qualitative Physical Education Classroom Instrument (PECI designed by Krech *et al.,* 2010) was used as the approach for measuring the MD and the levels of misbehaviour in the PE students over the course of the learning a unit of Indoor Hockey. The PECI consists of five independent subscales, including aggression (four sub questions) low engagement levels (four sub questions), failure to follow directions (four sub questions), poor self-management and regulation (four sub questions), and distractions by others (four sub questions). The students were then required to rate how often they engage in the misbehaviours in their PE class, on a scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always). Each of the students answered 20 questions on the PECI questionnaire and these were based on the topics identified by Krech *et al.,* (2010) but in the context of MD in PE.

Wu *et al.,* (2016) stated that the PECI has produced high levels of consistency and that evidence for using it is robust and reliable. There is an example of the questions below in the appendix section of this study and then to further triangulate this information the teacher-researcher also used a qualitative MDPE scale to strengthen the results. This used the same five dependent subscales, similar to that of a 'Likert Scale' scoring system, to report the results from the student participants. The MDPE questionnaire was originally developed and designed by Pan & Hsu (2018) and it was used in this study as it was specific to a PE context and special school setting.

The MDPE measured the type of conduct, levels of responsibility, distortion of consequences and the levels of blame shown by the participants and the PECI and the MDPE used a total of 20 questions to allow the teacher-researcher to analyse the data, which ensured there was a consistent approach to this analysis by the same person. A total of 24 questionnaires were analysed and the results from the questionnaires was broken down into sub-themes. During the delivery of the TGfU unit, the teacher-researcher engaged in participant observations and the recording of researcher notes, and this was the third aspect of data collection to ensure there was a strong triangulation between the results.

3. Results and Discussion

The study used an inductive thematic data analysis approach, allowing codes to surface directly from the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) therefore, allowing research findings to "emerge from the frequent, dominant, or significant themes, inherent in the raw data" (Thomas, 2006). The teacher-researcher notes were read multiple times to ensure nothing was missed and the data analysis allowed for a deductive approach to help group themes together, which were consistent and similar to each other. This type of axial coding supported emerging themes and once all of the codes were labelled and identified key points were highlighted. Once the questionnaires had been completed and the teacher-researcher notes were finalised then the coding process took place across the duration of one week at the end of the teaching unit.

The PECI question results showed that the students knew when they were being disruptive. For example, the highest number of positive replies to the questions about engagement and behaving better were noted as being less often using a TGfU approach. The students were more engaged and there was less disruption (75% more engaged) and distractions were fewer (92% less distractions) during the course of the TGfU unit. These results show that by using a models-based intervention with students with SEND can have a significant impact on their learning and that of others within the PE class. Furthermore, the results from the PECI also show that the students listened, learned more and enjoyed learning using the TGfU model as opposed to their traditional skills and drills-based lessons. This is another important finding as the replies are again high at over 81% for students enjoying the lessons more and a further 88% for the students feeling more engaged in their learning using this approach. Therefore, highlighting that MD can be diminished using a different teaching approach when the children have SEND. There was less aggression (75%) and less poor behaviour shown in this study (83%).

Further results from this study indicate that as a result of the MDPE questions the mechanisms of advantageous comparison and non-responsibility positively predicted misbehaviours in physical education. These are the two areas which the teacher-researcher and the students reported as having the biggest impact on their learning of Indoor Hockey using the TGfU model. These are the two factors which had the greatest impact on their MD. When the students were engaged in a range of misbehaviours it was as a result of another student in their class encouraging them to do so and they were trying not to show themselves as the one who started it or the main antagonist. Hinrichs *et al.,* (2012) highlighted that, when student athletes argue with each other their antisocial behaviours are the results of not following the instructions of the coach, teacher or session leader and they are actually blaming this on the actions to others.

The questions about remaining calm and respecting classmates both scored the highest levels of MD and therefore these are the two factors that could be focussed on by the teacher-researcher in a follow-up study. "Advantageous comparison entails comparing one's transgressions with worse behaviours committed by others, and by doing so, one's own transgressions would seem less harmful or insignificant (Hsu & Pan 2018). Also, the factor of not taking responsibility for a situation such as an aggressive or unkind act was another highly scoring area of the results. This shows that the students were keen to displace themselves by diffusing the responsibility onto other classmates. This finding would concur with the view of Bandura (1999) who suggested that individuals tend to demonstrate fewer deviant behaviours when there are more severe behaviours happening within the same learning environment.

This study has taken the mechanisms within moral disengagement and identified whether it is possible to affect these factors with students who have special educational needs. Previous studies have not looked at the individual mechanisms of MD instead they have taken the concept, for example Boardley and Kavussanu (2007) researched the model holistically and did not separate each factor. Therefore, this current study has taken each of the main factors and highlighted the ones which have been affected the most using the intervention of the TGfU model. Also there have been no other studies which have taken place in the "Western World" (Hsu and Pan, 2018) which have focussed on MD and whether it can be affected by a models-based approach in a PE context. Hsu & Pan (2018) suggested that this was the next step after their similar investigation which was conducted in Taiwan was to look at MD and investigate whether they were similar findings to the ones, they found with students based in Taiwan. Therefore, the current study which took place in the UK was another example that an intervention model can affect change in the students MD.

To diminish misbehaviours in physical education, intervention strategies such as models-based learning should be created and tested to eliminate students' use of advantageous comparison and non-responsibility. The results from this study show that advantageous comparison and the factor of non-responsibility were the two main areas affected by the use of the TGfU model and it would be a recommendation that PE professionals should remind students that small indiscretions may cause severe consequences. The TGfU model has been used to affect the levels of MD within this study. From the results highlighted above the teacher-researcher would recommend that using the TGfU model with students who have SEND can improve the engagements levels within teaching games units such as Indoor Hockey. A follow-up study could focus on a range of different games-based activities and settings including

mainstream settings and Post-16 providers. However, it is clear that there has been some impact on the MD of the students in this study. The results are significant, and the teacher-researcher can conclude that this study is clearly important to other PE professionals.

There are several limitations to the current study in that there was only a small number of participants (n = 12) and only one games unit was analysed with a male only cohort of students. Future research should ensure there are other games and non-games teaching units involved and include a wider cross-section of participants including girls. Finally, the TGfU model ensures the social and emotional engagement of students as it places them at the centre of the model. It celebrates the connection between students, the task at hand, and the PE environment and this is important when students have experienced MD in a PE context (Chow *et al.,* 2007).

The teacher-researcher should ensure that this study is shared with other PE professionals in special and non-special school settings to allow them to build up a knowledge of how to implement the TGfU model within their PE lessons and this will lead to improved outcomes for students with special needs.

5. Conclusion

This study made a breakthrough by finding that implementing the TGfU model intervention strategy could improve the levels of misbehaviour of students with SEND. By understanding the factors behind students' behaviours in PE, along with the combination of the TGfU model, this can help produce better outcomes in a PE context for students with SEND. In conclusion this study represents a new attempt to examine the effects of implementing the TGfU model as an intervention technique to minimise the misbehaviours of students with special needs in a special school PE setting.

The findings contribute to the existing literature on how PE teachers can reduce students' misbehaviours, but with a specific focus on children and young people with additional needs. The findings from this study show that children and young people with special educational needs are able to engage with an intervention model for teaching physical education. The participants / students in the study were able to follow an intervention model called the TGfU approach and this allowed the PE teacher to observe, analyse and the collect data based on the moral disengagement levels of the students throughout a teaching unit based on Indoor Hockey. The findings show following an intervention teaching model, this approach can positively affect the moral disengagement levels of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities.

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Ethics Approval
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Informed Consent
Written consent was obtained from the participants.

Conflict of interest
The author declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Does this article screened for similarity?
Yes