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Participation of special education students in extracurricular activities: motivation and effects on academic performance and social skills

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PARTICIPATION OF SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS IN EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES: MOTIVATION AND EFFECTS ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AND SOCIAL SKILLS

by
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ABSTRACT

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Participation of Special Education Students in Extracurricular Activities: Motivation and Effects on Academic Performance and Social Skills.

2000

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Jay Kudar

Special Education

This study examines special education students' participation in extracurricular activities. This study involves 40 special education students in seventh and eight grades. Each student was interviewed individually during one class period to answer a survey to determine their participation rate in extracurricular activities inside and outside of school. Their responses were recorded and analyzed to determine the rate of participation in extracurricular activities. The students were interviewed again during a forty-two minute class period to determine if they demonstrate appropriate social skills. These questions were answered with always, sometimes, or never. The results of this research study showed no significant correlation between the participation of special education students in extracurricular activities. Also, there was no significant relationship found between the special education students who received social skills training and the students who did not receive additional training. Results indicated that the majority of the students join activities because they enjoy participating in the groups in which they belong.

MINI-ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study was to determine what motivates special education students to participate in extracurricular activities and the effect of their participation on their academic performance and development of social skills. Results show no significant relationship between the participation of special education students in extracurricular activities, academic performance, and the use of appropriate social skills.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Many individual demonstrate social behaviors out of habit. It is enough to know how to perform such social behaviors as saying " thank you" or making eye contact? Adults, children, and teenagers need to know how to demonstrate acceptable and unacceptable behaviors.

Behavior management is one of the toughest jobs a teacher must perform. According to Hundert and Burlak (1999) dealing with behavior management in the classroom takes up a large portion of the teacher's time and takes away from instruction. When behavior problems start interfering with other classmates' learning, then something must be done.

There are many forms of social skills programs. Outside of school, there are individual and group therapies, and within the schools there are social skills groups. Such individual and groups therapies help children respond appropriately to situations that may occur outside of therapy. Individual and group therapies are not the only way children can acquire social skills instruction. Interventions for social skills can be incorporated into the schools' curriculum and used in the classrooms.

However, it is possible that beyond therapy and the classroom that another kind of intervention exist. The participation of special education students in extracurricular activities can improve social skills, academic performance, and self-esteem. Research

studies have determined that participation rates in extracurricular activities help prevent early school dropout. Other studies focused on how physical fitness improves grades, social behavior, and self-esteem. This research provides answers to a very important question. Does the participation of special education students in extracurricular activities improve their academic performance and development of social skills?

Problem/Question

What motivates special education students to participate in extracurricular activities and what are the effects of their participation on the development of social skills and academic performance?

Hypotheses

1. The outcome of this research will show that the number one motivational factor for special education students to participate in extracurricular activities is their enjoyment of the activity.
2. The participation in extracurricular activities will contribute to the development of social skills for the special education students.
3. The most frequent reason that special education students do not choose to participate in extracurricular activities is because they do not like the other students who participate.
4. Through the participation in extracurricular activities, the special education students will improve their academic performance.

Definitions

Academic self-concept- related to motivation and attribution, or the belief that effort will result in success (Carlisle and Chang, 1996).

Extracurricular activities- any club, sport, or organization a student may belong to, inside or apart from school. The activity may be school sponsored or community based.

Self-esteem-how an individual sees him or herself.

Social skills- respect for humanity, friendships, cooperation, courtesy, appreciation of the home, conservation of the home, homemaking, democracy in the home, social justice, social activity, social understanding , critical judgment, tolerance, conservation, social applications of science, world citizenship, law observance, economic literacy, and political (Cosden, Iannaccone, and Wienke, 1990).

Social skills programs- individual or group therapies that help children think through problem solving situations that may occur in a situation outside of therapy.

Special Education- specially designed instruction, at no cost to parents or guardians, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability.

Purpose

There are many programs to help assist children in developing social skills. There are many ways social skills are incorporated into a school's curriculum. Direct instruction of social skills can help students develop self-confidence. The development of self-confidence influences socialization skills and the ability to make lasting friendships. Another way special education students develop social skills is through the participation in extracurricular activities.

The purpose of this research is to determine influential factors that motivate special education students participation in extracurricular activities. Also, the effects of special education students' participation in extracurricular activities on academic performance and social skills development will be examined.

Overview

In chapter two, I will be reviewing different literature articles on the effects of special education students involvement in social skills programs, as well as the effects of their participation in extracurricular activities on social behavior and academic improvement. In chapter three, I will be designing a research study to address my topic. Chapter four will publish the results of the research study, while chapter five will follow with a discussion.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

"Thank you," "please," and "hello" are words used by many people, but are difficult words for some individuals to use appropriately. Many times a person may use words such as "please" and "thank you" out of habit. Is it enough to know how to perform some social behaviors, such as saying "thank you" or marking eye contact? A person, whether an adult, student, or child must know how to demonstrate acceptable or unacceptable behavior in certain circumstances.

Inappropriate behavior displayed by an adolescent can lead to behavior problems in the classroom. According to Hundert and Burlak (1999) dealing with behavior management in the classroom takes up a large portion of a teacher's time and takes away from the quality of class instruction. It was determined by Farrington (1992) that aggressiveness in children not only leads to behavior problems in school, but correlates with poor student performance in academic subjects, who end up dropping out of school early, abusing drugs, and committing juvenile criminal acts (Hundert & Burlak, 1999).

When a student's behavior starts to interfere with his or her learning something has to be done. There are many children who suffer from adjustment problems. Today it has been estimated that one in six students suffers from adjustment problems (Hundert & Burlak, 1999). The need to help these children continues to grow, but must start with promoting a healthy social development.

Providing a healthy social development for students requires teachers, administrators, and coaches to understand that there are cognitive, behavioral, and communication skills necessary to have successful interpersonal interactions (Rothenberg, 1999). Rothenberg (1999) states that social skills can be broken into four processes; input, organization, output, and self-monitoring skills. A child needs to be able to interpret verbal and nonverbal cues and identify feelings to him or herself and others. Rothenberg (1999) explains he or she then needs to organize the input that the child received into something meaningful to him or her. Then the child must decide on an appropriate response to the behavior in which he or she perceived. After the process is completed, the child must self-monitor and evaluate how the interaction went.

Are social skills important? A child moves from their immediate family in the early years to the growing world of friends in elementary school, along with many more social interactions. Interactions between peers and teachers lead a child to wonder how others perceive him or her. Cullinan, Sabornie, and Crossland (1992) explained that non-handicapped students reject handicapped peers because of the inappropriate social behavior by the learning disabled students. Impressions from other students is very important, however how a child perceives him or herself is just as important.

Monitoring social skills development among students is important because physical symptoms such as headaches, stomachaches, as well as anxiety, depression, low self-esteem and school avoidance may occur. Rothenberg (1999) states that there is no clear cause and effect as to whether social problems and attentional difficulties are secondary to learning, or whether they are entirely separate entities. Rothenberg (1999) continues that

it would make sense that children with learning and attentional problems would be more valuable to poor social skills since learning disabilities and attention disorders involve difficulties in the processing and organizing of verbal and/or non-verbal information. Social situations for children with a learning disability can be as difficult to interpret as a book to read. Children with behavior and attention problems may react to irrelevant cues which affect their social competence. The lack of organizational skills makes it difficult to follow a conversation which requires developing a logical sequence. Transitions from one activity to another is also difficult for children of learning disabilities.

According to Peter, Ayres, Meyer, and Park-Lee (1999) social skills must be learned and practiced in various natural situations in which different skills are used. The situations developed should be age appropriate. It is impossible for parents and teachers to teach a child all the social skills he or she needs to participate successfully in society.

Children of all levels of disabilities need the chance to practice and use these skills in a wide range of activities and in the environment with friends, relatives, and the many other people with whom they will interact. The social interactions that occur are the basis for children to develop friendships. Many opportunities need to be provided so children with disabilities can develop ever-lasting friendships.

There are numerous ways situations can be arranged to help children with learning disabilities develop lasting social skills. Children can seek individual or group therapy. Individual therapy includes the child and the therapist, who helps the child to cognitively think through and problem solve social situations that may occur in a situation outside of therapy (Rothenberg, 1999). The therapy may include modeling, role play, storytelling,

and other play techniques to help develop realistic social situations for the child. If low self-esteem is also a problem for the child, individual therapy can be helpful in getting the child to look and feel differently about him or herself in social situations.

Group therapy is the opposite of individual therapy. Children bring together their problems to a group. Group therapy allows children the opportunity to work on social difficulties as they arise in the group (Rothenberg, 1999). Group therapy provides opportunities to role play and allows the children to work on different outcomes to social interactions. Group therapy allows children to be with other children with similar problems, which in turn lets the children help others like themselves. Hopefully, this process will contribute to the increase of positive self-esteem. It is very important to maintain parental contact because therapy cannot be substituted for real-life situations. Parents and teachers are very important components in helping children take with them what they learn in therapy to social interactions that occur everyday.

School is another place social skills can be taught, or rather interventions can be taught. Social skills groups in schools allow for first-hand knowledge of the situations that are problematic. The school-based groups can help the child in dealing with the problematic situations and with children from their community with whom they interact everyday (Rothenberg, 1999).

Another setting possible for social skills intervention is the classroom. According to Spivak and Shure (1974) class focused interventions have been used to increase positive social behaviors of children in early childhood setting (Hundert & Burlak, 1999). At the early preschool level, the collaborative team approach for teachers to develop class-

wide strategies resulted in increased peer interaction of preschoolers with disabilities (Hundert & Burlak, 1999). Hundert and Burlak (1999) explained that problem solving skills strategies taught to classes in both the elementary and middle schools have positive results.

There are many ways social skills strategies can be intertwined into the school's curriculum. The last few years inclusive education has become very popular. Inclusive education is defined as the provision of education and related services to all special education students in the regular classroom settings for all or substantial part of the day (NEA, 1993). Inclusion education provides opportunity for learning disabled students to interact with non-disabled students on a daily basis. The general education classroom provides the learning disabled student with potential social behaviors, such as negotiating their individual needs and taking turns (Strain and Smith, 1996). Students learn to be cooperative with each other, as well as their teachers.

Successful integration into regular education classrooms is challenging for students whose reading, writing, and math levels lag years behind their non-handicapped peers (Taymans, 1989). Special education students are expected to perform essential study skills, such as taking notes, just as the regular education student is expected. Adolescents who are eligible for special education services exhibit skill deficits that lead to poor classroom performance. It has been noted that learning disabled students have usually been found to have lower academic self-concept than their non-learning disabled peers (Carlisle and Chang, 1996). Ayres, Cooley, and Dunn (1990) also agrees with Carlisle and Chang, learning disabled students generally report lower self-concepts associated with

academics than non-disabled students. The special education students who are included in a regular education setting need interventions that will promote academic and social growth (Taymans, 1989). Ideally, general and special educators with their respective areas of expertise in content and social skill development, would co-plan and possibly co-teach these integrated lessons (Warger and Rutherford, 1996).

Unfortunately, it is not always realistic that general and special educators are able to co-plan. One approach that can be used to meet the needs of the learning disabled students and regular education students is cooperative learning. Cooperative learning is an umbrella term used to describe a number of specific group activities in which students work together in small groups to meet shared goals while maintaining individual accountability (Taymans, 1989). Cooperative learning is geared toward helping diverse students increase their academic and social skills. Cooperative learning is an excellent tool for regular education-special education interaction.

Basic social skills can be taught to adolescents as part of cooperative learning. Skills such as participation, communication, maintaining eye contact, expressing appreciation, and many more, develop through group activities. When the teacher provides direct instruction for appropriate social responses, he or she presents the social skill, models it, and involves the group in role playing it. After the process is completed, the teacher ensures the students' understanding of the positive interactions. Students learn to interact with each other in socially accepted ways.

Inclusive education has the potential to help students to learn to understand and respect individual differences, develop communication skills and friendships, and work

cooperatively with others (Maag and Webber, 1995). However, the importance of promoting social development in the classroom has been a debated educational goal for sometime. Traditionally, schools have been responsible for the cognitive development of a child. However, more recently schools have become responsible for promoting values appropriate for survival in society. These values that include working cooperatively together, can be taught in the schools. Research suggests that teaching students social skills, such as getting along with another and working cooperatively together, can be accomplished in a successful inclusion classroom.

Cosden, Iannaccone, and Wienke (1990) performed a study that described responses to the need for social skills instruction by teachers in secondary schools. The research also identified factors that contributed their use of educational programming in this area. This study included twenty-eight teachers from a multi-ethnic, southwestern high school who voluntarily completed a questionnaire in this study (Cosden, Iannaccone, and Wienke, 1990). Twenty-three teachers were part of the regular education faculty, and five teachers were special educators. All participants were employed by the same school district. The questionnaire was arranged with items of multiple choice, multiple selection, and Likert-scale format. The questionnaire measured the teachers' current and ideal levels of involvement and values that influences their activities (Cosden, Iannaccone, and Wienke, 1990).

The results of this study indicated that the teachers wanted to be more engaged in social skills activities. However, the teachers reported limited access to resources that could support social skills instruction. Teachers stated the importance of knowledge and

skills related to the instruction of social skills. Factors that contributed to their instruction of social skills were inservices, coursework, direct instruction, and family background. Teachers were also asked who they felt should be responsible for social skill instruction, especially the learning disabled students. Most teachers felt that the responsibility falls on both regular and special educators (Cosden, Iannaccone, and Wienke, 1990). In order to provide successful social skills strategies, special and regular educators must work together to incorporate social skills into the curriculum.

Beyond the classroom setting, there is another strategy that may prove to be a positive social skills intervention. The participation of the special education students in extracurricular activities including sports related events, will provide an opportunity to improve self-esteem, social skills, and academic performance. The students' participation in extracurricular activities will positively effect their academic achievement and strengthen social and emotional development. Extracurricular activities include all school sponsored activities as well as community-based activities. Research has determined that students' involvement in school-related activity declined during middle school and junior high school years (Sabornie, 1994). Learning disabled students' participation follows the trend. Previous research discovered that learning disabled students have a lower activity participation rate compared with non-disable students (Sabornie, 1994). However, it is possible that participation in extracurricular activities contributes to the development of social skills in learning disabled students.

Although, extracurricular activities provides opportunities for social skills development is it possible that extracurricular activities can protect against early school

dropout? Mahoney and Cairns (1997) completed a study to examine the relationship between extracurricular involvement and early school dropout. Participant were interviewed yearly, and information was gathered from teachers and peers on a range of social and academic dimensions. In addition, yearbooks were used for annual information on extracurricular involvement. Mahoney and Cairns (1997) had three purposes stated in their research:

> 1) "to describe the normative pattern of extracurricular activity across the years of middle school and high school,
>
> 2) to identify persons in the 7th and 8th grades who are marginal or at risk for early school dropout, as determined by teacher evaluations, and,
>
> (3) to assess the relation between extracurricular activity participation and early school dropout across students showing different levels of risk for school dropout."

Mahoney and Cairns (1997) hypothesized that extracurricular activity participation would be negatively related to early school dropout. It is also suspected that this effect would be strongest for students at greatest risk for early school dropout.

The results of this study indicate that involvement in school extracurricular activities is linked to decreasing rates of early school dropout in both boys and girls (Mahoney and Cairns, 1997). The results were primarily observed among higher at risk students for dropout. Mahoney and Cairns (1997) observe that participation in extracurricular activities provides an opportunity to create a positive and voluntary connection to the school. Extracurricular activities provide a pathway into the

conventional social networks while, simultaneously, promoting individual interests, achievement, and goals.

The high school provides teenagers with more opportunity for activity participation suited for their interest and ability then middle and elementary schools provide. Extracurricular involvement, particularly for students at risk for dropout, may be one component of the transition that could help shift the balance toward greater engagement in school (Mahoney and Cairns, 1997). Mahoney and Cairns suggests that future research is needed for why students join extracurricular activities, maintain their participation over time, and the possible reasons why they do not become involved with extracurricular activities.

Research states that participation levels should be addressed in school based interventions to make lives of adolescents with LD more like those of ND youth (Sabornie, 1994). Extracurricular activities are a main ingredient for intervention of LD and ND youth. Further research is needed to determine the effectiveness of special education students' participation in extracurricular activities. Information on this topic is very limited. Scherman (1989) studied the significant or non-significant personality changes as a result of physical fitness in children. It is necessary for research to follow the idea of physical fitness as an intervention tool.

Scherman (1989) researched previous studies to examined the benefits of physical fitness for children. This research states that exercise is beneficial for children because the physical dimension concrete and is a good starting point (Scherman, 1989). The foundation of this research considers all areas of a person and how they work together to

develop the self. This approach has proven to be effective in improving self-concept in group setting (Scherman, 1989). The review of this literature provides the effects of physical fitness on the personalities of children.

Scherman divided his participants into five groups depending on the age range of the children, the type of physical training, or special needs (1989). The groups included (a) an elementary age group, (b) a junior and senior high school age group, (c) sports camp participants, (d) a special education group, and (e) a group of obese children. The variable Scherman (1989) explored in each review included the psychological focus on the study, a subject description, use on non-use of control group, whether fitness was demonstrated the type of psychological assessment instrument used, and the outcome.

The elementary group contained boys and girls who participated in 10 studies involving self-concept as the focus, with two studies including locus of control, mood, and trait anxiety. Physical fitness as an intervention strategy with elementary children has not typically resulted in either improved physical fitness or enhanced self-esteem (Scherman, 1989). However, within a group setting, where fitness was structured into the curriculum, physical activity was observed to aid in establishing an internal locus of control and increasing self-concept (Scherman, 1989). This research on elementary students supports the idea that self-concept relates to the situation. The elementary group also supports the multimodal approach in group settings.

The junior and senior high school group consisted of 12 studies focusing on varied personality variables. At the junior high school level, previous research suggested that integrated program of counseling andphysical education was te most

effective method of improving cardiovascular fitness (Scherman, 1989). This age range also shows that physical fitness correlates with self-concept to a greater extent than does actual physical performance (Scherman, 1989). However, in earlier research Scherman found that when self-concept was measured between athletes and non-athletes, the athletes were shown to have higher self-concept scores than did their non-athletic peers (1989). The junior high school age group is very fragile. Many changes are occurring for these young adults. Self-image is very important for young people to develop positively. Self-image has been shown to improve with increased in physical activity for children in the junior high school level who are classified as introverts, who have low self-esteem (Scherman, 1989).

The group of obese children resulted in the obese male improving body attitude and physical fitness with the help of a structured program combining calisthenics, swimming, and group counseling was provided (Scherman, 1989). The group that contained the sports camp participants also seemed to have a positive impact on self-concept of elementary students. Competitive sports improved self-concept in children however recreational sports did not show as much improvement. Although non-disabled children have been shown to possess a more positive attitude toward physical activity and self-concept than do emotionally disturbed children, improved physical fitness and self-esteem have been demonstrated in the learning disabled students when incorporated into a routine program (Scherman, 1989).

This review suggests potential effectiveness of physical fitness on improving self-esteem in children. School counselors can also incorporate physical fitness as an

intervention tool in various ways. Physical activities are fun and involve students in groups, offering the students to develop social skills within an inspiring setting. Physical activities are a positive trend for children to develop and improve their self-concept, self-esteem, and social skills.

Scherman's research review included an experiment completed by Young. The research study was designed to determine whether significant relationships exist between physical fitness, estimation of fitness, estimation of physical ability, and self-concept for adolescent females (Young, 1985).

The female participants were randomly selected from a predominately white suburban junior high school. There was a total of seventy-five grade seven, seventy-five grade nine, and grade ten consisted o all of the female students in the first six require physical education classes (Young, 1985). The participants were required to complete a background sheet and physical education questionnaire that included items relating to estimation o fitness and ability as well as belief in personally being good in sports and physical activity. The Tennessee Self-Concept Scale was completed by all the young female.

Aligned with the AAHPER Youth Fitness Test Manual, two physical performance tests (sit-ups and the 600 yard run) were administered (Young, 1985). These two activities were selected because they were part the schools' testing program and considered valid measures of muscular strength, and endurance, and stamina.

Young (1985) described that the estimation of physical fitness, estimation of ability in physical education activities, and belief in the importance of personally being good in

sports and physical activities were measured by using a five-point Likert type scale:

- How would you rate your present physical fitness level? (5-very good, 4-good, 3-fair, 2-poor, 1-very poor).

-How would you rate yourself in terms of your ability in physical education activities? (5-very high, well above most people, my age. 4-high, above most people my age, 3-average about the same as most people my age, 2-below average, less than most people my age, 1-low, well below most people my age.

-Personally, how important do you believe it is to be good at sports and physical activities? (5-very important, 4-important, 3-somewhat important, 2-little important, 1-not important).

This study contained an eight day test and retest performance to establish reliability. Each grade level had separate correlation matric to examine the combination of all variables. One factor compared was those females who believed it was important to be good in sports and other physical activities and who rated their ability in physical activity high, were compared against all others (Young, 1985).

The results of this study showed a significant positive relationship between both items of physical performance and overall self-esteem for grade ten females and between overall self-esteem and the 600 yard run for grade seven females (Young, 1985). There was no significant correlation among these items in grade nine. Estimation of physical fitness was significantly and positively related to overall self-esteem for females in all three grades and estimation of ability in physical education activities forthose in grade seven

and ten. The study also revealed that the females who believed it was important to be good in sports and rated themselves high in physical activity have overall higher levels of self-esteem than those who do not. The estimation of physical education, ability, and physical fitness items were significantly related to females in all three grades with correlations for estimation of fitness and stamina item higher in each instance (Young, 1985). This research is not directly related to learning disabled children, however if female learning disabled students could build their self-esteem, they would feel better about themselves and be more eager to join extracurricular activities where they could learn to improve social behavior.

A more recent study completed by Bluechardt and Shephard (1995) determined how far both motor proficiency and social skills could be enhanced for learning disabled students by a closely supervised program of extracurricular activity, with embedded social skills component. Another group was given an equal amount of individual academic assistance as a matched control group.

The participants were volunteers, 34 boys and 11 girls recruited with approval by the Human Research Committee at the University of Toronto(Bluechardt and Shephard, 1995). All the participants had learning disabilities marked by a significant deficiency motor performance and a significant deficiency in one or more areas of social behavior. The participants were randomly assigned to a group, the experimental or the control treatment group.

The experimental students began a closely supervised program of extracurricular physical activity, while the control group began closely supervised program of additional

academic assistance. The experimental group consisted of twice-weekly, supervised, 90 minute extracurricular sessions designed to combine vigorous physical activity with social skills training and problem solving(Bluechardt and Shephard, 1995). The control group met twice-weekly, 90 minutes periods of closely supervised academic instruction. Individual attention was provided for assistance in deficient skills.

The results of this study showed that individualized physical activity program with embedded social skills improves motor proficiency, academics, and nonacademic competence, and teacher ratings of social behavior in students with learning disabilities(Bluechardt and Shephard, 1995). However, the gain, in comparison to the controlled students who received individualized attention, was no larger.

Sport related activities not only can improve social skills, it is well documented that sports participation is positively correlated with higher academic achievement and school attendance (Goepert, 1995). Camp (1990) also stated that whether it involved participation in school, church, and community, student activities were all related positively with school grades. A study conducted by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement reported that students who participated in extracurricular activities had achieved higher grade-point-averages than that of nonparticipants (Camp, 1990).

The review of the related literature indicated problems with special education students having poor social skills, low self-esteem, and difficulty in academic performance. Research performed in these areas shows the potential for the special education population to improve social behavior, develop self-esteem, and gain confidence in academic studies. This can be accomplished through the participation in extracurricular activities. Early

intervention designed to promote participation of special education students in extracurricular activities will encourage their lives to be made more like those of non-disabled youth (Sabornie, 1994). Extracurricular activities, specially sports related events, are group oriented which encourages proper social behavior to occurred. While involved in activities students learn skills to perform throughout their entire life. Camp (1990) makes a reference in his literature review, to the cardinal principles, which mention being worthy of leisure time, citizenship, ethical character and health. It is agreed that the development of those attributes is encouraged and facilitated by participation in student activities (Camp, 1990). It has also been reported that 95% or more high school principals surveyed regarding their views of athletics reported that such programs promote good citizenship and positive "school spirit" (Goepert, 1995). Not only do extracurricular activities promote social development but activities have a positive relationship to grades (Camp, 1990).

Camp (1990) completed a study that examined the effects of participation in student activities on the overall student success in school, as measured by grades, while controlling for the effects of other variables that could reasonably be expected to affect those grade. This study contained two follow-up studies, the initial study completed in 1980 used data collected from the sophomore class. The first follow-up was conducted in 1982, when the sophomore class were than presumably seniors. The second follow-up of the same cohort was conducted in 1984, when the sophomore class was presumably out of high school.

A random sample of all high school sophomores attending United States public

and private schools during the sampling period in 1980 were used in the initial study. More than 30,000 sophomores in the 1,015 high schools participated throughout the United States (Camp, 1990). The second follow-up contained approximately 15,000 participants, and the final analysis contained 7,668 students.

The level of student activity participation was measured by a single indicator, which was a researchers-constructed composite variable derived by combining the student's self-reported participation level in a series of extracurricular activities (Camp, 1990) during the study the participants were asked to respond to each of a series of sports, clubs, other in-school activities, and several out of school student activities by indicating nonparticipation, limited participation, and participant in a leadership role.

Camp (1990) organized the variables into four blocks. The first group consisted of gender and family background. The second block consisted of the students' indication of their academic ability. The third block consisted of four competing uses of time, three involving watching television. The fourth block consisted solely of academic achievement, basked on grades.

This study results supports many stereotypes that exist in society. Camp's findings indicate females watch less television, study more, participate in student activities more, and make better grades than males do, when other variables are taken into consideration (1990). The study confirms that rather than being detrimental to academic achievement, participation in study activities has a positive relationship to grades.

Many students who suffer from adjustment problems posses difficulty exhibiting positive social behavior. There are many possible intervention for teaching appropriate

social skills. Individual and group therapies, school-based social skill groups all help promote a healthy social environment. However, there is a possible additional intervention. Although, there is limited research focusing on the participation of special education students in extracurricular activities, research completed on related topics indicate potential improvement is possible in the development of social skills, self-esteem, and academic performance.

Chapter 3

Design and Procedures

Subjects

The number of subjects included in this study totals 40. All the students who participated in this study are in seventh and eighth grade and attend a middle class, large, rural school district in Franklinville, New Jersey. The total population of the school is approximately 653 students with 544 being Caucasian, 86 African American, 20 Hispanic, one Native American, and two Asian/Pacific Islander. Approximately, 14% of the students are eligible for special education and related services. There are 72 students diagnosed with a specific learning disability, seven students with a language impairment, five students with an emotional disturbance, four students with traumatic brain injury, two students with multiple disabilities, and one student with orthopedic impairments. Out of 40 students, 33 are classified as having a specific learning disability. Two students are classified with traumatic brain injury, three students with a language impairment, one student with emotional disturbance, and one student with multiple disabilities.

Settings

This study was conducted with the students in their special education math class. Each special education student was questioned during two forty-two minutes class period.

Apparatus

This is an exploratory study and there are no formal measures that address this topic. The inventory included two questionnaires. The first survey, which contained eight questions was designed to explore the participation rates of special education students in extracurricular activities, and their reasons for involvement in the various activities offered by the school. The second questionnaire, which contained 15 questions, examined the use of appropriate social behavior performed by each special education student. The students answered each question with always, sometimes, or never. Each questionnaire was administered orally, and individually to each student.

Measures

The extracurricular activity questionnaire was designed to find out how many special education students participates in extracurricular activities, and if they do participate, why do they belong to the team or group. The students' involvement included school-related activities as well as out-of-school activities, such as playing softball for the township or attending their church's youth group.

The social skills survey was designed to include the most common social behaviors performed by the middle school students that attend this school. Each special education student had to answer each question with always, sometimes, or never.

Procedures

The students were given a general introduction of the purpose of the study. It was explained that their participation in the research would help determine if the special education students participation in extracurricular activities would help improve their grades, develop appropriate social skills, and increase their self-esteem.

The first survey was conducted on February 11, 2000. As each student completed the surveys individually each question was read aloud to the students. Each student was encourage to include all activities in which they participate. Each survey had a number at the top of the first page. The number corresponds with a number assigned to each student. The number system keeps all the information gathered confidential. The second survey was conducted on March 10, 2000. The students follow the same procedures as the first survey. Each student was asked the questions individually, and a number was recorded in place of their name. At the end of the second day, the students were thanked for their participation and cooperation

Chapter 4

Presentation and Analysis of Data

The purpose of this study was to identify what motivates special education students to participate in extracurricular activities and the effects of their participation on academic performance and social skills development. The students were interviewed during two forty-two minute class periods where they were asked to fill out a survey pertaining to their participation in extracurricular activities and a survey relating to the use of appropriate social skills behavior.

Tables 4.1 through 4.3 presents information on the subjects and their participation in extracurricular activities. Tables 4.4 through 4.8 presents information of the relationship between academic performance and participation in extracurricular activities. Table 4.9 presents the relationship between social skills behavior and participation in extracurricular activities. Percentages were derived by comparing the participation of special education students in extracurricular activities and those special education students who do not participate in extracurricular activities.

Table 4.1 represents the frequency of involvement in extracurricular activities. The question number correlates with the question number on the survey located in the appendix. Question one asks the students if they participated in any school-related sport activities. Question two asked if they participated in any out-of-school sport activities. Question three questioned if they belong to any school-related clubs or groups. Question

four asked if they belong to any out-of-school clubs or groups. Question five was not significant to this study. Question six asked why the students why they joined an activity. Question seven questioned why the students do not participate in extracurricular activities, and question eight asked if the students participated in the social skills program held at the school.

Tables 4.1 through 4.3 present the frequency of involvement in extracurricular activities of the special education students. The results of question one show that 43% of the subjects participate in school-related sports activities. The results of question two show 45% of the subjects participate in out-of-school sports activities. Questions three and four show a total of 21 students participate in a club or group. 35% of the clubs are school-related, while 18% belong to out-of-school club or group. Question eight identifies 25% of the subjects participate in the social skills training provided by the school.

Table 4.1

Frequency of Involvement in Extracurricular Activities

Question Number	Yes	No
1	17	23
2	18	22
3	14	26
4	7	33
8	10	30

Table 4.2

Participation in Sports Related Activities

Subject	school-related sports	out-of-school sports
1	no	no
2	no	yes
3	yes	no
4	no	no
5	no	no
6	yes	yes
7	yes	yes
8	yes	yes
9	no	yes
10	no	no
11	no	no
12	yes	yes
13	no	no
14	no	no
15	no	no
16	no	no
17	yes	yes
18	no	no
19	yes	yes
20	yes	yes
21	no	no
22	yes	yes
23	yes	yes
24	yes	no
25	no	yes
26	no	no
27	no	no
28	no	no
29	yes	no
30	no	no
31	no	yes
32	no	no
33	yes	yes
34	yes	yes
35	yes	yes
36	yes	yes
37	yes	no
38	no	no
39	no	no
40	no	no

Table 4.3

Participation in Clubs or Groups

Subjects	School-related club	Out-of-school club
1	yes	no
2	no	no
3	no	no
4	yes	no
5	no	no
6	yes	yes
7	no	no
8	no	no
9	no	no
10	no	no
11	yes	no
12	yes	no
13	no	no
14	no	no
15	yes	no
16	yes	no
17	yes	yes
18	yes	no
19	no	no
20	no	no
21	no	no
22	no	no
23	yes	yes
24	no	no
25	no	yes
26	no	no
27	yes	no
28	no	no
29	yes	no
30	no	no
31	no	yes
32	no	no
33	yes	no
34	no	no
35	yes	no
36	no	no
37	no	no
38	no	no
39	no	yes
40	no	no

Table 4.4 presents the relationship between academic performance and participation in school-related sports. The grades of each subject for the first three marking periods were averaged together to obtain the mean of all students of each academic subject. The subjects who participated in school-related sports activities the mean for Math was 83.8 and for those who did not participate in extracurricular activities the mean was 81.2. The mean for Social Studies for those who participated was 79.0 and 77.0 for those who did not participated in school-related sports. The remaining academics subjects, Language Arts, Literature, Science, and Health and Physical Education, the means were 81.9, 80.5, 77.4, and 83.9, respectively, for those who did participate in school-related activities. The mean for the students who did not participated in school-related sports, the average of the grades in the subject areas of Language Arts, Literature, Science, and Health and Physical Education were 78.2, 77.7, 77.3, and 80.4, respectively.

Table 4.5 presents the relationship between academics and out-school-sports . The mean for the subject areas, Math, Social Studies, Language Arts, Literature, Science, and Health and Physical Education are 83.1, 78.5, 80.4, 82.6,77.7, and 82.0, respectively. The average grades for the students who do not participate in extracurricular activities are as followed: Math, 81.2; Social Studies. 77.0, Language Arts, 78.2; Literature, 77.7, Science, 77.3; and 80.4.

Table 4.6 displays the relationship between academics and participation in school-related clubs. The means for the students who participated in school-related clubs in the subject areas are as followed: Math, 83.6; Social Studies, 74.0; Language Arts, 80.6; Literature, 77.7; Science, 77.8, and Health and Physical Education, 81.6. The students

who did not participate in any school-related clubs averages are as followed: Math, 81.6; Social Studies, 79.9; Language Arts, 79.3; Science, 77.8; and Health and Physical Education, 81.6.

Table 4.7 displays the results of the relationship between academics and participation in out-of-school clubs. The means for the academic subjects for the subjects who participated in out-of-school clubs are as followed: Math, 84.1; Social Studies, 78.9, Language Arts, 82.8; Literature, 83.0; Science, 78.2; Health and Physical Education, 88.4. The averages for the subjects who did not participate in any out-of-school clubs are as followed: Math, 81.9; Social Studies, 77.6; Language Arts, 79.1; Literature, 78.0; Science, 77.2; and Health and Physical, 80.5.

Table 4.4

Relationship Between Academics and Participation in School-related Sports

Subjects	Participation	Mean	SD
Math	yes	83.8	7.5
	no	81.2	8.3
Social Studies	yes	79.0	5.8
	no	77.0	9.9
Language Arts	yes	81.9	4.7
	no	78.2	10.0
Lit/Writing	yes	80.5	7.8
	no	77.7	9.4
Science	yes	77.4	8.4
	no	77.3	10.8
Health/PE	yes	83.9	9.2
	no	80.4	10.6

Table 4.5

Relationship Between Academics and Out-of-school sports

Subject	Participation	Mean	SD
Math	yes	83.1	7.2
	no	81.7	8.6
Social Studies	yes	78.5	5.9
	no	77.3	10.1
Language Art	yes	80.4	7.3
	no	79.4	9.2
Lit/Writing	yes	82.6	5.5
	no	75.9	9.9
Science	yes	77.7	7.2
	no	77.1	11.5
Health/PE	yes	77.1	11.3
	no	82.0	9.2

Table 4.6

Relationship Between Academics and Participation in School-related Clubs

Subject	Participation	Mean	SD
Math	yes	83.6	7.7
	no	81.6	8.1
Social Studies	yes	74.0	10.4
	no	79.9	6.4
Language Arts	yes	80.6	7.4
	no	79.5	8.9
Lit/Writing	yes	77.7	10.0
	no	79.5	8.2
Science	yes	77.8	8.9
	no	77.1	10.3
Health/PE	yes	81.6	10.1
	no	82.1	10.2

Table 4.7

Relationship Between Academics and Participation in Out-of-School Clubs

Subjects	Participation	Mean	SD
Math	yes	84.1	8.3
	no	81.9	7.9
Social Studies	yes	78.9	7.4
	no	77.6	8.6
Language Arts	yes	82.8	8.6
	no	79.1	8.2
Lit/Writing	yes	83.0	7.8
	no	78.0	8.8
Science	yes	78.2	10.2
	no	77.2	9.7
Health/PE	yes	88.4	5.7
	no	80.5	10.3

Table 4.8 represents the relationship between academics and a social skills training program offered by the school district. The means for the academic subjects for the students who participated in the social skills program are as followed: Math, 81.3; Social Studies, 77.9; Language Arts, 79.9; Literature, 73.8; Science, 79.0; and Health and Physical Education, 84.0. The averages for the subjects who did not participate in the social skills program at the school are as followed: Math, 82.7; Social Studies, 77.8; Language Arts, 79.9; Literature, 80.6; Science, 79.0; and Health and Physical Education, 84.0.

Table 4.9 presents the relationship between social skills and the participation of special education students in extracurricular activities. The results of the surveys completed by the subjects were tallied to find an over-all score for the survey of social skills performance. This table show the mean for participation in school-related sports was 18.0 and for non-participation the mean was 19.0. Out-of-school participation in sports showed a mean of 18.3 and non-participation has a mean of 18.8. The mean for participation in school-related clubs and groups was 19.4 and non-participation was 18.2. The mean for participation in out-of-school clubs or groups was 21.0 while non-participation was 18.0. The relationship between social skills training and appropriate social skills behavior resulted in a mean of 15.5 for those subjects who received social skills training, and a mean of 19.7 of those subjects who did not receive the training.

Table 4.8

Relationship Between Academics and Social Skills

Subject	Participation	Mean	SD
Math	yes	81.3	7.2
	no	82.7	8.3
Social Studies	yes	77.9	6.1
	no	77.8	9.1
Language Arts	yes	79.3	7.9
	no	79.9	8.6
Lit/Writing	yes	73.8	10.7
	no	80.6	7.5
Science	yes	72.5	12.0
	no	79.0	8.4
Health/PE	yes	75.8	7.8
	no	84.0	9.9

Table 4.9

Relationship Between Social Skills and Participation in School-related Sports

Question Number	Participation	Mean	SD
1	yes	18.0	3.4
	no	19.0	3.4

Relationship Between Social Skills and Participation in Out-of-School Sports

Question Number	Participation	Mean	SD
2	yes	18.3	3.7
	no	18.8	3.2

Relationship Between Social Skills and Participation in School-related Clubs

Question Number	Participation	Mean	SD
3	yes	19.4	4.0
	no	18.2	3.1

Relationship Between Social Skills and Participation in Out-of-School Clubs

Question Number	Participation	Mean	SD
4	yes	21.0	3.0
	no	18.0	3.3

Relationship Between Social Skills Performance and Social Skills Training

Question Number	Participation	Mean	SD
5	yes	15.5	3.8
	no	19.7	2.5

Chapter 5

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to identify what motivates special education students to participate in extracurricular activities and what effects their participation had on their academic performance and social skills behavior. Forty seventh and eighth grade students were interviewed to determine the extent of their involvement in extracurricular activities. Also, the students were asked to describe their social behavior by using a questionnaire form. The surveys used in the interviews are included in the Appendix.

The results of this study showed approximately half of the special education students participated in school-related sports activities. Approximately the same percentage of the students participated in out-of-school sports activities. Out of 40 subjects, 21 participate in a club or group whether it is in school or out of school. One hypothesis of this research study was that participation in extracurricular activities for special education students would have a positive effect on academics. The results of this study do not support the hypothesis. Similar results were found with the participation of special education students in extracurricular activities and the effects on their social behavior. It was speculated that the students' social behaviors would improve. However, this study did not confirm this hypothesis.

I found in this study that 43% of the students did participate in school-related sports and 45% of the subjects participated in out-of-school sports, however the grade

averages of the students who did participate were not significantly different when compared to those students who did not participate in sports-related activities. The results of special education students participation in sports-related activities in the present study differs from earlier research. For example, Goepert (1995) stated that it is well documented that sports participation is positively correlated with higher academic achievement and school attendance. However, the results difference among the present study and earlier research may be due to uncontrollable influences in the students' lives. The students interviewed in this project are generally unmotivated and unsuccessful in public school. Also, many students have family responsibilities that require them to be home at a certain time in order to prepare a meal or to babysit other siblings. Also, most of the earlier research associated with the participation in extracurricular activities focuses on the regular education population. The results of this study does not mean that participation in extracurricular activities does not have a positive effect on special education students. The results indicate a need for further studies to be implemented.

This study also compared special education students participation in social skills training to the special education students who did not receive the training. This study focused on the students' academic performance as well as the demonstration of appropriate social behavior. Present research suggests school-based groups can help the child in dealing with the problematic situations and with children from their community with whom they interact everyday (Rothenberg, 1999). However, at this time in the school year, this study shows that the children receiving the training actually demonstrate less appropriate social behavior in public. The results of the relationship between social

skills performance and social skills training show the mean for the students receiving the training as 15.5 and the students who did not participate in the training the mean as 19.7. Perhaps the results of the is study indicate the students receiving the social skills training need to continue with the group program next year.

This study also examined the participation of special education students in clubs in school as well as outside of school. Camp (1990) as stated in chapter two, explained that not only do extracurricular activities promote social development but activities have a positive relationship to grades. There was no significant results found in this study that indicates participation in extracurricular activities has a positive effect on academic performance.

Another area explored in this research was why special education students participate in extracurricular or why they do not participate in an activity. 26 of the subjects said they enjoy the activity in which they belong. Two students stated they like being with the other kids. One student explained his or her parents make him or her participate in the activities. One other student stated he or she wanted to remain physically fit. On the other hand, the students who did not participate indicated that five of them were not any good, six stated they do not enjoy the activities, and one student explained he or she does not like the other kids.

This study contained many limitations. The number of subjects in this project was easily handled, however the amount of data collected was overwhelming at times. If I was to redo my study, I would limit my focus to one or two outcomes or goals. Some of the students involved in this study were subject to a change of teachers in the middle of the

school year. Switching teachers may effect the students' grades, especially if the students enjoyed the former teacher. Some of the students also compiled a few days absent from school, this also could impact grades. When teaching special education students there are many issues a teacher has to handle each day. Many special education students have emotional problems that influence their grades as well as their behavior on any given day.

There are also many factors that influences a student's decision to participate in an activity. Many participants in this study have dysfunctional families. These students have additional responsibilities at home such as babysitting siblings or preparing their meals. Transportation to all events may also influence a student's decision in joining an activity. Some students visit with different family members different nights of the week. It is possible that a student would want to participate in a sport or club but do to uncontrollable circumstances cannot participate.

Many of the limitations associated with this research study were uncontrollable. Also, the measurement of the data used in this study is not the only way to obtain the information. It is possible that surveys were not the most informative way to collect the data. Additional, forms of measurements may influence the results in this study differently. Further studies should be completed on the participation of special education students in extracurricular activities. An examination of what motivates special education students to participate in activities would help to offer insight, suggestions, and strategies to involve more special education students in extracurricular activities. Many studies completed have focused on the elementary child or the high school student potential drop out, more research is needed for the middle school age group. Increasing the participation of special

education students in extracurricular activities in the middle school years could be very successful in building positive social behavior and self-esteem.

The results of study show no significant difference among students who participated in extracurricular activities and the students who do not participate in any activities. However, if more research is conducted and strategies to promote involvement in extracurricular activities are derived than positive results may occur. The present study and earlier research can be used to promote the participation of special education students in extracurricular activities to help improve social skills and academic performance.

This research study shows no significant difference between the students who do participate in extracurricular activities and those who do not participate in activities. However, with the influence of previous research and the research completed for this project it is possible that extracurricular involvement promotes a healthy social development and correlates positively with academic performance.

APPENDIX

Name_____ **Number**_____

Date_____ **Grade**_____

Gender_____ **Ethnic Background**_____ (Optional)

Age_____

Survey:

1. Do you participate in any school-related sport activities? (Examples: Basketball, wrestling, or swimming) If so, list them.

   If you answered yes to question number one, how long have you been playing in the school-related sport activities?

2. Do you participate in any out-of-school sport activities? (Examples: Play basketball for the township, wrestle for the township, or play softball for the township) If so, list them.

   If you answered yes to question number two, how long have you been playing the sport for the township?

3. Do you belong to any school related clubs or groups? (Example: art club, yearbook, or math club) If so list them.

If you answered yes to question number three, how long have you participated in this school-related club or group?

4. Do you belong to any out-of-school clubs or groups? (Example: church youth group, 4-H, or girl scouts) If so list them.

If you answered yes to question number four, how long have you participated in this out-of-school club or group?

5. Do you hold any leadership positions in the activities in which you participate?

If you answered yes to question number five, how long have you held this position?

6. Why do you participate in the activities in which you belong? (Examples: I enjoy the activity, I like the other kids, My parents make me do it)

7. If you do not participate in any extracurricular activity, what is preventing you from joining a club or sport? (Example: I don't think I am any good at the activity, I don't enjoy the activity, I don't like the other kids)

8. Do you participate in the social skill group held at this school?

If you answered yes to question number eight, how long have you been involved with this group?

Read the questions silently as I read them aloud. Read and then circle the answer that describes you the best.

1. Do you raise your hand to ask a question during a class period?

Always Sometimes Never

2. Do you follow directions on assignments?

Always Sometimes Never

3. Do you raise your hand to get out of your seat?

Always Sometimes Never

4. Do you ask for help when something is difficult on an assignment?

Always Sometimes Never

5. Do you participate in group activities within the classroom?

Always Sometimes Never

6. Are you easily distracted during class?

Always Sometimes Never

7. When two adults are talking do you say "excuse me" when you have a question?

Always Sometimes Never

8. Do you have a best friend?

Always Sometimes Never

9. Do you gossip about other students? (Example: talk about other students, start rumors)

Always Sometimes Never

10. Do you make friends easily?

Always Sometimes Never

11. Do you "hang out" with friends after school hours?

Always Sometimes Never

12. Do you tell other classmates to "shut up?"

Always Sometimes Never

13. Do you use inappropriate language in or out of school?

Always Sometimes Never

14. When someone is approaching you that you do not like, do you walk away?

Always Sometimes Never

15. Do you say "please" and "thank you" on a regular basis?

Always Sometimes Never

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