

The Trouble-free Playground Program

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Supporting evidence, data and information of why the Trouble-free Playground program is worth implementing at your school.

The Trouble-free Playground Program focuses on the following 4 concepts:

1. Developing social-emotional intelligence
2. Engaging students in highly-active, constant movement type games and activities.
3. Developing self-responsibility and intrinsic motivation.
4. Using the inclusion-style of teaching.

Below is a description of each concept and supporting evidence as to why this concept is important in regards to creating a trouble-free playground.

The importance of developing social-emotional intelligence:

The basis for this concept comes from the books Emotional Intelligence (1995) and Social Intelligence (2006) both by Daniel Goleman.

Goleman explains that approximately 80% of a person's success in life comes from his or her emotional intelligence, whereas only 20% of a person's success comes from his or her IQ. Skills such as communication, cooperation, self-control and empathy play a very large role in how a person gets along with others and how well they are able to handle social situations. Lack of appropriate social-emotional skills are a leading cause of disagreements on the elementary school playground. Students with well-developed social-emotional intelligence are able to play together longer, with less conflict and are able to resolve differences in a more amicable manner than students who are lacking proper social-emotional skills.

This information supports the idea that children should be taught specific social-emotional skills and given ample opportunities to use them. The Trouble-free Playground program focuses on developing social-emotional skills and gives teachers methods of how to incorporate this type of training into the classroom.

The importance of engaging students in highly-active, constant movement type games and activities:

The basis for this concept comes from the books Brain Rules (2008) by John Medina and Spark (2008) by John Ratey.

You don't have to look very far to realize that obesity is a major problem in America. An estimated 60% of Americans are overweight and childhood obesity has tripled in the last decade. With this in mind, it's important to engage children in highly-active, constant movement type games while at recess. Playing small-side sport lead-up games is one of the best ways to get kids moving, increasing their activity levels while at the same time, improving skills and reducing the number of conflicts that occur during games. In addition, according to both Medina and Ratey, exercise involving continuous movement

and activity is very valuable in brain development and in improving student learning. This concept is further supported by others as described below:

1991

Stephen Silverman

Reviewed dozens of studies and found that students engaged in play and game activities boost their academic learning.

1995

Carla Hannaford

Explained that playground games that stimulate inner ear motion like swinging, rolling and jumping improve cognitive functioning.

Charles Hillman

University of Illinois

Studied 259 3rd & 5th Graders

Measured BMI; sit & reach; run; push-ups; sit-ups

Compared results on physical tests with math and reading scores.
Kids with fittest bodies had the highest math and reading scores.

California Department of Education

2001 and 2002 (study was repeated and achieved the same results)

Using scores from 954,000 students on the FitnessGram fitness test, kids who measured the highest on the fitness test scored twice as well on academic tests as unfit peers.

2004

Panel of 13 noted researchers reviewed 850 studies related to the effects of physical activity on the academic achievement of school-age children. The panel found evidence that supported the findings from the two California studies, and also reported that physical activity has a positive influence on memory, concentration, and classroom behavior.

John Medina

Brain Rules

“Exercise improves children. Physically fit children identify visual stimuli much faster than sedentary ones. They appear to concentrate better. Brain-activation studies show that children and adolescents who are fit allocate more cognitive resources to a task and do so for longer periods of time” (p. 18).

“[When time was taken] away from academic subjects for physical education...[it was] found that, across the board, physical education did not hurt the kids' performance on the academic tests...When trained teachers provided the physical education, the children actually did better on language, reading and basic battery of tests” (p. 24-25).

This information supports the idea that students should not only have recess, but they should spend their recess time engaged in as much constant physical activity as possible. Traditional recess games do not always lend themselves to achieving this goal. The games that are included in the Trouble-free Playground program are designed to increase participation level.

The importance of developing self-responsibility and intrinsic motivation:

The basis for this concept comes from several books, including: Punished by Rewards (1993) by Alfie Kohn; Whale Done (2002) by Ken Blanchard; Drive (2009) by Daniel Pink; and Teaching Responsibility Through Physical Activity (2003) by Don Hellison.

The majority of schools around the country rely on extrinsic motivation to get students to behave, do their work, and pay attention. This type of motivation is based on bribes, threats, punishments, and rewards. It is widely used for two main reasons. First, it is easy to set up and administer. Adding a bribe here or a threat there takes no time and little thought. Second, it's very effective in making happen what teachers want to make happen. The kids respond quickly and do what they're supposed to do or don't do what they're not supposed to do. However, extrinsic motivation has two major drawbacks, as well. First, it's not long lasting. As soon as the bribe, threat, punishment or reward is taken away, the motivation tends to cease. In other words, for extrinsic motivation to continue working you have to continue using it. And, second, extrinsic motivation is not effective in developing self-responsibility. This means students don't learn to act appropriately or work hard for the value they get from it, they do those things to avoid punishments or to get rewards. As simple and as common as extrinsic motivation is, it undermines the type of students teachers are trying to create and develop; students who love to learn for learning's own sake and who behave responsibly because they desire to be a good person.

The opposite of extrinsic motivation is intrinsic motivation. This type of motivation comes from within a person. They tend to do things because they value them or they see the good in them, and they desire to benefit from them for personal satisfaction. To develop intrinsic motivation you must focus on five concepts known as the 5 C's of intrinsic motivation: Control, Challenge, Curiosity, Creativity, and Constant Feedback. Students who are given a sense of control; challenged at an appropriate level; made curious; taught with creative techniques; and given constant feedback on their performance tend to achieve more, become more self-responsible, and are typically more engaged in their own learning. As explained by Kohn in Punished by Rewards and by Pink in Drive, there is a hidden cost to using extrinsic motivation. It's hard to see it, but the true harm extrinsic motivation causes is that it destroys intrinsic motivation. And, it's intrinsic motivation that creates life-long learners.

This information supports the idea that intrinsic motivation and self-responsibility are traits to be developed in students so that they become well-behaved, conscious learners who desire to succeed. The Trouble-free Playground program defines ways to

incorporate the 5C's into the classroom and the playground, and utilizes a specific behavior program that is designed to foster self-responsibility.

The importance of using the inclusion-style of teaching:

The basis for this concept comes from the book, The Spectrum of Teaching Styles (1990) by Muska Mosston and Sara Ashworth.

In 1966, Muska Mosston created what he called the Spectrum of Teaching Styles (known in education as the “Spectrum”). The Spectrum is a framework of how teaching takes place based on decision-making within the lesson. There are eleven different styles in Mosston’s Spectrum, ranging from the Command style to the Self-learner style. At one end of the Spectrum (command) the teacher makes all the decisions and at the other end (self-learner) the learner makes all the decisions. The fifth style in the Spectrum is called the Inclusion style. This style, situated at the middle of the Spectrum allows for both the teacher and the learner to make decisions within the lesson. Decisions such as how many, how long, what equipment, what partner, how fast, how slow, how difficult, or how easy, are all decisions that can be decided by the student in this style. This enables the student to have a sense of control within the lesson, empowering and motivating them. The Inclusion style of teaching basically becomes a philosophy within the teaching environment that allows for all learners to participate and learn at their own level. This means everyone is involved at a level that is appropriate to them.

This information supports the idea that everyone should be active and involved on the playground in activities that meet their individual needs and abilities. The Trouble-free Playground program does this by using “inclusion-style” games. There is no standing and waiting to play and no one is eliminated from a game for failing to achieve a certain level or goal. Everyone is included, 100% of the time, at a level that meets their individual needs.

In Conclusion

The Trouble-free Playground program is a well-thought out program based on the ideas, concepts, philosophies, and works of many well-recognized professionals in the fields of psychology, neuroscience, cognitive science, physical fitness, exercise physiology, education, and business. The program was created and is supported by documented literature in these fields that helps to create intrinsically motivated, self-responsible students. All of the research and literature that was used to create the Trouble-free Playground program points in the same direction:

- Well-developed social-emotional intelligence is vital in achieving success in life.
- Students that are active and fit perform better academically than their non-fit peers.
- Intrinsic motivation and self-responsibility are the two main qualities of a life-long learner.
- When given an opportunity to participate at a level that meets their needs, students are more empowered, more motivated, and achieve better results.

The Trouble-free Playground program, although it is obviously designed to get children to be more active at recess and allow them to get along while playing, offers much more than that. It is a program that is completely aligned with improving a school's climate; improving academic achievement; and creating life-long, motivated learners.

The following resources were used to create and develop the Trouble-free Playground program and the concepts it embodies.

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