



Unlock Research Research for Physical Educators

Research Journal of the Month
NOVEMBER 2004

The Journal of Classroom Interaction.

On a cold November morning in 1965, at her desk in the urban high rise of Philadelphia's Temple University, the redoubtable Professor Anita Simon typed the following note on the masthead of a little mimeographed newsletter:

*For those who believe that how we teach
is as important as what we teach.*

With that invocation, The Journal of Classroom Interaction (JCI) was born, and although its progenitors might no longer recognize their offspring, at Volume 39 it will survive into 2005 as a vigorous, unpredictable, occasionally untidy, sometimes mischievous, and always pragmatic little publication (circulation presently listed at a modest 1,000). And for all of the physical educators who were "raised up" in the heady years when systematic observation in the gym seemed so exciting and so endlessly promising as a new way to do research, it always will be regarded with affection – because most of us still believe that how we teach is as important as what we teach.

After various changes of name (it began as the Classroom Interaction Newsletter), editors, sponsors, and locations, JCI finally settled down in the College of Education at the University of Houston in 1977 where, under the careful and energetic editorship of H. Jerome Freiberg, it has remained. Along the path of that 40 year journey, it served both as an outlet for research reports, bibliographic collections, and critical reviews, and as a forum for lively discussion about the work of studying teachers and students in their natural habitat – the classroom. The description provided in the latest issue sums it up nicely:

The Journal of Classroom Interaction is a semi-annual publication devoted to empirical investigations and theoretical papers dealing with observation techniques, research on student and teacher behavior, and other issues relevant to the domain of classroom interaction. Preference is given to manuscripts which relate to the implications of teacher and student interaction (emphasis mine).

But you might ask, "What has all that to do with physical education?" The answer lies in an examination of nearly 20 reports from people within our subject matter community (including such familiar names as Craig Buschner, Donetta Cothran, Matthew Curtner-Smith, Patt Dodds, Catherine Ennis, Peter Hastie, Victor Mancini, Thomas Martinek, Judy Placek, Stephen Silverman, and John Todorovich). The topics for study were diverse, ranging from tooth-cutting exercises to mature scholarship, but because they all dealt with real life in physical education classes, they have a wonderfully fresh and contemporary feel.

Not all of the messages those studies brought involved data that portrayed goings-on that were simple, straight-forward, and easy to digest. For example, the study from Cothran and Ennis in 2001 (Vol. 36, # 1) with the wonderfully evocative title of: "Nobody said nothing about learning stuff": *Students, teachers and curriculum change*, will entangle you in the complex differences between the way teachers and students view changes that come with new curricula.

Some of the reports also served as ominous foreshadowings of invisible conditions that, once documented, were to cause great concern in physical education. Among those were early studies by Martinek & Mancini in 1979 (Vol. 14, # 2), Martinek & Karper in 1986 (Vol. 21 # 2), and Devoe in 1991 (Vol. 26, #1) which began to insist that physical education teachers often treat their students very differently – not in terms of what they might need for effective learning but in terms of who they are (gender, motor ability, personality, physical attractiveness). Likewise, some of the early studies utilizing measures of Active Learning Time, such as that reported by Placek, Silverman, Shute, Dodds, & Rife (1982, Vol. 17 # 2), began to surface persuasive evidence that substantial amounts of physical education class time were wasted through inefficient forms of management.

Over the years, Editor Freiberg and an exceptionally stable (and distinguished) Review Board have continued to respond positively to submissions from the subject area of physical education. Most recently, Todorovich and Curtner-Smith (2003, Vol. 38 # 1) were the first to bring empirical study of teacher manipulated goal orientation class climate to the pages of JCI. With revived interest in systematic observation instruments as a tool for confirming the impact of pedagogical and curricular interventions, we can look forward to a continued presence for physical education research in this journal.

The journal maintains a website at <http://www.coe.uh.edu/cmcd/coejci/index.html> where subscriptions may be obtained for either the online edition (\$35 individual or \$55 institutional) or the print version (\$37 individual or \$42 institutional). A full listing of Tables of Contents for 1965-2004 is available at the website. The same listing also appears periodically in the journal. JCI utilizes the format provided by the American Psychological Association (5th Edition) and is indexed in a variety of database systems including: Psychinfo, Contents Pages in Education, Educational Technology Abstracts, ingenta, and Sociology of Education Abstracts. Full text of the entire JCI archive is available in Microform from University Microfilms International.

For readers who are not familiar with JCI, I want to add a personal observation about the question of quality – a matter about which one can hear some occasional carping from critics. The complexity and sophistication of studies published in JCI do extend across a wide range. Insofar as the purpose of the journal is to include both new voices and diverse ideas about method and theory in education, that degree of inclusiveness seems entirely appropriate. I would not wish to see that change.

It also is clear that neither the editorial staff nor the reviewers feel constrained to impose a great deal of technical editing to refine writing style and form in most of the reports. My own interpretation of this is that once basic adequacy of research procedures has been assured, authors are left mostly to their own devices. This produces a sometimes startling unevenness in the writing found in adjacent reports. That would not be my own choice of editorial policy, but I have to admit that it usually produces no more than minor annoyance. I have never found a JCI report to be unintelligible for reason of inelegant expression or faulty organization.

JCI always has been a place where active and enthusiastic researchers could share data and ideas about teaching. Some of that process gets fairly messy, but so long as the focus is on the interactions among teachers and their students, the value of content should outweigh the defects of form. We still have a lot to learn about what's going on in the gym, and JCI has carried important contributions to that conversation. For my own part, I regard it as a friendly venue where we can continue to look for research that illuminates the work of physical education.

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