A QUALITATIVE EVALUATION OF A LIFE-SKILLS PROGRAM IN A PHYSICAL EDUCATION CONTEXT

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Abstract: This paper reports a qualitative evaluation of a life-skills program in physical education. Participants in the program were 86 students of Grades 6 and 8. Data were collected from students' interviews, field notes of participant observation and students' notebooks. Results showed a positive reception of the program by the majority of the students as well as knowledge and transfer of life skills. However, there was also a group of students who were negatively predisposed towards the program. Drawbacks of the program that emerged were the absence of variety and the compulsory nature of goal setting.

Key words: Evaluation, Life skills, Physical education, Qualitative methods.

INTRODUCTION

Do youngsters learn something useful for their life when they participate in sport? Although there is a widespread belief that sport participation is beneficial for youth, respective research results have been equivocal. Youth sport theorists warn that participating in sport will have positive or negative effects for youth. As Petitpas, Cornelius, Van Raalte, and Jones (2005) note «Sport can provide a wonderful forum for youth to learn about themselves and to acquire skills that can assist them throughout life, or it can create a negative environment that may have a detrimental effect on participants' self-esteem, confidence and physical self-efficacy» (p. 76). Therefore, youth sport programs should be carefully structured in order to provide positive and developmentally appropriate experiences to the participants.

Towards this aim a number of youth sport programs that teach concurrently life and sport skills and focus on personal, social, and sport development has been developed. These programs include the Sports United to Promote Education and

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Recreation (SUPER; Danish, 2002), the Play It Smart (Petitpas, Van Raalte, Cornelius, & Presbrey, 2004), the First Tee (Petlichkoff, 2001), and the Rugby Advantage Program (Hodge, 2008). The program SUPER is a sport-based adaptation of the Going for Goal program (GOAL; Danish et al., 1992a, 1992b), which used sport metaphors to teach adolescents a sense of personal control and confidence about their future so that they can make better decisions and ultimately become better citizens. SUPER is taught like sport clinics with participants involved in three sets of activities: learning the physical skills related to a specific sport; learning life skills related to sports in general; and playing the sport.

The present article reports a qualitative evaluation of an abbreviated form of SUPER taught in a physical education setting. It was selected because, first, it has been the first program to teach life skills through sport alongside with GOAL and, second, because other programs (i.e., The First Tee) has drawn elements from SUPER and GOAL.

Goudas and Giannoudis (2008) reported a quantitative evaluation of this program. Their results showed that students who received the program, compared to a control group scored higher on two of the four tests of sport skills, on knowledge, and on self-beliefs. However, relying solely on quantitative evaluation may mask important information regarding the implementation of this program and its effectiveness. A qualitative evaluation may shed light on the participants' perspectives and provide insights regarding aspects of implementation of the program (Greene, 1998; Rossman & Rallis, 1998). Conversations with participants, for example, can reveal information about their lived experience within the program. Petitpas et al. (2005) highlighted the need to evaluate not only the outcomes of a youth sport program, but also whether the program was implemented the way it was supposed to (implementation evaluation) and to identify specific features of the program that are related to program outcomes (process evaluation). Qualitative evaluation may be particularly useful both for implementation and for process evaluation.

Previous evaluations of SUPER have been mostly quantitative in nature and showed positive effects of the program. Brunelle, Danish, and Forneris (2007) reported significant changes on several 'character-related' measures. Adolescents who received the program in the context of a golf academy exhibited increased social interest and social responsibility from pre- to posttest. Another three studies tested the abbreviated form of SUPER employed in the present study. Papacharisis, Goudas, Danish, and Theodorakis (2005) reported that young volleyball and soccer athletes who received the program performed better in sport skills, and showed enhanced knowledge and improved confidence in applying life skills relative to athletes of a control group. Goudas, Dermitzaki, Leondari, and Danish (2006), in a

study with physical education students reported gains and retention on physical fitness, knowledge, and self-beliefs regarding goal setting. Similar results were reported by Goudas and Giannoudis (2008) who tested the effectiveness of an abbreviated version of SUPER which involved goal setting, positive thinking and problem solving.

The present study aimed to follow-up on quantitative data regarding the effectiveness of an abbreviated form of SUPER (Goudas & Giannoudis, 2008). The qualitative evaluation aimed to examine the meaning of the participants' actions within the program and to identify features of the program and related contextual factors that contributed to the program's outcomes. The expectation was that students would have articulated perceptions of the program and would be able to point out both strengths and weaknesses. Of particular interest would be their negative viewpoints which can provide feedback for future implementations of the life-skills program.

METHOD

Participants and procedure

Participants in the program were 86 students (40 boys and 46 girls) from four classes, each from a different school located in the broad district of Thessaloniki, Greece, in middle class areas. Of those students, 38 were in the sixth grade and 48 were in the eight grade. All the students from each class participated in the program. Permission to implement the program was secured from the school principals as well as from the Greek Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs. Further, informed consent was obtained from the parents of those students who were interviewed. Each of the four classes had a different physical education teacher. Three of them (one male and two females were between 45 and 50 years of age with more than 20 years teaching experience while the fourth one (male) was 36 years of age with 8 years teaching experience. All of them volunteered to implement the program.

The life skills program

An overview of the program is presented in Appendix A. The program consisted of seventeen teaching hours, was taught three times per week and lasted about two months. The program which is described in detail in Goudas and Giannoudis (2008) comprised three life skills: (a) goal setting, (b) problem-solving strategies, and (c)

positive thinking. Regarding problem solving we used a variant of a strategy proposed by Danish (1997) called STAR (Stop and chill out; Think of all your choices; Anticipate of the consequences of each choice; and Respond with the best choice). Regarding positive thinking, we relied on the concept of self-talk which is defined as athletes' self-verbalizations said overtly or covertly, which are multidimensional in nature and seem to serve at least two main functions, that is, instructional and motivational (Hardy, Hall, & Hardy, 2004). Students were provided with a notebook where they could find information about the life skills taught and brief life-skills exercises. There was also space for students to record their views about each of the life skills taught. Further, there was optional homework asking students to teach what they had learned to another person and to write about their experience.

Data collection

There were three sources of data: (a) field notes of participant observation, (b) interviews, and (c) the students' notebooks.

Field notes. To get involved with the students' culture as much as possible, the second of the authors assumed the role of participant observer. For two months prior to the program, he was constantly present at schools helping the physical educators to run their sessions. This helped him to be acquainted with the students before the beginning of the program and become, to some extent, an integral part of the school life. The second author also helped the physical educators to run the life skills program. Apart from having this responsibility, he tried to be involved in school life as much as possible. Thus, he was present at schools for several hours before and after the sessions devoted to the program in order to get a deeper understanding of the implementation of the program and its impact. For example, during breaks he was always at the schools' canteen or at the schoolyard engaging in informal conversations with the students. He was also present at the teachers' office attending teachers' conversations and discussing with them. Shortly after each session of the program the researcher kept respective field notes. These field notes were enriched by anything that he judged as relevant to the program during his presence at the schools. Then at the end of each day, he re-wrote, organized and transferred these notes in a word processor. These data amounted to 112 single space pages of text and served as field notes.

Interviews. After the completion of the program 12 sixth-grade students and 15 eigth-grade students were interviewed. Interviews were also conducted with the teachers of physical education involved. The students were selected to represent three groups of students: (a) those who were highly motivated towards the program, (b) those who were moderately motivated, and (c) those who were not motivated at

all. This selection was made by the second author, who had served as participant observer, on the basis of his experience with the students and his field notes. The interviews were semi-structured with questions regarding the application of the program and probes aiming to encourage students to describe their experience (see Appendix B). Each interview took about twenty minutes and was tape-recorded. Interviews' verbatim transcriptions resulted in 99 single-space pages of text.

Students' notebooks. Students' notebooks were collected upon the completion of the program. As this feature was optional, not all the students returned their notebooks. Further, several students had completed just a few of the exercises or the activities. There were 65 activity books that had some elements that could be used for the purposes of the present study. The activity books were used for two purposes. First, they served for developing the individual student profiles (see below). Second, students' comments regarding (a) their reaction to the program's elements, (b) their experience with teaching life skills to others, and (c) their overall evaluation of the program were extracted, entered in a word-processor and served as raw data together with the interview transcriptions and the field notes. This resulted in 27 single-space pages of raw data.

Data analysis

Prior to analyzing the data, the second author who had assumed the role of participant observer developed brief individual student profiles, for each of the experimental group students. These profiles included short information about the students' background (e.g., whether the student was an immigrant, his or her athletic ability) and the second author's overall impression about each student's behavior during the program. The two coding researchers read these profiles together with the respective interviews and excerpts from the students' notebooks in order to get a sense of the "holistic" story of the participants. This procedure has been advocated by Gould, Collins, Lauer, and Chung (2007).

Data from the three sources were analysed simultaneously using thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998). The two authors read the transcriptions several times and identified raw-data themes, grouped them in first-order themes, second-order themes, and then to higher-order or general themes. To enhance the reliability of themes and coding, a third researcher, familiar with qualitative research, commented on this procedure. Corrections were made in order the two coding researchers and the external researcher to reach an agreement. Data-driven themes were constructed inductively from the raw information. The inductive approach was searching for patterns that are based on the information being studied (Boyatzis, 1998).

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) four sets of criteria are needed in order to attain trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Regarding credibility three methods were employed: (a) prolonged engagement of the researcher which was achieved by the principal investigator who was involved in teaching the participants for two months before the intervention program; (b) triangulation of sources which was achieved by simultaneously examining data from interviews, field notes and students' notebooks, and (c) external check of the analysis by a third researcher who examined and commented on data analysis. Regarding transferability, the individual student profiles and the school profiles provided a basis for judging whether the conclusions from this research may be transferred to other settings. These profiles indicated that the schools involved and the students who participated in the study were fairly typical examples of schools from middle class urban areas in Greece. Finally, regarding confirmability and dependability, (a) a reflexive journal was kept by the researcher, in which he recorded aspects of the data gathering and analysis process, and (b) peer-debriefing sessions were carried out during data collection.

RESULTS

The analysis resulted in two higher-order themes namely "The program" and "Life skills". Table 1 presents first-order, second-order and higher-order themes from this analysis. Below we describe these categories[1].

The program

Positive views

A positive view about the program was dominant in students' interviews. Students felt that it was a novel program. Further, they commented that they enjoyed their participation and learned useful things for their life in general. For example, "It was a novel teaching approach for me, we hadn't done anything like this before"; "It was really good and good fun"; "It was not only about sport, but we learned to do things in our life" (Students' interviews).

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[1] Quotes are directly translated from Greek to English by the authors.

Table 1. Coding framework

Higher-order themes	Second-order themes	First-order themes
The program	Positive views	Novel
		Fun
		Learned things
		Important experience
		Useful
	Negative views	Boring
		Negative students
		Tiring
	Attributions for negative views of the program	Students' stereotypes about physical education
		Excessive talk
		Uninteresting motor content
		Students' immaturity
	Design drawbacks	Short time
		Compulsory goal-setting
	Suggestions for improvement	Minimize teacher's talk
		More play
	Comparisons with typical physical education	Prolong and enhance variety
		Learning instead of play
		Different lesson
	Program's features	Notebooks and homework
		Students as teachers
Life skills	Knowledge of life skills	Goal-setting
		Positive thinking
		Problem-solving
	Perception of usefulness of life skills	Life skills useful at school
		Life skills useful at work
		Life skills useful in personal life
	Application and transfer of life skills	Application during the program
		Applicability of life skills
		Life skills transfer

Some students had an initial hesitation about the program but they soon overcame it.

The first day that the teacher came I thought that the program would be boring and we were not going to play in physical education. But this changed the very

same day...I liked it a lot and especially cooperation. Day by day I liked the program more.

(Student's notebook)

This positive view was backed by the physical education teachers who commented that "They (students) liked it, they took a lot of positive things from the program, they set some goals and I noticed they improved a lot" (Teacher's interview). The physical education teachers also commented that this was a positive experience for them as well. For example, "Very important experience, I will apply it (the program) next year again, I quite liked it, I hadn't worked this way, I mean with specific goals before" (Teacher's interview).

Field notes and the students' notebooks also reflected this positive reception of the program. Specifically, "The game continued with stable interest...after the bell rang no one asked to stop the game" (Field notes); "The program was really fun. I think we had a good time. I am going to miss all these nice moments in the program...the experience was superb" (Student's notebook).

Negative views

There were also negative views about the program. The researcher's field notes indicated that there was a group of students who were negatively predisposed towards the program from the beginning and did not really engage at the program in any stage. For these students, the program was a tiring, boring, and negative experience characterized by a lot of talking by the physical education teacher. For example, "It became boring because we talked a lot...the same things again and again...it was tiring" (Student's interview). This negative attitude by part of the students was sometimes infused to other students as well and created problems in the implementation of the sessions. Specifically, "They looked anxious without looking eager to listen. When I asked them to be silent they did not take it seriously and kept messing around. I noticed a student's reaction who nodding disapprovingly said «nice physical education!»" (Field notes); "I was tired by some students talking all the time and this caused you (the physical education teacher) to talk more" (Student's interview).

Attributions for the negative perception of the program by part of the students

Possible reasons for the perception of the program by some students emerged from the data. These were students' stereotyping about physical education, excessive talk, the indifferent motor part of the lesson and students' immaturity.

Students' stereotypes. For many students physical education was recess time to relax from other school subjects, without any obligations. For some of these students it was hard or even impossible to participate in a physical education program that put certain demands on them. For example, "I come to school not only to learn but also to have a good time – I have physical education for having a good time" (Student's interview).

> We consider physical education as freedom, play, rest and as something different from the other school-subjects and with this program it (our view about physical education) changed because we thought of it (the program) as mandatory and tiring and that's why there was no response from some children. (Student's notebook)

Excessive talk by the physical education teacher. Both the students and the physical education teachers commented that the theoretical part was large and in combination with the class manipulation problems resulted in increased teachers' talk. For example, "You talked too much and this was tiring"; "There was a lot of time devoted to the theoretical part and this tired the students" (Students' interviews); "The only thing I didn't like was that the teacher talked too much and this was a waste of time" (Student's notebook).

Interestingly, the design of the program involved minimum time devoted to the theoretical part (10 min in the beginning of the sessions). According to the researcher's field notes, this was generally adhered to, except for instances of student misbehavior. However, even this minimum time allocated to the theoretical part was perceived as excessive by the students and the physical education teachers. Apparently, both students and teachers were not accustomed with theoretical teaching in physical education.

Uninteresting motor content of the program. Some students commented that the sports employed by the program were not popular amongst them. Further, they would like more variety regarding the skills practiced. For example, "But we did basketball all the time...you did not taught us any other sport" (Student's interview); "They told me that they liked the program but they are tired from basketball because we practice some basketball skills all the time" (Field notes from an informal conversation with a student).

Students' immaturity. The physical education teachers and the students felt that some students were just 'immature' to respond appropriately to the program and that they exhibited similar behavior in other subjects:

> She told me that the problem (some students misbehaving in class) is big and disturbing for other students too, but it does not apply only to physical education or the program we did, but they are like this in all other classes. (Field notes from an informal conversation with a student)

> This program did not run that well because there are always some kids that have a different opinion from the teacher and they are kids forever, they never grow up and of course they do not listen to the teacher and do whatever they want to… (Student's notebook).

Drawbacks in the design of the program

During the implementation of the program two drawbacks were observed. These referred to the short time devoted to the program and the second to the goal-setting process. Both of these drawbacks were reflected in the data. Regarding the duration of the program, it became apparent that the design was too ambitious in that it involved many things to be taught in a short time period. The researcher noted this in his field notes in several instances. For example, "They (the students) persistently asked to read loud the homework they did but I kept telling them that we did not have enough time"; "There is not enough time left to talk about the homework they did and to give them feedback and praise them individually" (Field notes). The physical education teachers also referred to this. For example, "If we had more time, we could have involved those students that were negatively predisposed toward the program" (Teacher's interview).

The second drawback regarded goal setting. In several instances, it was felt that students were asked to set goals for sports that were not interesting for them, especially for girls, and in turn they perceived goal setting as just another obligation they had to fulfill at school. For example, "Besides it was not possible for students to set goals for tasks they did not …choose and some did not like at all" (Field notes).

Apparently, it is somewhat contradictory to have students setting goals if they do not view this skill as important and beneficial. Goal setting is an active learning process and students have to be convinced regarding its utility. On the other hand, such resistance reflects real-classroom settings which need to be taken into account.

Suggestions for improving the program

In accordance with complaints about the excessive talk and prolonged theoretical part, students and physical education teachers suggested that the program would be

improved if (a) teacher's talk was minimized, (b) the program involved more play, (c) was prolonged in time with greater variety of sport skills. For example, "Teachers should try to make the program more interesting and less theoretical and students to be more cooperative" (Student's interview); "Things would be better if this (the program) was applied within a longer time frame" (Teacher's interview).

Comparisons with typical physical education

Most students commented that the program was a novel experience, completely different from physical education they knew. They thought that by means of the life skills program physical education was substantiated. For example, "In physical education...most kids think of it as play whereas now we learned a lot....we played but we learned as well"; "All these years we were just playing whereas now we learned what we play to make it better" (Students' interviews); "We did something special, we learned things, we felt the experience and we did not focus only on everyday volleyball but we did something different" (Student's notebook).

Comments regarding the program's features

Students' notebooks and homework. Students were initially skeptical about having to do homework in physical education. However, this attitude changed as soon as they discovered that this would demand minimum time and effort:

> It was a bit boring in the beginning and I didn't open it (the notebook). But at some point I quite liked it...it had important things, besides it wasn't that difficult...it took me only five minutes a time...
> (Student's interview)

Field notes confirmed that students with a positive attitude about the program were also positive about using their notebooks and doing their homework: "Students came in (the gym) with their notebooks and were showing me their homework asking persistently to read it loudly" (Field notes). On the other hand, students who were not really engaged in the program had also a negative attitude about doing homework: "I asked about their homework. Unfortunately, few students produced it and I was disappointed" (Field notes).

Students as teachers of life skills. Students reported that teaching someone else was something novel for them and that they really enjoyed this role:

It was nice and pleasant...it was like playing that I was a teacher to people older
than me...to my mum and as my mum taught me a lot of things it was my turn
now to teach her... (I did this) pretty well and I wish to be a teacher when I grow
up and to teach these things to my students.
(Student's interview)

Similar comments appeared in students' notebooks where in several instances
they were enthusiastic and exaggerated about being successful teachers of life skills.
For example, a student writing about her experience of trying to help her friend who
had a problem wrote in her notebook:

I talked to her about positive thinking and I believe that I helped her. It was
tough but in the end I did it and I believe that now she can change her negative
thoughts to positive ones...I liked what I did and I want to do it again because
this way I learned and my friend learned as well.
(Student's notebook)

Another student wrote:

My sister had to take a test the other day and was very anxious...I was watching
her studying for a long time and still she believed that she hadn't learned what
she was supposed to learn. I knew that I had to do something to relieve her
anxiety. So I remembered positive thinking. I told her using examples how to
change her negative thoughts to positive ones. Next day when she came home
she was really happy and told me that she got the best grade in her class.
(Student's notebook)

Of particular interest were the reactions of those adults that were taught life skills
by the students. For example, "She (my mum) now looks at me as if I am more mature
and trusts me more after those things I told her"; "She (my mum) praised me for
paying attention to school and for learning such interesting and important things"
(students' interviews).

I was a good teacher (to my parents) in the beginning I was anxious but in the
end I did it. I did not have any difficulty and I liked it. They (my parents)
understood what I told them and felt really proud of me. My parents
congratulated me for telling them a couple of things that made sense instead of
telling them showbiz news, it seemed quite remarkable to them.
(Student's notebook)

Life skills

Regarding the higher-order theme of life skills, three second-order themes emerged, namely knowledge of life skills, perception of usefulness of life skills, application and transfer of life skills.

Knowledge of life skills

Regarding goal setting, students' interviews denoted that they viewed goals as synonymous with effort, persistence and challenge. For example, "In the beginning it is a dream and we turn it to a goal and we want to achieve it and we try all the time and we do not quit". However, both the interviews and the field notes showed that students were uncertain about how to devise a goal plan or a goal ladder in order to achieve their goal:

> As in other classes, in this one the steps in the goal plan were vague...not precise
> and without a deadline...more like wishes and not like certain actions that had
> to be performed.
> (Field notes)

Regarding positive thinking, students could easily differentiate positive from negative thinking, to comment on the relation of these two types of thinking with performance. For example, "Positive thinking helps us having better confidence and this way we achieve things...negative thinking causes insecurity and we think we are not going to achieve anything...it prevents success" (Student's interview).

Similarly, students had understood the problem-solving technique they had been taught. For example, "I think what could be done, I think of solutions and then the one that is more closely to what helps me, this solution I choose" (Student's notebook).

Perception of usefulness of life skills

Students had a clear positive opinion regarding the usefulness of life-skills for their life. They thought that using the skills they had learned they would be better not only in sport but also in school and later in their life. For example, "...(life skills would be useful) to get higher grades...for succeeding and not giving up in the first instance...when I grow up perhaps in my job, in my personal life"; "To have higher confidence in whatever we do" (Students' interviews).

The physical education teachers also commented that the skills that students were

taught would be useful for them: "Kids, apart from motor skills would be more conscientious...and I believe they would be happier with what they do" (Teacher's interview). Informal conversations with the students also confirmed this view. In such a conversation, a student who was a high-level athlete commented that:

> For me all these things are really useful, I like them and they help me a lot. We may have been using them such as setting goals with my coach, but now I understand these goals better and most importantly I can set goals myself knowing what to do in every step. Also with positive thinking we learned something similar with what my coach keeps telling me, to focus on what I have to do and not to think of anything else.

Application and transfer of life skills

Themes that emerged from the data regarding the application and transfer of life skills regarded (a) the application of life skills in various situations within the program, (b) students' beliefs regarding the applicability of life skills, and (c) transfer of life skills.

Application of life skills within the program. During the program, unsupervised practice was allowed in order to create a setting in which the students could use the skills they learned in order to improve their performance. The investigator observed that students used the skills in several instances such as in a basketball game. Specifically, "They convened and they argued loudly to devise a strategy for their team"; "It was a great surprise for me that they were asking for a time-out in order to convene, without me having asked them to do so"(Field notes).

There has been an interesting case of a student with low confidence who could not cope in her team which was very competitive and she was constantly asking to be put in another team. The researcher noted in his field notes: "She insisted, started crying not being able to handle rejection from her peers in the team...I proposed to her to try to apply the problem-solving method we had learned and to try to apply this procedure". When interviewed, after the completion of the program, this student said:

> I looked for solutions I could find – I saw there was no other way. Crying and being sad I would not do anything and here I am – I managed to be a friend in this team...I set goals, I think positively even if I make a mistake, next time I could do it...I managed to have confidence...something I thought as impossible...and my character changed.
> (Student's interview)

Students' beliefs regarding the applicability of life skills. Students regarded life skills as applicable in their everyday life. For example, "Some time I will need them...in my life, after I finish school...in our everyday life when we have some problems"; "...in studying, in sport...basically in everyday life" (Students' interviews).

Transfer of life skills. Several students reported that they employed some of the skills in settings other than the program. For example, two student-athletes reported that they employed the skills when practicing their sport outside school. Specifically, "I have already started using them and they definitely help...I set a goal for 29 s for 50 m (the athlete refers to swimming) and I did it – with a lot of training of course"; "I used positive thinking in volleyball during the game yesterday but also when studying English at home" (Students' interviews).

Popular reasons for employing life skills were personal problems, time management and handling conflicts. For example, "When arguing...in order to find a compromise...how to get friends and things like that"; "I set specific goals in my life...it isn't like before that I was always in a hurry, I didn't find the time. I have said I will be free for so much time, I will study for so much time" (Student's interview).

> When I studied for school and had negative thoughts for example in history. I had negative thoughts such as the teacher will question me and I won't be able to answer, but then I changed this negative thought to a positive one and I had no stress, I wasn't afraid and everything was OK...
> (Student's notebook).

DISCUSSION

The aim of the present study was to evaluate a life skills program – an abbreviated form of SUPER – employing qualitative methodology. The results showed an overall positive impact of the program. The program was generally received positively by the students and compared favorably with traditional physical education. Further, the students learned about life skills, believed that these skills are applicable in their life, and transferred, to some extent, these skills in life situations. These results complement results from a quantitative evaluation of the program by Goudas and Giannoudis (2008) who reported that students who received the program had more knowledge about life skills and performed better on sport skills. Overall, the program appears to be effective in teaching life skills in conjunction with sport skills. However, as work with students' notebooks was optional, those students who returned those were probably the ones who were motivated toward the program.

These results are in accordance with previous studies that examined the effectiveness of the SUPER program (Danish, 2002), both its full form (Brunelle et al., 2007) and an abbreviated form (Goudas et al., 2006; Papacharisis et al., 2005). Thus, it appears that SUPER is an effective program for teaching life skills in middle- and high-school students. Gould and Carson (2008) have recently noticed that existing research on the effectiveness of life skills programs is somewhat limited. However, the results of the present study, together with those of previous respective ones compile a body of research that testifies the effectiveness of the SUPER program.

Gould and Carson (2008) have advocated the use of quantitative and qualitative research in life skills. The results of the present study, in relation to those of Goudas and Giannoudis (2008), show that the use of both types of research in evaluating a program may reveal different aspects of its effectiveness. For example, while Goudas and Giannoudis (2008) based on group means reported an overall trend of improvement of students' sport and life skills, the present study showed that there was a minority of students who were negatively predisposed towards the program and were never really engaged in the program's activities. Further, while the results of Goudas and Giannoudis (2008) showed a nonsignificant improvement in students' beliefs regarding the use of goal setting, the present results clearly show that a number of students felt competent in using these skills and applied it in several circumstances. These different aspects may have been masked if only one research method had been used. Petitpas et al. (2005) suggested that three types of evaluation research are needed in youth sport programs: implementation, process and outcome. Although both quantitative and qualitative research may be employed for all three types of evaluation, it seems that qualitative research is more suitable for implementation and process evaluations and quantitative research is more suitable for outcome evaluation.

Gould and Carson (2008) noted that the assumption that life skills learned in youth sport programs are transferred to other life settings is seldom tested. The present study provides evidence that several participants employed the skills they learned in other life circumstances. Those included sport practice, studying at home and trying to help friends who had problems. Life skills transfer does not occur automatically. On the contrary, specific strategies should be included in respective programs towards this aim. The present program involved three such strategies: (a) there was respective teacher talk during sessions; (b) there were respective exercises in the students' notebook, and (c) students were asked to teach the skills they learned to someone else outside school. It appears that these three strategies were successful in facilitating transfer of life skills. In future studies, a more formal evaluation of transfer should be tested. This may involve employment of a graded approach where

transfer of life skills is first examined in the same setting that the program took place, after the completion of the program (i.e., physical education), then transfer is examined in a similar setting (i.e., school) and then in a different context (i.e., home or community).

A note is warranted regarding the program's feature of students being asked to teach the skills they learned outside school. This strategy has, in our opinion, two important advantages. First, students are more deeply and actively involved with the skills because of the need to present and explain them. Rather than being passive recipients of the material taught, they need to engage actively with it in order to be able to teach this material to other people. Second, parents, who are usually those being taught by the students are informed about the program in a lively way. The results of this study show that parents commented very positively students' efforts to teach them life skills. Securing a positive reaction by parents is rather important for the program's visibility and longevity.

The evaluation of the program indicated two design-related drawbacks. These were the compulsory goal setting and the second was the short duration of the program in conjunction with the limited variety of the skills practiced. Some students were hesitant to set a goal in sports that did not interest them and this has detrimental effects on the teaching of the goal-setting element of the program. Clearly, goal setting is a self-regulation action and cannot be imposed to the students. In order to overcome this problem, future applications of the program may involve more efforts to convince students about the value of goal setting and, second, may provide students with a range of options regarding the sport skills they are asked to set a goal for.

A second drawback of the program was the short period for its employment. The researcher's observations and the interviews with the physical education teachers that were involved in the implementation indicated that more time was needed in order to teach the skills and involve all the students. Interestingly, several students complained that the program became boring and this may be, to some extent justified, as the program involved a limited number of sport skills. A possible solution in future applications of the program may be to teach only one or two life skills, in longer period of time involving more sports and giving students a range of choices.

APPENDIX A

Description of the program

Session	Life skills	Team sport	Lesson content
1	Goal setting	Basketball	Introduction to goal setting, principles of goal setting
			Basketball dribble pretest
			Goal setting for basketball dribble test
2	Goal setting	Basketball	Goal-setting examples
			Basketball pass pretest
			Goal setting for basketball pass test
3	Goal setting	Basketball	Goal achievement plan
			Basketball passing and dribbling drills
4	Goal setting	Basketball	Development of personal goal achievement plan
			Basketball passing and dribbling drills
5	Problem solving	Basketball	Problem-solving strategy
			Applying the strategy to modified games
6	Problem solving	Basketball	Applying the problem-solving strategy to overcome roadblocks to goal achievement
			Applying the strategy to modified games
7	Problem solving	Basketball	Applying the problem-solving strategy to overcome roadblocks to goal achievement
			Applying the strategy to modified games
8	Positive thinking	Basketball	Introduction to positive thinking and self-talk
			Drills practice using keywords
9	Positive thinking	Basketball	Changing negative thoughts to positive ones.
			Drills practice using keywords and changing negative thoughts
			Reminding of goals
10	Goal setting	Basketball	Dribble and pass posttest
			Check for goal achievement
11	Goal setting	Volleyball	Service and pass pretest
			Goal setting for service and pass tests
12	Goal setting	Volleyball	Goals achievement plan
			Pass and service drills

13	Positive thinking	Volleyball	Positive thinking and self-talk
			Drills practice using keywords
14	Positive thinking	Volleyball	Drills practice using keywords and changing negative thoughts
15	Problem solving	Volleyball	Applying the problem-solving strategy to overcome roadblocks to goal achievement
			Applying the strategy to modified games
16	Problem solving	Volleyball	Applying the strategy to modified games
17	Goal setting	Volleyball	Service and pass posttests
			Check for goal achievement

Note: The table is reprinted from Learning and Instruction, Vol. 18, Goudas, M., & Giannoudis, G., A team-sports-based life-skills program in a physical education context, pp. 528-536, Copyright 2008, with permission from Elsevier.

APPENDIX B

The student interview schedule

Can you describe what we did in this program the last two months?

How did you find the program?

If you were the leader of this program, what would you do in order students like the program?

What about doing P.E. like this program from now on?

What do you know about life skills?

What do you think about the homework you had to do?

Did you try to teach life skills to other persons? Tell me about this.

Do you think you can use life skills?

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