An Ecological Analysis of Middle School Misbehavior Through Student and Teacher Perspectives

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This study was designed to investigate how the classroom ecology (interactions among task systems) and program of action influence participants’ understandings of misbehavior in a middle school physical education setting. One teacher and 14 students participated in a 10-day basketball unit with 47-minute classes. Data included fieldnotes, stimulated recall using videotapes, and semi-structured teacher and student pre- and post-unit interviews. Data were first analyzed inductively by constant comparison (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and then by using Doyle’s (1986) classroom ecology model to understand the inductively generated categories. Data trustworthiness involved prolonged engagement, member checks, and triangulation. Results indicated that the teacher’s weak managerial task system, coupled with vague and incomplete instructional tasks, interacted with a student social system grounded in various forms of talk as social tasks to support a social program of action. Both teacher and student actions jointly created a primary social vector characterizing the overall program of action.

Key Words: classroom ecology, middle school physical education

Misbehavior is a complex problem that all teachers face regardless of their career stage (e.g., preservice neophytes to veteran teachers), the subject matter they teach, or the K–12 grade level they teach. Some teachers, particularly novices, confront misbehavior more than others (Fernandez Balboa, 1991; Veenman, 1984). Misbehavior has been shown to be one of the primary considerations when teachers plan and implement lessons (Placek, 1983), and effective teachers consistently manage student misbehavior better than do ineffective ones (Fink & Siedentop, 1989; O’Sullivan & Dyson, 1994; Siedentop & Tannehill, 1999). The ability to handle student misbehavior contributes to a teacher’s successful classroom management (McCormack, 1997) while failure to do so may contribute to
teacher dissatisfaction, lack of teaching efficacy, stress, and even burnout (Martin & Norwich, 1991; McCormack, 1997; Zeidner, 1988).

Misbehavior, sometimes called troublesome or disruptive behavior (McCormack, 1997; O’Hagan & Edmunds, 1982), influences classroom life by interrupting the learning environment and thus reducing students’ potential academic achievement. It also interferes with a positive classroom climate and student social interactions and may create an atmosphere that reduces the participation of some students (Brophy & Good, 1986; Doyle, 1986; Kounin, 1970). Disruptions due to misbehavior can reduce learning time for all students and can distract the teacher as well (Fernandez-Balboa, 1991).

Researchers have studied the types, frequencies, and severity of misbehaviors at both the elementary and secondary level in various cultures. British inservice teachers in one study, for example, said they spent an inordinate amount of time dealing with misbehaviors and class control issues, and that misbehaviors occurred at different levels of severity. However, they considered most misbehaviors to be somewhat trivial in their overall schemes of class management (Houghton, Wheldall, & Merrett 1988; McCormack, 1997; Wheldall & Merrett, 1988). French Canadian preservice teachers delineated three levels of severity of misbehaviors in their classes: those that disturbed the teacher only, those that disrupted the class briefly, and those that disrupted the class for a significant period of time (Brunelle, Brunelle, Martel, Goyette, & Mostafa, 1995; Gagnon, Brunelle, Spallanzani, & Marzouk, 1995). In general, the perspectives of teachers have been better represented than those of students in the research to date, both in the U.S. and abroad (Kulinna, Cothran, & Regualos, 2001a, 2001b; Lee, Croninger, Linn, & Chen, 1996; Lesley, 1981; Pestello, 1989; Stinson, 1993).

Many approaches to studying misbehavior yield information about the type, severity, or frequency of misbehaviors without regard for their specific classroom contexts, rather than providing explanations of how misbehavior fits into the ongoing dynamics of classroom interaction or of factors that may generate, maintain, or reduce misbehavior within a particular context. One study did address the behavioral context, however, finding that physical education student teachers responded both directly and indirectly, depending on the intensity of student misbehavior (Goyette, Dore, & Dion, 2000).

Doyle’s (1977, 1983, 1984, 1986) ecological paradigm provides an option for investigating misbehavior in context so that these issues can be addressed. The ecological paradigm has been used to examine several aspects of the dynamics of life in the gymnasium (Hastie & Siedentop, 1999). Doyle’s key concept in this paradigm is the program of action (PoA), that is, the simultaneous and ongoing interrelationships among the three major task systems composing the classroom ecology: the instructional, managerial, and student social task systems. Any classroom PoA features the primary vector, or the main flow of classroom events, which is analogous to a vector in physics as the intersection of several forces moving an object in a summative direction. In most cases this means the three interrelated task systems support the teacher’s strongest intended goal, usually centered on student learning.

This vector is strongest when the teacher’s agenda is about (a) completing academic work, as demonstrated through the instructional task system; (b) creating and maintaining order, as shown through the managerial task system; and (c) using the student social task system to support the vector moving in intended di-
rections (Doyle, 1977, 1986). Secondary vectors in the overall PoA are often created by student and teacher actions that challenge the strength of the primary vector in a lesson, effectively pulling or pushing it off to the side of its intended direction and weakening it. The PoA thus results from the dynamic interplay among the three task systems and among the primary and all secondary vectors present. Since student academic work tasks comprise the usual PoA, the extent to which both students and teacher negotiate these various tasks determines the ultimate strength of the overall PoA and the general climate of a particular classroom ecology.

Because the ecological framework focuses on behavior-environment relationships, it provides an appropriate way to capture social interactions between students and teachers as represented in lesson tasks, most of which can be categorized as part of the instructional, managerial, or student social task systems (Doyle, 1986; Jones, 1992; Siedentop, 1988; Siedentop & Tannehill, 1999). Teachers set managerial tasks to gain and maintain student cooperation (Doyle, 1986; Doyle & Carter, 1984; Siedentop & Tannehill, 1999). Effective teachers begin with explicit rules, routines, and expectations (Fink & Siedentop, 1989; O’Sullivan & Dyson, 1994), provide more explicit managerial tasks (Jones, 1992), set tighter managerial boundaries, and hold students accountable by close monitoring of their activities (Siedentop, 1988). Misbehavior is one way students can modify managerial tasks by not conforming to the teacher’s managerial expectations (Jones, 1992; Lund, 1992).

Instructional tasks, designed to help students learn subject matter (Doyle, 1977, 1983; Doyle & Carter, 1984; Siedentop, 1988), are often complex and not always equally appropriate for students of different backgrounds or skill levels within the same class. When students adjust such tasks to better suit their needs, this can sometimes be taken as misbehavior (Tousignant & Siedentop, 1983); such modifications occur frequently with instructional tasks (Alexander, 1982; Doyle, 1983; Jones, 1992; Son, 1989). Two important elements of students’ negotiating instructional tasks are the degree of ambiguity and the risk associated with a task. The ambiguity is greater when tasks are less explicit, and the risk is greater when accountability for accomplishing the tasks is tight. Furthermore, student social tasks are interwoven among the managerial and instructional task systems and are not always easy to observe (Jones, 1992; Siedentop & Tannehill, 1999). Depending on when and how social tasks occur, they may facilitate or inhibit the primary vector and the overall PoA (Hastie, 1995, 2000; Hastie & Siedentop, 1999). While some student-generated social tasks are accepted by teachers, others may be classified as misbehavior.

Therefore, misbehavior can interfere with the flow of teaching, interrupt the PoA (Doyle, 1986), and prevent students from learning. As a consequence, higher rates of misbehavior decrease opportunities for learning by creating secondary vectors that weaken the primary vector because the pace and continuity of the PoA cannot be maintained. When teachers effectively manage misbehavior through their overall PoA, more learning may occur as long as teachers intend learning as the primary vector and cornerstone of their PoA. Misbehavior thus becomes a key component of the classroom ecology to study in order to determine how it influences the PoA in a particular setting.

Since teachers and students negotiate the classroom environment (Doyle, 1977, 1986), it is important to look at both perspectives. Several researchers have shown that student perspectives on school and classroom events often differ from
those of teachers (Allen, 1986, 1995; Farrell, Peguero, Lindsey, & White, 1988). With respect to class management in particular, Zeidner (1988) found that Israeli teachers and students disagreed in their ratings of several strategies used by teachers. In a large-scale study based on a specifically developed psychometric instrument and interviews, student and teacher views of misbehavior coincide in some respects but disagree in others (Kulinna et al., 2001a, 2001b). Students differed by gender, age, and ethnic group in their perceptions of the misbehaviors captured on this psychometric instrument and were able to distinguish between mild, moderate, and severe misbehaviors (Cothran, Kulinna, & Tormanen, 2001).

Because events in a classroom ecology are situation-specific and depend on interactions among students and teacher, it is important to capture perspectives from all participants in those events. The significance of the present study was its use of classroom ecology (Doyle, 1986) as a theoretical base through which to detail the dynamics of this classroom’s interactions among participants. Specifically, this study investigated how the classroom ecology, the interactions among the task systems, and the PoA influence participants’ understandings of misbehavior in a middle school physical education setting.

**Methods**

**Participants and Setting**

This is an instrumental case study of one physical education class (Stake, 1995) used to understand how a middle school physical education classroom ecology functions around misbehavior as described by the participants. A male teacher and 14 of 20 students in a basketball unit volunteered to participate in this study. The setting was Champion Middle & High School (CMHS). Students included 5 eighth-graders and 9 seventh-graders (4 F, 10 M), of whom 12 were Anglo and 2 were Asian; the average age was 13. Pseudonyms are used for people and places, and appropriate university informed-consent procedures were followed; the remaining 6 of the 20 students chose not to be included in the study. CMHS was chosen for several reasons: it is a local high school with a physical education program typical of the area, its three physical educators accepted the first author for long-term study of their program, and all volunteered for this research.

CMHS has 676 students in Grades 7–12, with a third of them actively involved in school or community sports. Students rated the physical education program highly (4 or 5 on a 5-point Likert scale), and informal interviews with the three physical educators confirmed that they shared these positive views about their program. The CMHS student handbook contained specific examples of student misbehavior, along with graduated punishments (after-school detention, inschool suspension, and finally, suspension from school). The vice principal served as backup for teachers when the teacher, student, and parents could not resolve a particular misbehavior issue.

Since the school was undergoing major renovation at the time of this study, only one gymnasium and two outdoor spaces were available for classes. The physical educators taught both health and physical education. They were observed to be a congenial department that holds few formal meetings but communicates constantly in short bursts of conversation in the halls or gymnasium. Mr. B, with 27 years of experience, taught 5 to 6 classes per day and coached girls’ softball in the spring.
He was chosen randomly from the three teachers who volunteered to participate. CMHS required physical education for one semester per year, with students choosing among two or three activities offered at the same time. Classes met daily for approximately 47 minutes, and activity units lasted 10 days.

Data Collection

Data were obtained by (a) videotaped class observations, (b) stimulated-recall interviews based on the videotapes, and (c) teacher and student interviews. Several pilot field studies conducted in the same setting were designed to familiarize the first author with this middle school, its physical education program, the physical education teachers, and general student life at school (Supaporn, 1996).

Pilot Work. The first author observed Mr. B during an entire 10-day flag football unit by following him through complete school days to observe classes, converse informally with both teacher and students about their experiences in this activity, and gain a sense of the culture of this school in general and of Mr. B’s physical education classes in particular. Within the 47-min allotted class time, observation began as soon as Mr. B arrived at school and continued until he left the building after school. Observation focused on understanding this workplace context; discovering Mr. B’s general rules, routines, and expectations (RREs) for conducting physical education units; and observing incidents of misbehavior.

Videotaped Class Observations. Mr. B’s entire 10-day basketball unit was videotaped from a camera placed in a high corner of the bleachers, which was the best position for observing a wide angle of class activities. The tape began when students first entered the gym and stopped after they disappeared through the gym doors at the end of class. Videotaping captured observable events in the basketball unit. Live fieldnotes and expanded fieldnotes from the videotapes were taken to identify and catalog incidents of misbehavior from the researcher’s point of view and to prepare for the stimulated-recall interviews to follow.

Stimulated-Recall Interviews. Four of the 10 lessons in the unit were chosen for stimulated recall based on the high rates of misbehavior observed and noted in researcher fieldnotes in these lessons. The 14 students and the teacher individually watched these four videotapes with the first author. Pilot study data (Supaporn, 1996) indicated that 40- to 50-min review sessions worked well. Each participant identified and described instances of misbehavior he or she saw on the videotapes, indicating whether he/she had noticed this misbehavior during the lesson itself or only during videotape review. These stimulated-recall interview sessions were audiotaped and transcribed.

Teacher and Student Interviews. Semi-structured interviews with the teacher and 14 students were conducted at the beginning and end of the basketball unit. The pre-interview protocols, based on pilot study data (Supaporn, 1996), elicited descriptions of well-behaved and poorly-behaved students in physical education, definitions of misbehavior, specific examples of misbehavior and appropriate behavior during class, ideas for preventing and addressing misbehaviors, and the circumstances in which misbehavior occurs. The post-interview protocols addressed Mr. B’s particular basketball unit with respect to his RREs, appropriate behavior and misbehavior, class goals of students and teacher, and other topics similar to the pre-interview (specific protocols are available upon request from the first author at salee@swu.ac.th). All interviews were transcribed.
Data Analysis and Data Trustworthiness

Interview transcripts (student and teacher interviews, stimulated recall interviews) and observational fieldnotes from videotapes were inductively coded using constant comparative methods (Goetz & LeComte, 1984; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to search for similarities and differences, developing these into categories with mutually exclusive definitions, properties, and dimensions. Once categories were established, underlying themes were identified that cut across several categories. Themes and categories were then interpreted with reference to classroom ecology.

To assure the soundness of data collection and analysis, prolonged engagement, member checks, and triangulation among data sources and across participants were used (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Through general observation visits, two pilot studies, and the dissertation upon which this paper is based, the first author spent 2-1/2 years in the physical education department of this school. Member checks involved asking the teacher and students to read interview transcripts and indicate any misinterpretations, and, when necessary, clarify aspects of teacher and student perspectives on misbehavior during the post-interview. The three data collection methods and 15 participants allowed for triangulation in two dimensions, across sources and participants.

Results

An ecological analysis emphasizes contextualization of events. Misbehavior in Mr. B’s basketball unit was situated within the broad context of the lessons themselves. First, participants’ perceptions of misbehavior will be described briefly, followed by a short description to illustrate the general context of the basketball unit and the two lessons in which the most misbehaviors occurred. Then Mr. B’s classroom ecology will be described with reference to the three interacting task systems and how these influenced misbehavior.

Participants’ Descriptions of Misbehavior

Data from interviews, critical incidents, stimulated-recall sessions, and fieldnotes showed that all participants defined misbehavior in general as when students either were not doing what they were supposed to do, or doing what they were not supposed to do. Most misbehaviors that students provided were RRE-related, primarily verbal or physical, and were reported as interfering with instructional or managerial tasks. For example, verbal misbehaviors included talking, yelling, criticizing peers, using inappropriate language, or arguing with the teacher. As Meagan stated, “A lot of people were swearing in gym class. Probably everyone said so much, so he [Mr. B] didn’t care much any more.”

Physical misbehaviors included wandering or fooling around, walking on bleachers, hanging on basketball hoops, using equipment inappropriately, leaving the gym, pushing, hitting, kicking, or fighting. For instance, Alisa threw the team vest at Mr B: “I didn’t go over to give the shirt to him. I threw it at him instead. I wasn’t meaning to do it, because I like Mr. B. I think I was just fooling around and throwing it.” Other misbehaviors that violated Mr. B’s primary RREs of “change, participate, cooperate, and learn” included not listening, not changing clothes, not participating, skipping class, not following directions, breaking class rules, and
not paying attention. Mr. B’s particular RREs were vague enough to allow a range of student interpretations as to what constituted misbehavior in his classes.

These participants most frequently contextualized their definitions of misbehaviors by referring to the action itself, how it affected other students or the teacher, or how the teacher responded to the incident. Although there did not seem to be any clear and universal norms for classifying the severity of misbehavior, participants did indicate varying degrees of misbehavior: mild, such as fooling around; medium, such as students continuing to shoot baskets while Mr. B was giving instructions; and severe, such as fighting. The lack of universal norms appeared to be related to the contextual details of an incident, as Dick explained:

They were just fooling around. Depends on if you are doing it and you get into trouble or you are doing it to be fun. Fooling around with your friends and fooling around to get into trouble is different. If you are fooling around on someone else’s time while they are talking, that was misbehaving. If you are fooling around when you can be fooling around, that’s not misbehaving.

Based on the first author’s analysis of misbehavior incidents from fieldnotes of the classes and the videotapes, the next section briefly describes the basketball unit and two lessons to provide a sense of what these classes looked like with respect to the general ecology of this unit.

**Description and Analysis of the Basketball Unit and Lessons 4 and 10**

According to fieldnotes, the basketball unit, like the flag football unit that preceded it, lasted 10 days, which is typical for units at this middle school. Mr. B taught fundamentals with drills for skills the first 3 days, then switched to 2 days of half drills and half 5-v-5 game play, with two games each conducted across half of the full-length basketball court. The final 5 days of the unit began with a drill warm-up followed by full-game play, again cross-court, with Mr. B refereeing the game with more activity. On the last day, full-court 5-v-5 games were held. The most misbehaviors observed were in Lessons 4 and 10 (see Tables 1 and 2).

In the 29 minutes of activity time in Lesson 4, as in Lessons 1–9, students practiced drills and played games across the width of the gym. All practiced a 2-v-3 drill, shot free throws in groups of 6 or 7, and then chose between playing 5-v-5 games or “shooting around” (any shots allowed). Mr. B gave no task specifics such as explicit goals, number of trials, or elements of skill topography, perhaps assuming the students understood how to do the 2-v-3 drill. Mr. B monitored the class from the middle of the gym, walking around and giving feedback to students with his back to about half the class at any one time. Students generally misbehaved behind Mr. B’s back. Lesson 10 activity time, 38 minutes, was the first time students played full-court basketball. The two lesson tasks for the entire time were 5-v-5 games and shooting around, although the full-court lengthwise games left little space along the sidelines for the second task. Mr. B refereed and kept score for games but did not pay much attention to students shooting baskets.

As can be seen in Tables 1 and 2, and as might be expected, both the students and Mr. B noticed far more misbehaviors on the videotapes of these two lessons than they had during the actual classes, and none of the participants noticed as
### Table 1  Lesson 4: Misbehavior Incidents Identified by Participants From Videotape and in the Lesson

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Misbehavior Event</th>
<th>Gale</th>
<th>Knute</th>
<th>Meg</th>
<th>Tracy</th>
<th>Nero</th>
<th>Alisa</th>
<th>Dave</th>
<th>Hatch</th>
<th>Mark</th>
<th>Cam</th>
<th>Jacob</th>
<th>Dick</th>
<th>Victor</th>
<th>Pete</th>
<th>Mr. B</th>
<th>% Who saw it</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Jacob cutting before a turn</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
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<td>13%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Four girls cheering</td>
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<td>13%</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Jacob &amp; Stephen not listening</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>IC</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>40%</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Dave &amp; Cam playing with golf balls</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
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<td>7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Stephen kicked ball from Tim’s hand</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
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<td>6. Pete sat on the bleachers</td>
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<td></td>
<td>13%</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Gale pushed Dave, Dave hit Gale with hat</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>IC</td>
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<td>IC</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>IC 14/15</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Tim pushed Stephen</td>
<td>VT</td>
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<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
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<td>VT</td>
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<td>47%</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Jeff kicked Stephen</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
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<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Jeff hit Stephen</td>
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<td></td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Jeff threw ball at Steph</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
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<td>73%</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Jeff pushed Stephen</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>33%</td>
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<tr>
<td>13. Jeff threw ball at Steph</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>IC</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Jeff threw ball at Steph</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Jeff &amp; Stephen not listening</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>IC 13/15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Jacob kicked ball</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

% of Events seen by each participant: 38% 38% 56% 62% 19% 44% 12% 44% 56% 50% 25% 19% 37% 44% 50%

*Note: VT = videotape; IC = in-class observations. Columns = individual student responses.*
Table 2  Lesson 10:  Misbehavior Incidents Identified by Participants From Videotape and in the Lesson

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Misbehavior Event</th>
<th>Gale</th>
<th>Knute</th>
<th>Meg</th>
<th>Tracy</th>
<th>Nero</th>
<th>Alisa</th>
<th>Dave</th>
<th>Hatch</th>
<th>Mark</th>
<th>Cam</th>
<th>Jacob</th>
<th>Dick</th>
<th>Victor</th>
<th>Pete</th>
<th>Mr. B % Who saw it</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Jacob kicked Nero</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Eric tripped Jacob</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Pete &amp; Nero pushed each other</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
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<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
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<td>VT</td>
<td>IC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Three students kicked each other</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
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<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>IC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Cam twisted Scott’s arm</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Jacob kicked basketball</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Knute kicked basketball</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Beth &amp; Emily left the gym</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Gale threw the ball into the court</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td></td>
<td>VC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Jacob threw the ball at Eric</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Mark kicked a basketball</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Jacob threw the ball at Eric</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td></td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td></td>
<td>VT</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Eric threw the ball at Jacob</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>IC</td>
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<td>IC</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>VT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Jacob kicked a basketball</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>IC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Cont.)
### Table 2 (Cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Misbehavior Event</th>
<th>Gale</th>
<th>Knute</th>
<th>Meg</th>
<th>Tracy</th>
<th>Nero</th>
<th>Alisa</th>
<th>Dave</th>
<th>Hatch</th>
<th>Mark</th>
<th>Cam</th>
<th>Jacob</th>
<th>Dick</th>
<th>Victor</th>
<th>Pete</th>
<th>Mr. B</th>
<th>% Who saw it</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15. Dave threw the ball into the court</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td></td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Steph took a ball from Emily</td>
<td></td>
<td>IC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Three girls played with a volleyball</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Mark climbed balcony during a game</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Eric shot into a court from behind a hoop</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Nero threw a ball at Dave</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>VT</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Eric shot from behind the bleachers</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Dave shot from the bleachers</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td></td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Jeff served a volleyball</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td></td>
<td>VT</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>VT</td>
<td></td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Jeff kicked a volleyball</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Alisa threw a vest to Mr. B</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td></td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>VT</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Events seen by each participant</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: VT = videotape; IC = in-class observations. Columns = individual student responses.*
much misbehavior as the researcher did when taking fieldnotes. Data from fieldnotes indicated three typical occasions when students misbehaved within the instructional ecology Mr. B had established: when he stationed himself primarily on the game-playing end of the gymnasium; when his attention was on full-court play; and when he positioned himself amidst the students while giving overlapping managerial and instructional tasks. In all such instances he was unable to actively monitor and give feedback to everyone in the class, instead focusing on the group of students nearest him.

Interactions of the Managerial, Instructional, and Student Social Task Systems

The primary vector of Mr. B’s class is best classified as social in nature, “going along to get along”; in this case, however, it is the teacher who goes along to get along with his students. Thus, the overall PoA for Mr. B’s basketball unit was far weaker in terms of learning, and far stronger as a primary social vector securely held in place by the interactions among the three task systems. Mr. B’s managerial task system contributed to this primary social vector by lacking clear RREs and by his selectively addressing misbehaviors. His instructional task system contributed to the primary social vector by the lack of clarity in instructional tasks, the consequently strong task negotiation by students, his interruptions in the flow of lessons, and the looseness of his accountability measures. The student social task system supported the primary social vector in that students held social tasks to be highly significant in their goals for physical education, they accomplished these primarily through talking, and they identified and defined misbehavior partially by reference to the social tasks that flourished in this classroom ecology.

Managerial Task System. How Mr. B managed his class influenced student misbehavior. Students were reasonably clear about his RREs for dressing and participation as well as some managerial tasks, but they were unclear about consequences for violating these. With respect to dressing, Hatch said, “You have to wear appropriate clothing like tennis shoes, sweats, or shorts,” while Jacob recalled, “You got to change or you get a detention; you have to wear sneakers.” Mr. B concurred: “They are required to change for every class and they are graded on that and also their effort.” A statement by Mark, however, illustrates students’ uncertainty about the actual consequences of violating RREs: “He probably gives you a first chance and then a detention for a second chance. He will tell them [students] not to do any more and the second time they did, he probably gives them a detention.”

According to fieldnotes from videotape and live observations, Mr. B was also reasonably strict with managerial tasks such as grouping or asking students to form two lines around the hoops. He monitored these tasks fairly closely, expecting students to do what he said and making comments if students did not follow his directions. For example, when Stephanie tried to switch teams to be with her friends, he warned her, “Stay in your group if you are going to be in this unit.”

Unfortunately, data from the videotapes and stimulated-recall interviews showed no other explicit class routines being directly taught to support managerial or instructional tasks. Therefore students had difficulty determining misbehaviors that related to routines for gathering, handling equipment, leaving the gym, start-
ing the activity, and gaining student attention. For example, there was no routine for starting activities. After giving directions, Mr. B generally gave no signal to begin activity, so students did not know exactly when to start. In Lesson 10, for example, Mr. B told students that Jeff’s team would practice shooting while Dick’s and Eric’s teams would play 5-v-5 games. Videotapes showed that Jeff’s team variously listened to Mr. B, walked away with their friends, shot baskets, left the gym, or looked for basketballs to shoot on the sidelines. Without clear routines, explicit directions for starting this activity, or a definite signal to begin the games, these behaviors were difficult to categorize as misbehavior.

When students were unclear about class RREs, they used their own judgments about misbehavior and these typically differed. For example, when viewing the videotape, students disagreed on their interpretation of the following incident: Jacob kicked the basketball when he should have been listening to directions and when he should have been shooting around (see Table 1, Events 3 and 16). Dick said, “I can’t really tell if he misbehaved. I guess he was misbehaving because he wasn’t listening to the teacher. It’s kind of distracting. The teacher probably saw him but he [Mr. B] didn’t say anything.” Tracy waffled, but for different reasons: “Not really misbehavior, but kind of, because he could hurt somebody if anybody was around.”

Commenting on the same incident, Alisa argued that this was misbehavior: “He misbehaved because he was not supposed to do that. It ruined the ball. If people see him doing that, they might think that they can and then everyone starts doing it.” Pete agreed: “He shouldn’t do that [kick the ball] because he could ruin equipment and he was using a wrong kind of ball for doing it [kicking]. We are doing basketball, not soccer.” Had Mr. B explicitly indicated some routines about proper care of equipment and for treating other students respectfully, these students’ various interpretations of Jacob’s act may have been more alike. Since students were free to interpret misbehavior according to their own criteria, there was more room for engaging in various social behaviors and following their own social agendas since these did not necessarily conflict with Mr. B’s expectations for their managerial or academic work behaviors in class.

A second teacher action within the managerial task system that contributed to the primary social vector was how Mr. B addressed misbehavior. Generally he ignored misbehaviors that he did not perceive as severe. Fieldnotes and interview data indicated that he responded only to incidents he viewed as seriously disruptive to the class or which could lead to injury. If he was giving directions to the class and one or two students continued shooting baskets, this did not bother him as long as the whole class was not watching them. He said, “I don’t mind if they [misbehaving students] don’t distract what we are trying to do. As long as it doesn’t bother the kids who are involved in the activity, I have no problem with it.” Nonetheless, such behaviors often created a ripple effect; more students began shooting or watching those who were, until Mr. B said or did something to draw students’ attention back to his instruction. Students reported that Mr. B was not strict because he allowed students to get away with misbehavior too often, and they believed this resulted in more students being likely to misbehave in the future.

**Instructional Task System.** Mr. B’s instructional task system was characterized by fuzzy instructional tasks, much student task negotiation as a result of this fuzziness, a rather interrupted flow of lesson activities, and loose accountabil-
ity that did not drive the primary vector toward accomplishing the class work. His overall pattern for presenting instructional tasks during the basketball unit consisted of three classes spent teaching basic fundamental skills and drills, two classes split between drills and game play, and five classes (half the unit) with one drill and progressively greater proportions of game play, with full court 5-v-5 play only on the last day.

Mr. B’s task statements were usually implicit with respect to conditions, expected performance, and criteria. In one instance he simply said, “People who want to play a game or games are up here [gestured to one end of the gym]. People who want to just shoot around are down in this half.” Although Mr. B wanted students to complete these tasks, neither the conditions nor criteria for judging the quality of performance were provided. His tasks had only the broadest boundaries of what was expected as acceptable performance. For this example task, all kinds of shots (lay-ups, free throws) and all types of games (1-v-1, 2-v-3, 5-v-5) were acceptable. Of course most students also understood that Mr. B only wanted them to participate rather than be held accountable for instructional task performance or for learning. With such fuzzy stated tasks, there was great ambiguity but little risk in negotiating or ignoring the tasks, since there were no explicit standards for performance. Hence the instructional task presentation allowed ample room for students to implement their own tasks, primarily socializing, and thus to greatly influence the delineation of the primary vector as social rather than based on learning.

Actual instructional tasks generally seemed to differ from stated ones (e.g., shooting baskets or playing games). Fieldnotes and interviews indicated that even though students knew at some level what and how to do the tasks of shooting and game playing, they continued to push for broader task boundaries so they could also include their own social agendas during class. Some combined shooting and sitting or standing around with their friends. It gradually became clear to students that all combinations of task performance were acceptable because Mr. B did not respond negatively when they combined or changed the implicitly stated tasks. Students learned the actual instructional tasks from observing Mr. B’s responses to the class. Since socializing was accepted during shooting, these both became the actual instructional tasks over time. To illustrate, Pete shot from one hoop, then walked to the other hoop with Victor, sitting on the bleachers with a ball in his hand (Table 1, Event 6). Mr. B saw this and responded, “Pete, they are playing on this court; you can’t sit here. Sit down, sit over there.” He did not redirect Pete to the shooting task but simply suggested he move so the 10 students playing the full-court game would not run into him. This example shows how Mr. B seldom applied stringent accountability for performance of the stated instructional task and also illustrates the students’ combination of social and instructional tasks.

When students later observed the videotapes to indicate misbehaviors, they were confused by this incident. They recalled the stated instructional tasks of shooting or playing the game and that Pete did neither of these. Most students thought he did not misbehave since Mr. B did not seem to mind Pete’s sitting out. Some students disagreed, indicating that he should have shot baskets and therefore he misbehaved by sitting on the bleachers. Other students believed sitting was all right and that it was simply the area he chose which counted as misbehavior because it was in close proximity to the game.
Mr. B’s lesson flow generally was inconsistently paced and he flip-flopped between managerial tasks and instructional tasks (Kounin, 1970; Siedentop & Tannehill, 1999). It took him longer to finish directions for a task (e.g., organizing and grouping teams), so some students began to do other things besides listening. Social tasks often took place within the instructional task system. For instance, during one drill in Lesson 4, Mr. B asked students to form four lines and began explaining the drill procedure. Students stood close to each other in small groups, talking quietly to their friends with eyes focused on the explanation/demonstration. Some students held basketballs when Mr. B began the directions. He interrupted the explanation to tell these students to put the balls away, then continued explaining how to do the drill.

This flip-flop between managerial and instructional tasks created opportunities for more students to misbehave. This absence of momentum in lessons led students to lose attention and begin other activities. They did not believe they were misbehaving if they listened while shooting baskets or dribbling a basketball with their feet. Jacob, for instance, usually kicked the basketball as Mr. B gave directions. Students thought he was listening and not missing anything. But Jacob himself said during the videotape observation that he was having fun kicking the ball and not listening to what Mr. B was saying.

Finally, Mr. B’s instructional task system was characterized by loose accountability. Fieldnotes showed that he expected students only to dress out and participate, interacted with students through social banter, shot free throws with them, and monitored by walking back and forth seeing only half the class at a time. Since students understood that he never was positioned to see them all at once, they responded with more frequent misbehaviors behind his back (videotape data and student interviews). Gale, for example, mentioned during stimulated recall that Mr. B did not see a misbehavior incident because he was with a group of six girls and had his back turned to the opposite side of the gymnasium. Gale said, “Mr. B did not see them [Jeff and Stephanie] because he was looking at the group of girls… He had to watch the game and he was not watching them [students behind him], so they were running around and doing bad things.” Victor added, when viewing the videotape, “Mr. B did not see the incidents because he was looking at the game—he was watching the people playing games.” Like his students, Mr. B was able to see more misbehavior instances when he watched the videotapes as an outsider than when he was a class participant.

Student Social Task System. The social task system strongly influenced how students identified and responded to misbehavior, including elements such as Mr. B’s belief that he should socialize with students on a personal basis, ways in which students were grouped for tasks, and the importance of talking as a primary social behavior in this class. Unlike student-driven social tasks in most classes, those in this setting were jointly operated by Mr. B and his students. All participants were aware of the significance of socializing as this class’ primary vector, and both teacher and student actions worked together to create this social task system. Students and Mr. B emphasized during stimulated-recall observations from the videotape that social tasks were significant for students.

Mr. B viewed student socializing as an important aspect of physical education and believed he himself should socialize with students when possible. He commented, “For me, it is important to socialize. I enjoy socializing with the kids.
I have a good time with them. I think they sort of get to know me as a person, not just the teacher.” Often Mr. B socialized with students while he monitored the class by asking questions related to events outside school, such as yesterday’s field hockey match or a class play scheduled for next weekend. Social conversation between Mr. B and students occurred frequently in most classes, as noted in interviews, fieldnotes, and videotape stimulated-recall sessions. As Mr. B stated, “The ideal situation would be go on over there and practice your shooting, but kids sit down and talk or they shoot around and talk with their teammates or their peers.”

Student grouping affected how they identified misbehavior. When Mr. B assigned both managerial and instructional tasks, he usually allowed students to group themselves except for some drills or games when he tried to equalize students’ ability on teams. When students grouped themselves, they always chose friends they enjoyed playing with: girls usually played together, Stephanie always played with Jeff and Tim, and Victor shot around with Pete and Nero. When identifying misbehavior on the videotapes, student perspectives diverged, depending on whether they were talking about students inside or outside their own clique. Students were more reluctant to identify an action as misbehavior when it occurred in their own clique. For example, the videotapes showed that Jeff poked Stephanie frequently. Jacob, a member of their clique, did not see any incident between these two students as misbehavior because he said Jeff poked Stephanie often in other classes as well and she did not seem to care. Stephanie herself did not seem to mind because she continually chose to play with Jeff during the basketball unit. However, other students outside this group did identify Jeff’s actions as misbehavior.

As another example, in Lesson 10 (Table 2) Pete, Nero, and Victor formed their own group and pushed and kicked each other. These events were problematic for students outside the group to identify as misbehavior. Although most other students labeled these actions as misbehavior, the 3 boys themselves said they were just playing around rather than misbehaving, though they agreed that they were bad examples for others. Mr. B. interpreted their behavior as “just horsing around.” However, Tracy and Gale, not part of this group, saw these as severe misbehaviors because kicking and hitting could easily lead to fighting in which someone might get hurt.

The primary social task in Mr. B’s basketball unit was talking, including joking, teasing, cheering, or making comments about games (cf. Supaporn, 2000). Students looked forward to socializing in physical education because they felt it was the only subject in which they were allowed to talk as much as they liked so long as they did not disrupt the class or the teacher. They thought talking was not acceptable in other classes. According to Dick, “In normal classes you don’t really get to talk to all of your friends, but in gym you do.” Dave added, “I think students are more likely to misbehave in class because it’s more tempting to talk. That’s how most people get into trouble in the classroom, just talking. In gym they are allowed to talk.” Many students reported that they talked during instructional tasks, thus integrating their social agendas. Tracy stated, “Like during the drills, we wait. It will be a little wait time. Actually the teacher has us do drills so we start talking and if our turn comes, we go.” Jacob added, “Lots of people talk when they don’t have anything to do. If there is no ball, they can’t play. They just sit and hang around.”
Talking as a social task served four functions in Mr. B’s class. First, it created social interaction among class members. As Cam indicated, “You get to talk to your friends. That’s very important. If you don’t you can seriously ruin your day.” Talking also provided a chance to make new friends. Tracy and Meagan agreed that this was the time they could become friends with students in different groups and different grades. Tracy noted, “For eighth-graders, you don’t get to talk to them for the rest of the day. I guess it’s kind of important so you get to know them.” And Meagan followed with, “That’s the only time [in physical education] that I see eighth-graders and some of my friends from the same elementary school… It’s important to talk to them.”

Talking was also a way to communicate and work together as a team during game play. Knute said, “It’s pretty important because it’s, like in basketball to take a shot, you can yell to them when they have the ball. Tell them that you are open so they can pass to you.” Mr. B also realized the importance of this function of talking, as he often stopped games to remind losing teams that they needed to communicate better during game play. Finally, talking made students feel more comfortable in physical education and in school in general. Dick said, “It’s pretty important because you don’t like being alienated,” while Dave added, “You get to talk to them a little bit [in physical education] and you can talk during lunch.”

Students were skillful in discriminating when they could talk without getting into trouble with Mr. B. Dave indicated, “When it won’t disrupt the class or the game that you are in,” while Jacob continued, “When everybody is talking, I talk too.” Students were aware that when Mr. B was giving instructions was not the best time to talk. Dick said, “We talk whenever the teacher is not talking, whenever you don’t have to be paying attention to someone else,” and Pete commented, “I usually talk with my friends when the teacher is not talking so you won’t get into trouble.”

Data from all sources showed that Mr. B responded both proactively and reactively to student talk as a social task. He sometimes intentionally set up tasks in which students had their own time to practice, thus also providing appropriate opportunities for them to talk to their friends. He said,

I think there are certain times in the class that students can talk. When I said, “OK, this group stay in that half court and shoot around while they are playing,” I think if they sit down and talk or they shoot around or fool around and talk with their peers, that’s fine. That’s the time that socializing will happen.

At other times he did not respond negatively to students’ talking if the noise was not too loud and if most students could hear what he was saying. When student talk became too loud or too many were participating, he interrupted it to redirect their attention to his explanation.

While Mr. B’s intentions to socialize with students, the methods by which he grouped them for activity, and the use of talking as the principal social mode seem on the surface to be innocuous and unrelated to misbehavior, a look beneath the surface shows otherwise. When related to Mr. B’s managerial behaviors of vague, implicit RREs and his lack of close monitoring of students, it is possible that his social talk with students and allowing them to select their own groups may have increased the opportunities for misbehavior. Mr. B’s proactive support of student social talk may have undermined their concentration on instructional tasks, again creating more opportunities for misbehavior.
Discussion

The study reported here is an investigation of how the dynamic interactions among the instructional, managerial, and student social task systems influenced participants’ understandings of misbehavior in a middle school physical education setting. Misbehavior in Mr. B’s basketball unit was clearly situated within the three task systems that contributed to a classroom ecology supporting varying forms of misbehavior. The primary vector in the overall PoA of this class was certainly more social than academic, in contrast to Doyle’s work (1977). The social task system was predominant and well supported by Mr. B and by the students. The instructional task system was weak, with ill-defined tasks, while the managerial task system was minimal, with few explicit RREs.

Social interactions, as a way of getting along with students and giving them the opportunity to know him as a person besides being their teacher, were Mr. B’s strongest priority for his teaching. He consciously allowed student talk in virtually every aspect of his class, whether in managerial or instructional episodes. His managerial task system was somewhat loose, with few explicit RREs. He dealt with misbehaviors depending on the circumstances rather than according to a management system set in place and clearly understood by all. Mr. B’s instructional task system began with implicit stated tasks which were often negotiated into different actual tasks that incorporated much student socializing. His lessons often flip-flopped between management and instruction, and the flow of class was frequently interrupted by his own actions and sometimes by students misbehaving severely enough to disrupt others and require Mr. B’s attention. Without a tight system of accountability, students were able to comply minimally with managerial tasks and engage in instructional tasks as they wished, and with much attention to social tasks. Thus, all three task systems contributed to the strong primary social vector of Mr. B’s basketball classes.

Most misbehaviors that were identified by students and the teacher were clearly contextually dependent and resulted from the interplay among task systems. When students described misbehaviors, they most often situated these with respect to who acted, what the action was, which part of class it occurred in, and how it affected the actor, her or his peers, and Mr. B. Students noted misbehaviors connected with instruction, management, and social aspects of their classes and described a range of severity in these incidents. They frequently disagreed as to whether particular incidents constituted misbehavior, an outcome due to the teacher’s lack of specificity for both managerial and instructional tasks. Their identification of misbehaviors rested partly on membership in cliques, partly on whether they thought Mr. B would notice the incident, and partly on the consequences they thought might result from the incident, such as harm to students or equipment.

The confusions and differing perceptions of misbehavior in the physical education class described here illustrate a PoA closer to the “no sweat” or casual (Siedentop, Doutis, Tsangaridou, Ward, & Rauschenbach, 1994) end of the “continuum of rigor” (Hastie, 2000) than to the fast-paced, vigorous, robust PoA described by Hastie (2000) in a sport education class. This class could also be described as procedural display (Bloome, Puro, & Theodorou, 1989) whereby both teacher and students merely went through the motions of constructing a physical education lesson without real attention to class work as the goal. In some ways the class also resembles Doyle’s counterfeit work (1979) accomplished in the absence of
serious understanding of and commitment to learning as an ultimate outcome of class participation.

Lack of explicitness in stated instructional and managerial tasks (i.e., RREs), and loose accountability much like the pseudo-accountability documented by Lund (1992), supported a PoA that in this instance became almost entirely social. Although the student social system appeared to be jointly responsible for driving the instructional task system, similar to the adventure and sport education studies reported by Hastie (1995, 2000), this instructional task system was manipulated skillfully by students, who easily managed the ambiguity and reduced risk inherent in Mr. B’s loose accountability.

Underneath the primary social vector was the students’ desire to have fun, which they did in this class by talking, fooling around, and pursuing other interactive social agendas during lessons. As in previous studies (Allen, 1986; Hastie & Pickwell, 1996), these students found that they could participate casually in instructional tasks, rarely being monitored closely by the teacher. They could accomplish their socializing easily without threat to their academic grade, thus having fun while passing the course (Allen, 1986). In contrast to Hastie and Pickwell’s (1996) social dance participants or Carlson and Hastie’s (1997) sport education students, the students and Mr. B noticed both girls and boys misbehaving in this basketball unit. The primary social vector created jointly by Mr. B and his students supported and maintained the student cliques, bolstered by the prevailing mode of student-chosen teams.

While peer pressure didn’t seem to be an issue here, in that students rarely complained about their treatment by others or indicated any coercion to engage in behaviors they did not choose, these participants were clearly aware of peer interactions influencing whether they labeled particular actions as misbehavior. In fact this study provides evidence that student social cliques, often thought to operate more strongly in the hallways, before and after school, or in the lunchroom, have actually infiltrated the classroom. In this study the seemingly innocuous misbehaviors cited by students and Mr. B may in fact have escalated into outright bullying and harassment in physical education and in other classes as well, particularly as illustrated in the example of Stephanie so often being the target of Jeff’s misbehavior. With Mr. B’s inconsistent responses to misbehaviors that even he later recognized, what began as innocent fun probably grew on several occasions into what the target student could have labeled as bullying or harassment.

Support for maintaining the student cliques was especially strong as it represented a complex combination of the three task systems interacting simultaneously. Since accountability for performance of instructional tasks was loose and mostly implicit, students could “act out” often and in many ways, and thus they followed their social agendas with peers. Furthermore, the student cliques filled a vacuum left when Mr. B did not indicate how to group for instructional tasks; in the absence of teacher specification, students grouped by their cliques rather than by skill level, gender, or in other ways the teacher might have placed them.

Since the managerial rules for appropriate behavior were so minimal and the consequences for breaking managerial rules were seldom specified or followed, this again gave students much opportunity to pursue their social agendas by interacting with the others in their clique. They did so in numerous ways (as noted earlier) that subverted both the management and instruction task systems by playing into the loose accountability measures in place. Mr. B’s own belief in a social
agenda as part of physical education led him to intensify the effects of the student social task system by allowing cliques to do their fooling around, not even interrupting when situations could escalate into far more serious instances of harassment.

Although in this case Mr. B and his students jointly supported their PoA with its primary social vector, the instances of differing interpretations of misbehaviors between him and his students are somewhat troubling, particularly if similar differences in teacher and student perspectives on misbehavior are found in other middle school physical education contexts. These differences could profoundly undermine both the PoA and primary vector established by the teacher through implicit student resistance to the teacher’s intentions. Researchers and teachers alike might take note of the differing perspectives on misbehavior uncovered in this study, particularly since these may not be readily apparent in other settings. Gender-based differences among students have often been found in other studies of student perceptions of various aspects of physical education (e.g., Mitchell, 1996; Ward, Doutis, & Evans, 1999). In this study, however, we found no gendered patterns of difference in student perceptions of misbehavior. Perhaps the major elements of this classroom ecology such as the three task systems and the compatible agendas of teacher and students within those task systems that contributed to the primary social vector were more important than such differences between students as gender.

The results of this study confirm those of several previous studies. These participants identified a range in types and severity of misbehaviors resembling those also found by other researchers (Gagnon et al., 1995; McCormack, 1997; Wheldall & Merrett, 1988). The types of misbehaviors are similar to those found in some large-scale studies of student views of misbehavior (Kulinna et al., 2001a, 2001b), although the levels of disagreement between student and teacher views of misbehavior found in some research (Allen, 1986, 1995; Farrell et al., 1988; Kulinna et al., 2001a, 2001b; Zeidner, 1988) were not clearly present in this study. The in-depth examination of a single class and the varied perspectives on misbehavior represented by the different participants and by the interactions of the managerial, instructional, and student social task systems richly complement similar information about misbehavior found in other types of studies.

In this study, Doyle’s (1986) ecological paradigm provided a useful framework for examining student and teacher perspectives on misbehavior within the total classroom context and as a function of their interactions with each other. Mr. B’s primary social vector, as detailed through the interactions of the instructional, managerial, and student social task systems combining to create the overall PoA and primary social vector, represents a new kind of PoA that may describe other physical education environments as well. The details within the three task systems around misbehavior clearly indicate how the ecological paradigm illuminates subtle aspects of participants’ actions and their perspectives on the phenomenon of misbehavior in middle school physical education.

References


