

The Effect of Middle School Physical Education Curriculum on Student Attitudes

美國中學生對體育課程的態度

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Abstract

Middle school physical education can serve as an important tool in shaping students opinions and behaviors regarding lifelong physical activity. The curriculum in middle school physical education is one component that can positively or negatively affect a students' attitude toward physical activity throughout their life. The purpose of this study was to investigate the middle school physical education curriculum and its effect on middle school students' attitudes and perceptions towards their physical education class. It was found that middle school students do like the curriculum they participate in, mainly consisting of team sports.

摘 要

中學體育在塑造學生的觀點和行為，可能擔當一個關於終身體育活動的重要工具。中學體育課程能夠正面地或間接地影響學生對體育活動的態度，以及他們日常生活行為的一個組分。本項研究的目的將調查中學體育課程及它的作用，如何影響中學生的日常行為及對體育的態度。結果中學生整體上喜歡體育課程，尤其是隊際體育項目。

Introduction

The United States Surgeon General, along with The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (Shalala, 1999), studied the affects of physical inactivity and activity on the American population. As part of their study, it was discovered that daily enrollment in physical education classes has declined among high school students, dropping from 42 percent in 1991 to 25 percent in 1995. With this being said, physical education has the opportunity to serve as the vehicle for helping students to participate in and learn of the benefits of physical activity for a lifetime. Unfortunately, for some students physical education is boring, unnecessary, a waste of time, or not cool (Rice, 1988). Physical education should be the ideal tool to help form positive attitudes towards physical

activity, but many students are turned off to physical education.

One way in forming positive attitudes in students is the curriculum students participate in during their physical education classes. Throughout the literature, studies have been conducted to determine how the curriculum affects student attitudes in physical education. One aspect that can affect student attitudes is giving them a voice or getting their input concerning the curriculum. Couturier, Chepko, and Coughlin (2005) studied why students chose to participate in a physical education class. In their study they found that middle and high school students agreed that they liked to get out and move, they liked competitive team sports, that physical education class made them healthier, and they had fun. One of the findings

from their study identified a repetition in the curriculum did negatively affect student attitudes in participating in a physical education class. Greenwood, Stillwell, and Byars (2001) suggested that physical educators should consider student interests and find out what students enjoy. Olafson (2002) has stated, "a curriculum that responds to the needs and interests of students, and students being actively involved in structuring the curriculum, might increase interest and enjoyment in physical education." Strand and Scantling (1994) suggested however, that teachers should not simply give in to all student ideas, but should use the training they received in college to benefit the students. These studies suggested that the curriculum can be a powerful tool in affecting student attitudes towards physical education.

Another factor dealing with the curriculum in middle school physical education is participation in team sports. Luke and Cope (1994) investigated the effects of teacher behavior and curriculum with students in grade 3, 7, and 10. In their study 386 students were surveyed. The survey consisted of 32 questions, 14 of which dealt specifically with the curriculum. The data suggested that all students enjoyed playing team games or activities with a partner, more than individual games. From this study, if students are given the opportunity to participate in team sports, attitudes can be influenced in a positive manner.

One last curricular factor that can affect student attitudes is having a variety of activities in the curriculum. Ryan, Fleming, and Maina (2003) studied middle school students' attitudes towards their physical education teacher(s) and physical education classes. The results of their study found that middle school student's liked their teacher and the interactions with them and that they had fun in their physical education class. There was another finding from this study suggesting that middle school students also enjoyed having a variety of activities. Students felt that the class was fun when the teacher introduced new or different activities to the students.

The literature has suggested that if students develop positive attitudes towards physical activity they will have a greater chance of developing and maintaining an active lifestyle (Schiefele, 1993; Simons-Morton, O'Hara, Simons-Morton, Parcel, 1987; Tjeerdsma, Rink, & Graham, 1996). The purpose of this study was to investigate the middle school physical education curriculum and its impact on middle school student attitudes and perceptions towards

their physical education class. This study presents an opportunity to add to the literature regarding curricular factors that affect middle school students' attitudes and interest in physical education.

Procedures

Participants and Context

The participants for this study consisted of students from a middle school in an upper Midwestern city. The students ($n=227$) came from an intact classes comprised of 6th, 7th, and 8th graders. This physical education program could be considered an excellent program. There are several reasons why this program could be considered an excellent program; first, there was a low absentee rate among the students from their physical education class. And second, this program has the students participate in a variety of curricular units. The curricular units that were taught at this middle school was flag football, soccer, basketball, volleyball, lacrosse, floor hockey, badminton, speedball, cooperative games/activities and other team activities. The two teachers (1 male and 1 female) that participated in this study had an average of 20 years of teaching physical education on the middle school level. The university institutional review board granted permission to conduct this study. Prior to the start of the study, the researcher met with the classroom teachers and principal and proposed the intentions of the study. Permission to conduct the study was given by the school principal. Parental consent was obtained. The survey was administered on site.

Instrumentation

The instrument used for this study, the Physical Education Interest Questionnaire (PEIQ) was developed to measure interest in physical education and related factors (Van Wersch, Trew, & Turner, 1992). The survey was used in a pilot study and it was found to be .70 reliable. During the pilot study the author's established content validity of the survey. The total number of items in the survey was 35. Within the survey, six sub-areas were created. They were: (1) interest in physical education; (2) the degree to which students construe physical education as a subject with masculine or feminine connotation; (3) how students construed physical education compared with other school subjects; (4) satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the class curriculum; (5) effect the physical education teacher has on the students; and (6) physical changes

middle school students are experiencing and the effects they have on their attitudes. For the purpose of the study, the five questions (8, 18, 20, 22, & 23) on the survey dealing with satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the class curriculum were analyzed.

Interviews

After the questionnaire was completed and analyzed, the researchers conducted student interviews. For this study, 28 students were interviewed. After the surveys were analyzed 14 students who responded positively and 14 students who responded negatively to the survey were interviewed. The researchers reasoned that 28 students would give a good picture of student attitudes towards their physical education class. The number of questions asked and analyzed to each student was determined by their responses from the survey. Every student was not asked the same amount of questions. The researchers analyzed all of the interview data, but for this study, the five survey statements regarding the curriculum were analyzed.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics in the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) program. Percentages were used to reflect the student's responses for each item being analyzed. A 3-point Likert scale was used. The following numerical values were given for every student response: 1= Agree, 2= Neutral and 3= Disagree. When analyzing the data the following variables were investigated: (a) all of the participants' attitudes (n=227), (b) grade levels: 6th, 7th, and 8th, and (c) male (n=118) and female (n=109) for each grade level.

Results

Table 1 provides information regarding the effects of the curriculum that impact student attitudes. Survey questions 8, 18, 20, 22 and 23 were examined. Student responses on question 8 show that students felt that class is not about beating classmates at games/activities. Results are consistent across grade levels with a slight deviation among male and females. Question 18 asked the students if they find the activities boring because they do the same thing. A majority of student's at all three grade levels felt that the activities in their physical education class were not boring.

For eighth grade females, 50% felt the physical education activities were not boring, and 44% were neutral. Question 20 asked students if they prefer to play less games and have more fitness activities in physical education. Of the total population, 74% do not want more fitness activities. The percentages for each grade level were similar to the percentage of the total population. For the three grade levels, 75% of the sixth grade, 77% of the seventh grade, and 69% of the eighth grade disagreed with question 20.

For question 22 the statement that is posed asks the students if they do not like doing the same games every lesson. The student responses are evenly distributed across the three grade levels. The even distribution of the students' responses suggests ambivalence with respect to doing the same games in every lesson. For this same question it appears that 6th and 7th grade females were more likely to agree with this question than their male counterparts (34% of 6th grade females agreed, compared to 14% of the males). And 42% of 7th grade females agreed, compared to 27% of the males. And finally for question 23 students were asked if they thought the sports played in PE were fine. It appears that 74 % of the students think the sports played in PE are fine. Yet, 62% of seventh grade males think the sports played in PE are fine and 31% are neutral in their responses. Question 23 asked the students if they find the sports played in physical education class fine. Each grade levels' results showed favorable attitudes towards the sports played in physical education class.

The other data results from this study were the student interviews. The following are responses from the students from the six survey questions. When students were asked if P.E. was only about winning and beating your opponent, some of the students responses were, "no, but there are some kids that play that way," and "it is about play and doing your best. And listening to the coach and doing what he tells us to do." A couple of the students responded by saying that P.E. wasn't about winning and beating your opponent, but that it was a time to get exercise.

When students were asked if the activities in P.E. were boring, many of the students responded by saying no. Students found the activities “fun”, and “different”. Because of these responses, students liked the sports they played. Students responded by saying they enjoyed playing basketball, lacrosse, badminton, floor hockey and volleyball. When students were asked if they preferred less games and have more fitness activities in P.E., many, if not all of the students said “no”. One student said, “I would rather play games. Because I can be active and learn more about the game. I’d rather play games then run.” In many of the student’s responses, they mentioned not wanting to run in connection with fitness activities. As one student put it, “I can play games and run while I play the game. That is a lot more fun then just running.”

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the middle school physical education curriculum and its impact on middle school student attitudes and perceptions towards their physical education class. When looking at the curriculum and its affects on middle school students, it was found that their attitudes towards physical education were positive. When talking with students regarding the curriculum, both male and female students, from each grade level felt that their physical education class was not boring; they said it was, in fact, “fun.” Prusak and Vincent (2005) found that if the activity is fun, there is a better chance of keeping a student’s interest in the activity. Further questioning revealed the reason why their class was fun was because of the types of activities/games they played. For example, one student said that the class learned how to play lacrosse, and that it “was a different activity”. Tjeerdsma, Rink, and Graham (1996) found similar results in their study when badminton was introduced to students for the first time. When asked if students liked fitness activities or games, a majority of the students preferred games to fitness activities. According to the students, games were “fun” and fitness activities “wear you out.” When asked if they would rather do fitness activities or games, one student responded by saying, “Games! Cause when you do games you get exercise and you can play a game.” From the data and student interviews, it is clear that student’s would rather participate in games then participate in fitness activities. Overall, the data suggests that middle school students have a positive attitude towards their curriculum.

Analysis of the data suggests that middle school students like the games/activities they participate in. Survey data indicated that the students are not bored with the activities, that the sports played in class are fine. Students in this study did not like playing the same games over an extended period of time. The teachers in this study indicated that they would teach a unit for three weeks and then start a new unit. The results from this study support findings from other research (Evan et. al., 1999).

Implications for Teaching

A couple suggestions that come from this study that can have some practical implications on teaching are that middle school students enjoy participating in team sports activities. In the interviews, students enjoyed participating in activities like flag football, basketball, soccer, floor hockey and other team sports. Also, in the interviews students indicated they did not like fitness type activities. This probably does not come as a surprise to teachers. Yet, a wise teacher should create activities to benefit the student’s fitness levels. Attempts should be made to incorporate fitness activities within team sports. Teachers should find ways to design team sports activities to include a fitness component that students might enjoy. Although there is no magic bullet for success in working with middle school students, the results of this study suggest some things teachers might try as they work to improve the experiences children have in their physical education programs.

Table 1. Student Attitudes Towards the Physical Education Curriculum.

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
8) I do not like PE because it is only about winning and beating your opponent.			
Total Population	86%	11%	3%
6 th	87%	9%	4%
M	86%	9%	5%
F	88%	9%	3%
7 th	87%	9%	4%
M	84%	7%	9%
F	83%	9%	2%
8 th	87%	12%	1%
M	90%	10%	0%
F	75%	19%	6%
	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
18) I find the activities in PE boring because we always do the same things.			
Total Population	5%	29%	66%
6th	9%	16%	75%
M	9%	5%	86%
F	9%	23%	88%
7th	4%	33%	63%
M	5%	42%	53%
F	3%	26%	71%
8th	3%	32%	65%
M	2%	29%	69%
F	6%	44%	50%

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
20) I would prefer to play less games and have more fitness activities in PE.			
Total Population	5%	21%	74%
6th	4%	21%	75%
M	0%	9%	91%
F	6%	29%	65%
7th	8%	15%	77%
M	7%	20%	73%
F	9%	10%	80%
8th	2%	29%	69%
M	2%	31%	67%
F	0%	25%	75%

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
22) I do not like doing the same games every lesson.			
Total Population	30%	39%	31%
6th	27%	39%	34%
M	14%	24%	62%
F	34%	49%	17%
7th	35%	34%	31%
M	27%	40%	33%
F	42%	29%	29%
8th	26%	46%	28%
M	27%	42%	31%
F	25%	56%	19%

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
23) I think the sports played in PE are fine.			
Total Population	74%	22%	4%
6th	73%	21%	6%
M	81%	9%	10%
F	69%	29%	2%
7th	76%	20%	4%
M	62%	31%	7%
F	86%	12%	2%
8th	74%	23%	3%
M	75%	25%	0%
F	69%	19%	12%

Table 2. Physical Education Interest Questionnaire.

Physical Education Survey			
When completing the survey, honestly answer the questions below.			
Answer the question by circling one of the three responses: (1) Agree , (2) Neutral , and (3) Disagree .			
Background Questions Circle Your Answer			
1. What grade are you in? 6 th 7 th 8 th			
2. Sex: Male Female			
3. Age: 10 11 12 13 14 15			
4. Who is your teacher? Mr. _____ Ms. _____			
Survey Questions	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
1. Sometimes I pretend to be ill so that I do not have to do PE.	1	2	3
2. I would take part in PE even if I did not have to.	1	2	3
3. I never forget to bring my PE clothes.	1	2	3
4. Even when I do not feel well, I do not want to miss PE.	1	2	3
5. I wish they did not make us do PE, because it is not important.	1	2	3
6. I like doing PE because it is fun	1	2	3
7. PE is not for me because I am not strong and big enough.	1	2	3
8. I do not like PE because it is only about winning and beating your opponent.	1	2	3
9. I like physical exercise which are strenuous and painful.	1	2	3
10. I prefer physical exercise which have beauty in movement such as in dance and gymnastic.	1	2	3
11. I prefer those activities in PE which do not make me tired and sweaty.	1	2	3
12. I do not like playing games because they are too rough.	1	2	3
13. I do not go to school to do PE, but to learn more important subjects.	1	2	3
14. PE at school is not important because you can do sports in your spare time.	1	2	3
15. PE is not important because you cannot get a job by doing it.	1	2	3
16. I would prefer it if PE were as important as other school subjects.	1	2	3
17. I would rather do PE than other school subjects.	1	2	3
18. I find the activities in PE boring because we always do the same things.	1	2	3

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
19. I wish we could choose what we do in PE.	1	2	3
20. I would prefer to play less games and have more fitness activities in PE.	1	2	3
21. I do not like competing against others; I would rather compete against myself as in fitness tests.	1	2	3
22. I do not like doing the same games every lesson.	1	2	3
23. I think the sports played in PE and games are fine.	1	2	3
24. My PE teacher does not treat students who are good at PE differently from the others.	1	2	3
25. When we learn new skills in PE my PE teacher only helps the good students.	1	2	3
26. My PE teacher does not pay much attention to the students who are not very good at games and activities.	1	2	3
27. The PE teacher usually gives more help to the students who are good at PE than to the ones who are not good at it.	1	2	3
28. My PE teacher does not pay more attention to the students who are good at PE than to the ones who are less good.	1	2	3
29. PE would be much more fun if the PE teacher did not praise only the good students.	1	2	3
30. Sometimes I feel I have no control over my body in PE activities and I trip over my own feet.	1	2	3
31. I have always been good at PE.	1	2	3
32. I sometimes have the feeling that my arms and legs are not doing what I want them to do in PE.	1	2	3
33. I do not like others watching me while I am doing activities in PE.	1	2	3
34. I do not like trying any new activity in PE in case somebody laughs at me.	1	2	3
35. I sometimes have the feeling that others are laughing at me while I am doing an activity.	1	2	3

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