
Physical Best and FitnessGram Use among United States PETE Programs

體適能測試應用於美國學校的體育教育課程

Joe DEUTSCH

Physical Education Pedagogy
North Dakota State University, U.S.A.

Paul Christianson

Doctoral Graduate Assistant
North Dakota State University Fargo, U.S.A.



Abstract

The Physical Best (PB) curriculum was launched in 1987 with a mission of fostering a healthier youth by providing quality resources and professional development for educators. The purpose of this study was to find out how many Physical Education Teacher Education programs are using the PB curriculum, as well as how many are using Fitnessgram fitness testing and the reasons for their decisions. The results of the data gathered from this study show that 53% (N=52) of the programs surveyed do use the program, representing just over half of those who responded (N=97). With the PB curriculum being the only health-related fitness curriculum created by the National Association of Sport and Physical Education and the fact it can be infused into a preexisting curriculum, the researchers were surprised to not find more use of the curriculum in PETE programs. Specific reasons given for not using the curriculum pertained more to the complexity of their program circumstances and less about the actual quality of the curriculum.

Introduction

The Physical Best (PB) curriculum was launched in 1987 with a mission of fostering a healthier youth by providing quality resources and professional development for educators (American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance [AAHPERD], 2005a). The PB mission is achieved by: (a) providing students with the education and skills needed to develop lifelong physical activity habits, (b) presenting the why's and how's of physical fitness, and (c) emphasizing individualization and enjoyment. Achieving the PB mission requires that teachers go beyond traditional means of

teaching health-related fitness such as finding and taking the heart rate or self-assessing fitness levels. Instead, PB teachers focus on the why's and how's of lifelong fitness and inspire students to internalize health-enhancing behaviors and beliefs (Ayers & Martinez, 2007). To accomplish this mission, it takes certified professionals to integrate the PB programming into their practice. Since its inception, professionals have been certified to integrate PB into their Physical Education Teacher Education programming (SOURCE). This study aimed to investigate the practical application of PB usage by certified PB professionals in the classroom across the United States.

Methods

Subjects

PETE professionals from all known PETE programs in the nation were sent emails with a link to the survey. PETE professionals from different Universities agreed to participate in the study and filled out the survey (N=97), representing 46 states in the nation. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the university approved the study and participants gave their informed consent to participate in the study.

Instrument

A review of literature failed to identify an instrument related to PETE programs uses of the PB curriculum. As such, the researchers constructed a survey from discussions with PETE professionals from peer institutions. The researchers constructed a survey of 5 specific questions and potentially 8 more questions. When the question was a yes/no statement, depending upon the answer, a follow up question was often asked. To establish content validity, the researcher had five experienced PETE professionals along with three general education professionals review the survey, and found the statements from the survey to be valid as well as the follow-up questions to be appropriate.

Procedures

For this study, the researchers used a known list of email addresses of PETE faculty in the US and sent them a link to the survey using Survey Monkey. Participants were asked to fill out the survey representing their program and if there was a more qualified faculty member to answer questions about PB and Fitnessgram. They were also asked to forward the survey to anyone at a University not in the list. In order to establish the wide range of the programs represented, as well as to ensure no University was represented twice, participants were initially asked what state they were from and what University they represented. After a week, those who had not responded yet were sent a follow-up email distribution asking them to please take time to complete the survey. After the second email distribution, the Universities with PETE programs in states not yet represented were identified and specific emails were sent to these Universities requesting their participation. In the end, 92% (N=46) of the states and 97 total Universities are represented. Results for this study are reported as percentages and as the respondents' comments.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics in the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 20.0 program. Percentages were used to reflect the PETE professional's responses for each item being analyzed. The other method of data analysis analyzed PETE professional's responses to either specific or the open ended questions from the survey. The researchers read and re-read the data until common themes became evident (Barney & Deutsch, 2009).

Results

The table provides percentages of the results of the questions asked. Question number one asked the PETE specialist if the teacher education program was currently using the Physical Best (PB) curriculum and a little more than half (N= 52 or 53%) indicated they did. They were asked to explain their answers and some cited a need to enhance their student's credentials, an appreciation for the curriculum's close alignment with National Standards, and the fact that it supports health-related fitness which is an important issue right now. Participants who didn't use the PB curriculum indicated issues such as lack of time, resources, and support for the curriculum from the public school systems.

If the pedagogist indicated they did use the PB curriculum (N=52), they were then asked if it was used in one specific course or throughout the curriculum. Of the participants answering this question, half (N=26) indicated that they used the curriculum in one specific course, while the other half (N=26) indicated that they used it throughout the whole PETE curriculum. Of the participants indicating one specific course (N=26), they were then asked to list the title of that specific course. Three varying course subjects were evident throughout; Fitness Education, Physical Education Curriculum, and Methods of Teaching Physical Education.

Question 2 asked PETE professionals if they use Fitnessgram and/or Activitygram software in their PETE programs with 64% (N=62) indicating that they did. If they did, they were then asked which specific software they used of which 71% (N=44) indicated that they only used Fitnessgram software while 27% (N=17) used both. Only one program used Activitygram only. If they at least used Fitnessgram, they were then asked if they

use it in one specific course or throughout the whole curriculum. Results indicated that 61% (N=38) use it throughout the whole curriculum, while 39% (N=24) used it in a specific class. Those who indicated they used it in a specific class were then asked the name of the specific course they used it in. The names of the courses varied but specific course subjects that were indicated most frequently included “Testing and Measurement in Physical Education”, “Health-Related Fitness” and both “Elementary and Secondary Methods”.

Question 3 asked the pedagogist if they have personally taken the Physical Best in Higher Education course offered by NASPE. Results indicated that 19% (N=18) have taken it, while 81% (N=79) have not. They were then asked if they certify their students in Physical Best during the time in their program and 16% (N=16) indicated they do while 84% (N=81) do not.

Regardless of their answer to Question 3, they were asked in Question 4 to specify why (N=97) they had decided to certify their students or not too. Answers varied, but reasons for certifying students included making students more marketable and providing a value-added benefit to their degree. Others felt it helped students engage with The National Association of Sport & Physical Education’s (NASPE) mission of life-long physical fitness. The reason most gave for not doing so was both the fact that they didn’t have a certified instructor on staff, the cost of the exam for students, and the fact that there simply was not enough time in the curriculum.

Question 5 asked all respondents (N=97) if they used the PB Activity Guides (Elementary and Middle School/High School) in their curriculum. The results indicated that 49% (N=48) did not use either Activity Guide, while 11% (N=11) indicated they used the Elementary Guide only, 2% (N=2) used the Middle/High School Guide only, and 37% (N=36) said they used both. Participants who indicated some use (N=48), were then asked to specify why they used them. Answers varied. Reasons given why they used both indicated overwhelmingly that they “Need to know both” and “We use both and at times it aids in creating new activities.” Common answers given for why they used the Elementary Guide only stated, “The elementary guide provides fewer busy, happy, good activities” and “Elementary as most of our students begin their career as elementary teachers. The content is solid for both though.”

The last question was posed to those who indicated in question 1 that indicated they used the PB curriculum in their teacher preparation program (N=52). Those who indicated they did use the curriculum were asked if they viewed the PB curriculum as beneficial to their teacher education students and to please explain. The results indicated that 94% (N=49) said yes they felt it was beneficial, while only 6% (N=3) felt it was not. Reasons given for why they felt it was beneficial again varied. One pedagogist indicated, “The Physical Best curriculum is an excellent research-based model for teaching instructionally and developmentally appropriate fitness to our teachers.” Another indicated, “I think it is important that our students be taught best practices in the field, including the PB (Physical Best) curriculum. Accountability of PE programs is more critical than ever and this program provides an evidence based, pedagogically sound way to do it.” Of those who didn’t believe it was beneficial, only one commented. The comment stated, “There are better materials available.”

Table 1. Percentages of PETE Programs Use of the Physical Best Curriculum.

1. Do you currently use NASPE's Physical Best curriculum with your Physical Education Teacher Education program (PETE)? Explain your answer. (N=97)
Yes 53% (N=52) No 47% (N=45)
1a. Is the curriculum used in one specific course or infused throughout the entire curriculum? (N=52)
One Course 50% (N=26) Entire Curriculum 50% (N=26)
1b. What is the title of the course? (N=26)
2. Do you use the FitnessGram and/or software in your PETE program? (N=97)
Yes 64% (N=62) No 36% (N=35)
2a. Which software do you use? (N=62)
FitnessGram Only 71% (N=44) ActivityGram Only 2% (N=1) Both 27% (N=17)
2b. What do you use the FitnessGram/ActivityGram for? (N=62)
One Specific Class 39% (N=24) Throughout the Curriculum 61% (N=38)
2c. What is title of the course? (N=24)
3. Have you personally taken the Physical Best in Higher Education course offered by NASPE? (N=97)
Yes 19% (N=18) No 81% (N=79)
4. Do you certify your students as Physical Best Specialists during their time in your program? (N=97)
Yes 16% (N=16) No 84% (N=81)
4a. Why or why not? (please specify) (N=97)
5. Do you use the Physical Best Activity Guides in your curriculum? (N=97)
No 49% (N=48) Elementary Only 11% (N=11) Middle/High School 2% (N=2) Both 37% (N=36)
5a. Do you prefer one of the other? (N=49)
Yes 14% (N=7) No 86% (N=42)
5b. Why? (please specify) (N=49)
6. Do you view the Physical best curriculum as beneficial to your teacher education students? Please explain. (N=52)
Yes 94% (N=49) No 6% (N=3)

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to find out how many PETE programs are using the PB curriculum as well as how many are using Fitnessgram and the reasons for their decisions. The results of the data gathered from this study show that 53% (N=52) of the programs surveyed do use the program, representing just over half of those who responded (N=97). With the PB curriculum being the only health-related fitness curriculum created by NASPE and the fact it can be infused into a preexisting

curriculum, the researchers were surprised to not find more use of the curriculum in PETE programs. While only 53% used the curriculum, most cited reasons not directly related to the PB curriculum for why they don't. Reasons given included; "Trying to incorporate – waiting on faculty approval.", "We are currently integrating use of the NASPE Standards, but have not progressed to Physical Best Curriculum just yet", and "Mentioned as one of many curricula but not specifically taught because of limited curricular time." The closest comment that could be found to not support the curriculum was, "We

use other materials instead that better meet our state certification standards.” So, while some participants stated that the PB curriculum was not effective for their PETE students, it was because their state standards did not align well.

Those who indicated use of the curriculum were then asked if it was used in a specific course or throughout the entire curriculum and the statistics showed that PETE programs are split right down the middle with half using it in one specific course (N=26) and the other half using it throughout (N=26). Several factors could influence this situation. Because the Physical Best Specialist Certification only requires the administrator to provide one semester long class, some may thoroughly cover it during one class and then test at the end of the semester to ensure the information is fresh in their heads when they take the exam. If the administrators infuse the curriculum throughout the four years in the PETE curriculum, information may be forgotten by the time they take the exam. While this could be one reason, other reasons must exist because question 4 asked how many PETE programs certify their students and only 16 (or 62% of those who used PB) indicated they did. While 16 certify their students, question 3 indicated that 18 are actually capable of certifying students due to their taking the PB in Higher Education course offered by NASPE. More startling than the fact that only 18% of programs surveyed currently have the capability to certify their students, is the fact that only 16 or 16% actually do. The main issue comes down to cost.

Cost plays a large factor in certifying a student as a PB Specialist. Answers for why they did not certify their students included; “Cost”, “Current instructor of class has not been certified”, and “Budget.” The first issue that has to be addressed is certifying the PETE professional to be able to train the students. If the PB in Higher Education class is offered at the AAHPERD National Convention in 2013, it will be held as a preconference all day session with a \$100 registration fee coupled with the \$280 Nationals conference registration fee. Airfare and hotel to Charlotte, NC are added to the bill and as you can see cost begins to become an issue. If the PETE professional finds the resources to accomplish this and then gets certified, they can then train their students to sit for the exam. If the student decides to sit for the exam, they must pay \$50 for a student membership as well as \$35 for the exam fee. In a down economy

where faculty are looking for ways to cut back, these expenses often times are the answer. What can we do to change this? With the addition of Fitnessgram to the Presidential Youth Fitness Program, it is important for NASPE promote the PB curriculum and making getting certified more cost effective may be an answer. Could the PB in Higher Education training session be offered as a webinar saving conference registration fees as well as travel expenses?

Fitnessgram and Activitygram use was also looked at in question 2 and 64% (N=62) indicated use of one or both. More specifically, 71% (N=44) of them only used Fitnessgram while only 27% (N=17) used both. These statistics indicate that a large percentage of PETE programs are using Fitnessgram in their PETE programs, but it is simply not enough. With the addition of Fitnessgram as the official assessment tool for the newly formed Presidential Youth Fitness Program, it is imperative that teacher preparation programs add Fitnessgram. By the beginning of the 2013-2014 academic year, Fitnessgram fitness testing will be the only nationally supported fitness testing program in the Nation. Unlike the PB curriculum, the Fitnessgram software is used throughout the PETE curriculum more often (61% N=38) than it is in just one class (39% N=24). This indicates the PETE programs understanding of the importance teaching their students that Fitnessgram is important throughout both the PETE program as well as in the K-12 curriculum.

Question 5 looked at the Physical Best Activity Guide use in the PETE curriculum and again about half used them and half did not. Those that did were asked if they preferred one over the other and the majority (86% N=42) did not have a preference. The data shows that those who use the PB curriculum also use the activity guides. Therefore, we can conclude that those who use the PB curriculum use it completely and couple it with Fitnessgram. The challenge is to figure out how to get the other half of the programs in the Nation to use the program as well. The Lets Move initiative, launched by First lady Michelle Obama, aims to curb childhood obesity, through proper nutrition and lifelong physical fitness. This program coupled with Fitnessgram fitness testing will help track student progress. The PB curriculum is based off the same principals and could very easily be the support curriculum for the initiative.

Recommendations

The results from this study suggest that about half of the PETE programs in the Nation use the Physical Best curriculum in their PETE programs. With that, 64% use FitnessGram software. With the President's Council on Fitness, Sports & Nutrition (PCFSN) recent announcement that the former Physical Fitness Test is now the Presidential Youth Fitness Program and that it will focus primarily on assessing health versus athleticism for American youth, PETE programs need to do more to expose their students to the tools necessary to make them successful in any school district they are hired. The Presidential Youth Fitness Program has chosen Fitnessgram as their official physical fitness assessment tool and the Physical Best curriculum is the perfect tool for accomplishing their goal of educating students on the five components of fitness (Aerobic Fitness, Muscular Strength, Muscular Endurance, Flexibility, and Body Composition). Exposing students to this curriculum as well as certifying them as PB Instructors, sends a clear message to them as well as their potential employers, that health-related fitness is of critical importance and life-long physically active students are our ultimate goal. Also, the endorsement of Fitnessgram sends a clear message to physical education teachers that their students should be assessed based off of established criteria for their age and gender, rather than the former norm referencing they were do. Comparing students to their peers only encourages competition in fitness testing and that is not the objective of Fitnessgram or Physical Best.

While it is unknown how many of the surveyed PETE programs have a coaching course, it is expected that most do. This is not sending a clear message to students that excellence in teaching is the most important objective in our PETE programs.

Implications of the Study

After analyzing the data and reviewing PETE professional's personal responses, some interesting implications for PETE programs across the nation can be concluded from this study. First, only 64% of PETE programs in the nation are currently using Fitnessgram software with their students. With the recent announcement by the PCFSN that Fitnessgram will now be the only supported fitness testing assessment in the Nation, it is of paramount importance that that number increases to 100%. Students in all PETE programs must be trained to use

the fitness testing tool they will unquestionably be using in the field.

While very few respondents could say a negative thing about the PB curriculum, only 53% actually use the PB curriculum in their programs. The glaring truth is that the PETE professionals who are not using the PB curriculum believe that to effectively use it, they must be certified through the PB in Higher Education course as well potentially certifying their students as Specialists. While it would be ideal, it is not a necessity. The PB curriculum is important to the success of a PETE curriculum for several reasons; it is designed by teachers for teachers, it is not a standalone curriculum so it can be infused into any existing curriculum, it promotes health-related fitness including the use of Fitnessgram, and it promotes the Let's Move initiatives philosophy of life-long physical fitness. While the use of the entire curriculum would be ideal, several programs simply use the Activity Guides only and at least give their students some exposure to the only curriculum written by NASPE in direct relations to their National Standards.

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Correspondence

Joe Deutsch, Ph.D.
 Assistant Professor, Physical Education Pedagogy
 North Dakota State University, Fargo, ND
 Email: Joe.Deutsch@ndsu.edu
 Address: PO Box 6050 Dept. 2620,
 -Fargo, ND 58108, USA
 Phone: 701-231-5687, 701-231-8872