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Attitudes and Perceptions of Elementary Classroom Teachers Use of Physical Education Time for Planning

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Abstract

An elementary classroom teacher (ECT) has a busy day. The teachers teach their class, prepare class materials, and may supervise the lunchroom or the playground at recess time (Daily Physical Activity in School, 2005), attend meetings with parents and perform a number of other responsibilities. For this reason planning time is a very important component for the ECT. Planning time for the ECT is usually taken when students are in elementary physical education. This study investigated how elementary physical education can assist the ECT in their planning time. In this study 219 ECT from three states and 18 different schools participated in this study. The ECT was given a short survey to fill out regarding how, or if, planning time helps or benefits the ECT. The results found that the ECT appreciated the planning time that it was needed in order for them to be successful in the classroom and because of planning time the students would benefit. The results also showed a great respect from the ECT for elementary physical education, which can be beneficial for principals and other school administrators.

Keywords: Elementary Physical Education, Planning Time

Introduction

An elementary classroom teachers' (ECT) day can be considered busy. For example, they are responsible for their classes, which include teaching and preparing of the class materials. In many cases they may have recess duties, lunch supervision duties, meetings with students and parents, grade level meetings, and the monthly faculty meetings. Because of their demanding schedule one has to ask, when does the ECT have a chance to use the restroom

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or have a brief moment to themselves? This brief moment usually takes place during the ECT planning time. The planning time is a block of time; usually 30 to 60 minutes, when a teacher has no students in their classroom. The purpose of this time is to plan and prepare for upcoming lessons, correct tests, call parents, or have a brief moment to themselves. Principals and other school administrators can play an important role in the ECT planning time when they give the ECT planning time and encourage them to wisely and effectively use their planning time.

Aquila (1992) provided suggestions for teachers of how to manage their planning time more effectively. One of the first suggestions for planning time is to establish a quiet time. This allows the teacher time to distance themselves from the students and other distractions that may have occurred in class. A second suggestion is do not be afraid to delegate certain tasks. Elementary schools have aides, support staff, parent helpers, secretaries, and student assistants. When delegating certain tasks to others, this only gives the teacher more time to plan. A third suggestion is learn to say no. When saying no, this does not mean the teacher does not like the person asking for their time or being rude. The teacher needs to consider his or her own priorities and time. Aquila states that when teachers implement these simple steps, they can give the teacher more time for planning lessons and activities that will benefit student learning and can give the teacher the time for self-renewal.

Other literature dealing on teacher planning time uses a concept termed, common planning time. Warren and Muth (1995) defined common planning time to be when teachers are put on teams with other teachers. These teams could be determined by teaching the same grade level, teaching the same subject areas, or being on a interdisciplinary team, for example, consisting such as a math teacher, an English teacher and a history teacher. The purpose of having teachers collaborate is to give students a greater opportunity for learning. The authors found common planning time to be beneficial for new teachers when they are assigned with veteran teachers for their common planning time. This affords teachers a chance to exchange ideas dealing with classroom management, to using equipment or tools in a lesson, or give lesson ideas (Shank, 2005).

Another aspect from the literature-reviewed teacher planning time dealt with the individual teacher and their own planning time. Hargreaves (1992) investigated the theory of intensification and the effects it has on the ECT. Larson (1980) defined intensification as "the most tangible ways in which the work privileges of educated workers are eroded" (pg. 133). The definition continues by stating that intensification "compels the reduction of time within the working day when no surplus is produced." Larson presents examples of how intensification for the ECT can occur. The examples are, the teacher has no time for lunch, reduction in quality of services, including lesson planning, contacting parents and other school obligations, resulting in cutting corners, and teachers are overloaded, thus affecting all aspects of teaching. Because the theory of intensification is so common among ECT, planning time is an important and necessary component for the ECT, teachers have had to fight for their planning time. Shimahara (2002) stated that with intensification there is no beginning or end (of work) because it just continues. Work is brought home, spending one or two hours every day. Hargreaves (1992) continued by discussing teachers in a Metropolitan Canadian school district going on strike to have a minimum of 180 minutes per week of planning time. The planning time issues became the key bargaining issue. During the school districts negotiations, the teachers made the following case for the importance of planning time. Many teachers complained about the amount of paperwork the teaching profession has added in recent years, dealing specifically with special education reports. The number of forms and reports that have to be filled out, has seriously cut into the ECT planning time. One teacher stated that because she had so much paperwork to fill out, she

was leaving school around 6pm on some nights. The teacher stated that some of those nights she was taking home school work to correct and grade, because of her lack of planning time. Another point teachers brought out during negotiations for increasing planning time was, that teacher's quality of work increases with the appropriate amount of planning time. Teachers felt that having more time helped reduce stress from the classroom (Elementary teacher planning time, 2008). And finally, planning time helped restore teachers' personal lives outside of teaching, giving them more time for their families, for leisure activities, and for themselves. With all the positive points of planning time presented during negotiations, the author found that a minority of teachers had different views regarding planning time. For example, they felt that planning time did not necessarily enhance community and collegiality among teachers. Also, teachers felt that planning time did not improve their classroom services, such as lessons, lesson activities and testing. And finally, some of these teachers appreciated the planning time they now received, and that the fighting for more planning time was not that important to them.

Another study dealing with teacher planning time investigated the decision-making process teachers make during shared planning time (Gill & Hoffman, 2009). This study looked at four middle school math teachers and how they went about teaching, planning and implementing their middle school math curriculum. Even though the emphasis of this study was looking at middle school math teachers thought processes of teaching math. The use of a shared planning time brought to light the benefits of having a shared planning time. It was found that these teachers were able to discuss pedagogical content, beliefs about the curriculum they were teaching, the textbooks the students were using and about the student's abilities in class. The teachers felt that this was a time to freely express themselves, propose ideas to each other, and get feedback on questions they had. Overall, the teachers felt that the shared planning time was beneficial for the fact that they became better teachers.

Planning time is not a cure all for the ECT; it provides no guarantees. However, it offers the teacher opportunities. Planning time can be used for the purpose it is intended to be used for, or it can be used in other ways. How planning time is used, is left up to the ECT. The literature emphasized that however much time the ECT has for planning, they like having it, and they need it, and want it. With planning time being such a big part for the ECT, elementary physical education plays a significant role in allowing the ECT to plan. Thus, the purpose of this study is to investigate ECT attitudes towards elementary physical education and the impact it has on ECT planning time, thus helping principals and other school administrators to better understand the importance physical education has in the school.

Methods

Subjects

Elementary classroom teachers ($N = 219$, 206 females and 13 males) from three states, North Dakota ($n=54$), Oklahoma, ($n=129$) and Utah ($n=36$), comprised of 18 elementary schools participated in the study. Teaching experience of the participants ranged from 34 years to the first year of teaching. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the university approved the study. Participants gave their informed consent to participate in the study. For this study the ECT solely taught in the classroom.

Instrument

A review of literature failed to identify an instrument related to classroom teachers' attitudes and perspectives regarding the effects of elementary physical education on teacher planning time. Therefore, the researchers constructed a survey from discussions that were held with

elementary classroom teachers and elementary physical educators dealing with physical education in the public schools. The researchers constructed a survey of five statements. Two statements have a 5-point Likert scale (1=Strongly Agree, 2= Agree, 3= Neutral, 4= Disagree, and 5= Strongly Disagree) and three statements were yes/no statements. To establish content validity, the researchers had five experienced elementary physical educators with ten or more years of teaching and three-experienced ECT, with 10 or more years reviewed the survey, and found the statements from the survey to be valid with no suggested changes. For this study, two statements asked the participants to explain their answers. The purpose of having the classroom teachers give an explanation on the given statement was to better help the researcher understand their attitudes and perspectives towards the role of physical education it plays in planning time for the ECT.

Procedures

For this study, the researchers contacted the superintendent or assistant superintendent regarding the study and secured ethics approval to administer the survey to the teachers in their school districts. After permission was secured, the researchers proposed their intentions to the principals at each school. After receiving permission from the principals, each physical educator was informed regarding the study and agreed to assist in the study. The next step was to place the surveys in the classroom teacher’s mailbox at their respective schools. From the schools that participated in the study, 70% of the surveys were returned. Within two weeks the researchers collected the surveys from those teachers that participated in the study. After the surveys were collected, they were analyzed. Results for this study are reported as percentages and as the ECT comments.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics in the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) 14.0 program. Percentages were used to reflect the classroom teacher’s responses for each item being analyzed. The other method of data analysis was analyzing teacher responses to the questions from the survey. Thus using a mixed methods analysis of the data. The researchers read and re-read until common themes became evident from the data (O’Sullivan & Tsanaridou, 1992).

Results

Tables provide percentages of ECT attitudes on the effects elementary physical education has on planning time, Table 1 by state and Table 2 by gender. For statement 2, ECT strongly felt (Oklahoma 98% (n=127); North Dakota 100% (n=54) & Utah 88% (n=29) that when students are in physical education class, it allows them the time to attend to other classroom needs. Percentages were similar for males (100%) and females (96%).

Table 1. Percentages of ECT (State) Attitudes Towards Elementary Physical Education On Planning Time

1. I personally know the physical education teacher in our school.			
	<u>Oklahoma (n=129)</u>	<u>North Dakota (n=54)</u>	<u>Utah (n=36)</u>
Yes	93% (n=121)	75% (n=41)	94% (n=34)
No	7% (n=8)	25% (n=13)	6% (n=2)
2. I believe when my students are in physical education class, it allows me the time to attend to my other classroom needs? Please explain your answer.			
	<u>Oklahoma</u>	<u>North Dakota</u>	<u>Utah</u>
Yes	98% (n=127)	100% (n=54)	88% (n=32)
No	2% (n=2)	0% (n=0)	12% (n=4)

Table 1. Percentages of ECT (State) Attitudes Towards Elementary Physical Education On Planning Time (cont.)

3. I use the time effectively when my students are in physical education time? Briefly explain what you do while your students are in physical education class.			
	<u>Oklahoma</u>	<u>North Dakota</u>	<u>Utah</u>
Yes	94% (n=132)	100% (n=54)	97% (n=35)
No	6% (n=7)	0% (n=0)	3% (n=1)
4. I look forward to the time I have to prepare for class while my students are in physical education class? Please explain your answer.			
	<u>Oklahoma (n=129)</u>	<u>North Dakota (n=54)</u>	<u>Utah (n=36)</u>
SA	90% (n=117)	71% (n=38)	56% (n=20)
A	8% (n=11)	20% (n=11)	15% (n=5)
N	2% (n=1)	5% (n=3)	23% (n=8)
D	0% (n=0)	2%(n=1)	0% (n=0)
SD	0% (n=0)	2% (n=1)	6% (n=3)
5. If there was no physical education teacher in your school, I feel confident enough that I could teach my students an effective physical education lesson? Please explain your answer.			
	<u>Oklahoma</u>	<u>North Dakota</u>	<u>Utah</u>
SA	6% (n=8)	9% (n=5)	14% (n=5)
A	10% (n=13)	27% (n=15)	33% (n=12)
N	22% (n=29)	16% (n=9)	12% (n=4)
D	40%(n=50)	34% (n=17)	29% (n=11)
SD	22%(n=29)	14% (n=8)	12% (n=4)

Statement 3 asked the ECT if they effectively use their planning time when their students are in physical education class. The majority (Oklahoma 94%; North Dakota 100% & Utah 97%) of the ECT use their planning time effectively while their students are at physical education class. Interestingly, 6% of ECT in Oklahoma felt they did not effectively use their planning time. Also in this study, 97% of the female participants use their planning time effectively. Question 4 asked ECT if they look forward to the time they have to prepare for class while their students are in physical education class. Between the three states the majority of the teachers strongly agreed (Oklahoma 90% (n=117); North Dakota 71% (n=38) and Utah 56% (n=20) that they look forward to the time they have to prepare for classes while their students are in physical education class. One point of interest from the data came from the ECT from Utah. Twenty-three percent were neutral and six percent strongly disagreed with question four. When looking at the male and female ECT for question four, again a majority (male 62% and female 75%) strongly agreed with this statement. Yet, 15% of the males and 8% of the females were neutral in their response to this question.

And finally question one and question five. Question one asked if the ECT personally knows the physical education teacher in their school. The ECT in Oklahoma (93%) and Utah (94%) personally know the physical education teacher in their school. In North Dakota, 75% know the physical education teacher in their school, and 25% do not know their physical education teacher. For question five, the ECT was asked if there was no physical education teacher in their school, would they feel confident enough to teach their students an effective physical education lesson. From Oklahoma, 62% of the ECT felt (strongly disagreed or disagreed) they could teach an effective physical education lesson. Respectively, in North Dakota (48%) and Utah (41%) could not teach an effective physical education lesson.

Table 2. Percentages of ECT (Gender) Attitudes Towards Elementary Physical Education On Planning Time

1. I personally know the physical education teacher in our school?		
	<u>Male (n=13)</u>	<u>Female (n=206)</u>
Yes	93%	88%
No	7%	12%
2. I believe when my students are in physical education class, it allows me the time to attend to my other classroom needs? Please explain your answer.		
	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>
Yes	100%	96%
No	0%	4%
3. I use the time effectively when my students are in physical education class? Briefly explain what you do while your students are in physical education class.		
	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>
Yes	100%	97%
No	0%	3%
4. I look forward to the time I have to prepare for class while my students are in physical education class? Please explain your answer.		
	<u>Male (n=13)</u>	<u>Female (n=206)</u>
SA	61%	75%
A	23%	13%
N	15%	8%
D	0%	1%
5. I look forward to the time I have to prepare for class while my students are in physical education class? Please explain your answer.		
	<u>Male (n=13)</u>	<u>Female (n=206)</u>
SA	61%	75%
A	23%	13%
N	15%	8%
D	0%	1%
SD	0%	2%
6. If there was no physical education teacher in our school, I feel confident enough that I could teach my students an effective physical education lesson?		
	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>
SA	7%	8%
A	50%	16%
N	21%	18%
D	15%	38%
SD	7%	20%

The other data results from this study looked at responses the ECT had from four of the five survey questions. The following are the responses from the ECT. When classroom teachers were asked (Question 2) when their students are in physical education class, does this allow them the time to attend to other classroom needs? The ECT responded with comments such as, " this is extremely valuable time for planning tasks as well as parental contact, collaboration, and a 'break' from constant monitoring of students. Like milk, it does a body

good." Another teacher stated, "It is a great break for us all. I do feel that it is time that I can talk to parents or set up for the next lesson. Heck, bathroom breaks are always welcome." Another question from the survey (Question 3) asked ECT if they effectively use their planning time while their student's are in physical education class. The following are some of the responses from the ECT, for example, one teacher stated that she "runs copies, check turned in papers, get ready for the next subject." One ECT stated, that she "collaborates with other teachers, prepare for lessons and activities, phone calls, respond to emails." Another teacher summed it up by stating, "Plan, write lesson plans, research subjects, copies, return emails, contact parents, collaborate, eat a snack, sit down, relax, check office mail, grade and record answers."

For Question four ECT were asked if they look forward to the time to prepare for class while their students are in physical education. For example, statements were given, like "we need time to do tasks that can't be done with children in our charge." One teacher stated, "they wear me out. I need a break." One seasoned teacher stated, "I don't get excited about it (planning time), but I welcome that time to plan." And finally, ECT were asked (Question 5) if there was no physical education teacher in their school, would they feel confident enough to teach an effective physical education lesson. From the ECT their responses, a majority of them answered this question in a tone of "no, I could not do it." One ECT stated, "No way, I wouldn't do the lesson justice." One ECT stated, "A professional who was specifically trained in health and physical education would provide a more thorough learning environment regarding physical education." Another ECT stated, "My expertise is in other areas. While I have knowledge of child development, I would not know where to begin to teach PE skills."

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate ECT attitudes towards elementary physical education and the impact it has on ECT planning time. The results from the gathered data indicate the ECT find their planning time to be very important to them and the physical education class allows them time to plan lessons, contact parents and attend to other important business. Also, in this study, it was revealed that a majority of the ECT would not or could not teach an effective physical education lesson. This feeling resulted in the ECT having a greater respect and appreciation for elementary physical education in their schools and how it benefits their classroom teaching.

The first question of the survey asked the ECT if they personally know the physical education teacher in their school. Between the three states, over 90% of the teachers in Oklahoma and Utah personally know the physical education teachers. How well the ECT knows the physical education teacher was not known. Yet, the ECT knew them and the impact elementary physical education plays for both the students and the ECT. One ECT stated that she feels good knowing that her students are with Mrs. Jones (pseudonym), because "I know what kind of teacher she is, and what she has the kids doing. That lets me focus on what I need to do during my planning." Along this line of thought, question five asked the ECT if they could effectively teach physical education lessons. In reviewing the responses of the ECT, there was a sense of relief for the fact that they would not have the responsibility of teaching physical education classes and that having a physical educator made it possible to have planning time. One ECT stated, "No way would I have enough knowledge or time to do what our PE teacher does. She is awesome." Another ECT stated, "I am so grateful for someone to take my class, for the fact that I get to do what I want to do." These types of comments show support to what elementary physical educators do with students during the ECT planning time. Faucette and Patterson (1989) had similar results in their study. They found that ECT felt they could not successfully teach elementary physical education, for the fact that they

had not had training in college or no in-service training. For some of the ECT they stated that didn't like teaching physical education and would gladly have some else teach it.

Another point of discussion is that the ECT believes that having the students' physical education class allows them the time to attend to other classroom needs. (Question 2). A majority of the ECT from all three states felt that when their students' are in physical education class, it allows them the time to attend to other matters. Certain words or phrases used by the ECT, they were, "let's me regroup", "extremely valuable for planning", "my only time besides lunch and recess to plan", and "my planning time is priceless." Question three of the survey asked the ECT if they used their planning time effectively. The researchers found it interesting that the ECT did answer the yes or no statement, but their statements regarding this question were telling. Some of the ECT statements from this question were, "this allows me time to prepare for the next activity and clean up from the previous activity." Many of the ECT stated that they can "prepare lessons", "get organized", and "catch up on paper work." And a first year ECT stated, "I get last item things together or begin setting up for the next day."

And finally, ECT was asked if they look forward to the time they have to prepare for their class while their students are in physical education (Question 4). From this survey question, 90% of the ECT from Oklahoma, 71% from North Dakota and 56% from Utah look forward to their planning time. When looking over the data from this question, 23% of the ECT from Utah was neutral and 6% did not look forward to their planning time. To shed some light on the ECT attitudes regarding looking forward to planning time, the following statements were given. One ECT said, "I don't look forward to it, but I do appreciate the time to prepare." A second grade teacher stated, "I have ½ hour when my kids are in PE, no big deal." And a ECT that has taught for over 20 years stated, "I don't look forward to my planning time, yet, I am glad I have the time. I guess I have been teaching too long and have gotten use to having planning time." Even though some of these attitudes are not positive, as stated above, a majority of ECT does look forward to their planning time. A first grade teacher stated, "As a teacher I need every minute I can get!" One teacher stated, "We all need a moment to ourselves. We need time to do tasks that can't be done with children in our charge." And lastly, a fourth grade teacher stated, "I greatly look forward to this (planning) time. It is almost impossible to get anything done while they are here."

Analysis of the data suggests that elementary physical education is a big part of a student's education, ECT planning time allows them the time they need to attend to classroom work. And with there planning time the ECT know of the importance it is, thus they effectively use their planning time. The data also suggests that ECT have an attitude of appreciation towards the elementary physical educator in their school, along with appreciation for elementary physical education because it is the appointed time for students to be involved in a different type of student learning, giving the ECT time to use for planning and to attend to other business. The findings add to the literature of the importance of elementary physical education in the case that it helps ECT for more opportunities to better prepare lessons and other class materials for the benefit of educating their students. Also, these findings can be used to gain or maintain support from administrators and parents, as an added bonus to the importance of physical education in the elementary school setting.

Implications of the Study

After analyzing both sets of data, it does not come as a surprise that ECT like having, need, and want their planning time. This study shows the importance how elementary physical education benefits the ECT by allowing them some time for planning. Elementary physical educators need to talk with their administrators for the purpose of pointing out that elementary physical education does benefit the students. And it also benefits the ECT by allowing them to have the planning time they need to improve their teaching, prepare and plan lessons and activities to better help their students learn. It is the author's hope that principals and other school administrators will take the data from this study and educate other classroom teachers, school superintendents, parents and their community about the importance planning time can have on a students' education.

Another implication from this study that elementary physical educators should use in promoting their program to administrators, parents and school boards, is the respect ECT gives to elementary physical education. The ECT sees the value of elementary physical education. In many of the ECT comments given during this study, they voiced their attitudes in regards to elementary physical education as respectful and appreciative for what elementary physical educator does while the ECT utilizes their planning time. These attitudes point to the fact that elementary physical education plays an important role in an elementary school, and without elementary physical education present, it impacts more than just the students.

The hope is that when the elementary physical educator sits down and talks with the principal or another school administrator, they will have an open mind and give thoughtful consideration the positive benefits elementary physical education can play in allowing the ECT the planning time they need and desire for the purpose of creating, planning and preparing lessons and activities for student learning. These findings from this study can be beneficial to principals and other school administrators, for the purpose of showing the importance of elementary physical education and it's role of providing and encouraging the ECT planning time.

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