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Oklahoma Elementary Classroom Teachers' Attitudes and Perspectives of Elementary Physical Education

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Students who participate in physical education (PE) class are being educated in the psychomotor, affective and cognitive domains. For example, in the psychomotor domain, students learn locomotor skills such as throwing, catching, striking, and kicking, which are taught throughout the curriculum. In the cognitive domain students learn to focus on acquiring, comprehending and evaluation of knowledge, such as learning values, strategies, skills and safety in certain games or activities. In the affective domain, students' develop attitudes and appreciation for participation in physical activity. This encompasses fair play, sportsmanship and cooperation with classmates during an activity (Lumpkin, 1998). Physical educators see this happening on a daily basis, whereas classroom teachers have a limited knowledge of the academics taking place in the gymnasium or on the playing field.

Physical education is an academic discipline that has not been given the respect it deserves both in the school setting and among the general public. As a result of the lack of respect physical education has in the educational community, it is one of the first content areas to be eliminated. Cook (2005) presented how elementary physical education has been eliminated from an elementary school in the Pacific Northwest. For that reason, parents and others in this community-based elementary school have held fundraisers sponsored by the Parent Teachers Association (PTA) so that they can raise enough money to support a physical education teacher in the school to teach physical education to the students. It's interesting to note that even though some schools are eliminating physical education classes, logic should dictate that physical education programs should expand faster than the waistlines of today's youth.

In reviewing the literature it was found that internationally, physical education is marginalized. Johns & Dimmock (1999) investigated how physical education is marginalized in Hong Kong. They found physical education to be a "less academic subject". The researchers reported parents and administrators felt that physical education is unimportant and not on the same level of other academic subjects. One obvious fact that illustrates the lack of respect for physical education was the space given to physical educators for their classes. One physical educator in Hong Kong reported that the average size of his class is 100 students with a working gym space the size of half a regulation size basketball court. This dilemma forces the physical education classes to be conducted outside, where there is a high level of pollution and extreme humidity. Another fact that illustrates marginalization of physical education is the lack of equipment for students to use during class activities. The authors made the point that equipment was either broken, or not satisfactory for student use.

Because of these examples, physical educators need to gain support so they can demonstrate to administrators and parents the value of physical education on a students overall education. Therefore, the purpose of the study was to obtain and better understand Oklahoma elementary classroom teachers' attitudes and perceptions towards elementary physical education, and thus help gain support for elementary physical education.

Methods

Subjects

Elementary classroom teachers (N=120) from the central part of Oklahoma, comprised of 10 elementary schools participated in the study. Average population size of schools that participated in the study was 375. Schools were selected by convenience. Teaching experience of the participants ranged from first year teaching to 34 years of teaching. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the university approved the study. Participants gave their informed consent to participate in the study by signing a consent form. Surveys were placed in the teachers' school mailboxes. When the surveys were completed the teachers were to give the surveys to an office secretary. A week after the surveys were placed in the teachers' mailboxes the researchers returned to the schools and collected the completed surveys.

Instrument

A review of literature failed to identify an instrument that covered all the items related to classroom teacher's attitudes and perspectives towards elementary physical education. As such, the researchers constructed a survey from discussions that were held with classroom teachers and elementary physical educators dealing with physical education in the public schools. The researchers constructed a survey of seven statements. Six of the statements were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1=Strongly Agree, 2= Agree, 3=Neutral, 4=Disagree, and 5= Strongly Disagree), and one statement from the survey was a yes/no statement. To establish content validity, the researcher had five experienced elementary classroom teachers along with three highly qualified and experienced elementary physical educators review the survey, and found the statements from the survey to be valid. For the seven statements used in this study, five statements asked the participants to explain their answers. The purpose of having the classroom teachers give an explanation on the given statements was to help the researchers better understand their attitudes and perceptions towards elementary physical education.

Procedures

For this study, the researchers contacted administrators in charge of granting permission to conduct this study (superintendent and/or assistant superintendent) and secured permission to administer the survey to the teachers in their school districts. After receiving permission from the principals, the next step was to place the surveys in the classroom teachers' mailboxes. From the schools that participated in the study, 90% of the surveys were returned. Within one week, the researchers collected the surveys from the office secretary for those teachers who participated in the study. After the surveys were collected, they were analyzed and results were reported as percentages along with classroom teachers' comments.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics in the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) 14.0 program. Percentages were used to reflect the classroom teachers' responses for each item being analyzed. In addition to the data, five of the seven questions required the teachers to comment. Thus, the other method of data analysis was analyzing teacher responses from the five questions from the survey. The

researchers read and re-read data until common themes became evident (O'Sullivan & Tsanaridou, 1992).

Results

Table 1 provides percentages of classroom teachers' attitudes towards elementary physical education class. For statement 2, classroom teachers strongly agree (95%) that physical education is important for the students.

Statement 3 asked classroom teachers if physical education makes a valuable contribution to a student's overall education. A majority (84%) of the classroom teachers felt that physical education does make a valuable contribution to a student's overall education. A statistic of note is that only 1% of the classroom teachers were neutral in their attitudes about physical education making a valuable contribution to a student's overall education.

Question 4 asked classroom teachers if they thought the skills and knowledge the student's learned in physical education classes would be important for them throughout their lives. The classroom teachers strongly agreed (85%) or agreed (15%) that the skills and knowledge learned in physical education class will be important throughout their lives.

For question 5, classroom teachers were asked if their elementary physical education experience was positive. Many (42%) of the classroom teachers had a positive experience; however,

this was not a significant majority. Interestingly, 14% of the classroom teachers were neutral, 13% disagreed and 4% strongly disagreed regarding their elementary physical education experience.

Question 6 asked classroom teachers if students learn better after returning from physical education. Once again, a majority of the classroom teachers either strongly agreed (48%) or agreed (28%) with this statement. Yet, at the same time, some of the classroom teachers felt otherwise. It appears that 22% of the classroom teachers were neutral and 2% disagreed with the statement.

Finally, question 7 asked classroom teachers if there wasn't a physical education teacher in their school, would they feel confident enough to teach an effective physical education lesson. For this statement 6% strongly agreed, 10% agreed, 22% were neutral, 40% disagreed and 22% strongly disagreed.

The other data results from this study were the responses the classroom teachers had from five of the seven statements from the survey. The following are the responses from the classroom teachers. When teachers were asked (Question 2) if they believed physical education class was important for their students, some classroom teachers responded with such comments as "it (physical education class) can help with the obesity problem", "it can encourage students to have healthy lifestyles", and "PE can help students learn other things like social skills,

teamwork, communicating with others and problem solving."

Classroom teachers were asked (Question 4) if the skills and knowledge students learn in physical education class are going to be important for them throughout their lives and they responded in a positive manner. One overwhelming response the classroom teacher gave was that students would learn the skills and knowledge that will encourage being physically active throughout their lives. Other classroom teachers responded by saying that students would learn sportsmanship, strategies used in the games being played, being able to work successfully with others, and problem solving skills.

When classroom teachers were asked (Question 5) if they had a positive elementary physical education experience, both positive and negative responses were expressed. For example, some of the negative comments were, "My PE teacher was a jerk"; "All I remember was running and playing dodge ball"; "One thing really stands out in my mind and that was my PE teacher was always yelling at us"; "It wasn't encouraging"; and "I remember not getting much encouragement". Some of the positive comments were, "I'm 50 years old and Mr. Brown taught me the joy and fun of exercise"; "Because of PE, it has helped me stay active"; and "I loved the games and the chance to get out of my desk and move around."

Percentages of Classroom Teachers' Attitudes Towards Elementary Physical Education

1. I personally know the physical education teacher in our school?
Yes 93% No 7%

2. I believe the students' physical education class is important for the students? Explain your answer.
SA 95%
A 7%
N 0%
D 0%
SD 0%

3. I believe that physical education makes a valuable contribution to a student?
SA 84%
A 15%
N 1%
D 0%
SD 0%

4. I think the skills and knowledge the students learn in physical education class are going to be important for them throughout their lives? Please explain your answer.
SA 85%
A 15%
N 0%
D 0%
SD 0%

5. My elementary physical education experience as a child was a positive experience? Please explain answer.

SA 42%
A 27%
N 14%
D 13%
SD 4%

6. I feel that students learn better after returning from physical education? Please explain your answer.

SA 48%
A 28%
N 22%
D 2%
SD 0%

7. 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.

SA 6%
A 10%
N 22%
D 40%
SD 22%

Classroom teachers were asked (Question 6) if their students learn better after returning from physical education and their comments, for the most part, were positive (48% strongly agreed and 28% agreed). Such statements for example were, "students are focused on class work" were given by the classroom teachers. Still there were some comments from the classroom teachers who felt differently. Some classroom teachers said, "It took a couple minutes to calm down, thus cutting into my instruction time", and "The students were tired and sweaty, still thinking about the games they played in PE class."

The final question (Question 7) was if there were no physical education teachers in their school, would they feel confident enough to teach an effective physical education lesson. Teachers responded to this statement by saying, "No, I could not or would I want to do it"; "No way, I would not do the lesson justice"; and "I couldn't do it, it helps me appreciate Mrs. Jones (pseudonym) and the job she does."

Discussion

The purpose of the study was to obtain and better understand Oklahoma elementary classroom teachers' attitudes and perspectives towards elementary physical education. The results from the data gathered show that classroom teachers in Oklahoma have positive attitudes and perceptions towards elementary physical education. The first question of the survey asked classroom teachers if they personally know the physical education teacher in their building. Ninety-three percent of the teachers personally knew the physical education teacher. How well the classroom teachers personally knew the physical education teacher was not known from this study. A majority (93%) of the classroom teachers knew the physical education teacher in their school, therefore, there is a good chance they have an accurate picture of what goes on in the gymnasium/playing field during physical education time, as they talk in the halls or in the faculty lounge. Also, because they know what is going on during physical education, the classroom teachers appreciate and better understand the work they are doing. Along the same line of thought, question 9 of the survey asked the classroom teachers if they could teach an effective physical education lesson, and from the responses many of them could not teach an effective physical education lesson.

The data appears to indicate that the classroom teachers knew the physical education teachers, and it is hoped that they understand and appreciate the importance the physical education teacher plays in the school and to the students. It was the researcher's hope that this question would cause the classroom teacher to pause and think: 1) that teaching a physical education class is important for students, 2) teaching physical education should not be a "roll out the ball" method of teaching physical education, 3) elementary physical education

teaches and exposes students to three domains (psychomotor, affective and cognitive) on a daily basis, and 4) elementary physical education is an opportunity for students to learn and develop skills that can last a lifetime.

Another point of support the classroom teachers give to elementary physical education, is that they believe that physical education is important for students. Once again, over 90% of the classroom teachers feel it is important for students. Many of the classroom teachers responded to this question with statements that dealt with how physical education could help combat the obesity problem in our county. At the same time, classroom teachers feel that physical education could encourage students to have an active lifestyle or to be physically active.

Question 4 of the survey asked classroom teachers if they thought the skills and knowledge students learn in physical education class are going to be important throughout their lives. The majority (84%) of the classroom teachers strongly agreed with this survey statement. Even though 1% were neutral in their response, the elementary physical educator has an opportunity to help classroom teachers better understand the lifetime benefits of physical education. Many of the teachers made statements such as "students learn how to play a game and learn the rules of the games." Also, the classroom teachers stated, "students learn about life long fitness" and "having a healthy lifestyle." The classroom teacher reported "students can problem solve, which encourages communication with each other". Given these responses to this survey statement, the classroom teachers' responses align with Standard 2 (Demonstrates competency in motor skills and movement patterns needed to perform a variety of physical activities), Standard 4 (Achieves and maintains a health-enhancing level of physical fitness) and Standard 5 (Exhibits responsible personal and social behavior that respects self and others in physical activity settings) of the National Standards for Physical Education (NASPE, 2004). With these responses to this survey statement, the classroom teachers are reaffirming what physical educators have been professing for many years.

When classroom teachers were asked if they had a positive experience in elementary physical education, the majority did (42%). One teacher stated, "I owe my self-confidence, fitness and much more to my successful PE experience." Even though a majority of the classroom teachers had a positive experience in elementary physical education, there were some that felt differently. Some classroom teachers stated that the teacher negatively affected their physical education experience. For example, one teacher said her teacher was "mean". Another teacher plainly put it this way, "had a jerk for a PE teacher". Whatever the experience the classroom teachers had when they were in elementary physical education, these experiences do affect their attitudes

and perspectives towards elementary physical education, and their perceived importance in a child's education.

And finally, classroom teachers were asked if their students learn better after returning from physical education. This question is subjective in nature. There was no objective measure used in this study for this question yet, over 75% of the teachers felt that students learned better after they returned from physical education. Many of the classroom teachers stated that the students were "more alert"; "more focused to learn", and one teacher said that the students appear to "be refreshed". As for possible negative comments to this question, some classroom teachers stated that students had to take more time to "calm down after coming from physical education" and "the students were hot and sweaty." One interesting point noted by the researchers from this statement came from a number of classroom teachers that stated that students who had physical education in the afternoon tended to return back to class "more wound up."

The data suggests that a majority of elementary classroom teachers had positive attitudes and perspectives for and towards elementary physical education. The findings from this study help provide support for elementary physical education, and physical education in general, as an important academic component of a student's education. These findings can be used to gain or maintain support from administrators and parents regarding the importance of physical education in a student's education.

Recommendations

The results from this study suggest that elementary classroom teachers generally have positive attitudes and perceptions of and for elementary physical education. Still, physical educators need to continue to promote their programs to everyone they come in contact with. Physical educators should make it a point to schedule an appointment with the principal at the end of the school year and during this appointment, they can promote their program by reviewing the highlights that took place in the gymnasium or on playing fields. Another method physical educators can implement to promote their program is utilizing parent/teacher conferences. It is during the parent/teacher conference that the physical educator can share with parents what is taking place in the gymnasium or playing field. The physical educator can describe grading policies, curriculum units that their student will be participating in, classroom rules, the national standards and if the physical educator utilizes heart rate monitors or pedometers in their classes, they can discuss how the heart rate monitors and pedometers are implemented into the class activities (Barney & Mauch, 2003). The elementary physical educator can positively impact students' experience in elementary

physical education by using the NASPE "Teacher Tool Box". The NASPE "Teacher Tool Box" is an on-line resource for activities that have been used by teachers throughout the country. Other materials that can be used are the NASPE Teacher Evaluation Tool, journals such as the *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance*, *Strategies*, and the Oklahoma PASS standards. All of these are recommendations physical educators can employ to improve classroom teachers, parents, and administrator's attitudes and perspectives of elementary physical education.

Implications of this Study

After analyzing the data and reviewing the teacher responses, some interesting implications for physical educators can be gleaned from this study. First, it is important to make every student's elementary physical education experience positive. Physical educators should be reminded that the students they teach will grow up to be parents, teachers, school board members and voters. If a student had a negative experience in elementary physical education, there may come a time when they will be in a position to decide if physical education should be eliminated from a child's education. Those experiences that were not favorable could determine how they decide the fate of physical education in their community (Aicinena, 1991).

Another implication from this study is the importance of promoting one's physical education program in the schools and community. The bottom line is that physical educators cannot be shy about the positive impact they are having in the gymnasium, on playing fields, in the classrooms and in the halls. They need to sell their program to teachers, parents, administrators, community leaders, government officials, and state board members. As this takes place, the importance of physical education will be firmly planted in the minds of teachers, parents and administrators, thus, helping physical education shed its tag of marginality.

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