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Physical Education: The Finnish Way Vs. The American Way

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PHYSICAL EDUCATION:

THE FINNISH WAY VS. THE AMERICAN WAY

By

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Teaching.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Is physical education essential for students' grades pre-kindergarten through 12th grade? There have been multiple studies done that have shown activity will keep students more alert and be able to focus for longer amounts of time. I was noticing our schools have been going away from physical education and testing more at the elementary school levels and all the way up through high school. Physical Education is getting cut so students can enroll in more AP courses to prepare them for college. Also, I have noticed that test scores are not drastically changing for the better. I wanted to look at Finland, the country known for having the best education in the world to see exactly what they were doing to get this great reputation. They still give their students "recess" everyday for 45 minutes. I saw a quote that said in Norway "there isn't ever bad weather, people are just underdressed".

This year is my eleventh year of teaching Physical Education and Health Education. I am currently in my fourth school district. I did not achieve tenure in any of the previous three school districts but just achieved it last year in my fourth school district. The reason I had not achieved tenure was my position kept getting cut. Either the student enrollment went down in the district, the graduation requirement of Physical Education and Health Education changed, the school district

needed a female teacher to supervise the girls locker room, or I was the last Physical Education teacher hired and first one to let go are the reasons I had not been tenured.

My first teaching job was in a large south suburban high school in Minnesota. I was hired as the long-term substitute for three Physical Education and/or Wellness teachers. The first teacher I subbed for had knee replacement surgery and then I subbed for two teachers on Maternity leave. I was able to teach the entire first year covering for these teachers. The second year I was hired back as part time at the high school and travelled to a middle school nearby because they did not have as many sections available for me to teach. During this year, I was pink slipped because the district was going to cut down on the requirement for Physical Education and Wellness for the high school students.

My third and fourth years teaching, I was hired in a very large Suburban district where I taught 8th Grade Health in one of three of their middle schools. Health was viewed as a core subject along with Math, Science, Social Studies, and Language Arts. Our school had two 8th Grade Health teachers. I taught half of the 8th grade class for the entire year. This was great to really get to know the students as well as teaching them very in-depth Health subjects and units I had never gotten to because of time restraints. The other two middle schools in the district did not have Health as a core subject so the students at these other schools only had Health for half the year as our students had it for the whole year. The high school did not like this because they could tell which students were from my school compared to the other schools because of their knowledge of the content. My students were usually had more

knowledge because they had Health for the entire year. Also the other middle schools (principals, parents, teachers, students) did not like it because all three middle schools were not the same. So I was pink slipped because the other Health teacher at my school was hired a year before me, and they wanted to make all middle schools the same and cut down on Health for only have the year.

My fifth year I found a teaching job at an urban school in a large city in Minnesota. I was hired at a Community School where we taught pre-Kindergarten through 8th grade. I taught pre-Kindergarten through fourth grade Physical Education and 6th, 7th, and 8th grade Health. The students I taught Health to never had been taught Health before and many of those students were at a reading level five or more grades below what grade they were in. There were fist fights at least once a week during Physical Education in the gym. This was easily the toughest school setting I have been in. I couldn't go to Administration because they wouldn't do anything. Instead of teaching kids, I was baby-sitting kids.

The last five years I have been teaching in a large west Suburban district. I started teaching Physical Education and Health Education to 6th, 7th, and 8th grade students at one of three middle schools. Three years ago I travelled between the middle school and high school to get closer to full time and benefits. The past two years I have only taught at the high school. I received tenure or "continuing contract" last year and this year was the first year I have been full-time and received full benefits.

My dad taught Physical Education and Health Education in a very large suburban high school in Minnesota for over 30 years. Every year, or so it seemed, my dad came home talking about how the school district was talking about budget cuts and cutting Physical Education and other electives. It seemed he was always in a fight for the school district to keep Physical Education.

I grew up idolizing my dad and wanting to be just like him. I looked up to him and realize now I am more and more like him. I look like him, act like him, and probably teach and coach like him. So probably when I was in junior high, I starting thinking about becoming a teacher.

With test scores not improving very much and obesity rising in America, I wanted to see what Finland, known as the best Country in Education, was doing with Physical Education and physical activity. Does cutting back on PE and Health and teaching more and more to the tests really help the students? That is what I want to look at; the educational system of Finland versus the United States and how they view Physical Education and physical activity.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

Is physical education essential for students' grades pre-kindergarten through 12th grade? This is the question I am after. In Chapter One, I told the story of my personal teaching experiences throughout my teaching career. Now in my fifth school district in my nine years of teaching I am getting frustrated with school districts cutting back on physical education to spend more time for standardized tests and the "core" subjects. Why is it that physical and health education is not a "core" subject? Are the other subjects more important? Do students need more time in the classroom and less time being physically active?

Overall you will see in this Literature Review that most people agree that physical education and physical activity is very important for students for their well-being as well as being alert in school for taking tests and doing schoolwork. So why are schools still cutting back on physical education?

In Chapter Two, I explored this question in depth by reviewing what other researchers and educators have discovered about having physical education in the schools Pre-Kindergarten through high school. Several related ideas emerged as I did my review of the literature.

Staying Active & Disease Prevention

According to an article published by the prestigious Harvard University, "regular exercise or physical activity helps many of the body's systems function better, keeps heart disease, diabetes, and a host of other diseases at bay, and is a key ingredient for losing weight". Physical activity helps "prevent type 2 diabetes (what was once called adult-onset)". It also "relieves symptoms of depression and anxiety and improves

mood". Physical Activity also "improves heart-lung and muscle fitness" and "improves sleep."

Also in the article, "a sedentary lifestyle does the opposite, increasing the chances of becoming overweight and developing a number of chronic diseases". "People who spend more time each day watching television, sitting, or riding in cars have a greater chance of dying early than people who spend less time on their duffs". In their studies "researchers speculate that sitting for hours on end may change peoples' metabolism in ways that promote obesity, heart disease, diabetes, and other chronic conditions".

The article also stated that aerobic physical activity (activity that is being taught in Physical Education) "is especially beneficial for disease prevention". "Some studies show that walking briskly for even one to two hours a week (15 to 20 minutes a day) starts to decrease the chances of having a heart attack or stroke, developing diabetes, or dying prematurely."

The 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans recommends "children should get at least 1 hour or more a day of physical activity in age-appropriate activities".

The article also researched and stated that walking, as simple as that is, "substantially reduces the chances of developing heart disease, stroke, and diabetes in different populations". They actually say that brisk walking (at least 3 miles per hour) "is more beneficial than slow walking for weight control". They talked about how difficult it may be for some to "brisk walk" so bicycling, even on an exercise bike, would have the same benefits as "brisk walking".

<http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/staying-active-full-story/>)¹

¹ Frenk, Dean Julio. "Search the Nutrition Source."

Another article from the American Heart Association states that children should have “at least 60 minutes of moderate- to vigorous-intensity aerobic activity everyday”. A major factor of inactivity is “developing coronary artery disease” as well as increasing risk of “stroke, obesity, high blood pressure, low HDL (good) cholesterol, and diabetes”. Later in life “increased physical activity has been associated with an increased life expectancy and decreased risk of cardiovascular disease. Physical activity produces overall physical, psychological and social benefits”. The biggest thing with children being inactive is that “inactive children are more likely to become inactive adults:. With children and adults physical activity helps with many aspects including “controlling weight, reducing blood pressure, raising HDL (good) cholesterol, reducing the risks of diabetes and some cancers, as well as improved psychological well-being, including gaining more self-confidence and a higher self-esteem”. With the diagnosis of Type 2 or used to be called Adult-Onset Diabetes getting diagnosed at a younger and younger age, the ability in controlling weight is essential.²

According tot the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Physical activity reduces one’s risk for “dying prematurely, dying of heart disease, and developing diabetes, colon cancer and high blood pressure”.³

² "The AHA's Recommendations for Physical Activity in Children." 2014. 12 Mar. 2015

<http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/GettingHealthy/HealthierKids/ActivitiesforKids/The-AHAs-Recommendations-for-Physical-Activity-in-Children_UCM_304053_Article.jsp>

³ "CDC - Physical Activity - Facts - Adolescent and School Health." 2005. 12 Mar. 2015

<<http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/physicalactivity/facts.htm>>

Benefits of Physical Activity

According to an article called “13 Unexpected Benefits of Exercise” it states that exercise reduces stress. “Working a sweat can help manage physical and mental stress. Exercise also increases concentrations of norepinephrine, a chemical that can moderate the brain’s response to stress.” Exercise also boosts happy chemicals. It releases endorphins, which creates feelings of happiness and euphoria. Studies have shown that exercise can even alleviate symptoms among the clinically depressed. It is stated that that “exercise can be just as effective as antidepressant pills in treating depression”. Exercise also improves self-confidence.

Exercise alleviates anxiety, boosts brainpower, and sharpens your memory. “Various studies on mice and men have shown cardiovascular exercise can create new brain cells (aka neurogenesis) and improve overall brain performance”. Studies also “suggest that a tough workout increases levels of a brain-derived protein (known as BDNF) in the body, believed to help with decision making, higher thinking, and learning”. Regular physical activity boosts memory and ability to learn new things. Exercise increases production of cells in the hippocampus responsible for memory and learning. Research has “linked children’s brain development with level of physical fitness and a study has also showed that running sprints improved vocabulary retention among healthy adults”. Exercise also helps control addiction, increases relaxation, and you can get more done. The brain releases “dopamine, the “reward chemical” in response to any form of pleasure, be that exercise, sex, drugs, alcohol, or food”. “Short exercise sessions can also effectively distract drug or alcohol addicts, making them de-prioritize cravings (at least the short term)”. “A moderate workout can be the equivalent of a sleeping pill, even for people with

insomnia. Moving around five to six hours before bedtime raises the body's core temperature. When the body temp drops back to normal a few hours later, it signals the body that it's time to sleep". Also in this article it states "research shows that workers who take time for exercise on a regular basis are more productive and have more energy than their more sedentary peers". Exercise also helps one tap into creativity and also inspires others. "A heart-pumping gym session can boost creativity for up to two hours afterward".⁴

According to Fitness Magazine, "as little as 30 minutes of cardio three to five days a week will add six years to your life, according to research at the Cooper Clinic in Dallas".⁵

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention states that "regular physical activity in childhood and adolescence improves strength and endurance, helps build healthy bones and muscles, helps control weight, reduces anxiety and stress, increases self-esteem, and may improve blood pressure and cholesterol levels". The benefits of regular physical activity they listed were regular physical activity helps "build and maintain healthy bones and muscles, reduce the risk of developing obesity and chronic diseases, such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and colon cancer, reduces feelings of depression and anxiety and promotes psychological well-being, may help improve students' academic performance

⁴ "13 Unexpected Benefits of Exercise | Greatist." 2013. 12 Mar. 2015

<<http://greatist.com/fitness/13-awesome-mental-health-benefits-exercise>>

⁵ "The Hidden Mental and Physical Benefits of Exercise | Fitness." 2014. 12 Mar. 2015

<<http://www.fitnessmagazine.com/workout/tips/power-surge-the-hidden-benefits-of-exercise/>>

including academic achievement and grades, academic behavior, such as time on task, and factors that influence academic achievement, such as concentration and attentiveness in the classroom".⁶

Physical Education

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "in 2011 only 29% of high school students surveyed had participated in at least 60 minutes per day of physical activity on all 7 days before the survey, and only 31% attended physical education class daily". Also in 2011, "only 24% of seniors or 12th graders attended physical education class daily". Also in that same survey "fourteen percent of high school students had not participated in 60 or more minutes of any kind of physical activity on *any* day during the 7 days before the survey".⁷

Finnish Lessons

Finland is known as the "best country in the world". Whether it is education, technology enhancement, or happiness it is ranked very high. In the USA Today, there was an article on Finland and it stated "if you want to live the American dream, move to Finland".

⁶ "CDC - Physical Activity - Facts - Adolescent and School Health." 2005. 12 Mar. 2015

<<http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/physicalactivity/facts.htm>>

⁷ "CDC - Physical Activity - Facts - Adolescent and School Health." 2005. 12 Mar. 2015

<<http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/physicalactivity/facts.htm>>

Pasi Sahlberg is the well-known author of the book “Finnish Lessons”. He travels all around the world to talk about education. He compares the Finland educational system to the United States. He said the U.S. educational system is the GERM (Global Educational Reform Movement) versus Finnish Lessons. A couple things that he said caught my attention. The first, he stated that the U.S. is “doing a wrong thing righter”. Another thing Pasi said was “Prevention is cheaper than repair”. I believe he was talking about the whole school system but I feel it also relates to physical activity and physical education directly. Finland believes in play. They believe that children and young adults need time everyday to play.⁸

In 2015, Finland did a study on their Physical Education in their schools. According to the Liitu study there was most physical education in the 9th grade (128 minutes/week) and least in the 7th grade (95 minutes/week). The recommendations were put in that there should be 150 minutes of physical education per week in primary schools (grades 1-5) and progressing to 225 minutes per week in the secondary school (grades 6-12).

An article named “Finnish Schools Are on the Move—and America’s Need to Catch Up”, a teacher that had taught in the U.S. and now is teaching in Finland stated that when she was in the U.S. teaching she noticed that “requiring my young students to sit passively for a half-hour or so on the rug was clearly not working for them. By the time I’d release them from the rug to do independent work, they were exasperated and I had to peel a few of them from the floor”. So she then forced herself to use an old-fashioned stopwatch and kept all of her lessons under 15 minutes. She said the results were encouraging, her students transitioned quicker and worked more

⁸ Sahlberg, Pasi. *Finnish lessons*. Teachers College Press, 2011.

efficiently. She then noticed a bigger problem: Her “students were sitting down nearly 100 percent of every class”.

She said when she thought of it, whenever she had visited other schools in the states, “American students were being asked to sit for the majority of lessons. Not only that, but they weren’t very active during the entire school day”. “Research has shown that physical activity can fend off obesity, reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease, improve cognitive functions—like memory and attention—and positively improve mental health”.

She said she “assumed the lack of physical activity in schools was an American problem—a natural byproduct of long school days and limited opportunities for recess”. When she started teaching in Finland she saw the same thing happening in their public schools. “Kids in Finland have short school days and frequent 15-minute breaks—typically there’s one after each 45-minute lesson. And even though the breaks keep them more focused in the classroom, they don’t necessarily keep them more active at school”. During recess many students were on their smartphones or huddled up with their class mates or friends chitchatting.

On the “Finnish Report Card 2014 on Physical Activity for Children and Youth,” kids in Finland received a “D” for overall physical activity levels. On the “2014 United States Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth,” received a “D-” for overall physical fitness levels.

“Though children in both countries suffer from low activity levels, a key difference exists between Finland and the United States: Hundreds of schools across this tiny Nordic nation are now endeavoring to keep kids active throughout the day through a relatively new government initiative called “Finnish Schools on the Move”. Many Finnish Schools, 45 to be exact, piloted this program. Within two years, according to a survey conducted, “half of participating elementary school students and a third of middle school students reported an increase in physical activity”. After these results came out, the number of participating “comprehensive” schools has grown from 45 to nearly 800.

“Under this new model, the older students will have the chance to come up with their own diversions to keep themselves active during the school day”. They assigned students as the “recess activators,” meaning they’ve been trained to work with their younger peers, especially first and second graders, once a week.

Another school in Finland, sixth graders are helping out in a different way. It is recess time and instead of all of the kids grabbing their jackets and heading out the day, several are lining up in a straight line in front of a table near the front door. Each child is holding onto a small notecard known as a “passport”. These “passports” grant them the right to borrow exercise equipment during recess. Students grabbed basketballs, jump ropes, soccer balls, footballs, etc. Both of these examples worked well for the elementary school students but not the secondary schools.

The pilot program revealed that sedentary behavior at school increased steadily by age. Later surveys, moreover, reported that just a third of students in grades seven through nine increased their level of physical activity each day, despite participating in the pilot. So instead of the short 15-minute recesses, the schools were offering at least one 30-minute break at the secondary schools. Under this new model, the older students will have the chance to come up with their own diversions to keep themselves active during the school day: yoga, palates, floor hockey, or gymnastics to name a few of the possibilities. The kids get to dream it up; as long as it’s something vigorous, it’s an option. Students will run and direct these activities—and that’s intentional. “Finnish schools are encouraging children to take ownership by inviting their ideas and carving out the time and space for these activities to happen at school.”

Also from the “Finnish Schools on the Move”, coordinators came up with various strategies for getting students to be more active during lessons. They call these “energizers” (short breaks from sitting for students during lessons), they also allow kids to complete work while standing, and have replaced conventional chairs with exercise balls so that students can bounce and learn simultaneously, for example.

Another activity that this teacher did was the “Gallery Walk”. She noticed “all too often, students present their work passively; they stand at the front of their classrooms with a poster or slideshow presentation and lecture the class on what they’ve learned, for example. Not only does this common practice consume a lot of instructional time, but it’s also unproductive. Sitting down and listening to numerous presentations in a row can become eye-glazingly boring for everyone in the class—including the teacher—no matter how skillfully the students share their work”.

Here is how the “Gallery Walk “ works “students fasten their presentations to the walls of the classroom or hallway as if they were exhibiting their work in an art gallery. Each display is numbered and children rotate from exhibit to exhibit systematically, spending a minute or two carefully studying each one. To make this experience more meaningful, students provide written-feedback to each other as they’re visiting each display. Before they start the active gallery walk, the teacher hands out sticky notes in two different colors. On one color, the students write questions about the work for the presenter to consider and on the other, they jot down positive observations”.

The teacher stated that: Finnish Schools on the Move” has helped her “see that schools in America—and around the world—can increase the physical activity of children by nudging all students to take ownership of their lifestyles and encouraging teachers to come up with creative ways of getting kids to move inside their classroom”.

In a study that came out in early September of 2016 by the BBC News, children in Finland need three hours of exercise per day. The target of the study is children eight and under. “Parents have been advised to actively encourage their children to pursue hobbies and interests that require physical exertion”. Finland is known to “produce some of the most physically fit children in Europe” as well as “some of the highest academic results among schoolchildren in the developed world”. Finland’s Minister for Education and Culture believes there is no coincidence. She said “physical activity contributed to a child’s happiness and promoted learning by developing a young

person's ability to interact socially". She also said, "when children exercise together they develop interaction skills and connect socially, and it's healthy, too".

Finland is now experimenting with "new ways of teaching". The head of basic education with the Finnish National Board of Education, told the BBC that "in our new curriculum, we are looking at two to three hours a week of physical education and more outdoor activities. But we are also looking at non-traditional ways of teaching". That includes removing desks and chairs from some classrooms, so that children are not sitting as much while learning regular subjects. "Some children learn well sitting at a desk and listening, others would benefit greatly from moving around the room talking with their classmates. The child has an active role. We will emphasize personalized learning. The learning environment should be modern and support different learners.". "Finland is one of the first countries to put forward these recommendations, which will use classrooms to connect physical exercise with traditional learning". Young people in Finland were in favor of more physical activity in schools and many suggested using the school gym during breaks and increasing out-of-hours school club activities.

The BBC decided that an increase of exercise was needed because of the "economic, social and cultural development through globalization is having a detrimental impact" on Finland's population. Finland's population is still among the healthiest but "as in many countries, health inequalities are on the rise in Finland". Finland introduced "child health care clinics way back in the 1940s" and now "with the latest focus on physical activity among schoolchildren, Finland remains a leading nation when it comes to the health of its young citizens".

Finland – Give Students a break. More than 1,000 schools are taking part in a national program, "Finnish Schools on the Move". This Finnish approach is to create opportunities for activity elsewhere in the school day, not necessarily increase the number of hours dedicated to physical education. Students "now have four breaks a day, at least two of them outside. Short breaks are also used to stop students from spending too long sitting down during lessons-they might be asked to stand up to

discuss what they have learned so far, or do some short exercises before carrying on working. In some classes a nominated student has responsibility for alerting the teacher if the group need to stretch their legs”.

“Its about introducing cultural change. The idea is that if they don’t sit for too long in lessons then they’ll be less likely to do so in their spare time and when they are older.” Some classrooms are completely chair free in Finland schools, but have standing desks instead.

https://www.theguardian.com/teacher-network/2016/jan/19/schools-fighting-childhood-obesity-fitness-physical-education?CMP=share_btn_link

Finland has been at the top or close to the top of Europe’s comprehensive school system rankings for the past 16 years. Looking at their school system, they believe that “groundwork for good school performance begins earlier, long before children enter formal school”. In all of Finnish daycare centers, “the emphasis is not on math, reading or writing (children receive no formal instruction in these [subjects] until they are seven and in primary school) but creative play”. This is surprising to many parents as they see education as a competitive race. In Finland, they are more relaxed. The head of the daycare center stated that they “believe children under seven are not ready to start school, they need time to play and be physically active. It’s a time to for creativity.”

The early years of education in Finland is “not explicably education in the formal sense but the promotion of the health and wellbeing of every child”. “Daycare is to help them develop good social habits: to learn how to make friends and respect others, for example, or to dress themselves competently”. They also emphasize the “joy of learning”, along with “language enrichment and communication. There is an

emphasis on physical activity (at least 90 minutes outdoor play a day). “Kindergarten in Finland doesn’t focus on preparing children for school academically, instead the main goal is to make sure that the children are happy and responsible individuals”, writes the Finnish educational expert Pasi Sahlberg.

Finland believes that play gives children vital skills in how to learn. At the daycare, the staff-child ratio for under-threes is 1:4 and for older children 1:7. Obviously this a great ratio that every teacher would love to have. “Great care is taken to plan not just what kind of play takes place – there is a mix of free play and teacher-directed play – but to assess how children play. The children’s development is constantly evaluated – it’s not just random play, it’s learning through play”.

Play at this stage of child development can successfully engage them in the process of learning. Once a child is engaged in a task they enjoy, whether acting out a story or constructing a building, children become “motivated to constantly refine and improve on their task and to increase the challenge”. “From a psychological point of view you can see how play can help children become powerful learners”. Carefully organized play “helps develop qualities such as attention span, perseverance, concentration and problem solving, which at the age of four are stronger predictors of academic success than the age at which a child learns to read. There is evidence that high-quality early years play-based learning not only enriches educational development but boosts attainment in children from disadvantaged backgrounds who do not possess the cultural capital enjoyed by their wealthier peers. The better the quality of pre-school,

the better the outcomes, both emotionally and socially and in terms of academic achievement”.

Early years care in Finland is designed and funded to ensure high take-up: every child has a legal right to high quality pre-school care. About 40% of 1-3-year-olds are in daycare and 75% of 3-5-year-olds. Optional pre-school at the age of six has a 98% take-up. Daycare was supposed to get mothers back into the workplace, but it is also about “lifelong learning and how we prepare young children”. The time children spend in pre-school, with its emphasis on play and socialization, are “the most important years”. Finnish education is undergoing the biggest financial cuts in its history, but early years and primary schools – the bedrock of the system and the point where learning skills can be most successfully embedded – have been relatively protected.

Finland has one of the best comprehensive school systems in the world. Finnish pupils produced some of the world’s highest scores in math, science, and reading. In 2012 the scores dropped slightly but it still remains the highest-ranked in Europe. The “Teaching to the Test” concept is an alien concept to the Finnish, and was abolished decades ago. In my many years of teaching in the United States, I have heard the term “teaching to the test” multiple times and in multiple schools and school districts.

Finland looks at the “quality-not-quantity approach”. Finland’s school hours are shorter than the United States and homework duties are lighter. After-school tutoring

is rare and because of this approach, Finnish children are happier and less stressed than other children their age in other countries.

Of all of the articles that I looked at talking about Finland's comprehensive school system, most talked about how they allow their younger children to play. They were not forcing them to learn; giving homework; teaching to the tests; at an early age. Children were allowed to have fun; be creative; and because of this not be stressed out thinking about and going to school. Finland gives their students breaks and encourages them to use these breaks throughout the day to go play or be outside. This is a lot different than the schools I was educated in and even now teach in. There is a lot more content in classes. Students need to know this content from these core classes. Physical education and health education are being cut or can take an online P.E. course to give them more class time to get ready for standardized tests. Finland knows what they are doing and I believe parents believe being active is a positive thing but think parents put more emphasis on these "core" courses.

CHAPTER THREE

Methods

Introduction

To investigate my capstone question I gave a qualitative survey. I asked ten multiple-choice questions and then of those ten questions I had the human subjects answer four more detail questions explaining why they answered the way they did.

Selecting Methods

I ended up sending out this qualitative survey to 37 teachers, coaches, parents, and administrative. Twenty-four (24) were male and thirteen (13) were female. I was planning on sending it out to more people since I have taught in four districts but because I needed to get approved by each school district, it was easiest to only use the current school district I am teaching in now.

Setting and Participants

I chose 37 adults that I am in contact with that are in the same school district as myself. Whether it is co-workers as in teachers I teach with, teachers that teach the same subject matter, coaches I coach with, secretaries that are in the building, administrative I work with, or parents that I have dealt with.

Of the 37 adults I sent the survey to, only 24 of them filled out the survey. I am not sure how many males versus females responded as I did not require them to put their name on the survey. I had them remain anonymous.

Recap

I made a Google form survey with five questions asking how important parts of Physical Education were. The human subjects answered Important (1), Somewhat Important (2), Important (3), and Very Important (4). These five questions were:

How important do you feel the public views Physical Education in schools?

How important do you view Physical Education in schools?

How important do you feel the school district that you live or work in views Physical Education?

How important do you feel exercise affects student's overall grades?

How important do you feel exercise affects tests scores?

I also asked two additional questions to get more evidence why they felt the way they did with a follow up question: In 50 words or less why do you feel this or that way?

In Part 2 of my survey the human subjects had to answer Poor (1), Okay (2), Good (3), or Excellent (4) to the following five questions:

How do you feel about the amount of exercise elementary school students(Grades Pre-K through 5th) are getting in school?

How do you feel about the amount of exercise middle school students (Grades 6th through 8th) are getting in school?

How do you feel about the amount of exercise high school students (Grades ninth through twelfth) are getting in school?

How do you feel about the overall health of the people of the United States?

After these four questions I asked again: In 50 words or less why do you feel this way?

My last question was: Do you feel that there should be any changes done within the curriculum of Physical Education in schools? I had the human subjects answer with the following: Yes, a complete overhaul (1), Yes, a few changes here and there (2), No, it is perfect the way it is (3), or I have no idea what the curriculum is in Physical Education now (4). After this final question I asked in 75 words or less, why or why not?

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

Introduction

There will be some bias opinions because of the 37 human subjects or participants many were either coaches I coached with or were Physical Education and/or Health Education teachers that I work with. Also some of the parents were parents of athletes I coached and I also surveyed the Activities Director that is at my school. Of the 37 participants, more than half of of them coach some sport (Football, Basketball, Baseball, Softball, Danceline, Adaptive Soccer, Golf, and Tennis).

Results

How important?

The majority (62.5% or 15 human subjects) found that they felt that the public views Physical Education as either Not Important (16.7% or 4 human subjects) or Somewhat Important (45.8% or 11 human subjects). Only 9 human subjects felt that the public view was Important (6 subjects) or Very Important (3 subjects).

The importance that the human subjects put on Physical Education was all Important or Very Important. 29.2% of the subjects or 7 humans believed it to be Important while 70.8 % or 17 human subjects believed it to be Very Important.

I asked the human subjects why they feel this way. The majority of those that took the survey talked about obesity and how “America is fastly becoming the fattest and unhealthiest country in the world”. We, as educators, need to teach kids “early on the

importance of being active for a healthy lifestyle". Many mentioned the research being done that suggest being active aids in all other curriculums. One person mentioned how fast food and electronic devices are getting in the way of students being active.

The next question asked about the school district they lived in, how important they thought was put on Physical Education? The majority (14 people or 58.3%) said they felt the school district thought Physical Education was Important or Very Important. Only 2 people or 8.3% thought the school district they lived in felt Physical Education was Not Important at all. The main reason why the majority felt that the school district thinks Physical Education is important or very important was it is a "required class for all grades" in high school. Also some talked about schools starting an Online Physical Education course as well as many students involved in extracurricular activities. The ones that feel the district does not give Physical Education importance talked about the schools not "scheduling students in class at appropriate times", they think the school district doesn't see it "as learning how to stay healthy but still as playing games", they see Physical Education getting cut and students getting "taken out of (PE) class for speech, student tutoring, etc" or if it is not getting cut that the classes have increased to too many (40+) students to help kids be successful

The last two questions dealing with importance of Physical Education were:

How important do you feel exercise affects students overall grades and how does it affect test scores? Twenty-three (23) out of 24 that answered the survey or 95.8%

said that exercise is important or very important in how it affects student's overall grades. Twenty-one (21) or 87.5% said that exercise is important or very important in affecting test scores. No one said that it was not important for either question affecting grades and test scores. The ones that didn't say it was important or very important said it was somewhat important.

Feelings

Part 2 of the survey asked 5 questions about how the individual felt about exercise and physical education in the schools (Grades Pre-k through 5th grade or Elementary School; 6th through 8th grade or Middle School; and grades 9th through 12th or High School) and the overall health of the people in the United States. The last question asked if any changes should be done in the Physical Education curriculum in schools.

None of the individuals surveyed thought the amount of exercise that Elementary School students get is excellent. Four or 16.7% thought it was Poor; Ten or 41.7% thought it was Okay and the other ten or 41.7% thought it was Good. For Middle School students, one individual thought it was Excellent; nine or 37.5% thought it was Good; the majority or eleven individuals which was 45.8% thought it is Okay, while three individuals or 12.5% thought it is Poor. For High Schoolers, no one thinks it is Excellent; only eight individuals or 33.3% think it is Good. The majority thinks it is Okay (fourteen individuals or 58.3%) and only two individuals or 8.3% think it is Poor.

The overall health of the people in the United States surveyed thought it is either Okay (50%) or Poor (45.8%). Only one individual thinks the the overall health of the

people is Good. One person said "Obesity is epidemic, poor diet is the norm and exercise is not a priority for many, although these issues are changing slowly for the better". Curriculum and teaching was also talked about when answering this question. "Our schools get too concerned with test scores so we take our lowest scoring kids out of PE classes and put them in additional math and reading courses". "Health education and physical education need to be implemented more". "As a society, we need to continue to educate on the value of physical activity, nutrition, and overall health".

The last question asked about changes in curriculum of Physical Education in schools. Over 70% said "Yes, a few changes here and there" . 12.5% stated that the curriculum should have "a complete overhaul" and 12.5% said they "have no idea what the curriculum is in Physical Education now. Only one person surveyed thought the Physical Education curriculum in schools "is perfect the way it is". Many surveyed stated that students in the district should be required to take more physical education. One stated that it should start in elementary school so we would have "true health care rather than sick care" in the U.S. Another person stated "Kids need more physical activity to stem the increase of disease from a sedentary lifestyle". Another person stated that they feel "we need to move away from the tradition of playing games and focus on life-long activities. We also need to get kids moving more throughout their day, not just during PE" ..

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

Introduction

In conclusion, everyone agrees that education plays a huge role in shaping our young people's minds and bodies. They agree that children should be more active whether it is during the school day (at school in recess or Physical Education class) or at home being outside instead of playing video games or on their electronics.

The eating habits and "fast food nation" that we live in has a huge affect on our children's health. Many believe that students in school are getting more and more educated on Nutrition and knowing to "choose this food not that" when coming to food choices. Also school lunches are getting healthier and the vending machines or snacks students can get are getting healthier. Soft drinks are getting traded in for vitamin water and fruit and vegetable infused water.

Our schools today are focusing more and more on standardized tests. We are focused on the "core" classes. We are spending more time in the classroom and way more time at home working on homework (being sedentary) than we are being up, moving around, and "just playing" at home. Teachers are changing teaching styles and focused on "student based learning" so maybe students are not just sitting in the classroom taking notes and listening to lectures but they are spending more time in the classroom setting.

Physical Education is being decreased in their lives but there has to be some give and take. If we are so worried about “not being the smartest” nation or “not getting into the college I want to”, then we could focus on being the “fittest nation”. What is our goal?

It would be great to be able to tell our kids to “go out and play” everyday. It is extremely hard with all of the activities students are involved in today and also the Minnesota winters can be a bear.

Another thing is the United States is the “melting pot” of the world, especially in the schools. What other countries have as many non-speaking native language students than we do? Most countries the students speak the same language so it is easier to teach them the “core subjects”. We have many obstacles in our educational system because of the language barriers. Whether it is parents that need a translator or students that need help in an ELL class (English Language Learner). Many times because of the language, students then fall behind in literacy (speaking, reading, writing) which then affects standardized tests and learning in general.

Are we just like other countries? As you see above, I believe we are not. So by taking the education system from one country and putting it in place here, is that going to solve our educational system? No. I believe we are looking at other countries and taking some things from their educational system that we feel would work best for us. We are comparing and thinking would that benefit our kids? Why or why not?

All in all, it would be great to “play” and increase children’s fitness levels but is this realistic? With so much on children’s “plates” these days, can we tell them to just go

out and play or are they exhausted from spending hours doing homework and working a job and volunteering because it looks good on their resume' and still having a social life. We educate them as much as we can about how important fitness and nutrition is that I think we just hope and pray they will be the sponges that they are and soak up the knowledge and "know better".

APPENDIX 1

Email sent to teachers who agreed to participate in the survey

Teachers-

I am working on finishing up my Masters this summer through Hamline University. My Capstone is called "Physical Education: The Finnish Way Vs. The American Way". I have a few survey questions on Google Forms that I will send you that should only take you a few minutes of your time. Before I can send you the Survey, I need your consent to be apart of my Capstone. I will not put your name in any of my findings but will just use your answers anonymously.

Could you please sign the form electronically and e-mail it back to me so I can keep in my file for finishing up my Masters. Thanks and I hope you are enjoying your summer.

Rob

APPENDIX 2

Summary of Responses to the Survey

How important do you feel the public views Physical Education in schools?

(24 responses)

1 - Not Important (4 responses or 16.7%)

2 - Somewhat Important (11 responses or 45.8%)

3 - Important (6 responses or 25%)

4 - Very Important (3 responses or 12.5%)

How important do you view Physical Education in schools?

(24 responses)

1 - Not Important (0 responses or 0%)

2 - Somewhat Important (0 responses or 0%)

3 - Important (7 responses or 29.2%)

4 - Very Important (17 responses or 70.8%)

In 50 words or less why do you feel this way?

(24 responses)

America is fastly becoming the fattest and unhealthiest country in the world and has very little resources of knowledge to combat the luxuries (fast food, electronic devices) that we have in this country. Not enough emphasis in diet, nutrition and exercise that kids would be getting in PE/Health

Learning how to live a healthy life, understanding physical activities, and working with others are very important skills.

Obesity is an epidemic in this country, students need to learn skills they can practice throughout their lives, school can do that. I dislike that school is the only place kids get most sports in our society, and that the communities don't have clubs for sports as they do in Europe. This emphasis allows the community not to fill this need. It also creates conflict between athletics and academics during the school day.

Many kids are not getting exercise on their own so they need to get it somewhere. Other kids need to blow off energy in order to learn in other classes. They also learn sportsmanship and team in PE

All of the research I've read on the brain shows how important physical education is to aiding all other curriculums.

We don't need anymore obesity in this world. People are dying everyday due to inactivity, obesity, diabetes, etc. Why not stay healthy and live!!

If children don't lead a healthy way of life and don't take care of themselves they won't be able to reach their full potential or be able to do the things they want in life.

Students need physical activity in their day and need ways to revive the brain.

Children need to learn how to be physically active in a variety of ways. In addition, lessons revolving around personal body health issues and choices is best learned from a licensed professional in an educational setting.

great health is more important than great knowledge (i.e. I'd rather be healthy and live long than be smart)

Kids need to learn early on the importance of being active for a healthy life style. By having it in school, it can help by being a part of their regular day and hopefully become a routine.

Research shows that physical activity helps students in many different areas of their life. It's also integral for building life long habits.

For the physical, mental and emotional health of students.

School is a place that is designed to teach the child how to be successful. Not everyone will grow up to be a mathematician but everyone will need math. Not everyone will be an athlete but physical education is a part of everyone's life and the choices they make.

PE is a class that students can be challenged both mentally and physically. The whole child needs physical activity to be a better person, be healthier and I think it helps them concentrate in other subjects better.

I believe that education for all students includes a focus on the mind, body, and heart. There is great research that speaks to some of the health challenges in our society and education is the key to helping make progress in the lifelong health and well-being of all our students.

Our country is in a downward spiral with the obesity epidemic. Increased daily activity equals increased test scores.

I personally believe in the holistic approach to the Education of our kids. Unfortunately, we live in a very political environment that enjoys testing the "flavor of the day". Physical Education should be a very important part of the Education Curriculum. In addition to the physical benefits, and learning process relating to Good Health, it provides a great stress relief. Our kids are under a great deal of pressure in today's society and good physical health, coupled with Academics results in a well rounded adult.

Active people have more energy and focus throughout the day. With the large population of obesity I feel it should be held at a higher standard at an early age.

Because people need to learn to be active for their own health. If you look at our society too many people want the fat mans job of sitting at the desk. There are too many people coming out of school to fat and lazy to actually work a hard day of physical labor.

I think its healthy to challenge the mind and body during the day

Important to create a foundation of activity and build a team concept that is taught.

We need to prepare kids for all aspects in life besides the academic piece. courses outside the core curriculum provide opportunities for kids to explore their interests as well as gain skills for lifetime success, a healthy lifestyle, meeting new people, and problem solving skills with others

This helps students to learn how to live healthy life styles. We also know there is a correlation between physical activity and learning.

How important do you feel the school district that you live or work in views

Physical Education? (24 responses)

1 - Not Important (2 responses or 8.3%)

2 - Somewhat Important (8 or 33.3%)

3 - Important (11 responses or 45.8%)

4 - Very Important (3 responses or 12.5%)

In 50 words or less why do you think they feel that way?

(24 responses)

Have provided the course through all four years of high school but have also forced high schools to create online PE courses.

Health and wellness for students are stressed.

There is the graduation requirement for PW, and the schools support teams in many sports in which many students participate. Students are excused from academic courses to participate in these activities.

It is required but only for a short time of their high school years

We have too many online/hybrid physical education courses and our district doesn't schedule students into PW classes at appropriate times.

Because staying healthy matters and gives us a higher quality of life.

I unfortunately don't think they see it as learning how to stay healthy. I think they still see it as playing games. Therefore it usually doesn't take priority when making students schedules or will be the first thing that is put to online or just tossed out to fit in other classes.

We provide many opportunities for students during the day and with extracurricular activities.

As a member of the Secondary Redesign Committee we supported requiring students to continue their physical education every year of their high school career.

I feel they must feel it is important if they have made it a required class for all grades
(at least that is what I think).

I answered based on where I work. I find that the administrator in each school
shows support for PE at differing levels.

PW requirements exceed state requirements

Many times when a child is taken out of a class for speech, student tutoring, etc. the
class they miss is physical education. It seems to not hold as high of an importance
as core subjects.

They have kept PE, but have increased class sizes (40+) kids too much.

I do believe that our School District places a value on personal wellness. I think the
bigger challenge is to create a mindset where personal wellness is viewed as an
essential part of our guaranteed curriculum, similar to our core academic courses.

We have a requirement of 2 credits to graduate. We need to have more electives.

It's not any different from District to District. It's a National Education issue.

Programs continue to decrease each year. The value student's get from exercises is vital to development.

Because of all the classes they offer all the way thru high school

I don't have specific knowledge of the current situation, but when I was in school there were many PE options.

Based on staffing and programming.

Most districts have cut PE requirements to bare minimums. Our district requires PE every year in grade 6-12 still

We make it a priority in our offerings. Students K-12 are required to have physical education time in their day.

How important do you feel exercise affects student's overall grades?

(24 responses)

1 - Not Important (0 responses or 0%)

2 - Somewhat Important (1 response or 4.2%)

3 - Important (11 responses or 45.8%)

4 - Very Important (12 responses or 50%)

How important do you feel exercise affects test scores?

(24 responses)

1 - Not Important (0 responses or 0%)

2 - Somewhat Important (3 responses or 12.5%)

3 - Important (10 responses or 41.7%)

4 - Very Important (11 responses or 45.8%)

Part 2

How do you feel about the amount of exercise elementary school(Grades Pre-K-5) students are getting in school? (24 responses)

1 - Poor (4 responses or 16.7%)

2 - Okay (10 responses or 41.7%)

3 - Good (10 responses or 41.7%)

4 - Excellent (0 responses or 0%)

**How do you feel about the amount of exercise middle school (Grades 6-8)
students are getting in school? (24 responses**

1 - Poor (3 responses or 12.5%)

2 - Okay (11 responses or 45.8%)

3 - Good (9 responses or 37.5%)

4 - Excellent (1 response or 4.2%)

**How do you feel about the amount of exercise high school (Grade 9-12)
students are getting in school? (24 responses)**

1 - Poor (2 responses or 8.3%)

2 - Okay (14 responses or 58.3%)

3 - Good (8 responses or 33.3%)

4 - Excellent (0 responses or 0%)

How do you feel about the overall health of the people of the United States?

(24 responses)

1 - Poor (11 responses or 45.8%)

2 - Okay (12 responses or 50%)

3 - Good (1 response or 4.2%)

4 - Excellent (0 responses or 0%)

In 50 words or less why do you feel this way?

(24 responses)

Not enough emphasis on healthy diet and exercise and what that looks like.

We are trending in the right direction, but living a healthy life in all areas isn't stressed enough.

Obesity is epidemic, poor diet is the norm, and exercise is not a priority for many, although these issues are changing slowly for the better.

obesity, diabetes and other diseases are growing exponentially

Our schools get too concerned with test scores so we take our lowest scoring kids out of PW classes and put them in additional math and reading courses.

Because the evidence seems to point to a growth in all obesity across the board in our country.

I just always think we can do more. Statistics show we still have a huge amount of our population who are morbidly obese. We need to start the habit young so it

becomes just that, a habit. We can provide more time for students to exercise and get more bang for a buck than when they are in their classrooms.

The fast pace of our society doesn't allow us to focus on nutrition and citizens have to much stress because of the pace of society.

Obesity rates are rising, fast food sales are rising, diabetes is rising. All of these nutritional choices affect our health.

not as bad as everyone says, but still bad

I am unsure about how much is in middle school and elementary school. I feel kids are thinking more about what kinds of foods they are eating. At least my older 2 kids are very conscientious of eating healthy.

The number of unhealthy continues growing.

Obesity rates, health trends, eating habits, etc.

Americans have a reputation for being overweight. We do have a lot of fitness centers, and eating healthy is an important topic in our society, but after spending time outside the country I feel there are other countries that do a better job of it.

I think some people are very healthy or making changes to get healthier. But others are not healthy at all.

My response is based on the literature that speaks to the health challenges in our society, including childhood obesity. As a society, we need to continue to educate on the value of physical activity, nutrition, and overall health.

Obesity is still on the rise. Health education and physical education need to be implemented more.

Again, this is addressed in my first response!

Obesity is huge challenge in the U.S. helping young students become more aware of their health is vital.

It shows as you walk around in public and see all the overweight people. Diabetes in people above 50 is out of control as their waist lines continue to grow.

I feel it is becoming 'cool' to exercise, nonetheless American's are getting fatter and more unhealthy.

Based on data shown in our society and how people look at their health and exercise.

Number 1 killer in the USA is heart disease. This is attributed to lifestyle choices

Often time the demands on our time cause it us to not spend time focused on physical activity.

**Do you feel that there should be any changes done within the curriculum of
Physical Education in schools?(24 responses)**

1 - Yes, a complete overhaul (3 responses or 12.5%)

2 - Yes, a few changes here and there (17 responses or 70.8%)

3 - No, it is perfect the way it is (1 response or 4.2%)

4 - I have no idea what the curriculum is in Physical Education now (3 responses or
12.5%)

In 75 words or less, why or why not?

(18 responses)

We need to require physical education for longer into curriculums and put more emphasis in elementary school so kids can have the required time of movement each and every day. We will then start to be able to have true health care rather than "sick care" in the U.S.

The Physical Education Department does a great job in District 112 from my experiences.

All students must complete PE to graduate, and our school incorporates many options and practice for each, so students can identify that which best meets their needs and which they can continue to do. I would like to see more biking included.

Kids need more physical activity to stem the increase of disease from a sedentary lifestyle

Schools need to put more of an emphasis on the importance of physical education. Students need to see that we care about their overall health and not just our test scores.

It should be (or stay) a required course full year all the time for everyone.

There needs to be a better balance between fun and fitness. It seems to me that there is too big of a swing one way or the other. The curriculum shouldn't just be all

games, but it should be all about heart rate monitors or other fitness assessment tools. It needs to feel a little more "real life" especially at the high school level. I don't have a great answer for that, but somehow the students should own and assess their own health, make goals and then take action.

I have a vague idea of the curriculum since my children attend D112 schools. From my children's experiences the middle school curriculum needs to be revised to meet the needs of individual students. For example, my daughters are not athletic and did not find value in many of the phy ed units at the mid-level. I know your HS curriculum continues to evolve as you seek to meet the needs of our learners. One daughter enjoys the choices and ability to personalize her sophomore year. The other daughter opted to take the online class because she "hated gym." Thank you for giving them options.

I am not sure what the changes would be, but I am sure there are always room for improvement in every department :)

We need to move away from the tradition of playing games and focus on life-long activities. We also need to get kids moving more throughout their day, not just during PE.

Health needs are different today.

I think it depends on the teacher. There are some that do a good job of diversifying activities and trying to connect them with kids. There are others I feel that will play games in a lifetime fitness and rec class that really does not relate the activities to what someone might actually use when they get older.

Increased PE time in schools.

The entire approach to Physical Education in Schools needs to be overhauled. Good Physical Health and a knowledge of one's Body (Physically & Mentally) leads to a healthy, happy approach to life. Additional benefits include a focus on good eating habits, healthy decisions regarding intimacy, and great personal pride in our youth's well-being!

Very necessary! As the growing number of obese adolescents on through adult hood needs to be addressed.

I think kids should be forced to get more physical exercise. I believe more people would learn at a younger age how to take care of themselves.

I feel strongly about needing PE, but I do not know what the current curriculum is.

Funding for a broader spectrum of opportunities to include more outdoor options like fishing, archery, biking. Programming directly related to meet and address individual goal

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