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The Marginalization of Physical Education: Problems and Solutions—Part 2

Increasing the Value of Physical Education in Schools and Communities

THADDEUS J. FRANCE MICHELLE MOOSBRUGGER GRETCHEN BROCKMEYER

Connecting physical education to life through a community-based orientation can make the subject more meaningful.

The marginalization of physical education involves many facets, including the beliefs of students and teachers and the context of schools and of the communities in which schools are located. Nearly two decades ago, Rink (1993) and others described issues that have plagued the profession and contributed to the marginalization at the middle and secondary school levels. These issues include (1) failure of the profession to articulate program goals, (2) failure of state and local districts to hold programs and teachers accountable, (3) failure of teachers to act professionally regardless of the level of accountability, and (4) failure of teacher education programs to prepare teachers for the real world and support them in schools. Although some progress has been made in addressing these concerns since they were presented, physical education as a profession continues to struggle in an effort to enhance its value and status in schools, communities, and society in general.

To state that “the marginalization of physical education can be fixed, if...” is at best oversimplified. Addressing the marginalization of physical education demands a systematic approach that builds on the current knowledge base of the discipline and is successful in helping students create meaningful connections between their physical education experience and their life. The purpose of this article is twofold: (1) to examine select current innovations that may help in combating many of the issues identified in Rink (1993) that have contributed to the marginalization of physical education and (2) to examine the concept of community-based physical education and its role in addressing the marginalization of physical education.

Innovations in Physical Education

An innovation can be defined as a sustained idea that has a positive impact on the delivery of a service (Rogers, 2003). In an effort to address the marginalization of physical education and help students find meaning in the subject, specific innovations have been developed and implemented that have significantly influenced physical educators, students, physical education teacher education (PETE) programs, and the profession as a whole. These innovations have also had an impact on several of the concerns identified in Rink (1993), such as the lack of clarity in program goals, lack of accountability for teaching and learning, and the failure of PETE programs to prepare teachers for the real world and support beginning teachers in their first years of teaching.

Clarity in Program Goals. Teachers have been introduced to various innovations in the areas of technology and philosophy throughout their career (Gurvitch, Metzler, & Lund, 2008). For example, the implementation of curricular models, such as teaching games for understanding, sport education, and fitness/wellness, has reshaped and clarified content, learning outcomes, and assessment in physical education. These curricular models have allowed physical educators to become more effective in articulating program goals to others and delivering physical education curricula aligned with national standards. In addition, instructional models such as teaching personal and social responsibility, cooperative learning, and adventure education have helped physical educators to redefine and align their approach to planning, instruction, and assessment (Gurvitch et al.). Through the implementation of these models, physical educators have been able to explicitly align learning objectives, instructional methods, and learning assessments as part of their curricular planning.

Individual physical education programs have had some success implementing these curricular innovations and have seen positive effects related to their program goals and intended learning outcomes. The end result with respect to the clarity of program goals is that physical education teachers, if they can explain and deliver content using these curricular innovations in a manner that is meaningful to students and enhances student learning, will be able to clearly articulate the purpose and importance of physical education to others.

Accountability for Teaching and Learning. In response to concerns about the minimal accountability for outcomes, the lack of clarity in program goals, and the quest for quality physical education, national standards were developed (National Association for Sport and Physical Education [NASPE], 1995) and revised (NASPE, 2004). Furthermore, many states have constructed standards that align closely with the national standards. The creation of both national and state standards has promoted increased accountability in physical education. The existence of explicit outcomes has clarified what students should achieve in physical education and has allowed for physical educators to be held accountable for teaching in a manner that supports students in attaining standards.

Physical Education Teacher Education Programs. Many PETE programs have undergone revisions in curriculum and practice in the past two decades to address concerns about preparing future teachers for the realities of the profession, as well as to address the marginalization that teachers will face when they begin teaching. Two important advances that have been made in PETE programs to better prepare teachers for the real world include early field experiences and induction and mentoring programs.

Early field experiences (EFEs) have proven to be effective in preparing novice teachers for the realities of teaching physical education. Ample research has been published regarding the development of effective EFEs for preservice

teachers (Chepyator-Thomson & Liu, 2003; Curtner-Smith, 1996; O'Sullivan & Tsangaridou, 1992; Smith, 1993).

When carefully planned and implemented, EFEs can expose preservice teachers to day-to-day teaching responsibilities. Model EFEs include opportunities to fulfill teaching responsibilities with close supervision, guidance, and specific feedback from a PETE faculty member or model practitioner. With more positive experiences in the field before inservice teaching, physical educators are less likely to face "reality shock" (Chepyator-Thomson & Liu, 2003) and more likely to be learner-centered and to focus on creating meaning within student learning. Despite the best efforts of researchers to provide clear suggestions and applications for the field, not all PETE programs include EFEs, leaving some preservice teachers to develop a teacher-centered perspective and experience difficulty in providing meaningful instruction.

Another improvement that has enhanced PETE programs is the use of university-based teacher induction and mentoring programs. These programs are designed to support beginning teachers in achieving professional standards of teaching. Knowing that novice teachers may be prone to wash-out, partially due to marginalization (Blankenship & Coleman, 2009), the provision of trained, experienced mentors and professional development can help new teachers in applying and retaining the pedagogical content knowledge cultivated in their PETE program. Further, some states (e.g., Delaware, Iowa) use induction programs to familiarize new teachers with state or district standards and goals and with aligned methods of assessing student progress. This focus on assessment lends itself to holding new teachers accountable for effective instruction and meaningful student learning. Armed with a focus on learning, new teachers participating in induction programs may be more successful in minimizing the effects of wash-out, as well as in fighting the effects of marginalization.

Although the innovations that have been described demonstrate that progress has been made to address issues that have contributed to marginalization, physical education still lacks value and status in schools, communities, and general society. The innovations have contributed to elevating the status of physical education, but marginalization still exists. Perhaps one reason is the fact that physical educators struggle to make meaningful connections between physical education content and the lives of students. How do physical educators do this? Part of the answer lies in implementing and enhancing the innovations that have already been introduced in physical education. However, the implementation of community-based physical education (CBPE) may be another innovation that helps answer the question.

Community-Based Physical Education

Resnick (1987) cautioned educators about the disconnect between learning in schools and in applied settings in real life. Many physical education programs operate within the confines of the school building in what Lawson (2007) described as a "walled-in" environment, void of community



Middle school students in the LACES program make their final presentation to vested community members.

realities. Ennis (2006) eloquently described the historical challenges that physical education has faced in the “low-demand” context of public schools. Ennis further remarked, “It’s time, we [physical education professionals] imagine, design and build places where education of and through the physical holds a central role in American society accessible to all children and families” (p. 56). Community-based physical education holds the promise to do this by breaking down the “walled-in” and “isolated” nature of schools, while situating student learning as a “high need” in the community.

A CBPE program builds on the innovations that have been implemented in physical education and allows students to apply in their communities what they have learned in physical education outside of school. In a CBPE program, there is an explicit need for physical education teachers and programs to be a “part of” rather than “apart from” the greater community. The process of building a community-based orientation in a physical education program would not negate the advances that have been made in physical education, but would further enhance program clarity and accountability.

It is important to note that CBPE programs are not a replacement for school-based physical education programs. They are supplemental programs that can support school-based physical education programs in the community, as well as make the content learned in physical education more meaningful as a result of the relationship between the content and the community.

Creating a CBPE program may seem overwhelming because it takes time and effort to develop partnerships with community-based organizations and integrate physical education program goals within those organizations. Although fairly new, successful CBPE programs have been documented. For example, Adelphi University has reported some success

in the development of partnerships among the university, public schools, and community-based organizations (Doolittle, Beale, & DeMarzo, 2009). Another CBPE program was developed at Springfield College and has had a great deal of success. The CBPE program at Springfield, called Leaders in Academics, Community Engagement and Service (LACES), involves several community partnerships, service-learning for college students, and a focus on year-round learning for youth participants.

The LACES program creates learning contexts that promote supportive relationships and help youths to build physical, intellectual, and social skills. It also includes families, schools, and community-based organizations in the education of youths and provides opportunities for youths to develop efficacy in their role as members of the greater community (Eccles & Gootman, 2002).

The LACES program includes an intensive, two-week, summer experience; after-school programming in the Springfield parks and recreation department’s 21st Century Learning Community; and connections within the school physical education curriculum. Youth participants are identified and nominated by schools, community programs, and service agencies. In the summer they attend an age-appropriate two-week program. During the first week, youths attend the program daily and work in small (8-12 people) groups. They are informed of program expectations, which include involvement in their group and engagement in all aspects of the program. At the beginning of the week, groups work together to develop cohesiveness and to become comfortable speaking in public, and at the end of the week, groups are presented with a “real” community problem that their group must solve together. For example, past problems have included childhood obesity, gang violence, and gaining access to college.

The second half of the summer experience is a residential week at Springfield College. Youths move onto campus and participate in a daily schedule that is similar to that of a college student. Each day they wake up, eat a healthy breakfast, attend a research-and-planning session to work on solving their community problem, participate in physical activities, and at the end of the day reflect on how productive they were in working to solve their community problem and how good their choices were related to a physically active and healthy lifestyle. The culmination of the two-week summer experience consists of each group presenting its potential solutions to the community problem before a large audience of community members, including teachers and city council members.

At the conclusion of the summer portion of the program, students return to their after-school and school-based programs. In these programs, students work with teachers, after-school leaders, and PETE students to bring about changes in their communities. For example, one group of high school students participated in a mentoring program with elementary school children that focused on fair play in sport. Their mentoring visits to the elementary schools

occurred during physical education class and the program was activity based.

Community-based physical education programs not only make meaningful connections with physical education content, but decrease the marginalization of physical education by contributing to the value of physical education. They also enhance the value of physical education because they focus on critical aspects of youth development. These aspects include helping youths to forge positive relationships in the community and make connections between physical education content and their life in their community. In addition, CBPE program participants learn skills that help them to identify and define their role in their school and the community and to recognize how physical education content supports that role.

Rink (1993) identified the important function that PETE programs have in educating PETE students in the realities of schools. The strength of LACES lies in its capacity to prepare preservice teachers to teach in the "real world." The LACES program provides an opportunity for preservice physical educators to apply content and pedagogical content knowledge in a community service-learning experience that differs from their traditional field experiences.

The experiences provided to PETE students who participate in the LACES program help prepare them for the real world by situating their learning at Springfield and in the greater community. Physical education teacher education students do most of the teaching and facilitating of physical activities with the youth groups. They also work with groups to develop solutions for their community-based problem, while at the same time using team-building strategies that are taught as part of their preservice education. They gain valuable experience working with students from diverse backgrounds and develop an understanding of strategies that can help youths to make connections between the physical activity choices they make and their community. Throughout these experiences, PETE students reflect on their role in the program and on the relationship between what they are learning in their course of study and the needs of the community.

Conclusion

The marginalization of physical education in schools and society is an issue that has plagued the profession for decades. There have been several innovations—such as curriculum models, the creation of standards, improvements in EFEs, university-based teacher induction programs, and CBPE programs—that have enhanced the status and value of physical education to a degree, but much more needs to be done in order to address the low status of physical education.

There is hope, however, in that innovations such as those described in this article will further decrease the marginalization of physical education and contribute to children and adolescents valuing physical education more. New ideas such as the promotion of CBPE programs are significant in helping students find meaning in physical education content.

Perhaps the notion of collaboration between individuals who work in recreation, exercise science, human services, and PETE should be explored further to help students realize the important role that physical education content plays in their community. If we are successful in this endeavor, physical education will not only be more meaningful to students, but may be viewed as an essential part of the greater educational community.

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