THE IMPORTANCE OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION IN TODAY’S SCHOOLS

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THE IMPORTANCE OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION IN TODAY'S SCHOOLS

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Obesity in young children and adults has become an issue within the United States of America. It has been found that obesity is one of the top three reasons why middle school student-athletes drop out of organized sports. One of the areas in which we can address this issue is in physical education class. This phenomenological case study investigated the indirect impact of the Carol M. White Physical Education Program (PEP) Grant on a semi-rural school district’s physical education program. Five physical education teachers with diverse experiences and backgrounds were interviewed. Two middle school and three high school physical education teachers were interviewed twice for approximately sixty minutes per interview. In addition, there was a two-hour focus group meeting held with these same five physical education teachers at their board of education office. Furthermore, the five physical education teachers in this study were observed teaching at their site on two occasions for approximately one hour. The sites were in the gymnasium and physical fitness exercise rooms. As a result of this PEP Grant, this study investigated three research areas. One is the possible characteristics of an effective physical education program. Second, this study investigated what motivates physical education teachers to
improve their instruction. Last, it investigated how these five physical education teachers feel about how people perceive their physical education program. According to the results, characteristics identified by the five physical education teachers within this study support several characteristics identified in the literature. An important finding of this study was that the five physical education teachers in this study believed that seeing students increase their participation in physical activity and improve in their overall fitness level was a motivational factor for them to improve their instruction. Last, since there is little literature on how people perceive the field of physical education, this study provides several perceptions provided by the physical education teachers about how they thought their physical education program is perceived.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family who supported me for the past several years during my pursuit of a doctoral degree in leadership studies. My sons, Carson and Anderson have been my motivation through this process. Their love, support, and understanding at such young ages have made a huge impact on me and have driven me to complete this dissertation to the best of my ability.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A common phrase used by the general public is that “a healthy body leads to a healthy mind.” One of the major health issues facing the United States is obesity, not only in adults, but many children as well. It is important that people strive for a healthy lifestyle to combat being overweight or obese.

There are many benefits physical education provides today’s students and society. Within a school setting, a physical education program can serve society in many ways if implemented and utilized appropriately. There are many areas physical education can serve and positively affect students and society. One is overall physical fitness. For example, physical education helps students and society improve skill-related components such as speed, agility, reaction time, balance, coordination, and basic movement patterns. Physical education helps students and society improve upon are strength, endurance, flexibility, and cardiovascular/respiratory activities. The American Heart Association (AHA, 2010) recommends that if children and adolescents want to increase their life expectancies, they need to eat healthier and become physically active. Doing those two things will help children and adolescents defend against certain diseases and other health problems. Hence, the question: why is there little emphasis on the importance of physical education in today’s schools?
Background of the Study

This phenomenological research study investigated the indirect impact of the Carol M. White Physical Education Program (PEP) Grant used by middle school and high school physical education teachers in a semi-rural school district in the state of Ohio. This was a federally funded project by the United States Department of Education. The primary purpose of this PEP Grant was to assist this school district’s physical education teachers in implementing a program that would ensure that students would improve their overall physical fitness. Instead of focusing on the traditional sport education model, which involves learning team sports, the intention of this PEP grant was to focus more on enhancing students’ physical fitness and increasing participation in moderate and vigorous physical activity.

According to Mood, Jackson, and Morrow (2007), children should be engaged in moderate physical activity for thirty minutes per day for five or more days per week and vigorous physical activity for twenty minutes per day for three or more days per week. The National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) (2011) stated that elementary students should be participating in 150 minutes of physical activity a week and middle and high school students should be participating in physical activity for 225 minutes a week. According to The School Health Policies and Programs Study (SHPPS) 2006 study, only 3.8% of elementary schools, 7.9% middle schools, and 2.1% high schools provided daily physical education in the United States. There were several goals for the middle school and high school students involved with this PEP grant. These goals included student improvement in (a) time involved in moderate to rigorous physical activity.
activity, (b) nutrition habits, (c) body composition, (d) flexibility, (e) aerobic capacity, and (f) muscular strength and endurance. The other goal directly involved the physical education teachers in this school district. The PEP grant provided the opportunity to pursue professional development opportunities which allowed them to better understand the changes that needed to be made in their classes regarding curriculum and class management. Furthermore, and more importantly, the professional development opportunities were intended to enhance their instruction.

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of a federally-funded PEP grant on a physical education program in a semi-rural school district. The three major areas that this study investigated were (a) characteristics of an effective physical education program, (b) physical education teachers’ motivation to improve instruction, and (c) peoples’ perceptions of physical education in today’s schools. The three major research questions that emerged from this study were (1) What are the characteristics of an effective physical education program? (2) What motivates physical education teachers to improve their instruction? (3) How do people perceive the field of physical education? The phenomenological study investigated the PEP Grant and its effects on the physical education curriculum and program. Furthermore, it investigated the various assessments that could be used to accurately evaluate a student’s overall physical fitness.

A chronic issue physical education combats in the United States is childhood, adolescent, and adult obesity. Obesity is defined as a body mass index (BMI) of 30 or
greater. BMI is calculated using a person’s weight and height. Obesity may lead to health problems such as cardiovascular disease, certain types of cancer, and Type II diabetes. Research has found that obese children and adolescents are likely to become obese as adults. According to the Centers of Disease Control Prevention’s (CDC) National Health and Examination Survey (NHANES), there has been an increase in obesity in the United States, especially from 1985 to 2010. As of 2010, 36 states had an obesity rate of 25 percent and 12 of those states had an obesity rate of 30 percent or higher. One-third of United States adults are considered to be obese. Also, 17 percent or 12.5 million children and adolescents in the United States between the ages of two and 19 years old are obese. Furthermore, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP, 2010) reported that close to 32 percent of children and adolescents are overweight with a body mass index at or above the eighty-fifth percentile and more than 16 percent are obese with a body mass index at or above the ninety-fifth percentile. These statistics reported by the AAP (2010) are provided by the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey. Along with the health problems and diseases mentioned above, the AAP (2010) warned that children and adolescents who are overweight have an increased risk of asthma, sleep apnea, skin infections, joint pain and other health conditions as they get older. These statistics are overwhelming and an excellent indication that physical education programs must come to the forefront to educate and promote the importance of physical activity and a healthy diet.

Physical education teachers are responsible for promoting a healthy and positive environment for learning. A healthy positive environment can be created and maintained
especially if a physical education teacher provides constructive and positive feedback. In addition, if a physical education teacher is prepared, provides well-organized activities, and establishes clear expectations, students will usually respond to the environment in a positive manner. Physical education provides students the opportunity to enhance their physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development. This usually occurs during team sports, project adventure activities, problem-solving and physical fitness activities (McCaughtry, Kulina, & Cothran, 2009).

According to Chiodera, Volta, Gobbi, Milioli, Mirandola, Bonetti, Delsignore, Bernasconi, Anedda, and Vitale (2008), physical inactivity is related to increased levels of body fat and as a result childhood obesity. These researchers argued that preventive measures should be taken at a young age in order to reduce future health risk factors. Furthermore, they found that students who engage in daily physical activity within the school setting will achieve the health benefits they need to be physically fit more so than those students which do not engage in daily physical activity throughout the school day.

According to Evenson, Ballard, and Ammerman, (2009), in the year 2007, only 35 percent of high school students in the United States were physically active for one hour on five or more days in the previous week. In addition, high school students who attended physical education class dropped from 42 percent in 1991 to 30 percent in 2007. As a result, in 2007, 25 states enacted laws or adopted policies to address physical education in the schools. Furthermore, these researchers found that teachers have reported positive results regarding students being more alert and focused during class after participating in
physical activity. Teachers also reported that 30 minutes of physical activity during the school day has not had any negative effects on student academic performance.

Moreno, Gonzalez-Cutre, Martin-Albo, and Cervello (2010) find that intrinsic motivation for middle and high school students is a key factor in motivating students to make improvements in physical education class. Furthermore, these researchers stated that if physical education teachers give students a reason to believe that they can make improvements in their abilities, then there is an increase in intrinsic motivation. Chen and Ennis (2004), suggested a couple more ideas to motivate students. These researchers have found that providing students with goals gives them direction on what will meet their individual physical skill and fitness needs. Furthermore, they stated the importance of relating physical education classes to student interests. As a result, students will be more motivate to participate in physical education class. These are just a few ideas given to show the importance of motivating students in physical education class. In order to implement these motivational techniques and other teaching methods, physical education teachers need to pursue professional development opportunities to enhance their instruction and teacher knowledge in the field of physical education. According to Cothran and Kullina (2008), teacher knowledge is a major factor to effective teaching. It is imperative for physical education teachers to effectively use the resources they have available. With a declining economy and declining school budgets, physical education teachers will need to learn to adapt to the resources they have available.

As we are aware the United States is facing economic problems, which has affected education in more ways than one. According to Schneider, Konukman, Ferman,
and Stier (2010), physical education programs throughout the United States are feeling the negative effects of the current financial crisis the country is facing. Some of the negative effects include limiting resources and equipment, cutting costs in the budget, as a result, hindering professional development opportunities, and laying-off or cutting teachers. Schneider, Konukman, Ferman, and Stier (2010), noted that during these difficult financial times, physical education teachers need to maintain a high morale, be versatile with their instruction, and take on other roles within the school. Regarding versatility, these researchers state that physical education teachers need to be innovative, flexible, and persuasive. They stated that physical education teachers have to rely on their creative skills to stimulate positive class environments regardless if they lack state-of-the-art equipment and/or supplies to stimulate their students. Furthermore, they pointed out that physical education teachers need to take a flexible and innovative approach to teaching because of the constant changes in the classroom and work environment as a result of budget cuts due to the recession. Finally, these researchers stated that physical education teachers have to have the ability to persuade their students that goals and objectives can still be met regardless of the lack of state-of-the-art exercise equipment and/or supplies. The ability of physical education teachers to be creative and provide a positive environment alleviates any recognition regarding state-of-the-art equipment and supplies within schools.
Professional Significance of the Study

As it has been noted throughout this first chapter, physical education serves many purposes for elementary, middle school, and high school students. Obesity is a growing concern with today’s children, adolescents, and adults. Physical activity is imperative in order to defend against being overweight or obese. Effective physical education teachers and physical education programs are essential in motivating students to be physically active. Motivating students to be physically active can be done in several ways. First, physical education teachers need to think about developing a curriculum that meets the needs of students. Second, they need to adjust their teaching methods to meet the goals, needs, and interests of students. The ability of physical education teachers to be innovative and flexible also is a contributing factor to increased student participation in physical activity (Martin, McCaughtry, & Cothran, 2009). Third, providing constant feedback and reinforcement will create a positive environment and encourage students to participate in physical activity and improve their overall physical fitness (Chase, Lirgg, & Sakelos, 2003). Last, according to Martin, McCaughtry, and Cothran (2009), whenever possible or when the time is appropriate, physical education teachers need to pursue professional development opportunities.
Summary

It is necessary to investigate ways to continue to improve physical education programs and provide students and the school community with ways to live healthy lifestyles. It is imperative to investigate what motivates physical education teachers to improve their instruction. This is imperative because once these motivational factors are determined, then schools can look at what further needs to be done to meet the needs of physical education teachers to help them improve their instruction. As a result, students will benefit from improved instruction. Last, investigating peoples’ perceptions of the field of physical education may assist physical education teachers in how to promote the quality of their physical education programs and prove that there may be misconceptions about the field.

This study was intended to further increase peoples’ knowledge of the importance of the field of physical education in today’s schools. Through interviews, observations, and focus group meetings with five middle school and high school physical education teachers, the researcher intended to further enhance people’s understanding of the importance and role physical education plays in today’s schools.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Physical Education and Combating Obesity

Obesity is a major issue with today’s children, adolescents, and adults. In a study conducted by Greenleaf and Weiller (2005), it was found that over 90% of their participants agreed that poor eating behaviors, leading a sedentary lifestyle and excess calorie consumption are important factors contributing to youth obesity. Secondly, they learned that a majority of their participants reported that youth obesity is a significant cause of peer rejection. Lastly, they found that over 80% of their participants stated that schools are not doing enough to fight obesity, but that the school setting is an appropriate place for dealing with youth weight problems. This is where the physical education teachers need to take the initiative and a leading role within their school district to come up with ideas to promote a healthier school community.

There needs to be collaboration among physical educators to get their ideas introduced and enacted within their school community. Not only will this promote health and fitness, it may also contribute to adding credibility to the physical education field. When all 105 physical educators were asked what school personnel should be involved in treating obesity, over half reported that physical education teachers, school nurses, school counselors, and classroom teachers should be involved (Greenleaf & Weiller, 2005). It is imperative to investigate how the entire school community perceives the field of physical education. The beliefs about physical education may be shaped through the social
in institution of the school, teachers, physical education programs, and sport experiences (Placek & O’Sullivan, 1997).

Characteristics of Effective Physical Education Programs

Physical education provides students with many opportunities to improve their overall lifestyle. First and foremost, it provides students the opportunity to improve their physical fitness, development, and health. According to Bailey (2006), consistent participation in physical activity is associated with a longer and better quality of life, reduced risk of disease, and several psychological and emotional benefits. Also, Bailey stated that basic movement skills are taught in physical education classes which provide students the opportunity to apply those skills into a sports or recreational setting. Physical Education also provides students the opportunity to enhance their social and cognitive development. According to Bailey (2006):

Intervention studies have produced generally positive results, including improvements in moral reasoning, fair play and sportsmanship, and personal responsibility. It also seems that the most promising contexts for developing social skills and values are those mediated by suitably trained teachers and coaches who focus on situations that arise naturally through activities, by asking questions of students, and by modeling appropriate responses through their own behavior. (p. 399)

Furthermore, many studies have demonstrated that well-structured and presented activities can contribute to enhancing students’ social and cognitive development (Bailey, 2006).
It is imperative to investigate effective teaching methods, behaviors, and learning environments in order to accurately evaluate physical education programs. Previous researchers (Pangrazi, 2007, Kulinna, Cothran, & Regualos, 2006; Siedentop & Tannehill, 2000 as cited in Zeng, Leung, Wenhao, & Hipscher et al., 2009) described characteristics of effective teaching/learning environments as those that provide (a) clear objectives; (b) well-organized and appropriate expectations; (c) meaningful task and high rates of success; (d) smooth transition and low rates of management times; (e) appropriate guidance and accurate supervision; (f) high rates in student-engaged time and low rates in student waiting times; and (g) teacher’s enthusiasm. The researchers state that these findings support the importance of teachers carefully planning and implementing their instructions with informing, questioning, and feedback to ensure the quality of physical education. Silverman, Tyson, and Morford (1988), (as cited in Zeng, Leung, Wenhao, and Hipscher et al., 2009) stated that teachers who present a clear explanation and demonstration, allow time for motor skill practice, and structure practice so that students are successfully engaged will promote student learning.

According to Portman (2003), ninth graders who are identified as low-skilled students indicated that they would not participate in moderate to rigorous physical activity after their final ninth grade physical education class. Another finding was students did not perceive any changes in physical education throughout their secondary education. Furthermore, it was found that ninth grade students perceive their physical education classes as focusing on individual and team sports. One of the common suggestions of these ninth grade students is to match students in physical education based
on similar skill levels. As a result, a possible characteristic of an effective physical education program is the ability of the school to schedule physical education classes so students are matched by physical ability.

Another possible characteristic of an effective physical education program according to Sullivan (2007), is the importance of incorporating character education concepts in daily physical education. The researcher indicated the importance of children’s ability to enhance their physical education through learning a variety of lifetime activities that they can apply to outside of class experiences. He also stated that teachers are responsible for teaching children to identify the character traits being demonstrated; whether through a project adventure activity, problem solving activity or other physical activities. He expressed these experiences should be in a non-threatening environment.

Professional Development and Teacher Self-Efficacy in Physical Education

According to Martin, McCaughtry, Kulinna, and Cothran (2009), social cognitive-based intervention enhances physical education teacher efficacy. Specifically, they investigated an intervention designed to assist physical education teachers teach physically active lessons using the Exemplary Physical Education Curriculum (EPEC). The four domains of the EPEC consist of physical fitness, motor skills, personal and social development, and physical activity and fitness knowledge. The researchers provided physical education teachers with workshops, lessons, and mentoring in
according to the domains provided by the EPEC in relation to enhancing self-efficacy. They describe self-efficacy as:

one’s perceived capability to complete a particular task in a particular setting.

Efficacious teachers work harder, use more problem solving strategies, develop greater skills, become more competent teachers, and persist more in the face of failure compared with less efficacious teachers. Thus physical education teachers who feel efficacious about implementing a new curriculum such as the EPEC should be more likely to do so, compared with teachers who lack self-efficacy in using the curriculum, (p. 512)

These researchers also said that those physical education teachers that have a strong self-efficacy are more likely to overcome barriers such as student resistance, students of low socio-economic status, at-risk students, diversity, lack of space, and lack of time. They found through the implementation of the EPEC, a social cognitive-based intervention, that physical education teachers increased their self-efficacies and abilities to overcome various barriers to teaching physically-active lessons. They also found that physical education teachers gain efficacy to overcome time, space, and institutional barriers to physical activity more easily than being involved with day-to-day challenges of interacting and motivating students. These researchers suggested implementing a psychology of physical education class into professional development programs to help physical education teachers better understand how to motivate students in physical education classes. They further indicate that physical education teachers can enhance their self-efficacies to help children overcome childhood obesity and encourage them to
lead a more physically active lifestyle through their teen years to adulthood. According to Chase, Lirgg, and Sakelos (2003), physical education teachers who have a high teacher efficacy are more likely to have more instruction time and provide more feedback to their students.

According to Woods, Karp, Hui, and Perlman (2008), schools are expected to keep up with advances in technology, thereby preparing students with skills needed to use technology effectively. These researchers found that the physical education teachers perceived themselves as competent or more proficient in using timing devices, aerobic exercise equipment, and activity monitors, such as pedometers. The physical education teachers indicated that they were beginners or less proficient in using databases, hand-held PCs and software, heart rate monitors, and body composition analyzers. The physical education teachers indicated that they were less proficient in using this technology which was essential to their physical education programs. The hand-held PCs and available software give physical education teachers the opportunity to record assessments of student performance in both behavior and sport skill development. Regarding the heart rate monitors, they are an accurate tool that provides students individual feedback for appropriate intensity levels of physical activity as well as a visual aid for learning. Furthermore, heart rate monitors are a valid means for assessing a student’s effort during physical activity (Woods, Karp, Hui, & Perlman, 2008).
Physical Education Curriculum

An area physical education teachers need to review is the effectiveness of their school districts’ physical education curricula. Since sport education is the dominant curriculum model within many schools, the question still exists: are physical education teachers providing the opportunities for students to be physically active through not only the sport education model, but physical fitness and health-related activities as well? It appears that many physical education programs are not adequately promoting physical activity and health-related fitness among young people (Bulger, Mohr, Carson, & Wiegand, 2004). It appears that physical education’s role is more important than ever in meeting important public health goals for the future (Mohr, Townsend, & Pritchard, 2006).

Regarding physical education curricula, physical education teachers need to focus on gender and students’ attitudes toward physical education. Generally speaking, students have favorable attitudes toward their physical education teachers and classes (Ryan, Fleming, & Maina, 2003). Furthermore, these researchers found in their study that middle school students enjoyed having a variety of activities, liked the teachers, had fun in their physical education classes, and disliked brief class periods and dressing out. Qualities middle school students liked about their physical education teachers were that they had good physical skills and were friendly. The middle school students disliked those physical education teachers who could not relate to students and they are partial to the skilled students. Physical education teachers may want to explore a more multi-activity model or models that will relate to gender differences and preferences. Future research is
needed to investigate different curriculum models and teaching methods toward improving student attitudes about physical education teachers and classes (Ryan, Fleming, & Maina, 2003).

High school physical education teachers and supervisors also need to consider the curriculum design of the physical education program. The fact remains that many high school physical education programs are failing their students (Kinchin & O’Sullivan, 2003). Rikard and Banville (2006) found that high school students indicated a much greater preference for game play compared with fitness activities. A majority of the students also indicated that they liked physical education due to the fun factor. Finally, high school students indicated their greatest reason for disliking fitness activities was because of the limited and dull choices of running activities (Rikard & Banville, 2006). Again, physical education teachers not only need to focus on differences in physical skills, but they also need to focus on what females need compared to what males need to create an effective physical education curriculum and program. This notion is further supported by a study done by Couturier, Chepko, & Coughlin (2007), in which girls indicated that they were more interested in cooperative activities, fitness, and dance than boys. Physical education teachers need to consider the differing needs of girls and boys when planning and implementing the physical education curriculum if they are to be successful in attracting and retaining the interest and participation of all their students.
Assessment in Physical Education

Another area that needs to be investigated is the importance of assessment in physical education classes and how assessment measures are incorporated within the physical education curriculum. Physical education needs to be a viable area on the school report card in order to enhance accountability and give credibility to the subject area (Stevens-Smith, Fisk, Williams, & Barton, 2006). Physical education needs to become a more credible subject, grade determination needs to be aligned with set objectives and a notion of fairness. Wiersma and Sherman (2008), stated that it is important to use appropriate practices while assessing students’ physical fitness levels. They said that students should be motivated in order to have enjoyable experiences while being assessed. They concluded that if physical fitness testing is done inappropriately and students’, as a result, develop a low self-esteem, then they will most likely stay away from performing physical activities.

Physical education teachers do conduct assessments from the Presidential Physical Fitness Program and Fitness Gram Program. These programs assess elementary, middle school, and high school students’ overall physical fitness levels. The fitness areas tested by these two programs are cardio-respiratory fitness, flexibility, muscular strength and endurance. But, do they determine a portion of the overall physical education grade from these fitness tests? If so, how do they determine this?

According to Welk (2008), fitness testing, when done correctly, can provide and document important information to determine students’ levels of health-related fitness. He stated that fitness testing focuses more on desired outcomes rather than on behavior
itself. Furthermore, he said that by implementing physical activity assessments into lesson plans, physical education teachers can provide direct instruction on physical activity and assist students in developing behavioral skills needed later on in life. To ensure that students establish lifelong patterns of physical activity and fitness, Welk (2008), stated the importance of authentic assessment in physical education. Authentic assessments are performed in “real life” settings. For example, instead of taking the skill out of the context of a game, the skill is observed in the game. The use of videotaping a skill would also be an example. He indicated that these assessments should include both physical activity and physical fitness. He also stated that there are those who contend that physical activity cannot be measured as accurately as physical fitness.

According to Mood, Jackson, and Morrow (2007), the assessment of physical activity has resulted in a variety of measurement metrics, such as (a) number of steps taken (calculated by a pedometer), (b) calories of energy expenditure, (c) metabolic equivalents (METS), and (d) minutes of light, moderate, or vigorous physical activity. (p. 223)

They indicated that “the focus of the 21st century should be how to accurately determine the levels of physical fitness and activity in children, youth, and adults because of the important economic and health impacts of a healthy society” (p.225). According to a study conducted by Biddle and Goudas (1997), student teachers and in-service teachers both at the primary and secondary levels prefer to grade students on effort and improvement rather than ability. They also found that the least preferred grading method was grading students based on physical fitness tests.
Perceptions of Physical Education

How administrators perceive physical education is essential to physical education teachers and their physical education program. Do they believe that physical education is a subject of substance or importance? In a study conducted by Stevens-Smith and Fisk (2006), they found that 36% of the principals surveyed indicated that they did not view physical education as an academic subject. The principals also ranked physical education last in a list of 11 subjects evaluated. They also found that principals valued the classroom teacher as the most important teacher in the school. Conversely, this study found that principals indicated that the physical education teacher was valued as the next most important teacher in the school.

Physical education teachers’ overall appearances also may impact student performance. Dean, Blair, Adams, and Corneau (2005) found that there is support given to the idea that the physical appearance and fitness level of physical education teachers was important and related to how students perform in physical education classes. This finding indicated that physical education teachers should possibly be role models, not only as teachers in the gymnasium, but also looking the part of a physically-fit physical educator. Previous studies have shown physical appearance of body fatness to have a negative effect on students’ attitudes toward the physical education teacher.

Fifteen high school students from a rural school district in North Carolina and fifteen secondary students in England were interviewed and surveyed regarding their perceptions of enjoyment in physical education class (Smith & St. Pierre, 2009). Twenty-four out of the 30 students interviewed indicated that the physical education teacher was
the most important aspect of the physical education experience. Furthermore, all of the students indicated that teacher’s enthusiasm, caring, sense of humor, and outgoing personality also made the physical education experience enjoyable. Eighteen of the 30 students interviewed indicated that the method of instruction impacted their enjoyment levels regarding physical education class. Activities that encouraged peer interaction and group work were viewed as more enjoyable forms of instruction rather than activities that focused on individual performance. In addition, students indicated that they enjoyed participating in health and fitness activities, as long as they were not competing or being compared to other students’ performances. The students preferred to perform in health and physical fitness activities that gave them the opportunity to improve and compete to beat their personal best score or performance. Twenty-four of the 30 students interviewed indicated that the physical education environment makes physical education class enjoyable. According to Smith and St. Pierre (2009), the main reasons for this were the uniqueness of the setting compared to a classroom and the many opportunities to interact with their peers. Last, according to Osborne, Bauer, and Sutliff (2002), in certain physical education situations, students preferred co-ed classes and other situations they preferred non-coed classes. For example, in certain team sports, female students indicated that the male students were less cooperative and the male students indicated female students did not give enough effort. The researchers indicated that the physical education objectives and curriculum need to meet both genders’ needs.

Finally, it is worth mentioning how undergraduate future physical education teachers perceive teaching physical education. There is a need for more quality physical
education teachers. Physical education teachers need to be well-prepared to teach at all levels of education. They need to study the models within the physical education field. Some of these models include sport education, which focuses on the teaching of team and/or individual sports; lifetime leisure; multi-activity; and health and physical fitness models. Many studies have indicated the importance of incorporating a variety of physical education units and combination of the different models within the field. Future physical education teachers need to focus on the content of the physical education curriculum, endeavoring to add substance to the physical education practice and profession. Finally, future physical education teachers can develop enough understanding of the field to respect it, and see it as something that is taught, rather than as free play (Humphries & Ashy, 2006).

Physical Education Teacher Motivation

According to Moreira, Fox, and Sparkes (2002), teacher motivation is defined as or relates to decision making, enthusiasm, and commitment to his/her work. These researchers surveyed 183 British physical education teachers. The researchers used the Motivation Profile for Physical Educators instrument. The four areas this instrument assessed were job satisfaction, job dissatisfaction, personal investments, and career alternatives. The researchers’ theory is that these four areas relate to job commitment. Regarding job satisfaction, it was found that physical education teachers were motivated by intrinsic factors. For example, they were motivated by positive feelings of observing their children improve and become successful. The converse of that regarding job
dissatisfaction was that teachers were less or not motivated when their children did not improve or were not successful. Furthermore, their job dissatisfaction also stemmed from high administrative loads, the low status of physical education in the school, poor resources, disenchantment in children, and lack of recognition. Extrinsic factors such as personal investments were of less importance to these British physical education teachers. It was found that investment in housing, status, or salary, were of less importance.

Regarding career alternatives, physical education teachers indicated that they were motivated by the opportunity to seek promotion at their school. Also, physical education teachers were motivated by career alternatives such as sport-related jobs outside of the school system and sport-related jobs at higher levels of education.

The principal research questions that emerged from this literature review are as follows: (a) What are the characteristics of a physical education program? (b) What motivates physical education teachers to improve their instruction? (c) What are the perceptions of physical education? There is minimal research on what motivates physical education teachers to improve their instruction. There are a few studies that discuss their levels of job satisfaction. There have been several studies on the characteristics of an effective physical education program. However, this study is an extension of previous studies on characteristics of an effective physical education program because this research also investigates the effects of a PEP grant on a physical education program. Last, it is necessary to further investigate the perceptions of physical education. In this study, the physical education teachers were interviewed about how they believed physical education was perceived within their school community.
Summary

Within this chapter, some researchers who have found several characteristics important to an effective physical education program were cited. Some of these characteristics include the effectiveness of the physical education teacher’s instruction, physical education teacher and student interaction, the physical education curriculum, and physical education assessments used to evaluate students’ performance. Furthermore, this chapter identified the perceptions of students and administrators concerning the field of physical education. As stated in the literature, students perceive physical education as being important and enjoyable as long as the physical education teacher is caring and enthusiastic. Last, regarding teacher motivation, there is limited research on what truly motivates physical education teachers to improve their instruction. Therefore, teacher motivation is investigated within this phenomenological case study.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Within this chapter the processes for selecting the participants, treatment of the interview data, coding procedures, and design and development of the observation instrument will be discussed. The purpose of this phenomenological case study was to investigate the characteristics of an effective physical education program, motivators that influence physical education teachers to improve their instruction, and the school community’s perceptions of physical education. Furthermore, this study intended to relate the three areas just mentioned to the affects and impact of a federally-funded grant on a middle school and high school physical education program in a semi-rural school district.

This chapter is divided into four sections. First, the qualitative methodology used in this study is discussed. Techniques such as interviewing, observing, and facilitating focus group meetings are addressed. Second, is the description of the school district and physical education teachers who participated in the study. Third are the primary interview questions that were asked of each participant during the face-to-face interviews and focus groups. Last, is the coding procedure and treatment of the interview data.

Qualitative Methodology

A qualitative approach was used in this phenomenological case study. A phenomenological case study was appropriate for this research because it is important to understand the participants’ perceptions and motivations related to their occupation.
Face-to-face interviews and transcribing the participants’ responses provided a thick
description of what they experience related to the field of physical education.

According to Creswell (2008), qualitative research is an exploration in which
minimal information is known about the problem or over-arching research question or
questions. In qualitative research, the purpose statement and research questions are
intended to gather information from participants to better understand their experiences.
“The literature might yield little information about the phenomenon of study, and you
need to learn more from participants through exploration” (Creswell, 2008, p. 53). He
defines a central phenomenon as “the key concept, idea, or process studied in qualitative
research” (Creswell, 2008, p. 53). The central phenomenon of this study is the indirect
impact of a federally-funded grant on a physical education program at the middle and
high school levels. The three areas being investigated are (a) characteristics of an
effective physical education program, (b) motivating factors that influence physical
education teachers to improve their instruction, and (c) perceptions of physical education.

According to Merriam and Associates (2002), qualitative researchers want to know how
people do things and what meaning do they give to their lives. “Questions of meaning,
understanding, and process are appropriate for qualitative research” (Merriam &
research is used to take the literature already present and extend upon it to continue to
inform the general public. It is also used to find the gap in our knowledge concerning a
certain phenomenon and explore or investigate it.
The data were collected in three ways. These include (a) two face-to-face interviews, (b) two observations of each teacher within their settings, and (c) one focus group meeting. This method of triangulation (Creswell, 2008) is being used to validate the findings of this research study. According to Creswell (2008), triangulation ensures that the study will be accurate because the information is taken from multiple sources of information, individuals, or processes. The process of triangulation or using multiple sources strengthens the credibility of the study. According to Merriam and Associates (2002), the process of triangulation strengthens the internal validity of a study. “Using multiple data collection methods, are commonly found in qualitative studies” (Merriam & Associates, 2002, p. 25).

A combination of semi-structured and standardized interviews was conducted to investigate and/or explore individual experiences and perspectives. These interviews were semi-structured because there was an already established interview protocol with guiding questions established prior to each interview. “Although researchers come to the interview with guiding questions, they are open to following the leads of informants and probing into areas that arise during interview interactions” (Hatch, 2002, p. 94). After listening to the participants’ responses to each guided question, this researcher followed up with questions to further understand and receive in-depth information related to the desired topic at that time. There were some standardized interviews as well. “Researchers enter the interview setting with predetermined questions that are asked in the same order, using the same words, to all informants” (Hatch, 2002, p. 95). Again, there was a predetermined set of interview questions used within this study to which each participant
was asked to respond. The purpose of using these predetermined questions was to gather information that can be compared in a systematic fashion through a manual coding procedure.

Observations of the participants within their educational settings were also conducted to provide further information for this study. Each participant was observed multiple times at his or her educational setting. The participants were observed interacting with their students. An observation instrument developed by the researcher and descriptive field notes were used to record how the participants were instructing and interacting with their students. The researcher took on the role of a nonparticipant observer. According to Creswell (2008), a nonparticipant observer is someone who visits the site and writes notes without becoming involved in the activities of the participants. As a nonparticipant, the researcher was located on the periphery of the site where the activities were taking place. The researcher took on the role of watching and recording the interactions, activities, and events.

The focus group interview was more formal and structured. According to Hatch (2002), formal interviews are planned events that take place away from the research setting for the purpose of gathering more information from the participants. The participants of this focus group consisted of all of the middle school and high school physical education teachers within this present study. The researcher facilitated and led the interview process. The focus group interviews encouraged participants to interact with each other and generate information on the desired topic. As questions were asked, the participants responded and took the interview in a direction more applicable to meet
their concerns and needs related to resources and professional development opportunities. The focus group meeting allowed opportunities for the participants to provide richer and more meaningful information. Last, to ensure thick description, which is a detailed account of the phenomenon being investigated, the focus group interview was transcribed.

**Sampling Procedures**

For this research study, a semi-rural middle and high school were selected. The middle school consists of seventh and eighth grade students, while the high school consists of students in grades nine through twelve. As of the 2009-2010 school year, there were 469 middle school students served by the Carol M. White Physical Education Program Grant and 1012 high school students served. Two hundred fifty-one or 53.52% middle school students were considered as low income. Three hundred ninety three or 38.83% high school students were considered as low income.

Purposeful sampling was conducted to identify the participants. According to Merriam and Associates (2002), regarding purposeful sampling, the researcher needs to determine the criteria of the participants and or sites to be investigated or observed. “Qualitative inquiry seeks to understand the meaning of a phenomenon from the perspectives of the participants, it is important to select a sample from which the most can be learned.” (Merriam and Associates, 2002, p. 12). The participants in this study ranged from one year of physical education teaching experience to 30 or more years of physical education teaching experience. There were a total of five participants. The
participants selected for this study consisted of two middle school and three high school physical education teachers.

Prior to this investigation, a revised human subjects’ research proposal was submitted and approved by the Human Subjects Review Board at Ashland University in August, 2010 (see Appendix A). An informed consent was provided to the participants before they were interviewed. Each participant signed the written consent form indicating his or her willingness to participate in the study. See Appendix B for copies of the consent forms.

Information about Teacher Participants

The following information describes each physical education teachers’ background, years of teaching experience, and grade levels taught. All of the participants’ names are indicated with one letter to protect confidentiality.

Teacher 1 – S
S is a White female. She is currently a high school physical education teacher. She has 32 years of physical education teaching experience. Her first nine years, she taught grades seven through twelve. From her tenth year on, she has taught physical education at the high school level. During college, she switched from being a math major to a physical education major.

Teacher 2 – T
T is a White female. She is currently a middle school physical education teacher. She has taught for 23 years. She has 21 years at the current location. She has taught one year of
high school physical education and 20 years of middle school physical education. She has mostly taught grades seven through nine, however this past year only grades seven and eight.

**Teacher 3 – J**

*J* is a White female. She has been teaching high school level physical education at the same location for nine years. She has experience teaching physical education, health, special education and adapted physical education. Currently, she is teaching in all three areas at the high school level.

**Teacher 4 – B**

*B* is a White male. He has been teaching physical education for five years. He has been teaching physical education at the middle school level for three years at the current location. The first two years teaching grades seven through nine and this past year (3rd year) grades seven and eight. The previous two years he taught grades kindergarten through eighth grade at a charter school.

**Teacher 5 – D**

*D* is a White male. He is a first-year physical education teacher. He teaches at the high school level. He previously taught special education.

Design and Development of the Interviews

Interviews were conducted using a protocol of open-ended questions. Follow-up questions were asked when deemed appropriate by the researcher. The purpose of the first interview was to find out each participant’s background information related to the
field of physical education. The purpose of the second interview was to receive information from each participant related to the research questions and any follow-up questions related to the interview protocol. Interviews were conducted either at a place of convenience for the participants or at their teaching sites. The physical education teachers in this study were interviewed twice. Each interview was audio recorded. The interviews lasted between 45 minutes to a little over an hour in length with no time restrictions. Participants answered all questions within the two interview sessions. The open-ended questions and responses for each interview were manually coded. The primary research questions and responses were coded as R1, R2, and R3. Consistent patterns were identified from the data and developed into themes which were generalized as specific or empirical findings. The recordings and data are being kept in a locked cabinet at the researcher’s home and will be destroyed within 12 months.

The second part of the data collection process was conducting observations of the participants within their settings. Between the first and second interview, each participant was observed at his or her teaching site. The researcher observed two fifty-minute class periods for each participant in the study. Field notes and an observation instrument developed by the researcher were used to record the data. The design of the observation instrument was developed from what the literature suggests as characteristics of an effective physical education program. This data is also being secured in a locked cabinet and will be destroyed in 12 months.

The third part of the data collection process was the focus group meeting. It was an audio-recorded session that lasted approximately two hours. The meeting was held at
the school district’s board of education office. A protocol of pre-determined, open-ended questions was used along with follow-up questions to the participants’ responses. The researcher/facilitator of the meeting encouraged open discussion between the physical education teachers. Each participant either responded to the question or listened to others as they responded. There was no set pattern of who was to answer the question. Each question was left open for discussion. The data was used in accordance with the face-to-face interviews to identify emerging themes that can be generalized into findings. This data is also secured in a locked cabinet and will be destroyed in 12 months.

Analyzing the Data

Open-ended research questions produced qualitative data that revealed physical education teachers’ thoughts and feelings regarding what motivates them to improve their instruction, the effects of the PEP Grant on their physical education program, peoples’ perceptions of physical education, and characteristics of an effective physical education program. Emergent themes were identified from the interview transcriptions and coding procedure, field notes, and an interview transcription of the focus group meeting. The process of triangulation was utilized to validate the thematic findings (Creswell, 2008). The emergent and developing themes were derived from the data and results were generalized to the population.
Summary

Within this chapter, the qualitative methodology used in the study, the participant and location selection process, instrument development, and techniques of analyzing the data were discussed. The main reason qualitative methodology was used in this study is because this semi-rural school district was provided a Physical Education Program Grant (PEP Grant), and it is imperative to research the impact this grant had on the areas concerning the literature and research questions. In other words, regarding characteristics of an effective physical education program, perceptions of physical education programs, and physical education teacher-motivation to improve instruction, this PEP Grant may have had an influence or impact on these areas being investigated. Data were collected through the triangulation of face-to-face interviews, observations, and a focus group meeting. Qualitative items were analyzed using a manually-coded process that sorted interview responses into developing consistent themes.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This phenomenological case study intended to investigate three primary research questions regarding the field of physical education. The responses of the five physical education teachers from the same school district with varying backgrounds were analyzed and the results are shared within this chapter. This chapter is organized in terms of the three primary research questions posed in Chapter I.

There are several studies within the review of the literature found in Chapter II that support similar characteristics of an effective physical education program. The physical education teacher responses’ support and add further information regarding characteristics of an effective physical education program. However, there has been minimal research conducted regarding motivation factors for physical education teachers to improve their physical education instruction. Last, the five physical education teachers in this study were asked about how they believed the field of physical education is perceived. There has not been any information within the literature about how physical education teachers think their profession is viewed.

Research Question I

Research Question I: What are the characteristics of an effective physical education program?

The data gathered from the five physical education teachers revealed that providing a variety of activities in physical education class and within the physical education
curriculum is an important characteristic of having an effective physical education program. These activities mentioned include physical fitness activities such as strength conditioning and aerobic activities, cooperative activities, and team and individual sports.

Participant S stated,

Each kid isn’t going to enjoy everything that you lead them through, but they are going to get exposed to enough things that they find something they like, that maybe they will stick with as they get older that they will enjoy. Maybe it is just walking, maybe it is golf, maybe its’ tennis, maybe it is riding the bike, maybe it’s using the elliptical machine, but you have got to find something that these kids enjoy that they may be willing to do for a lifetime.

According to Participant T, “team building, team sports, physical fitness, flexibility, and lifetime skills” are important characteristics of an effective physical education program.

Participant J stated,

I think if you had the resources to have three teachers all the time, then you are able to offer three different things every period. You might get more interest from kids who don’t necessarily like that sport that’s going on. You know what I mean – if you are not into Ultimate Frisbee. You might have twenty kids that are, but you might not be. You might say these two weeks I want to pick the fitness room because I don’t like Ultimate Frisbee and I want to pick tennis because I really like it. That’s the key because then you have each and every kid doing what they want to do if you offered those things.
Other similarities that were mentioned by the participants that are characteristics of an effective physical education program were space, student-teacher ratio, and appropriate facilities, and other resources such as equipment to meet the needs of the students.

As mentioned in chapter three, the five physical education teachers in this study were observed at their teaching sites. As discussed in chapter two, one characteristic of an effective physical education program is the ability of the physical education teacher interact with his or her students and provide continuous feedback. It was found through the observations conducted of these five physical education teachers at their teaching settings, at some point during their teaching sessions feedback was given to their students. Three out of the five physical education teachers continuously provided feedback to their students. The feedback consisted of re-establishing goals for students and correcting improper technique while the students were exercising with various physical fitness equipment. These same three physical education teachers observed students performing a skill well or demonstrating a good effort. Once again, the three physical education teachers consistently provided their students positive verbal feedback. Conversely, if their students were not behaving or not following expectations, the same three physical education teachers would reinforce the expectations and re-direct their students to stay on task. The other two physical education teachers were sporadic in giving positive or negative feedback.

Another characteristic of an effective physical education program supported by the literature in chapter two is the ability of a physical education teacher to keep all of their students active during physical education class. All five physical education teachers
in this study were successful in keeping most of their students active throughout the entire class period. There were times in each class period where only a few students were not active. However, the waiting time to participate did not last more than a few minutes. Waiting time is the amount of time a student is not active or not participating in the activity. The amount of wait time endured by the students is determined by the type of physical activities being performed. For example, if the activity consisted of a tag game or specific training exercises, then the students remained active for the entire class period. If the activity consisted of taking turns or playing a team sport, then the student would experience wait time.

A fourth characteristic of an effective physical education program mentioned in the literature is the ability to match skill levels and interests of the students in physical education classes. As mentioned in the literature, a diverse curriculum gives physical education teachers the opportunity to match skill levels and interests of their students. There were two physical education class periods in which Participant J and Participant S were observed team teaching. This allowed them to have a physical education class in which the students were given the opportunity to participate in several physical activities. Half of the class participated in a team activity while the other half of the class performed physical fitness activities in the new physical fitness training facility provided by the PEP grant. In this facility, the students were given the choice to perform strength resistance exercises or cardio-respiratory exercises, such as running on the treadmill or riding the exercise bikes. During Participant J’s second interview, Participant J mentioned the importance of matching students by their abilities and interests. Participant J believed
that if students are matched by their abilities and interests, students would be willing to increase their participation in physical activity. Participant S stated, “It would be nice to get the real obese kids together in a group where they were in there (fitness room) every day. When asked the question “Can you tell me what a physical education curriculum should look like? Participant J stated,

I think that a good seventy-five percent of it should be based on fitness and lifelong goals. I would say the other twenty-five percent of it should be more focused on your major team games. It doesn’t mean you can’t incorporate those games into your fitness activities because you could. I think that if you spend more time on the team game aspect, you are going to lose a lot of people, because that is not what kids like. You will lose a lot of kids when you say every single day that we are going to play football, basketball, common sports; you are going to lose them. Tennis is good and I would consider that more in the fitness aspect of it.

Finally, for each physical education class observed, all five physical education teachers provided their students with expectations, goals, and objectives before each activity. Throughout the activity, the goals were reinforced and reiterated by the physical education teachers. This supports the literature, because one of the major components of an effective physical education program is providing students with set goals and objectives for each physical education activity they perform in class.

During the focus group meeting with the five physical education teachers, it was found that every physical education teacher agreed that there was a need for more
professional development. They addressed the importance of the PEP grant and the professional development opportunities it provided for the physical education teachers. The three high school physical education teachers also addressed the need for more appropriate professional development opportunities that would meet their needs at the high school level. They felt that most of their PEP Grant professional development experiences were geared more toward the junior high and elementary levels. All five physical education teachers agreed that most of the professional development did not fit the culture at the high school.

*Participant S* stated, “If that lady went in our classes and tried to do those activities, she would get laughed right out of there. I’m not saying that she didn’t have good ideas, but you have to be age specific, and she absolutely wasn’t. I wouldn’t even try it.” One of the junior high physical education teachers, *Participant T* continued and stated “In the junior high there were a ton of lead up games. It was wonderful. At the high school level, it wasn’t that. It was hula-hoops and bean bags. These high school kids are going to look at you and say ‘Are you serious?’

*Participant D* stated, “They had a lot of good ideas about keeping kids moving. The ideas are there. I thought it was good, but *Participant S* is right. You try to sell that stuff to our school; it might work at School L.” It is worth noting that the junior high physical education teachers were satisfied with their profession development experiences. The two junior high physical education teachers agreed that they learned the importance of keeping their students moving and reducing the wait time during physical activities.
Summary of Research Question I

There were several important results from research question one regarding the responses of the five physical education teachers and what they said are characteristics of an effective physical education program. It is important to mention that all of these results support the literature. First, all five physical education teachers believed that a physical education curriculum should be diverse and provide a variety of physical activities for their students. They stated that a variety of physical activities during physical education class gives students the opportunity to choose what they would like to do. When this is done, there is an increase in student participation during physical education class.

A second characteristic was discovered through field observations. The literature expresses the importance of physical education teacher and student interaction. The five physical education teachers support the literature because they did demonstrate the ability to interact with their students. They mostly did this by providing positive and negative feedback during physical activities being performed by the students in physical education class. The other characteristics of an effective physical education mentioned from the literature and supported by these physical education teachers through their interview responses, observations, and focus group meeting were keeping students active during physical education class, matching students by their physical ability, and providing expectations, goals and objectives before each physical activity during physical education class.
Research Question II

What motivates physical education teachers to improve their instruction?

Four out of the five physical education teachers interviewed said that seeing their students improve their physical performance was a motivation factor to improving their instruction. Participant J stated, “It’s my job to do the best job I possibly can to prepare these kids for the rest of their lives. I feel like as a physical educator, I have got to give them as much opportunity to succeed in life physically as I possibly can.”

Participant S commented, “It is about seeing improvement in the kids. It is feeling like you made a difference in their lives in a positive way and that you have made them healthier and happier and you’ve made them more effective in the classroom and more effective in life.” Participant T remarked, “Seeing kids have fun. Seeing them succeed at something. Seeing them get excited that they bettered their score. They want to improve.”

Furthermore, Participant B stated, “The first thing that motivates me is when I see somebody I have reached that I didn’t expect to reach. When a kid comes in and says, ‘Mr. B., I did this after school’, and it’s a kid you don’t expect - that makes me feel like I’m doing my job.

Since the school district’s physical education program received a PEP Grant which enabled the five physical education teachers to purchase new equipment, they were asked if the new equipment motivated them to improve their instruction. All five physical education teachers said that it did. They mentioned that each student in class were able to check his or her heart rate after certain physical activities with the strap-on heart rate
monitors. The five physical education teachers also mentioned the importance of their new physical fitness room facility.

*Participant T* stated,

“You have kids that are horrible at sports, absolutely horrible at sports, but can get on an elliptical and go for longer than other kids. People see that and they get a little confidence in there, even your kids that are overweight. They can get out there and if they can go on an elliptical half of a mile, that is a step for some of those kids because they are not used to doing that kind of thing. I have noticed a big change in the kids that aren’t athletes, kids that are just your regular, ordinary kids that are never going to play a sport. I think they do a much better job because they succeed in that area out there (fitness room), gives them more confidence.”

From the researcher’s observations, five physical education teachers provided more instructional feedback in their new fitness facilities - more so than they did in the gymnasium. The researcher observed that the physical education teachers enjoyed the new facility and new equipment. This was evident because the physical education teachers seemed more engaged with their students while they were exercising in the physical fitness room. Furthermore, the teachers were able to have more small group or one-on-one interaction with their students in the fitness room. During small group and one on one interaction, the junior high and high school physical education teachers provided goals and objectives for their students. It was evident that having more than one facility allowed physical education teachers to teach more physical activities to their
students. Also, because of the additional fitness facility, students were increasing their participation.

Once again, during the focus group meeting with these five physical education teachers it was obvious to recognize that what was important to them was seeing their students improve and participate more in physical education classes. As a result, this was their motivation to improve their instruction. The general consensus among them was that the additional physical fitness facility was a motivating factor because the class sizes were smaller; this allowed for more space to do things and student participation increased. Also, the physical fitness facility gave the students more options to improve their physical education experiences.

*Participant B* stated,

“With this new facility, we get the gym by ourselves which improves the room for us as far as room to roam and room to do things. In the fitness room, you have some kids that maybe don’t get into the stuff we are doing in the gymnasium, whether it be hockey or basketball or whatever else. Students like getting on the equipment because they are pushing themselves. I’m not measuring against anybody else. I’m just measuring against myself.”

*Participant D* said,

“I think with the new equipment P.E. has become more of a platform to let kids learn how to use things so they feel more comfortable using it outside of school. Through P.E., most of the kids that come to our weight room sessions after school are usually the kids you had in P.E. because they don’t feel intimidated as much
anymore. Most of my kids that come every day never miss it because they have already gotten over that initial hump of, ‘Well, I really don’t know what I’m doing so it feels awkward’. Get that out of the way in P.E. I think they are going to be more apt to go to gyms on their own and do things on their own outside of school because they feel like they know what they are doing now. They are not doing it as much. That’s one of the biggest things I’ve seen.”

Participant B followed up and stated, “We go back the team sports as well. You do get those kids that know they are not good at it, so instead of try and fail, they just won’t try so you are constantly trying to motivate them in that setting, where you put those in the fitness room and once again they are competing against themselves. They are not competing against anybody else. I have seen a lot more effort from those kids because it is a little more intrinsic.”

Summary of Research Question II

It is important to point out that from the physical education teachers’ interviews, observations, and the focus group meeting, helping students improve and increase their participation in physical activities and physical fitness levels are motivational factors for the physical education teachers to improve their instruction. It is evident that the amount of space and equipment are also possible motivational factors for physical education teachers to improve their instruction. From the observations, it was seen that more space
in the gymnasium to perform physical activity enhanced or increased student participation.

Since this school district received a PEP Grant to improve their physical education program, these five physical education teachers have taken advantage of using the new fitness facilities and new exercise equipment. As can be seen from the participants’ comments in this study, the need and use of an additional fitness facility has enhanced students’ overall physical fitness performance and participation in physical activities. Furthermore, the physical education teachers like their additional facility because it has reduced class sizes and has allowed the physical education teachers to interact with their students on a one-on-one basis. This has also allowed the physical education teachers to clarify and set goals for their students on an individual basis. Last, because of the new physical fitness facilities and equipment, the physical education teachers have been able to diversify their physical education curricula. A diverse physical education curriculum not only gives options for what the physical education teachers want to teach, it also gives students a better opportunity to excel at improving their fitness level in the new fitness room versus the gymnasium and performing in team sports that they do not like or that they perform poorly.

Research Question III

How do people perceive the field of physical education?

There were several statements by the physical education participants in this study that demonstrated how they thought people within their school district perceived the field
of physical education. Participant T who has taught at the middle school level at the same school for twenty-one years stated, “I’ve never heard anybody put us down. The public that comes in and sees our fitness room sees the facilities we have; they think their child is pretty lucky to have something like that. I’m starting to have a lot of parents come in that were my students. They wish they could have had something like that at that time.”

Participant B who has taught physical education for five years at the middle school level, three years at the same school said, “To the general outsider, most of their perceptions are of your program unless they take an active interest in their child’s life based on their own experiences. They are going to think they are doing exactly what they did back in middle school or high school, depending on which building they are in.”

Participant J who has taught nine years of high school physical education at the same school stated,

“I really think that people think all we do down there is throw a ball out and kids play. I really do. I really think that academic teachers feel that our job is easy and all we have to do is make sure that they wear tennis shoes, and refs call safe and out. That is not the case. We got $55,000 of equipment out there that you have to take care of and make sure that the kids are using it properly so they don’t get injured. Discipline is a huge thing.” Participant J also has recognized that since the PEP grant has been implemented peoples’ perceptions have changed.

Participant J commented, “Now when they see PEP Grant, see what we have, they see that fitness room, and they are like, ‘man, kids are really working down there. Kids are really working hard.’
Regarding the parents, Participant S who has taught high school physical education for thirty-two years, twenty-two at the same school, stated, “Most of the parents that I am in contact with are active parents, your upper academic kids and kids who are involved with athletics and they are very positive about that room. In fact, they would love to get in there themselves. Those kinds of parents we have huge support from, but your average student, below average student, we don’t hear a lot from those parents either way.”

Participant S also mentioned how she felt administrators perceived physical education and she said, “They have been very supportive of us. Most of them are pretty active guys themselves and they understand the importance of physical education and fitness and I think they have been very positive.”

Participant D, a first year high school physical education teacher, made his comments regarding the PEP Grant and how people presently perceive the physical education program. Participant D stated “I think they perceive it as more structured, more under control. The second thing that they would probably say is the weight room orientation of it, just because I think it is different from most P.E. programs.”

In order to explore further into peoples’ perceptions of the field of physical education, during the focus group meeting with the middle school and high school physical education teachers, they were asked if the students recognized the changes being made to the physical education classes due to the effects of the PEP Grant and curriculum changes. Participant B stated, “Seventh graders didn’t know any different. They don’t have anything to compare it to.” When asked about eighth, ninth, and tenth grade
students’ perceptions, *Participant D* commented, “I think they see they got a lot of cool equipment and they just want to use it.” *Participant T* remarked,

“I think the same for unmotivated kids. You could give them a million dollars and they are still going to be unmotivated. They are a little more motivated, but I think that overall the kids just do what they are asked to do. They like it, they do it. They might not love it every day out there, but they may try to hustle and get their bike. They think it is easier, but when you tell them to go on level five instead of level one, they may not rush to that bike anymore. You are going to get your overweight kids who can’t do that, and that is when we just say, ‘O.K. you are walking at 4.0 today’. They are not going to love everything, but I think they see improvement.”

**Summary of Research Question III**

The middle school physical education teachers within this study had different thoughts of how they thought people perceived their physical education program. *Participant T* believed that the physical education program is supported by the parents. She thought that the parents see that their children are fortunate to have nice facilities to exercise in and nice equipment to work with. *Participant B* thought that the parents believe that their children are participating in the same activities in physical education class that they participated in when they were in school.

The high school physical education teachers had varied thoughts of how people perceive their physical education program. *Participant S* at the high school and
Participant T at the middle school thought that their physical education program is viewed as being necessary and improving. Participant J at the high school and Participant B at the middle school have different feelings and thoughts of how their physical education program is perceived. They thought that parents see their program as the same as when they were going to school and taking physical education classes.

Participant J was adamant and direct in implying that people see physical education class as a time where the physical education teachers throw a ball out there and the students just play. She also mentioned that teachers think that a physical education teacher’s job is easy. Of course, she defended that notion by explaining the complexity of a physical education teacher’s job and responsibilities. Participant J further mentioned that peoples’ perceptions of the physical education program have changed due to the PEP Grant and the facilities and new equipment it has provided. Participant S explained that physically-active parents and administrators have a better idea of what is going on in physical education class and are very supportive and understand the importance of the physical education program. She mentioned that the active parents are the ones who have students participating in athletics. She explained that the parents of athletes are more actively involved with what their children are doing in school and physical education classes. However, she noted that the average or below average students’ parents are not that visible and that she really does not have the opportunity to interact with those parents.

Since Participant D is a first year physical education teacher, he could only speak about how people perceive the physical education program due to the implementation of the PEP Grant. He thought that people see the physical education program as unique because
of the facilities and equipment being used. He also mentioned that people perceive the physical education classes as more structured and under control.

Summary

It is evident that the implementation of the PEP Grant made an impact on this semi-rural school district’s physical education program. The middle school and high school physical education teachers made it clear that the additional facilities and equipment improved their physical education program. They agreed that the new facilities and equipment influenced a change in the physical education curriculum and provided the opportunity for students to increase their participation in a variety of physical activities. Furthermore, from the observations conducted, the physical education teachers are providing more feedback to their students in a variety of ways such as whole-or small-group interaction and one-on-one interaction.

It is also evident that the PEP Grant has indirectly motivated these five physical education teachers to improve their instruction. The physical education teachers mentioned the importance of observing improvement in their students overall physical performance. The improvements that they all noted relate to the physical fitness activities these students are performing in the new facilities with new equipment. As a result, because of the facilities and equipment, the physical education teachers designed a physical education program emphasizing the importance of physical fitness in their physical education classes. Through the observations conducted, the physical education
teachers are providing goals and objectives for their students, which allow them opportunities to see their improvements in physical education class.

Last, regarding how these five physical education teachers believed their physical education program is perceived, there was differing points of view shared by each physical education teacher. However, they all mentioned, in one way or another, that the implementation of the PEP Grant has influenced peoples’ perceptions about what is going on in these physical education classes. The physical education teachers within this study thought, overall, that their program is being supported in a more positive way because of the grant which has provided the facilities and equipment to enhance the physical education program.
CHAPTER V

INTRODUCTION

This chapter contains the results of this study as well as discussion related to contributions of the study. Recommendations are included for future research regarding the field of physical education.

Discussion

The results that pertained to the first research question were in alignment with the current available literature. There were five characteristics which the five physical education teachers within this study thought were characteristics of an effective physical education program. The five physical education teacher participants of this study believed that a diverse curriculum is one characteristic of an effective physical education program. A second characteristic which emerged from the interviews and observations was the importance of interacting and providing feedback to students. From the observations, it was evident that the physical education teachers were more actively involved in providing feedback to their students during physical fitness activities being performed in the new physical fitness rooms. A third characteristic of an effective physical education program shared by the participants that is supported in the literature is the importance of increasing the amount of time that students are engaged in physical activity. From interviews, observations, and the focus group meeting, it was clear that the physical education teachers believed that it is important that most or all of their students are engaged in physical activity throughout the duration of a physical education class period.
A few of the physical education teachers mentioned the importance of the Carol M. White Physical Education Program Grant (PEP) and the professional development opportunities which trained them to keep their students physically active for a longer duration of physical education class. This third characteristic relates to or leads to a fourth characteristic of an effective physical education program. Due to the implementation of this PEP Grant, new fitness facilities, and fitness equipment, the physical education teachers within this study were able to match students’ skill levels and interests. As a result, since students were able to choose or were given options to which physical activities they wanted to participate in during physical education class, more students were participating in physical activity. Furthermore, because of the additional fitness facilities, there was less wait time for students to participate and engage in physical activity during physical education class. Last, another result from this study that was supported in the literature is the importance of providing students in physical education class with goals and expectations. It was evident, especially from the observations conducted, that the physical education teachers recognized the importance of providing their students clear expectations and goals in the new fitness facilities. Goals and expectations were usually provided in small group or one-on-one interaction with the students while they were using the fitness equipment during physical education class.

Regarding the second research question, there was little research in the current literature found about what motivates physical education teachers to improve their instruction. Within this study, it was learned from interviews, observations, and the focus group meeting that the five physical education teachers believed students who improved
in their physical fitness levels and reach their personal best during a given physical activity was a motivating factor to improve their instruction. Also, the physical education teachers mentioned that seeing their students increase their participation in physical fitness activities was a motivating factor. Furthermore, the physical education teachers noted the importance of having more space and room for students to be effectively engaged in physical activities either in the gymnasium or fitness facility. Due to having more space in the gymnasium, the physical education teachers agreed more participation and less wait time to participate physical activity in physical education class was evident. As a result, the new fitness facilities and equipment may possibly be an indirect influence or motivational factor for the physical education teachers within this study to improve their instruction.

Regarding how the physical education teachers in this study thought about how people perceived their physical education program, there were several different feelings and thoughts provided by each physical education teacher. However, one similarity was shared by the five physical education teachers in this study. They mentioned that because of the implementation of the PEP Grant, people especially parents who are more involved with their child’s education, perceived their program as being important in their child’s physical education experience.
Limitations of the Study

One limitation of this study was the number of participants. Only five educators with diverse experiences and varying number of years in the field participated in the study. Second, only middle school and high school physical education teachers from the same school district were selected for this study. There were no elementary physical education teachers included in the study. It is possible that physical education teachers from other school districts and at the elementary teaching level would respond differently to the research questions posed in this study.

Third, participants were asked if the new equipment and facilities motivated them to improve their instruction. They did not initially indicate that the new equipment and facilities due to the PEP Grant were motivating factors of their teaching instruction. The participants later concurred that the equipment and facilities had an impact on improving their instruction. A fourth limitation was the observation instrument used by the researcher. Instead of a checklist of items to be observed, the researcher should have included the frequency of events that took place during a given physical education class. A fifth limitation relates to research question three. In order to get a better perception of the field of physical education, the school community including parents, administrators, and students should have been surveyed or interviewed. The last limitation was the Hawthorne Effect, which means the participants were aware that they were in a study. Since they were aware of being in this study, their behavior may have possibly changed.
Contributions of this Study

It is important to point out that according to the second research question, at some point during the participants’ interview sessions each participant indicated that seeing students improve physically was a motivating factor for them to improve instruction. This is a valid finding because it was evident from the interviews, observations, and the focus group meeting that witnessing students improve in their overall physical fitness was a motivating factor to the physical education teachers’ instruction and performance. It is also important to point out that the Physical Education Program Grant (PEP) had an impact on the participants’ responses. The participants indicated that the PEP Grant allowed them to make changes in their physical education program. As a result of the new equipment and fitness facilities, the physical education teachers in this study have placed more focus on the importance of students improving their overall physical fitness. Furthermore, because of this PEP Grant, the physical education teachers have transformed from a sport education curriculum model to a more physical fitness curriculum model. Finally, regarding the third research question, the physical education teachers feel that the implementation of the PEP grant has changed people’s perceptions of their physical education program.

Recommendations for Future Study

Since there were only five participants in this study, it is imperative to select more participants with diverse backgrounds and experiences to get a more vivid picture of what characteristics make up an effective physical education program. Even though the
literature was supported by the five participants regarding the first research question, more participant responses may give a better indication or new ideas of what characteristics make up an effective physical education program. There is little research related to the second research question regarding what motivates physical education teachers to improve their instruction. Interviewing or surveying more physical education teachers at different levels of teaching with diverse backgrounds and experiences may give a better indication of what motivates physical education teachers to improve their instruction. Furthermore, more in-depth research needs to be conducted to investigate or explore the effects that new equipment, technology, and facilities may have on a physical education program. The participants agreed that the new equipment and facilities motivated their instruction and made things easier to conduct their physical education classes. Last, there needs to be further investigation into appropriate professional development opportunities that can be appropriately administered to schools of varying climates and cultures.

There is also little research regarding the third research question. In this study, regarding this research question, physical education teachers were asked how they thought people perceived the field of physical education. It is recommended that parents, students, classroom teachers, and administrators also be asked how they view the field of physical education. This is important because this exploration may give a better idea of how the school community regards physical education and its importance within the schools. It is also recommended that researchers explore how physical education teachers at the elementary, middle school, high school, and college levels perceive the field of
physical education. Last, it is imperative to investigate how students are being assessed and evaluated in their physical education classes. It is possible that if there is more emphasis on assessment and evaluation, the grades students receive in physical education class may carry more weight and change people’s perceptions which will, as a possible result, add to the substance of physical education classes.

Conclusions

Childhood obesity is a concern in the United States. It is imperative to look at the field of physical education to combat this concern. In order to get a better understanding of the field of physical education, researchers need to focus on what characteristics make up an effective physical education program, what motivates physical education teachers to improve their instruction, and peoples’ perceptions of physical education.

Regarding research question one, it was found that the characteristics of an effective physical education program provided by the participants was supported by the literature. These characteristics include (a) diverse curriculum, (b) teacher-student interaction through instructional feedback, (c) increasing student participation in physical activity, (d) matching skill levels and interests of the students in physical education classes, and (e) teachers’ abilities to provide goals and expectations for their students in physical education classes. Concerning research question two, there has been little research done on what motivates physical education teachers to improve instruction. This is an area that needs to be further explored. Within this study, it was found that all five participants were motivated to improve their instruction because of student advancement.
Again, this may have been because of the indirect impact of the PEP Grant which allowed the physical education teachers to purchase and use new fitness equipment. This brings forth a question for further exploration: Does being given a grant, new equipment, technology, and new facilities motivate physical education teachers to improve instruction? Also, if schools are considered to be low socio-economically and are not provided a grant, new equipment, or facilities, how are they motivated to improve their instruction? This is where the importance of professional development needs to be considered.

In this study, it was evident that the physical education teachers were more actively involved in providing feedback to their students while they were in the fitness room using the new fitness equipment. As a result of the fitness facilities the physical education classes were managed more effectively. Physical education teachers divided their classes. One half of the class would go to the fitness room and the other half would stay in the gymnasium. This allowed the physical education teachers to manage smaller class sizes and increase their interaction and feedback with their students.

Regarding research question three, again there has been little to no research conducted on how people perceive the field of physical education. One common similarity among the five physical education teachers about how they thought their physical education program is viewed was that people feel that the program has improved because of the new fitness facilities and new exercise equipment. Other perceptions included (a) physical education teachers do not do much but roll a ball out and have the kids play, (b) parents feel students are doing the same things they did when they
participated in physical education class, (c) the parents that are more involved in their child’s education or athletics seem to care more about what their child is doing in physical education class, and (d) some think administrators believe there is more structure and control of what physical activities are being performed in physical education classes.

Again, it is essential that physical education comes to the forefront of education. There are several misconceptions about what goes on during physical education classes. It is not throw out a ball and go play. There is much more that physical education teachers engage in on a daily basis. They are practitioners that refine skill, help students develop teamwork, pursue team and individual goals, and counsel and re-direct behavior to achieve positive outcomes.

The obesity rate in the United States is not only high in adults, but in children and adolescents as well. There needs to be more substance added to physical education classes. Whether it is a diverse curriculum or more emphasis placed on improvement in physical fitness, something needs to be done to increase the importance of physical education in today’s world. One suggestion might be to place more emphasis on how students are graded in their physical education classes. This might be done by placing emphasis on student-improvement, since students vary or differ in physical skills and talents. Finally, there needs to be further exploration on the approach and need for appropriate and effective physical education in today’s schools.
REFERENCES


School Health Policies and Programs Study (2010) http://www.cdc.gov/shpps


APPENDIX A

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND PROTOCOL
Research Questions:

1. What are the characteristics of an effective physical education program?

2. What motivates physical education teachers to improve their instruction?

3. What are the perceptions of the field of physical education?

   • How many years have you been teaching physical education?
   • Which levels and how many years at each level?
   • Mentors/education background.
   • What are your feelings about the importance of physical education?
   • What improvements have you observed within the physical education program?
   • What further improvements need to be made? How can there be added substance to the physical education program?
   • How can P.E. carry more academic weight? (How are they graded now?)
   • Has student participation increased with the addition of the new physical education equipment?
   • What is the driving force behind an effective physical education program?
   • What have you learned from the implementation of this program/curriculum?
   • How would you describe student participation in your physical education classes?
   • What do you believe are characteristics of an effective physical education program?
   • What motivates you to improve your instruction?
   • How has the new equipment impacted your teaching instruction?
   • What would you like to see change with regards to the physical education curriculum?
• Have you ever proposed an idea of what the physical education curriculum/program should look like?

• Are there ideas that you would like to propose to improve the physical education curriculum, but decided against it? If so, why have you decided against it?

• How do you think teachers perceive physical education at your school?

• How do you think your students perceive physical education at your school?

• How do you think your administrators (principal) perceive physical education at your school?

• How do you think the students’ parents perceive physical education at your school?

• Any ideas of how to get the community involved with your physical education program?

• Would you like to see the state of Ohio develop state standards for physical education? Why?

• Would you like these state standards to emulate another state’s physical education standards?

• What is it that you can do to make physical fitness fun?

• What do you think about how the students are being assessed/tested in physical education?

• How do you think physical education students should be assessed?

• Do you talk with the coaches regarding what you are doing in your physical education classes or vice versa?
TO: Ken Brubaker
FROM: Randy Gearhart, Chair
DATE: August 30, 2010
RE: Human Subjects Review Board Approval

The Human Subjects Review Board has approved the research proposal you submitted. You may proceed with the project.

The primary function of the HSRB is to ensure protection of human research subjects. As a result of this mandate, we ask that you pay close attention to the fundamental ethical principles of autonomy, justice, and beneficence when establishing your research proposal. These ethical principles pertain specifically to the issues of informed consent, fair selection of subjects, and risk/benefit considerations.

If you have any questions, please contact me.

Sincerely,

Randy Gearhart
Phone: 419-207-6198
Fax: 419-289-5460
E-mail: rgearhar@ashland.edu
APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANT PERMISSION FORM
PERMISSION FORM

FOR INTERVIEW PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

I, ____________________, give Ken Brubaker, graduate student from Ashland University permission to interview me for his dissertation.

• Pursuant to the Human Subjects policies at the University, I understand that my name will not be used, that the interviews will be tape-recorded, and that the tapes will be kept in a locked cabinet to which only the researcher has access.

• I understand I may withdraw from this study at any time by informing the researcher that I wish to do so.

• I understand that the results will not be used for commercial purposes and that the researcher may submit the finished study for a presentation or publication at an educational conference or in an educational journal.

___________________________   _______________________
Signature      Date
APPENDIX D

PHYSICAL EDUCATION OBSERVATION CHECKLIST
Physical Education Observation Checklist Instrument

1. _____ Is the teacher mobile during class?

2. _____ Is the teacher providing feedback throughout the class session?

3. _____ Is the teacher organized? (lesson plans, structure of class)

4. _____ Is the teacher providing feedback to the class as a whole?

5. _____ Is the teacher providing feedback to small groups?

6. _____ Is the teacher providing feedback to individual students?

7. _____ Did the teacher provide closure to the class with a review exercise?

8. _____ Did the teacher teach any skills to the students?

9. _____ Were the teacher’s expectations posted for the class?

10. _____ Did the teacher provide goals or objectives for the class?
APPENDIX E

FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL
Focus Group Questions:

- What specifically have you observed in your Physical Education Program that has been improved?
- Has student participation increased due to the new, additional equipment?
- Do you divide your classes up? Do some go to the gym and others to the new equipment facility?
- Do you have after school programs?
- Are there more non-athletes or athletes participating in these programs?
- How are you going to keep the after school programs going once the weather changes?
- How much access do you have to the new equipment facility?
- How do you feel about opening up the new equipment facility to the community?
- How do you feel about opening the facility up to teachers?
- How do you feel about opening it up to coaches and their teams?
- What did you think about the professional development opportunity provided (SPARK Program)?
- What more do you want to get out of your professional development opportunities?
- How do you feel about how your students are being assessed in this physical education program?
- How has the grant allowed you to make changes?
- Do the students recognize the changes made in the physical education program?