

Parents Knowledge of Appropriate Teaching Practices in Elementary School Physical Education Programs

David Barney

Oklahoma State University
Stillwater - OK (U.S.A.)

Francis T. Pleban

Oklahoma State University
Macomb – MI (U.S.A.)

Having parental support in a child's education is very important. Parents are, and can be, a valuable force when it comes to their child's education. The purpose of this study was to investigate parent's knowledge of appropriate practices in their child's elementary physical education classes. The data were obtained by surveying 311 parents. Parents were asked to complete a 40-statement survey dealing with appropriate practices in elementary physical education. The data showed that parents tended to correctly identify appropriate practices in their child's elementary physical education class. Yet, from the 40 survey statements, six statements were incorrectly answered by a majority of parents. It is hoped, if parents are more educated regarding their child's physical education experience, then there is a greater chance they will be more willing to support, or continue to support, elementary physical education in their child's education.

Keywords: Appropriate Practices; Elementary Physical Education

Background.

One method of gaining public support for an elementary physical education program in our schools is to have the endorsement and backing of the parents. Sheehy (2006) stated that parental dispositions towards education are immediate and of obvious importance. For example, a third grade girl comes home from school one day and proceeds to tell her parents that she played dodge ball in her physical education class. While playing she got hit in the stomach with a ball, thus hurting her and making her cry. From this example, parents can exhibit their dispositions of support or denial for funding of school programs when they vote. This support or denial can and does apply to physical education in schools. For this reason, providing quality elementary physical education is essential.

The literature regarding parents and their child's physical education experience, is primarily directed toward marketing a school's physical education program to parents (Scantling, Lackey, Strand & Johnson, 1998; Wilcox, 1987). Another component of the literature investigated parent's knowledge and attitudes towards their child's physical education experience. Sheehy (2006) investigated parents' perceptions of their child's fifth grade physical education program. In this qualitative study, parents were asked if they knew who their child's physical education teacher was, how many days their child had physical education class, and what kinds of activities/games they performed during class. The investigator found many parents made incorrect statements regarding their child's physical education class. It was concluded that parents were not able to provide detailed information about their child's physical education program. Another finding from this study was that parents drew conclusions from their own personal physical education school experiences. In summary, parents assumed the physical education curriculum had not changed since they had attended school.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to David Barney, e-mail: David.Barney@okstate.edu

Wilkinson and Schneck (2003) examined the effects of a school physical education website on parent's knowledge of their child's program. It was found that parents responded favorably to the physical education website. A reason parents responded so favorably towards the website was because of the knowledge gleaned from the website giving the parents a better understanding of what was being taught in class; as well as expectations of the students (i.e., their children). As mentioned previously, there is other published literature dealing with parental support for physical education emphasizing the importance of marketing physical education programs to parents (Moore & Gray, 1990; Scantling, et al., 1998; Schneider, 1992; Wilcox, 1987). These studies found that if physical educators marketed their physical education programs to the parents and administrators, there was a greater likelihood that physical education as a subject would be found to be valuable to their child/student.

One way elementary physical educators can gain and maintain parental support for physical education is to teach lessons that are specifically designed for their child's developmental levels, with the ultimate purpose of guiding and encouraging children to be physically active throughout their lifetime. A tool elementary physical educators can use in guiding their planning and implementation of lessons and activities is the document published by National Association for Sport & Physical Education (NASPE), titled *Appropriate Practices for Elementary School Physical Education* (COPEC - Council of Physical Education for Children, 2000). The purpose of this document is to help physical educators "incorporate the best-known practices into a pattern of instruction that maximizes opportunities for learning and success for all children" (p. 4). Thus, using this document can assist elementary physical educators in exposing students to appropriate practices in physical education; enabling students to be successful in patterned activity throughout their lives. The *Appropriate Practices for Elementary School Physical Education* document concludes by stating "it is intended for policymakers, school administrators and parents to provide specific guidelines that identify practices that are in the best interests of children and those that are counterproductive or even harmful" (p. 7). Thus, the purpose of this study was to investigate parent's knowledge of appropriate teaching practices in their child's elementary physical education classes.

Method.

Participants.

Three hundred and eleven adults with a child or children (116 males & 195 females) enrolled in three elementary schools in an upper midwest city in the United States were the sample of convenience for this study. The mean age of those parents participating in this study was 29 years of age. Prior to the start of the study, the researcher met with the elementary school principals and physical educators, and proposed the intentions of the study. Verbal and written permission to conduct this study were given by the principals and physical education teachers. For this study, 750 surveys were sent home to parents, by way of their child's weekly folder, asking parents for their participation in the study. Survey response rate was 41%. Finally, the University Institutional Review Board (IRB) granted approval to conduct this study.

Survey

For this study the researchers utilized a survey that was created and used from another study dealing with elementary school physical education appropriate practices (Strand, Barney, & DeFries-Evans, 2008). The *Elementary School Physical Education Appropriate Practices Survey* (ESPEAPS) is a 40-statement survey. The ESPEAPS focused on five general areas of interest that apply to elementary physical education. The five general areas were: 1) Curricular Decisions, 2) Health-Related Fitness, 3) Assessment, 4) Active Participation, and 5) Instructional Strategies. Seven statements refer to curricular decisions, 10 for health-related fitness, four assigned for assessment, six to active participation, and 13 to instructional strategies, for a total of 40 survey statements. Descriptive statistics were computed, including percentages to determine if parents agreed or disagreed for each survey statement to help explain the results.

Results.

A total of 12,440 statements were answered from the administered survey, and of the 12,440 statements, 9,346 statements were identified correctly. As shown in APPENDIX A, data indicate that a large majority (over 78%) of the 34 of the 40 statements were answered correctly. Conversely, six of the statements were answered incorrectly.

Curriculum

Questions 3, 6 and 7 indicate that parents overwhelmingly felt that *the curriculum should create an environment that is supportive for all students* (93%), thus allowing the students to participate in an environment that is conducive to learning, and that the curriculum should be balanced and taught to the students' age that is age appropriate. Of the three previously mentioned statements, over 90% of the parents responded in an affirmative manner.

Health-Related Fitness

Data from statements regarding health-related fitness showed parents wanted their child to understand, participate in, and enjoy fitness that would lead to a healthy individual. The parents also wanted their child to be taught the purpose of exercise and the correct procedures when exercising. For statements 8 and 12, parents strongly felt (96% and 95% respectively) that teachers should monitor, guide and encourage students in the area of fitness.

There was one statement from the survey in the health-related fitness statements that the majority of parents incorrectly identified as appropriate. Statement 13, states *teachers should administer physical fitness tests for the purpose of identifying children to receive awards or some other types of recognition for meeting district or state requirements*. The data showed that 61% of the parents felt this was an appropriate practice, while 39% of the parents disagreed.

Assessment

Data from the statements regarding assessment indicated that parents did not clearly understand the role of assessment in elementary physical education. Concerning the four assessment statements, data from two of the four statements did not have a large majority of correct responses. For statement 19, only 58% of the parents felt that using different methods of assessment, such as checklists, self and peer assessments and portfolios can be used to assess students. And for statement 21, 56% of the parents felt that *students should not be tested in an artificial context (e.g., dribbling a basketball between cones)*. Statement 20, which was incorrectly identified, revealed that the majority of parents (80%) felt that *students should be assessed on dress, attendance and effort as part of their child's grade*.

Active Participation

For the six active participation statements, parents correctly identified four of the statements. Two statements, 23 and 24, were incorrectly answered by the parents. For question 23, 57% of the parents felt that *teachers may use large groups in which participation is based on individual competitiveness*. The next statement that was incorrectly answered was statement 24. This statement stated that *teachers may use such activities as relays, dodge ball and elimination tag to provide everyone in class with the opportunity to participate*. Data revealed that a large majority (84%) of parents agreed with this statement.

Instructional Strategies

Finally, data regarding instructional strategies showed that parents were again able to best identify appropriate practices. A majority of the 13 statements were correctly answered with a high percentage of the parents answering the statements correctly. Yet, statement 34 was incorrectly answered. This statement stated that *teachers may organize full-sided or large sided games/activities for students to participate in*. For example, a class of 30 students are split into two groups of 15 in each group. The data indicated that 92% of the parents agreed with this statement, while only 8% disagreed. One interesting point, previous to statement 34, statement 32 states teachers should organize small games, (e.g., two to three per team that allow numerous practice opportunities for children while allowing them to learn the various aspects of the game being taught). Here the parents overwhelmingly agreed (97%) with this statement. Yet, two statements later parents felt (92%) that it was fine to divide students into large-sided groups.

Discussion.

From the data it appears parents in this study tended to correctly identify a majority of the appropriate practices in elementary physical education. For example, 15 of the 40 statements were answered correctly by at least 90% of the parents. However, of the 40 statements, six were incorrectly answered by a majority of the parents. These six statements that were incorrectly answered will be discussed because of the impact they could have on a student's elementary physical education experience. When analyzing the five general areas contained within the survey, at

least one question was incorrectly answered in four of the five areas of the survey.

Health-Related Fitness.

The first statement that parents incorrectly identified (61%) was statement 13. It stated that teachers should administer fitness tests once or twice each year for the purpose of identifying children to receive awards from the school district or state department. The data indicates that parents feel their child should get some type of recognition for being physically fit. The form of recognition this could take might be a trophy, a certificate, or a ribbon. This in turn sends the wrong message to students. The message being that the student gets a reward for being fit. And for those students that do not get an award, this may turn them off to physical activity. This has the possibility of affecting the students' motivation to exercise later in life. For those students that are recognized there is the chance those students' will be extrinsically motivated when it comes to being physically active. As students get older and do not receive awards or recognition for participation, they will lose interest in being physically active (Nicholls, 1984). Teachers should promote the process of testing rather than just the product (end result). The process orientation allows teachers the flexibility to help and encourage students while making the testing a positive experience.

Assessment

The second statement that was incorrectly identified (80%) was statement 20. It states that dress, attendance, and effort should be counted as the affective portion of the students' grade. Pangrazi (2004) has defined assessment as the collection of information about student performance. Many involved in education are obviously aware of the importance of assessment. This also applies in elementary physical education. It is surprising that such a large majority (80%) of parents agreed with this statement, for the fact that parents want to see results for their child's learning. Effort is a subjective measure and difficult for teachers to assess. Because of the subjectivity of assessment, parents will not have their questions or concerns answered regarding their child's physical education experience and grade. Rather, teachers should explore a variety of alternative assessment techniques to analyze students' understanding and the teachers' effectiveness (Barney & Strand, 2006). Miller (2002) has stated that basing grades on dress,

attendance and effort undermines physical education class.

Active Participation.

The next statement that was incorrectly identified (57%) was statement 23. This states, teachers may use large groups in which student participation is based on individual competitiveness. This statement that was answered incorrectly suggests that parents may have reflected on their own physical education experiences as a child, as discussed by Sheehy (2006). One of the goals of elementary physical educators is for every student to have a piece of equipment during class activities (Pangrazi, 2004). Darst and Pangrazi (2002) suggested that more effective student learning takes place when students have frequent interaction with a ball, racquet, or beanbag. It would be in the student's best interest to modify the game or activity. Teachers can shorten or widen the field, use a bigger ball, change game rules and have students focus on certain skills within the context of multiple small-sided games. When teachers use large group activities, standing in line or waiting their turn invites off-task behavior. It would be wise of teachers to modify games/activities to provide students a greater chance of interacting with equipment.

The fourth statement that parents incorrectly identified (84%) was statement 24. It states that teachers may use such activities as relays, dodge ball and elimination tag since they provide opportunities for everyone in the class. If parents were to recall their physical education experience, dodge ball would probably be the activity that stands out in their memories, as the activity that defined their physical education experience. Also, looking at the statement more closely it states that relays, dodge ball and elimination tag "provides opportunities for everyone in the class". However, there are students that do not like or enjoy these activities. Because they do not enjoy these activities they will in many cases be the first ones to be eliminated, so they can sit out of the activity, thus not receiving any benefits of physical activity.

The fifth statement that parents incorrectly identified (74%) was statement 27, which states: teachers may use games with the purpose of keeping students "busy, happy, and good." Many parents are probably of the opinion that if their child is busy, happy, and good they are probably learning. Barney & Strand (2006) stated that students themselves may experience a class as "busy, happy, and good," but the teacher should

not assume that enjoyable, yielding physical activity equates with learning objectives and meeting standards. All classes should be based on specific objectives related to what students will learn about movement and physical fitness.

Instructional Strategies.

The sixth and final statement that parents incorrectly identified (92%) was statement 34. It states teachers may organize full-sided or large-sided games (e.g., the class of 30 is split into two groups of 15 that play against each other). This statement has a similar tone to statement 23. It appears parents still feel that having their child participate in games that have two teams with 15 students or more on each team is beneficial to them. A large majority (92%) of the parents agreed with this statement. When these types of games/activities are implemented with elementary-aged students, there tends to be standing around and very little student involvement, thus resulting in a greater chance for a lack of activity and inappropriate behavior from students. If there is any involvement in these types of activities it is similar to a youth soccer game. For example, there is one ball and every child follows the ball around the field. There is the possibility the students will get some cardiovascular benefits from chasing the ball up and down the field, yet the child's soccer skills will not improve. Another result of these types of games/activities is that there is little to no learning (Pangrazi, 2004). As stated above students need to have their own equipment and space in order for the student to learn.

When looking at the statements parents incorrectly identified, it presents physical educators a great opportunity to educate parents. Parents want what is best for their child's education. By taking some time during parent-teacher conferences, monthly newsletters home, and in-class visits to let parents know what practices are appropriate in elementary physical education, these types of opportunities can and will better educate parents (Barney & Mauch, 2003). Attitudes, opinions and perceptions will be formed in a positive manner, or made clearer in parent's minds regarding what appropriate practices in elementary physical education really should be.

The appropriate practices document provides guidelines for elementary physical educators. When elementary physical educators implement the appropriate practices into their daily lessons everyone benefits. As the appropriate practices are being carried out in physical education classes the child's experiences will filter back to the parent's through their children, thus exposing them to quality elementary physical education. This will also serve as a method of educating parents on the importance of physical education to their child and their education. And as parents become more educated about appropriate practices in elementary physical education, it is hoped that they will give support in all possible ways, either by vote, financially or verbally.

References.

- Barney, D., & Mauch, L. (2003). Making the most of parent/teacher conferences. *Strategies, 16*, 13-15.
- Barney, D., & Strand, B. (2006). Appropriate practices in elementary physical education: Create a foundation for physical education majors. *Teaching Elementary Physical Education, 17*, 20-23.
- COPEC. (2000). *Appropriate practices for elementary school physical education*. Reston, VA: National Association for Sport and Physical Education.
- Darst, P.W., & Pangrazi, R.P. (2002). *Dynamic physical education for secondary school students*. San Francisco: Benjamin Cummings.
- Miller, D.K. (2002). *Measurement by the physical educator: Why and how*. Boston: McGraw-Hill.
- Moore, D.B., & Gray, D.P. (1990). Marketing-The blueprint for successful physical education. *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation and Dance, 61*, 23-26.
- Nicholls, J. (1984). *Research on motivation in education: Student motivation Vol. 1*. New York: Academic Press.
- Pangrazi, R.P. (2004). *Dynamic physical education for elementary school children*. San Francisco: Benjamin Cummings.
- Scantling, E., Lackey, D., Strand, B., & Johnson, M. (1998). Maintaining physical education's place in our schools. *Strategies, 11*, 13-16.
- Schneider, R.E. (1992). Don't just promote your profession- Market it! *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation and Dance, 63*, 70-73.
- Sheehy, D. (2006). Parents' perceptions of their child's 5th grade physical education program. *Physical Educator, 63*, 30-37.
- Strand, B., Barney, D., & DeFries-Evans, N. (2008). Knowledge of appropriate practices in elementary school physical education: Research to application in a teacher preparation program. *SD Journal of Research, 3*, (2), 24-30.
- Wilcox, R.C. (1987). Promoting parents as partners in physical education. *Physical Educator, 45*, 19-23.
- Wilkinson, C., & Schneck, H. (2003). The effects of a school physical education and health web site on parental knowledge of the program. *Physical Educator, 60*, 162-168.

APPENDIX A

Table 1
Results Regarding Appropriate Teaching Practices in Elementary
Physical Education (Inappropriate practices are *italicized*).

	Agreed	Disagreed
<u>Curriculum</u>		
1. The curriculum should include a balance of skills and concepts in the area of games, educational gymnastics, and rhythmical activities and dance.	94%	6%
<i>2. The curriculum should consist primarily of large groups and competitive team games.</i>	23%	77%
<i>3. Activities should be the same for all grade levels K-6.</i>	7%	93%
4. Teachers should design activities with both the physical and the cognitive development of children in mind.	99%	1%
5. Children should receive opportunities to connect movement concepts and skills into their learning experiences in other subject areas.	95%	5%
<i>6. Children may be permitted to use harassing remarks, physically harmful activities, and behavior that is hurtful to others.</i>	2%	98%
7. The environment should be supportive of all students, including those of lesser skills, and promote the development of a positive self-support.	99%	1%
<u>Health-Related Fitness</u>		
8. The process of fitness development should be monitored, and guidance for setting personal goals and strategies for goal attainment provided.	96%	4%
<i>9. All children should be required to do the same fitness activities regardless of their fitness levels.</i>	22%	78%
<i>10. Calisthenics/mass exercise should be the avenue for fitness development.</i>	42%	58%
11. Teachers should use fitness assessment as part of the ongoing process of helping children understand, enjoy, improve and/or maintain their physical fitness and well-being.	95%	5%
12. Tests results should be shared privately with children and their parents as a tool for developing personal goals and strategies for maintaining and increasing the respective fitness parameters.	95%	5%

PARENTS KNOWLEDGE OF APPROPRIATE TEACHING PRACTICES

Table 1. cont.

Results Regarding Appropriate Teaching Practices in Elementary Physical Education (Inappropriate practices are *italicized*).

<i>13. Teachers should administer physical fitness tests once or twice each year for the purpose of identifying children to receive awards that meet a requirement of the school district or state department.</i>	61%	39%
<i>14. Fitness results should be interpreted based on comparison to norms rather than in terms of how they apply to children's future health and well-being.</i>	30%	70%
15. Elementary school children should be taught the purpose of exercise, correct procedures for exercise, and different exercise categories-stretching, strength, etc.	96%	4%
16. Exercise should be taught as positive physical activity learning experiences but not as a primary part of elementary physical education.	65%	35%
<i>17. Exercises may be used as punishment for misbehavior and/or lack of participation.</i>	12%	88%
<u>Assessment</u>		
18. Teachers decisions should be based primarily on ongoing individual assessment of children's performance as they participate in physical education class.	82%	18%
19. Many different forms of assessment, including checklists, self and peer assessments, portfolios, and student journal should be incorporated in the process.	58%	42%
<i>20. Dress, attendance, and effort should be counted as the affective portion of the grade.</i>	80%	20%
<i>21. Assessment items should focus on isolated skills in an artificial context (e.g., dribbles between cones for time as compared to dribbling in a game situation).</i>	44%	56%
<u>Active Participation</u>		
22. Teachers should involve all children in activities that allow them to participate actively, both physically and mentally.	99%	1%
<i>23. Teachers may use large groups in which student participation is based on individual competitiveness.</i>	57%	43%
<i>24. Teachers may use activities such as relays, dodge ball, and elimination tag since they provide opportunities for everyone in the class.</i>	84%	16%

PARENTS KNOWLEDGE OF APPROPRIATE TEACHING PRACTICES

Table 1. cont.

Results Regarding Appropriate Teaching Practices in Elementary Physical Education (Inappropriate practices are *italicized*).

<i>25. Teachers should limit participation of students with special needs to activities that don't facilitate learning, such as keeping score or counting repetitions for other students.</i>	14%	86%
26. Teachers should modify the rules, regulations, equipment, and playing space to facilitate learning by children of varying abilities or to focus learning on particular games of skill components.	79%	21%
<i>27. Teachers may use games with a learning purpose or goal of keeping children "busy, happy, and good".</i>	74%	26%
<u>Instructional Strategies</u>		
<i>28. Official adult rules of sport should govern the activities in physical education classes.</i>	22%	78%
29. Groups or teams may be formed by grouping clothing, colors, birthdays, and favorite activities.	76%	24%
<i>30. Groups or teams may be formed by student "captains" publicly selecting one child at a time sometimes with a system of alternating gender.</i>	29%	71%
<i>31. Groups/teams may be formed by putting "boys against girls."</i>	22%	78%
32. Teachers should organize small games, e.g., 2-3 per team that allow numerous practice opportunities for children while also allowing them to learn the various aspects of the games being taught.	97%	3%
33. Equipment should be provided to permit active participation and practice for every child.	96%	4%
<i>34. Teachers may organize full-sided or large-sided games (e.g., the class of 30 is split into two groups of 15 that play against each other).</i>	92%	8%
35. Teachers should plan activities that emphasize self-improvement, participation, fair play (shaking hands, positive comments, etc.), and cooperation.	99%	1%
36. Children should be allowed to choose between keeping score and skill practice in selected situations.	61%	39%
37. Teachers should provide choices in levels of competition and teach participants how to compete positively and constructively at each level.	95%	5%

PARENTS KNOWLEDGE OF APPROPRIATE TEACHING PRACTICES

Table 1. cont.

Results Regarding Appropriate Teaching Practices in Elementary Physical Education (Inappropriate practices are *italicized*).

<i>38. Teachers should require children to participate in activities that designate children as "winners and losers."</i>	22%	78%
<i>39. Teachers may use strategies that compare one child's or one's team performance against others.</i>	29%	71%
<i>40. Teachers should use rewards and punishments for winning and losing in class games.</i>	5%	95%