

Parents' Perceptions of Their Child's Fifth-Grade Physical Education Program

What Was the Question?

The purpose of this study (Sheehy, 2006) was to examine parents' perceptions of their fifth-grade child's physical education program and the sources of information from which those perceptions were derived. In the current economic and educational climate, in which physical education has been under pressure, this issue is of more than scholarly interest. As noted by the author, parents can play an important role in shaping educational policy by their participation in such things as "tax referenda, pressure group activities, testimony at public hearings, letters to the editor in the public press, parent-teacher conferences, and family discussions around the dinner table..." However, the extent of parents' involvement greatly depends on what they know and believe about the value of different classes. Therefore, this study attempted to determine what parents believe about physical education, the sources of information upon which those beliefs are based, and the accuracy of their views.

What Was Done?

Twenty-seven working- and middle-class parents were interviewed about their child's physical education program. The program included such skill themes as volleying, dribbling, throwing, and catching, and, from her own independent observations, the author characterized it as being developmentally and instructionally appropriate for K-6 students. She also noted that it promoted an understanding of spatial awareness, the importance of effort, and the development of social relationships. The program's learning environment was characterized as

positive, inclusive, and designed to provide ample time for students to acquire targeted concepts and skills. However, the author reported that communications with parents was limited, consisting only of a note from the physical education teacher at the beginning of the year, containing information about the days physical education was scheduled, appropriate clothing to be worn, and behavioral expectations.

To assess parental knowledge and attitudes about the program, the author conducted two, one-hour, taped, open-ended interviews with each parent. Using transcripts, qualitative methods were subsequently applied to answer the research questions.

What Was Found?

Three main conclusions were supported by the results. First, with a few exceptions, most parents were unable to provide information about their child's physical education program. The information that the parents acquired, mostly provided by their children, was characterized as "trivial, frequently inaccurate, and often filled with discrepancies."

Second, many parents assumed that they knew what the program encompassed by drawing on their own experience in physical education classes. These parents were unlikely to seek information about their child's physical education program.

Finally, parents indicated that, in contrast to academic courses, physical education was of less importance. For example, they noted that the S, N, U grading system, as opposed to the A, B, C grading system, was used for less important, nonacademic classes. In addition, they indicated that they

had little contact with the program because the physical education teacher did not invite them to seek information, attend classes, or become involved, as teachers typically do with other subjects being taken by their children.

What Does the Study Mean?

Many physical educators believe that if they deliver a quality physical education program, children will accurately portray the program to their parents. From this study, it appears that this common belief is false. Most parents interviewed in this investigation had little or no recent and accurate information about their child's physical education program. Consequently, the message from this study is that if physical educators wish to generate and sustain parental support, they must not assume that the virtues of their program will be evident to them. They must take responsibility for initiating and maintaining regular communications and interactions with parents.

Reference

Sheehy, D. A. (2006). Parents' perceptions of their child's 5th grade physical education program. *The Physical Educator*, 63(1), 30-37.

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