

ARTICLE REVIEWED

Power of the Curriculum: Content, Context, and Learning in Physical Education

Zhang, T., Wang, Y., Yli-Piipari, S., & Chen, A. (2020). Power of the curriculum: Content, context, and learning in physical education. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 1-12.

THE PROBLEM:

Continued changes in education legislation have led to testing subjects such as mathematics and reading becoming the main recipients of school funding, while non-testing subjects such as physical education (PE) continue to be cut or underfunded. Because PE is underfunded, there is a noticeable difference in the quality of PE in low socio-economic status (SES) schools versus high SES schools.

In low SES schools, PE teachers often lack equipment and space and face teacher burnout. And, some low SES schools don't hire PE teachers. Carlson et al. (2014) discovered that only 63.2% of low SES schools had a PE teacher, while 93.8% of high SES schools did.



Research Summary:

The purpose of this study was to understand the impact of SES factors on a constructivist physical education curriculum in an attempt to decrease the learning gap between low and high SES schools. A constructivist physical education curriculum is based on the idea that if students are provided meaningful and authentic physical activity experiences in PE, they will apply those skills outside of the classroom. The participants in this study were 24 middle schools, with 10 being assigned the intervention (a constructivist PE curriculum called *Cardio Fitness Club*). It should be noted that due to the schools differing in SES status the intervention looked different at each school. For example, some schools only allowed students to take PE two to three days per week, while others had PE daily.

Conclusion:

In this study, the researchers found that a constructivist PE curriculum success is based on teacher quality and students' prior knowledge. However, a school's SES status impacts the effectiveness of the curriculum due to factors like schedules, equipment, facilities, and class sizes. It is important to point out that although SES status did impact students' prior knowledge, it did not impact their ability to gain knowledge. Thus, the authors suggest that a well implemented curriculum could have significant impacts on student learning.

Key Takeaway:

This study has shown that a constructivist PE curriculum could be a solution to narrowing the gap in education of low SES and high SES schools. However, the authors note that the curriculum must be designed based on the teacher and the current prior knowledge of the students in order to be impactful. Therefore, it may be necessary for PE teachers to assess their students' knowledge if the teacher is not already aware.