

ARTICLE REVIEWED

Physical Education Policy Research in the United States: Setting a New Orientation

Landi, D., Walton-Fisette, J.L., & Sutherland, S. (2021). Physical education policy in research in the United States: Setting a new orientation. *Quest*, 73(1), 45-62.

THE PROBLEM:

U.S. physical education policy research is often viewed as a linear process, which implies that many believe that legislated policy works in a top-down fashion with policy implementation causing change and addressing social issues (Stein, 2004). The authors point out that in physical education, this has looked like policies being established that require students to meet a set number of minutes of physical activity per week. Some may have assumed this would lead to more physical education in schools and increasing students' physical activity levels with the hopes of eradicating the childhood obesity issue. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Thus, the need to understand and address the current policies that are in place.



Research Summary:

The purpose of this study was to critically examine U.S. physical education policy research using a sociocritical perspective. The authors break down the policy procedure by identifying those who implement policy, the types of policy, and the gaps currently in physical education. It is important to note that the federal, state, and local governments are the “who” behind policy (Furhman et al., 2007), with the state level serving as the primary authority of educational policies. There are three types of policy: (1) economic, (2) case studies, and (3) critical. Economic policy focuses on outcomes, such as financial or performance gain. Case studies are designed to capture the implementation process and which factors are influential. Critical research looks at the inequities of policy like privilege, social injustices, and power relations.

Conclusion:

In this study, the researchers find that the current goal of U.S. physical education policy research is “to increase the amount of physical education for young people,” (Landi et al., 2021, p. 56), with most research focused on establishing relationships between PE policies and health-related outcomes. Further, the authors argue that instead of PE policy advocating for the benefits it provides, it has instead relied upon education policy and its goal of educating the ‘whole child,’ and PE being a necessary component of that experience. Thus, they believe it is important for U.S. physical education policy research to re-orient itself under the notion “all young people have a right to equitable opportunities in physical education as a form of personal, physical, and social development” (Landi et al., 2021, p. 58). The researchers believe that PE can align itself as a contributing member to a democratic education for young people, rather than remaining an “added experience.”

Key Takeaway:

This study highlights the importance of physical education policy research. The authors point out the shortcomings of the current policy research and PE's role (or lack thereof) in providing an equitable education to all young people. They also note that physical educators should be the primary focus of the physical education policy research agenda, rather than health promoters (Penney, 2008). From this, physical education can take on a ‘response-able’ approach (Barad, 2007), which is attentive to differences, curious for learning and progress, responsible for self, others, and the environment, and competent in all four domains (affective, cognitive, physical, and social),(Bozalek, 2017).