

INTRODUCING PHYSICAL EDUCATION INTO SCHOOLS: THE VIEW OF TEACHERS AND LEARNERS

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Abstract

Introduction

A number of initiatives were launched in various countries worldwide to provide quality physical education in schools. However, the promotion of participation in sport and specifically elite sport is still regarded to be economically more feasible, than the introduction of physical education in schools and "sport for all" programmes at community level. In order to improve the current situation, the conventional ideas of the school physical education programme needs to be reconsidered and more serious consideration should be given to the preferences and needs of the key stakeholders.

Methodology

The aim of the study was to determine the views of teachers and learners with regards to physical education and the promotion of physical activity in a local community school. Participants included learners and teachers involved in life orientation and coaching of sport in a high school in a local community in the Western Cape, South Africa. The school was purposively selected as it caters for the previously disadvantaged learners in the area. Data was collected by means of focus group discussions.

Results

The results indicated that both the learners and teachers appreciated the benefits associated with participation in physical education but also highlighted significant barriers that prevented the effective implementation of physical education programmes in the school.

Conclusion

South Africa needs a structured, cost effective approach to physical and health education in schools that stipulates national objectives and detailed strategies to realize the objectives.

Key words

Physical education, teachers, learners, views

INTRODUCTION

Since 1994, the South African government has undertaken several international and country level policy initiatives to promote the health and well-being of young people. At international level they participated in the signing of the World Summit

Declaration and the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 2003). At national level, the National Action Plan for Children was a further illustration of existing commitments to improving the health of the youth in South Africa (National Programme of Action Steering

Committee, 1996). The Ministry of Education, launched a five-year plan, the Trisano programme, to transform the education and training system from one of segregation to one of equal opportunity for all young South Africans (Department of Education 2001-2002) focusing on both the health and education of the learner. This leads to a focus on physical education in schools as a tool to address the health of the learner. The importance of physical education cannot be ignored if the health and well-being of young people are to be considered.

An audit on the state and status of physical education in 1999 provided a clear picture that physical education as a school subject was under threat worldwide (Hardman and Marshall, 2001). A number of initiatives were launched in various countries to provide quality physical education in schools. However, it was still regarded as economically more feasible to promote participation in sport and elite sport rather than physical education and "sport for all" at community level (Burnett and Hollander, 1999). Darlison (2001) indicated that despite the proven benefits of quality school physical education programmes, a need still exists for education policies that prioritizes the subject in schools. Within the South African context history reveals that the low institutional priority of physical education can be attributed to three problems namely: the availability of qualified physical education teachers in former black schools; lack of basic educational facilities and the non examination status of physical education which made it much less of a priority when it came to the provision of resources (Walter, 1994; George, 1995; Van Deventer, 1999). The Department of Education attempted include physical education programmes in schools by reinstating physical education as a school subject with full status as part of the Revised National Curriculum in the Life Orientation Learning area (DOE, 2002). According to the Department of Education in South Africa (2002), the development of learning programmes such as life orientation is the responsibility of the school and teachers. The fact that physical education specialists are no longer appointed at schools means that generalist teachers, who may have no knowledge about the subject, are required to teach life orientation (Hardman and Marshall, 2001). This could lead to physical education as a

focus area in life orientation being ignored or alternatively widespread variations in the actual delivery of physical education programmes could occur.

The challenges facing physical education include the need to embrace strategic initiatives at school, community and policy level. In order to improve the current situation, the conventional ideas of the school physical education programme needs to be reconsidered and more serious consideration should be given to the preferences and needs of the key stakeholders namely the learners and teachers. The question that arises is: Are the needs of the key stakeholders being heard when we focus on the re-introduction of physical education in schools? According to Strand and Scantling (1994), gaining insight into student's beliefs assists in understanding their attitude towards and their interest and involvement in physical education curriculums.

Methods

The aim of the study was to determine the views of teachers and learners with regards to physical education and the promotion of physical activity in schools in a local community school. Participants included learners and teachers from a high school in a local community in the Western Cape, South Africa. The school was purposively selected as it caters for the previously disadvantaged learners in the area. Permission to conduct the research was obtained from the Western Cape Department of Education and the principal of the selected school. Written informed consent was obtained from participants and guardians of participants. Data collection methods included focus group discussions held separately with learners and teachers. The aims of the focus group discussions were to determine their views on the inclusion of physical education into the school curriculum as well as possible barriers to implementation and recommendations for the future. The sample of learners consisted of 2 learners from grades 8 - 11, randomly selected from a list of all learners in the various grades. This constituted a focus group of 8 learners of which 4 were male and 4 were female. The teachers involved in the teaching of life orientation and coaching of sport at the school constituted the second focus group. The focus group discussions were tape-recorded with

permission from the participants. The tape recorded information was then transcribed verbatim into a manuscript and the information was analysed into emergent clusters. The clusters were then coded and categorized into themes. Quotes are given that best support the theme identified.

RESULTS

The statement and question that was posed to both learners and teachers was: The Minister of Education had made the following statement "Physical education must be re-introduced into schools" and "How do you feel about this?" The learners and teachers that participated in the focus group discussions expressed that they recognized the values and benefits of including physical education in the school curriculum, however, they had reservations.

"Physical education assists in a child's holistic development and this is important, but...."
(Teacher)

"Physical education is important for me as an outlet to let go of frustrations caused by studying as well as my personal circumstances"
(Learner)

Teachers acknowledged that participation in sport and physical activity encourages discipline, improves fine motor control and stimulates the brain.

"Sport is needed within the school because it instills discipline within the children and they know that if they misbehaved they would not be allowed to do something they loved" (Teacher)

"I can control my anger better during the day if I can get rid of it through something like sport. Running around the field helps get rid of the feeling of wanting to hit someone." (Learner)

The main themes relating to barriers for implementation included lack of time within the school timetable; a paradigm shift on the part of learners and teachers regarding physical education; inadequate facilities and a lack of foresight of the Department of Education.

Teachers reported that a vacuum had been created for many years and that children were not used to the idea of sport and physical education being

compulsory in schools. This idea was in part supported by the learners:

"This vacuum exists for many years, it is difficult to get the learners to accept that there is compulsory sport so you are sitting with a situation where you must almost threaten learners to something so you can evaluate them" (Teacher)

"I have been at this for four years and now all of a sudden they (teacher) want to make participation in sport compulsory. No way!!"
(Learner)

Facilities within schools in previously disadvantaged communities are limited and cannot accommodate a wide variety of physical activities and sporting codes:

"It's difficult in a school set-up like this because although we have a hall it is not big enough to do any sport in it as it's not conducive for ball games or anything requiring space" (Teacher)

"We need more sports in our school. At the moment it's not possible cause we don't have the space or proper grounds" (Learner)

The Department of Education creates barriers to physical education by not assisting in creating facilities that are conducive to sport. The requirements of the Education department places more emphasis on academic performance with little or limited emphasis on promotion of physical activity :

"You have got the full academic programme ... the minister also said he wants maths literacy and all those other little things included into the curriculum. I think there is no emphasis on sport in the curriculum and no real time for physical education in the school timetable" (Teacher)

"We must do all this research now as part of our subjects... where must we find time to do sport if we must go to the library to complete our assignments that has increased with this outcomes based education" (Learner)

"the role of physical education in the life orientation curriculum is not very clear and therefore no time and space is really made for it.." (Learner)

The new curriculum format called outcome based education at schools has placed an increased workload on teachers. Teachers have to fulfill multiple roles within the school that does not make it viable for physical education to be re-instated at present unless there is an increase in both human and financial resources.

"...The rich schools that can afford it, and can charge learners' large amounts of school fees, to employ physical education teachers. We don't have the money or the resources to employ physical education teachers" (Teacher)

"Teachers are so busy marking that they don't have time to properly supervise us for sport. Maybe they should have other teachers to do the sport."(Learner)

The teachers also made recommendations that could facilitate the re-introduction of physical education into this school. Teachers felt that physical education should become an examination-based subject with a theoretical component and a practical component. In order to assist schools to implement and sustain physical education programmes, appropriately trained physical education teachers should be appointed. In addition, opportunities should be created to train life orientation teachers to effectively provide physical education opportunities to learners.

DISCUSSION

A review conducted by Cale and Harris (2006) concluded that promotion of school-based physical activity interventions through physical education is a worthwhile effort. This statement is supported by both the learners and the teachers in the current study as they clearly identify the benefits associated with participation in physical activities. However, if a change is to be brought about in the approach to physical activity promotion and the inclusion of physical education in schools, all stakeholders need to work together. To achieve desired objectives of health promotion or social development, efforts must be co-ordinated and combined (Darlison, 2001; Spain 2000).

Richard and Banville (2006) highlighted the need for teachers to consider and listen to the voices of students when designing and modifying physical education curriculums. It is evident from the current

study that learners and teachers as key stakeholders in physical education at schools have a definite opinion. A similar study conducted by Amusa and Toriola (2008) concluded that "as consumers of education, the perceptions and expressions of students on the value of physical education and school sport should inform the revamping of quality physical education in South Africa". Van Deventer (2008) highlighted the need for co-ordinated efforts or partnerships to assist in training life orientation teachers to effectively implement physical education programmes. The department of education in South Africa thus needs a structured, cost effective approach to physical education and health education in schools that stipulates national objectives and detailed strategies to obtain the objectives of health promotion and social efficiency amongst others.

CONCLUSION

The benefits of physical education and physical activity at schools are well known. However, it is evident that the Department of Education should assist schools to build capacity relating to successful implementation of physical education programmes. A collaborative approach to implementation of physical education and physical activity at schools, that equitably involves all partners in the process and recognizes the unique strengths that each brings, will facilitate a positive introduction of physical education into schools facing challenges.

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