Teachers' perceptions of physical education within the K-6 personal development, health and physical education key learning area

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Teachers’ Perceptions of Physical Education within the K-6 Personal Development, Health and Physical Education Key Learning Area

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree

Doctor of Education

from

The University of Wollongong

by

Peter John Webster

Bachelor of Education (Physical and Health Education)

Master of Education

Faculty of Education
DECLARATION

I certify that work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for a degree in any other university or educational institution. This thesis contains entirely my work.

I certify that any help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged.

Signed

...........................................

Peter John Webster
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Teachers’ Perceptions of Physical Education within the K-6 Personal Development, Health and Physical Education Key Learning Area

Abstract

For many years educators have been concerned with the decline of physical education in schools. The concern for physical education has been outlined in articles by Alexander, Taggart and Medland (1993), Blanksby (1995), Crowley (1993), Evans (1993), Hickey (1992), Moore (1994) and Turnbull (1995) and was emphasised by the Senate Report on ‘Physical And Sport Education’, which was tabled in March 1994. This report made several recommendations that are of particular significance to physical education and the teacher. The recommendations focus on policy formulation, qualification of physical educators, minimum training levels, provision of support networks, the preservicing and inservicing of staff and the professional development of our educators. One of the criticisms of this report is that it is primarily based on anecdotal evidence of what is happening in schools. Therefore the purpose of this research study is to address this lack of research by investigating teacher perceptions’ of physical education within the K-6 PDHPE Key Learning Area (KLA) in New South Wales (NSW) primary schools.

The study drew information from a stratified random sample of 227 teachers in 37 NSW primary schools across Government, Catholic and Independent school systems. The survey instruments collected data that included the background variables such as gender, age, years of teaching, tertiary qualifications, pre-service training, professional development and teachers’ perceptions and practices in relation to primary physical education. The use of qualitative open-ended questions from the questionnaire provided additional insights into teachers’ perceptions,
attitudes and practices as these related to primary physical education in their schools.

The questionnaire survey allowed for data to be entered into the Statview SE statistics package. The survey information was analysed statistically for patterns of data, seeking linkages among activities, attitudes and outcomes and drawing informed conclusions. The open-ended questions were transcribed with coded findings used to describe the perceptions teachers have of physical education in NSW primary schools.

The findings of this study indicated that the teacher of physical education in NSW primary schools is most likely to be a generalist teacher who has undertaken only compulsory units of physical education during their pre-service education. Many of the teachers reported being dependent on previous personal knowledge and experience or the assistance and support of their peers in teaching their classes. The demographics of the sample highlighted that the primary teaching population is aging and there is a disproportionate percentage of female teachers to male teachers. Teachers emphasised the areas of fitness, games and sports skills and organised sport, while the areas of gymnastics, aquatics and adaptive physical education received minimal attention due to the limited expertise of teachers, legal liability issues and time restrictions. The resources and equipment available to teachers were generally considered adequate in the areas fitness, games and sports skills and organised sport, while those for gymnastics, aquatics and adaptive physical education were judged by teachers to be inadequate.

It was the intention of this research study to provide, from the teachers' point of view, a comprehensive picture of physical education in NSW primary schools. The research findings will be supplied to all relevant stakeholders, in anticipation of future development and enhancement of the learning environment for students and teachers in NSW primary schools.
The recommendations in Chapter Five have been developed to assist the teacher of physical education in NSW schools. The development of a common understanding of physical education needs to occur with the promotion of a physical education model rather than physical fitness or physical activity models. The pre-service education of primary school teachers must include mandatory units which are directly related to the content strands of the PDHPE syllabus, with further opportunities for teachers to specialise in physical education courses. Consultancy support is required to assist schools and teachers to implement the recently released syllabus and documents, with ongoing support on the development of an inclusive whole-school curriculum and focussing on lesson preparation prior to expanding into areas of safety and legal liability. All teachers should be provided with a series of school-based professional development opportunities and the development of an interactive website to enable teachers to expand their range of teaching and learning strategies, with identified groups of teachers targeted to ensure minimal students’ experiences across a range of physical education. A minimum standard of facilities and equipment to conduct physical education should be established, so that teachers can fulfil syllabus requirements. Finally all stakeholders need to work in unison to enable students in NSW primary schools to experience meaningful physical education.