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Natasha Kane

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The Effects of Physical Education Experiences on Homeschooled Students and Families

NATASHA KANE

Introduction

The number of homeschooled students in the United States continues to rise year after year. In 2011, 3.4% of the school-age population was being homeschooled, which was a jump from 2.9% in 2007 (HSLDA, 2013). A study done by the U.S. Department of Education conducted in 2013 reported that approximately 1.77 million students are homeschooled in the United States (United States Department of Education, 2013). Due to these substantial numbers, many students and families are having to find ways to fulfill certain requirements, one of which being physical education. Physical education is a mandated subject in public schools and many private schools; however, many homeschooled students often miss out on these structured and purposeful classes (The General Court, 2015). Fortunately, the recent passing of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) supports the role of physical education in the public school curriculum and acknowledges physical education as a part of a student's well-rounded education. Physical education is therefore significant to a child's overall educational experience. Consequently, the purpose of this study was to investigate how homeschooled students and their families are effected through participation in physical education experiences, including any behavior changes, health changes, increased learning, or derived enjoyment.

Literature Review

Physical activity and the desire to move are innate characteristics of young children (Haywood, Getchell, 2014). Physical education classes in public schools have evolved throughout the years to become a necessary and purposeful part of a child's education. The focus of physical education is not only on acquiring motor skills and developing fitness; it places an equal emphasis on the three domains of learning—the psychomotor domain, the cognitive domain, and the affective domain. Each of these domains affects a student equally and contributes to their development of becoming a well-rounded individual (Baumgarten & Langton, 2006). The psychomotor domain focuses on movement skills, fitness, and the overall physical activity experiences of physical education. Physical activity has many benefits, including strengthening bones/muscles, improving cardiovascular fitness, and more (PHIT America, 2015). The cognitive domain focuses on the knowledge of skills and tactics, movement concepts, and the overall understanding of physical education which acts as a catalyst for skill proficiency. Since the main goal of physical education is to lead students in the direction toward a lifetime full of physical activity, the cognitive domain is essential in helping them understand why this is important (SHAPE America, 2015). Lastly, the affective domain focuses on personal and social behavior, respect, sportspersonship, and attitude (Baumgarten & Langton, 2006). There are many methods that public school teachers use to teach students about these concepts, each of which helps promote their physical and mental well-beings. Section III in the General Law of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts states that physical education must be taught to all students in public schools to promote the physical well-being of each and every student (The General Court, 2015).

Context of Current Research Studies

With the increasing numbers of students being homeschooled, there must be sufficient benefits to a homeschool education compared to a public or private school education. In fact, a study conducted in 2009 by the Home School Legal Defense Association

(HSLDA) found that homeschooled students scored 34-39 percent higher than public school students on standardized achievement tests (HSLDA, 2009). The HSLDA, in this same study, researched the differences in approaches that homeschooling families take in regard to education; they found less than a 0.5% variance in achievement based on various approaches. The degree of structure, the amount of time spent per day in parent-directed learning activities, and the enrollment in a full-service curriculum are all different approaches that contributed to the 0.5% variance in achievement. This means that homeschooling can be very versatile and often yields similar results from student to student. Nonetheless, homeschooled students consistently outperform their public school peers. (HSLDA, 2009).

In terms of higher education, more than 78% of college admission officers indicated that homeschool graduates perform as well as, or better than, traditional high school graduates in university courses (Journal of College Admission, 2004).

A common myth regarding homeschooling is that it produces social misfits. Homeschooled students are actually exposed to a wider variety of experiences and situations than traditional public school students, whose environments are limited to a certain number of people of similar age and socioeconomic status and backgrounds (Romanowski, 2006). Additionally, homeschooled students typically have a more flexible and dynamic schedule allowing them the ability to learn real-life skills and social interaction.

The benefits to a homeschool education are plentiful, as seen through the growing number of families choosing this educational process over the traditional public or private school education. However, even with all of these benefits, there is still a need for structured and purposeful physical education classes and physical activity; homeschooled children lack the physical education classes and the physical activity options available in schools. There have been no known studies conducted to learn about the effects of physical education opportunities on this particular group. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate any effects in terms of behavior changes, enjoyment, learning, and any other impacts of physical education experiences on homeschooled students and their families.

Methods

Participants. Participants included six elementary-aged homeschooled students and three parents who participated in a physical education opportunity offered at a mid-sized liberal arts university in Massachusetts, Bridgewater State University. Four of the homeschooled students had been involved in the physical opportunity for five years, and two homeschooled students had been involved for one year. Data was collected during the spring of 2015.

Instruments. Data collection included 60-90 minute focus group interviews, surveys, and written artifacts (i.e. student pre- and post-assessments). Survey questions asked the following:

1. How long has your child been involved in the physical education experience?
2. What did your child enjoy most about the physical education opportunity?
3. Did you notice any changes to your child's overall attitude through participation with this opportunity (e.g., happier or more energetic)?
4. Did you notice any health changes in your child? (For instance, did he or she play the activities learned in class and continue to play at home?)
5. Do you believe your child became more skillful in the game lessons taught?
6. Do you believe your child became more skillful in the dance lessons taught?
7. Do you believe your child became more skillful in the gymnastics lessons taught?
8. Do you believe your child learned more about respect toward others?

Data from the interviews and surveys were qualitatively analyzed using open-axial coding over one semester (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Procedures. Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was granted before any contact with participants. Once approved, potential participants were sent an initial recruitment letter through email explaining the purpose of the study and what they could expect

as a participant. Next, parents of the homeschooled students were given a consent form to review and sign. Once parent consent was confirmed, they were asked to complete a survey which asked general questions about their experiences in a physical education opportunity offered at Bridgewater State University during the Fall 2014 semester. These survey responses were then sent back through email for analysis. In addition to parent involvement, parent participants were given a consent form through email for their child[ren] to participate in the study. Subsequently, the children were asked to be interviewed. Prior to each 60-90 minute interview, each child's oral assent was obtained. The children ranged from 7 to 11 years of age. Each interview was conducted at Bridgewater State University where a list of pre-developed open-ended questions were asked, as well as certain follow-up questions used to expand on their answers.

Results

Four main themes emerged as effects for the homeschooled students and for their families. Homeschooled student effects included 1) a derived enjoyment, and 2) learning in the psychomotor and cognitive domains; mutual benefits for the homeschooled students and their families included 3) respect toward others in the affective domain; and 4) development of a community of friendship.

Derived Enjoyment. The homeschooled students derived enjoyment from the physical education experiences. Parent interviews and survey responses about the homeschooled student benefits yielded the following responses: the students were "very energetic and eager to return to class," "after the first gymnastics class, my son asked me to take gymnastics," and, "they were so excited to go to it every week." The enjoyment that emerged with homeschooled students from the physical education experiences continued beyond the walls of the gymnasium, as well. Not only did the homeschooled students enjoy the games, dance, and gymnastics lessons that were taught, but they continued to practice what they had learned at home and enjoyed teaching others as well. One parent noted that she "found [her children] practicing dribbling a basketball in [a sporting goods store], and [she] didn't know they could do that!" Additionally,

another parent stated that "[her] children played some of the similar games at home, practiced dribbling the basketball, dragged the floor hockey equipment out of the garage to practice, etc." During an interview, one homeschooled student expressed her enjoyment by saying that she "came out [of the gymnastics lesson] and was like, 'Wooohoo!'"

Learning in the psychomotor and cognitive domains.

As a result of the physical education experiences provided, the students improved their overall skill proficiency within games, dance, and gymnastics in the psychomotor domain, as well increased their knowledge base regarding these activities within the cognitive domain. In terms of the psychomotor domain, analysis of parent and student interviews, as well as parent surveys, demonstrated their skill development. One parent noted that "it was hard to do the balance beam in the beginning, but [my daughter] excelled toward the end of the session." Additionally, another parent said, "I think they acquired new skills and skills they already knew were reinforced." After thorough review of recorded physical education class sessions, observation and analysis showed that the homeschooled students did indeed improve their overall skill levels, and some of them even noticed this themselves by expressing their content in learning how to do a headstand, which they previously said was "something [they] could not do." Survey responses indicated that parents agreed their homeschooled students had improved their skill levels, as demonstrated through a response of "yes" to all three skill-level improvement questions.

In terms of the cognitive domain, pre- and post- assessments given to the students during their lessons demonstrated their increased knowledge of movement skills and terminology in games, dance, and gymnastics. For example, during a square dance lesson, an informal teacher assessment was conducted at the beginning of the class when the homeschooled students were shown a video and asked if they could name the following three terms/movements: elbow swing, do-si-do, and promenade. Four out of six homeschooled students did not know all three terms. At the end of the lesson, a formal formative student assessment was given which showed a pic-

ture of the movement and asked the homeschooled students to write the term of the square dance movement underneath the picture. Six out of six homeschooled students knew all three terms. A sample assessment of these square dance terms can be seen below along with the answer key.

Respect toward others in the affective domain. Families of the homeschooled students also mutually benefited in two main ways. First, the homeschooled students learned more about respect toward others, which influenced their behaviors at home and outside of the gymnasium. One parent explained that “they realized the importance of good listening and respect to teacher and others because when other children do not listen, it isn’t fair to them.” Additionally, another parent stated that their “children were more obedient to follow instructions at home following the structured physical education classes.” Regarding respect toward others, some parents made comments about how their children “learned to appreciate the

different skill levels.” In these physical education classes, the homeschooled students learned more about inclusion and how to show respect toward others, which the parents saw as a mutual benefit because of their children’s subsequent actions at home, such as “being more able to follow instruction.” Throughout the lessons focused solely on inclusion, the homeschooled students had to work together to complete various tasks; in the process, they learned more about each other and how to care for one another despite individual differences. In a formal formative student assessment given at the end of one of these inclusion lessons, six out of six homeschooled students responded to both questions shown below by circling the smiley face, meaning they understood how to work together and even enjoyed solving problems and physical challenges as a group. This affective assessment can be seen below along with a sample student response.

Development of a community of friendship. Another mutual benefit for the homeschooled students and their families,

Name _____

Square Dance

Please label each of these square dance moves using the names in the box below.

Do-si-do Elbow Swing
 Promenade





Name ANSWER KEY

Square Dance

Please label each of these square dance moves using the names in the box below.

Do-si-do Elbow Swing
 Promenade



PROMENADE

EL-BOW SWING



DO-SI-DO

Sample assesment of square dance terms (left) an answer key (right).

aside from learning about respect toward others in the affective domain, was the development of a community of friendship. The physical education experiences created opportunities for the families involved to shape a community of friendship among each other. One parent shared that she thought “it was just nice to talk to other homeschooling parents about their experiences and stuff, too. People [they] don’t normally get to meet.” Furthermore, another parent said that they would “share with their friends some stuff that they were learning” since they “had friends that recommended this physical education opportunity.” A student expressed her positive opinion on creating new friends through this experience and said, “that sometimes I practice some of the new gymnastics skills that I learned with a friend.”

As a result of the physical education experiences, many benefits emerged; including the sense of enjoyment and the development of skills in multiple domains. Additionally, two mutual benefits for the homeschooled students and their families emerged; including learning how to show respect toward others, and finally, the creation of new friendships.

Conclusion

Results from this study indicated that physical education opportunities with homeschooled students create many positive effects. First, participation in meaningful physical education lessons within the content of games, dance, and gymnastics, may promote a sense of enjoyment which leads to physical activity being present in the homeschooled students’ lives. This study showed that a derived sense of enjoyment was noticeable when given the opportunity to engage in a physical education setting. Second, homeschooled students may increase their knowledge in the psychomotor and cognitive domains. This means that their skill levels will improve, their knowledge surrounding games, dance, and gymnastics will expand, and their overall understanding of the importance of physical activity will help promote it in their daily lives. Similar to previous studies (Journal of College Admission, 2004), the results of this study showed that homeschooled students perform just as well as public school students.

Not only did results indicate positive effects with the homeschooled students, but their families benefited mutually as well. Third, there may be an increase of learning in the affective domain.

Name _____

I like working together with everyone in my group. ☺ ☹

I did a good job working together with everyone. ☺ ☹

Name sample _____

I like working together with everyone in my group. ☺ ☹

I did a good job working together with everyone. ☺ ☹

Affective assessment (left) with sample student response (right).

Homeschooled students may learn more about inclusion and respect toward others; this may influence their actions at home, such as the ability to follow directions or listen to parental guidance. Fourth, the homeschooled students and their families may build a larger community of friendship. Being involved in physical education opportunities allows them to meet more people taking a similar approach to learning which could affect them positively through the creation of new friendships. Similar to previous studies, (Romanowski, 2006), this study showed that homeschooled students, who have the ability to take advantage of this physical education opportunity due to their style of schooling, were able to engage with other families and further develop their social interaction skills. Physical education opportunities for homeschooled students effect both the students and their families in positive ways.

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About the Author



Natasha Kane is graduating in May 2016 with a major in Physical Education Teacher Licensure K-12. Her research was completed during the Spring 2015 semester under the mentorship of Dr. Misti Neutzling (Movement Arts, Health Promotion, and Leisure Studies) and made possible with funding provided by BSU's Undergraduate Research Semester Grant. Natasha presented this research at the Society of Health and Physical Educators (SHAPE America) national convention in Minneapolis, Minnesota in April 2016. After graduation, she plans to work as a homeschool physical-education teacher in Parkland, Florida while pursuing her master's degree, and then becoming an elementary-school physical-education teacher.