Enhancers and Inhibitors of Teacher Change Among Secondary Physical Educators

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The purpose of this study was to explore enhancers and inhibitors that impacted 4 secondary physical education teachers to make changes in their programs. An interpretivist approach was used to understand the physical educators’ change process. Data were collected from document analyses, participant information sheets, interviews, discussion groups, and observing classes. Data were analyzed as 4 case studies using inductive analysis that examined emergent themes for each participant. A cross-case analysis highlighted the common enhancers and inhibitors for the teachers’ change process. The enhancers to change were the teachers’ visions and beliefs of physical education and support from principals, colleagues, and students. The inhibitors to change were district practices and policies and educational priorities. Gaining a better understanding of the teacher change process will help to design more effective professional development programs for secondary physical education teachers.

Key Words: influences, barriers, professional development

The release of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education [NCEE], 1983) prompted the beginning of the most recent teacher and teacher education reform movements in the United States. Education reform initiatives have asked teachers to attempt new methods of instruction and introduce new approaches to learning (Borko, Davinroy, Bliem, & Cumbo, 2000; Fullan, 1992; Rosenholtz, 1991). The educational reforms have specifically targeted areas of literacy, math, and science education (NCEE, 1983), though all curricular areas have been impacted. The reforms require teachers to gain new content knowledge and administrators to provide teachers “with the professional development and other support needed to carry out their [teacher’s] leadership role” (NCEE, 1983, p.31).
The National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future (NCTAF) released its own report titled, *What Matters Most: Teaching for America’s Future* (1996). This report focused on teachers as key players in the reform of the educational system and increased student learning (NCTAF, 1996). The report stated that “most U.S. school districts invest little in on-going professional development for experienced teachers . . .” (NCTAF, 1996, p. 40). The report indicated that this must be changed if our schools are to succeed.

**Changes in Physical Education**

The educational reform movement has also impacted physical education, even though it was not a focus of most education reform initiatives. Many physical education professionals have called for the reshaping of secondary physical education programs (Locke, 1992; Norton, 1987; Rink, 1993; Siedentop, 1992). One suggestion has been to change the type of curriculum offered in high schools and middle schools to better benefit students (Corbin, 1994; Locke, 1992; Siedentop, 1992). The adoption of Sport Education (Siedentop, 1994), a fitness curriculum (Corbin, 1994) and Teaching Social Responsibility through Physical Activity (Hellison, 1995) are examples of new curricular models promoted as more appropriate physical education curricula for youth than the traditional multiactivity curriculum.

Additional possibilities for change in secondary physical education have been prompted by new approaches to the delivery of physical education, the development and implementation of content standards, and revisions in assessment strategies. One new instructional approach is to implement the tactical approach to teaching games to secondary students (Griffin, Mitchell, & Oslin, 1997; Mitchell, Oslin, & Griffin, 2006). In this approach the students learn skills through focusing on learning the strategies or tactics of the games. The introduction of content standards for physical education in the United States by the National Association for Sport and Physical Education in 1995 (NASPE, 1995, 2004) was an additional change for the field. The standards serve as a guide to designing or redesigning a quality program (Lambert, 2000). Improvements in assessment strategies have been introduced to promote change. Authentic assessments “serve as the link between curriculum and instruction” (Tannehill, 1999, p. i). New methods of assessment have been suggested to help students take responsibility for their learning.

These are only a few of the changes suggested for secondary physical education teachers and many have not been implemented in any systematic way (Lambert, 2000; Rink, 1993; Vail, 1999; Ward, 1999a). The existence of programs with traditional activities/sports, instructional practices, and assessment strategies are easily found rather than the new approaches to physical education (Lambert, 2000; Vail, 1999). Traditional programs typically use the multiactivity curriculum, have units lasting from 5 to 10 lessons, and often evaluate students in isolated skills-testing situations. A better understanding of the teacher change process is necessary if we are to understand why teachers have not adopted some of these innovations.

**Teacher Change Research in Physical Education**

Previous research on teacher change in physical education has focused on several areas. The norms of school culture were investigated by Rovegno and Bandhauer (1997a). They identified five school norms that impacted a teacher’s change process.
when implementing movement education and knowing these norms helped facilitate teacher change. Pope and O’Sullivan (1998) explored a teacher’s professional culture as a new curriculum model, Sport Education, was introduced in physical education classes. The findings indicated that the school context influenced the teacher’s willingness to make changes to the content and delivery of the program.

Sparkes (1988) explored the micropolitics of schools and its influence on the teacher change process in physical education. He found that when teachers were not united in change efforts, it was hard for effective change to take place.

The school principal’s role in changing physical education teachers was studied by Faucette and Graham (1986). Principal support and empathy contributed to the success of teachers implementing change in their programs.

The Saber-Tooth Project (Ward, 1999a, 1999b) addressed the role of professional development in a curricular reform effort at the middle school level. The researchers concluded that a shared vision (purpose) was a key factor in teacher change (Ward, Doutis, & Evans, 1999). The Saber-Tooth Project also identified that if workplace conditions were not appropriate there was less chance for change to take place (Ward et al., 1999).

Teacher dispositions to change have also been studied. Cothran (2001) explored characteristics of physical education teachers who had successfully made self-initiated curricular changes in their physical education programs. Key characteristics of successful change were the use of teacher reflection, the power of the students, and teacher solicitation for help from those outside their classrooms (Cothran, 2001). Rovegno and Bandhauer (1997b) explored the psychological dispositions involved in a physical educator’s change process. They found five essential dispositions from their study: (a) possessing appropriate content knowledge to implement a change adequately, (b) accepting that change was difficult and often required asking for clarification, (c) implementing change practices aligned with sound philosophy and theory, (d) creating a willingness to explore change and new ideas, and (e) suspending judgment on new ideas. Teacher dispositions had to be understood before change was attempted and then fostered during the change process for the change to be implemented successfully.

Ennis (1994) explored the interdependence of beliefs and knowledge of physical educators and how these impacted curricular expertise. She found teachers typically made decisions on instructional methods and curricular approaches based upon their beliefs and knowledge. The strength of a belief impacted the ease or difficulty for teacher change. Ennis found that knowledge and beliefs were partners in determining curricular expertise of teachers.

In their study, Kulinna, Silverman, and Keating (2000) explored the alignment between teachers’ beliefs about physical fitness and activity and the content teachers taught. It had been hypothesized that teachers with strong beliefs in the importance of physical fitness would incorporate higher levels of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (MVPA) in their classes. However, the researchers found no relationship between teacher beliefs and teaching behaviors. Teachers with the strong beliefs were not able to act or chose not to act on their beliefs in terms of MVPA.

Given the previous research, there is still much to learn about the catalysts for positive teacher change among secondary physical education teachers. The factors found in previous research included the following: norms of school culture, school context, micropolitics of the school, the role of the school principal, importance of shared vision, workplace conditions, teacher dispositions, and teacher beliefs. These
factors have all impacted the teacher change process either positively or negatively. The purpose of this study was to better understand how these factors enhanced or inhibited teacher change. It is hoped that by gaining a better understanding of the factors that enhance or inhibit the change process for physical education teachers could lead to more effective professional development programs. This, in turn, might lead to more effective physical education programs for students. For this study, the term *teacher change* is defined as “teacher involvement in new and/or nontraditional approaches to curriculum or instruction.” That is, teachers used new or different curricular models, teaching strategies, class management strategies, and/or different activities in their programs.

**Method**

This study was conducted in a large, urban, Midwestern school district in the United States during the 2000-2001 academic year. The district included traditional middle schools and high schools, as well as several alternative high schools and middle schools that either highlighted a specific type of curriculum (e.g., college prep), a specific instructional delivery (e.g., Spanish immersion), or a specific instructional focus (e.g., foreign language). Students applied to attend these schools through a lottery system. Both traditional and alternative schools were represented in this study.

**Participants**

Four secondary physical education teachers from three middle schools and one high school volunteered to participate in this study. Once the teachers agreed to participate, confidentiality and anonymity procedures were explained to them individually. Informed written consent forms and appropriate human subjects procedures were obtained from the participants, school district, and University Institutional Review Board (UIRB). A description of each participant follows, with pseudonyms selected by each teacher.

*Billy*, an African-American male, was in his 4th year of teaching Physical Education II at an alternative high school. He had been involved in teaching or coaching for 25 years at the time of the study. He was one of two physical educators at the school. The focus of the school was on college preparation with an internship during the sophomore year. After he attended a workshop on the Sport Education model, he utilized this curriculum model in all the physical education classes he taught. The Sport Education model had been in use for 2 years at the time of the study with seasons for volleyball, basketball, badminton, and golf established each semester. His classes were divided into teams with roles for each player. He created the instructional tasks, he established behavior expectations, and created awards for the culminating tournaments/events.

*Maime*, a Caucasian female, was in her 2nd year of teaching at an alternative middle school. She had previously taught 9 years as a substitute teacher in a neighboring state. Her school’s focus was on competence in a foreign language and students were required to take 3 years of a foreign language. Maime had altered the structure of the program to incorporate formal instruction of skills and expanded the
offerings of the curriculum. When Maime arrived at the school, physical education was structured in an “open gym” setting with the primary activity being basketball and little instruction was provided. She felt a need to change this and taught skills related to sports/activities. Maime added 3-week units in soccer, flag football, recreational games (badminton, four square, table tennis), weight lifting, aerobics, basketball, volleyball, fitness activities, and softball to the curriculum. She team-taught the classes every day, though she assumed responsibility for planning every unit and her partner assisted her only with the instructional component.

Julie, a Caucasian female, was in her 4th year of teaching at the largest traditional neighborhood middle school in the district, having spent 6 years teaching aerobics at fitness/health clubs. She taught each unit with her male teaching partner sharing organizational, instructional, and discipline responsibilities during classes. The activities taught were tennis, soccer, basketball, and volleyball. Julie strengthened and varied the aerobic component of the sport skill classes planning 30 min of the 80-min block for aerobic activities, such as low-impact aerobics, Tae Bo, and jump rope activities. Sport skills were taught in the time remaining. Fitness testing was conducted throughout the 4.5- or 9-week sessions. Julie designed the aerobic activities based on the results of the fitness testing conducted at the beginning of each session.

Y, a Vietnamese male, was a 5th-year teacher at a traditional neighborhood middle school. Y and his male teaching partner had taught together for 4 years. Y discussed activity ideas with his partner, but he was the lead teacher the majority of time in their classes. The physical education units were 3 to 5 weeks long depending on the interest level of the students. There was limited outdoor space, so most of the activities were indoor activities. Y made two changes to the program. He implemented an attendance routine, which established assigned seats on bleachers for students rather than allowing standing in groups (student choice) to start each class. The second change was the introduction of new activities into the curriculum. He discovered gymnastic equipment (pommel horse, uneven bars, and a balance beam) and mats in a storage room, so instruction on these activities was added to the physical education curriculum. He also added curriculum units in floor hockey, basketball, volleyball, fitness testing, and Wiffle ball.

Additional Informants. Additional informants for this study were the current and retired teacher coordinators for health and physical education for the school district. Sally was in her 1st year as teacher coordinator, and Sadie had recently retired from the position. The principals at each school were also interviewed as part of the study.

Data Collection

Data were collected using the following methods: document analysis of district materials, participant information sheet, individual interviews, discussion groups, and school observations. A participant information sheet provided information related to years teaching physical education in present position, other teaching positions held, areas of certification, and changes made in the physical education program. This information was used as a starting point for the individual interviews, discussion groups, and observations.
Document Analysis. A document analysis was conducted on school district catalogues and curricular materials looking for information on district benchmarks and goals for high school and middle school physical education. These analyses were completed to determine if the district had prompted the participants’ change by exposure to new ideas or mandated change through curricular materials provided.

Individual Interviews. There was one semistructured interview held with each teacher at the school sites with participants receiving some questions before the interview. The purpose of the interview questions was to gain better insights on information provided on the participant information sheet.

The purpose of the interviews with the teacher coordinators was to establish the history of professional development in the district and to confirm present physical education practices and policies in the district. The purpose of the interviews with the principals was to clarify their views toward their physical education teachers and programs. Interviews with participants and the teacher coordinators were audiotaped and transcribed later. Handwritten notes were taken during interviews with the principals and notes were fully transcribed after the interview.

Discussion Groups. Four discussion groups (Salant & Dillman, 1994) were held with the teachers. Each discussion group had a different focus. The focus of the first meeting was to discuss the changes identified by the teachers in their interviews and to better understand the nature of positive influences when making these changes. The focus of the second meeting was to discuss the negative influences participants felt impacted them during their efforts to change their programs. A third meeting focused on the teachers’ views of professional development in the district, and discussed the results obtained from the PDNQ-PE (Conkle, 1997) given to 76 secondary physical educators in the district. The fourth meeting focused on suggestions for professional development days for secondary teachers in the district. These 2-hr discussion groups were held after school and were facilitated by the primary researcher. These sessions were audiotaped and later transcribed.

Observations. The primary researcher collected observational data by acting as a participant observer (Creswell, 1998) during three school days at each teacher’s school. A total of 54 physical education classes were observed. The purpose of these observations was to verify that the changes the participants identified, had, in fact, been implemented. Field notes were kept on these visits.

Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

Data were analyzed inductively using individual and cross-case analysis (Patton, 1990; Huberman & Miles, 1998). Key themes emerged from each case and the cases were examined for common themes. Data were organized using the computer software Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing Searching and Theorizing (NUD*IST 4.0, 1998) for qualitative research. All transcripts and notes were coded and categorized to develop themes for each participant. The district’s Web site and the Web sites for each school were reviewed for information that could help the researcher gain a better understanding of each school.

Trustworthiness for this study was established using four strategies (Glesne, 1999). Triangulation was used with the various sources of data (Glesne, 1999).
Member checking (Glesne, 1999) was used with all participants (teachers and informants). All received copies of their individual interview transcripts and/or case results to review for discrepancies. The search of the data for discriminant or negative cases for each theme was also implemented. According to Glesne (1999), the presence of negative cases helps to refine the working hypothesis of the study. There were several examples of discriminant cases and these served to illustrate the different influences on the teacher change process. Peer debriefing (Glesne, 1999) was used as the principal researcher met weekly with the second author to discuss data during the study.

**Results and Discussion**

This section of the manuscript provides a description of the factors that served to enhance or inhibit the teacher change process for the four teachers involved. Discriminant cases are discussed in appropriate sections.

**Enhancers to Change**

Two themes emerged across all cases that served to enhance the teacher change process for these teachers. These were beliefs and visions of physical education and teacher support (principal, collegial, and student) during the change process.

**Beliefs and Visions.** Beliefs and visions of physical education constituted a key theme that served to enhance the change process for all four teachers in this study. Billy, Julie, and Maime held strong beliefs concerning their profession and this was evident in the type of change each implemented. Y’s beliefs were not expressed as strongly and this influenced the changes he made.

Billy wanted to be in touch with new ideas and be current in his teaching. This led him to the Sport Education model.

Always looking for something new. You know I’m looking for something cutting edge that is maybe just out there waiting to be tried. . . . Make sure to show it to me. Let me see it, so I’m looking for change. I welcome change. (Discussion Group #3)

Julie’s beliefs toward physical education helped her to introduce activities like Tae Bo and step aerobics. She believed “you have to have physical education—you have to have it in your life. It’s a necessity as far as healthy habits and keeping healthy throughout the rest of your life.” This view helped her look for exciting aerobic activities in her lessons to keep her students engaged.

Maime knew what a good program should be and was determined she would create that in her school.

I had excellent teachers in my college level and they told me what a program should be about. When I got here that’s not what my program was about! I was determined that we were going to have a good program. (Discussion Group #1A)

She introduced new activities and procedures that provided for a better physical education curriculum and experience for her students.
The teachers commented that their knowledge and beliefs of good physical education prompted them to attempt changes in their programs, and teaching practices. This confirms earlier work suggesting teacher beliefs impact the change process (Borko et al., 2000). Parajes (1992) suggested a relationship between teacher beliefs and “planning, instructional decisions, and classroom practices” (p. 326). In physical education, Ennis (1994) explored the interdependence of beliefs and knowledge of physical educators and she showed how teachers’ beliefs impact the change process. The results of the study contradicted the work of Kulina et al. (2000) as three teachers’ beliefs did lead to their making changes and the changes aligned with their beliefs. They were able to incorporate their beliefs into their teaching.

**Support.** The support the teachers received was the second key theme that served as an enhancer for the change process. Several subthemes of support came from principals, colleagues, and students. Several teachers viewed their principal as supportive of the physical education program and their efforts to improve the program. Billy’s previous principal had challenged him to find a new curricular approach and prompted him to attend the Sport Education workshop. His principal had provided support and encouragement as he made changes to the program. “He realizes the value of it [Sport Education]. Is very supportive of it, the things we do there, want to do there. I think he perceived it as part of the overall picture [curriculum]...” (Discussion Group #3). Maime’s principal told her he wanted to have a different (i.e., better) program. He provided emotional and financial support as she attempted changes in the program. His comments to parents encouraged Maime to persevere with changes:

> I mean he pops his buttons when he comes in with the parents and there’s a lot of activity going on and he can say, “Now this is a program, and look what’s going on here.” You know you can tell he’s proud of that. (Discussion Group #3)

Collegial support from other teachers served as a second subtheme, providing encouragement and ideas in their efforts to improve. As Julie explained,

> I also talk to the dance teacher and she gives me ideas. And our strings teacher, . . . we did Tae Bo together and she’s given me some tapes and we’ve done things outside the school to give me some more ideas and make some changes in the aerobics program.

Teaching partners for some of the participants were also identified as supporters of the change process. Julie noted,

> I don’t think either of us is afraid of criticism from the other. You know we might suggest, “instead of doing this you might want to try this.” And he’s been teaching for 31 years, so I’ve learned a lot from him. I try to keep updated and bring new things his way too so he can also be up to date.

Student support was a third subtheme that emerged to impact the teacher change process. Billy’s students talked to other teachers about their physical education class, “So I guess hearing enough of that they realize we’re doing something down here...
that is different or something that generates these young peoples’ interest because they’re talking about it in a positive manner.” Maime commented on student support when she said,

... if the students had bucked me and said, “We hate this; we don’t want to do this; why can’t we have our open gym thing?” I think due to my frustrations, I would have conformed. ... But they didn’t do that. They were like, “Wow, this is cool! We’re doing something different.” (Discussion Group #1A)

Not all of her students reacted positively initially and complained when they had to run, but “Just seeing the reaction on their faces, their want, their desire to get better fitness—that sparks me to keep going!”

There were discriminant cases for each of the subthemes identified. Julie’s principal often served as a barrier in her efforts to improve the aerobics component of her program. Julie submitted requisitions for equipment, but often did not receive it. As her comments indicated, “The problem is, getting things purchased around here is very difficult and the thing I’ve struggled with is getting signatures from my Principal.” Even though the principal provided vocal support to Julie, the financial support and support for the subject was not evident during this study.

Y and Maime were the discriminant cases for collegial support. Y didn’t express a strong need for collegial support from outside his department. He had participated in a district mentorship program during his 1st year of teaching and observed another physical education teacher at a different middle school. He did not collaborate with many other teachers to gain new ideas, but used the Internet instead. Maime’s teaching partner was a barrier for her change process. He operated an “open gym” as physical education class with little instruction and the attitude of “busy, happy, and good” (Placek, 1983) before she arrived. He agreed to make changes only if Maime completed all the planning for the new instructional units. As she said, “If I want to do it, that’s fine, as long as I take responsibility for the entire planning. That makes it difficult. It’s time consuming. It wears me down, but I keep going!” (Discussion Group #2)

The discriminant case for student support was Y. He had little student support for his attendance procedures. In observations of his classes, students were often not sitting in their assigned spots, nor did they appear to be supportive of his program. He often dealt with behavior and discipline problems in his classes. The following field note reflects the students’ lack of support:

Second period—Y doesn’t have control of his class today. His students aren’t listening to him and he seems to have a short fuse with them today. Dealt with problems in front of class not off to the side.

The importance of principal support in the teacher change process had been highlighted in previous research (Fullan, 1992; Faucette, 1987; Faucette & Graham, 1986). However, the involvement of the principal in a physical education innovation has not always been a necessary component for change to occur (Cothran, 2001; Pope & O’Sullivan, 1998). Yet in studies where principals were involved in an innovation, they provided a positive impact, whereas a lack of principals’ support tended to result in a negative impact on the change process (Faucette, 1987; Faucette & Graham, 1986). The supportive relationship of principals in this study
affirms earlier research on workplace conditions (Doutis & Ward, 1999) and served to confirm the power of the instructional leader (i.e., principal) during the teacher change process. (Faucette, 1987; Faucette & Graham, 1986).

The importance of collegiality relative to teacher change has been addressed in the literature (Doutis & Ward, 1999; Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991; Rosenholtz, 1991, Sparkes, 1988). If school conditions did not provide support among colleagues, change was unlikely (Doutis & Ward, 1999; Fullan & Steigelbauer, 1991; Sparkes, 1988). The results of this study confirmed the importance of collegiality in the change process. However, change did occur in this study without collegial support, which differed from previous findings regarding workplace conditions (Doutis & Ward, 1999; Rosenholtz, 1991). The role of teaching partnerships in school physical education programs is problematic (Doutis & Ward, 1999; Sparkes, 1988; Stroot, Collier, O’Sullivan, & England, 1994). When physical education departments are not united in the change effort, the possibilities for change are reduced (Doutis & Ward, 1999, Sparkes, 1988). Despite this, Maime implemented change without direct collegial support, but it made her working conditions more difficult.

Student support in the form of gaining and maintaining the cooperation of students may be the first priority for many high school teachers (Siedentop, Doutis, Tsangaridou, Ward, & Rauschenbach (1994). Cothran (2001) also highlighted the power of students in her study of successful curricular change. Findings in the current study confirmed the earlier research. Student behavior sometimes served to initiate change, but at other times served to sustain the change process. Student support was key to the teacher change process.

**Inhibitors to Change**

There were two themes that emerged as inhibitors to the teachers’ change process. These were district practices and policies and educational priorities. Data from the teacher coordinators for health and physical education provided the district’s perspective on these inhibitors.

**District practices and policies** were inhibitors to teacher change in this district. The lack of professional development for physical educators in the district was perceived as a key barrier to teacher change. An analysis of four professional development catalogs for the school district found no workshops related to issues of concern for physical educators. The only professional development opportunity listed was the opportunity to participate in the discussion groups for this study. The retired teacher coordinator provided a historical perspective of the professional development practices, “We used to meet on a regular basis with the elementary physical educators. That was not the case with the middle and high school.” The participants might have been exposed to new ideas and approaches if the district had planned professional development opportunities on a regular basis for all physical educators.

The teachers felt the district had not met their professional development needs because there had only been 2 days specifically designed for physical education in the last 3 years. Both days addressed the Sport Education model and had been organized via a local university. There were four professional development days scheduled by union contract annually. However, principals required their
teachers to stay at their buildings, even when the workshop was not related to physical education. Julie’s comment reflected the other teachers’ feelings when she suggested, 

. . . on our professional development days let us go someplace where it’s just physical education, and where I know I can really take something and use it on a day-to-day basis, whether it’s dealing with discipline or just different ideas, cooperative games, things you can add into units to motivate students. I think that would be a big help. (Discussion Group #1A)

Armour and Yelling (2004) addressed the need for continuing and relevant professional development (CPD) in physical education, a concern also expressed by the four teachers in this study. Effective professional development for all teachers seems to be key to current educational reform (Guskey, 2002), and such opportunities must be designed for the needs of the teachers rather than with the idea of “one size fits all” (NCTAF, 2003, p.28). The limited professional development opportunities were an inhibitor for all four teachers. They overcame this obstacle and made some changes to their programs, but without prompts from the school district.

*Educational priorities* of the district were noted as an inhibitor to change by the four teachers. A subtheme was the marginalization of physical education by the school district. A major focus of the school district during the study was to improve student academic performance on the state proficiency tests, because the district was in the state’s “academic emergency” category. Both teacher coordinators emphasized this point in their interviews. Sally noted, “If I do have them up here at the Professional Development Center, I can’t just talk about physical education things. This is the dictate this year. I have to talk about all the content area integration.” Sadie noted, “Proficiency testing is driving what [professional development] we do.”

The four teachers saw this focus on a narrow academic agenda as negatively impacting their programs. Billy felt this concentration on improvement of academic performance affected every curricular area and every teacher’s efforts to make change, as he commented:

Right now because of the emphasis on the proficiency tests, unless you are making a change that is going to make them [students] better on the test, they aren’t even going to want to hear about it. (Discussion Group #2)

Creating exposure to new curricular models, instructional approaches, or class management systems were not priorities for the district. The pressure of the proficiency tests did hamper the focus of change for the four teachers, but each overcame this inhibitor to some degree to implement changes for their programs.

*The status of physical education* emerged as a barrier to change. The participants felt physical education was considered as, “bottom of the barrel” (Maime), a “dumping ground” (Billy and Y), and a “stepchild of the school” (Julie) by some school and district officials. The low status of physical education within the district produced the following impacts: very little professional development was offered, grade report changes were proposed on the interim reports, changes in the grading system were proposed, and the order for scheduling students into physical education.
Julie’s principal notified the Unified Arts teachers they no longer needed to enter interim grades and proposed a pass/fail grading system for these classes. This reflected the status these classes held. Julie noted, “Well that makes it look like those classes don’t matter or that they are not important.” Maime felt the low status of physical education impacted how students were scheduled into her classes, “We are the last! Everybody [academic classes and other Unified Arts] else and then us.” (Discussion Group #3) This resulted in some unequal class sizes for her during the day.

The marginalized status of physical education is not a new phenomenon (O’Sullivan, 1989; Sparkes, Templin, & Schempp, 1990; Stroot et al., 1994). If physical education had been viewed with a higher status, more professional development might have been offered and these experiences could have created more opportunities for more teachers to explore new ideas in programming. However, all four teachers attempted to implement change and were successful to different degrees despite physical education’s not being an educational priority in the district.

**Conclusions**

These teachers desired to make change and they were successful with little encouragement from the district. The teachers felt good about their change efforts and how they were positively impacting their students.

There are three conclusions that can be drawn from this study. The first is that beliefs about teaching and the profession greatly impact the enthusiasm and willingness of teachers to try new approaches and to sustain any changes made. These beliefs impact the changes teachers are willing to make. The implication is that designers of effective professional development programs will need to help teachers to examine their current beliefs pertaining to teaching and/or physical education as part of the professional development process. Teachers’ own beliefs will impact the effectiveness of the professional development offered and therefore these beliefs must be examined and addressed as part of professional development programs.

The second conclusion is that support from colleagues, principals, or students is influential for teachers to make and sustain change. The degree to which teachers are likely to make change and sustain these changes over time is influenced by the support they receive from the above groups. An implication from this is that effective professional development programs will need to incorporate support mechanisms for teachers attempting change. An essential component of an effective professional development program is support from colleagues. Meetings with teachers undergoing change need to become key components of professional development programs. Teachers helping teachers is a key element of quality professional development (Armour & Yelling, 2004). Support may come in a variety of forms, but support of teachers under going change is an essential component in professional development. A second support mechanism would mean informing the school principal about professional development programs and attempting to include him or her in these programs. The support of principals during a teacher’s change process can be beneficial to the teacher, but it need not be present for teachers to make change. The support of students is also beneficial in order for change to
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occur and be sustained. Cothran (2001) discussed the “power of students” (p. 77) and their role in the change process. Student positive support helped change to take place for three of the participants (Billy, Maime, Julie) in this study. However, Y was the participant whose students’ lack of support did not enable him to sustain some of his changes or consider making more changes in his program. Student support can impact the change process of teachers.

The third conclusion is that all teachers deserve professional development opportunities to help improve their teaching or programs. “Strong professional development programs must be embedded in every fabric of public education (NCTAF, 2003, p. 28) regardless of subject matter content. The implication is that all content area teachers (and their professional organizations) need to investigate and promote potential effective professional development opportunities to district personnel, so that the needs and interest for such programs are made known. Exploration of possible funding opportunities such as the Carol White Physical Education for Progress Act (PEP; OSADFS, 2006) can provide the financial means for designing effective professional development programs. But such professional development must be part of the formalized system of career support throughout the district.

This study examined how enhancers and inhibitors contributed to the teacher change process of four physical education teachers. Additional studies that address the emotional dimensions of teacher change (McCaughtry, Martin, Hodges-Kulinna, & Cothran, 2006) hold promise in helping us to better understand the workplace conditions of physical educators and how teaching and changes to teaching are contemplated by teachers. Beginning teachers often have different concerns than experienced teachers, so the stage of one’s career might have an impact on the teacher change process. Career stage and the impact this has on the teacher change process is an area to be addressed by future research. A final area for future research relates to gaining a better understanding of the relationship between teacher beliefs and an individual’s change process. Such a study might examine where in the sequence of the teacher change process beliefs and attitudes fit best to bring about the most effective change in teachers to positively impact physical education programs.

References


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