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Perceptions of Classroom Physical Activity

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ABSTRACT

Background: Few children meet the physical activity (PA) recommendations. One new and innovative way schools have tried to improve this is through classroom PA. Studies have found that incorporating opportunities for classroom PA can not only increase PA but also increase children's time on-task as well as academic scores. However little is known about teachers' perceptions of classroom PA. **Purpose:** The purpose of the study was to determine teacher's perceptions regarding classroom PA. **Methods:** Four school districts in a metropolitan Midwest City were recruited to participate. Twelve teachers from each district took part in a semi-structured interview over the phone (n=48). Data were analyzed using the process of immersion/crystallization. **Results:** Factors from all five levels of the socio-ecological model impacted teachers' perceptions. **Conclusion:** Results provide preliminary evidence that teachers have a positive view of classroom PA. Future strategies to improve the use of classroom PA will be discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Regular participation in PA is an essential part of any child's life to obtain optimal health and development. PA participation has been associated with numerous health benefits (WHO, 2011). However, less than half of children in the U.S. meet the PA recommendations of achieving 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous PA every day (Troiano, et al., 2008). One setting that can serve as a primary opportunity to improve children's PA are schools (Katz, et al., 2005; Peterson & Fox, 2007). A recent development in PA offerings within schools is classroom PA programs. Numerous classroom PA programs have been developed for teachers and several have been found to increase children's PA, on-task behavior, and academic outcomes (e.g., reading, math, and spelling scores) (CDC, 2010).

An area that has received little attention though is the perception of teachers related to implementing classroom PA. This information could help guide future intervention strategies to promote PA. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to determine teacher's perceptions regarding classroom PA.



METHODS

This was a qualitative collective case study conducted within the boundaries of teachers employed in Omaha metro school districts. Staff from four school districts (n=48) were recruited to complete semi-structured interviews based on the socio-ecological model (SEM) (Dahlberg & Krug, 2002). Data were analyzed using the process of immersion/crystallization (Borkan, 1999).

RESULTS

Major themes collected from the interviews were categorized according to SEM constructs.

Individual

- A majority of teachers utilized classroom PA, would like to incorporate more PA, and felt the biggest barriers to implementing were classroom management and time.

"Um time and definitely space, I don't have a lot of room for my kids to move around."

- A majority of teachers were interested in learning more about classroom PA especially to gain more ideas and research knowledge.

"I mean you get the sense that the movement is important but just how important and why ... I could use more information on."

Interpersonal

- Teachers primarily reported informally collaborating with peers about classroom PA.
- Teachers thought the best way to improve collaboration would be by adding the subject to existing meetings and working with teachers within their grade.

"I think getting together once a month to talk and get ideas would be nice, like a round table."

Organizational

- Over half of teachers believed their school administration promoted and supported the use of classroom PA.

"She understands. She was a second grade teacher for a very long time and she gets it...she gets that you just got to do what you got to do to, you know, to get through to the kids."

- A majority of teachers believed their district would have positive feelings regarding classroom PA, but were not able to definitively state the districts support.

"Um I mean I think they have a positive view of it."

RESULTS

Community

- Over half of teachers believed community organizations could support classroom PA through resources and programming.

"GoNoodle was a perfect example where somebody from the community came, it was probably 15 minutes, but I went away with something I will continue to use in my classroom."

Policy

- A majority of teachers were not aware of any district, state, or national guidelines regarding classroom PA.

"I mean I know they have professional developments on it but it's not like a policy or requirement, everything is optional."

DISCUSSION

Results indicate many teachers are not incorporating as much PA as they would like to. Potential solutions for helping teachers overcome barriers and increase classroom PA include:

1. Increase teacher's knowledge of pre-existing programs. If teachers can learn about classroom PA without spending large amounts of time researching or creating activities they may be more likely to implement PA.
2. Encourage district administration to show support for classroom PA. If teachers know their district supports their decision it could enhance their desire to implement.
3. Train teachers on the impact of classroom PA in regards to on-task behavior and improved academic performance. Teachers who see classroom PA as a benefit rather than a deterrence to their students learning process may be more likely to implement PA.

These findings in combination with a quantitative survey have led to the creation of "Brain Blasters", an online sharing resource for Omaha metro teachers that includes videos, research, and programming resources. This resource is currently being piloted to evaluate its effectiveness.



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