

# Exploring Late Career Physical Education Teachers' Professional Development and Changes.



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## Introduction

### PEP Grant Program:

The *Carol M. White* Physical Education for Progress (PEP) program, introduced in 2001 under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, has enhanced K-12 physical education (PE) programs across the country through grants used for training in health and wellness-based physical education methods and the acquisition of state-of-the-art PE equipment and facilities.

### Theoretical framework:

A significant amount of research into school reform and teachers' professional development has been conducted; however, not much research has been conducted in the physical education field. Lawson (1986) categorized three phases through which teachers are socialized into the profession: acculturation, professional socialization, and organizational socialization. Guskey's (2002, 2007) Teacher Change Model which stated that professional development programs that are embraced and "owned" by teachers facilitate 1) change in classroom practices, 2) change in teachers' attitudes and beliefs, and 3) change in the learning outcomes of students. and multidimensional view of change (Fullan, 1992, 2001) and socialization theory (Lacey, 1977; Zeichner and Gore, 1990) provide a theoretical framework for examining the process of school reform and professional development for teachers in the physical education field.

### Purposes:

School reform designed to simply put the latest policy or educational initiative in place cannot bring about real systemic innovation. However, in spite of this series of effort educational innovations, educational reform has not led to significant improvements in our schools (Fullan, 2001, 2007). The purpose of this study was To examine the process of professional development and teacher change in relation to curricular and instructional reform through the introduction of *Siedentop's* Sport Education Model.

## Methods

A total of seven physical education late career teachers, 5 female teachers and 2 male teachers, at Liberty middle school and Pioneer junior high school in the U.S. Midwest participated in this study. Five of the teachers were in the final stages of their career and two others had 20 years of experience of teaching in physical education. This study is part of a series of research projects that focused on physical education curriculum reform in one school district with support from the *Carol M. White* Physical Education Program (PEP). Over the project period, all teachers worked with a "PEP team" to implement the best evidence-based practices into their physical education curriculum. The main method was interviews. All seven teachers were interviewed four times individually, for this study in particular. Researcher conducted a total of four interviews for all seven teachers through four different stages. During the academic year, the "PEP team" observed classes and we also had scheduled meetings with the teachers to discuss their progress and assist them according to their expressed needs.

## Data Analysis

The data analysis consists of two stages. The first stage involves an attempt to describe the sample. This is accomplished using descriptive statistics. The sample is described in terms of such variables as year of career.

The second stage is qualitative data analysis. The open-ended items (e.g. class observations, informal interviews, and teachers' journals) and formal interview data are analyzed using the constant comparative method. The challenge is to reduce the data, identify emerging themes, and extract the essence of what the data reveal (Patton, 2002).

All formal interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim, typed into MS-Word, labeled by participants' name and date, and categorized by theme. The other qualitative data (informal interviews and observation notes) were typed into MS Word. Themes are defined as units derived from patterns such as "conversation topics, vocabulary, recurring activities, meanings, feelings, or folk sayings and proverbs" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p.131). The data analysis was ongoing during the investigation and then continued after the Sport Education seasons were over.

### Observational Data:

The researcher conducted classroom observations of the seven teachers. After the teachers were introduced to the curricular models being focused upon (Sport Education), they were observed in the gymnasium as they implemented the models through instructional units. Nonparticipant observations were conducted by one of the members of the research team, using an observation guide. Two or three observations per week were conducted while the teachers were teaching their lessons. The observation guide lists elements specific to each model that the researchers should look for and take notes on concerning the teachers' behavior, class procedure, and instruction.

### Trustworthiness:

Researcher used inductive analysis, and trustworthiness (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) was supported through member checks and triangulation of various data sources.

## Results

### Understanding and perceptions with regard to the PEP Grant and PE curriculum reform:

- Teachers at both schools stated that they were open to change, excited about the PEP Grant, and expected it to improve their program. However, they did not cite specifically how the PEP Grant could improve the PE programs.
- Teachers at both schools were confident that they would fully implement the SE curriculum. The Liberty teachers followed through and made several advances in implementing the curriculum while the Pioneer teachers made few advances.
- Even though all of the teachers admitted that they lacked knowledge of the SE model, they reported that they had previously implemented it in their classes.

### What factors, both personal and institutional, influence the process of school PE program reform and teacher change?

- All of the teachers concurred that the SE workshop provided new ideas and improved their pedagogical knowledge.
- All of the teachers recognized the benefit of the SE curriculum model (i.e. students' responsibility, leadership, and actual involvement), but they agreed that implementing the new model took too much time at the beginning of the season.
- All of the teachers concurred that the PEP Grant project provided a chance for the PE teachers to collaborate and improve their communication.

### What has been the impact of learning the Sport Education Model on the two PE programs and its teachers?

- The teachers concurred that the SE curriculum model was a great fit for both PE programs even though implementing it presented challenges and resulted in a hybrid form of the model, more so at Pioneer than Liberty. The Liberty teachers demonstrated more elements of SE than did the Pioneer teachers. Also, they noted that students may be hesitant to comply with a new curriculum, it was time consuming to implement, and it required strict adherence to the SE guidelines. Such adherence was not observed on a daily basis.

### In what ways did the two schools' PE teachers change their practices and beliefs? And what are the ways in which they did not change their practices and beliefs?

- They concurred that the PEP Grant project provided an opportunity for them to improve and refocus their pedagogy.
- The teachers' experienced some stress from the curriculum change process and it did not change their beliefs.
- Although SE was presented in a hybrid form, they all acknowledged that the SE curriculum model was useful for both teachers and students.

## Conclusions

### Theme one: The late career teachers' excessive self-confidence about change and THE difficulty of the process for them.

During the first year of the PEP Grant project, most of the PE teachers expressed similar ideas such as: "I am very excited that..." and "We are ready for the project" and "I am not nervous; I very well know about the SE curriculum model; we used it." However, these expressions showed excessive self-confidence. This means that the change process has a risk of failure. The researchers recognized that there was a risk of failure for the change process both for early career and late career teachers. However, the research team trusted teachers' confidence after the initial individual interviews. This trust may have been a fatal mistake or significant misjudgment. The problem under the first theme may have been the researchers' true understanding of the schools' culture, the teachers' motivation for change, their approach to pedagogy, and the character of each school's PE programs.

### Theme Two: Sport Education and change.

*Full and Cafeteria style approach.* The Liberty teachers stated that the new SE curriculum model was not much different from what they had done in the past. However, they maybe pretty understood the traditional SE model they tried to use the full version of the model and delivered units that were congruent with the concept of *Siedentop's* (1994) SE model.

*Watered-down style approach.* The Pioneer School teachers took a watered down approach to the SE model. At the beginning of the first season, the Pioneer School teachers stated that the new SE curriculum model was similar to what they had done in the past. However, they totally misunderstood and misinterpreted the traditional SE model. The Pioneer teachers said that they tried to apply the new SE curriculum model to their class but their classes were no different from the traditional sporting units.

### Theme Three: Communities of Practice, Reflection, and Commitment: Real and Unreal.

As one teacher stated. "I think it's great being able to work with them [other teachers] and I believe that everybody has really jumped in wholeheartedly at doing it and likes what's going on. I feel like we all kind of blend together and we all, you know...we can get upset with one another and we can, you know, not like this, but we will work it out and go on." In contrast, while the junior high teachers claimed they were "on the same page," there was dependence on the university team to provide lessons and direction for the season.

### Theme Four: organization socialization and Professional Development

Most late career teachers said that the PEP Grant project provided a chance for all the PE teachers to get together and improve their communication – again more so at Liberty than Pioneer. As one teacher from Liberty stated, "We have all worked very closely, even though everybody is taking on different jobs." One late career teacher at Pioneer thought that the PEP Grant had been an easy process and she showed strong self-confidence in using this project. "It hasn't been difficult at all. It does take up a little, no let me just rephrase that, a lot more time than the research team implied to us."

Finally, this also suggests, as Griffin and Patton (2008) found in their study, that change involves risk – some teachers are more willing than others to "risk" a change in routine. We found that some teachers (Liberty) are more comfortable with the uncertainty that goes along with learning new approaches to teaching while others prefer more certainty by holding onto routine over innovation (Pioneer).

## References

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