

Urban High School Physical Education: A Synthesis of the Literature in Academic Journals (2003–2013)

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With increasing worldwide migration, and the United States experiencing growth in major cities, greater numbers of diverse students are predominantly featured in urban schools. Physical education is an area of school curriculum that experiences the direct impact of urban diversity. The purpose of this literature-based study was to examine research that helps inform physical education curriculum and prepare teachers for professional engagement in schools. Data collection involved the online ProQuest Physical Education Index database of a southern university's library to search articles from 2003–2013. Four phases were used in data collection. Phase I concerned selection of English-only peer-reviewed articles, yielding 112 articles. Phases II and III involved use of constant comparison method (Keener & Bargerhuff, 2006) to determine the relevance of articles to the study. Of the 112 articles, researchers found 26 articles to analyze for emergent themes (phase IV). Findings of the study revealed the following themes: limited research on urban physical education, impact of

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professional development on urban teachers, urban youth and access to physical activity environments, physical activity levels of urban youth, personal and emotional paradigms, and curricular programming and perspectives. The article concludes with suggestions for change to curricular offerings in physical education in urban contexts.

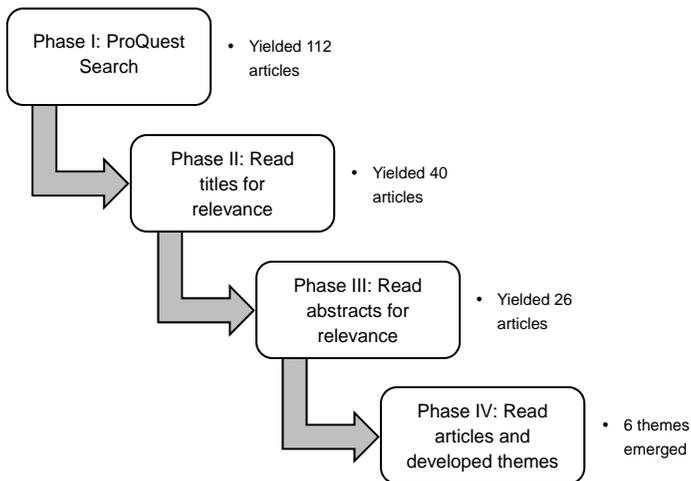
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In the United States, children and youth living in urban areas are exposed to risk factors such as violence, substance abuse, and criminal activity (Wright, Li, Ding, & Pickering, 2010). In urban school districts, students are at an increased risk of academic failure and often have low achievement on test scores (Anyon, 1997). Urban high schools have unique characteristics that include overcrowding, limited resources, and a diverse population of students with a variety of needs and issues related to violence, low income, and single-parent families (Montalvo, 2007). Physical education programs in urban areas often have limited space, overcrowded gyms, limited or no appropriate gym or field space, a lack of equipment (Cothran & Ennis, 1999), diverse learners requiring individualized attention from teachers, classes that often meet for limited times (once a week for 50 minutes), and students that typically enroll in the required one or two physical education or health classes during their entire four-year high school. Often, teachers are not prepared to teach in urban environments (Montalvo, 2007) as many colleges and university teacher education programs and student-teaching placements take place in suburban school districts. Training in urban environments is often not included in a teacher preparation program. As can be seen, there are many challenges that face urban school physical education programs. The purpose of this study was to synthesize the literature in peer-reviewed academic journals focusing on urban high school physical education.

Method

Data collection involved utilization of the online ProQuest Physical Education Index database of a southern university's library to search for articles that dated from 2003–2013. ProQuest is a popular online academic journal database and has a specific database search called Physical Education Index, which provides citations and abstracts on a wide variety of content, ranging from physical education curricula, to sports medicine, to dance. Records are indexed and classified from peer-reviewed journals, report literature, conference proceedings, trade magazines, patents, articles from the popular press, and many other publications. The authors did not want to search a few journals, so they chose to use a broad database search instead, which gave them access to many different journals and articles focusing on the topic of urban high school physical education. The authors decided to use ProQuest because it is a popular, broad, and very comprehensive search engine. Data collection involved four phases, which are represented in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Phases of Research Method



In phase I, the search was limited to English-only peer-reviewed articles dating from 2003 to 2013. Search terms were the following keywords: “urban or inner city,” “physical education,” and “high school or secondary.” Inclusion criteria were any peer-reviewed articles written in English from 2003 to 2013 found in the Physical Education Index related to the topic of urban high school physical education. The exclusion criteria were any articles not related to the topic of urban high school physical education. Other articles excluded were articles written in a language other than English, articles written before 2003, articles which were not peer-reviewed, and articles not found in the Physical Education Index. One of the two researchers involved in this study conducted this initial Internet-based search. The Physical Education Index search yielded 112 articles. The researcher who conducted the search then printed off the titles of all 112 articles and shared them with the second researcher.

In an effort to make sure no other articles were missed by using only ProQuest Physical Education Index, both researchers conducted further database searches. The researchers conducted searches using two other databases: the university library data search, and EBSCO Education Research Complete. The researchers used the search terms “urban or inner city,” “physical education,” and “high school or secondary” and limited the search between the years of 2003 and 2013 to peer-reviewed English language articles. While the searches yielded a variety of articles, all of the articles were duplicates of the articles from Physical Education Index search.

In phase II, the two researchers read the titles of the 112 articles and used the constant comparison method (Keener & Bargerhuff, 2006) to determine the relevance of the articles to the proposed study. The researchers involved in this study both have their PhDs in Physical Education-related content areas, typically conduct research on urban environments, and are considered knowledgeable on topics in the field of inquiry. During this phase, the researchers disagreed on how to code 10 of the 112 articles, which means the researchers disagreed 8.9% of the time and agreed 91.1% of the time. The researchers then discussed

their rationale for coding those 10 articles and five of the 10 were recoded as negative cases. The negative cases were deemed outside the scope of the study and were not related to urban high school physical education. For the five that were not recoded (where the researchers were still in disagreement), it was determined that the abstracts must be read to determine if the articles fit within the parameters of the scope of the study. When the researchers disagreed, the elements of disagreement required further analysis of the articles in question and the researchers wanted to make sure each article was clearly focused on urban physical education. After phase II, the researchers had 40 potential articles for the study.

In phase III, the two researchers repeated the process of phase II, but utilized the abstracts. The researchers disagreed on how to code three of the 40 articles, which means the researchers disagreed 7.5% of the time and agreed 92.5% of the time. The researchers then discussed their rationale for coding those three articles and came to 100% agreement on whether or not the articles should be analyzed for themes. Of the 40 articles, the researchers were left with 26 articles to analyze for themes. For the articles to be included in the thematic analysis, they had to involve physical education in urban or inner city settings in the United States in high school. This means articles could have been about teachers, students, student experiences, curriculum, teacher training, and the context of an urban school setting, such as resources. The 26 articles that the researchers reviewed for themes were from a very diverse number of journals, in total 20 different journals were represented. The most popular journal with four articles was the *Journal of Physical Activity and Health*. The second most popular journal with three articles was the *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*. The third most popular journal with two articles was the *Journal of School Health*. All other journals had one article each. Nine of the 26 articles were from the top three most popular journals from this study.

In phase IV, the 26 articles were then read and re-read individually and then the two researchers compared notes and agreed on emergent themes. The researchers used the constant comparison method, which is

a method whereby data are examined and re-examined until general categories or themes emerge (Keener & Bargerhuff, 2006).

Results

After qualitatively reviewing the 26 articles using the constant comparison method, the researchers discovered six themes that focus on the following areas: limited research on urban physical education, the impact of professional development on urban teachers, urban youth and access to physical activity environments, physical activity levels of urban youth, personal and emotional paradigms, and curricular programming and perspectives. Themes are discussed in detail in the following sections. The main findings from each article, the reference from the 26 articles reviewed by the two researchers, and 5 of the 6 themes (the researchers did not include the theme of limited urban physical education research) are included in Table 1.

Table 1: Emerged Theme, Main Findings, and Reference for 26 Analyzed Articles

Emerged theme	Main findings	Reference
Impact of professional development on urban teachers	Physical educators who are able to identify the diverse social motives that underlie students' goals can maximize learning opportunities by increasing student effort and minimizing disruptive behavior.	Garn, McCaughtry, Shen, Martin, and Fahlman (2011)
Impact of professional development on urban teachers	Teachers' narratives, when viewed as a form of critical inquiry, can allow teachers to tell and retell stories from their evolving points of view and contextual positions, with the goal of better understanding the complexity and depth of the experiences that have informed their teaching.	Dyer (2010)
Impact of professional development on urban teachers	Teachers' judgments vary on inclusion and their level of acceptance in teaching differently abled students. The teachers agreed that more professional training was a need.	Hersman and Hodge (2010)
Impact of professional development on urban teachers	Authors found support for the value of professional development training in a physical activity curriculum on teachers' self-efficacy perceptions for teaching the curriculum.	Martin, McCaughtry, Hodges-Kulinna, and Cothran (2008)

Table 1 (Cont'd)

Emerg ed theme	Main findings	Reference
Urban youth and access to physical activity environments	Both the physical incivilities factor and the walkable neighborhood factor had substantial to near perfect reliability in both urban and rural segments.	Evenson et al. (2009)
Urban youth and access to physical activity environments	Trail traffic is significantly correlated with neighborhood characteristics. Health officials can use these findings to influence the design and location of trails and to maximize opportunities for increases in physical activity.	Lindsey, Yuling, Wilson, and Yang (2006)
Urban youth and access to physical activity environments	In-Motion program helped students to engage in more physical activity. Program awareness by high school students and staff was high.	Choy, McGurk, Tamashiro, Nett, and Maddock (2008)
Urban youth and access to physical activity environments	Children residing in neighborhoods high in incivilities are more likely to walk to school, in spite of lower levels of perceived safety. As a high proportion of children residing in disadvantaged neighborhoods walk to school, efforts should be directed at minimizing exposure to neighborhood hazards by ensuring safe routes to and from school.	Rossen et al. (2011)
Urban youth and access to physical activity environments	The prevalence of physical activity was lowest and prevalence of sedentary behavior highest for urban students. Students from the South reported the lowest prevalence of physical activity and the highest prevalence of TV watching, while students from the West generally reported the highest physical activity prevalence and lowest sedentary behavior prevalence.	Springer, Hoelscher, and Kelder (2006)
Urban youth and access to physical activity environments	Overall, girls who attended schools with 5 or more facilities within the buffer reported more physical activity per day than girls in schools with less than 5 facilities.	Trilk et al. (2011)
Physical activity levels of urban youth	The population segments of youth with lowest levels of physical activity and fitness also have least access to school-based physical activity opportunities and resources.	Basch (2011)
Physical activity levels of urban youth	Students showed lower TV viewing, higher physical activity time and more physical education time, and showed lower risk of being overweight.	Edwards and Magel (2007)

Table 1 (Cont'd)

Emergent theme	Main findings	Reference
Physical activity levels of urban youth	Boys accumulated significantly more steps than girls. Further analyses also revealed a significant main effect for mode of school transportation. Walkers obtained significantly more steps than car or bus transit users.	Johnson, Brusseau, Darst, Kulinna, and White-Taylor (2010)
Physical activity levels of urban youth	Students demonstrated mastery of one component but failed to meet passing values for all other components and overall health-related fitness knowledge. Female students outscored their male counterparts, but there was no difference for ethnicity.	Keating, Chen, Guan, Harrison, and Dauenhauer (2009)
Physical activity levels of urban youth	During leisure time, urban students were less active than were rural students, especially girls.	Lopez and Hynes (2006)
Physical activity levels of urban youth	Ethnic differences showed an 8% lower activity level among African Americans than for non-Hispanic white and 6% lower than for Mexican-American females. The study indicated that adolescent females in schools are at risk for inactivity at certain times of the day. Schools in partnership with their communities should assume a major role to promote participation in physical activity among adolescents through innovative activity programs in schools.	Sulemana, Smolensky, and Lai (2006)
Personal and emotional paradigms	Teasing about body weight was consistently associated with low body satisfaction, low self-esteem, high depressive symptoms, and thinking about and attempting suicide.	Eisenberg, Neumark-Sztainer, and Story (2003)
Personal and emotional paradigms	Findings from the present study suggest the importance of providing a social environment that focuses on health and fitness, rather than on weight control, to increase adolescent girls' likelihood of being satisfied with their bodies.	Kelly, Wall, Eisenberg, Story, and Neumark-Sztainer (2005)
Personal and emotional paradigms	Greater family intimacy and support but not neighborhood violence, was associated with physical activity. Family factors, including family intimacy and support, are potential targets in physical activity interventions for urban high-school girls.	Kuo, Voorhees, Haythornthwaite, and Young (2007)
Personal and emotional paradigms	Regardless of each leader's developmental level, it is important to provide leadership opportunities for kids who are continually trying to connect with something bigger than themselves.	Martinek and Schilling (2003)

Table 1 (Cont'd)

Emerg ed theme	Main findings	Reference
Personal and emotional paradigms	The findings support that nurturing quality relationships between and among both teachers and peers may hold promise for enhancing learning.	Shen, McCaughtry, Martin, Fahlman, and Garn (2012)
Personal and emotional paradigms	Similar to other studies, authors found that TPSR (teaching for personal and social responsibility) fostered a positive learning environment and influenced student behavior in the program.	Wright and Burton (2008)
Personal and emotional paradigms	Physical educators should incorporate strategies to develop self-efficacy such as mastering experiences including increasing difficulty, self-observation, external feedback, peer modeling, and verbal persuasion.	Wright, Ding, and Li (2005)
Personal and emotional paradigms	Findings indicated the TPSR program goals were effectively delivered, received and enacted by participants. Descriptive statistical analysis of pre- and post-program educational outcomes indicated students in the treatment condition had more positive gain scores on truancy, tardiness, grades and conduct than peers in a valid comparison condition. It is concluded that TPSR programs can be effectively integrated into the high school curriculum. Further, given robust implementation, it appears that such programs have the potential to positively impact educational outcomes.	Wright, Li, et al. (2010)
Curricular programming and perspectives	Young women actively negotiate their dance cultures in order to construct multiple and shifting minority ethnic subjectivities.	Atencio (2008)
Curricular programming and perspectives	High school dance was set up in ways that worked to benefit white middle-class students at the expense of oppressing their black counterparts.	Atencio and Wright (2009)

Limited Research in Urban Physical Education

Scholars have limited research activities that center on urban secondary schools. When the following keywords — urban, high school, and physical education — were used in determining articles that center on physical education in urban high schools, 112 articles were found in the

initial search, but upon further review of those articles, only 26 articles focused on urban high school physical education. The articles for this literature review were taken from a ten-year period (2003–2013). Only 26 articles were found to be relevant to the scope of this study, which means, on average, only two to three articles were written about urban high school physical education in a given year. This is a very low number and scholars need to consider conducting more research on physical education in urban settings. The articles related to physical education in urban high school focused on areas of professional development of teachers, the lack of physical activity of urban youth (often related to a lack of resources or facilities), implementation of the Teaching for Personal and Social Responsibility (TPSR) model in urban environments, and the development of new curricular offerings.

Impact of Professional Development on Urban Teachers

Professional development programs can have a lasting impact on urban teachers. In this research investigation, four articles focused on professional development, with three being qualitative and the other quantitative. The quantitative study was conducted in an urban school district in the Midwest and used experimental and control groups. Teachers in the experimental group were trained in a workshop on how to implement a physical activity curriculum and then taught overweight students. The results of the repeated measures multivariate analyses of variance found that professional training development in a physical activity curriculum could improve teachers' self-efficacy perceptions of teaching the curriculum. The qualitative studies all used a constant comparative method of analysis and involved case studies and interviews. The studies discovered the need for urban school districts to regularly engage teachers in professional development and indicated that professional development in urban settings should include the opportunity to work with mentor teachers who can be role models. These role models helped new teachers acclimate themselves to teaching, students, and the environment. The studies also found the need

to have professional development focus on outcome-based curricula, as teachers would be able to make a difference in student learning and to enact changes to the curriculum that shows teachers as making positive changes to student learning. This in turn could positively motivate teachers to continue teaching and may reduce the chances of burnout.

Urban Youth and Access to Physical Activity Environments

Six articles focused on the environmental contexts available for urban youths to engage in physical activity around urban high schools. Examination of these articles revealed urban youth have limited access to physical activity environments, particularly access to safe recreational facilities. While some scholars used GIS data, others looked at urban trail use and walking habits of students in urban school districts to determine types of environments used for physical activity participation.

Examination of the articles indicated access to physical activity facilities positively influence physical activity behavior, with one study finding that students who were active commuters (people who walked to school) had accumulated more steps than students who commuted to school via bus or car. It was found that girls also had increased physical activity if they had access to facilities within a one-mile radius of their school. Implications from this study include developing walking and cycling programs to help students meet physical activity recommendations. Other implications from other research related to youth's access to physical activity environmental contexts include the need to develop safe routes of walking to and from schools in urban settings, a wise use of recess and after-school programs, and bicycling to and from school.

Physical Activity Levels of Urban Youth

This theme centers on physical activity levels of high school students, both in and out of the physical education setting. Six articles focused on this theme and the results of the studies conducted showed urban

students to be taller and heavier than rural students, with rural students having better scores on the mile run and PACER (Progressive Aerobic Cardiovascular Endurance Run) test, and students were more active in rural areas when it came to high-intensity activities. Studies also found urban youth to be less active (having the lowest level of physical activity and highest level of sedentary behavior) and have high prevalence rates for obesity and being overweight than rural youth. It was also found that urban girls were less active during the week, but more active on the weekends. One study closely examined the effect that the involvement of the family has on physical activity of urban girls and it was determined that physical activity increases as family involvement and support increases, therefore increased familial communication and monitoring can help increase physical activity levels among urban youth.

Research investigators proposed a high-quality physical education program based on the national standards to increase physical activity levels of students. There were further indications that wise use of recess and co-curricular physical activities and biking or walking to school could be ways to improve physical activity levels of urban youth. Another finding from the examination of the research articles is that students of color tend to have a significantly lower physical activity levels than Caucasian students, and young women, especially from African-American and Hispanic descent, have the lowest physical activity levels. Suggestions are that schools need to develop innovative after-school and in-school programs to target students of color and young women to participate in physical education. Further, it was pointed out that schools should provide a social environment that focuses on health and fitness to increase physical activity involvement among students, specifically young women.

Personal and Emotional Paradigms

Emotional and personal attributes of students in urban high school physical education were the subject of focus in eight articles. A major seminal work for personal and social responsibility with urban youth

was Hellison's (2003) study. The majority of articles analyzed for this theme were directly related to Hellison's personal and social responsibility. The studies focused upon for this literature review took the TPSR program and implemented it into existing school settings. The TPSR model has been used for over 30 years and is designed specifically to address the needs of underserved youth, predominately those living in urban environments. TPSR uses physical activity to teach life skills and promote responsible behavior. The ultimate goal of TPSR is for students to take the knowledge they gain in a physical activity setting and apply it to real-world settings and life skills (Hellison, 2003).

Scholars found that when used, the TPSR program indicated students improved in truancy, tardiness, grades, and conduct in the classroom. Furthermore, in other studies, it was found that improving the quality of emotional relationships between students and teachers is integral in physical education and can improve students' grades, affect, and behavior. In other studies, TPSR fostered a positive learning environment and influenced student behavior in a positive way. Students were found to accept higher levels of responsibility and explored application of the model outside of the school setting. Practical implications for physical educators in urban settings include helping students develop self-efficacy and requisite mastery experiences that involve successive trials of increasing difficulty, self-observation, peer modeling, verbal persuasion, and external feedback. By understanding students' goals and the social motives that underlie them, physical educators can maximize learning opportunities and minimize disciplinary problems.

Curricular Programming and Perspectives

Many of the 26 articles reviewed alluded to curricular changes and ways to improve physical education in urban environments, but only two articles focused specifically on curricular programming in urban physical education high school settings. The two articles focused on dance and ballet only as they were classes offered in place of the

traditional physical education curriculum. Instead of team sports or traditional physical education, many schools offered dance and other non-traditional sports. The findings of the qualitative studies, which focused specifically on women and their experiences in high school dance, showed how dance could allow the women to embody their feminine and ethnic subjectivities while attaining physical activity and gaining their required physical education credit. The scholars also noted that the dance programs marginalized hip hop and African dance forms, and often included classical dance forms like ballet. The traditional classical dance forms taught were geared toward privileged Caucasian students, often alienating African-American women, leaving them finding little value in the high school dance program. Implications for future programming in physical education include promotion of more non-traditional curriculum and culturally responsive curricular choices like dance, specifically urban, hip hop, and African dance in urban physical education programs.

Discussion

Urban environments are becoming increasingly diverse and this emanates from rural-urban migration or border crossings worldwide. In the United States, urban environments are increasingly becoming places that many people of different national origins and varying ethnic and cultural affiliations come to reside. With these changes, schools face challenges of great magnitude in the areas of human and material resources. Socio-economic issues impact operations of activities in urban schools making it hard for teachers and administrators to decipher and make changes to promote student learning. Ward and O'Sullivan (2006) discovered that one is not able to "understand the context of urban schools in the United States without considering the economic, political, and social influences that have made urban settings what they are today" (Ward & O'Sullivan, 2006, p. 348). The purpose of this study was to synthesize literature on urban physical education in the last 10 years, focusing on high school environments in the United States.

The review of extant literature on physical education in urban schools revealed conditions that pale in comparison to suburban areas. The findings of this study show urban high schools to have limited resources, underprepared teachers, and a diverse population of students with a variety of needs and issues related to socio-economic status (Montalvo, 2007). The schools tend to be overcrowded (Gordon-Larsen, McMurray, & Popkin, 2000), and further crime, violence, drugs, and poverty are present (Gordon-Larsen et al., 2000). The dire issues that urban high schools face are rooted in historical developments and changes in society. Following World War II, the government of the United States introduced laws that allowed men and women to advance their education, empowering them to improve their standard of living, which meant moving out of the crowded cities. The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, also known as G.I. Bill of Rights, put higher education within reach of World War II veterans — they received financial aid to attend college, and were able to purchase homes through low-interest mortgage rates (Goldsmith, 2013). Furthermore tax-based policies were pro-home ownership in 1940s and 1950s (Ward & O'Sullivan, 2006). Home ownership was encouraged (French, 1997), resulting in what came to be termed suburban flight or white flight (Ward & O'Sullivan, 2006). White flight lowered property values in the urban areas, and according to Theobald (2005) there were policies developed that resulted in “diminished tax bases” (p. 121) that did not favor those urban residents left behind who had the fewest economic means to sustain their livelihood and education for their children. These social and economic developments underscore institutional discrimination that impact inner city or urban residents (Ogbu, 1997). Tackling issues of equity in urban schooling remains an issue of consideration in future research studies.

As a consequent of urban life predicaments, physical education programs suffer from lack of space, equipment and funding to support curriculum development and professional training (Cothran & Ennis, 1999). Furthermore, scholars Dyson, Coviello, DiCesare, and Dyson (2009) indicate urban students exhibit lower levels of physical activity

than suburban students, often leading to issues of obesity. Scholars indicate that physical education encourages active participation in physical activities and imparts health benefits to youth (Skala, Springer, Sharma, Hoelscher, & Kelder, 2012). In addition, Corbin's (2002) work indicates that school-based physical education programs are an important means to educate students about their overall health. Indeed physical education is often the only organized physical activity that urban students receive (Gordon-Larsen et al., 2000), which reveals the need to make urban physical education a paramount element of urban education. Gordon-Larsen et al. (2000) further point out that there needs to be strategies at the national level to consider the promotion of physical education in under-resources communities that lack outlets for physical activities. Challenges such as unsafe environments limit inner-city youths' involvement in physical activities (Shen, Rinehart-Lee, McCaughtry, & Li, 2012). An indication from this research study points to the need to develop safe routes of walking to and from schools in urban settings, a wise use of recess and after-school programs, and bicycling to and from school. There is also the need to enlarge school physical education courses (Shen, Rinehart-Lee, et al., 2012).

As was seen in this study, there is limited research being conducted on urban physical education and scholars must continue to study the dynamics of inner-city and urban physical education programs to find out what works and what needs to change. Curricular changes in physical education need to be considered in order to meet the needs of urban students. One area of needed change that emerged in the present study is student-centered curriculum. For instance, student-centered and responsive teacher instructions have been found effective in promoting gender equity in physical education (Wright & Li, 2009). Implications for future programming in physical education include promotion of more non-traditional curriculum and culturally responsive curricular choices in urban physical education programs. Another curricular change that could improve urban physical education programs is the TPSR model. Past research has shown that using TPSR improves

students' truancy, tardiness, grades, and conduct in the classroom. Besides, when students are exposed to a safe and supportive learning environment and to teachers who are authentic and promote student learning, students tend to want to engage in increased activities in physical education (Li, Rukavina, & Foster, 2013). This increase in physical activity helps improve overall health of the students with possible outcomes being a decreased chance for diseases associated with inactivity, and decreased obesity, which produce healthier, happier, and more productive citizens.

If the goal is to increase fitness education and have students be more active, then understanding why students choose to engage or not engage in physical activity and physical education needs to be studied. Physical education in urban settings needs to be studied and understood to improve the experiences of students. By studying and understanding the experiences of students in urban high school physical education programs, researchers can learn about students' wants and desires to bring out positive changes in students. Resulting changes as related to urban physical education programs could be in the areas of curriculum in terms of course offerings, teaching styles and strategies, which all could better meet the needs of the diverse learners that exist in urban school settings. It has been found that knowing students' perspectives has the potential to impact curriculum and instructional processes (Cothran & Ennis, 1999; Pissanos & Allison, 1993). These potential changes could, in turn, help students enjoy physical education and participate more frequently inside and outside of the school environments leading to a more productive and healthy society.

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