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THE EFFECTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GENDER  
INTERACTION IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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A Project  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts  
in  
Education:  
Kinesiology

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by  
Angel Castro, Jr.

June 2011

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Angel Castro, Jr.  
June 2011

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6/16/2011  
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## ABSTRACT

Physical education could be the only time where some students receive any form of physical activity. However, many students refrain from maximal participation due to the environment of current physical education. The purpose of this project was to review effects of gender interaction in physical education that might contribute to students' participation levels in different learning environments. In this project, the general problems in physical education were reviewed in terms of students' participation, the effects of mixed gender classrooms, and the effects of single gendered classrooms. The review of literature was used to examine the effects of physical education and it was found that most studies suggested a single gendered environment resulted in more class participation.

Considering the gathered research studies, recommendations were made to increase the participation for both male and female students. Included in these recommendations, there are specific times within the same lesson where the learning environment should be single gendered and physical educators will be properly educated on the effects of gender interaction in the physical

education classroom by taking a gender interaction course during a credential program.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### Gender Interaction

In physical education classroom settings there may be more negative effects on gender interactions than there is when students are separated according to gender (Lyu & Gill, 2011). According to Drudy and Chathain (2002), many negative effects of gender interactions occur because our physical education curriculum is not being delivered in the most efficient way possible.

A physical education classroom in our modern culture includes one teacher to a class of mixed gendered students. The gender of the teacher also varies between males and females. Physical education is typically taught with different units derived from different individual and team sport activities. A unit in physical education is defined as a specific activity taught during and over a set amount of time. Many times these activities are considered to be stereotypically gender specific (Stuntz, Sayles & McDermott, 2011). Gender specific activities are activities that are stereotypically associated with one gender preference while excluding the other. An example of this

would be an activity such as dance; female students will usually have a preference for this particular activity and are more comfortable performing in front of their peers (Derry, 2002). Stated are negative effects that occur during physical education that lead to student horseplay with the opposite sex. Consequently, some students become timid with their lack of experience with the specific activity, and some students attempt to impress others.

Lyu & Gill (2011) mentioned the learning environment is one of the most important variables might positively and negatively influence students' perceptions, including perceived competence, interest/enjoyment and behavior. Even teachers may have difficulties with gender interactions. Depending on the gender of the teacher and the unit being taught, teachers may face challenges while teaching gender specific units. Students may have difficulties with their actions in front of the opposite sex and teachers may also have difficulties delivering the curriculum. The important question that needs to be addressed is, "How do we create the best learning environment to help solve the gender interaction problem in physical education settings?" The purpose of this project was to examine how gender

interaction is affected in a co-educational physical  
education learning environment

## CHAPTER TWO

### METHODOLOGY

#### Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project was to examine how gender interaction is affected in a co-educational physical education learning environment. The specific focus was mixed and single gendered secondary physical education classes. The significance of this project is to make sure that the physical education curriculum is being delivered in the most effective way possible. Recommendations were developed based on the research literature. It is important that further research be conducted and that recommendations considered because if gender environment issue can be resolved than physical education will be more productive for all.

#### Scope of the Project

This project was specifically targeted for administrators and physical education teachers for secondary education. They can use this information to help promote awareness of gender interaction in the physical education learning environment. The gathered information

for this project was obtained from scholarly articles that were researched from journals obtained from the electronic library EBSCOhost, such as *The Journal of Physical Education, Recreation and Dance*, *Physical Educator*, and *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*. The journal articles used were peer reviewed and were all published within the last ten years.

#### Limitations of the Project

There were limitations to this project because some of the literature reviewed was published ten years ago and some of the studies were completed in a different culture. Only research published in peer reviewed journals was considered for this project. The project excluded information from primary physical education classrooms.

#### Definition of Terms

- A. Physical Education: Is defined as a course taken during primary and/or secondary education that is taught to create awareness through movement of the human body (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2008).

- B. Gender interaction: Is defined as how the male and female species interact with one another (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2008).
- C. Single gendered class: Is defined as a classroom setting that has all the same gendered students (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2008).
- D. Mixed gendered class: Is defined as a classroom setting that has both male and female students in the class (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2008).
- E. Gender specific activities: Is defined as activities that are stereotypically associated with one gender preference while excluding the other gender (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2008).
- F. Horseplay: Is defined as misbehavior that may be disruptive to others (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2008).

## CHAPTER THREE

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### Existence of Physical Education

In recent years the existence of physical education has been jeopardized. There are districts throughout the nation that have already removed physical education from their education curriculum. "Arguments for or against coeducational physical education frequently voice concerns for equity, socialization, physical and emotional safety, and students and teacher preferences" (McKenzie, Prochaska, Sallis & La Master, 2004, p. 446).

The discussion was brought up because some administrators of schools and districts believe there are minimal amounts of positive effects physical education may have on students. The reason physical education is believed to have a minimal positive impact on students is due to how the curriculum is being delivered (Schneider, Konukman & Stier, 2010). The main issue that exists with delivery of the curriculum is that it involves the students' gender interaction in a mixed gender physical education environment. When discussing delivery method of physical education curriculum, issue on gender interaction in mixed

gender classes will be addressed. Gender interaction in a mixed gender setting is not just the topic of single gender or mixed gender. Gender interaction in a mixed gender setting involves how students interact with one another, and how they react in stereotypical gender activities. "Because of the gender-stereotyped beliefs of students, some of them did not participate in PE lessons, including gender-appropriate activities" (Koca, 2009 p. 178).

In addition an issue is how male and/or female teachers react to both male and female students. According to Drudy and Chatháin (2002), student-teacher interaction patterns can be affected by four key variables: the gender of the teacher, the class size, the gender-type subject being taught (i.e., feminine-traditional vs. masculine-traditional), and the gender composition of the class. Teachers need to be more aware of their classroom environment and be able to accommodate accordingly.

#### Effects of Mixed Gender

In mixed and single gender classroom settings there are both positive and negative effects on students and teachers (Parker & Rennie, 2002; Duffy & Warren & Walsh, 2001; Lyu & Gill, 2011). In a mixed gender classroom the

negative effects of gender interactions are the positive effects of the single gender classroom, and the positive effects in a mixed gender classroom are the negative effects of the single gender classroom (Drudy & Chatháin, 2002). The major drawback of having the current mixed gender classrooms environment is that students begin to horseplay with one another because of their maturity level and raging hormones. For example, students are placed in one physical education classroom for the entire year, and are taught different individual units for an estimated four weeks span. Somewhere during one or more of these units, it is common that male students will lose interest. This is because they will become a bit more advanced than other students' in that particular activity. Due to male students' loss of interest, other students learning time will be disrupted. Typically this will involve the same male students teasing or performing inappropriate gestures towards female students. This will then cause both male and female students to lose focus and not gain the intended knowledge from the physical education lesson. Female students typically become timid with activities that they are not familiar with. Derry conducted a study in 2002 and found that many girls stated they participated and

challenged themselves because they did not have to compete with the boys.

An example of female students beginning to lose interest in physical education would be when participating in a weight-training unit. Weight training is stereotypically known as a male dominant activity. During Koca's study (2009) on PE classrooms in Turkey, it was observed in some Physical Education lessons that the teacher generally felt it was natural for boys to be aggressive, competitive, and rough. However, there is little tolerance for similar behavior in girls. Female students who are unfamiliar with male specific activities will tend to blend into the background and avoid almost all participation.

Another concern with mixed gender classrooms is students who tend to overachieve in a particular lesson causing the average student to be timid and not participate or perform the new task in the particular lesson. (Stuntz, Sayles & McDermott, 2011; Drudy and Chathain, 2002) These are the main concerns of a physical education program with a mixed gender classroom.

The positive effect of having a mixed gender classroom is that students will have the opportunity to receive the

positive aspects of gender interaction. Social interaction with the opposite gender will assist students in maturing and growing as an individual (McKenzie, Prochaska, Sallis & La Master, 2004).

### Effects of Single Gender

Some positive effects of having a single gender classroom would be the elimination of the negative effects of having a mixed gender classroom, which includes horseplay and peer intimidation. This means male and female students will not get the opportunity to socially interact with one another. This will reduce the chance of horseplay because they will be separated.

Another positive effect of a single gender classroom would be that females would be separated from males eliminating the competition between the two genders, allowing the females to gain confidence and respond in a more positive manner. "Women participating in coed settings may be at a disadvantage compared to women in single gendered settings if they use peer comparison as a source of competence information (as most men would outperform most women)" (Stuntz, Sayles & McDermott, 2011, p. 102). According to Lyu and Gill (2011), students in single

gendered classrooms showed more confidence than those in mixed gendered classrooms.

The negative effect of having a single gendered classroom setting in physical education is that students will not be able to interact with the other gender. Gender interaction in a physical education classroom during specific units can sometimes be important because the students are able to help each other throughout the lesson. Mixed gendered physical education allows equally opportunities for both male and female students to socially interact (Koca, 2009).

#### Gender of the Teacher

Another concern with gender interaction is the way male and female teachers interact with the students according to the students' gender. Some teachers interact with students differently depending on the unit, and treat male and female students differently according to their gender. Male students receive more interaction in class depending on the gender of the teacher and current activity (Duffy, Warren & Walsh, 2002).

An example of this was in Nicaise, Coggerino Fairclough, and Bois study, where boys received more praise

combined with technical information than girls. This study was conducted in physical education classes in France. Different gendered teachers wore a microphone so that the teacher-initiated statements could be recorded. Also, the teachers rated each individual on a scale of 0-20 based on the students' physical abilities and cognitive engagement during lessons. The results of the study showed boys received more criticism, organization, and misbehavior feedback. Physical education teachers tend to ask male students more questions, praise for good performance, and give more corrective feedback (Nicaise & Coggerino, 2007). The results of the findings showed that the trend physical education teachers have with specific genders are not equal. Therefore, when the desired curriculum is examined it must be taken into consideration that the teacher must be trained in a manner to handle all units with students of both genders.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FINDINGS

#### Conclusion

Physical education in public schools is being threatened by complete elimination from the curriculum. The reason considered is because there is minimal amount of learning taking place each day. Minimal learning could be due to gender interactions and the way instruction is being delivered. This affects learning environments. "Learning environment is one of the most important variables that can positively and negatively influence students' perceptions, including perceived competence, interest/enjoyment and behaviour" (Lyu & Gill, 2011, p. 248). The recommendations were developed from gathered research information and experiences from physical education classroom environments. Drudy and Chathain (2002) states more research needs to be done on classroom interaction to properly administrate equal learning environments for male and female students. The recommendation was to have a mixed gender classroom setting for culminating activities, but still keep the two genders separate for skill acquisition learning. Short (2006) suggested, if school districts wanted everyone to

understand things the same and stay in shape the school should convert to single gendered classrooms.

Another finding was to have teachers train to handle mixed gender environments in the classroom. It would be a requirement that all physical educators take a social gender interaction course during their physical education credential courses. This is an issue that needs more support through research because it is important to keep physical education a part of our school system.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Suggestions to Improve Curriculum

Curriculum in physical education needs be delivered in a manner that favors both single sex and mixed gendered environments. Lyu and Gill (2011) stated single gendered classes lead to higher competence, confidence, achievement, enjoyment and effort for the female students. Also there are negative side effects in mixed gendered environments in spite of good educational intentions and opportunity. It is students' best interest to continue to be in a mixed gender environment but at times should be separated for the benefit of a specific unit. Students need to be combined in physical education because they need social interaction to grow and develop (McKenzie, Prochaska, Sallis & La Master, 2004). Students will only be separated during the skill practice and development portion of the lesson. An example of this would be during a football unit where students will be separated during the skill acquisition-learning portion of the unit. This will give students a chance to learn how to properly perform the skill of throwing a football. The teacher would describe the general purpose of the activity

to the entire class. The teacher will then separate the class into approximately six groups, three groups consisting of all male students and three of the groups consisting of all female students. This will allow female students to be separated from male students. In this manner Females will be able to practice the technique without feeling intimidated by male students who may already possess this skill. This will leave no room for male students to try and impress female students with their skills. During Derry's 2002 study it was found that both female students and teachers believed that single gendered classes benefited the female students more when attempting to learn lifelong physical activities. However, during the culminating activity, female and male students will be brought back together to practice what they learned during the skill acquisition portion of the unit. The six groups after practicing separately will be brought back together to play a game that involved the skill that was learned.

Another recommendation is to properly train teachers. Koca (2009) described that in the physical education context, gender appropriateness of physical activities is one of the most important factors that reflect gender-stereotyped beliefs of both teachers and students. This is

another component of the recommendation and it is aimed at improving gender interaction in physical education. This would be done by properly training teachers so they are aware of the effects of mixed and single gender classroom settings.

Following this further, it has been recommended that all physical educators take a social gender interaction course during their physical education credential courses. This will help in the understanding of the gender interaction environment. McKenzie et al suggested even though physical activity is an important goal for physical education it is not the only desired goal and teachers should pay more attention to student skill development.

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