

PEDAGOGY

Parents' Perceptions of Their Children's Experiences in Physical Education and Youth Sport

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine parents' perceptions of their children's experiences in physical education and youth sport. Qualitative research design was employed in this study. Data collection methods included phenomenological interviews and qualitative questionnaires. Forty-one questionnaires were collected and analyzed through inductive analysis method to identify themes. Ten parents (either father or mother) participated in the interview process. Parents indicated aspects of physical education classes (learning life skills, playing time, and health promotion) and aspects of youth sport (learning life skills and health promotion). Parents believed that their children learned more from youth sport than physical education because of deeper understanding in one sport, children's choice of activities, and parental involvement.

A way to connect learning in physical education (PE) with life experience is to use community resources such as sport camps or youth sport programs. In other words, youth sport research in relation to PE is important because students' participation in a youth sport program is a real-life situation where they can connect with their learning in a PE class. Kirk and Macdonald (1998) suggested that the community practice that has a strong substantive relationship to PE is participating in institutionalized sport, exercise, and

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physical recreation. PE and youth sport are both valuable learning environments in which children participate in physical activities. Nevertheless, PE researchers have paid little attention to the connection of these physical activity settings. Thus, one intent of this study was to show the connection between PE and youth sport.

Parents are important teachers and social referents for children (Raudsepp, 2006). Many educators encourage parents to participate in the educational process because they believe that parental involvement is critical in children's education (Wilkinson & Schneck, 2003). Indeed, researchers in their empirical studies have revealed that students experience positive outcomes in terms of learning and academic achievement in many subjects due to parental involvement (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Green & Walker, 2007). The starting point of parental involvement may be their perceptions of or beliefs about school subjects and educational topics. Therefore, understanding parents' perceptions of or beliefs about education is essential because they influence educational policy and the particular nature of schooling (Sheehy, 2006). In addition, children's perceptions of their parents' beliefs are significantly related to their own beliefs about their sport involvement (Brustad, 1996). Despite this importance, there is little literature related to parents' perceptions of or beliefs about their children's experiences in PE classes.

Likewise, little is known about parents' perceptions of their children's experiences in youth sport programs. Instead, many researchers mainly focused on parents' effects on their children's motivation, achievement, and competence (Bois, Sarrazin, Brustad, Trouilloud, & Cury, 2005; Eccles, 1993; Fredricks & Eccles, 2004; Ullrich-French & Smith, 2006). In addition, some researchers concentrated on coaching preferences of parents (Martin, Dale, & Jackson, 2001), parents' perceptions of youth sport and interference with family time (LaVoi & Norris, 2011), and parents' inappropriate behavior at youth sport events (Holt, Tamminen, Black, Sehn, & Wall, 2008; Kanter, 2002). Although these researchers primarily examined the effects of parents on children's experiences, there is a limitation because they excluded in-depth information about parents' perceptions of their children's experiences in a youth sport program. Gould (2002) suggested that researchers should employ qualitative research methods in youth sport research to obtain detailed information and depth of understanding not available from traditional quantitative methods.

In short, little attention has been paid to parents, although they directly influence children in their experiences and learning in physical activity settings. Thus, examining parents' perceptions of their

children's experiences in PE classes and youth sport programs is necessary. Based on these rationales, the purpose of this study was to examine parents' perceptions of their children's experiences in PE and youth sport. Through this study, PE teachers, youth sport coaches, and researchers in both areas will better understand parents' experiences in and perspectives on PE and youth sport, which could lead to enhanced provision of quality education through physical activities.

Method

Qualitative research design was employed in this study. A major data collection method was phenomenological interviewing, wherein the purpose was to explore and gather experiential narrative material that may be a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon (Van Manen, 1990). In addition, complementary data were collected through qualitative questionnaires, which consisted of seven open-ended questions. The results from these questionnaires were used to construct the phenomenological interview questions and to gather descriptive information about parents' perceptions. Data collection procedures were as follows: The researcher visited youth sport programs located in a small college town in the southern United States. Based on convenience sampling, the researcher asked registered parents to complete a qualitative questionnaire through a face-to-face meeting. Forty-one questionnaires were collected and analyzed through inductive analysis method to identify themes (Grbich, 2007). Of parents who completed the questionnaire, 10 parents (either father or mother) voluntarily agreed to be interviewed and participated in individual phenomenological interviews. Three 1-hr interviews for each participant were conducted. Each interview was focused on (a) overall perceptions of their children's experiences in school, home, PE, and youth sport; (b) comparison of experiences in PE and youth sport based on the first interviews; and (c) summary of two previous interviews. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Data were analyzed through phenomenological analysis processes (Hycner, 1985). Each step of data analysis was as follows: transcribing the data, completing the phenomenological reduction, listening to the interview for a sense of the whole, delineating units of general meaning, delineating other units of meaning relevant to the research questions, clustering units of relevant meaning, and determining themes from clusters of meaning. After this analytic process for each interview, the researcher returned to the participant with a written

summary and themes to increase credibility of data. The researcher checked whether the research participant agreed that the essence of the interview was accurately and fully captured (Hycner, 1985).

Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine parents’ perceptions of their children’s experiences in PE and youth sport. To examine parents’ perceptions, the researcher used phenomenological interview data. Van Manen (1990) mentioned, “From a phenomenological point of view, to do research is always to question the way we experience the world, and to know the world in which we live as human beings” (p. 5). Thus, the goal of this study was to question the way parents experience PE and youth sport and to know PE and youth sport in which parents live, that is, to know the personal meaning of PE and youth sport to them in their life. To attain this goal, the researcher listened to participants’ personal experiences, their stories, events, episodes, and situations. Also, the researcher explored what those experiences mean to their daily lives. For example, to understand their perspectives on PE, the researcher asked what the similarity or difference is between PE and other subjects and how PE contributes to learning in school life.

Participants’ Background

Ten parents (either father or mother) with children aged 12 to 15 years participated in this study. Their children had experiences with youth sport in O County Park and Recreation (OCPR), YMCA, or YWCO. Two parents had served as a volunteer coach for their children’s soccer teams. The basic demographic information about the research participants is shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Basic Demographic Information of Parents

Parents	Age	Occupation	Highest level of education	Household income
Father	47	Speechwriter	Master’s degree	\$100,000 or more
Mother	42	Nurse manager	College/ university	\$100,000 or more
Father	45	Technician	College/ university	\$100,000 or more
Father	47	Lawyer	Master’s degree	\$100,000 or more
Mother	34	Housekeeper	High school	\$40,000 to less than \$60,000

Table 1 (cont.)

Parents	Age	Occupation	Highest level of education	Household income
Mother	38	Researcher	Doctoral degree	\$40,000 to less than \$60,000
Mother	43	Housekeeper	College/ university	\$40,000 to less than \$60,000
Mother	43	Housekeeper	College/ university	\$40,000 to less than \$60,000
Mother	47	Housekeeper	High school	\$40,000 to less than \$60,000
Father	37	Assistant professor	Doctoral degree	\$40,000 to less than \$60,000

Perception of Physical Education

From a parents' viewpoint, PE, as a part of school curriculum, is an important subject to contribute to the promotion of students' physical health and cognitive, psychomotor, emotional, and social development. Parents seemed to agree that PE is a valuable subject as a part of total education. One parent explained,

I think it's an important part of a total education. I think it's important for them as a part of total education to understand health and fitness, to be exposed to a lot of different activities and different games and different sports. I think, you know, I think particularly in elementary school, it's just important for them to sometime during the day just to be able to run around and play and not just be sitting; particularly for boys it's important to have that. But I think it's a part of an overall education to understand the health and fitness aspect. (John's father interview transcript)

In particular, parents indicated the following aspects of PE classes: (a) learning life skills, (b) playing time, and (c) health promotion

Learning life skills. Understanding parents' perspective on learning from whole school life helped the researcher talk about learning from PE because parents regarded PE as a part of total education. The following episode is representative of parents' views on their children's learning in school:

I remember one day in sixth grade which is the first day of middle school. Drew was standing around a group of boys and as happens in middle school, a little fight broke out. And

Drew, trying to do the right thing, went to try to break the fight up. Well... by the time the teacher got there it looked like Drew was in the fight and they had to work all that out, and he and I talked about how I liked how you wanted to do the right thing, but the thing to do when there is a fight is to go get a teacher. Because nobody can tell who's in the fight and who's trying to help when everybody is in a big pile. So I think those are... outside the subject matter. Those are the kinds of experiences and lessons they can learn. (Drew's father interview transcript)

Parents believed that their children learn not only knowledge of each subject but also life skills to deal with conflicts through social interaction at school. Parents valued the social development in whole school life:

One of the important things you learn in that process [school] is you're not gonna like everybody you have to deal with in life. And so you have a teacher you don't like. You know I have had bosses I don't like. Conflict among friends and peers, we've had some conversations about being careful, being truthful, and not getting involved in someone else's problem. (Drew's father interview transcript)

I think the interacting. Especially with Russ, our oldest one going from middle school to high school kind of learning that social hierarchy that goes with that, and it's the same if you go to a job or anything else. They learn about the customs and the culture of our little community, how they need to behave here... I think just learning how to behave in a society is one of things. (Robert's mother interview transcript)

PE is a school subject that is used to teach students responsible social behavior such as etiquette, cooperation, teamwork, ethical behavior, and positive interaction. Parents believed that PE as a part of school life contributed to their children's social learning process through cooperative activities. In particular, they believed that through team sports in PE classes, students learn how to interact with a teacher and teammates as a team member. Two parents explained,

I always thought like they had someone in PE that they enjoyed the coach, that they enjoy the activities with the other children. It was almost always team activities or group activities; it wasn't really individual skills. So the team might be working in groups together and having fun with physical activity... there is a social element of that, of working together in physical education. (Richard's father interview transcript)

Well I think most of what they do in the physical education classes are team sports, so they learn how to interact on a team and they learn, hopefully they learn the positive way to behave when it comes to somebody is stronger in sport than another, and encouraging and accepting everybody for what they can do... (Joseph's father interview transcript)

Playing time. Although some parents believed that PE deals with educational issues such as teamwork, some were not able to state what their children learned from PE. Rather, they thought their children played with other classmates in PE classes. Some parents believed that PE is playing time rather than learning time. They explained,

Well, I don't think they learned something from PE in middle school... In elementary school, he was playing and running with other kids... I have seen him running here and there at the gym... Definitely he had fun... He began swimming [at YWCO]... but I don't know they learned something about physical from PE. (Mark's mother interview transcript)

PE is more for fun and a lot of goofing off, whereas the youth sport is more of a competition. And there is more of a goal to do something. I mean a lot of the physical education is more just hanging out with your buddies and goofing off. (Rose's mother interview transcript)

In particular, parents thought their children played rather than learned in elementary level PE. However, they understood the nature of PE classes changes according to grade level. They explained that doing many activities is the main intent of PE at the elementary level and that it changes into health education at the secondary level:

In elementary school, they got exposure to a lot of different activities and I think that is the intent of it. They got to play a lot of different sports and learn a lot about different sports. I think the idea of teamwork and what it means to be on a team. (Drew's father interview transcript)

In middle school, it becomes a different kind of subject matter. It's something they can choose to take, and it's also paired with health with... is also sex-edu... In elementary school, it was pretty much chaos because they get a lot of kids in a gym playing around and doing a lot of things. So it's loud and crazy. But because it's more of a health and sexual education class in middle school, I just see more of a classroom setting. I don't think they're really doing PE in middle school. Now I could be wrong, but I think the emphasis is more on it's an academic, personal hygiene, personal fitness, diet, that sort of thing, so it is more of a classroom. (John's father interview transcript)

Health promotion. An aim of PE is to promote health and physical fitness by teaching and encouraging physical activities. The findings from the qualitative questionnaires indicated health promotion to be the most important benefit that children gain from PE. Parents believed that PE is an important school subject to promote individual health or physical fitness:

I think physical education program that they have at school, I feel like their goal is to educate them more the benefits of physical conditioning or ways of maintaining physical conditioning, nutrition, and the whole thing. I think that is sort of their goal is more of lifelong to teach them stuff they can use for the rest of their lives... I think the difference [from youth sports]... being just teaching them the benefits and how to as far as physical fitness regardless of a sport. (Joseph's father interview transcript)

Well I think long term... if taught properly it can help develop long-term awareness of your health and better health. It teaches you different ways of exercising... it introduces the physical activities. And giving them [children] a few minutes to get away from math and science gives their brain a

rest, gets the blood circulating... (Richard's father interview transcript)

Parents seemed to understand the basic principle of physical fitness and believed that their children were able to learn and acquire a habit of physical activity from physical education classes. In particular, they stressed that early experience with exercise leads to lifelong participation in physical activities:

I think kids should take PE class in school... because exercise is a kind of habit... so if they don't take PE in early age, they cannot do exercise... When I was a student, I was sick often, so my PE teacher made me doing exercise, so I physically felt better and it helps me study... you know you cannot study for a long time without physical fitness. (Mark's mother interview transcript)

Physical fitness has long been an important goal of PE. Indeed, parents considered fitness tests an important part of the PE curriculum. One mother indicated that she talked about PE with her child:

He [Robert] doesn't really talk about any sport that they do at school. It's more he talks more about the physical fitness test that they do at the beginning and at the end. The days he has to do the long mile after mile in eight minutes or when he has to do sit-up and pull-up... I don't really hear him talk about any sport. (Robert's mother interview transcript)

Perception of Youth Sport

Parents' perceptions of youth sport may be an important predictor for their children's participation in a youth sport program. By understanding how parents perceive youth sport, professionals in the fields of PE and coaching education could increase the quantity and quality of physical activity programs. The findings of parents' perceptions of youth sport were divided into two major themes: learning life skills and health promotion.

Learning Life Skills

Parents believed that their children learn life skills through participation in youth sport. The following transcripts show parents' perspectives on the major benefits gained from participating in youth sport. Parents indicated how their children learned life skills from youth sport:

I think the value of sports is good value for life. So I think in some way it probably does help their academic life. I like to see them get better, and I like to see them improve in whatever they're doing, whether it is school work or sports. So I like seeing improvement, I like seeing them commit to something and carry out that commitment, and again, I think that is an important value that extends beyond sports as well. (Drew's father interview transcript)

It [playing sports] teaches them a lot about winning and losing and sportsmanship and how to get along with folks, and I think it's good for their social growth... Learning to deal with other people, which is also our job to teach them... learning to play as a team, learning to accept other people's inadequacies or the fact that somebody may be better than them and they get to play more fair play, and I just think that is a benefit to them. Plus, our oldest son, his life revolves around social activity; he just wants to be with his friends all the time, and so it gives him a chance to be with his buddies. (Joseph's father interview transcript)

Parents who participated in interviews strongly believed that social development is one of the most important life values their children have to learn inside and outside of school. Also, a top benefit and motivation of sending their children to a youth sport program was social development. Data from the questionnaires show that social development (45%) is the most important attribute children should be learning through participating in a youth sport program. The most frequently noted subtheme in the transcripts about participating in a youth sport program was being a team member or learning teamwork. Making friends and acquiring sense of community were also subthemes under social development.

Parents believed that through youth sport experiences, their children learned life skills related to social development, including respect for and working with others. In particular, participation in team sports such as soccer and basketball was a great source for learning about working as a team member. The following quotes show how much parents value their children's learning experiences that involved teamwork, which they considered an important life skill. Drew's father explained that the best moment in youth sport was when his children displayed true teamwork:

I think the moments I'm most proud of in sports are when they show true teamwork. Where the decisions they make and the things they do are driven by what's best for the team. So in basketball, it might be making a pass rather than taking a shot, or an assist in soccer or if your coach puts you in a position that you're not used to playing, then you just do... So those are the kind of values I want them to have as a part of a team, that the team is more important than you.

Other parents also agreed that their children learn teamwork through participating in a youth sport program:

I think learning to be part of a team is important. I think some level of commitment to a team and saying I will be there at these times, I will commit to doing that... I think they learn what it means to be on a team and what your responsibilities to the other people on the team are. I think they learn about working hard. I mean just classic values of commitment and teamwork and working hard. (John's father interview transcript)

You know that I think it's important for them to learn to be a part of the team or a part of the group. I think in life most of the time you're going to be working with other people. So the skills of working with other people, appreciating other people's strengths and your own strengths, and working on weakness to get better, but the idea of how a group of people works together to accomplish a common goal is part of what they learn in youth sports. I think it does definitely have application to their life in everything they do. We're always going to be around other people. (Joseph's father interview transcript)

Because you know again they have the opportunity to meet kids and work together as a team and you may meet some kids through youth sports that he wouldn't have met at school. (Brian's mother interview transcript)

Parents whose children played team sports pointed out that youth sport is an activity in which their children are able to learn social life skills such as teamwork. On the contrary, parents whose children participated in individual sports such as swimming and taekwondo

stressed learning self-discipline through participating in a youth sport program. Parents believed that their children could apply self-disciplines such as patience to their daily lives. They explained,

He feels self-achievement [through swimming training]... He learns patience and self-control after finishing the hardest practice... so he can stop playing video game by himself, and he wants to be prepared for all other things like playing piano, reading, and doing homework. (Mark's mother interview transcript)

I think they also learn a lot of discipline, self-discipline. How you have to apply yourself, you can't just show up and expect to be successful, you have to do something to make it happen. (Rose's mother interview transcript)

Data from the questionnaires also showed a similar theme related to self-discipline such as developing sportsmanship and learning through competition.

Health Promotion

Active participation in physical activities is good for children's health and well-being. Parents in this study agreed that their children experience physical health benefits from participating in youth sport.

I think the physical activity is important [for kids' health]. Certainly I think being in good physical shape helps your general life. So I think that is important. (Thomas's mother interview transcript)

I like it when they play sports; it keeps them somewhat healthy. (Rose's mother interview transcript)

It [playing youth sports] gives them a physical outlet to burn off some energy to help keep them in physical condition. Health benefit is one of benefits to send our kids to youth sports. (Joseph's father interview transcript)

Parents could not explain the process of how physical activities maximize personal health. In spite of a lack of health-related knowledge, parents believed their children experienced physical health

benefits from participating in physical activities in a youth sport program. Indeed, parents' personal experiences made them think that being physically active is beneficial to their children's physical health. Parents talked about their past experiences to explain the importance of their children's physical health:

I think the idea of physical fitness is interesting. I've gotten more active in the last two and half, three years. I've realized that I was getting a little heavy and I wasn't active, and so I started doing a lot more running and bicycling and swimming and doing all that. So I think it's important for them to be active... I think it's important just to go out and play without structure without somebody telling them what to do without necessarily being on a team with sports, and then I think it's important to be physically active in the context of an organized sport. (John's father interview transcript)

I thought I have to let my kids do exercise even before I got married. I was weak when I was a student, so I knew the importance of physical fitness. And because I strongly believe that sound mind from sound body. (Mark's mother interview transcript)

Data from questionnaires were in line with these interview transcripts. Staying active (16%) was second most frequent subtheme.

Connection Between Physical Education and Youth Sport

From the questionnaires about the relationship between PE and youth sport, 17 parents thought there was no relationship between them. By participating in these, children have active, healthy lifestyle. However, other parents indicated differences between them. For example, PE is a more general, health-focused program and scaled-down version of youth sport. By contrast, youth sport is a more specific teamwork-focused program. Also, parents believed that youth sport is an opportunity for parents to be more involved in a program and for parents and children to become acquainted with other people.

Parents believed that their children learned more from youth sport than PE. One mother commented that she was not concerned about the possibility of no PE in the school curriculum at her child's

school. However, she did not want to imagine a life without youth sport. She felt that youth sport could be a substitute for PE:

I think that, in our case with Robert, he has an opportunity to play and do other sports outside the school PE program, and because I guess of my comfort level with talking to them about other things that they do in PE... if all of a sudden they decided he couldn't have PE at school, I don't think that would be something that upset us a lot because we know he would have an opportunity to do it somewhere else. However, if he was in a situation where we did not have youth sports, then it would become very important. (Robert's mother interview transcript)

Reasons parents believed their children learned more in youth sport than in PE included deeper understanding in one sport, children's choice of activities, and parental involvement.

Deeper Understanding in One Sport

Parents understood that PE, as a part of school curriculum, includes topics such as health, fitness, sports, games, motor skills, and psychosocial development. They did not think that their children could learn all of these in a limited time. Therefore, they believed that their children learn more in youth sport by playing one sport and acquiring a deeper understanding of it. Parents explained,

I think... [they learn more in] youth sports because it's learning the levels and layers of one activity over a period of time. Certainly in PE they learned a lot of different things and they had exposure to a lot of different games, which I think is good and important, but I think over time, with Jon and Drew with soccer and Tom with basketball, because now you're talking about multiple seasons of playing and seeing what they've learned and seeing how more sophisticated their understanding of their particular sport has become over that time, they've learned more through the focus of playing one sport over time. (Drew's father interview transcript)

I think with the PE at school, there is a curriculum, you know. You're not really trying to teach them to perfect their skills. They just learn how the game is played. Where in youth sports they come with some expectation that you

know pretty much how the game is played and the rules. And you really are working around more on their skill, you know their ability to play the game, and then youth sports are totally centered around the sports that they're coming in to play. (Joseph's father interview transcript)

Because you spend more time with one sport in the course of a season in youth sports or sports, so you would learn more deeply about that sport over the course of the season playing one sport. (John's father interview transcript)

Children's Choices of Sport in Youth Sport

Parents believed that their children could learn life skills through youth sport. When asked why parents chose sports over other educational programs for their children to learn life skills, they answered because their children chose a sport. Although the original impetus for participating in a youth sport program came from their parents, students chose sports more than other activities. They explained,

So primarily it's been their choice that they enjoy sports. If they enjoy playing, I mean we are about to have four kids on five teams for the next two months. Thomas will play two soccer teams, school and club. Tom will do track pole-vaulting, and Jon will finish out basketball season and play tennis at school. So that has been their choice to play sports. (Thomas's father interview transcript)

Parents' preference for a certain sport was not transmitted to their children. For example, Robert's parents were faithful baseball fans, but their son dropped baseball from his list of youth sports. Robert's mother explained:

My husband's brothers played baseball, so I knew I would probably get my kids started in baseball. Robert played one year of Tee ball and one year of baseball and he did not like it. So he did not play anymore baseball, but he really likes basketball and taekwondo.

She also explained why Robert chose basketball and taekwondo instead of baseball:

But he started taekwondo at an early age and I think he was very impressed with how far you can go with it. And I think he was pretty good at it, and I think with baseball it was just too slow because he played it one year.

The story of this family shows that child's choice of athletic activity is important for their enjoyment and continuation of youth sport activities. This study shows that parents do not need to provide a model of sport preference or participation. However, Robert's parents encouraged their children to participate in what they wanted to play. That is, they influenced their children's involvement in physical activity through encouragement:

He played football last year in middle school and he liked it, but he said it got in the way of his taekwondo; he didn't have time to do both so he prefers the taekwondo... We're really big baseball fans, but we've encouraged them... if that's what you want to do, then we've encouraged them to do it. Like Robert is not interested in playing football, so that's fine if he doesn't want to play; we're not going to try pushing him into it. (Robert's mother interview transcript)

Robert's parents seemed to keep an appropriate balance in terms of parental expectation. A case from Robert's family showed how a child's participation in a youth sport program begins and continues through the interaction among family members:

After the first year, I think they had no idea until we took them the first year, and after that, Robert was very quick to tell me he wants to get signed up for basketball every year and taekwondo. It's kind of become a habit now; I mean they know each season is coming. (Robert's mother interview transcript)

Parents believed that their children may not enjoy PE, compared to youth sport, because it is mandatory. They thought that having such an obligation was a restraint to enjoy PE classes. Parents believed their children preferred youth sport to PE because they chose their sports. Parents assumed their children followed teachers' direction in PE classes rather than actively seeking autonomous learning:

With the PE classes at school, it's everybody. You don't have a choice of whether you want to take that class. People that

rarely love it are there and people that hate it and just do it because they have to be there... so I think it's not really a love of a sport as much as it having to do a certain curriculum. (Joseph's father interview transcript)

Physical education as opposed to youth sports, typically you sign up for youth sports that you're interested in... where physical education you follow curriculum, so you may have to play some sports you're not really interested in or not really good at. (Larry's mother interview transcript)

In addition, the researcher found, from parents' viewpoint, students are less likely to be involved in PE classes because they did not select the activities they wanted to play:

One year they did lacrosse or something [in PE]. I mean he didn't care about that. He just did it because he had to do it. But I think that they tend to learn more what they want. And youth sports they signed up for that because they love the game. (Thomas's mother interview transcript)

I have to think you know with PE there might be a few things that the kids would not necessarily try for whatever reason; you know, they think they couldn't or think it would be silly, but they have to in PE, so that kind of gives them a chance to learn something they wouldn't pursue. I remember in the seventh grade we had to do a unit on square dancing. And I would have never done that in my life. (Robert's mother interview transcript)

Parental Involvement

The biggest difference between youth sport and PE from parents' standpoint was the level of their involvement in their children's experiences. Parents believed that through a youth sport program, they have an opportunity to interact with their children. Through participating in a youth sport program, family members bond because they "all go together and ride home together and talk about what happened and things that maybe happen to do differently next time" (Robert's mother interview transcript). Participation in a youth sport program leads family members to spend time together. This was evident in two parents' responses:

We go to... we play a tournament in Atlanta or we play two games on Saturday and one on Sunday, so you might have time to spend together. So a chance to go on for a weekend with children for some other activity has been really a lot of fun. And I think definitely a bonding experience. (Joseph's father interview transcript)

It is certainly one of the ways that a part of my relationship with my children has developed, particularly because I coached all of them. I think that is an opportunity to have a particular relationship and a particular set of memories with each one of them. I know it's important to me and something that I value and I hope that they value too, but it's time spent together doing something we both enjoy. (Drew's father interview transcript)

Parents agreed that through youth sport participation, family members bonded through having a chance to talk with their children. In particular, parents listened to their children after practices and games. Listening to children's stories about practice, game, or competition is an important form of parental emotional support. They explained,

As a parent usually I try to listen to what they're saying, to what they're talking about the game, if they were happy or unhappy, and as they've got older, those conversations have gotten better because they do understand more about the sport, about the game, about what went well, what didn't go well. (John's father interview transcript)

Richard and I talk about the kinds of things the team needs to do and each player needs to do to make sure that we play a full game. I try not to start the conversation. I like to talk, so it's hard, but I really want to listen to what he says... and I wanna respond to what they say, and if they want me to respond, I wanna respond to them. (Richard's father interview transcript)

Every parent was concerned about their children playing too many video games and watching television when they described their children's routine of life. Parents took for granted that their children play video games in their leisure time. They said,

A lot of times when we don't have a game, we kind of all get in the house and we get in different parts of the house. You know the boys will be upstairs playing video games or that sort of thing. So I think we have more conversation with them on the days there is a sport activity. (Thomas's father interview transcript)

You know they are teenagers and so they're playing video games and talking to their friends and playing on the computer. (Robert's mother interview transcript)

If they got a free time, what are they [children] gonna do? They play a video game and watch TV... He has no time to do [video game] because he has to swim... He plays a video game only during the weekend... if he could have a spare time, I am pretty sure he wants to play a [video] game and watch TV. (Mark's mother interview transcript)

From parents' perspectives in this study, children spent time efficiently through participating in a youth sport program. Parents believed that a benefit of youth sport participation is their children use their free time well.

The following interview transcript from a father showed how much his child's participation in a youth sport program signified an important and valuable activity to his family. He said that youth sport forms his family's identity:

It's almost our identity because we have done it so much and every season except for summer, and now Tom does tennis in the summer, so every season where somebody is playing a sport and it's been up to this point mostly been sports, and so it's sort of a common bonding experience. It's something we can all share. We can all enjoy in different ways. And something we can all be proud of. (Drew's father interview transcript)

Furthermore, not only family members bond through youth sport but also community members through having an opportunity to interact with each other in youth sport. Children may first be introduced to sport by their parents. However, as they continue to participate in sport, the direction of influence may be reversed; that is, children may influence their parents' involvement or adjustments in

lifestyle. For example, for children's participation in a youth sport program, parents have to fill out enrollment forms, wash uniforms, drive children, and most important, watch children's practices or games. Parents in this study believed that they met other familiar or unfamiliar families and constructed new relationships with them during children's practices or games. This process of parental socialization contributes to building a sense of community. One parent indicated,

Well, I think we enjoy going to the games because just like the boys have the same kind of friends, a lot of parents have become our friends; either we've knew them from before or we've gotten to know them better through sports. So my parents live close to us, so they come, so it gives us an opportunity to see family. They can come see the boys, and I mean it's a big part I guess right now socially, most of what we do outside of work is around a sport that one of the boys play. Go and be with other families. (Thomas's mother interview transcript)

In addition, a father believed, based on his personal experience, that participation in a youth sport program helps people to have a sense of attachment to community:

I think it gives them a stronger tie to the community because where I grew up, I grew up in a small town and I was never allowed to play youth sports. I was in a small private school and then left home, when I got out of high school and went to college, so now when I go home to visit my parents, I don't know anyone there. So I don't feel a real strong tie to my community just because I never did anything there... I mean they know kids they don't go to school with, and I think it gives them a strong tie to their community. (Joseph's father interview transcript)

Characteristics of moderate levels of parents' involvement include attending children's practices and games and providing social support (Hellstedt, 1987). Parents who participated in this study showed characteristics of moderate involvement in youth sport. However, they indicated a lack of interest in PE. One parent said,

[In youth sport] talking to them especially after games, after practices. Again a lot of this is inferred; you just assume

this is where they're picking this up. We go to a lot of their practices, and you see the way they behave at practice or at games and it seems to be more obvious [than physical education]. (Joseph's father interview transcript)

In addition, Robert mother's description of PE and youth sport showed how she was more involved in youth sport than PE. When she described her son's routine of PE classes, she used her imagination. On the contrary, she was able to describe youth sport more vividly and actively than PE because she participated in youth sport with her child. She discussed PE and youth sport:

Physical education: Well, they [students] have to change clothes, so I know that he has to change clothes, and it's boys and girls together I think in middle school, so I think they change and go and the teacher tells them what they're doing for the day, and I imagine Robert is breathing hard and sweaty.

Youth sports: For Robert, his games usually start at 7:00, so he gets home from school those days on the bus. He gets home about 4:30, and that morning, I say, "You've got a game. I'll pick you up. Get your homework done." So we leave our house about 6:15. Coach Eric likes them to be there about 15 minutes early. We'll go to the gym, and Robert gets out of the car and goes in and I come later and we watch the game and then usually a lot of nights after a game, we'll go through Zaxbys or something and get them something to eat afterward and come home. On the way home, he talks about... we talk about how many points he had and whether they won or lost or what coach Tony was saying and, you know, if anybody fell down or whatever. We'll talk about if they got hurt and if Robert got to throw free throws; we'll talk about whether or not he was nervous... He always calls his dad on the way home and tells him what the score was and how many points he scored. (Robert's mother interview transcript)

Finally, another difference between PE and youth sport is that parents are able to recognize their children's learning directly or indirectly. In other words, parents see children's learning directly in youth sport settings and know it indirectly in PE from grades and

conversations with their children. One parent indicated the different views on recognition of students' learning in two settings:

How to know children's learning in youth sports: Well, I watch them play. And what I see and would like to see is the level of complexity that they understand about the games they play from five years ago to today. They not only learn the physical skills of the game but some sophistication and complexity about strategy of a game, how the game should be played, what response you have to certain situations, and decision making. So I can see those particularly in the team sports they've played that they have a much deeper understanding of the game itself in addition to the physical abilities that they've improved. (Drew's father interview transcript)

How to know children's learning in physical education: Well, I see their grade. And we assume their grade is a reflection of how well they performed in the class. We have some conversations and we talk to them about what they're learning, but that's at the time that they're at the class. It is an interesting question how do I see, what did I carry beyond the moment of learning in the academic setting. I don't know. I've never really thought about that. Beyond the grade, beyond the conversations we had at the time, I don't know how to measure that. (Drew's father interview transcript)

Data from questionnaires and interview transcripts about parents' perceptions of two physical activity settings is summarized in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2
Summary of Questionnaire Data About Parents' Perceptions of Youth Sport and Physical Education

Aspect	Youth sport program (198, 100%)	Physical education program (24, 100%)
Physical	Staying active (32, 16%) Learning sport skills (13, 7%)	Health promotion (8, 33%) Learning diverse sport rules and skills (9, 38%)

Table 2 (cont.)

Aspect	Youth sport program (198, 100%)	Physical education program (24, 100%)
Social	Being a team member or learning teamwork (49, 25%) Making friends (25, 13%) Sense of community (15, 7%)	Team play (2, 8%)
Affective	Fun (22, 11%) Sportsmanship (21, 10.5%) Learning through competition (11, 5.5%)	Fun (4, 17 %) Sportsmanship (1, 4%)
Other	Other (10, 5%): Self-discipline, aggression out, responsibility, self-esteem, how to work toward a goal, effective listening and following direction, deal with disappointment, value of exercise, sport as a microcosm of life, and how to challenge themselves and understanding limitation.	Four parents (of 41) answered that learning in the two settings is the same. Thirteen parents (of 41) left it blank or answered that they were not sure about learning in physical education classes.

Note. (frequency, percentage).

Table 3

Summary of Interview Transcripts About Parents' Perceptions of Youth Sport and Physical Education

Youth sport	Physical education
1. Health promotion in youth sport	1. Social development through PE
2. Learning life skills in youth sport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participating in cooperative activities such as team sports
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working together with peers (teamwork) Self-discipline such as patience 	2. Playing time rather than learning time
3. Family relationship	3. Understanding the nature of PE depending on the grade level
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chance to interact with their children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A variety of activities and playing with peers in elementary level Health education and fitness test in secondary level
4. Their children learn more in youth sport than PE	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deeper understanding in one sport in youth sport Their children's choice of sports Parental involvement 	

Discussion

Lareau (2003) found that middle-class parents strongly believed that children learn crucial life lessons from sport, and they have repeated opportunities to practice those lessons in organized sport activities. Likewise, in this study, parents agreed that sport in both physical activity settings is a valuable source for children to develop socially through life lessons. They strongly believed that learning social skills and gaining knowledge of subjects were the most important and meaningful experiences in school for their children. Thus, PE and youth sport to them were great opportunities for their children to learn social skills. Although parents struggled to explain the process of how their children learned life skills in PE, they believed their children learned those skills in PE and youth sport. Based on this finding, the author suggests that physical educators consider how parents are addressing social development.

In this study, parents believed that their children learned more from youth sport than PE. Also, the biggest difference between the physical activity settings was parents' level of involvement in their children's experiences. Côté and Hay (2002) presented that family environment is a big influence on whether children become involved and decide to remain in sports and physical activity. In this study, the level of parental influence was higher in youth sport than in PE, mostly due to parents' time commitment, one of tangible parental support (Côté & Hay, 2002). Lareau (2003) documented that middle-class parents took for granted their obligation to develop their children's talents through participating in organized activities such as youth sports. As in previous research (Côté, 1999), parents in this study were heavily involved in spectating and transporting their children to practices and games. This time commitment was important. First, the family had a chance to construct companionship by spending time together. Companionship is a parental support wherein parents are involved in activities such as attending sporting events with their children (Côté & Hay, 2002). Lareau found that "the greater the number of activities middle-class children are involved in, the fewer opportunities they have for face-to-face interaction with members of their own family" (p. 39). On the contrary in this study, through participating in a youth sport program, family members were able to interact with each other. Playing video games or watching television was the most dominant leisure activities of children. Parents seemed to take for granted that their children play upstairs while they are downstairs. Separation during their leisure

time was typical of families in this study. In this reality, youth sport experiences were an opportunity for family members to bond because they spent time together and talked with each other.

Second, spectating children's practices and games was important for parents to understand their children's learning. Parents recognized learning in PE mainly from students' grades. Sometimes, children talked with parents about special experiences they had in PE. In contrast, parents observed the routine of practices and games and directly saw children's learning such as improvement of psychomotor and social skills. The most important benefit of direct observation is that parents were able to initiate conversation and provide their children with more concrete feedback; that is, they were able to provide emotional and informational support. Many researchers have revealed that these parents' psychosocial supports are an essential factor for children to develop self-esteem, competence, achievement, enjoyment, and enthusiasm (Power & Woolger, 1994; VanYperen, 1995; Woolger & Power, 1993). In addition, parents influence children in their level of enjoyment and self-competence because parental feedback is an important source of competence information (Hein, 2003). Thus, watching was not merely watching but a starting and key point for parental support. A parent who is not involved influences children in their learning in PE. Therefore, PE teachers need to make an effort to increase parental involvement. For example, teachers may arrange their gym in a way that invites parents in (Pawlas, 1999). Furthermore, inviting as an instructor as well as a spectator provides a memorable experience for families (Na, 2009).

Too high or low parental expectations may result in less enthusiasm from children who participate in youth sport (Côté & Hay, 2002). Hellstedt (1987) used a parental involvement continuum from *underinvolved* to *moderate* to *overinvolved* to describe the amount of involvement that parents have in their children's sport activities. Children benefit from moderate levels of parental involvement, that is, emotional and informational support, through increased enjoyment and competence, whereas students may not learn if their parents are excessively involved. Overinvolved parents are characterized by excessive attendance at practice sessions, standing next to the coach, and yelling (Hellstedt, 1987). A father showed those characteristics of overinvolvement in a low level:

I try not to coach. And both Drew and Jon have come asked me not to speak up. And I try. So I think Mary, my wife,

probably catches that because I just talk about what I wished had had happened differently or... some particular things that I might have observed that I would have liked to have been different. But I am trying not to coach from the stands or from the sidelines. (Drew's father interview transcript)

This finding of parents' overinvolvement is a rationale for parent education in youth sport programs. Recently, media have been focused on parents' violence coming from overinvolvement in youth sport settings. Regardless of violence, however, parents should recognize that positive experiences in physical activity settings are not necessarily individual processes, but may be collaborative processes. Parents should be educated about how they influence their children through their their behaviors and affect the quality of their children's experiences in physical activity settings.

Conclusion

Although the main finding of this study was that youth sport was a more valuable learning environment than PE from parents' perspectives, the intent was neither to distinguish superiority of one nor to be critical of the other. Rather, the author believes that by understanding the strengths and weaknesses in each setting from a comparative viewpoint, physical educators can improve their teaching or coaching methods. In addition, the purpose of this qualitative study was not to generalize findings to other PE and youth sport. Rather, based on a phenomenological perspective, the assumption is that an event that one parent experiences may happen to another (Van Manen, 1990). Thus, the findings in this study could be useful for physical educators situated in the similar contexts in PE and youth sport. Youth sport administrators and coaches need to recognize that parents believe that a youth sport program is an important learning context for promoting physical, social, and emotional development. For PE teachers, the findings in this study are an opportunity to reflect on their practice because parents could not answer or were unsure about what their children were learning in PE classes. Although this does not mean that learning does not occur, it is a message to physical educators that the intended curriculum may not be what is being communicated to students. Finally, teachers, coaches, and students may have similar or different perspectives on PE and youth sport. Therefore, research including all of them in the same context, such as a case study, will be useful for a true understanding of PE and youth sport.

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