Chapter 10
Transformational Learning for Community Health: The Case of Physical Education Teacher Candidates

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ABSTRACT

The qualitative research study explored in this chapter took place in a physical education teacher education program at a large public university in Puerto Rico. Study findings are relevant for similar programs in the United States. The research questions guiding the chapter are: (1) What can physical education teacher candidates do to help promote community health awareness? (2) What does transformational learning look like for physical education teacher candidates in a physical education teacher education program? (3) From the point of view of the university instructor, what are the challenges training physical education teacher candidates to promote health awareness? Data collection sources include: The researcher’s journal, informal conversations with physical education teacher education university colleagues from different institutions, alumni questionnaire responses, electronic communications with 11 physical education teacher education program graduates, and documents (e.g., the National Association for Sports and Physical Education Standards, and the Physical Education Teacher Education Standards). The authors draw on transformational learning theory as a framework to inform the study, and narrative analysis plays a central role reporting study findings. The chapter includes the following sections: a theoretical framework section discussing how transformational learning theory informs the study; a relevant literature section that provides the definition, benefits, and connection with concepts such as physical activity, community health, and effective teaching in physical education; a qualitative methodology section that describes the study setting and participants; data collection sources and data analysis procedures; a study findings section that is organized by research questions; an implications for practice section; and conclusion.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-6260-5.ch010
INTRODUCTION

The students are like a mirror reflecting what we as instructors teach them; when you teach a negative behavior their response will also be negative; when you teach a positive behavior the students’ response will be positive. The physical education instructor needs to promote a positive attitude and respect when communicating with the students.

This introductory vignette was provided by Sandra (pseudonym) who is currently a graduate student in kinesiology. Her comment is meaningful to the scope of the chapter on what physical education teachers in general and physical education teacher candidates in particular can do to promote community health awareness. It is a truism that obesity epidemic is a huge problem we are facing today. Unhealthy eating habits, lack of physical activity, and excessive sedentary behavior are some of the factors contributing to this epidemic problem (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2011a). There are numerous professionals working in different fields studying this phenomenon and working towards a solution. The physical education (PE) teacher has the potential to be one of the professionals contributing to finding the solution for this problem. Furthermore, “quality programs in physical education contribute to valuing and adopting a physically active lifestyle” (Graham, Holt/Hale, & Parker, 2010, p. 5). However, PE programs in schools have not been effective throughout the years (Trost, 2006). There has been a consistent failure of PE classes meeting public health objectives related to the quality and quantity of engagement in physical activity. In addition, the emphasis on competitive team sports during PE class rather than individualized lifetime physical activities for the students has aggravated this problem (Trost, 2006). We, the chapter authors, believe that effective PE teacher candidates can help promote community health awareness and dispel the myths associated with PE through the work they do in schools. This is why PE teacher candidates need to go through a transformational learning process during their residence at any physical education teacher education program.

This chapter reports findings of a qualitative research study in a physical education teacher education program at a large public university in Puerto Rico relevant for similar programs in the United States. The research questions guiding the chapter include: What can physical education teacher candidates do to help promote community health awareness? What does transformational learning look like for physical education teacher candidates in a physical education teacher education program? From the point of view of the university instructor, what are the challenges training physical education teacher candidates to promote health awareness? In order to provide answers to these questions we gathered data through the researcher’s journal, informal conversations with physical education teacher education colleagues at different institutions, alumni questionnaire and follow up electronic communications with 11 physical education teacher education program graduates, and documents (e.g., National Association for Sports and Physical Education Standards, and the Physical Education Teacher Education Standards). For this chapter we draw on transformational learning theory as a framework for data collection and analysis. The chapter includes the following sections: A theoretical framework section discussing how transformational learning theory informs the study, a relevant literature section that provides the definition, benefits, and connection with concepts such as physical activity, community health, and effective teaching in PE, a qualitative methodology section that describes the study setting and participants, data collection sources, and data analysis procedures, a study findings section that is organized by research question, an implications for practice section, and conclusion.