

ARTICLE REVIEWED

Using Social Media: One Physical Education Teacher's Experience

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THE PROBLEM:

In the world of education where many teachers collaborate and form friendships with coworkers due to similar interests and schedules, this is often not the experience of those who choose to teach physical education (PE). PE teachers are typically isolated both physically and socially. Many are physically removed from other teachers due to the gymnasium being unattached or placed in a far corner of the school building. Also, PE teachers are commonly the only teacher of their subject in a school, especially at the elementary level. This means that there are usually not others in the same work environment with whom they can share ideas and common teaching interests. However, some have found solace in connecting to other PE teachers through social media.



Research Summary:

The purpose of this study was to understand how one PE teacher's experience in an online #PhysEd community (OPC) influenced her feelings of isolation. The participant of this single case study was a 29-year-old female who was currently in her sixth year of teaching. She earned a bachelor's and master's degree in physical education and was teaching at a middle school during this study. She was recruited for this study due to her longtime, active engagement with other physical educators on Twitter (in the #PhysEd community), and because she had experienced feelings of isolation. The researchers used semistructured interviews, Twitter artifacts, and informal participant communication as data sources.

Conclusion:

In this study, the researchers identified three themes: 1) taking initiative ("fire myself up"); 2) stages of social media participation; and 3) support from different types of colleagues. In the first theme, the participant realized early in her career that if she wanted to grow as an educator, she needed to advocate and find resources herself. In the second theme, she identified four stages of joining an OPC, which were: (a) thinking about joining; (b) lurking; (c) participating and sharing; and (d) leading. In the third theme, she acknowledged the different components of her collegial support system, which include in-person colleagues (such as coworkers in her PE department), hybrid (such as those who attend similar conferences), and virtual (PE professionals with whom she interacts with online only).

Key Takeaway:

This study highlights the use of social media, specifically Twitter, as a way to establish OPCs, which can be used to connect PE teachers to help negate feelings of isolation. The authors make it clear that the participant felt all three types of colleagues were beneficial in decreasing her feelings of isolation. It should be noted that establishing a relationship and feeling comfortable sharing in an OPC may take time but can lead to finding a supportive and informative community.