

ARTICLE REVIEWED

“It’s Gonna Take Time”: Enacting Culturally Relevant Physical Education in Urban Schools

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THE PROBLEM

Culturally relevant physical education (CRPE) has become more prominent as there are Eurocentric perspectives that are traditionally embedded in K-12 schools. The United States is becoming more diverse, as most students represented in K-12 schools are culturally and ethnically diverse (CED).

As this trend continues, there is a barrier between linguistic and cultural backgrounds of both teachers and students, which results in cultural misunderstandings.



Research Summary

Using culturally relevant physical education (CRPE), this study examined how one elementary physical education teacher implemented strategies that bridged cultural distance between their own background and lived experiences and those of their culturally and ethnically diverse (CED) students. Additionally, the study explored factors that support school-wide initiatives reflecting cultural knowledge. The study focused on a physical education teacher with six years of teaching experience who worked at an urban-intensive K-5 school in the Southeastern United States. Data was collected through interviews, reflective journaling, voice memos, and supporting documents from the teacher’s professional preparation program and current physical education program. Three themes emerged: personalizing curriculum to reflect student lives; investing in school-wide change; and pedagogical and structural adjustments to the class. These themes suggest that CRPE is not just adding diverse activities and is responsive rather than scripted. It also extends beyond instruction, centers on care and structure, and develops continually over time.

Conclusion

CRPE is dependent on intentional adjustments that are based on students’ unique needs. Further research is needed to more deeply understand how CRPE is enacted in practice, especially in ways that connect curriculum, student lived experiences, and classroom structure. It is important to understand the factors that shape teaching and learning for CED students. Teachers should emphasize teaching strategies that make physical education meaningful and responsive to students’ backgrounds and needs through intentionally designed programs. Additionally, gaps remain in research around how physical education teachers are being prepared and supported in CED settings.

Key Takeaway

In an ever-evolving educational environment, physical education teachers should enact culturally responsive teaching strategies to meet the diverse needs of students. CRPE is a continual process in which teachers actively reflect on their practice and adapt curriculum, instructional strategies, and classroom structures over time. When physical education teachers make a commitment to CRPE, their students gain an equitable and meaningful learning experience.