In a previous Advocacy in Action article, Richards and Wilson (2012) discussed quality physical education as a precursor to advocacy. It was argued that before physical education teachers can be effective advocates, they must first develop a high-quality physical education program for which to advocate. The American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (AAHPERD; National Association for Sport and Physical Education [NASPE], 2010) guidelines for quality physical education and the national standards for physical education (AAHPERD, in press) were cited as being critical to the development of a quality program. We extend the points made by Richards and Wilson by arguing that in addition to being standards-based, a high-quality physical education program should promote a student-centered learning environment. Such a learning environment fosters student engagement and learning and increases the likelihood of transfer outside of physical education. The integrated model for learning and motivation (IMLM; Levesque-Bristol, Sell, & Zimmerman, 2006) is reviewed as a conceptual framework for enhancing student learning through the development of a student-centered learning environment.
Students who are intrinsically motivated are more engaged in the learning process and are less likely to view physical education as unimportant to their education.

The Integrative Model for Learning and Motivation

Grounded in self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), the IMLM provides a conceptual framework for understanding the influence instructors have in facilitating student learning. The model posits that students’ experiences in a class can be influenced by the type of learning environment the instructor creates. A teacher-centered learning environment focuses more on the needs and perspectives of the instructor. In contrast, a student-centered learning environment is characterized by high levels of student engagement and empowerment so that students become central to the learning process. This environment allows students to achieve the three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Autonomy relates to students’ ability to make choices in the learning environment. It is important to note that giving students choices does not require that the physical education teacher turn over complete control of the class. Rather, autonomy can be fostered by allowing students to make small decisions during a lesson. For example, if a teacher sets up three stations at which to practice basketball skills, students could be given the freedom to choose at which station to begin based on the skill they need to work on the most.

Competence is closely related to self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) and can be defined as an individual’s perception that they are effectively able to perform the behaviors required to accomplish a task. In physical education, competence can be fostered by designing tasks that are appropriate given students’ developmental level and skill. Giving students numerous opportunities to practice and providing them with positive or corrective feedback can also enhance feelings of competence.

Relatedness is fostered through connecting and engaging with other people. It manifests through a sense of belonging or affilia-
tivation with others. Physical education teachers can promote relatedness by giving students opportunities to work in collaborative environments. Team-building activities and instructional models such as sport education (Siedentop, Hastie, & van der Mars, 2004) that foster interdependence among students can enhance relatedness.

Drawing on self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), the IMLM (Levesque–Bristol et al., 2006) holds that satisfying the three basic psychological needs through the development of a student-centered learning environment will lead to more intrinsic and self-determined forms of motivation. When students are intrinsically motivated, they pursue learning for the joy or excitement they derive from learning the material itself. In contrast, extrinsic motivation occurs when students believe that they are learning material because they feel it is something that they have to do. Extrinsic motivation also occurs when learning is motivated by the pursuit of a reward or punishment avoidance.

Students who are intrinsically motivated are more engaged in the learning process and are less likely to view physical education as unimportant to their education. These students are involved in physical education because it is enjoyable for them rather than something they have to do to get a good grade in the class. As a result, they are more likely to learn and retain the material. Intrinsic motivation also leads to knowledge and behavior transfer. Related to physical education, children will be more likely to put the skills and information they learn to use in other contexts, such as community-based physical activity programs. This works toward the key program outcomes of personal growth and encouraging students to be active beyond the school day (AAHPERD, in press).

Concluding Thoughts

As state and federal policies continue to marginalize physical education, it becomes increasingly important for physical education teachers to become good advocates for their programs. However, prior to engaging in advocacy initiatives, it is important for physical education teachers to develop quality programs that can be used to showcase the positive outcomes of physical education. Richards and Wilson (2012) note the importance of structuring physical education programs in a way that works toward the national standards for physical education (AAHPERD, in press) and meets the definition of a quality physical education program (NASPE, 2010). In this article, we have argued that in addition to the criteria posed by AAHPERD, a student-centered learning environment is an important element of a quality physical education program as it can foster student growth and promote lifelong learning. Developing an environment in which students feel empowered, engaged, and active in the learning process helps to satisfy the three basic psychological needs, which leads to more intrinsic motivation. The combination of a student-centered learning environment, satisfaction of basic psychological needs, and enhanced intrinsic motivation leads to greater student learning and the transfer of skills and knowledge beyond the gymnasium. When students are engaged in physical education and are more likely to pursue physical activity outside of school, physical education teachers can more effectively advocate for their programs.

References


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Submissions Welcome!

Readers are encouraged to send “Advocacy in Action” submissions to column editor K. Andrew R. Richards at advocacy@aahperd.org.

The purpose of the Strategies column “Advocacy in Action” is to provide tangible, real world examples of grassroots and national-level advocacy activities taking place in the fields of physical education, health education and physical activity. Submissions should be written in a conversational, practical tone. Columns should be 1,000–1,300 words, or roughly four typed, double-spaced pages.