In an educational era marked by subjects competing for legitimacy, the tangible benefits these courses provide students in the form of relevant content becomes paramount. Physical education (PE) is no stranger to this competition. Prior to advocating for its place in the K–12 curriculum, however, it is crucial that we, as a unified profession, ensure that our programs are indeed providing such tangible benefits. Certain steps can be taken in that regard, including curricular alignment with SHAPE America’s National
Standards and guidelines for quality PE (Richards & Wilson, 2012; SHAPE America – Society of Health and Physical Educators, 2016), as well as the cultivation of a student-centered learning environment (Richards & Levesque-Bristol, 2014). Student-centered learning environments encourage the meaningful engagement that has been identified as a necessary but often lacking condition for learning. From a self-determination theory perspective (Ryan & Deci, 2000), heightened student engagement is a product of the more self-determined forms of motivation students display toward PE, which arises from the satisfaction of the basic psychological needs for autonomy (i.e., choice), competence (i.e., mastery) and relatedness (i.e., connectedness). The purpose of this article is to introduce the concept of need-supportive instruction as a practical means through which PE teachers can satisfy their students’ psychological needs, leading to more self-determined student motivation in class and, ultimately, tangible benefits outside of school.

### Need-Supportive Instruction in Physical Education

Teachers’ motivational styles are highly influential in the process of student need satisfaction. These styles reside on a spectrum ranging from highly need-supportive to highly controlling. Need-supportive teachers nurture their students’ needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness via the provision of autonomy support, structure and interpersonal involvement, respectively (Haerens et al., 2013). Together, these three pedagogical categories comprise the concept of need-supportive instruction. The antithesis of need-supportive instruction is that which frustrates students’ needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness through the delivery of pressuring, chaotic and cold pedagogies, respectively. Table 1 provides specific examples of teacher behaviors that support or frustrate each psychological need.

Autonomy-supportive teaching involves identifying, nurturing and developing students’ interests and personal goals (Hae-

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<tr>
<th>Controlling Behaviors</th>
<th>Need-supportive Behaviors</th>
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<td>The teacher identifies the skills to be practiced for the lesson and dictates the proper progressions for the class.</td>
<td>The teacher allows the students opportunities to experiment with and identify the most efficient way to hit a forehand shot in pickleball without prematurely intervening.</td>
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<td>The curriculum is set, offering little to no room for student input.</td>
<td>The teacher offers students a choice in the unit of instruction and/or the order in which content is introduced.</td>
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<td>The teacher only provides general instruction to the class and neglects to accommodate necessary extensions for advanced students and modifications for students experiencing difficulty.</td>
<td>The teacher offers new tips to students individually beyond the general instruction offered to the class.</td>
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<td>Students are simply “along for the ride” throughout the lesson and experience lesson phases and activities as they happen.</td>
<td>The teacher provides students with clear learning objectives and a general outline of the lesson at the beginning of class.</td>
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<td>The teacher rarely communicates with students; when doing so, communication is restricted to that which pertains to the content.</td>
<td>The teacher shows a genuine interest in all students and makes an effort to engage in dialogue pertaining to goals, hobbies and values.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The teacher appears disengaged, as if there was someplace he or she would rather be.</td>
<td>The teacher is enthusiastic and engaged in the lesson and invites all students to participate and endorses the value of the content in their lives.</td>
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Note. Examples are drawn from the Need-Supportive Teaching Behaviors instruments designed and validated by Haerens et al. (2013).
In PE, for example, teachers can provide autonomy support by allowing their students to create a warm-up routine based on a movement form that interests them. Teachers with more controlling motivational styles may pressure their students to engage in predetermined warm-up exercises, possibly regulating the number of repetitions and even the pace at which they are to be completed.

Students also yearn to be successful in class. Teaching behaviors that contribute to the satisfaction of students’ need for competence fall within the need-supportive category of structure. Teachers provide structure, for instance, by clearly explaining tasks and expectations to students and effectively demonstrating skills (Haerens et al., 2013). In contrast, teachers can thwart their students’ need for competence by creating a chaotic learning environment, characterized by ambiguous or absent learning objectives and criteria for success.

Lastly, need-supportive teachers can foster their students’ need for relatedness by providing interpersonal involvement (Haerens et al., 2013). Interpersonally involved teachers invest significant resources in their students. Additionally, their interactions with students are indicative of responsiveness and warmth. Contrastingly, controlling teachers restrain their students’ need for relatedness by creating a cold environment, in which their communications with students are unfriendly, condescending or altogether nonexistent (Van den Berghe, Vansteenkiste, Cardon, Kirk, & Haerens, 2014). A need-supportive instructional style is beneficial to students and teachers alike. Students receiving need-supportive instruction experience greater need satisfaction, leading to more intrinsic motivation toward the subject. This enhanced motivation yields higher learning gains, course enjoyment and leisure-time physical activity. Teachers receiving need-supportive instruction training have reported more intrinsic motivation for teaching, improved teaching effectiveness, and increased job satisfaction (Van den Berghe et al., 2014).

Conclusions and Final Thoughts

Teaching is a difficult, and often thankless, profession. Some may argue that in light of the marginalization with which they and their subject are chronically confronted, PE teachers fight a particularly steep uphill battle. Rarely is sufficient equipment, space and time provided to adequately meet the demands of administrators and policymakers. Burdened with this harsh reality, the crux of the issue then becomes how best to motivate students to take what they learn in PE and use it during their leisure time. More importantly, perhaps, is the task of instilling in them an intrinsic desire to independently discover, learn about, and engage in novel forms of physical activity for themselves. Teachers can take great strides in promoting this motivation in their students by creating a student-centered environment through the provision of need-supportive instruction.

This article has supported previous advocacy efforts calling for the structuring of PE programs around the National Standards and guidelines set forth for quality PE (Richards & Wilson, 2012; SHAPE America, 2016) and promoting student-centered learning environments that assist in developing more self-determined forms of motivation for PE (Richards & Levesque-Bristol, 2014). Additionally, the authors have extended these previous efforts by suggesting need-supportive instruction (Haerens et al., 2013) as an effective means through which teachers can create student-centered learning environments. Teachers of PE can further ensure the fulfillment of its mission, thus elevating its credibility for future advocacy efforts by providing need-supportive instruction.

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@shapeamerica.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.