

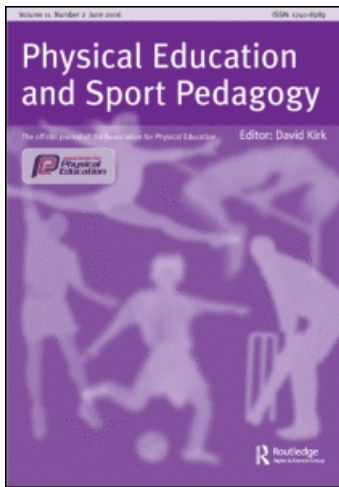
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Paul M. Wright ^a; Weidong Li ^b

^a Department of Health and Sport Sciences, University of Memphis, Memphis, TN, USA ^b College of Education and Human Ecology, The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH, USA

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Exploring the relevance of positive youth development in urban physical education

Paul M. Wright^{a*} and Weidong Li^b

^aDepartment of Health and Sport Sciences, University of Memphis, Memphis, TN, USA; ^bCollege of Education and Human Ecology, The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH, USA

Background: While there are numerous claims that physical activity promotes positive youth development, there is a need for more empirical research in this area. Many qualitative studies suggest a relationship between a youth development orientation and participants' attitudes and behaviors in physical activity programs. A quantitative analysis of such relationships would test some of the underlying assumptions of physical activity programs designed to promote youth development.

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to examine the relationships among four youth development scales (Affective Context, Support for Youth Development, Opportunities to Engage Youth as Resources, and Belonging) and perceived effort, enjoyment, and usefulness in the context of urban physical education.

Participants and setting: Eighty-seven African American high school students (41 male and 46 female) with a mean age of 14.8 years volunteered to participate in the present study. The setting was a public high school located in an inner-city neighborhood. This school was located in a mid-sized city in the southern USA.

Research design: A single administration, cross-sectional design was employed.

Data collection: Participants completed the battery of questionnaires in a classroom setting after they completed a six-week physical fitness unit. Directions for completing questionnaires were read aloud and a sample item was provided to clarify the process. Most participants completed the questionnaires in approximately 30 minutes.

Data analysis: The relationships among effort, youth as resources, support, belonging, usefulness, enjoyment, and affective context were assessed using simple Pearson correlations with the option of no missing data. A one-way MANOVA was conducted to investigate whether ratings of effort, youth as resources, support, belonging, usefulness, enjoyment, and affective context would vary as a function of gender. Three multiple stepwise regressions incorporating both forward and backward selection were used to investigate the relationships between the independent variables of interest and dependent variables.

Findings: The results indicated positive correlations among effort, youth as resources, support, belonging, usefulness, enjoyment, and affective context. Perceived effort, enjoyment, and usefulness were significantly predicted by various combinations of the four youth development scales.

Conclusions: It is suggested physical education could be integrated into comprehensive, school-wide positive youth development programs, and that physical education teacher education programs should integrate youth development principles and practices.

Keywords: youth development; urban youth; physical education

Many children and youth in impoverished urban environments are confronted with negative influences such as drug and alcohol abuse, criminal activity, teen pregnancy, and violence.

*Corresponding author. Email: pwright2@memphis.edu

They are disproportionately 'at-risk' or 'disaffected' due to circumstances beyond their control. Researchers have been actively seeking effective and meaningful educational programs to address these challenges. Among these, programs with a youth development orientation show potential in terms of promoting positive attitudes and behaviors that fortify participants against many of the challenges and risk factors they encounter (Catalano et al. 1998; Lerner 2004). A positive youth development framework for supporting urban children and youth is endorsed in reports and policy statements coming from the USA and UK (Children and Families Research Group 2002; Department of Social Security [DSS] 1999; Social Exclusion Unit 1999; United States Department of Health and Human Services 2000).

Positive youth development, as a relatively young and still evolving interdisciplinary field, is characterized by a commitment to helping children and youth reach their full potential (Lerner 2004; Silliman 2004). Although Catalano et al. (1998) acknowledged that positive youth development is not consistently defined, they determined that effective programs frequently emphasize the following objectives: strengthen social, emotional, behavioral, cognitive, and moral competencies; build self-efficacy; shape messages from family and community about standards for positive youth behavior; increase healthy bonding with adults, peers and younger children; expand opportunities and recognition for youth who engage in positive behavior and activities; provide structure and consistency in program delivery; and intervene with youth for at least nine months.

Positive youth development programs take many forms and are delivered in a variety of contexts, such as the school, community, and family setting (Catalano et al. 1998; Walberg, Reyes and Weissberg 1997). While many youth development programs focus on prevention and deficit reduction, a number of scholars argue that programs should focus on the strengths of youth (Astroth 1993; Hellison and Cutforth 1997; Seita 2004; Walberg, Reyes and Weissberg 1997). In describing positive youth development programs that have been effective in urban communities, McLaughlin, Irby and Langman (1994) highlight the value of defining and developing potential, not just reducing pathology. They also see effective urban youth development programs striking a balance between providing services to young people, supporting their explorations, and identifying opportunities for them to make real contributions (McLaughlin, Irby and Langman 1994). This strength-based approach to positive youth development is reflected in a commitment to empowering and giving voice to youth (Cargo et al. 2003; Ginwright and Cammarota 2002; Kegler and Wyatt 2003; Mitra 2004).

A review study, funded by the US Department of Health and Human Services and the National Institute for Child Health and Human Development, was conducted to explore positive youth development in the USA (Catalano et al. 1998). This study involved a meta-analysis of youth development program evaluations. Seventy-seven empirical studies and data-driven evaluations of youth programs were reviewed. Studies were included if they employed a control or strong comparison group and measured youth behavioral outcomes in participants between the ages of 6 and 20 years old. Twenty-five of the 77 youth development programs reviewed were deemed effective because they provided evidence to support the following outcomes: better school attendance; higher academic performance; healthier peer and adult interactions; improved decision-making abilities; as well as decreased substance abuse and risky sexual behavior (Catalano et al. 1998).

The youth development literature contains many examples of school-based programs that are connected to school health and psychological services (Buckley, Storino, and Saarni 2003; Catalano et al. 2003; Flay 2002; Greenberg et al. 2003). Conspicuously absent in the literature

is, however, any reference to physical education. A related body of literature indicates sport and physical activity experiences can be effective in promoting positive attitudes, motivational responses, and prosocial behavior in urban environments (Collingwood 1996; Danish, Forneris, and Wallace 2005; Hellison 2003; Martinek and Hellison 1997; Wright, Ding, and Li 2005). Based on their work with the personal and social responsibility model, Hellison and others contend physical activity can serve as a vehicle for promoting positive youth development (Hellison et al. 2000). With the 'Sport for Peace' curriculum, Ennis and her colleagues have demonstrated that principles aligned with positive youth development can be implemented in urban physical education (Ennis et al. 1999). The Sport for Peace study and others indicate that trusting and caring relationships, as well as relevance, are key factors in engaging students in urban physical education (Ennis 1999; Ennis et al. 1999).

While there is a growing body of anecdotal evidence to support the concept of youth development through physical activity, there is a need for more empirical research in this area (Petitpas et al. 2005; Sandford, Armour, and Warmington 2006), especially in physical education settings. Many of the empirical studies on the topic to date have used qualitative methods to provide rich program descriptions (Cutforth and Puckett 1999; Ennis et al. 1999; Schilling 2001; Wright and Burton 2008). Many of these studies suggest a relationship between the presence of a youth development orientation and participants' attitudes and behaviors in the program setting. A quantitative analysis of the relationships between these variables could provide additional empirical evidence supporting the underlying assumptions of physical activity programs designed to promote youth development. The purpose of the present study, therefore, was to employ a quantitative approach to examine the relationship between four youth development scales ('Affective Context', 'Support for Youth Development', 'Opportunities to Engage Youth as Resources', and 'Belonging') and perceived effort, enjoyment, and usefulness in the context of urban physical education. It was hypothesized that participant ratings on the four youth development scales would be positively correlated with and significantly predictive of ratings of perceived effort, enjoyment, and usefulness. It is well established that students' motivational responses and attitudes toward physical education often vary with gender (Beveridge and Scruggs 2000). Therefore, gender differences were examined in the present study.

Method

Participants and setting

Eighty-seven high school students (41 male and 46 female) with a mean age of 14.8 years volunteered to participate in the present study. Reflecting the demographics of this school, 100% of participants were African American. They were enrolled in one of four pre-existing physical education classes. These classes met daily for 50 minutes and were taught by an African American physical education teacher. This teacher, with a master's degree in education, had been teaching for 30 years. He also served as the school's athletic director and coached the girls' track and field team at the time of this study. This high school is located in a large city in the southern USA. The school had been on academic probation for several years and was on the state's failing list for attendance, drop-out rates, and standardized test scores. The neighborhood surrounding this school has high rates of poverty, violence, obesity, physical inactivity, and sexually transmitted disease. In accordance with the university's Institutional Review Board, active parental and child consent was secured for all participants before the initiation of this research.

Instrumentations*Demographic information*

Participants reported their age, gender, and their physical education class period. As 100% of the school's student population was African American, it was not necessary for students to report race.

Youth development orientation

The presence of a youth development orientation was assessed using four scales that represented key elements of effective youth development programs as described by Catalano et al. (1998): 'Affective Context', 'Support for Youth Development', 'Opportunities to Engage Youth as Resources', and 'Belonging'. These four scales also align with key indicators of success in urban physical education programs (Ennis 1999). The Affective Context, Support for Youth Development, and Opportunities to Engage Youth as Resources scales were developed by Kahne et al. (2001). The Belonging scale was developed by Anderson-Butcher and Conroy (2002). The Affective Context scale consists of nine items that assess participants' general feelings about the learning environment. A sample item is, 'I feel safe'. The Support for Youth Development scale is a nine-item scale that indicates the degree to which participants see adults in the program as supportive and encouraging. A sample item is, 'The teacher pays attention to what is going on in your life'. The seven-item Opportunities to Engage Youth as Resources scale measures the degree to which participants feel they have been given roles of responsibility. A sample item is, 'I have been in charge of a group'. The Belonging scale consists of five items that tap participants' perception of belonging to a group (Anderson-Butcher and Conroy 2002). A sample item is, 'I am accepted in the physical fitness program in my class'. All four youth development scales were rated from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Previous studies with urban adolescents have supported the reliability and validity of these measures. The Belonging scale was validated with a group of culturally diverse adolescents living in a large western city. Approximately one-half of the calibration and cross-validation samples identified themselves as other than Caucasian (Anderson-Butcher and Conroy 2002). The scales developed by Kahne et al. (2001) were validated using Rasch analysis with a sample of adolescents living in a large mid-western city. The majority of these participants were African American and living at or below the poverty level.

Perceived effort

Perceived effort was assessed using the Effort sub-scale from the Intrinsic Motivation Inventory (McAuley, Duncan, and Tammen 1989). A sample item is, 'I tried very hard while doing the exercises'. In the present study, this measure was rated on a five-point scale instead of the original seven-point scale to be consistent with the other surveys, which ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Enjoyment and usefulness

Perceptions of enjoyment and usefulness were assessed using the Student Attitude Toward Physical Education survey (Subramaniam and Silverman 2000). This instrument consists of two sub-scales: 'Enjoyment' and 'Usefulness'. The Enjoyment sub-scale consists of 10

items that tap participants' feelings of fun and interest. A sample item is, 'I feel my physical education teacher makes learning in the physical fitness unit fun for me'. The Usefulness sub-scale also consists of 10 items that indicate the perceived relevance to participants. A sample item is, 'I feel the exercises I do in the physical fitness unit are valuable to me'. The rating ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). This measure has yielded internally consistent results in studies on suburban and urban physical education programs (Dyson et al. 2004; Wright and Li 2006).

Procedure

Participants completed the battery of questionnaires in a classroom setting after they completed a six-week physical fitness unit in the first semester of the academic year. This fitness unit included calisthenics in the gymnasium, resistance training in the weight room, and running/jogging on an outdoor track. Directions for completing questionnaires were read aloud and a sample item was provided to clarify the process. Most participants completed the questionnaires in approximately 30 minutes.

Data analysis

All negatively worded items were reversed before any data management and analysis. The average scores for each sub-scale were obtained by summing all responses and dividing by the relevant number of items per sub-scale. Internal consistency and reliability for all sub-scales were assessed using Cronbach's coefficient alpha (Cronbach 1951). Next, the relationships among effort, youth as resources, support, belonging, usefulness, enjoyment, and affective context were assessed using simple Pearson correlations with the option of no missing data. A one-way MANOVA was conducted to investigate whether ratings of effort, youth as resources, support, belonging, usefulness, enjoyment, and affective context would vary as a function of gender.

Three multiple stepwise regressions incorporating both forward and backward selection were used to investigate the relationships between the independent variables of interest and the dependent variables. The first statistical model with effort as a dependent variable was composed of nine independent variables: support, youth as resources, belonging, affective context, gender, and the four interaction effects between gender and the other four independent variables. The other two statistical models were composed of the same nine independent variables, but with either usefulness or enjoyment as a dependent variable. The normality tests, homogeneous variance tests, and the residual and probability plots were obtained to assess how well the models fit the data.

Results

Means, standard deviations, and Cronbach's coefficient alphas for effort, youth as resources, support, belonging, usefulness, enjoyment, and affective context are presented in Table 1. The coefficients for all sub-scales ranged from 0.68 to 0.85. The MANVOA analysis indicated that there were no overall significant gender differences in effort, youth as resources, support, belonging, usefulness, enjoyment, and affective context ($F_{(7, 72)} = 0.33, p > 0.94$).

The correlations among effort, youth as resources, support, belonging, usefulness, enjoyment, and affective context are presented in Table 2. The correlational analysis indicated

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and Cronbach's coefficient alphas for all variables.

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation	Coefficient alphas
Effort	3.93	0.61	0.68
Youth as resources	3.19	0.80	0.79
Support	3.72	0.65	0.73
Belonging	3.81	0.71	0.85
Usefulness	3.81	0.65	0.78
Enjoyment	3.71	0.76	0.73
Affective context	3.97	0.83	0.77

Table 2. Correlation matrix between all variables for participants.

Variable	EF	RE	S	BE	US	EN	AC
Effort (EF)	–	.20	.45*	.48*	.38*	.36*	.16
Youth as resources (RE)		–	.31*	.26*	.22*	.24*	.05
Support (S)			–	.43*	.59*	.65*	.50*
Belonging (BE)				–	.37*	.50*	.24*
Usefulness (US)					–	.80*	.49*
Enjoyment (EN)						–	.49*
Affective context (AC)							–

Note: * $p < 0.05$.

that the effort scale was positively correlated with the support, belonging, usefulness, and enjoyment scales. The youth as resources scale was positively correlated with the belonging and support scales. The support scale was positively correlated with the affective context scale. The belonging scale had a positive relationship with the usefulness, enjoyment, and affective context scales. There was a positive relationship between the enjoyment scale and the affective context scale.

For the statistical model with enjoyment as a dependent variable, the three variables that entered into the model were belonging, affective climate, and support. The model accounted for 49% of the variance in usefulness. The test of normality of the residuals did not show significant evidence of normal violation. No evidence of heterogeneous variance or quadratic behavior was shown. The Cook's D test was used to identify any statistical outliers. No potential influential outliers were identified. The largest value was 0.23, which was less than 1. The model, therefore, fits the data well. The regression analysis indicated that belonging ($t_{(81)} = 2.69$, $p < 0.0086$), affective climate ($t_{(81)} = 2.62$, $p < 0.0104$), and support ($t_{(81)} = 4.45$, $p < 0.0001$), significantly predicted enjoyment in a positive way. A summary of the regression analysis is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Summary of regression models with stepwise selection to predict enjoyment.

Variable	B	SE B	R-squared
Support	0.50	0.11	0.43
Belonging	0.25	0.09	0.48
Affective context	0.18	0.08	0.51

Table 4. Summary of regression models with stepwise selection to predict effort.

Variable	B	SE B	R-squared
Belonging	0.32	0.10	0.24
Support	0.28	0.10	0.32

Table 5. Summary of regression models with stepwise selection to predict usefulness.

Variable	B	SE B	R-squared
Support	0.46	0.10	0.34
Affective context	0.20	0.08	0.39

For the statistical model with effort as a dependent variable, the two variables that entered into the model were belonging and support. The model accounted for 32% of the variance in effort. The test of normality of the residuals did not show significant evidence of normal violation. No evidence of heterogeneous variance or quadratic behavior was shown. No potential influential outliers were identified based on the Cooks' D test. The largest value was 0.25, which was less than 1. The model, therefore, fits these data well. The regression analysis indicated that both belonging ($t_{(81)} = 3.52, p < 0.0007$), and support ($t_{(81)} = 2.92, p < 0.0046$), significantly predicted effort in a positive way. A summary of the regression analysis is presented in Table 4.

For the statistical model with usefulness as a dependent variable, the two variables that entered into the model were affective context and support. The model accounted for 38% of the variance in usefulness. The test of normality of the residuals did not show significant evidence of normal violation. No evidence of heterogeneous variance or quadratic behavior was shown. No potential influential outliers were identified based on the Cooks' D test. The largest value was 0.5, which was less than 1. The model, therefore, fits these data well. The regression analysis indicated that both affective context ($t_{(79)} = 2.57, p < 0.0121$), and support ($t_{(79)} = 4.48, p < 0.0001$), significantly predicted usefulness in a positive way. A summary of the regression analysis is presented in Table 5.

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to examine the relationship between four youth development scales (Affective Context, Support for Youth Development, Opportunities to Engage Youth as Resources, and Belonging) and perceived effort, enjoyment, and usefulness in the context of urban physical education. As hypothesized, significant positive correlations were seen among the four youth development scales, perceived effort, enjoyment, and usefulness. Participants who felt supported by the teacher as well as those who felt a sense of belonging were likely to exert effort, enjoy the exercises, and value the physical fitness unit. Participants who perceived a positive affective climate as well as those who felt they were treated as resources were also likely to enjoy the exercises and value the physical fitness unit.

Moreover, the regression analyses indicated that participants' perceived effort, enjoyment, and usefulness were significantly predicted by various combinations of the four

youth development scales. Participants who felt supported by their teacher were likely to exert more effort, experience more enjoyment, and perceive the physical fitness unit to be more valuable. Participants who felt a sense of belonging were likely to exert more effort and experienced more enjoyment. For those who perceived a positive affective climate, they were likely to experience more enjoyment and perceive the fitness unit to be more valuable.

Support from a caring adult emerged as a significant predictor variable in all three regression models. This finding is consistent with previous studies on physical activity programs with urban youth (Ennis et al. 1999; Hellison and Wright 2003; Schilling 2001). Studies of programs delivered in extended day and sport camp settings have highlighted the importance of a supportive and committed program leader (Hellison and Wright 2003; Schilling 2001). As noted earlier, research supports the importance of a trusting and caring environment in urban physical education (Ennis et al. 1999). In addition to the physical activity programs referenced here, teachers committed to integrating an ethic of caring in their teaching should review the work of Noddings (1992, 1995, 1996, 2002) in the general education literature.

Promoting empowerment and giving voice to students is a strong feature of many youth development programs (Cargo et al. 2003; Ginwright and Cammarota 2002; Kegler and Wyatt 2003; Mitra 2004). Hellison and his colleagues have demonstrated that such strategies can be effectively integrated into physical activity programs for urban youth through their work with the personal and social responsibility model (Hellison 2003; Hellison et al. 2000; Hellison and Walsh 2002; Hellison and Wright 2003). However, this aspect of youth development was not strongly related to participants' perceived effort, enjoyment, or usefulness in this urban physical education program. One possible explanation is that the opportunities for youth as resources scale mainly focuses on community based service and activities, and it is likely that participants in the present study did not see a connection between this type of activity and their physical education experience. This issue could be explored in future studies by testing these relationships in programs that incorporate civic engagement activities such as service-learning or cross-age teaching (for examples, see Hellison et al. 2000).

Although boys and girls often have different perceptions of physical education, findings in this study revealed no significant differences related to gender. According to Beveridge and Scruggs (2000), student-centered and democratic teaching practices represent effective ways to promote gender equity in physical education. As the principles of positive youth development align with these practices, it stands to reason that this orientation does not appear to be gender-biased. This finding suggests that promoting gender equity may be a programmatic benefit of integrating youth development principles in urban physical education.

Taken together, the findings presented here support the relevance of a positive youth development orientation in urban physical education. It has recently been argued that school-based sport programs can be used to promote youth development (Danish, Forneris, and Wallace 2005). It appears that physical education could also play a role in comprehensive, school-based youth development programs like those called for in the literature (Catalano et al. 2003; Greenberg et al. 2003; Minnard 2002). A youth development orientation in urban physical education would be consistent with strategies for engaging students (Ennis 1999) and promoting gender equity (Beveridge and Scruggs 2000). Moreover, this approach would be consistent with physical education standards that call for the promotion

of personal and social responsibility as well as enjoyment and self-expression (NASPE 2004; TKI: The Online Learning Center 2006; United Kingdom National Curriculum 2006).

A limitation in the present study relates to the four scales used to represent a positive youth development orientation. In this relatively young field, the number of effective measures available is growing but still limited (Catalano et al. 1998; Silliman 2004). As a diverse field where a wide range of programs targets various objectives, positive youth development is difficult to define (Catalano et al. 1998; McLaughlin, Irby, and Langman 1994). More vigorous tests of the psychometric properties of these positive youth development scales are warranted in urban physical education settings.

It is suggested that school leaders interested in developing a comprehensive, school-wide approach to positive youth development consider ways to integrate physical education into their planning. This could be accomplished through professional development and training related to exemplary models such as 'Sport for Peace' and Hellison's (2003) personal and social responsibility model. Physical education teacher education programs, especially those serving urban school districts, should consider ways to integrate youth development principles and strategies into their curriculum. Regarding future research, these findings support key assumptions underlying the concept of youth development through physical activity. Specifically, the presence of a youth development orientation appears to be positively related to and predictive of participants' attitudes and behaviors. However, this study did not assess an intervention. Impact studies and empirical evaluations of specific programs are desperately needed to complement the current literature base (Petitpas et al. 2005; Sandford, Armour, and Warmington 2006).

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