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Positive Psychology Effects on Middle School Physical Education
Grades, Attendance, and Discipline

Lindenwood University

by

Randolph Christopher Helms

A Dissertation Submitted to the Education Faculty of Lindenwood University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of

Doctor of Education

School of Education

Positive Psychology Effects on Middle School Physical Education
Grades, Attendance, and Discipline

Lindenwood University Ed.D.

by

Randolph Christopher Helms

This dissertation has been approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
Doctor of Education
at Lindenwood University by the School of Education

Graham Weir
Dr. Graham Weir, Dissertation Chair

11 / 19 / 2021
Date

Lynda Leavitt
Dr. Lynda Leavitt, Committee Member

11 / 19 / 2021
Date


Dr. Ed Dreyer, Committee Member

11-19-21
Date

Declaration of Originality

I hereby declare and attest that this is an original study based solely upon my own scholarly work here at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree here or elsewhere.

Full Legal Name: Randolph Christopher Helms

Signature: Randolph Christopher Helms Date: 11/17/2021

Acknowledgments

I would like to dedicate my dissertation to the many middle school students that I have had the pleasure of working with within various classes over the years.

Additionally, I dedicate this dissertation to my family and many friends and administrators who have guided me over these many years. A special feeling of gratitude to my loving wife and children; Erin Helms, Sophia, Clayton, Liam, and Piper.

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Abstract

The present study explored the effect of instructing middle school students in sixth, seventh, and eighth grades in positive psychology lessons, as compared to control classes that did not receive this positive psychology instruction. This study used quantitative procedures to determine the implementation of this curriculum on lowering student absence rate, discipline referrals, increasing student physical education grades over a trimester, improving overall grade point average, and increasing student well-being. Additionally, the study analyzed the EPOCH survey pre- and post-data on a research question regarding the well-being attitudes/perceptions of these middle school students who received positive psychology instruction in their physical education classes compared to control classes.

This study sought to provide additional data regarding how the positive psychology variables of engagement, perseverance, optimism, connectedness, and happiness, as defined by Seligman in 2009, can provide protective factors against the potential detrimental impact of inappropriate student behavior. Research about disruptive behaviors has shown that they are related to increases in students' emotional and behavioral issues (Stanley et. al., 2006). The increase in these issues demonstrates our students' needs to develop more positive character education traits that help eliminate bullying and reduce violence in our schools. The complicated relationships that our middle school students face, and their variety of needs show the importance of finding and supplying a supportive environment where middle school students feel respected and safe (Wigfield, et. al. 2006; Damon et al. 2006; Shallcross, 2015).

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Chapter One: Overview of the Study

Introduction

We have seen an increase in negative student behaviors in our schools, including cheating, bullying, and violence. The increase in disruptive behaviors in our classrooms has caused educators and parents to be concerned throughout America (Vallaire-Thomas, et al., 2011). Research about disruptive behaviors has shown a correlation with an increase in students' emotional and behavioral issues (Stanley et al., 2006). The increase in these issues demonstrates our students' needs to develop more positive character education traits that help eliminate bullying and other disruptive issues in our schools. The complicated relationships that our middle school students face and their variety of needs show the importance of finding and supplying a supportive environment where middle school students feel respected and safe. In general, many students possess increasingly negative attitudes toward school in the middle school years (Wigfield et al., 2006; Damon et al., 2006; Shallcross, 2015).

Teaching character education or positive psychology has been especially important towards reducing some of the educational concerns mentioned above. Lahey (2013) pointed out schools that implement a character education or positive psychology program report higher academic performance, improved attendance, reduced violence, fewer disciplinary issues, reduced substance abuse, and less vandalism. Montera (2001) said, "most Americans will tell you that character education is a good idea. According to pollsters, 90% of people want schools to teach moral values" (p 191). This researcher hopes to prove further how implementing a character education program / positive

psychology program into physical education helps meet our middle students' needs today.

Students want to know that their peers like, respect, and care about them. They need to know that they are coming to a safe environment free of stress. A safe, caring environment allows students to explore, learn, and grow safely (Applebury, 2020). This researcher will demonstrate further that implementing a student-centered character education program / positive psychology program in physical education leads to improved attendance, grade point average (GPA), and student discipline reduction. When our students are relaxed, they are ready to learn (The Share Team, 2020). Teaching students positive psychology in physical education will develop feelings of well-being and better preparation to learn. There is a direct link between well-being and academic achievement and vice versa; i.e., well-being was a crucial prerequisite for achievement, and achievement is essential for well-being (Unknown, 2020). Physical activity is associated with improved learning and the ability to concentrate. Tripp et al. (2007) say a “strong, supportive relationships provide students with the emotional resources to step out of their intellectual' comfort zone' and explore new ideas and ways of thinking, is fundamental to educational achievement” (p. 34). This study will gather quantitative data about student academic outcomes and compare the differences between test and control classes. Students' scores on the engagement, perseverance, optimism, connectedness, and happiness (EPOCH) survey given at the start of a trimester will be compared to survey results at the end of that trimester. The survey data were analyzed to determine if there were any significant gains in student well-being. Additionally, academic outcomes were

studied by comparing grades, attendance, and overall grade point average at pre- and post-intervals.

Chapter One outlined the methodology rationale, background, statement of the problem, and other subsections within Chapter One. This researcher sought to determine if a physical education program incorporating a positive psychology program will improve middle school students' academic outcomes, reduce student discipline, and improve student well-being. The quantitative data of academic outcomes and discipline data will be compared between treatment and control classes. The population affected by the research problem focuses on male and female middle school students at a midwestern suburban middle school. This study shows the importance a positive education is to the development of our students.

Methodology Rationale

This study used a quantitative procedure to help the researcher better understand the effects of a PE class that teaches positive psychology on lowering the number of discipline referrals and increasing the students' overall grade point averages. A two-sample *t*-test was conducted to compare the discipline referrals and overall grade point average between student treatment and control groups. The *t*-test used analyzed two populations using this statistical examination. A *t*-test with two samples is commonly used to test for the difference between the samples when the two normal distributions' variances are unknown (Maverick, 2019).

Implementing a positive psychology (PP) program into physical education classes is important because students make decisions that impact their educational success, and these decisions or actions could have lifelong effects on their future achievements (Selva,

2020). Research-based programs that allow students to make choices that influence them to be more engaged and become more optimistic could help students to be happier and remain in school, which is invaluable for life-long success. In an article by Huebner et al. (2004), a positive class atmosphere is where student efforts are encouraged, rewarded, accepted, and supported by their teachers, regardless of their understanding and personality. A positive atmosphere is associated with more positive reactions to the demands of school (Huebner et al., 2004).

This positive psychology study contributed to our understanding of how students, through this positive psychology curriculum, are encouraged to change their behavior, choose to become engaged in lessons, and learn how to persevere and work within school policies and regulations. These actions could develop more positive attitudes toward participation in physical education classes and throughout their middle school years.

In classrooms across the country, class discipline and disruptive behavior dramatically affect the students' instructional time. Many instructors continued to rank disruptive behaviors as a primary concern in the classroom (Hoglund et al., 2015). These disruptive behaviors resulted in poor academic achievement, frequent delinquency, increased mental health needs, and adult criminal behavior (Kellam et al., 1998; Sterling-Turner et al., 2001). Additionally, disruptive behaviors cause the loss of valuable instructional time and future social and emotional concerns (Kellam et al., 1998; Sterling-Turner et al., 2001).

The loss of valuable instructional time to disruptive classroom behaviors demonstrated the importance of implementing a positive psychology program into our schools. When similar positive psychology programs or character education programs

have been implemented, students learned to be more engaged, developed a willingness to work harder, became more optimistic about what they do, connected better with others, and became much happier. Many children today feel like they have no control over their lives because they do not know how to deal with people or issues. This feeling often leads to students accepting whatever happens to them (Cohen, 2006.) An article by Cohen (2006) believed chaotic classrooms leave students feeling powerless to learn.

This study looked at the benefits of lowering discipline referrals and increasing student overall grade point average (GPA) through physical education classes that used positive psychology. Students who participated in middle school physical education have shown a positive relationship between increased physical fitness levels, academic achievement, fitness levels, and measures of cognitive skills and attitudes (Castelli et al., 2007). Other studies have shown that improved motor skill levels are positively related to improvements in academic achievement and measures of cognitive skills and attitudes (Knight & Rizzuto, 1993).

A significant amount of research on students and program effectiveness has been quantitative, emphasizing group achievement gains with almost no attention to individual students and students' perceptions of why they have succeeded (McMillan & Reed, 1993). According to a summary of 50 research articles by the Center for Disease Control (CDC), 43 of the 50 items suggested a positive link between physical activity and academics (CDC, 2010).

The quantitative data gathered for this research determined if there was a significant difference that showed students who are taught respect through a prescribed curriculum show improved discipline referrals and overall grade point average. Students

from the 2020 – 2021 school year who participated in the "A" day received the treatment will be compared with the "B" day students who received the regular physical education class curriculum.

Background

This study was selected because improving student behaviors was essential to improving academic outcomes, such as grades, attendance, and lowering discipline concerns. Students enter and re-enter our schools in an educational environment facing an ever-changing landscape (because of the pandemic) without some basic wellness skills. Instructors and school personnel need to act to support students' well-being and overall personal development. "Children's well-being is influenced by a range of factors and includes their subjective feelings as well as social, physical and psychological aspects of their lives" (Bowling, 2011, p. 146). As a result, our schools are an important place for shaping student well-being.

As Chapter Two demonstrates, our schools need to improve academic outcomes and decrease student discipline. This researcher felt that providing background research would give the reader a broader understanding of the history of the Midwest suburban public-school student discipline and why discipline concerns affect American education. Additionally, Chapter Two provides an analysis on how positive education and participation in physical education activities that incorporate a positive education curriculum can reduce student discipline and increase academic achievement.

The researcher currently works as a physical education teacher at a midwestern suburban middle school, where the study will be conducted. The researcher has been

employed in education for 17 years, serving as a physical education teacher with 13 years at the elementary and four years at the middle school.

Character education and positive psychology have been important tools helping to improve the discipline in classes. Positive psychology was the framework for assisting students in understanding the good life that Peterson (2006) states “makes life most worth living” (p.305). Research has shown that “character education / positive psychology not only impacts school culture and security but can also have a positive impact on attendance, academic achievement, and discipline referrals” (Goss & Holt, 2014, p. 62). This dissertation's research will further help prove the importance of teaching positive psychology in our schools today.

The literature research indicates that schools are looking for ways to increase student academic outcomes and reduce the number of discipline incidents. In a study by Whisman and Hammer (2014) results showed a growing body of research that points to a link between school discipline practices and lowered academic achievement. A Texas study by Fabelo et al., (2011) found when students repeated grades and dropped out of school, the number of disciplinary violations increased together. As these gaps in the research point out, positive education was a response to the learning gaps between what people wanted for their children and what schools taught (Seligman et al., 2009). Shankland and Rosset (2017) stated that “At its core, education is about nurturing strengths, about growth and learning. Furthermore, psychological, and social well-being were key concerns for teachers, other educators, and for people working in the field of positive psychology” (p. 385).

Statement of the Problem

It is not known if and to what degree or extent positive education affected middle school students. Few school systems provided plans which supported students who needed accommodations (Terada, 2020). This researcher sought to determine if a physical education program incorporating a positive psychology program will improve middle school students' academic outcomes, reduce student discipline, and improve individual well-being. Quantitative data of academic outcomes and discipline data were compared between the treatment classes and the control classes. The population affected by the research problem focuses on the male and female middle school students at a mid-western suburban middle school. This study helped show the importance a positive education can be for the development of our students. Many mental health disorders are known to begin in childhood. It is important that mental health issues are identified early and treated. When a student's mental health goes untreated, it can lead to severe health and emotional concerns (Terada, 2020).

Maciejewski et al. (2015) suggested that in the early part of teen years, teen cognitive control falls behind their emotional development, making it hard for adolescents to cope with their emotions (Maciejewski et al., 2015). Middle school educators understood that the biological event of puberty fundamentally disrupted the relatively smooth development of the elementary school years and profoundly impacted young teens' cognitive, social, and emotional lives (Armstrong, 2006). An article by Flook (2019) believed the impact on the developmental needs of male and female middle school students was significant as the instructional needs. These developmental needs of students contributed to age-related declines in a student's motivation (Flook, 2019). The

school environment's characteristics and classroom teachers' instructional practices further contradicted adolescents' developmental needs (Pintrich & Schunk 2002). There was an impersonal design in our large middle school complexes that unintentionally has a negative effect (Osterman, 2000). Our schools' impersonal middle school design included lacking the connections our students needed, but only looked to educate the student and move on to the next student. Osterman (2000) believed the large, impersonal design of some middle and junior high schools might not meet adolescents' relational needs. "Our schools' impersonal design meant the most significant need for students was not getting higher test scores, but rather learning how to direct their surging emotional impulses into productive directions" (Armstrong, 2006, p. 116).

According to Barrington (2018), 50% of students in grades 4 through 12 have experienced bullying within a given month, and 70% of students have admitted to having seen bullying occur in their schools (2020). This increase in the issues of bullying reflected our students' needs to develop character in our schools.

According to O'Donnell (2021), positive psychology specifically worked to help individuals and groups become the best person they can be. The introduction of positive psychology in middle school needs to be studied to determine if it can address this turbulent time in a child's life (O'Donnell, 2021, para. 1). O'Donnell (2021) also stated that our middle school students face many issues that include self-esteem, drama, temptation, disappointment, and rejection. Middle school was a transition for children, and while it can be an experience of growth and independence, it can also be difficult for children who face specific problems associated with middle school (O'Donnell, 2021). The researcher understood that these middle school issues occur throughout many

classes. However, this researcher contended that physical education classes present a physically active, challenging, and character-building curriculum in which middle school students can benefit from a positive psychology program. A study of positive psychology programs in schools by Waters (2011) identified that "evidence shows that positive psychology programs are significantly related to student well-being, relationships, and academic performance" (pp. 86-87).

According to *PE Can Help Build a Child's Self-Esteem* (2014), Sears was quoted as saying, "A healthy self-esteem provides a platform to develop the skills to achieve total wellness" (para. 2). When teachers taught students to respect each other, the students felt respected. The increased confidence allowed students to develop healthy self-esteem. There was a positive correlation between students' self-esteem and their levels of achievement. Healthy self-esteem allows children to perform to their potential (*PE Can Help Build a Child's Self-esteem*, 2014).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of conducting this *t*-test study with two independent variables was to determine if positive psychology could increase student well-being and positively affect middle school students' class grades, overall grade point average, improved attendance, reduced discipline concerns, and increased student well-being. Instructors and administrators have spent a significant number of hours dealing with inappropriate student behavior, negatively affecting overall student educational outcomes. A positive psychology program could be a proactive approach to reduce discipline, improve attendance, and increase grades. Will this curriculum of positive psychology make a difference? If positive psychology could increase a student's well-being, reduce

disciplinary problems, and increase academic performance, it would promote a more inclusive educational atmosphere. However, if this positive psychology curriculum does not significantly affect how students behave, valuable school resources could be reallocated to other programs. This *t*-test with two independent variables study was conducted at a large midwestern middle school with 98% African American students and 2% Asian, Hispanic, and White students. Over 67 % of the students were on a free and reduced lunch program.

The researcher contended that most middle school discipline concerns-- such as a lack of participation-- occurring in the physical education classroom arise from a lack of inclusion. Students felt they were left out for various reasons, such as lack of athletic ability, size, disabilities, or lack of actionable knowledge. Willis (2007) stated inclusion was about “embracing all students, making a commitment to do whatever it takes to create meaningful learning opportunities, and providing a community of learning where all students have a right to belong” (p. 60). O’Donnell (2020) said growing up is full of challenges, and the tween years can be particularly difficult for children. A tween is a student between being a child and a teenager, ranging from the age of nine to twelve (O’Donnell, 2020). During the “tween years,” students are constantly evaluating their status with peers, which often leads to bad behavior, as they learn to juggle for top social spots, ignoring, bullying, or leaving out others, even former friends (O’Donnell, 2021).

Tripp et al. (2007) suggested that teaching techniques that exclude any student from significant and active physical education need to be replaced with a human movement or a fitness curriculum that provides a diverse learning environment. A diverse learning environment was where all students looked for personal meaning, set goals,

solved problems, and inquired responsibly (Tripp et al., 2007, p 33). For setting goals and solving problems, an inclusive PE program values interdependence, as well as independence. It valued its students, staff, faculty, and parents as a community of learners. Inclusion in PE honors all kinds of student diversity (Webb & Pope, 1999).

Importance of Study

The researcher felt strongly that participation in physical activities provides positive benefits to all participants. Literature and research studies on this topic, presented in Chapter Two of this project, indicated that participation in physical education leads individuals to become quality individuals and contribute to society after their middle school experience.

These research study results were presented to middle school administrators within the district that the body of research belonged to and the school district superintendent and school board members. This project's results assisted the middle school principal where this study took place, and other schools in the geographic area, in determining if positive education impacted student attendance, discipline, and participation. Furthermore, this study may also be beneficial to middle school administrators in other areas of the United States to determine if implementing a positive education program assists in improving students' outcomes, i.e., discipline, attendance, and grade point average (GPA).

Significance of the Study

The researcher uncovered several areas of significance to the study, such as self-esteem, academic pressure, and respect. Below are some possible answers:

This study showed the importance of participation in middle school physical education programs that incorporate positive psychology does improve students' academic outcomes, such as attendance, overall grade point average, student discipline, and well-being. Students showed improvement in engagement, perseverance, optimism, connectedness, and happiness, because of physical education that incorporated positive psychology. The study showed the importance physical education class has on helping students develop positive behaviors. This study's findings allowed teachers and administrators to understand the importance a positive psychology program had on students in the classroom and school. The results from this study allowed teachers and administrators to understand better how to implement a positive psychology program into their classroom or school.

The following areas were uncovered as necessary to the significance of the study. These areas include self-esteem, academic pressure, and respect.

Self-Esteem

Student self-esteem was essential for students and was based on their confidence levels. When students begin to compare themselves to their peers, they sometimes decide they do not measure up to their peers they see as smarter, more athletic, talented, or popular. In many studies, students in sixth, seventh, and eighth grades have shown a decline in self-esteem (DuBois et al., 2002; Rhodes et al., 2004). Adolescent students who show low self-esteem do experience more adverse outcomes than those who do not. Those adverse outcomes include depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and dissatisfaction with their lives (Bolognini et al., 1996; Harter, 1999; Hoffmann et al., 2003; Kaplan, 1996; Stacy et al., 1992).

Academic Pressure

The middle school years were also the time when students were beginning to feel academic pressure. Many of these students were being told they were competing to get into good colleges, score well on the SATs or the ACTs; they were competing with other schools to do well on the state's testing (Ciciolla, 2016). This pressure came from school staff and well-meaning parents. A study done by Ciciolla (2016) and her colleagues showed that middle schoolers were pressured to achieve and is linked to lower well-being and worse grades. The study found that students who perceived their parents to value achievement had lower self-esteem, more symptoms of anxiety and depression, and low school performance (Kennedy-Moore, 2016). The tension and stress from academic pressures had a substantial adverse effect on students' social, emotional, and academic success (Thakkar, 2018). Middle school was the peak year for bullying and other antisocial behaviors (O'Donnell, 2018). An article by Sun and Shek (2012) described middle schools as “a time when some kids find themselves on the receiving side of bad behavior such as excessive tardiness to class or disruptive behavior that distracts the class from learning and bullying behavior” (p.49).

Respect

Respect was the focused value that was taught in positive education. Giving and receiving respect was essential to helping group dynamics and influencing one's well-being (Huo & Binning, 2008). In an article by Cohen et al. (2011), they define respect as being taken seriously. Acting respectfully allowed one to appreciate the feelings of others. In an article by Cohen et al. (2011), he described how a 15-year-old student feels that teachers listen, and the teachers care about what students think and feel (para. 3). The

student also described how teachers wanted the student to be part of making this school even better, such as when teachers realized there was much more bullying going on here than they knew, and they immediately began trying to do something about it (Cohen et al., 2011 para. 3).

A respectful school was a democratically informed learning environment where people felt safe, supported, engaged, and challenged (Cohen et al., 2011). Cohen et al. (2011) suggested that respect did not happen in isolation; it was based on relationships. Relationships were what was taught in the positive psychology lessons. Students developed positive relationships with other students and the teachers. By creating this respectful environment, it created a sustainable positive school environment for our youth's development. The National School Climate Council describes this environment as;

People were engaged and respected. Students, families, and educators worked together to develop and contribute to a shared school vision. Educators modeled and nurtured an attitude that emphasized the benefits and satisfaction of learning. Each person contributed to the operation of the school and the care of the physical environment. (National School Climate Council, 2009, p.20)

It is also suggested that respect is not something that one can imitate but something that must be embodied (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2000). Positive Psychology would teach students how to integrate respect into their lives through their lessons and activities. In each lesson taught, students would learn how to earn respect by being respectful. By practicing respect, students were creating a positive educational environment.

In the article by Drewe (2000), an associate professor at the University of Manitoba, made a case that PE is a perfect place to teach our youth moral education. In this study, the researcher showed how physical education played an essential role in teaching positive psychology. Drewe (2000) stated,

If physical education can be viewed as providing an important context for practicing moral behavior, as well as being a subject that is intimately connected to the process of moral education, a strong justification will have been made for including physical education in the educational curriculum. (p. 562)

Moral Education

Moral education is training that shows a student the right and just way to lead their lives. Some of the fundamental ethical education principles are being honest, just, legitimate, accommodative, generous, sharing love and care, showing consideration, and sensitivity. Halstead (2010) describes moral education as “student acquiring a set of beliefs values regarding what is right and wrong” (p. 630). Educating students to be good citizens and socially responsible is a straightforward explanation of moral principles (Halstead, 2010, p.631). Drewe (2000) believes that physical education is a logical environment to teach moral education. "Physical Education involves the teaching and acquiring practical knowledge, i.e., "knowing how" to perform various movements, know rules, strategy, and the knowledge of the body" (Drewe, 2000, p. 565). To teach moral education, Drewe (2000) believes that competition is essential. The competition allows students to compare themselves to others. By comparing themselves to others can teach students what they need to be successful. When students compete in an activity, they compare themselves to others to determine how they can become successful. For

example, by competing in a basketball game, a student learns to follow the rules, shoot, dribble, and pass. As they compete in basketball, they compare themselves and determine what they need to do to become better (Cherry, 2020); encouraging a competitive environment teaches the students how to work together and develop respect for their opponents (Rosario, 2017 & Lynch, 2020). Working with others and respecting your opponents is one of the lessons in positive psychology that will teach students to respect each other.

Another example of how physical education connects with moral education is by teaching through example. The physical education class provides many opportunities for a teacher to stop an activity, point out how a player is not receiving the respect they deserve and seek why this situation occurred and why it creates a problem (Drewe, 2000). The "Enjoy the Game" lessons will help further develop respect for a student's self and others. The respect students learn will help them develop competitive striving together in pursuit of excellence to flourish (Drewe, 2000).

Drewe (2000) suggests that teaching students to respect the rules of the game is also an essential component of a physical education program. Some philosophers of sports and physical education have justified the moral education potential in PE by saying the necessity of following rules to play a game requires an honest commitment. When contestants agree that, both logically and morally, there is only one way to play the game fairly, it is by following the rules (Arnold, 1997, p. 76). Following rules is a lesson students will learn through positive psychology. By respecting the rules, students are moral.

The aim of any PE class is the teaching and acquisition of practical knowledge. This acquisition of knowledge is gained through competitive activities that help teach students respect for their opponents and rules. This respect that students learn through competitive activities or examples helps make PE useful to provide them with moral education.

Methodology

The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine if positive psychology made a significant difference between middle school sixth, seventh, and eighth-grade treatment and control groups in physical education classes after implementing the instructional curriculum of positive psychology in one of two classes over one semester. Treatment and control groups would meet the same number of class days. These classes will be labeled A-day classes (treatment) and B-day classes (control). Students in the A-day classes will receive 30 days of the standard physical education curriculum with the addition of a positive psychology curriculum. Students in the B-day classes will receive only the traditional physical education curriculum. All students will receive a pre- and post-survey to measure their well-being.

The researcher will seek to discover if there is a significant difference between the "A" classes of students and the "B" classes of students regarding student discipline infractions, attendance, and classroom grade, overall grade point average, and feelings of well-being after one trimester.

The researcher will use an independent *t*-test, which involves examining the significant differences on one factor between means of two independent groups (A-class, treatment groups vs. B-class, treatment group). The *t*-test with two independent variables may be one of the most trusted and utilized statistical tests. A *t*-test is a well-known

statistical analysis tool used for its simplicity, ease of application, and flexibility (Kenton, 2020). The *t*-test will determine if a prescriptive positive psychology curriculum offered in a middle school physical education can improve a student's class individual physical education grade, overall grade point average, and reduced discipline referrals. The researcher felt that using a comparison treatment and control group would allow the researcher to ascertain that the treatment being applied results from the positive psychology instruction and not something outside the experiment.

Research Questions

This study focused on two research questions. The first question is: what is the relationship between middle school students' academic success and physical education classes that teach positive psychology? Additionally, is there a correlation between physical education and academic success in sixth, seventh and eighth-grade students? This question aligns with and will be analyzed by quantitative data gathered by hypotheses one through four. Answering the first four hypotheses allows this researcher to better understand the effect of incorporating positive psychology into a physical education program and if students will show improvement in academic outcomes, overall grade point average, class grade, decreased discipline concerns as well as improved attendance.

Hypotheses

The first null hypothesis will be analyzed to determine if there is no difference in discipline referrals when students participate in physical education classes that incorporate positive psychology, as compared to there is no difference in grade point

average when students participate in physical education classes that incorporate positive psychology.

The second hypothesis is that there is no difference in overall grade point average when students participate in physical education classes that incorporate positive psychology.

The third hypothesis states that there is no difference in overall grade point average when students participate in physical education classes that incorporate positive psychology. Finally, the fourth hypothesis states that there is no relationship between attendance and physical education classes that use positive psychology.

The first four hypotheses are about determining the significance of this question and should help determine if physical education is an appropriate place to teach positive psychology and improve academic outcomes. Academic performance stems from a complex interaction between intellect and contextual variables, and health is a vital moderating factor in a child's ability to learn. The idea that healthy children learn better is empirically supported and well-accepted (Basch, 2011). An online report originally published by HeroicHollywood.com (2018) suggests students receive a lot of benefits from physical education classes. Physical education classes can help students to develop higher levels of concentration, develop more composed behaviors, and activities help reinforce knowledge learned in other subjects (HeroicHollywood.com, 2018, para. 5). This knowledge can help them to make wise decisions concerning their safety, health, and well-being (HeroicHollywood.com, 2018). In a paper by Claver et al. (2020), the author stated results from the study indicated, “physical education and overall students’ performance . . . revealed that positive no outcomes (discipline and academic

performance in physical education) were positively predicted by autonomous motivation; autonomous motivation was positively predicted by basic psychological needs” (p. 5).

The *t*-test with two independent variables will be used to determine if there is a significant difference between treatment groups and control groups. Four null hypotheses will be analyzed to determine if there is a significant difference in discipline, grade point average in physical education, overall grade point average, and improved school attendance.

The second research question is: what are the attitudes/perceptions of participants who are involved in the physical education class that includes positive psychology? This study seeks to understand the attitudes/perceptions of participants who were involved in the physical education class that includes positive psychology as compared to the control classes that only received the district-approved physical education curriculum are? This second question aligns with and will analyze the quantitative information gathered by hypotheses five through nine. By using survey data and testing student improvement in the areas of engagement, perseverance, optimism, connectedness, and happiness will allow the researcher to determine if the positive psychology program has an effect on a student's attitudes/perceptions.

Hypothesis five will look at whether there is no difference in engagement when students participate in physical education classes that incorporate positive psychology, as compared to those that received the district-approved physical education curriculum. Additionally, hypothesis six will consider if there is no difference in perseverance when students participate in physical education classes that incorporate positive psychology, as compared to those that received the district-approved physical education curriculum.

Hypothesis seven will examine if there is no difference in optimism when students participate in physical education classes that incorporate positive psychology, as compared to those that received the district-approved physical education curriculum.

Next, hypothesis eight will look at if there is no difference in connectedness when students participate in physical education classes that incorporate positive psychology, as compared to those that received the district-approved physical education curriculum.

Finally, hypothesis nine will look at if there is no difference in happiness when students participate in a physical education class that incorporates positive psychology, as compared to those that received the district-approved physical education curriculum. Pre- and post-test survey results will be analyzed to determine if there is a significant difference in each of the stated null hypotheses. Data gathered by the *t*-test analysis will answer hypotheses five through nine.

The *t*-test with two independent variables will be used to determine if there is a significant difference between treatment groups and control groups. The five null hypotheses will be analyzed to determine if there is a significant difference in engagement, perseverance, optimism, connectedness, and happiness between the treatment class and the control class that receives the district-approved physical education curriculum.

The following is a recap of the following questions and hypotheses posed for this study.

- Q1: Is there a correlation between physical education and academic success in 6th-8th-grade students?
- Q2: What are the attitudes/ perceptions of participants who are involved in the Physical Education class that includes positive psychology?

- H1: There is no difference in discipline referrals when students participate in Physical Education classes that incorporate positive psychology.
- H2: There is no difference in grade point average when students participate in Physical Education classes that incorporate positive psychology.
- H3: There is no difference in Overall GPA when students participate in Physical Education classes that incorporate positive psychology.
- H4: There is no relationship between attendance and Physical Education classes that use positive psychology.
- H5: There is no difference in engagement when students participate in Physical Education classes that incorporate positive psychology.
- H6: There is no difference in perseverance when students participate in Physical Education classes that incorporate positive psychology.
- H7: There is no difference in optimism when students participate in Physical Education classes that incorporate positive psychology.
- H8: There is no difference in connectedness when students participate in Physical Education classes that incorporate positive psychology.
- H9: There is no difference in happiness when students participate in a Physical Education class that incorporates positive psychology.

Conceptual Framework Basis

The following are key factors or variables to be studied and measure the presumed relationship:

- Participation in a positive psychology program during physical education improves a student's academic outcomes.

- Improve attendance
- Improve grade point average
- Decrease in student discipline
- Participation in a positive psychology program during physical education class

improve EPOCH factors:

- Increased engagement
- Increased perseverance
- Increased optimism
- Increased connectedness
- Increase happiness

Character refers to the aspects of one's personality that are morally valued. Good character is the core of positive youth development (Baumrind, 1998). When teachers commit to building and enhancing character strengths, it will reduce adverse outcomes (Botvin et al., 1995). When a student has good character, they can develop the desired results such as school success, leadership, and kindness (Scales et al., 2000). Having good character has also been associated with reducing problems, such as substance abuse, smoking, violence, and depression (Park, 2004).

Definitions of Terms and Acronyms

For this study, definitions were created to be used solely for this project.

Academic Success

For this study, academic success is defined as student discipline, grade point average in physical education, overall grade point average, and student attendance.

At-Risk Students

When describing at-risk students, experts have identified four factors contributing to school dropout behavior. Those four factors are individual, family, school, and community/societal factors (Higgins & Mueller, 1988). What was true in Higgins and Mueller's study has changed some for the better; however, dropping out remains a problem for American youth. Individual and family factors play significant roles in student dropout rates. Family factors cause students to drop out because they have the same problems their family members had when they dropped out (Gallagher, 2002). Past studies have indicated that dropouts earn less annual income, which continues the family dropout tradition and keeps the cycle of low income, making students more inclined to drop out.

Character Development

Character development has been a topic of discussion for years (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Character development is both external and internal, with internal referring to how individuals feel about themselves. The development of positive character strengths has been associated with fewer problematic and risk behaviors (Benson et al., 1998). According to Seligman is determined that character is required in Positive Psychology (Seligman, 2018). Benson et al. (1998) found that the more developmental assets a student has, the fewer risk behaviors they engage in. Physical education is an excellent place to help instruct students in character development. Triolet (2015) stated that: Character education meets many of the affective domain's goals and objectives. Many of the skills obtained in physical education are linked to sportsmanship and teamwork concepts easily found in any physical education activity. It is important to

remember that some learning opportunities do not avail themselves so easily for the classroom teachers. Physical education is the perfect delivery system to reinforce character education traits daily. These traits lend themselves naturally to those critical 21st-century learning skills (Triolet, 2015).

Discipline Referrals

Discipline referral for this study will constitute school discipline as defined by the school district. Such as:

- Failure to complete in school suspension assignments
- Suspension from in-school suspension assignment
- Possession of drugs
- Chronic disciplinary violations
- Blatant disrespect
- Vandalism
- Fighting
- Excessive tardiness

EPOCH model (Engagement, Perseverance, Optimism, Connectedness, Happiness)

Engagement

In the EPOCH model, engagement is similar to the PERMA model.

Csikszentmihalyi (1997) describes engagement as the ability to be absorbed in and focus on what one is doing as well as be involved in and interested in life activities and tasks (1997). Literature shows that when at-risk students are engaged, they have higher life satisfaction, greater educational attainment, and lower rates of arrest (Chan et al., 2014).

Perseverance

Perseverance refers to the ability to pursue one's goals to completion, even win in the face of difficulties. Duckworth et al., (2007) describe it as a sub-facet of the Big Five personality trait of conscientiousness and comprises the drive of "grit." In four studies, the studies found that individuals high in perseverance are more likely to graduate from school and stay in their jobs (Eskreis-Winkler et al., 2014).

Optimism

Optimism is characterized by hopefulness and confidence about the future, a tendency to take a favorable view of things, and an explanatory style marked by evaluating adverse events as temporary, external, and specific to the situation (Kern et al., 2016). When one is optimistic, they show greater satisfaction with life, are more effective using coping strategies, show fewer symptoms of depression, have better physical health, longer life, and better social relationships (Carver et al., 2010).

Connectedness

Connectedness is similar to the PERMA model's meaning. Connectedness also refers to the sense of having satisfying relationships, believing they are cared for, loved, esteemed, valued, and providing friendship or support to others (Kern et al., 2016). Over 15 years, students' social connectedness can predict students' better well-being when they become adults (Olsson et al., 2013). The more connected students are, the more likely they will succeed.

Happiness

Happiness is the steady-state of positive mood and feeling content with one's life, rather than the momentary emotion (Kern et al., 2016). Adolescent happiness relates to

having better health, using few risky behaviors, and are independent of depressive symptoms (Hoyt et al., 2012).

External assets

External assets are the assets that focus on the positive experiences that students receive from the people and institutions in their lives (Rose, 2006).

Impersonal Design

Impersonal design refers to schools' inability to relate to students' diverse needs. Our schools today are not making connections with students or personal to a student's needs. The large, impersonal design of some of our middle and junior high schools may not meet our current adolescents' relational needs (Osterman, 2000). Our schools' impersonal design means the most significant need for students is not getting higher test scores but rather learning how to direct their surging emotional impulses into productive directions (Armstrong, 2006). Schools are caught in the testing storm and fail to see that students are learning something at the end of the day, the semester, or the year (Boyd, 2016). Schools' impersonal design makes it difficult for students to learn, and by incorporating positive psychology into the lesson, we are helping make the lesson personable and relatable to our students.

Insubordination

Potter (2015) defines insubordination as any action in which a student refuses to comply with directions or instructions given by school authorities.

Internal assets

Internal assets are the assets that shape students' internal dispositions by encouraging wise, responsible, and compassionate judgments.

Learned Optimism

Heuvel (2019) talks about how optimism can be learned. She believes that a pessimist can change their thoughts and beliefs to be more optimistic. The theory of this belief is that people emulate and duplicate the behaviors that they observe in their environment (Heuvel, 2019). The people who can be most affected by their environment are children. If they see their parents not positively coping with stress, they may develop a pessimistic attitude and behavior (Heuvel, 2019). However, if a parent shows their child more positive or optimistic ways to cope with the stress, they are more likely to combat helpless behaviors.

A person's perceptions of events can be seen in two ways. Scott (2020) describes a pessimist as a person who expects negative outcomes and are concerned when things are going well (para. 2). The pessimist is always blaming themselves and viewing failure as long-lasting (Scott, 2020, para. 20). An optimist is the opposite of a pessimist. Scott (2020) describes an optimist as a person who approaches problems from a position of power and sees challenges as opportunities to overcome adversity (para. 1). When optimists meet failure, they see it as temporary and attribute the failure to the situation or the circumstances (Scott, 2020, para. 2).

Lifetime skills

Shaw's (2016) article believes self-regulation affects well-being across the lifespan, from mental health and emotional well-being to academic achievement, physical fitness, and socioeconomic success (para. 1). Self-regulation or self-discipline can be taught quite effectively in physical education. Students can better understand one of the basic skills learned through physical education courses is self-discipline. Students learn to

set personal goals, strive for continuous improvement, and learn how to determine if and how they improve their results (Ackerman, 2021). It becomes clear for students to recognize the benefits of consistent effort and commitment in a physical education class. Students in physical education receive instruction and learn the value of self-discipline, and always strive for improvement. Consistent and focused effort can improve health and self-esteem character traits, which are lifetime skills. Instruction in physical activities and training can guide students toward a positive result when hard work and self-discipline are maintained. These are lifetime skills that help all people lead positive and productive lives (Kohl III & Cook, 2013).

Middle School Students

Middle school students will be students from the age of eleven to fifteen years old in grade sixth, seventh, and eighth grades.

PERMA Model (Positive emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishments)

Everyone today seems to be in the pursuit of happiness (Pascha, 2019). This pursuit has led Seligman to create PERMA. PERMA is that acronym for Positive emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishments. Seligman's theoretical model helps to understand each of the following elements and maximize those elements to reach a life full of happiness (as cited in Pascha, 2019). The PERMA model was created to stop focusing on mental illness treatment and focus on the five elements of PERMA and work towards a life full of fulfillment, happiness, and meaning. The PERMA profiler was developed to flourish for adults (Butler, & Kern, 2016). Kern et al., (2016) developed the EPOCH profiler for the positive adolescent characteristics that

support adult flourishing defined by Seligman's model. EPOCH stands for engagement, perseverance, optimism, connectedness, and happiness. EPOCH was created because much of the focus on measuring positive psychology has been focused on adults; children and young adults have a unique perspective (as cited in Casas, 2011).

Positive Emotions

This element is the most obvious to the connection of happiness. Positive emotions are the ability to remain optimistic and view the past, present, and future from a constructive perspective (Pascha, 2019). Developing positive emotions helps students enjoy their daily tasks, persevere through challenges they may face, and remain optimistic about the eventual outcome (Pascha, 2019). Examples of positive emotions are pleasure and enjoyment. Pleasure is the satisfaction of bodily needs for survival, such as thirst, hunger, and sleep. Many of our students lack the feeling of when they come to school. Enjoyment is when one has been intellectually stimulated and creative. For example, when a student can complete and turn in a completed assignment, they have worked hard. Developing our positive emotions allows us to broaden our thinking and build relationships. Positive emotions will enable one to be more flexible, more persistent, and more curious, all traits that we want students to develop (Webster, 2014).

Engagement

Engagement is about helping to find enjoyment in different things. Being engaged could be learning an instrument, playing a sport, or working on an exciting project. Engagement is about finding that activity that absorbs us into the moment and creates a task or activity (Pascha, 2019). This engagement is when we find ourselves involved in an activity and are surprised when it is over.

Relationships

Students today thrive on developing connections that promote love, intimacy, and strong emotional and physical interaction with others (Pascha, 2019). Developing these relationships with parents, teachers, and other students helps support them through difficult times and promote resilience. In an interview with Prinstein (2015), he talked about the brain's pain center and how our pain centers are activated when one is at risk of isolation. Ideally, when these pain centers are activated, it will encourage one to reconnect socially with someone or a group. Being a part of a group helps one feel safe and valued (Pascha, 2019). Teaching relationships will allow students to maintain positive emotions and develop coping methods to avoid pain or loneliness.

Meaning

Many people find this meaning through religion, working at a good company, raising children, volunteering for a greater cause, or expressing themselves creatively. However, our media promote glamour, the pursuit of material wealth, thinking money is the gateway to happiness (Pascha, 2017). Teaching students meaning, we are helping students understand their impact and why they show up at school. When students have an enjoyable reason to show up, they will feel more satisfied (Williams, 2016).

Accomplishment

Having a goal and ambition in life can help one achieve, giving them a sense of accomplishment. Setting a realistic goal and putting effort into achieving that goal can give one a sense of accomplishment when reaching the goal (Pascha, 2017). A book by Dweck (2008) recommends another way to frame the sense of accomplishment for students is to say "YET." Dweck (2008) recommended encouraging students to say, "I

have not learned YET," or "I'm not good at that YET." This mindset helps students steer away from the negative and make it a goal to accomplish what they are not good or have learned (Dweck, 2008, p. 229).

Physical Education Class

Teaching physical education in most people's minds involves instruction in sports or physical activities. However, this researcher believes that it should include several additional strategies to promote student wellness. Students' physical education experiences are often limited to learning just sport-specific skills, and the learning environment is competitive and exclusive. It is not one that creates a positive sense of community or a sense of belonging for many students. Physical education aims to ensure that all students acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to lead healthy, active lives and embody this sense of physical literacy. (Temertzoglou, 2014) In an article by Temertzoglou (2014), Dr. Humbert was quoted as suggesting that young people's health depends on physical education teachers making a difference.

Preventative discipline

Morin (2021) describes preventative discipline as allowing the teacher to establish their expectations and rules in the early few days of the class, creating a safe, non-confrontational classroom.

Pessimism

In Scott's article What is Pessimism? (2020), it described the pessimist as someone who is always blaming themselves and viewing failure as long-lasting.

Positive Psychology

Positive psychology (PP) specifically works to help individuals and groups to become the best person that they can be. In regard to positive psychology and middle school students for both males and females, is there a more tumultuous period in a child's life than middle school? Middle school is a transition for children, and while it can be an experience of growth and independence, it can also be difficult for children who face specific problems associated with middle school (O'Donnell, 2018). O'Donnell (2018) addressed many issues that our middle students face, including self-esteem, drama, temptation and disappointment, and rejection. We understand that these middle school issues occur throughout many classes (O'Donnell, 2018). Evidence suggests that positive psychology programs are significantly related to student well-being, relationships, and academic performance (Waters, 2011)

Preventative Discipline

Morin (2021) describes preventative discipline as allowing the teacher to establish their expectations and rules in the early few days of the class, creating a safe, non-confrontational classroom.

Optimism

An optimist is the opposite of a pessimist. The optimist approach's problems from a position of power and see's challenges as opportunities to overcome adversity (Scott, 2020). Scott (2020), in her article, outlined that optimists meet failure by seeing it as temporary and attribute the failure to the situation or the circumstances.

Self-discipline

Self-discipline is the same as self-control, and self-control is the ability or capacity to resist an impulsive response and respond with an appropriate response (Hagger et al., 2018). Self-control helps us manage motivational conflicts (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007, DeWall, 2014).

Self-esteem

Self-esteem is the degree to which the qualities and characteristics contained in one's self-concept are perceived to be positive (VandenBos, 2007).

Wellness Promotion

Students are cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally pliable (Adler, 2016; Bandura and Walters, 1977; Rudman et al., 2001). It is an educator's job to prepare students for life during their earliest and two most pliable phases: childhood and adolescence (Compas et al., 2001). Our education system currently does not teach students how to live a life with meaning, purpose, love, virtue, character, connectedness, health, and a sense of self-efficacy, autonomy, and mastery (Seligman et al., 2009). Education itself wants to take students and move them from their current state, too, ideally, a better one.

Willful Defiance

Willful defiance is the disruption of any school activity or willfully defying the authority of any school staff member. This willful defiance can include everything from talking back to teachers to students refusing to take off a hoodie to chewing gum in class, to using a cell phone in class, to public displays of affection, repeated tardiness, or even forgetting to bring school supplies (Jones, 2018; Schleisman, 2018; & Nori, 2020).

Limitations

The 12-week implementation of a positive psychology curriculum from the beginning of August 2020 and lasting until November 2020 may not be enough time for the students to understand and use this information. The short duration of the study and the pandemic of COVID-19 during this schedule resulted in several instructional changes in the implementation of the physical education and positive psychology curriculum. The shift in instruction from in-person to virtual did make a difference in how the positive psychology program was presented during physical education classes. Traditionally, physical activities, such as lifetime sports, games, and group activities, required students to work together, close physical proximity, and cooperate in an atmosphere that will not occur in this virtual classroom.

The adjustment to virtual lessons also limited the researcher's ability to study the positive psychology curriculum's effects between male and female students and grade levels. The student population's demographics limited the researchers' ability to investigate if the results differed by race/ethnicity. African American students were 98% of the school population, with White, Hispanic, and Asian population making up the other two percent. Additionally, a lack of studies analyzed positive psychological effects in the selected categories to make statements about the researched associations. Finally, the researcher was unable to control for outside influence regarding this study. As a result, the impact of PP on positive or negative growth could not be controlled.

Delimitations

The researcher controlled the sample of this study by including middle school students in physical education classes for 146 students. The classes included 28 "A-day"

Eighth graders and 32 "B-day" Eighth graders. There were 23 "A-day" seventh graders and 19 "B-day" seventh graders along with 25 "A-day" sixth graders and 19 "B-day" sixth graders. The time of the study was from September 2020 to November 2020, coordinated with the school trimester, and took place at a large midwestern suburban middle school with a population of 800 students in the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. Grade-level counselors randomly selected all participants in the study—the test and control groups' demographics 98% African American and two percent white and Asian. Because of the demographics, the researcher limited the study to concentrate on the physical education classes assigned by school counselors randomly.

Additionally, the researcher conducted research involving students in physical education classes that were split into "A-day" and "B-day" sections to allow for test and control classes. The "A-day" classes received the positive psychology and the district's approved physical education curriculum and were referred to as the test group. Students in "B-day" classes received the district-approved physical education curriculum only. Finally, the researcher had all students take a 20 question EPOCH survey to determine their wellness level. After the study, all the students were given the same survey as a post-test to determine any difference.

Summary

For this study, chapter one included an introduction and statement of the problem and purpose of the study. Additionally, the researcher reviewed the limitations and delimitations of the study. Chapter Two will present a review of the literature that includes reviews of books, educational studies, and periodicals related to positive psychology/character education and its effect on reducing discipline concerns, improving

student academic outcomes, and the need for student well-being. Chapter Three describes the methodology used to determine the effectiveness of the applied positive psychology curriculum. Chapter Four will present the data gathered by the researcher. Chapter Five contains the analysis of the data, the researcher's conclusions, and recommendations for future research in the area of positive psychology.

Chapter Two offers a literature review to examine research and writings about the following elements: (1) middle school students, (2) public school discipline with a historical perspective, defining discipline, and looking at the aims of discipline, (3) statistics on discipline and dropout rates, (4) what effect discipline has on students, (5) educational concerns for the at-risk student, (6) factors of at-risk students (social and emotional identifiers) looking at risk past data and at-risk present data, (7) physical education and the use of character development, lifetime skills, and wellness promotions, (8) Positive Psychology will be discussed with learned optimism, PERMA, EPOCH, and respect as a focused value, (9) model programs such as positive behavior intervention and support (PBIS) will be discussed in Chapter Two. Research pertaining to these areas was beneficial when reflecting on, discussing the results, and making recommendations for increasing the number of females who chose to participate in high school.

Chapter Three will explain the research aspect of this study. The EPOCH survey was distributed to sixth, seventh, and eighth-grade students within the middle school of study to establish where they are with their level of happiness. Also, data on student discipline, grade point average, physical education grade, and attendance were collected. At the conclusion of the study, the EPOCH survey was distributed again, and data on student discipline, grade point average, physical education grade, and attendance were

collected. The data collected will be compared between the students in the treatment and control groups. A more in-depth explanation of this study begins in Chapter Three.

Chapter Four includes the results of the EPOCH surveys and the student discipline, grade point average, physical education grade, and attendance data from the beginning and end of the trimester within the middle school of study. This information was disaggregated in multiple ways. Survey results were compared in several ways, looking at discipline, grade point average, physical education grade, and attendance. The gathering of data from student discipline, grade point average, physical education grade, and attendance participation was also used to answer the research questions.

In Chapter Five, the results of this study will be reviewed, and the two research questions and nine hypotheses will be answered. Chapter Five will also have recommendations for future studies. Recommendations to the high school of study will also be touched on in this chapter.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

Chapter Two presents a review of previous research that is relevant to this study. Providing background research gives the reader a broader understanding of middle school students and their many challenges and how discipline concerns affect student attendance and academic achievement. Additionally, this chapter will cover the following sections and subsections to demonstrate the need for positive education and how it can help our schools.

- 1) Background
- 2) Theoretical Framework
- 3) Discipline concerns, Attendance, and Academic Achievement
- 4) Public School Discipline
 - a) Historical Perspective
 - b) Defining School Discipline
 - c) Aims of Discipline
 - d) How Discipline Affects Schools
 - e) The Need to Improve School Discipline.
- 5) Character Education / Positive Psychology Development
- 6) Positive Psychology
- 7) Physical Education
 - a) Lifetime Skills
 - b) Wellness Promotion
 - i) Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS)
- 8) Positive Psychology
 - a) Positive Psychology Elements
 - b) Positive Psychology as a Growing Field
 - c) Positive Psychology Criticisms
- 9) Emphasis on Self-reporting And Cross-sectional Data
- 10) Learned Optimism
 - a) Optimism Benefits
- 11) PERMA Model: Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, Accomplishments/Achievements
- 12) EPOCH Model: Engagement, Perseverance, Optimism, Connectedness, Happiness model
- 13) Summary

Background

The complicated relationships that our middle school students face and their variety of needs show the importance of finding and supplying a supportive environment where middle school students can feel respected and safe. Wigfield et al. (2006) believed that the middle school years are a turbulent time for young adolescents. In the middle school years, many students possess increasingly negative attitudes toward school, in general. Almost all educational researchers have found the tremendous developmental needs of both male and female middle school students may be as great as the instructional needs. Although developmental changes contribute to age-related declines in student motivation, characteristics of the school environment and the instructional practices of classroom teachers can further contradict adolescents' developmental needs (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002). There can be an impersonal design in our large middle school complexes that unintentionally has a negative effect. Osterman (2000) stated, "the large, impersonal design of some middle and junior high schools may not meet adolescents' relational needs" (p. 325).

The middle school years are also the time when students begin to feel academic pressure. Many of these students are being told they are competing to get into good colleges and must score well on the SATs or the ACTs. Additionally, they are competing with other schools to do well on the state's testing. This pressure comes from school staff and well-meaning parents. Wallace (2019) cited a report naming one of the top conditions harming adolescent wellness was the excessive pressure to excel. A study by Ciciolla (2016) also showed that middle schoolers have pressure to achieve, which is linked to lower well-being and worse grades. The study found that students who perceived their

parents to value achievement had lower self-esteem, more symptoms of anxiety and depression, and low school performance (Kennedy-Moore, 2016). The anxiety and stress from academic pressures have a substantial adverse effect on students' social, emotional, and academic success (Thakkar, 2018). Middle school is the peak year for bullying and other antisocial behaviors (O'Donnell, 2018). Middle school is also a time when some kids find themselves on the receiving side of bad behavior.

Theoretical Framework

Researchers and practitioners want to know if the application of positive psychology in an educational atmosphere will have a positive impact on discipline, attendance, and academic success.

Beginning this study in middle school may provide an opportunity to prevent, reverse, or address some of the middle school student concerns for educators. For example, the literature shows that middle school students show more anxiety and stress from academic pressures, which is attributed to discipline problems and low attendance rates. According to OECD (2016), the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) performed a survey that included responses from 540,000 students between the ages of 15 and 16 years. The results found that 66% of students reported feeling stressed about poor grades, and 59% reported students were worried that the test they would take would be difficult (OECD, 2016). The OECD survey also discovered that 55% of students were anxious about testing, even when they were prepared (OECD, 2016). A study by Zhang et al. (2020) found that positive psychology may improve the psychological well-being of students. The study also found that students showed a decrease in depression and anxiety symptoms from a positive psychology treatment and

that positive psychology intervention could increase the psychological well-being of students (Zhang et al., 2020). This agrees with a series of studies that have shown the effectiveness of positive psychology in optimizing health and well-being in the general populations (Bolier et al., 2013, Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Zhao et al., 2019).

If the use of a positive psychology curriculum was established in a middle school that could demonstrate a positive impact on a young student's life, a number of concerns could be addressed. Vallaire-Thomas et al. (2011) stated that there was an increase in disruptive behaviors in our classrooms. Additionally, these behaviors resulted in students' emotional and behavioral issues (Stanley et al., 2006). As an educator and researcher, it is common knowledge that disruptive behaviors interrupt the educational process for all students. Those inappropriate behaviors result in an increase in student negative attitudes toward school in the middle years (Damon et al. 2006; Shallcross, 2015; Wigfield et al. 2006).

When our students are relaxed, they are ready to learn (The Share Team, 2020). By teaching students positive psychology in physical education, students would have the opportunity to develop feelings of well-being and may be better prepared to learn. There is a direct link between well-being and academic achievement and vice versa, i.e., well-being is a crucial prerequisite for achievement, and achievement is essential for well-being (Unknown, 2020).

Many school officials, parents, and community members have expressed concern about the disorder and lack of a safe and orderly learning environment in public schools. Beyond the school discipline issues, the classrooms in America are constantly plagued by a barrage of student infractions or misbehaviors that have a negative effect on the

learning environment and continually interfere with the learning process (Weerman et al., 2007). According to Nelson (2002), classroom disruptions hamper lessons for all students, and those disruptive students are affected by their own behavior. Having discipline is essential for creating a positive school climate conducive to sound academic performance (Masitsa, 2008; Sun & Shek, 2012). Ahmad (2011) defined school discipline as a system of rules, punishments, and behavioral strategies to regulate students and maintain order in schools. Discipline is meant to create a safe and productive learning environment in the classroom. School discipline does not use a single specific method (Cotton, 2001).

According to Đurišić and Bunijevac (2017), educators and parents play important roles in the educational success of students. Students need a positive learning environment that provides support, motivation, and quality instruction (Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017). To implement a positive environment, administrators and teachers need to have quality professional development in the implementation of this positive psychology curriculum (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

Additionally, recognizing and rewarding students for good behavior and positive contributions to their class, school, and community is essential. Effective discipline practices are only achieved by consistency and everyone working together. According to Bear (2010), American educators have two aims for effective discipline, and the first is to create and maintain a safe, orderly, and positive learning environment that requires the use of discipline to correct misbehavior. The second is to teach or develop self-discipline in the students (Bear, 2010). For school discipline practices to be continuous they must be

evaluated, and strategies that are developed should be monitored and assessed for improvements or needed adjustments (Putnam et al., 2003).

Discipline concerns, attendance, and academic achievement

Discipline is a vital component of human behavior, and researchers assert that without it, an organization cannot function well towards the achievement of its goals (Ouma et al., 2013). In the context of a school system, a disciplined student is a student whose behaviors, actions, and inactions conform to the predetermined rules and regulations of the school (Ali et al., 2014). Discipline is widely acknowledged to be essential for creating a positive school climate conducive to sound academic performance (Masitsa, 2008).

To further address the discipline concerns, the term "school discipline" is described by Moles (1989) as having two primary goals. The first is to ensure the staff and students' safety, and the second is to create an environment conducive to learning (Moles, 1989). When a student's conduct involves behaviors that defeat school discipline goals, this causes disciplinary action and corrective actions used by teachers that interrupt student learning, which affect both students causing the disruption and those around them to lose valuable learning time (Bryne, 1999). Duckworth and Seligman (2005) stated, "positive psychology could help students improve their self-discipline and reduce student discipline allowing more time on task" (pg. 941). In a longitudinal study of 140 middle school pupils, self-discipline predicted higher grades and achievement test scores (Duckworth & Seligman, 2005). When schools fail to deal with the low levels of aggressive behavior effectively, this causes students, schools, and the community to have poor outcomes (Conoley & Goldstien, 2004, Dammu, 2016). In addition, exclusionary

disciplinary policies for students of color mean lost instructional time, which can negatively impact academic performance and further widen the racial achievement gap. As discipline relates to this study, the school population is 98% African American, with the other 2% made up of Asian Americans, Hispanic, and White. Research also suggests that students who have been suspended are more likely to repeat a grade or drop out because of academic problems (Dammu, 2016).

To address discipline concerns, several articles point out that schools are working to counteract the concerns that discipline causes and are looking for easy solutions, such as getting rid of out-of-school suspension (OSS). When these districts changed the policy to get rid of OSS, schools saw a decrease in suspensions from 8% in 2007–2008 to 0.55% in 2014–2015, and days lost because of a suspension decreased from 75,000 to 5,025 (Watanabe & Blume, 2015). It could have been seen that this move away from suspensions would decrease classroom concerns. However, many teachers contended that this ban on suspensions triggered an increase in aggressive behavior and classroom disruption (Watanabe & Blume, 2015).

Many researchers have expressed concern over the removal of students from the classroom, believing that it promotes poor behavior and does not address the students' behaviors at all (Hochman & Worner, 1987; Sauter, 2001). Aggressive behavior is considered a teacher-managed discipline concern and does not get dealt with by an administrator (Dammu, 2016). Classroom management procedures, routines, structure, and discipline are about impulse management and self-control (Evertson & Weinstein, 2006; Walters & Frei 2007). “Classroom management is the teacher’s responsibility; discipline is the student’s responsibility” (Marshall, 2003, para. 7). When a student's

belligerent behavior begins to increase, it can be challenging to control when many students are hostile (Dammu, 2016). In addition, exclusionary disciplinary policies for students of color mean lost instructional time, which can negatively impact academic performance. (Dammu, 2016).

Public School Discipline

Historical Perspective

When the United States Constitution was first created, our founding fathers did not account for public education. They believed that schools' implementation should be the responsibility of the states (FindLaw, 2016). Education was more reserved for the wealthy, as the general public did not have access to educational opportunities, and the belief that the poor were not worth educating continued through the eighteenth century (FindLaw, 2016). In 1852, Massachusetts secretary Horace Mann began to encourage states to offer public education to all children. Offering public education was a revolutionary idea that believed that all individuals could and should be educated (FindLaw, 2016).

Little is known about how the early American high schools handled discipline, except for the fact that there was discipline. The earliest records were found in schools in Chicago, and those high schools in the 1890s were small, select institutions with five hundred students or fewer (Findlaw, 2016). Admissions to these schools were quite competitive, and few applicants were accepted. Teachers and students were near equals in those schools, sharing washrooms and working together in some cases to set school hours or other such policies. Discipline or corporal punishment was chosen over the expulsion, which was rarely necessary (Findlaw, 2016). In the late nineteenth century, the size and

shape of public-school education in Chicago began to change (FindLaw, 2016). Gutwoski (1988) reported that between 1880 and 1915, the number of pupils in Chicago high schools increased sharply, from roughly 2,000 to 25,322. When the growth began, the sense of community in school began to wane, and large comprehensive high schools began to appear. Educators of the time decided to move away from the small community school to larger schools to accommodate more students of diverse populations (Gutwoski, 1988). Those diverse populations did not come together as expected, and the schools devolved from prominent families into small cliques. Ties connecting faculty, administration, and students began to dissolve. Gutwoski (1988) stated that Bodine, in 1911, reported to the school board that schools had replaced truancy as the major discipline concern facing the schools.

The most common form of discipline was corporal punishment in the nineteenth century, and it was the acceptable form of discipline used to keep students behaviorally in line. A teacher was allowed to hit students for not paying attention in class, discipline concerns, or academic issues (Lambert, 2018). This form of student discipline currently remains legal in 19 states in the United States (Gershoff & Font, 2016). As more public schools developed, so did the need for additional classroom discipline (Cotton, 2001). There needed to be some form of order if students were to feel safe and could be free from discipline distraction to learning.

By 1910, attendance had become mandatory at the public-school level, causing teachers to become the disciplinarian at school. By becoming the new disciplinarian, teachers had to shape their punishment and curriculum around a more parental role; teachers began to function “in loco parentis, meaning in place of parents” (FindLaw,

2019; School Discipline History, para. 5). As attendance increased and schools grew in size, schools started to hire principals who would oversee the creation of a new hierarchy. In this new hierarchy, teachers would no longer become the discipline source and could focus on the curriculum and teaching practices (Murry, 2019).

In 1943 and 1954, Abraham Maslow (1970) created his Hierarchy of Needs theory. This theory made a significant impact on education. The theory stated that people are motivated to achieve certain needs (McLeod, 2020). With Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory, schools began to look at how school conditions make a difference in how students behave. Mcleod (2020) stated that Maslow's theory says there are five needs everyone wants to have. The first is the basic needs, which are safety and physiological needs: security, safety, food, water, warmth, and rest. The next needs are psychological needs, the need to belong, be loved, and have good self-esteem. When one feels they belong, feel loved, and have good self-esteem, they are more likely to have friends and the feeling of accomplishment. The final need is the feeling of self-fulfillment (McLeod, 2020). The self-fulfillment need is achieving one's full potential and being creative (McLeod, 2015). If any of these needs are not met for the student, there could be discipline concerns. The theory made it essential for teachers to create a safe environment for students to succeed (Murry, 2019). Maslow's theory had teachers think about their classroom management to create lesson plans that decreased the chance of behavior issues occurring (Murry, 2019).

By the 1970s and 1980s, a new form of discipline was started. Dwyer (1996) stated the new term for this discipline was called "time-out." In Dwyer's (1996) article, he believed that a time-out would interrupt and prevent aggressive behavior, protect

students' rights and safety, and prevent them from being encouraged by the other students in the classroom. Today, this form of discipline is not as popular, because it takes the student out of the lesson, humiliates them, and gives them a way not to be engaged in class (Murry, 2019). Additionally, Kazdin (2012) and Yell (1994) believed, teachers should keep in mind important ethical considerations when using time-out. A consequence of time-out is that children may be excluded, even if briefly, from their instructional settings (Kazdin, 2012; Yell, 1994).

Students with disabilities were disciplined more than twice as often as their non-disability peers (Perkes, 2018). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1997 requires every state to have in effect policies and procedures to ensure a free appropriate public education (FAPE) for all students with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). IDEA was amended to ensure that children with disabilities whose behavior blocked learning must have their behaviors addressed within their Individual Education Plan (IEP). Although it was an expected practice to ensure students with disabilities received help before IDEA, those practices to help support students with disabilities were seldom implemented. Children with such needs were under-served and punished and too frequently would eventually drop out of school (Dwyer, 1996).

In 1975, the Individual Educational Plan (IEP) was introduced to education. IEPs were created so that all students, regardless of learning or physical ability, had the opportunity to receive an education. IEPs were plans which were a legal contract between the student, parents, and school district. IEPs gave students who have disabilities more time to work on assignments or tests, and they required teachers to modify assignments to

meet a student's needs. IEPs could also be a behavioral plan for the students to help lessen the discipline problems (Special Education News, 2018).

By the late 1980s and 1990s, a concept was brought about by the idea of "zero tolerance," a popular term for a fast approach to discipline, emphasizing a severe and uncompromising punishment (Richards, 2004). "Zero tolerance" is a term borrowed from the criminal justice system applied to many policies aimed at drug and weapon infractions (Skiba & Knesting, 2001). The goal of the "zero-tolerance" policy was to help cut crime and decrease behavior issues by implementing more punitive approaches to behavioral infractions (Gjelten, 2015; Skiba & Knesting, 2001). Some examples of zero-tolerance policies used today are bringing any weapon to school, having alcohol or drugs on campus, fighting, threatening students or teachers (Gjelten, 2015; Richards, 2004). Zero tolerance was the one leading school discipline policy practiced in school systems across the United States (Advancement Project, 2010; Boccanfuso & Kuhfeld, 2011; Browne-Dianis, 2011; Dinkes et al., 2007). Initially, zero tolerance was developed, designed, and implemented to prevent guns and illegal drugs from gaining access to the school environment (Skiba, 2014; Skiba & Peterson, 2000). However, zero-tolerance policies have taken on an umbrella effect and currently envelop many more areas in school systems. Zero tolerance policy apportions precise punishments to specific violations of school rules, regardless of the situation or context of the behavior (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Skiba, 2014; Skiba & Rausch, 2006). In the late 1990s, nearly every school district in the United States reported having implemented a "zero-tolerance" policy for weapons and other serious infractions (Heaviside et al., 1998; Welch & Payne, 2012). Many people referred to "zero tolerance"

policies as promoting the "school to prison pipeline" by punishing students for minor infractions (Kamenetz, 2014). A large body of research has demonstrated the negative consequences of suspensions and expulsions. Students who experience such "exclusionary discipline" tend to have lower academic achievement and are more likely to deal with the criminal justice system. Historically, Black and Hispanic students were much more likely than White students to experience exclusionary discipline. Rates of suspension for Black students were nearly three times larger than those for White students (Curran, 2016).

Defining School Discipline

Ahmad (2011) defined school discipline as a system of rules, punishments, and behavioral strategies to regulate students and maintain order in schools. Discipline was meant to create a safe and productive learning environment in the classroom. School discipline does not use a single specific method (Cotton, 2001). Gaustad (1992) suggested school discipline has two main goals: (1) ensure students, instructors, and staff safety, and (2) create a climate and building conducive to learning. Serious student misconduct involving violent or criminal behavior defeats these goals and often made headlines in the process. However, the most common discipline problems involved non-criminal student behavior (Moles, 1989).

Aims of Discipline

To determine if discipline policies and regulations were appropriate depends on various present, historical, and social factors. These factors have helped shape the definition of the discipline in today's educational system. Many believed student discipline considers the school as a segment of real life, a community in which the

appropriateness of the conduct of its members and the rules and motives which control behavior were to be determined by the same criteria which applied to social relationships outside the school (Nelson, 2002). Gaustad (1992) described two main goals for discipline as, one to ensure the safety of staff and students, and two to create an environment conducive to learning.

The most important school discipline goals were ensuring staff and students' safety and creating a conducive learning environment. Students involved in violent or criminal behavior defeated the purpose of providing a safe and conducive environment. Most school discipline problems involve noncriminal student behavior (Moles, 1998). Even if most discipline concerns were not severe, they still affected the learning environment negatively. For example, even minor disruptions, such as dealing with noisy students, late arrivals, early leavers, distressed students, and students that challenge the teacher's authority, caused all students and students causing the disruption to lose even more learning time (Race & Pickford, 2007). Maintaining discipline in schools has always been essential to guarantee opportunities for educational development (Walker et al., 2004). According to the Riverside Military Academy (2021), the reasons for maintaining discipline in school where discipline encourages students to perform well academically, it helps students stay focused, it limits problems with negative peer pressure, and it aids in creating a safe environment.

A loss of educational opportunities for American students took place with constant class disruptions by class peers who could not or would not suppress or control themselves. These consistent class disruptions affected other students, and those who wanted to learn could not do so, as some of their peers could seem to keep from

exploding in anger or have little or no sensitivity to others around them (Kraft, 2020; Walker et al., 2004). Kraft (2020) stated that when teachers and students were emotionally upset, people could not remember, attention was diminished, learning was shortchanged, and decisions were not made clear.

How Discipline Affects Schools

The images of a young person getting into a physical fight with a peer or threatening a teacher often come to mind when one thinks of exclusionary discipline, and most suspensions were handed down for minor rule breaking. Jacobson (2018) and Skiba et al. (2014) reported most offenses that young people were suspended for were non-violent issues, including things like chronic absences and general classroom disruptions, according to a 2014 systematic review.

Disruptive students who needed to be disciplined impacted the learning process in all schools. The students being disciplined were not the only students affected by their actions. Those students who were in the room with those who were being disciplined were also losing valuable instructional time (Race & Pickford, 2007). In school situations, whether in the hallways or classroom, “disruptive behavior is time that is not being spent on facilitating learning. Also, there was a danger of drawing other students into the situation who will then escalate the disruption” (Race & Pickford, 2007, p.85). When instructors disciplined students or even threatened a student with discipline consequences, there was a negative impact on student performance (Arbuckle & Little 2004). According to Bodo (2020), punishment or even the threat of punishment, depending on the type, has both a positive and negative impact on learner performance. The negative impact included fear and anxiety that distorts the learning motivation (the

child learns to please the teacher and not to acquire skills and knowledge), loss of interest in the subject, negative feelings against the teachers and the classes they teach, absenteeism, and disengagement, aggression, reduced self-esteem, and resentment that results in poor school performance. (Bodo, 2020; Cherry, 2020)

Sun and Shek (2012) stated that “student misbehaviors retard the smoothness and effectiveness of teaching and also impede the learning of the student and his/her classmates” (p.1). Moreover, research findings have shown that school misbehavior not only escalated with time but also lowered academic achievement and increased delinquent behavior (Bryant et al., 2000; Weerman et al., 2007).

The Need to Improve School Discipline

An article by Jones (2018) cited a 2017 report on student discipline, finding that 43% of severe disciplinary actions nationwide from 2007 to 2008 involved insubordination, which was double the increase from the 1999 to 2000 school year. Potter (2015) defined insubordination as any action in which a student refused to comply with directions or instructions given by school authorities. This trend was also seen in California's public schools, with the leading cause for suspensions being "willful defiance" (Jones, 2018). Nori (2020) defined willful defiance as the disruption of any school activity or willfully defying the authority of any school staff member. This willful defiance included everything from talking back to teachers to students refusing to take off a hoodie, to chewing gum in class, to using a cell phone in class, to public displays of affection, repeated tardiness, or even forgetting to bring school supplies (Jones, 2018; Nori 2020; Schleisman, 2018). Nori (2020) cites a UCLA study that shows willful

defiance is being used to target Black students, especially males, and it accounts for over 21% of the suspensions of Black students in middle schools.

In the following sections, this researcher discussed school programs aimed to help improve discipline and increased discipline, as well as improved academic outcomes. Those programs to be discussed included character education, positive psychology, and positive behavior, intervention, and support (PBIS).

Character Education / Positive Psychology Development

Character development has been a topic of discussion for years (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Spallino (2017) describes character development as an intentional, proactive, and comprehensive approach to support schools in creating a caring and supportive learning environment. When students were developing their character, students were encouraged to develop morally and provided opportunities to grow morally (Spallino, 2017). The development of positive character strengths has been associated with fewer problematic and risky behaviors (Benson et al., 1998). Seligman has determined that character is required in positive psychology (Seligman, 2018). Scales and Blyth (1997) found that the more developmental assets a student has, the fewer risk behaviors they engaged in. Scales and Leffert (1999) described developmental assets as a set of benchmarks for positive student development.

Positive student developments were divided into external and internal assets (O'Connor et al., 2014). External assets are the assets that focus on the positive experiences that students receive from the people and institutions in their lives (Rose, 2006). Internal assets were the asset that shaped students' internal dispositions by encouraging wise, responsible, and compassionate judgments. When a student possessed

both external and internal assets, they felt good about themselves and what they could do (Rose, 2006). Physical education was an excellent place to help instruct students in character development and develop those external and internal developmental assets. Triolet (2015) believed character education met many of the affective domain's goals and objectives. Many of the skills obtained in physical education were linked to sportsmanship and teamwork concepts, easily found in any physical education activity (Martens, 2012). It was important to remember that some learning opportunities do not avail themselves so quickly for the classroom teachers as compared to the physical education teachers (Shields & Bredemeier, 2007). Physical education was the perfect delivery system to reinforce character education traits daily (Martens, 2012; Triolet, 2015).

Positive education programs, such as character development, help students develop strategies that protect youth from behaviors that can be detrimental to themselves and others. At the same time, positive education programs help students create more positive results (Pala, 2011). Instruction in character development can influence more positive character traits, such as self-discipline and positive social interactions. In that case, our youth improved their overall school experience and became more successful. There was some evidence that well-designed youth development programs may do just this (Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education, 2010; Pala, 2011). For example, Battistich et. al. (2004) examined 1,246 middle school students who were part of a child development project during primary school. The project used a resilience intervention program that attempted to foster positive development and create a caring community of learners. It is thought that many students become resilient when faced with adversity, but

resilience can also grow when a student has a supportive home environment and classrooms (Tocino-Smith, 2013). Tocino-Smith (2013) believed that teachers who teach resilience had an opportunity to change the direction of their students' lives. Schools are beginning to recognize the importance of a students' social and emotional well-being, as well as having a supportive school climate, to promote positive academic and behavioral outcomes (Lippman & Schmitz, 2013). Research showed that SEL not only improved achievement, but also increased prosocial behaviors, improved student attitudes toward school, and reduced depression and stress in students (Durlak et al., 2011). One of the best ways to teach students social-emotional learning involved training teachers in delivering specific lessons that teach students social and emotional skills and then finding opportunities for students to reinforce their use throughout the day (Weissberg et al., 2016). Resilience intervention programs encompassed many aspects of school life through class-based programs (including a focus on collaboration, building positive relationships, self-control, and responsibility), a school-wide intervention, and involving the student's families (Tocino-Smith, 2013). According to Battistich et al. (2004), students in middle school who received the interventions while in primary school showed better academic achievement and had more pro-social peers than the students who had not received the resilience intervention. Those who received high or moderate exposure to the program showed more significant levels of global self-esteem and self-efficacy, better relationships with teachers, a stronger sense of school community, and a better liking for school (Battistich et al., 2004). While the intervention had no significant impact on severe delinquent behaviors or drug use, intervention students were more involved in

positive activities, such as youth groups and sports teams. They showed fewer instances of misconduct (Battistich et al., 2004).

Positive Psychology & Positive Learning Experiences

Positive psychology was not formally accepted as a branch of psychology until 1998, when Wallis (2005) stated the psychologist, Seligman, chose it as the theme for his term as president of the American Psychological Association (Wallis, 2005). The New World Encyclopedia (2019) describes Seligman as the father of the modern positive psychology movement, becoming interested in how to alleviate depression, and then in those who resisted becoming depressed. Seligman (2018) realized that he and other psychologists spent their time on victims of suffering and trauma, depression, anxiety, and anger based as if it was a disease being treated after one has it. Seligman (2018), through research, believed that treatment for depression should be preventative instead of reactive.

Seligman (2012) asked parents two questions: “First, what do you want most for your children? Secondly, what do you want schools to teach? The response parents gave on the first question was they wanted well-being as the top priority for their children” (Seligman, 2012, p. 78). The response to what parents wanted schools to teach their children was how to succeed in the workplace. As these questions demonstrate, it was important for educators to work to help students flourish and increase their well-being. Seligman (2018) described people who flourish as those who have deeper, more engaged, and more meaningful experiences. A robust educational environment cannot exist without foundation, based on well-being (Noviski, 2017). By teaching well-being in

school, we reduce the flood of depression we are seeing and further increase happiness (Seligman, 2012).

Administrators and teachers think about how to help their students be self-disciplined and follow the rules and policies, so they can learn in a safe environment. DeWall (2014) stated that more and more schools were thinking of positive ways to help students become self-disciplined. Self-discipline was the same as self-control, and self-control was the ability or capacity to resist an impulsive response and respond with an appropriate response (Hagger et al., 2018). Self-control helped us manage motivational conflicts (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007, DeWall, 2014). According to De Ridder and Gillebaart (2017), the case of well-being indicated, the initiatory component of self-control may have proven even more important because people with high self-control experience better well-being.

Schools were and should be the best place, besides the home, to teach students positive ways to handle concerns. Each day at school, students had the opportunity to interact with adults and peers in ways that can help them grow and learn (Murray et al., 2016). In a child's life, early childhood and early adolescence are important times where developing their self-regulation skills can be important (Murray et al., 2016). Murray et al. (2016) believed "schools were the best place for self-regulation interventions because there are opportunities for students to obtain skills in a cohesive approach and potential power of shared learning with peers" (p.35). By introducing these positive learning opportunities in schools, they impacted a school's culture and climate (Murray et al., 2016; Shaw, 2016).

With all the rules, school policies, and procedures that schools have, it can make one lose sight of the most important part of teaching, and that was to keep the ultimate goal of the school in mind while working to improve school discipline (Duke, 1990). As education researcher Duke (1990) pointed out, “the goal of good behavior is necessary, but not sufficient to ensure academic growth” (p. 20). Effective school discipline strategies seek to encourage responsible behavior and provide all students with a satisfying school experience and discourage misconduct.

Physical Education

Teaching physical education, in most people’s minds, involves instruction in sports or physical activities. Physical education aimed to ensure that all students acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to lead healthy, active lives and embody this sense of physical literacy (Temertzoglou, 2014). Temertzoglou (2014) suggested that young people’s health depends on physical education teachers making a difference.

Shields and Bredemeier (2007) stated that physical education classes were the most significant environment for teachers to teach moral character to students. Physical education classes emphasized more cooperative games, team building, lifetime fitness, and group problem solving provide the framework for developing a moral character, because there is less emphasis on winning found in the after school or youth sports (Shield & Bredemeir, 1995). Physical education classes that incorporated and reinforced the character traits of kindness, respect, and sportsmanship have better student outcomes. According to Shields and Bredemeier (2007), physical education has been recognized as “probably the most significant physical activity context for developing moral character” (p. 664). The positive education lesson students will receive will teach students to be

more kind, respectful and develop better sportsmanship. By creating a student's character through physical education, a student saw an improvement in behavior, attendance, and grades (Farrant, 2013).

Physical education has been an activity-based curriculum where sport or lifetime fitness activities are taught. Research suggested that physical education activities were a significant factor in the development of adolescents' self-esteem, identity, and feelings of competence (Shields & Bredemeier, 2007). Physical education instruction benefited our youth; however, one of the real concerns was the belief that physical education can make a difference by just playing games or instruction in lifetime sports (Suherman et al., 2019). Physical education positively affected our youth if we included positive education components that helped increase a student's overall emotional wellness (Farrant, 2013). According to the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MoDESE), school health and physical education are recognized as part of a student's "well-rounded" education. The MoDESE highlighted physical education and health as two of the ten school health components within the Whole School, Whole Community, and Whole Child (WSCC) model, which every school needed to have to ensure the health, safety, and well-being of their students, staff, and environment (MoDESE, 2017). The WSCC model was a collaboration of the community, school, and health and education to support the needs and full potential of every student (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development & Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014). According to Chiang et al. (2015) WSCCs work with other health and education parts has led to improved efficiencies and better health and education outcomes for students.

A well-designed and effectively implemented health and physical education program allowed students to acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills they needed to be physically fit. A health and physical education program helped students make healthy decisions, achieve health literacy, adopt healthy behaviors, and promote others' health (MoDESE, 2017). Research showed a strong connection between healthy behaviors and academic achievement (e.g., grades, standardized tests, graduation rates, attendance). Healthy students are better learners, and academic achievement bears a lifetime of health benefits (CDC, 2019).

Instruction or teaching in the physical education activity-based curriculum can help students be successful. In essence, when adolescent students learned how to treat each other respectfully, they knew how to respond positively and productively to directions and instructions. Conflicts with fellow students were avoided or resolved peacefully, and behavioral disruptions were reduced. Lines of communication were opened, and disputes were resolved (Nelsen et al., 2000). Teaching respect makes for a more conducive learning environment. An article by Wuest (1999) stated, "Teaching students to assume responsibility for their behavior and learning is essential to the promotion of lifelong involvement in physical activity. Respecting others, valuing individual differences, and fair play are desirable physical education outcomes" (p. 1). Wuest (1999) defined respect as students who controlled their behavior and showed respect for others' feelings and rights. Examples of respect were when students understood they all had the right to participate. Students have the right to resolve conflicts peacefully. Students are taught to recognize and respect differences of opinion

and to negotiate disputes. By practicing respect, students increased their awareness of empathy and understanding of the impact of one's behavior on others (Wuest, 1999).

Physical Education and Moral Education

Glover and Anderson (2003) proposed the need to create a safe environment in a physical education class. This safe environment allowed students to feel safe and welcomed. When students felt safe and welcomed, their learning improved. Teaching character in physical education can be promoted effectively during unexpected teachable moments (Sullivan, 2006). A study by Drewe (2000) argued that physical education was a perfect place to teach our youth moral education. Meakin (1982) described moral education as

fostering a pupils' degree of knowledge and understanding and that degree of emotional development, which were necessary conditions of their coming to think critically for themselves on moral issues and of their making rational moral judgments which they translate into appropriate intentional action. (Meakin, 1982, p. 65)

My Private Tutor UAE (2017) described moral education as training students the right and just way to lead their lives. Some of the basic moral education principles were being honest, just, legitimate, accommodative, generous, sharing love and care, showing consideration and sensitivity (My Private Tutor UAE, 2017). Moral education was a combination of civic education and civic engagement. Educating students to be good citizens and social responsible was a straightforward explanation of moral principles (Halstead, 2010; Lickona et al., 2007).

Drewe (2000) believed that physical education was a logical environment to teach moral education. Physical education involves teaching and acquiring practical knowledge, i.e., knowing how to perform various movements, knowing rules, strategy, and the knowledge of the body (Drewe, 2000). To teach moral education, Drewe (2000) believed that competition was essential. The competition allowed students to compare themselves to others. By comparing themselves to others, students can teach themselves what they need to be successful. O'Sullivan (2019) believed that when a student competed in an activity, they compared themselves to others to determine how they could become successful. For example, by competing in a basketball game, a student learned to follow the rules, shoot, dribble, and pass. As they competed in basketball, they compared themselves to one another and determined what they needed to do to become better. This competitive environment was where students learned to work together with others and develop respect for their opponents (Goldstein & Iso-Ahola, 2006). Working with others was very important because one of the lessons in positive education was to teach students to respect each other. Meador (2020) described respect as a positive feeling of esteem for a person and specific actions and conduct representative of that esteem. It was the goal of schools to have created an atmosphere of respect with all individuals involved in school (Meador, 2020).

Another example of how physical education connected with moral education was by teaching through example. The physical education class provided many opportunities for a teacher to stop an activity, point out how a player was not receiving the respect they deserved, and seek why this situation occurred and why it created a problem (Drewe, 2000). The positive education lessons helped further develop respect for a student's self

and others. The respect students learned helped them develop competitiveness and strive to work together in pursuit of excellence to flourish (Drewe, 2000).

Drewe (2000) suggested that teaching students to respect the rules of the game was also an essential component of a physical education program. Some philosophers of sports and physical education have justified the moral education potential in physical education by saying the necessity of following rules to play a game requires a moral commitment (Gibbons & Ebbeck, 1997). When contestants agree, both logically and morally, there was only one way to play the game fairly—that was by the rules (Arnold, 1997). Playing the game fair was another lesson students learned through positive education. When students respected the rules, students were moral. Dillion (2003) described moral respect as the acknowledgment and conducted a person had for themselves. Respect for others was not only appropriate but also morally and unconditionally required; the status and worth of persons was such that they must always be respected (Dillion, 2003 & Farrant, 2013).

The aim of any physical education class was the teaching and acquisition of practical knowledge. This acquisition of knowledge was gained through competitive activities that helped teach students respect for their opponents and rules. This respect that students learn through competitive activities, or by example, helps make physical education useful to providing students with moral education (Burgueño & Medina Casaubón, 2020).

Positive Psychology and Character Education

A relevant term that will be used to help teach students character is positive psychology. Positive psychology was the scientific study of what goes right in life

(Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). In 2008 Park and Peterson stated that positive psychology did not deny that people have a problem or ignore the stress and challenges one has as they attempt to understand what it means to live well. Positive psychology intended to complement the business as usual, not replace it (Park & Peterson, 2008). Park and Peterson's (2008) statement suggested that positive psychology helped people with or without problems move from where they started to beyond, regardless of where they started. When students hear their names for the right things they do, they want to continue that behavior because it gave them a positive feeling (Boynton, & Boynton, 2005). Kohn (1996) said, "students were more likely to care about others when they know they are cared about" (p. 111). Marzano (2003) believed that students who resisted rules, procedures, and disciplinary actions did not have a foundation of a good relationship. He maintained that developing positive relationships with students was most important at the elementary and junior high levels (Marzano, 2003).

Character was another relevant term. Character referred to the aspects of one's personality that were morally valued. Good character was the core of positive youth development (Baumrind, 1998). When teachers committed to building and enhancing character strengths, it reduced negative outcomes (Botvin et al., 1995). When students have good character, they developed the desired outcomes, such as school success, leadership, and kindness (Scales et al., 2000). Having good character has also been associated with reducing problems, such as substance abuse, smoking, violence, and depression (Park, 2004). By implementing positive psychology lessons in a physical education class, it taught students good character through the character trait of respect. To promote the trait of respect, positive psychology was used to enhance students and

increase their success. The more positive things students hear about themselves, the more they wanted to demonstrate the positive aspects of character (Young, 2014). Middle school physical education was a perfect environment to teach students how to be respectful (Barney, 2002; Chen, 1996; Darst et al., 2009; NASPE, 2009). Barney and Christenson (2012) determined in their study that students learned to respect each other by working together during team sports. Students respected the coach or teacher by learning to listen to instruction. They also learned to respect the rules so they could stay safe. After learning about respect and practicing respect, students used it outside the classroom to improve behavior, attendance, and grades (Barney & Christenson 2012).

Lifetime Skills

An article by Ray (2013) pointed out self-discipline should be taught quite effectively in physical education. According to Schwartz (2021), the research mentioned that discipline was a key to developing positive self-esteem. Schwartz (2021) believed there was a direct relationship between self-discipline and self-esteem. Schwartz (2021) believed that the more one practices self-mastery and self-control, the more one likes and values oneself. The more one practices self-discipline, the greater amounts of a sense of self-respect and personal pride existed. The more one practices self-discipline, the better a self-image would be in place. When one sees oneself and thinks about oneself in a more positive way, one felt happier and be more powerful as a person (Schwartz, 2021). As students learn to set goals, work toward improvement, and observe tangible results in their lives in this physical education setting, it became easy for students to see the benefits of regular effort and commitment (Kay, 2017). Kay (2017) also stated that in PE classes, students learned the value of discipline, hard work, and a committed effort to

improve health and self-esteem. McLeod (2015) described self-esteem as a precursor to well-being in this manner, “I considered what were both precursors and parallels to the rise of wellbeing, specifically attending to the concept of self-esteem” (p. 181).

It became clear students recognized the benefits of consistent effort and commitment in a physical education class. Students in physical education received instruction and learned the value of self-discipline, which McLeod (2015) viewed as a precursor to well-being. Consistent and focused effort can improve health and self-esteem character traits, which are lifetime skills. Instruction in physical activities and training guided students toward a positive result when hard work and self-discipline were maintained.

As a life skill, self-discipline was an important one. Studies by psychologists have shown that self-discipline is key to academic success. Fraser-Thill, (2019) cited a 2005 study of eighth graders that found self-discipline was strongly associated with the marking period and final GPAs, student achievement test scores, and selection into a competitive high school. Children with high self-discipline also behaved differently in relation to school. In particular, they were less frequently absent, did more hours of homework, spent less time watching television, and began their homework earlier in the day compared to children with low self-discipline (Fraser-Thill, 2019). The primary purpose of our middle schools should be to help students develop self-discipline, which leads to improved self-esteem and promoted a feeling of well-being (Adams et al., 2006). The instruction of positive psychology and promotion of well-being prepared students for their step into high school (Norrish et al., 2013). Life skills, such as improved self-esteem and feeling of well-being cultivated in middle school were just as relevant in high school,

college, and the workplace. We needed to begin now to provide our children with much-needed resources for lifelong success by promoting well-being through a positive psychology curriculum.

Wellness Promotion

Wellness offered a new educational model that paralleled academic learning, emphasized positive emotions, character traits, and personalized motivation to promote understanding (Seligman et al., 2009). Positive education focused on creating a student's well-being, along with teaching them academic achievement skills. Wellness education was essential in the pursuit of improving the well-being of our students.

Today's psychological literature offered several arguments for incorporating a positive education program into schools. Evidence from this literature suggested that student well-being played a part in the students' improved academic achievement, fewer risky behaviors, and better physical health during adolescence and adulthood (Caprara et al., 2000; Durlak et al., 2011; Hoyt et al., 2012). Studies suggested that well-being acted as a protective factor against youth depression and promoted creativity, social cohesion, and civic citizenship (Nidich et al., 2011; Seligman et al., 2009; Wang et al., 1997; Waters, 2011). A meta-analysis showed that mental illness contributed to a student having lower grades, higher absenteeism, lower self-control, and higher drop-out rates (Hinshaw, 1992; McLeod & Fettes, 2007).

Wellness programs were a starting point for schools to build a supportive, respectful, and connected school culture to help a school community clarify and reach an agreement about the values that guide a school's practices (Adler, 2016). A study of

middle school students found that even though anxiety and depression predicted school absenteeism, they did not predict students' grades. In that same study, students who had positive well-being could be predicted to have better grades, particularly in math and reading (Suldo et al., 2011).

Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS)

In the 2000s, schools, on their own, created a list of the procedures for the handling of student discipline (Meador, 2018). When these procedures were used, teachers were expected to give the students warnings and call parents before giving the student-written referral (Evertson & Weinstein, 2013). The referral sent the student to a principal or counselor. A referral aimed to get the student the help they needed to come back to class and be successful (Evertson & Weinstein, 2013; Meador, 2018).

The creation of discipline procedures has led to a variety of discipline and classroom management techniques. The first discipline procedure was preventative discipline. Morin (2021) described preventative discipline as allowing the teacher to establish their expectations and rules in the early few days of the class, creating a safe, non-confrontational classroom. The second discipline procedure was positive reinforcement, which was organized around rewarding students for their positive behavior. Instructors were encouraged to add positive reinforcement to their teaching methods and curriculum to decrease behavior issues (Morin, 2021; Roter, 2015). One such program that is used in schools is Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS). PBIS focused on changing problematic behavior by changing the behavior's settings (Carr, 2007). PBIS was an implementation framework designed to enhance academic and social behavior outcomes for all students by emphasizing the use of data

for informing decisions about the selection, implementation, and progress monitoring of evidence-based behavioral practices and organizing resources and systems to improve implementation fidelity (Sugai & Simonsen, 2012 p.1; Sugai et al., 2000).

Positive Psychology Elements

Positive psychology consists of many different elements. Such elements included engagement, perseverance, optimism, connectedness, and happiness. Each of these sections were important for students to develop happiness, positive wellbeing, positive self-esteem, and reduce academic pressures to be discussed in the following paragraphs. These sections also included discussions on how positive psychology would be beneficial, positive psychology was not immune to its criticisms, and how too much emphasis on self-report and cross-sectional survey data was used to evaluate the effectiveness of positive psychology.

Positive psychology has been described in a variety of ways; however, the most accepted definition of this field of study is that positive psychology was the scientific study of what makes life most worth living (Peterson, 2008). Peterson (2008) goes on to suggest that positive psychology was the scientific approach to studying human thoughts, feelings, and behavior, with a focus on strengths instead of weaknesses, building the good in life instead of repairing the bad, and taking the lives of average people up to “great” instead of focusing solely on moving those who are struggling up to “normal.”

Renowned positive psychologists Baumeister et al. (2013) took on the challenge of determining what makes a good life, and they found some interesting findings that one could apply to one’s own life. Positive psychology (PP) specifically worked to help individuals and groups to become the best persons they could be. In an article by

O'Donnell (2018), she believed that middle school was a transition time for children that can be an experience of growth and independence and may be a difficult time for children to face the problems associated with middle school. O'Donnell addressed the issues that our middle students face, including self-esteem, drama, temptation and disappointment, and rejection. We understood that these middle school issues occurred throughout many of their middle school classes; however, Waters (2011) stated that physical education presented a physically active, challenging, and character-building curriculum in which middle school students benefited from a positive psychology program. In an article, Waters (2011) said that "The evidence shows that positive psychology programs are significantly related to student well-being, relationships, and academic performance" (p. 80). The Wichita Eagle (2010) quoted Sears saying the challenges our middle school students faced may be addressed through a physical education program that provided an opportunity to build a healthy self-esteem. Self-esteem was the degree to which the qualities and characteristics contained in one's self-concept were perceived to be positive (VandenBos, 2007). When a positive psychology program was incorporated with a physical education program, the teacher worked with students to build on strengths instead of weaknesses. Positive psychology was based on the idea that building our strengths was often a more effective path than trying to force excellence in an area we were not suited for (Ackerman, 2020). In practice, students were given opportunities to use their strengths. By building a student's power, we should see an increased level of positive beliefs, which translate into improved academic outcomes (Erwin, 2004).

When instructors hold students responsible for their actions about respecting others, students gained a feeling of respect from their classmates (Wessler, 2003). The

Wichita Eagle (2010) suggested that respect boosted confidence levels that led students to experience healthy self-esteem. There was a positive correlation between students' self-esteem and their levels of achievement. Healthy self-esteem allowed children to perform to their potential (The Wichita Eagle, 2010).

Positive Psychology as a Growing Field

Positive psychology was a growing psychological field. It was considered a scientific study of one's thoughts, feelings, and behavior with a focus on strengths instead of weakness, building the good instead of repairing the bad, and taking the lives of ordinary people up to "great" instead of focusing solely on moving those who were struggling up to "normal" (Peterson, 2008). Positive psychology was an exercise not changing one's values but helping one achieve what they already value (Seligman, 2018). The idea behind positive psychology was to be preventative with people's issues and get them to think more positively about their lives. What is good? What is successful? What makes you happy? These questions are examples of how positive psychology helped people think more positively about their lives.

How was positive psychology beneficial? Bennett (2018) suggested that some of the benefits of positive psychology were a boost in self-esteem, change in perspective, improved relationships, higher productivity, and increased success. A study by Seligman et al. (2005) found that positive psychology promoted and improved gratitude. Gratitude played a major role in happiness, suggesting that the more gratitude we had and showed, the better, the happier we were (Seligman et al., 2005). A similar study by Layous et al., (2012) found that positive psychology promotes kindness. Kindness encouraged more social behaviors in students and boosted increased peer acceptance and wellbeing. This

discovery suggested that those who performed acts of kindness showed an increase in wellbeing and are more liked by the others around them (Layous et al., 2012). Positive psychology was about shifting one's perspective. Moving one's perspective allowed one to discover more optimism and gratitude and change one's outlook. When students changed their perspective about school, and made changes to achieve their goals, they saw improvements in themselves (Arredondo, 2020).

Happiness was contagious; those happy friends and significant others were more likely to be satisfied in the future (Fowler & Christakis, 2008). When one puts on a happy face, it may not make one feel happier, but the effort put in helped (Scott & Barnes, 2011). Students wanted to be a part of safe and comfortable environments. By being a part of this happy, safe, and positive environment, students worked to maintain these positive environments. They also did what it took academically to continue to be a part of the positive environment. The students who participated in physical education saw improvement in their skills and abilities; they also saw success academically. When a student had success, they were much happier, felt happy, and had positive emotions that increased the chance of success (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005).

In her article about positive psychology, Ackerman (2020) listed the goals psychology has for teaching and coaching positive psychology. Those goals were to positively impact students' lives, to increase a student's experience of positive emotions, and there was a need to enhance the students' goal setting and goal striving abilities. Goal setting and goal achievement was instrumental in helping students to identify and develop their strengths and unique talents, to build a sense of hope into the student's perspective, to nurture a sense of gratitude, to help students build and maintain healthy and positive

relationships with others, encouraged the students to keep an optimistic outlook and to help them to savor every positive moment (Mentor Coach, n. d.; Pepercorn, 2014). Having goals guided instructors to teach and support students to develop an optimistic belief about themselves (Loveless, 2020). When students were optimistic, they felt better and more confident about themselves. This optimism translated into improved academic outcomes for them. Akerman (2019) suggested that optimism should be taught through the practice of a gratitude journal. The gratitude journal allowed students to reflect on the good things that happened in their lives. They needed to write three things they were grateful for, with the only stipulation being that what they were thankful for was different each day. Within a week, the student started to experience a boost in their well-being and increased gratitude (Akerman, 2019).

Positive Psychology Criticisms

Positive psychology's criticisms were that the research findings were often invalid, overstated, and misleading (Akerman, 2019). Positive psychology was like any other scientific field, and mistakes were made. The mistakes seemed to occur because of one's excitement over the potential finding. This excitement made it hard for one to maintain objectivity when one felt results had a broad and deep application to the real world (Akerman, 2019). When the study was performed, it was essential to be careful to keep the claims within reason and think critically about the method's limitations (Akerman, 2019).

Emphasis on Self-report and Cross-Sectional Survey Data

Positive psychology's focus on self-report and survey data was not exclusive to itself. Positive psychology received feedback from those close to an individual, which corroborated or compared the data (Ackerman, 2020). Ackerman (2020) stated that reports from those close to the individual helped to increase confidence in the data being presented. In this research of students involved in physical education, we looked at school data provided by the MoDESE and the school to show how positive psychology improved students' belief in themselves and improved their academic success.

Learned Optimism

A person's perceptions of events can be seen in two ways. A pessimist was a person who saw events as negative and discouraging (Scott, 2020). In Scott's (2020) article, *What is Pessimism?*, it described the pessimist as someone who was always blaming themselves and viewing failure as long-lasting. An optimist was the opposite of a pessimist. The optimist approached problems from a position of power and saw challenges as opportunities to overcome adversity (Scott, 2020). Scott (2020), in her article, outlined that when an optimist met failure, they view it as temporary and attribute the failure to the situation or the circumstances.

Heuvel (2019) talked about how optimism can be learned. She believed that a pessimist changed their thoughts and beliefs to be more optimistic. The theory of this belief was that people emulate and duplicate the behaviors they observed in their environment (Heuvel, 2019). The people who were most affected by their environment were children. If their parents do not positively cope with stress, they may develop a pessimistic attitude and behavior (Heuvel, 2019). However, if a parent showed their child

more positive or optimistic ways to cope with the stress, they were more likely to combat helpless behaviors.

Seligman (2006) stated that optimism can be taught, and a pessimistic thought can be converted to a more optimistic thought. Seligman (2006) believed that anyone can use learned optimism regardless of how pessimistic they are. The first step to determining the level of treatment is to establish a base level of optimism. After determining the level of optimism, the next step was to assess one's reaction to adverse situations. To look at these reactions, Seligman (2006) created a system called the ABCDE. "A" stood for adversity, which is the event that causes stress. "B" was a belief, which was how a person interprets events. "C" was for consequence, which was the resulting action from the belief caused by adversity. "D" was for disputation, which used the evidence to challenge negative thoughts. "E" was for energizing, was when one can condition themselves into positive thoughts and behaviors in response to adversity (Seligman, 2006).

Optimism Benefits

The optimism students learned was helpful to improving their academic success. The researcher used Seligman's (2006) "ABCDE" model to help educate students on being optimistic. The "ABCDE" model allowed students to look at situations that caused one to be pessimistic or feel bad and discover how it can be a learning experience or not as bad as first thought. For example, Seligman (2006) states the "ABCDE" model was explained below,

Adversity: My teacher, Mr. Minner, yelled at me in front of the whole class, and everybody laughed.

Belief: He hated me, and now the whole class thinks I'm a jerk. Consequences: I felt really sad, and I wished that I could just disappear under my desk.

Consequences: I felt really sad, and I wished that I could just disappear under my desk

Disputation: Just because Mr. Minner yelled at me, it doesn't mean he hates me. Mr. Minner yells at just about everybody, and he told our class we were his favorite class. I guess I was goofing around a little, so I don't blame him for getting mad. Everyone in the class, well everyone except for maybe Linda. But she's goody-goody, but everybody else has been yelled at by Mr. Minner at least once, so I doubt they think I'm a jerk.

Energization: I still felt a little sad about being yelled at, but not nearly as much, and I didn't feel like disappearing under my desk anymore. (Seligman, 2006 p. 241)

Learning to use the "ABCDE" model helped students to be optimistic, which assisted in starting to improve academic success. The "ABCDE" model was used in physical education because teaching adversity which can inoculate against the potentially negative effects of stress and trauma that our students feel (Bell & Suggs, 1998).

Becoming more optimistic started with making changes to oneself. Those changes began with understanding one's own beliefs and reactions to adversity. Majiba and Majiba (2020) defined adversity as any unfavorable fortune, incident or fate or a condition marked by misfortune, calamity, or distress. There were multiple ways for students to deal with adversity. Journaling one's reactions obtained one's opinions and responses to adversity. Mason (2014), suggested that some of the benefits of journaling allowed for self-expression, provided one with feedback, allowed one to understand the situation that they were in, and allowed one to think outside the box. Waters (2019) stated

journaling was an effective tool for stress management, dealing with emotions, and developed personal growth. Journaling is important in dealing with adversity because it was known to increase cognitive functioning and counteract the negative effects of stress that come from adversity (Waters, 2019).

One obvious advantage to being optimistic was increased physical health (Heuvel, 2019). Stress was known to be dangerous to the body. High levels of stress are linked with increased inflammation levels, a weak immune system, an increase in headaches, and many other somatic symptoms (Berzin, 2020). Optimists were not resistant to stress but were known to manage stress better by minimizing its effect on one's body. In a study, Heuvel (2019) noted how students who practiced optimism techniques reported fewer moderate to severe depression cases than the control group. When one was at their full optimistic attitude (recall Seligman's "ABCDE" model), they had improved energy. When one had more energy, they were known to be more productive. Those athletes that were optimistic showed a decrease in injury occurrence. They also better-managed rest and nutrition and exercised at an appropriate intensity, frequency, and duration (Heuvel, 2019). A U.S. study of 100,000 students found that optimistic people were less likely than those who were pessimistic to die from coronary heart disease or any other cause over eight years (Heuvel, 2019).

**Positive, Emotion, Relationships, Engagement, Meaning, Accomplishments/
Achievements (PERMA Model)**

Everyone today seemed to be in the pursuit of happiness (Pascha, 2019). This pursuit has led Seligman to create "PERMA" (Seligman, 2012). "PERMA" was the acronym for positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and

accomplishments. Pascha (2019) believed Seligman's theoretical model helped understand each of the following elements and maximize those elements to reach a life full of happiness. The "PERMA" model was created to stop focusing on mental illness treatment and focus on the five "PERMA" elements and worked towards a life full of fulfillment, happiness, and meaning (Seligman, 2012).

When teaching the "PERMA" model, Seligman (2012) asked educators to think about the individuals in their schools and ask the following questions (Seligman, 2012). Answering "yes" to any of the problems means having identified students who were flourishing. Did these people feel and demonstrate positive emotions, such as hope, compassion, empathy, comfort, contentment, joy, gratitude, love, or zest Seligman, 2012)? Did they feel they belong to something larger than themselves? – whether a team or a religious group or a school community – that adds meaning to their lives (Seligman, 2012). Did they experience accomplishment by meeting goals or adding value to their community? (Seligman, 2012) Were they engaged in their work or interests, regularly demonstrating the capacity to find things about which they cared? (Seligman, 2012) Were they able to build and sustain strong relationships in many areas of their lives? (Seligman, 2012).

The "PERMA" model, along with the focus on academic achievement, educators needed to teach skills that strengthen relationships, engaged students, fostered positive emotions, and found meaning (Webster, 2014). The goal of PERMA was aimed to introduce students to identify happiness and work towards it. Each of the PERMA model elements sought to help individuals find joy and work towards it.

Positive Emotions

This element was the most obvious to the connection of happiness. Positive emotions were the ability to remain optimistic and view the past, present, and future from a constructive perspective (Pascha, 2019). Developing positive emotions helped students enjoy their daily tasks, persevere through challenges they may face, and remain optimistic about the eventual outcome (Pascha, 2019). Examples of positive emotions were pleasure and enjoyment. Pleasure was the satisfaction of physical needs for survival, such as thirst, hunger, and sleep. The satisfaction of these physical needs was what many of our students lack when they come to school. Enjoyment was when one has been intellectually stimulated and creative. For example, when students completed and turned in a completed assignment, they worked hard. Developing our positive emotions allowed us to broaden our thinking and build relationships. Positive emotions enabled one to be more flexible, more persistent, and more curious, all traits that we wanted students to develop (Webster, 2014).

Engagement

Engagement was about helping to find enjoyment in different things. Engagement included learning an instrument, playing a sport, or working on an exciting project. Engagement was about finding that activity that absorbed us into the moment and created a task or activity flow (Pascha, 2019). In an article by Adams (2010) he described engagement as when we find ourselves involved in an activity, and we were surprised when it is over and the phrase “time flies when you’re having fun” came to mind when being engaged. An article by Glynn (2012) cited a study from psychological science that studied the saying ‘time flies when you’re having fun and found it to be a true statement

when the phrase was adjusted to say time flies when you're having goal-motivated fun. When students set goals, they became more aware of the learning they were expected to experience and allowed students to be engaged in the learning process (Pascoe et al., 2020).

Relationships

Students thrive on developing connections that promoted love, intimacy, and strong emotional and physical interactions with others (Pascha, 2019). Developing these relationships with parents, teachers, and other students helped support them through difficult times and promotes resilience. In an interview with Printein (2015), the discussion focused on the brain's pain center and how our pain centers were activated when one is at risk of isolation. Ideally, when these pain centers are activated, it will encourage one to reconnect socially with someone or a group. Being a part of a group helped one feel safe and valued (Pascha, 2019). Teaching relationships allowed students to maintain positive emotions and develop coping methods to avoid pain or loneliness.

Meaning

We were all looking for meaning, purpose, and that feeling that our life was worth more than the sum of its parts (Ackerman, 2021). Many people find meaning by working at a good company, raising children, volunteering for a more significant cause, or expressing themselves creatively; however, the media promoted glamour, pursuing material wealth, thinking of money as the gateway to happiness (Pascha, 2019). When we taught students meaning, we helped them understand their impact and why they came to school (Pascha, 2019; Ackerman, 2021). When students have an enjoyable reason to show up, they felt more satisfied (Bald, 2018).

Accomplishment.

Having a goal and ambition in life helped one achieve, giving them a sense of accomplishment. Setting a realistic goal and putting effort into achieving that goal gave one a sense of accomplishment when reaching the goal (Pascha, 2019). Akey (2006) also believed that students learned more and retained more information when they actively participated in the learning and related to what was being taught. Many studies have found that students who recognized that their teachers were supportive and cared about their success were more likely to be engaged in the class and do well academically (Heller et al., 2003; Akey, 2006).

EPOCH Model: Engagement, Perseverance, Optimism, Connectedness, Happiness Model

The EPOCH model helped students learn to engage themselves by helping them find ways to be a part of the activity that makes them feel a part of the class. According to Kern et al., (2016) learning EPOCH taught students about developing positive relationships by finding ways to treat others the way they want to be treated. Through the EPOCH model, students developed meaning by learning about what it takes to be respected. The EPOCH model helped students to create a sense of accomplishment by setting goals and working to achieve those goals (Kern et al., 2016). Each section of the EPOCH model will be outlined and explained below.

Engagement

In the EPOCH model, engagement was similar to the PERMA model. Csikszentmihalyi (1997) describes engagement as the ability to be absorbed in and focus on what one is doing as well as be involved in and interested in life activities and tasks

(1997). Literature shows that when at-risk students are engaged, they have higher life satisfaction, greater educational attainment, and have lower rates of arrest (Chan et al., 2014).

Perseverance

Perseverance referred to the ability to pursue one's goals to completion, even winning in the face of difficulties. Duckworth et al. (2007) described it as a sub-facet of the Big Five personality trait of conscientiousness and comprised the drive of grit. In four studies, the studies found that individuals high in persevere were more likely to graduate from school and stay in their jobs (Eskreis-Winkler et al., 2014).

Optimism

Optimism was characterized by hopefulness and confidence about the future, a tendency to take a favorable view of things, and an explanatory style marked by evaluating negative events as temporary, external, and specific to the situation (Kern et al., 2016). When one was optimistic, they showed greater satisfaction with life, were more effective using coping strategies, showed fewer symptoms of depression, had better physical health, longer life, and better social relationships (Carver et al., 2010).

Connectedness

Connectedness in EPOCH was similar to the PERMA model's meaning. Connectedness also referred to the sense of having satisfying relationships, believing they were cared for, loved, esteemed, valued, provide friendship or support to others (Kern et al., 2016). Over 15 years, students' social connectedness predicted students' better well-being when they become adults (Olsson et al., 2013). The more connected students were, the more likely they succeeded.

Happiness

Happiness was the steady state of a positive mood and feeling content with one's life, rather than the momentary emotion (Kern et al., 2016). Adolescent happiness related to having better health, using fewer risky behaviors, and were independent of depressive symptoms (Hoyt et al., 2012).

Self-Esteem

Student self-esteem was essential for students. Searcy (2007) defined self-esteem as the result of an individual's overall feeling of self-worth. Students experienced a drop in their self-esteem when they compared themselves to their peers, and they decided that they did not measure up to the others they see as smarter, more athletic, talented, or popular. In many studies, students in sixth, seventh, and eighth grades have shown a decline in self-esteem (DuBois et al., 2002; Rhodes et al., 2004). The middle school years were also when students decide to experiment with smoking, drinking, drugs, and other dangerous behaviors. Adolescent students with low levels of self-esteem experienced depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and dissatisfaction with their lives (Bolognini et al., 1996; Harter, 1999; Hoffmann et al., 2003; Kaplan, 1996; Stacy et al., 1992). Significant studies have shown that positive psychology programs were playing an important role in building self-esteem among students (Chowdhury, 2021). Chowdhury (2021) found that when teachers were more interactive and used a more collaborative learning approach, students had more self-esteem than in strict or closed classroom situations.

Summary

Chapter Two reviewed the literature and past research regarding factors associated with discipline concerns in American schools, and the positive effects of

physical education and positive psychology curriculum on reducing middle school student discipline concerns, attendance, and academic achievement. Chapter Two examined school discipline, in relation, to schools by defining what it was, the aims of school discipline and how lack of discipline affected a school, as well as the history of school discipline.

From this review of previous research, we learned that American public schools, once considered to be places free from disruption and violence, have become battlegrounds where learning and teaching were difficult to achieve. Discipline problems were a significant concern in schools, and educators worldwide sought strategies to make schools safer and lower drop-out rates. According to the literature, students who had more incidents of disruptive behavior than the general school population had academic achievement concerns and lower attendance rates.

This inspection of the literature looked at character education and positive psychology as programs that assist in improving student's behavior and academic successes. The literature reviewed the historical perspective of character education and positive psychology, as well as lifetime skills, and student wellness promotion.

Chapter Two stated the literature discussing positive Emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, achievement (PERMA) and engagement, perseverance, optimism, connectedness, and happiness (EPOCH) models. PERMA was found to be the adult and first psychology study that looked into happiness and what one needs to improve their happiness. EPOCH was the adolescent psychology version to study happiness. The literature reviewed PBIS as a similar program used to improve student behaviors and academic outcomes.

Chapter Three explains the research aspect of this study. The EPOCH survey was distributed to sixth, seventh and eighth grade students within the middle school of study to establish where they are with their level of happiness. Also, data on student discipline, grade point average, physical education grade, and attendance was collected. At the conclusion of the study the EPOCH survey was distributed again and data on student discipline, grade point average, physical education grade, and attendance was collected. The data collected will be compared between the students in the treatment and control groups. A more in-depth explanation of this study begins in Chapter Three.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this Positive Psychology (PP) study was to determine if there is a significant difference between middle school sixth, seventh, and eighth-grade physical education classes after implementing the instructional curriculum of positive psychology (PP) in one of two classes over one semester, which will meet the same number of class days. These classes will be labeled A-day classes and B-day classes. Students in the A-day classes received the traditional physical education curriculum and the Positive Psychology education curriculum, and the treatment group students in the B-day classes received the standard physical education curriculum, the control group. The researcher sought to discover if there was a significant difference between the A-day classes of students and the B-day classes of students regarding student discipline infractions, attendance, and classroom grade point average (GPA) after one trimester of implementing the positive psychology curriculum.

The researcher used an independent *t*-test for the difference in means, which involved examining the significant differences on one factor between means of two independent groups (A-class, treatment group, vs. B-class, control group). The researcher wanted to know whether there was a significant difference in the level of discipline referrals, attendance, and classroom GPA. The *t*-test with two independent variables may be one of the most trusted and utilized statistical tests (Hayes & Westfall, 2020). Hayes and Westfall (2020) described a *t*-test as a well-known statistical analysis tool used for its simplicity, ease of application, and flexibility. The *t*-test determined if a prescriptive positive psychology development program offered in a middle school physical education

curriculum can contribute to improvement in a student's class grade point average (GPA) and reduce discipline referrals. The researcher felt that using a comparison/control group in this study would allow data to show the treatment being applied results from character education instruction and not external elements.

Problem Statement

In this quantitative study, the *t*-test involved two independent variables. The researcher sought to observe, explain, and draw conclusions from implementing the curriculum of Positive Psychology (PP) in a mid-western middle school. This study examined how PP's implementation affects lowering student discipline, increasing students' grade point averages, and improving student attendance.

A *t*-test can determine whether a prescriptive character education/positive psychology development program offered in a middle school physical education curriculum can improve a student's class grade point average (GPA) and reduced discipline referrals. Two comparison groups were used in this study, as it would allow the researcher to discern whether or not the treatment from the character education instruction will yield positive results for students.

In this PP study, the control group received the same curriculum instruction at the same time of year with the same classroom conditions, and the same instructor. The only difference is the day of teaching and the addition of the Positive Psychology education curriculum component.

Rationale

This study was essential because, annually, students made decisions that impacted their educational success, which may have lifelong effects. Research-based information

that allows students and parents to make choices that influence students to remain in school can be invaluable. The PP study contributes to our understanding of how at-risk students were encouraged to conform to school policies and regulations, as influenced by choices to participate or not participate in activities during their middle school years in the following ways:

- Clarify relationships between physical education and discipline referrals.
- Clarify relationships between physical education and student GPA.
- Provide guidance for students and parents in balancing their choices in middle school.

This study looked at the possible benefits of lowering the number of discipline referrals and increasing the grade point average (GPA) of students through physical education classes that use positive psychology. Students who participated in middle school physical education that taught positive psychology gained a feeling of connectedness to the school and respect for others and themselves (McMillan & Reed, 1993). Prior research conducted on this topic indicated students involved in physical education were less involved in school-related deviance (Smith, 1994).

Much of the research on students and program effectiveness has been quantitative, emphasizing group achievement gains and almost no attention to individual students and the students' perceptions of why they have succeeded (McMillan & Reed, 1993).

According to a summary of 50 research articles by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), 43 of the 50 articles suggested evidence supporting a positive link between physical activity and academics (CDC, 2010). The CDC study showed that much can be learned from at-risk students who participate in physical education classes.

The quantitative data gathered for this research determined if there was a significant difference that showed that students who were taught respect through a prescribed curriculum show improved discipline referrals and GPA. Students from the 2020 – 2021 school year who participated in the A-class receiving the treatment were compared with the B-class students who received the regular physical education class instruction.

This study used a quantitative procedure to help the researcher better understand the effects of a physical education class that taught positive psychology on lowering the number of discipline referrals and increasing student GPA in students. A two-sample *t*-test was carried out to compare the number of discipline referrals and GPAs between students who participated and those that did not participate.

The research questions for this study included two questions. The first question asked if there was a correlation between physical education and academic success in sixth through eighth-grade students? This question was answered by the results for hypotheses one through four. The second question asked what were the attitudes/ perceptions of participants involved in the physical education class that includes positive psychology? Question two was answered by the results from hypotheses five through nine.

Methodology

This study was quantitative. Quantitative research was the process of collecting and analyzing numerical data (Bhandari, 2020). Analysis of this type was used to find patterns and averages, make predictions, test relationships, and conclude findings to a larger population.

A quantitative study provided both descriptive and inferential statistics to analyze data. Descriptive statistics provide a synopsis of the data that includes measures of averages and variables (Bhandari, 2020). These statistics visualized the data using graphs, scatter plots, and frequency tables.

Inferential statistics allows a researcher to make predictions or theorize based on the data. By using an inferential statistic, a researcher's hypothesis was tested or estimated the population parameter. The researcher chose to conduct a quantitative study for its advantages. The first advantage was that quantitative research studies were repeatable. Quantitative studies allowed for standardized data collection and real definitions of theoretical concepts (Bhandari, 2020; Miller, 2020). Using this research method eliminated the use of opinions, because quantitative data focused on the actual measurable data. Another advantage was the results of this study were compared to the results in other studies. This study on positive psychology will be replicated in other settings or with different groups, because the procedures were the same. Those results would be compared statistically with each other (Miller, 2020).

Quantitative research does not require direct observation to provide usefulness. Specific protocols were used for the quantitative method, but a researcher did not need to be in the room to observe students' participation directly. Not being in direct contact with the students was beneficial for this study, as classes were taught online due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research Design

This study used survey and archival data to study the effects positive psychology can have on middle school students in physical education. A survey was a data collection

tool to gather information about individuals (Cherry, 2020). Surveys were the most common research method because they allowed the researcher to collect data and describe naturally occurring phenomena in the real world (Cherry, 2020). The use of surveys enabled the researcher to manage a large amount of information quickly. A good survey investigates the characteristics, behaviors, or opinions of a group of people. In this case, the researcher studied middle school students in a suburban school district in St. Louis.

Validity

When using the survey method, the survey included the following two principles, validity, and reliability. The validity encompassed the entire experimental concept and established whether the results obtained meet all scientific research method requirements. Having validity helped determine if the survey measures what needed to be measured. The EPOCH survey's validity was determined by answering the following questions.

1. **Face validity:** *Did the questions appear reasonable to acquire the data you want to collect?*
2. **Content validity:** *Were the questions all about the issue and other subjects related to it?*
3. **Internal validity:** *Did the questions imply the outcome that you want to achieve from the survey?*
4. **External validity:** *Did the questions elicit generalizable answers. (Sincero, 2012 B)*

Kern et al. (2016) validated the EPOCH survey using four estimates of internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha, Guttman's I6, minimum and maximum split-half

reliability (b and l4) that were estimated using the psych package (Revelle, 2015) in R, based on 10,000 random draws across the data. Revelle (2015) described a psych package function as taking the most useful information for personality, psychometric, and psychological research. Cross-time correlations (Pearson's r) were then calculated to estimate test-retest the survey's reliability. Kern et al. (2016) examined correlations with measures of similar and dissimilar constructs. In each sample, correlations (Pearson r) were computed between the five EPOCH components and available constructs. The effect sizes, which are group differences, used multiple scientific studies to address the same question. (Rosenthal, 1991) combined samples using non-random quantities. Rosenthal then used multiple statistics to better present his findings (Rosenthal, 1991).

The researcher took no additional validity measures for the study. Additional validity measures were not needed because of how this measure was used by previous authors and researchers, in particular Kern et al., 2016.

The t -test was the chosen method to analyze the data because it is an inferential statistic that can determine if there is a significant difference between the means of two groups (Maverick, 2019). The t -test was one of many tests used for the purpose of hypothesis testing in statistics (Flom, 2018; Hayes & Westfall, 2020; Maverick, 2019). The t -test was also chosen because of how easy it was to gather data and easy to calculate results, since figures can be determined on a computer (Flom, 2018). The results from a t -test were also easy to understand, especially for those readers who may have had very little statistical training (Flom, 2018).

Reliability

Reliability was achieved when significant results were more than a one-off finding and were inherently repeatable (Martyn, 2008). For an experiment to be reliable, other researchers must be able to perform the same experiment under the same conditions and generate the same results. When an experiment produces the same results, this will reinforce the findings and ensure that the scientific community will accept the hypothesis. Reliability enabled other researchers to understand the researcher's hypothesis better (Martyn, 2008).

The survey method was chosen for this study because of its advantages. One of those advantages was, when using a survey, the researcher described the general population's relative characteristics more concisely. Surveys were also a convenient way to gather data and administer it to participants. The respondents were given paper and pencil or provided an online means to complete the survey, which was also very convenient to administer. For this study, the survey was given online using *Google forms*. An online survey provided the researcher with useful statistical data. Surveys have high representativeness, which means they gather statistics, and the researcher can effectively analyze multiple variables (Cherry, 2020; Sincero, 2012). Young (2021) describes a survey of high representativeness as one that was a small subset group that reflects the characteristics found in the target population. An example of this was, having a class of 30 students with 15 males, and 15 females might potentially bring about a representative sample that might include six students: three males and three females (Young, 2021). Surveys were ideal for this study, because they provided all the participants with a standardized stimulus, the statistics were reliable, and the researcher's own biases were

eliminated (Cherry, 2020; Sincero, 2012). VandenBos (2007) described standardized stimulus as a quantitative investigation of a physical stimuli and the sensations and perceptions they produced an example of a standardized stimulus was, in the method of adjustment, when a participant may be presented with a sound of a particular intensity (the standard stimulus) and then asked to change the intensity of another sound to match (VandenBos, 2007). The EPOCH survey was the standard stimulus and participants were surveyed again using the EPOCH survey to see if changes had been made after applying the positive psychology program. Surveys were also known for providing uniform definitions to all the subjects to answer the questionnaires. Thus, there was greater precision in terms of measuring the data gathered.

Instrumentation

The survey method studied the effects of positive psychology on middle school students in physical education class. The survey came from Kern et al., (2016) journal article “The EPOCH Measures of Adolescent Well-Being.” The survey allowed this researcher to observe and determine the impact of a positive psychology program on middle school students’ physical education. The survey was a question-and-answer method—Table 1 displays the questions and possible answers for this survey.

Table 1

Survey Format

		1	2	3	4	5
C1	When something good happens to me, I have people who I like to share the good news with.	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Almost Always
P1	I finish whatever I begin.	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Almost Always
O1	I am optimistic about my future	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Almost Always
H1	I feel happy.	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Almost Always
E1	When I do an activity, I enjoy it so much that I lose track of time.	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Almost Always
H2	I have a lot of fun.	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Almost Always
E2	I get completely absorbed in what I am doing.	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Almost Always
H3	I love life.	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Almost Always
P2	I keep at my schoolwork until I am done with it.	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Almost Always
C2	When I have a problem, I have someone who will be there for me.	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Almost Always
E3	I get so involved in activities that I forget about everything else.	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Almost Always
E4	When I am learning something new, I lose track of how much time has passed.	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Almost Always
O2	In uncertain times, I expect the best.	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Almost Always

C3	There are people in my life who really care about me.	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Almost Always
O3	I think good things are going to happen to me.	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Almost Always
C4	I have friends that I really care about.	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Almost Always
P3	Once I make a plan to get something done, I stick to it.	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Almost Always
O4	I believe that things will work out, no matter how difficult they seem.	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Almost Always
P4	I am a hard worker.	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Almost Always
H4	I am a cheerful person.	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Almost Always

Each item was scored on a 1 to 5 Likert scale (almost never/ not at all like me = 1; almost always / very much like me= 5). Scores for each domain are the average of the four items, and results can be presented as a profile across domains. That was:

Engagement = mean (E1, E2, E3, E4).

Perseverance = mean (P1, P2, P3, P4).

Optimism = mean (O1, O2, O3, O4).

Connectedness = mean (C1, C2, C3, C4).

Happiness = mean (H1, H2, H3, H4). (Kern et al., 2016 p 33)

Research Questions

The study focused on the following general research question: What is the relationship between middle school students’ academic success and reducing classroom discipline when receiving instruction in character education programs that teach respect?

The study explored two research questions and nine hypotheses:

- Q1: Is there a correlation between physical education and academic success in 6th through 8th-grade students?
- Q2: What were the attitudes/ perceptions of participants involved in the physical education class that includes positive psychology?
- H1: There was no difference in discipline referrals when students participated in physical education classes that incorporated positive psychology when compared to discipline referrals when students did not participate in physical education classes that incorporate positive psychology.
- H2: There was no difference in class grade point average when students participated in physical education classes that incorporated positive psychology.
- H3: There was no difference in Overall GPA when students participated in physical education classes that incorporated positive psychology.
- H4: There was no difference between attendance in physical education classes that use positive psychology and attendance in physical education classes that do not.
- H5: There was no difference in engagement when students participated in physical education classes that incorporated positive psychology.
- H6: There was no difference in perseverance when students participated in physical education classes that incorporated positive psychology.
- H7: There was no difference in optimism when students participated in physical education classes that incorporated positive psychology.
- H8: There was no difference in connectedness when students participated in physical education classes that incorporated positive psychology.

- H9: There was no difference in happiness when students participated in a physical education class that incorporated positive psychology.

Population and Sample Selection

Study Population

The study subjects consisted of secondary students attending a middle school in a large 600-student suburban school district located in Missouri. All subjects were sixth, seventh, and eighth-grade students and were both male and female, between 12 and 14 years old. The sampling method was a non-random convenience sample, obtained arbitrarily through scheduling students for first-trimester physical education classes for eighth grade. The racial background of these students was as follows: 99% African American and 1% Caucasian.

The sample included sixth-grade, seventh grade, and eighth-grade students, both male and female, between the ages of 12 and 14. There was a treatment and a control group. Students in the A-class will be the treatment group, and the students in the B-class will be the control group. The total population in the study was 140 students. The A-classes consisted of 76 students with 28 sixth graders, 23 seventh graders, and 25 eighth graders. The B-classes consisted of 70 students with 32 sixth graders, 19 seventh graders, and 19 eighth graders. There was a total of 78 male and 67 female students involved in the study.

Participant Confidentiality Measures

This researcher first visited the middle school principal and received written permission from this educator to conduct the study there. This researcher also submitted the proposal to the school district administration and received approval to carry out the

study at the middle school. After receiving approval from the building principal and school district, the researcher completed the Institutional Review Board (IRB) training and submitted the research proposal to IRB to be approved. The students chosen for this study were sixth, seventh, and eighth-grade students and were both male and female between 12 and 14 years old. The sampling method was a non-random, convenience sample obtained arbitrarily through scheduling students for first-trimester physical education classes for sixth, seventh, and eighth grade. After receiving approval for the study by the IRB and obtaining the class roster for the semester, the researcher sent out a permission form to parents to ask for permission to include their son or daughter in the study.

When the study began, the researcher started the semester by giving all students who participated in the study the pre-assessment survey on EPOCH. Through the semester, the A-day classed received the treatment of positive psychology, and the B-day classes are the control group. At the end of the trimester, all participating students were given a post-assessment EPOCH survey. The researcher compiled all data into an Excel spreadsheet, when all EPOCH post-assessments were gathered. Data about the class grade, overall grade point average, attendance, and student discipline were gathered from the district's online student information system. Once the data was matched up with the individual students, all identifying data were removed and deleted off of the server.

Data Collection

When the study began, the researcher started the semester by giving all students who participated in the study the pre-assessment survey on EPOCH. Throughout the trimester, the A-day class received the treatment of positive psychology lessons, and the

B-day classes were the control group. All students who participated were given a post-assessment EPOCH survey at the end of the trimester. Additionally, at the conclusion of the trimester, the researcher collected archival data from the start and end of the first trimesters in physical education classes and compiled all data into an Excel spreadsheet. The data collected from the student information system (SIS) included the class grade, overall grade point average, attendance, and student discipline. Once the data were matched up with the individual students' survey assessments, all identifying data about the students were removed and disposed of.

As the data were collected for this study, the researcher secured all information on a private server. The server was password encrypted in which this research was the only one with access to the data.

EPOCH Measure

The Engagement, Perseverance, Optimism, Connectedness, and Happiness (EPOCH) measure was a series of 20 questions that provided a brief snapshot of well-being. The measures for EPOCH were created to measure the positive function. Kern (2018), one of the developers of the EPOCH measures, developed the measures to capture the general functioning rather than the functioning over a period. Kern (2018) suggested that this test is best used as a pre-test and post-test.

***t*-Test Measure**

The *t*-test is a statistical test used to determine if there is a significant difference between the means of two sets related to specific characteristics. Hayes and Westfall (2020) described an example of a *t*-test as the data set recorded from flipping a coin 100 times. The outcome from flipping the coin would follow a normal distribution and could

have unknown variances when the *t*-test is used as a hypothesis testing tool, testing a belief relevant to a population (Hayes & Westfall, 2020).

A *t*-test is a hypothesis testing tool that allows the testing of an assumption applicable to a population. A *t*-test analysis used the *t*-statistic, *t*-distribution values, and the degrees of freedom to determine the statistical significance. To calculate a *t*-test required three fundamental data values. Those key values were the difference between the mean values from each data set (called the mean difference), the standard deviation of each group, and the number of data values (Kenton, 2020).

A *t*-test allowed a researcher to compare the two data sets' average values and determine if the results were correct and applicable to the entire population (Kenton, 2020).

The *t*-test was chosen for its simplicity to interpret, ease of gathering data, and ease of calculation. A *t*-test allowed the researcher to look at the mean of one sample and determine its difference and if it was significantly different to a comparison point. Statistical significance was the measure of how likely the differences were (Flom, 2018). The data gathered for this study allowed the researcher to use the *t*-test to compare data collected between the treatment group and the control group.

The ease of gathering data was another reason the researcher chose to use a *t*-test. A *t*-test required little data to assist in showing some quantitative variables (Flom, 2018). This test's information was also quite easy to obtain for this researcher, primarily since much of the data were to be obtained through surveys and archival data.

The *t*-test was also chosen for its simplicity of making the calculation. Today, *t*-testing is always done with the aid of a computer (Flom, 2018). This tested formula was

also simple and easy for this researcher to understand what was happening with the data. Understanding the data was very appealing because this researcher did not have a significant amount of statistical training (Flom, 2018).

Data Analysis Procedures

The researcher used a *t*-test for the difference of two means, with the samples being independent of each other. The researcher set the alpha at a .05 level of significance.

Figure 1. *t*-Test Value.

$T = \frac{mean1 - mean2}{\frac{s(diff)}{\sqrt{n}}}$
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * <i>mean1</i> and <i>mean2</i> = The average values of each of the sample sets * <i>s(diff)</i> = The standard deviation of the differences of the paired data values * <i>n</i> = the sample size (the number of paired differences) * <i>n - 1</i> = The degrees of freedom
<p>(Kenton, 2020).</p>

Relationship to Participants

The researcher was also the teacher of the physical education classes. The potential participants will be involved in a middle school physical education teacher’s class at a middle school located in the Midwest. Students were assigned randomly by the grade-level counselors before the start of the school year.

Research Timeline

This study started in August of 2020. The students in the selected midwestern middle school were randomly placed in grade-level classes labeled A-class or B-class by school counselors to allow for the equal distribution of students in each grade level. Classes in each grade level were then assigned as treatment or control by the researcher.

Students in A-class were designated as the treatment group and B-class as a control group. This researcher had no input to which students were in the class. When classes began for the fall first trimester, the researcher emailed permission forms to the parents. Along with a written permission form parents completed, there was a place for parents to provide permission for their students to access a *Google* form. The *Google* form was designed to allow for a digital signature.

The study was conducted using the EPOCH survey. The survey was administered using *Google* forms. The survey was distributed to all students completing the parent permission form and distributed to students in the treatment and control groups of students in the sixth, seventh, and eighth grade during the class time provided. The consent forms were collected, and the participants answered ten questions. It was anticipated that it would take approximately five minutes to complete the “EPOCH Measure of Adolescent Well-being” survey (Kern et al., 2016). The information gathered for this study remained stored on a private server, password protected by the user.

All students received the same physical education curriculum. The prescriptive class students received additional instruction in the curriculum regarding positive psychology (EPOCH) into the regular physical education curriculum. Students who chose not to participate in the EPOCH assignments were given alternative physical education assignments. Alternative assignments were provided for students who did not want to participate in the study. Assignments provided relevant instruction and support related to the unit being taught for the week. The alternative assignments did not include any information about or related to positive psychology.

Week One and Two: *Fitness Testing, Engagement Began September 1st and 2nd*

- EPOCH assessment administered and pre-data collected, September 1st and 2nd
- We started talking about engagement.
- What goals do you want to achieve in fitness testing?
- What goal do you have for school?
- What were the positive things that have happened to you?
- What was engagement?
- Students wrote on a card one positive thing that happened to them during class.
- Guest speakers visited with students to talk about engagement.

Week Three: *Soccer, Perseverance*

- What was perseverance?
- How can I use perseverance in the lesson?
- Students wrote on a card how they persevered during class.
- What were the positive things that have happened to you?
- Guest speakers visited with students to talk about perseverance.

Week Four: *Health: Cardiovascular System, Perseverance*

- What was perseverance?
- How can I use perseverance in the lesson?
- Students wrote on a card how they preserved during class.
- What are the positive things that have happened to you?
- Guest speakers visited with students to talk about perseverance

Week Five: *Softball, Optimism*

- What was optimism?
- How can you practice optimism in class?
- How were you optimistic in class?
- Students wrote on a card how they tried to be optimistic during class.
- What were the positive things that have happened to you?
- Guests' speaker visited with students to talk about optimism.

Week Six: *Health: Muscular & Skeletal system and Optimism.*

- What was optimism?
- How can you practice optimism in class?
- How were you optimistic in class?
- Students wrote on a card how they tried to be optimistic during class.
- What were the positive things that have happened to you?
- Guests' speaker visited with students to talk about optimism.

Week Seven: *Football, Connectedness*

- What does it mean to be connected?
- Who do you have important connections with?
- How can you develop good connections?
- Students wrote on a card how they tried to connect with someone in or outside of class.
- What were the positive things that have happened to you?
- Guests' speaker visited with students to talk about connectedness.

Week Eight: *Health: Mental & Emotional, Happiness*

- What was happiness?
- How happy are you?
- How can you develop happiness?
- Students wrote on a card how they worked on their happiness during class
- Guest speakers visited with students to talk about happiness.

Week Nine: *Total Body Fitness, Review EPOCH*

- How have you been more engaged?
- How have you persevered?
- How have you developed optimism?
- What more connections have you made?
- How have you improved your happiness?
- What are the positive things that have happened to you?

Weeks Ten and Eleven: *Fitness testing, review EPOCH, and take post-assessment*

- Take post EPOCH assessments and collect post-data on November 9th and 10th
- What goals have you achieved since the start of the third trimester?
- What were the positive things that happened to you?
- How have you been more engaged?
- How have you persevered?
- How have you developed optimism?
- What more connections have you made?
- How have you improved your happiness?

- What were the positive things that have happened to you?

This study aimed to apply a positive psychology coaching model to teaching students in the sixth through eighth grades to improve student school commitment and the EPOCH variables (Engagement, Perseverance, Optimisms, Connectedness, Happiness). This study used the “EPOCH Measure of Adolescent Well-being” survey to collect relevant data regarding students’ academic success and reduce classroom discipline when receiving instruction in character education programs that teach respect (Kern et al., 2016).

Protecting the confidentiality of research participants’ personal information was carried out in the following manner. The survey was optional and distinct from the required classroom activities. No access to student educational records was needed. A letter of support from the building principal and the district office was obtained and included. Male and female student demographics in sixth, seventh, and eighth grade in the treatment groups were collected. If participants felt uncomfortable with a survey question, they could skip over that question. Likewise, if students experienced fatigue, they were encouraged to take a short break.

Student education records for research complied with all Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA; 34 CFR § 99.31). No private student records were accessed for this research.

Summary

Chapter Three outlined the methodology used to perform this quantitative study, including detailed descriptions of the participants, instruments, and procedures. Demographic data for the participants, validity, and reliability for the instruments, and

methods for administering the instruments were also explained. Finally, the procedures for conducting the study were detailed. This study examined the differences in academic performance and discipline levels between sixth, seventh, and eighth-grade students who received positive physiology lessons, compared to students only receiving physical education instruction. The researcher used the EPOCH survey to evaluate participants in both groups (treatment and control). Academic performance was assessed using the school district's academic benchmark tests and students' grade point averages to address the research questions presented in Chapter One. Discipline referrals were determined by inappropriate student behaviors, according to district policy.

Chapter Four includes the results of the EPOCH surveys and the student discipline, grade point average, physical education grade, and attendance data from the beginning and end of the trimester within the middle school of study. This information was disaggregated in multiple ways. Survey results were compared in several ways, looking at discipline, grade point average, physical education grade, and attendance. The gathering of data from student discipline, grade point average, physical education grade, and attendance participation was also used to answer the research questions.

In Chapter Five, the results of this study were reviewed, and the two research questions and nine hypotheses were answered. Chapter Five will also have recommendations for future studies. Recommendations to the high school of study will also be touched on in this chapter.

Chapter Four: Analysis

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine if middle school sixth, seventh, and eighth-grade students receiving positive psychology instruction in physical education would have a positive effect on their school behavior and well-being. This study focused on two research sub-questions. The first research sub-question focused on determining the effect of instructing middle school students in positive psychology in a physical education class and its impact on trimester grades, overall grade point average, discipline, and attendance, compared to classes that did not receive that instruction. The second research sub-question concerned the well-being, attitudes, and perceptions of participants who received positive psychology instruction in their physical education class, compared to participants in the control class, which did not receive positive psychology instruction.

The general research question for the study was:

What was the relationship between middle school students' academic success and reducing classroom discipline when receiving instruction in character education programs that teach respect?

Purpose of the Study

This study was conducted to determine if there was an improvement in the academic outcome of physical education trimester grades, overall grade point average, reduced discipline referrals, improved attendance, and an increased feeling of well-being, following participation in positive psychology instruction. It is not known if and to what degree/extent positive education would affect middle school students. Few school

systems, at the time of this writing, provided plans that supported students who needed those accommodations (Terada, 2020).

Specific research questions and null hypotheses for the study were:

- Q1: Was there a correlation between physical education and academic success in 6th through 8th-grade students?
- Q2: What were the attitudes/ perceptions of participants involved in the physical education class that includes positive psychology?
- H1: There was no difference in discipline referrals when students participated in physical education classes that incorporated positive psychology compared to discipline referrals when students did not participate in physical education classes that incorporated positive psychology.
- H2: There was no difference in grade point average when students participated in physical education classes that incorporated positive psychology.
- H3: There was no difference in overall GPA when students participated in physical education classes that incorporated positive psychology.
- H4: There was no difference between attendance in physical education classes that use positive psychology and attendance in physical education classes that do not.
- H5: There was no difference in engagement when students participated in physical education classes that incorporated positive psychology.
- H6: There was no difference in perseverance when students participated in physical education classes that included positive psychology.

- H7: There was no difference in optimism when students participated in physical education classes that incorporated positive psychology.
- H8: There was no difference in connectedness when students participated in physical education classes that incorporated positive psychology.
- H9: There was no difference in happiness when students participated in a physical education class that incorporated positive psychology.

Students in the selected mid-western middle school were randomly placed in grade-level classes labeled A-class or B-class by school counselors to allow for the equal distribution of students in each grade level. Classes in each grade level were then assigned as treatment or control by the researcher. Students in A-class were designated as treatment and B-class as control. All classes received 30 days of the standard district-approved physical education curriculum. A-day classes, the treatment classes, received an additional district-approved positive psychology curriculum. All students received parental or legal guardianship consent forms, which allowed them to participate in the study, a pre-and post-EPOCH survey to measure their well-being in the following five areas: engagement, perseverance, optimism, connectedness, and happiness. The researcher analyzed data to discover if there was a significant difference between the measured characteristics of A-classes and B-classes of students regarding student discipline infractions, attendance, trimester grade, overall grade point average, and feelings of well-being after one trimester.

Sample

The study population for this research came from a mid-western middle school that had a student population of 800 students. School demographics consisted of 98%

African American, with a combined 2% total of Asian American, Hispanic, and White population. Additionally, the study population sample was made up of sixth, seventh, and eighth-grade students, both male and female, between the ages of 12 and 14. Grade level guidance counselors, unaware of the study, randomly assigned 146 students in the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades to A-class or B-class, grade-specific physical education classes. Class populations were as follows: 28 A-class eighth graders and 32 B-class eighth-graders, 23 A-class seventh-graders with 19 B-class seventh-graders; and the sixth grade consisted of 25 A-class sixth-graders and 19 B-class sixth graders. The researcher did not have any involvement in student class assignments. Permission forms were sent out via email to all parents/legal guardians seeking to allow their son or daughter's participation in the study. Only students who were granted permission from parents or legal guardians were included in this study. Consent forms were placed in a lockable, fireproof box that only the researcher could access. This precaution was taken to protect the anonymity of each participant.

Each participant in this study was assigned a number to protect their identities. The list of the subject names and data collected were not linked to the individual subjects. Only information pertinent to the study was collected, and no student names or numbers were published. All materials, recordings, and statistical information were kept in the researcher's personal locked file cabinet, located at his residence. The researcher had sole access to the filing cabinet, which remained locked at all times, and he was the only person with the key to access its contents.

This study was conducted for one trimester, from September 2020 to November 2020, with each class receiving 30 days of instruction. The A-class received district-

approved positive psychology and physical education curriculum and were referred to as the treatment group. Students in B-class received a district-approved physical education curriculum only and were referred to as the control group.

Finally, the researcher distributed a parent permission form to all treatment and control subjects to obtain consent for their son or daughter to take a paper and pencil pre- and post-EPOCH survey of 20 questions. The EPOCH Measure of Adolescent Well-being followed the EPOCH definition of well-being as an amalgam of five areas: engagement, perseverance, optimism, connectedness, and happiness. Students completed this 20-item survey by responding on a five-point Likert scale to statements, such as “I feel happy . . . In uncertain times, I expect the best . . . I am a hard worker” (Kern et al., 2016). This measurement has been tested with adolescents of different socioeconomic situations across Australia and the United States. EPOCH Measure of Adolescent Well-being “If we’re going to eat would rather not eat” survey (Kern et al., 2016). Both pre- and post-surveys took approximately five minutes each of class time to complete. To protect the anonymity of each participant as they completed the survey, they placed their survey in a locked box with a slot to preserve the anonymity of the participant.

Data Collection and Analysis

The researcher collected archival data from the beginning and end of the first trimester of both treatment and control physical education classes. Trimesters lasted a total of 54 days, and students received 27 days of instruction. Treatment groups and control groups received the same number of instruction days, with the only difference being the treatment group receiving positive psychology lessons. Data collected consisted of the student’s class grade, overall grade point average, discipline, and

attendance for the trimester before the study was conducted. At the end of the trimester of study, the researcher gathered discipline referrals, overall grade point average, attendance, survey information, and the post-EPOCH survey results.

Treatment and control groups each received 30 days of the standard physical education curriculum, with the A-class receiving an additional positive psychology curriculum. The researcher selected and used an independent *t*-test, which involved examining the significant differences on one factor between means of two independent groups (A-class, treatment groups vs. B-class, treatment group). A *t*-test was a well-known statistical analysis tool used for its simplicity, ease of application, and flexibility (Kenton, 2020). The *t*-test determined if a prescriptive positive psychology curriculum offered in a middle school physical education improved a student's class individual physical education grade, overall grade point average, and reduced discipline referrals. Hole (2009) believed a *t*-test enables a researcher the ability to determine if the mean of one condition is really different from the mean of another condition. Knowing this information helped the researcher to decide if the conditions were real or a random chance of happening (Hole, 2009). This researcher used a comparison treatment and control group that allowed the treatment to be applied to ascertain positive psychology instruction results, not something outside the experiment.

Survey Data

Chapter Three described the methodology for this study, and the data gathered from those stated statistical methods are presented in this chapter. The researcher utilized a *t*-test for differences with two independent means. According to an Internet posting by Kent State University (2021), this article described independent samples *t*-test as a test

that compared two groups on the mean value of a continuous (i.e., interval or ratio), normally distributed variable. The model assumed that a difference in the mean score of the dependent variable was found because of the influence of the independent variable that distinguished the two groups (Kent State University, 2021).

In this study, a treatment group was compared to a control group, and two research questions were explored. Research question one worked to understand the relationship between middle school students' academic success in physical education, trimester grades, overall grade point average, discipline, and attendance in classes that received positive psychology instruction, as compared to classes that did not receive that instruction. The second research question investigated participants' well-being, attitudes, and perceptions who received positive psychology instruction compared to control classes and their physical education class.

Data for both the first and second research questions were analyzed to determine the significance of treatment groups as compared to control groups in trimester physical education grade. Additionally, the overall grade point average, discipline referrals, attendance, and five areas of adolescent well-being were also analyzed. The EPOCH survey asked 20 questions to ascertain a student's well-being in the five following areas: engagement, perseverance, optimism, connectedness, and happiness. Each item was scored on a 1 to 5 scale (almost never/not at all like me = 1; almost always /very much like me= 5). Scores for each domain are the average of the four items, and results can be presented as a profile across domains. That is:

Engagement = mean (E1, E2, E3, E4).

Perseverance = mean (P1, P2, P3, P4).

Optimism = mean (O1, O2, O3, O4).

Connectedness = mean (C1, C2, C3, C4).

Happiness = mean (H1, H2, H3, H4).

(Please refer to the survey found in the appendix. Figure 2).

Results

Null Hypotheses and Research Questions

Below are the findings of the null hypotheses 1 through 4 data, which sought to determine the first research question: What was the relationship between middle school student's academic success, reducing classroom discipline, and improving attendance when receiving instruction in positive psychology?

H1: There was no difference in discipline referrals when students participated in physical education classes that incorporated positive psychology. (Column L)

The researcher conducted a *t*-test for difference in two means to determine if there was a difference in the reduction of discipline referrals between students who participated in the PPP and students who did not. A preliminary test of variances revealed that the variances were equal. The analysis revealed that the discipline referral reduction of students in the positive psychology group ($M = 0.38$, $SD = 0.96$) was not significantly different from those not in the PPP ($M = 0.50$, $SD = 0.91$); $t(80) = -0.58$, $p = .717$. The researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that students in the positive psychology group had no significant difference in discipline than the control group.

H2: There was no difference in grade point average when students participated in physical education classes that incorporated positive psychology. (Column G)

The researcher conducted a *t*-test for the difference in two means to determine if there was a difference in the physical education grade point average when students participated in the PPP and students who did not. A preliminary test of variances revealed that the variances were equal. The analysis revealed that the discipline referral reduction of students in the positive psychology group ($M = 3.36$, $SD = 0.93$) was not significantly different from those not in the PPP ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 0.57$); $t(80) = -1.83$, $p = .074$. The researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that there was no significant difference; however, students in the positive psychology group did show non-significant, moderate evidence of a difference in physical education grade point average than the control group.

H3: There was no difference in overall GPA when students participated in physical education classes that incorporated positive psychology. (Column H)

The researcher conducted a *t*-test for difference in two means to determine if there was a difference in the overall grade point average when students participated in the PPP and students who did not. A preliminary test of variances revealed that the variances were equal. The analysis revealed that the discipline referral reduction of students in the positive psychology group ($M = 2.68$, $SD = 0.82$) was not significantly different than the control group ($M = 2.93$, $SD = 0.92$); $t(80) = -1.32$, $p = 0.905$. The researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that students in the positive psychology group did not have a significant gain in improvement in overall grade point average than the control group.

H4: There was no difference between attendance and physical education classes that use positive psychology. (Column J)

The researcher conducted a *t*-test for difference in two means to determine if there was a difference in physical education attendance when students participated in the PPP and students who did not. A preliminary test of variances revealed that the variances were equal. The analysis revealed that the discipline referral reduction of students in the positive psychology group ($M = 1.18$, $SD = 1.38$) was not significantly different than the control group ($M = 0.83$, $SD = 1.91$); $t(80) = 0.96$, $p = .338$. The researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that there was no difference in attendance from the control group.

H5: There was no difference in engagement when students participated in physical education classes that incorporated positive psychology.

The researcher conducted a *t*-test for difference in two means to determine if there was a difference in engagement when students who participated in the Positive Psychology Program (PPP) and students who did not. A preliminary test of variances revealed that the variances were equal. The analysis revealed that the engagement gains of students in the positive psychology group ($M = .35$, $SD = 0.94$) was significantly higher than the control group ($M = -0.03$, $SD = 0.95$); $t(80) = 1.80$, $p = .037$. The researcher rejected the null hypothesis and concluded that students in the positive psychology group had a significantly higher gain in engagement than the control group.

H6: There was no difference in perseverance when students participated in physical education classes that incorporated positive psychology.

The researcher conducted a *t*-test of two means to determine if there was a difference in perseverance gain between students who participated in the Positive Psychology Program (PPP) and students who did not. A preliminary test of variances

revealed that the variances were equal. The analysis revealed that the perseverance gain of students in the positive psychology group ($M = -0.04$, $SD = 0.85$) was not significantly different than the control group ($M = 0.13$, $SD = 0.80$); $t(80) = -0.91$, $p = .818$. The researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that students in the positive psychology group did not significantly differ in perseverance from the control group.

H7: There was no difference in optimism when students participated in physical education classes that incorporated positive psychology.

The researcher conducted a t -test of two means to determine if there was a difference in optimism gain between students who participated in the PPP and students who did not. A preliminary test of variances revealed that the variances were equal. The analysis revealed that the optimism gains of students in the positive psychology group ($M = 0.15$, $SD = 0.85$) was not significantly higher than the control group ($M = 0.07$, $SD = 0.85$); $t(80) = .45$, $p = .326$. The researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that students in the positive psychology group did not have a significant difference in optimism than the control group

H8: There was no difference in connectedness when students participated in physical education classes that incorporated positive psychology.

The researcher conducted a t -test of two means to determine if there was a difference in connectedness gain between students who participated in the PPP and students who did not. A preliminary test of variances revealed that the variances were equal. The analysis revealed that the connectedness gain of students in the positive psychology group ($M = 0.35$, $SD = 0.72$) was not significantly higher than the control group ($M = 0.10$, $SD = 0.81$); $t(80) = 1.45$, $p = .075$. The researcher failed to reject the

null hypothesis and concluded that students in the positive psychology group did show moderate, non-significant, evidence of a difference in connectedness than the control group.

H9: There was no difference in happiness when students participated in physical education classes that incorporated positive psychology.

The researcher conducted a *t*-test of two means to determine if there was a difference in Happiness gain between students who participated in the PPP and students who didn't. A preliminary test of variances revealed that the variances were equal. The analysis revealed that the engagement gains of students in the positive psychology group ($M = 0.15$, $SD = 0.85$) gain in the positive psychology group was not significantly higher than the control group ($M = 0.05$, $SD = 0.75$); $t(80) = 0.56$, $p = .290$. The researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that students in the positive psychology group did not have a significantly higher gain in happiness than the control group.

The following questions will be discussed further in chapter Five.

Q1: Was there a correlation between physical education classes receiving positive psychology and trimester grades, overall grade point average, discipline concerns, and attendance.

This question was answered by the results calculated from hypotheses one through four. Hypothesis one, three, and four failed to reject the null hypothesis and determined that the positive psychology group did not show a significant difference in discipline referrals, overall GPA, and attendance. In hypothesis two, the results from the *t*-test failed to reject the null hypothesis, but it did suggest there may be moderate, non-

significant, evidence of a difference between the positive psychology class the control class.

Q2: What were the attitudes/ perceptions of participants involved in the physical education classes that included the positive psychology curriculum.

This question was answered by the results calculated from hypotheses five through nine. Hypotheses six, seven, and nine failed to reject the null and concluded the positive psychology class did not have a higher gain in perseverance, optimism, or happiness than the control group. Hypotheses eight did fail to reject the null but did conclude that the positive psychology group shows moderate, non-significant, evidence of a difference in engagement and connectedness than the control group. Hypothesis five rejected the null hypothesis and concluded that students in the positive psychology group had a significantly higher gain in engagement than the control group.

Summary

Chapter One stated the research limitations, and Chapter Five elaborated further on the limitation of this study along with the results study data revealed. Implementing a positive psychology curriculum during a 12-week period may not be enough time for the students to understand, internalize and use this information. Along with most of the world, the COVID 19 pandemic during the implementation of positive psychology resulted in several instructional changes in physical education and delivery of the positive psychology curriculum. Student adjustment to virtual lessons limited the researcher's ability to study the curriculum's effects between male and female students and grade levels. Student demographics limited the researchers' ability to investigate if the results differed by race or ethnicity.

Additionally, studies that analyzed positive psychological effects in the selected categories make statements about the researched associations. Finally, the researcher was unable to control for outside influence regarding this study. Those external influences included what happens in other classes or at home. As a result, the impact of PP (positive psychology) on positive or negative growth could not be controlled.

In Chapter Five, the researcher presents findings and analysis for Null H1 – Null H9 and RQ1 and RQ2 in chapter Four. The data reported indicated that the implementation of a positive psychology program at a public mid-western middle school that involved sixth, seventh, and eighth-grade male and female students did not have a significant effect on the reviewed data points. Chapter Four presents the researcher's findings regarding two research questions and ten data points using a *t*-test for the difference between two independent variables. The positive psychology survey EPOCH analysis indicated that positive psychology test A-day classes had no significant difference from control B-day classes. This data set the stage for the further investigation of positive psychology and building student well-being as a possible way to build student resistance to poor behavior and lack of academic progress. The analysis of the data does indicate evidence that the implementation of a positive psychology program, such as EPOCH, may have a positive effect on the level of student well-being. The implications of these findings are discussed in chapter Five.

In Chapter Five, the results of this study are reviewed and will discuss the two research questions and nine hypotheses. Chapter Five offers recommendations for future studies. The researcher will offer guidance to the high school in the district of this study in Chapter Five.

Chapter Five: Discussion

Introduction

Chapter Five reveals the data analysis concerning two major questions researching the effects of implementing a positive psychology curriculum in mid-western middle school physical education classes. This study used quantitative procedures to determine the effects physical education classes that taught positive psychology had on lowering student absence rates, discipline referrals, increasing student physical education grades over a trimester, improving overall grade point average, and increasing student well-being. The researcher focused on determining the impact of positive psychology instruction of 6th, 7th, and 8th-grade middle school students in physical education classes, its effect on trimester grades, overall grade point average, discipline, and attendance. Instruction for positive psychology was given in classes called treatment classes/groups and compared this treatment to classes that did not receive positive psychology instruction, called control classes. Additionally, the study analyzed the EPOCH survey pre-and post-data on a second research question regarding the well-being attitudes/perceptions of those middle school students who received positive psychology instruction in their physical education class compared to control classes. This study's data were analyzed through the use of a *t*-test with two independent variables. All study data were collected pre-and post-application of the positive psychology instructional program in physical education, which spanned a 30-day trimester.

Overview and Importance of the Study

The findings of this study contributed to our understanding of how students, through this positive psychology curriculum, are encouraged to change their behavior,

choose to become engaged in lessons, and learn how to persevere and work within school policies and regulations. These research findings could develop more positive student attitudes toward participation in physical education classes and their middle school years. Additionally, this research helped us understand the effects of students who make positive educational decisions. Those positive choices helped us understand the profound impact on the students' academic success, which may have lifelong effects on their well-being. This study added to the understanding that Positive Education has regarding what people want for their children and what schools teach (Seligman, 2009). Seligman (2009) has said that most parents want their children to be happy, healthy, and confident, but schools only focus on achievement, discipline, and academic skills. This study assisted students in making choices and having experiences that influenced students to remain in school. The positive psychology study contributed to our understanding of how students were encouraged to make choices, follow policies and regulations that avoided negative actions, and influenced their intention to participate fully in the middle school experience. This study looked at the possible benefits of positive psychology lowering discipline referrals and increasing student academic success as measured by grade point average. The outcomes from this research added to the overall understanding and implementation of improved behavior interventions for middle school students by increasing their well-being capacity and selection of positive behavior choices.

Problem and Purpose Statements

Schools have seen an increase in student cheating, bullying, and violence. The increase in disruptive behaviors in our classrooms was causing quite the stir throughout America (Vallaire-Thomas et al., 2011). Research about disruptive behaviors has shown

that they are related to increases in students' emotional and behavioral issues (Stanley et al., 2006). The increase in these issues demonstrated our students' need to develop more positive traits that help eliminate bullying and reduce violence in our schools. The focus of this study was the implementation of a positive psychology curriculum for middle school students in a physical education class that can positively affect academic outcomes. In an article by the Council of Europe (2020), there was a direct link between well-being and academic achievement and vice versa, i.e., well-being was a crucial prerequisite for achievement, and achievement was essential for well-being. Teaching positive psychology has been especially important towards reducing some of the educational concerns mentioned above. Lahey (2013) pointed out that schools that implemented a positive psychology program reported higher academic performance, improved attendance, reduced violence, fewer disciplinary issues, reduced substance abuse, and less vandalism. This researcher hoped to prove further how implementing a character education program and/or positive psychology program into physical education helped meet our middle students' needs today.

Students need to know that they are coming to a safe environment free of stress. A safe, caring environment allows students to explore, learn, and grow safely (Applebury, 2020). This researcher further demonstrated that implementing a student-centered positive psychology program in physical education would improve attendance, grade point average (GPA), and student discipline reduction. According to the Council of Europe (2020) article, physical activity was associated with improved learning and concentration. Strong, supportive relationships provide students with the emotional resources to step out of their intellectual 'comfort zone' and explore new ideas and ways

of thinking, which was fundamental to educational achievement (Council of Europe, 2020).

When our students were relaxed, they were ready to learn (The Share Team, 2020). Teaching students positive psychology in physical education developed feelings of well-being and would be better prepared to learn. There was a direct link between well-being and academic achievement and vice versa, i.e., well-being was a crucial prerequisite for achievement, and achievement is essential for well-being (Improving well-being at school, 2020). Physical activity was associated with improved learning and the ability to concentrate. Strong, supportive relationships provided students with the emotional resources to step out of their intellectual 'comfort zone' and explore new ideas and ways of thinking, which is fundamental to educational achievement (Tripp et al., 2007 p. 34). This study gathered quantitative data about student academic outcomes and compared test class and control class differences. Student scores on the EPOCH survey, given at the start of a trimester, were compared to survey results at the end of that trimester. Survey data were analyzed to determine if there were any significant gains in student well-being. Additionally, academic outcomes were studied by comparing grades, attendance, and overall grade point average at pre-and post-intervals

As explained in Chapter Three, this study used a pre-and post-EPOCH survey that asked 20 questions to ascertain a student's well-being in the five following areas: engagement, perseverance, optimism, connectedness, and happiness. Each item was scored on a 1 to 5 scale (almost never/not at all like me = 1; almost always/very much like me= 5). Scores for each domain were the average of the four items, and results can be presented as a profile across domains. That was:

Engagement = mean (E1, E2, E3, E4).

Perseverance = mean (P1, P2, P3, P4).

Optimism = mean (O1, O2, O3, O4).

Connectedness = mean (C1, C2, C3, C4).

Happiness = mean (H1, H2, H3, H4). Kern et al. (2016)

Please refer to the survey found in the appendix.

A *t*-test of independent means was then used to compare the gain in the EPOCH well-being survey. The *t*-test was also used to determine a significant gain in overall grade point average, trimester physical education grade, attendance, and discipline referrals.

Summary of Findings and Conclusions

In this section, the researcher discusses the research hypotheses, questions, specific findings, and conclusions based on the data analysis related to the findings back to the literature review and the significance of the study from Chapter One. This section discusses significant themes and findings relative to the literature review found in Chapter Two.

Research Questions

The research study included two questions. The first question asked if there was a correlation between physical education and academic success in 6th through 8th-grade students? This question was answered by the results for hypotheses one through four. Hypotheses one: there was a difference in discipline referrals when students participated in physical education classes that incorporated positive psychology compared to discipline referrals when students did not participate in physical education classes that

incorporated positive psychology. Hypotheses two checked if there was a difference in grade point average when students participated in physical education classes that incorporate positive psychology. Hypotheses three checked if there was a difference in overall GPA when students participated in physical education classes that incorporate positive psychology. Hypotheses four verified if there was a difference between attendance in physical education classes that use positive psychology and attendance in physical education classes that do not.

The second question asked about the attitudes/ perceptions of participants involved in the physical education class, including positive psychology? Question two was answered by the results from hypotheses five through nine. Hypotheses five tested if there was a difference in engagement when students participated in physical education classes that incorporate positive psychology. Hypotheses six examined if there was a difference in perseverance when students participated in physical education classes that incorporate positive psychology. Hypotheses seven established if there was a difference in optimism when students participated in physical education classes that incorporated positive psychology. Hypotheses eight checked if there was a difference in connectedness when students participated in physical education classes that incorporate positive psychology. Hypothesis nine showed that there was no difference in happiness when students participated in a physical education class that incorporates positive psychology.

Research Study Findings:

Research question one and null hypotheses one attempted to discover if a significance level of .05 was achieved in regard to lowering discipline referrals when

students participate in physical education classes that incorporate positive psychology compared to discipline referrals when students did not receive positive psychology instruction. This study implemented positive psychology to introduce additional developmental assets to help students avoid discipline concerns. In an article by Scales and Blyth (1997), they suggested that the more developmental assets students have, the fewer risky behaviors they were involved in. Duckworth and Seligman (2005) stated, “positive psychology could help students improve their self-discipline and reduce student discipline, allowing more time on task” (pg. 941).

After reviewing the data, this researcher accepted the null hypothesis one premise that there was no difference in discipline referrals when students participate in physical education classes that incorporate positive psychology compared to control classes. This researcher believed that some of the study’s limitations played a factor in students not improving discipline referrals at a significant level. Implementing a program such as positive education takes time, and 30 days may be too short of a time to implement all the positive psychology changes to help improve discipline. Additionally, positive education was only implemented in some physical education classes. This researcher felt that a more robust program would include multiple classes or implementation on a school-wide basis.

Null Hypotheses two stated that there is no difference in grade point average when students participate in physical education classes that incorporate positive psychology. According to Battistich et al. (2004), students in middle school who have received positive education interventions early have shown better academic achievement. The researcher failed to reject this null hypothesis and concluded that there was no

significant difference that positive education improved grade point average. However, the data did not reach a significant level of .05. A level of .074 did suggest that students in the positive psychology group did show moderate evidence of a difference in physical education grade point average than the control group. The researcher believed that additional time, over an entire year or several trimesters and implemented in more classes or the whole school could yield results that demonstrate that positive education could improve student grade point average.

Dammu, 2016 felt disciplinary policies for students of color meant lost instructional time, negatively impacting academic performance (Dammu, 2016). Dammu's (2016) research also suggested that students who had been suspended are likely to repeat a grade or drop out. This research by Dammu (2016) related to null hypotheses three and four, which stated that there was no difference between student GPA and attendance in physical education classes that used positive psychology and GPA and attendance in physical education classes that did not. Null hypothesis three stated there was no difference in overall GPA, and four stated there was no difference in attendance when students participated in physical education classes that incorporate positive psychology. Hypothesis three was not accepted because the significance level was .905, and hypothesis four was not accepted as it only reached a significance level of .338.

The second question sought to determine if the attitudes/perceptions of participants involved in the physical education class that includes positive psychology were moved to significant levels of .05. According to Kern et al. (2016), learning EPOCH taught students about developing positive relationships by finding ways to treat others the way they wanted to be treated. Null hypotheses five through nine attempted to answer the

second research question, which was developed to determine if the students' EPOCH attitudes and perceptions were at a level that would be considered significant.

Null hypothesis five was rejected by the researcher as it reached a significance level of .037 and demonstrated there was a significant difference in engagement when students participated in physical education classes that incorporate positive psychology.

The researcher worked to understand the effects of positive psychology in regard to improving the students' understanding of engagement, perseverance, optimism, connectedness, and happiness when they participate in physical education classes that incorporate positive psychology. Hypotheses six, seven, eight, and nine were all not accepted as the researcher could not reject these null hypotheses. Null hypothesis six reached a level of .818. Null hypothesis seven reached a level of .326. Null hypothesis eight reached a level of .075. Null hypothesis nine only reached a level of .290. Again, this researcher felt the short amount of time of 30 days did not allow enough time for the full effects of the positive psychology program to take effect. Additionally, further limitations affected the significance levels, with one of the major obstacles being the pandemic and inability to work face to face with students. Zoom lessons, at best, allowed for instruction to continue; however, the personal and direct contact with students on a regular basis was a limitation that significantly affected this study's outcome.

This researcher suggested that studies such as this in the future be delayed if day-to-day personal contact is unable to take place. Additionally, this researcher would suggest that multiple classes or whole school applications and the professional development of instructors be a significant consideration in any future study.

Additionally, the researcher utilized the *t*-test to determine if there was a significant difference in five areas of student well-being referred to as EPOCH. Those areas of engagement, perseverance, optimism, connectedness, and happiness were defined by Seligman in 2009. Maverick (2019) explained that a *t*-test with two samples is commonly used to test the difference when the two normal distribution variances are unknown (Maverick, 2019). Student wellness offers a new educational model that parallels academic learning, emphasizing positive emotions, character traits, and personalized motivation to promote understanding (Seligman et al., 2009). These five positive psychology traits were measured in a study by Kern in 2018. The EPOCH model of Engagement, Perseverance, Optimism, Connectedness, and Happiness consisted of a 20-question survey designed to help researchers measure those areas' levels and determine the subjects' overall well-being levels. For example, when students learned to develop positive relationships with other students, they more readily engaged themselves in an activity. When they became a part of the activity, they felt a part of the class (Kern et al., 2016). The survey method selected for this study was developed by Kern et al. (2016) to research and better describe the overall student population's relative well-being characteristics. The survey sought to capture the general positive functioning. Kern et al. (2016) and associates developed EPOCH in 2016. Kern et al. (2016) suggested that this test was best used as a pre-test and post-test to measure well-being.

Kern et al. (2016) created the survey used from ten independent studies that included youth across the United States and Australia. The student sample was split between boys and girls, and the youth were primarily middle-school-aged. The students surveyed came from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds and demographics. One of

the studies from the United States included 1,515 youth (801 male, 704 females, ten unknown) from cities across the United States.

Kern et al. (2016) validated the EPOCH survey using four estimates of internal consistency (Cronbach's α , Guttman's I_6 , minimum and maximum split-half reliability (b and l4) that were estimated using the psych package (Revelle, 2015) in R, based on 10,000 random draws across the data. Revelle (2015) describes a psych package's function as taking the most helpful information for personality, psychometric, and psychological research. Cross-time correlations (Pearson's r) were then calculated to estimate test-retest the survey's reliability. Kern et al. (2016) examined correlations with measures of similar and dissimilar constructs. Correlations (Pearson r s) were computed between the five EPOCH components and available constructs in each sample. The effect sizes, which are group differences, used multiple scientific studies to address the same question. (Rosenthal, 1991) combined samples using non-random quantities. Rosenthal then used multiple statistics to better present his findings (Rosenthal, 1991).

In this study, the A-day and the B-day classes were randomly and arbitrarily labeled A-day classes the treatment group and B-day classes the control group. In the two independent sample applications, the parameter of interest in the test of the hypothesis was the difference in population means. The null hypothesis stated that there was no difference between treatment and control groups means. This study focused on nine null hypotheses regarding two research questions. Null hypotheses one through five were analyzed individually to help the reader understand the final analysis regarding the first research question. The first research question focused on determining the effect of instructing middle school students in positive psychology in a physical education class

and its impact on trimester grades, overall grade point average, discipline, and attendance in classes as compared to classes that did not receive that instruction. Null hypotheses six through nine were discussed individually to help readers understand the final analysis of the second research question of participants' well-being attitudes/perceptions who received positive psychology instruction in their physical education class compared to control classes.

The specific research questions and hypotheses for the study were:

- Q1: Was there a correlation between physical education and academic success in 6th through 8th-grade students?
- Q2: What were the attitudes/ perceptions of participants involved in the physical education class that includes positive psychology?
- H1: There was no difference in discipline referrals when students participated in physical education classes that incorporated positive psychology when compared to discipline referrals when students did not participate in physical education classes that incorporated positive psychology.
- H2: There was no difference in grade point average when students participated in physical education classes that incorporated positive psychology.
- H3: There was no difference in overall GPA when students participated in physical education classes that incorporated positive psychology.
- H4: There was no difference between attendance in physical education classes that use positive psychology and attendance in physical education classes that do not.

- H5: There was no difference in engagement when students participated in physical education classes that incorporated positive psychology.
- H6: There was no difference in perseverance when students participated in physical education classes that incorporated positive psychology.
- H7: There was no difference in optimism when students participated in physical education classes that incorporated positive psychology.
- H8: There was no difference in connectedness when students participated in physical education classes that incorporated positive psychology.
- H9: There was no difference in happiness when students participated in a physical education class that incorporated positive psychology.

Null Hypotheses and Research Questions

Below were the findings of the null hypotheses one through five as the researcher answered the first research question: What was the relationship between middle school students' academic success and reducing classroom discipline when receiving instruction in positive psychology? A *t*-test with two independent means was conducted to determine if students in the positive psychology treatment group had no difference in the hypotheses one through five compared to the control group. This researcher set the level of significance at .05.

Kim (2014) stated that the level of significance is important to hypothesis testing. The level of significance sets the critical value and power of the test, causing a consequential impact on the inferential outcome (Kim, 2015). Gauvreau and Pagano's (1994) article believes setting 5% as the cut-off indicates that approximately 5% of the

normal distribution comprises outlying or notably different values. Those values were more than two standard deviations from the mean.

Andrade (2019) suggested if the null hypothesis is rejected ($p < 0.05$), the p -value describes a probability, not a certainty. If the p -value is higher than 0.05 ($p > 0.05$) is not statistically significant and indicates strong evidence for the null hypothesis (McLeod, 2019). It should be noted that the null hypothesis cannot just be accepted; it can only be rejected or fail to reject (McLeod, 2019).

Hypothesis 1-4

This question was answered by the results calculated from hypotheses one through four. For hypotheses one, three, and four, the researcher did not reject the null hypothesis and determined that the positive psychology group did not show a significant difference in discipline referrals, overall GPA, and attendance. Hypothesis two sought to determine if there was no difference in grade point average when students participated in physical education classes that incorporate positive psychology to the grade point average when students participated in physical education classes that incorporate positive psychology. After the analysis of data, the researcher did not reject the stated null hypothesis. Statistically, the significance level was not achieved; however, statistical differences suggested there may be moderate evidence of a difference between the positive psychology class and control classes. Future studies over more extended time and involving more student participation may allow researchers to explore how a positive psychology curriculum impacts class grades.

Q1: Was there a correlation between physical education classes receiving positive psychology and trimester grades, overall grade point average, discipline concerns, and attendance.

Q2: What were the attitudes/ perceptions of participants who are involved in the physical education classes that included the positive psychology curriculum.

Hypothesis 5-9

The data analysis regarding this research question involved hypotheses five through nine. For hypotheses six, seven, and nine, the researcher failed to reject the null and concluded that the positive psychology classes did not have a higher gain in perseverance, optimism, or happiness than the control group. For hypothesis five, the researcher rejected the null hypothesis and concluded that students in the positive psychology group had a significantly higher gain in engagement than the control group. When the analysis was completed on hypothesis eight, the researcher did not reject the null that there was no difference as the set significance level was not met. However, it was concluded that the positive psychology group did show moderate evidence of a difference in connectedness from the control group.

For future studies, this researcher recommended conducting positive psychology studies for more extended periods of time. This researcher suggested that the positive psychology curriculum be implemented for half of a school year or longer. Once again, pre-and post-EPOCH Surveys should be utilized to determine student wellness. Additionally, professional development for instructors should be implemented with bi-monthly checks on student progress and best practice implementation. This extended time period may give instructors more time to implement EPOCH measures. Beyond the

classroom, this researcher suggests, information should also be disseminated to parents and the community regarding any positive psychology curriculum and practice implemented.

Additionally, any future studies would benefit from applying the positive psychology curriculum to more classes and various subjects to determine if EPOCH can benefit different subject areas. If EPOCH is implemented as a whole school program, it will be essential to train the teachers to implement EPOCH positive psychology into their classrooms. Training teachers would ensure that all students will receive the same message in all of the classes they attend. Edutopia (2008) staff research shows that when a teacher is inspired and informed, they are an essential school factor influencing student achievement. It is essential to look at how we train and support educators (Staff, 2008).

H1: There was a difference in discipline referrals when students participated in physical education classes that incorporated positive psychology. (Column L)

This researcher concluded that students in the positive psychology group had no significant difference in discipline than the control group. Improving student discipline in one class was not a simple process. It first takes time to help improve student discipline. Having 30 days of class is a short period of time to work with those students to make effective changes.

Additionally, students were involved with many different classes and instructors throughout the day. Those other classes promoted different discipline methods compared to the positive psychology education curriculum implemented in that class. Students may perform excellently in one class for various reasons, and a different class environment may have a completely different student response. When data were collected, it

encompassed the student's entire school record. Data collected by the researcher demonstrated there was no difference in discipline between the positive education classes and the control group. Bergmark (2008) suggested that for the positive psychology program to be effective, it takes participation and commitment by all.

H2: There was a difference in grade point average when students participated in physical education classes that incorporated positive psychology. (Column G)

The researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that there was no significant difference; however, students in the positive psychology group did show moderate evidence of a difference in physical education grade point average than the control group. With any implementation of a new program, change takes time to happen. In this situation, the data collected showed moderate evidence that students were starting to improve their grade point average in the class. With continued time teaching positive education to students, the researcher believed that there would have been a significant difference in class grade point average between that test group and control groups.

H3: There was a difference in Overall GPA when students participated in physical education classes that incorporated positive psychology. (Column H)

The researcher did not reject the null hypothesis and concluded that students in the positive psychology group did not significantly improve overall grade point average more than the control group. Improving student GPA does not happen overnight; it takes time to implement a positive psychology program into a school properly. To better implement the positive psychology program and improve students' overall GPA, the researcher would recommend that future studies focus on schools that implemented positive psychology with all students being involved (Anggraini & Kusniarti, 2016).

Having the whole school involved in the program allows everyone to be on the same page and teach the students to all hear the same message (Graff, 2012).

H4: There was a difference between attendance and physical education classes that used positive psychology. (Column J)

The researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that there was no difference in attendance from the control group. The researcher's opinion was that this null hypothesis was not rejected because of the short time frame that this study was conducted. As Romanowski (2005) suggested, positive psychology programs are not quick fixes to student behaviors because other factors, such as family, social, and cultural factors can impact student behavior.

H5: There was a difference in engagement when students participated in physical education classes that incorporated positive psychology.

The researcher rejected the null hypothesis and concluded that students in the positive psychology group had a significantly higher gain in engagement than the control group. Future studies regarding positive psychology curriculum implementation should be considered, as engagement is an essential part of student success in schools. Literature showed that when students were engaged, they had higher life satisfaction, greater educational attainment, and lower arrest rates (Chan et al., 2014). This researcher believed that the students became more engaged as they heard about engagement means as related to EPOCH. As students were taught engagement, the first perception students had about engagement was what a couple did before being married. As that program continued, students learned the other definition of engagement related to work or activities. The researchers believed that teaching the students the different meanings of

engagement allowed them to understand what it is and apply it to their work or act in class.

H6: There was a difference in perseverance when students participated in physical education classes that incorporated positive psychology.

The researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that students in the positive psychology group did not have a significant difference in perseverance than the control group. Van Deuren (2011) stated that developing perseverance in students is one of the factors that will determine future success. Perseverance was a learned response that takes time, and thirty days in one trimester may not provide a long enough time to develop this attribute. Future studies should be conducted over a semester or an entire school year.

H7: There was a difference in optimism when students participated in physical education classes that incorporated positive psychology.

The researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that students in the positive psychology group did not have a significant difference in optimism than the control group. According to Phillips (2020), it was challenging to think positively in one's life that has been devoid of a relaxed and loving atmosphere. Phillips (2020) also stated that there was room for students to develop optimism. Having this room showed that optimism takes time to develop and teach to students. According to Colker and Koralek (2014), optimism should be gradually built into students by integrating activities that lend themselves to learning and optimistic thinking. The next key was engaging the families to support students' learning optimism at home (Colker & Koralek, 2014).

H8: There was a difference in connectedness when students participated in physical education classes that incorporated positive psychology.

The researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that students in the positive psychology group did show moderate evidence of a difference in connectedness than the control group. Making connections can be both easy and challenging. Some relationships were organic and happened naturally, such as connecting with a teacher who showed a similar interest. On the other hand, a student may have difficulty making a connection because a student is uncomfortable or sees a divide between a teacher and themselves. The result from this connection hypothesis demonstrates why teaching positive psychology takes time and should be incorporated into the entire school. Time will be vital because it will take time for teachers to build relationships with students and an environment where they feel successful (Woodard, 2019).

H9: There was a difference in happiness when students participated in a physical education class that incorporated positive psychology.

The researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that students in the positive psychology group did not significantly gain happiness than the control group. Happiness was the end result of positive psychology. We wanted students to be happier than when they first started out. Improving happiness was very difficult because of how students' attitudes change throughout the day. A student may come to class with a great attitude, having a great day that day, but can come back the next day having a difficult time. As Fike (2020) pointed out, real change does not happen overnight; it will take time and continued practice to make changes in oneself. Despite what one sees in the media

or hears about people making miraculous changes overnight, this is not the norm, and in many cases, that change may have taken a lot of time and effort (Fike, 2020). Improving happiness was a long process and needed to be continually taught and reviewed for students to see success.

Implications

Reviewing the questions for this research, the researcher wanted to know if there was a correlation between physical education classes receiving positive psychology and trimester grades, overall grade point average, discipline concerns, and attendance. Many of the results pointed to no correlation. However, positive psychology did show some correlation between physical education classes receiving positive psychology and class grades. The researcher believed that there was no correlation because a program, such as positive psychology, does not just happen quickly. As Fike (2020) pointed out, real change does not happen overnight. It will take time and continued practice to make changes. It is unrealistic to expect change overnight. With extended time to implement the positive psychology program, a more favorable result can occur. As George and Martinez (2007) pointed out, schools will need to commit time and energy to plan, train, and implement activities to see real change occur in schools.

The second question that was asked is what the attitudes/perceptions of participants are who were involved in the physical education classes that included the positive psychology curriculum. This question was answered by hypotheses five through nine and determined if there was no difference in engagement, perseverance, optimism, connectedness, and happiness when students participated in a physical education class that incorporated positive psychology. Hypotheses six, seven, eight, and nine did not rise

to the level of rejecting the null hypothesis. Hypotheses five, the engagement hypotheses, did show there were differences between the classes that received positive psychology and the control class. Hypothesis eight, the connected hypotheses, despite showing no difference between the classes that received positive psychology and the control classes, also indicated that the data did suggest a moderate difference between the two classes. The researcher believed that time was a factor that limited the improvement of students in the areas of perseverance, optimism, connectedness, and happiness. Anggraini and Kusniarti (2016) concluded in their study that some of the traits in positive psychology needed more time to develop to become accustomed to using that trait.

Practical and Future Implications

Future studies should focus on applying a positive psychology curriculum over extended periods of time, such as semesters or full school years. This researcher believed that a 30-day period might be too brief to achieve any real significance. Additionally, implementation in one classroom may not be appropriate and should be used across entire grade levels or subject areas.

Professional development for instructors in positive psychology was an important consideration in any future study to ensure consistency throughout all classes and activities. Additionally, the use of learning communities that share results or areas of need would prove essential. There needs to be up, down, and cross-communication with different stakeholders and information sharing, so adjustments can be discussed and implemented, if appropriate. Future studies should plan for communication with parents and the community as supporting and understanding is vital for student success. Research

conducted by Chen (2020) showed that students achieve more in school when there is parent involvement.

Additionally, studies included looking at and tracking student well-being. A study by Gräbel (2017) suggested there was a direct link between well-being and academic achievement. Well-being was a crucial prerequisite for achievement, and achievement was essential for well-being. When well-being and resilience were promoted, it can increase student satisfaction with life, support creative thinking, and promote better learning (Seligman et al., 2009). Well-being was also important for developing important democratic competencies. Positive emotions were associated with the development of flexibility and adaptability, openness to other cultures and beliefs, self-efficacy, and tolerance of ambiguity.

Strengths

First, surveys were an excellent way to gather lots of information from many people in a short period of time and incorporating a pre- and post-survey allowed the researcher to compare and contrast data gathered. According to Cherry (2020), surveys were the most common research methods because they allowed the researcher to collect data and describe naturally occurring phenomena in the real world. This study used the "EPOCH Measure of Adolescent Well-being" survey to collect relevant data regarding students' well-being and how their feelings improved academic outcomes, reduced classroom discipline, and improved attendance when receiving instruction in positive psychology (Kern et al., 2016). The use of this survey enabled the researcher to collect a large amount of information quickly. According to Sincero (2012), a good survey would investigate the characteristics, behaviors, or opinions of a group of people. Additional

advantages of using this survey included that it better described the general studies population's relative characteristics, and this survey was a convenient way to gather data. This twenty-question survey took less than ten minutes of class time and did not detract from curriculum implementation. This survey provided the researcher with useful statistical data. As Sincero (2012) and Cherry (2020) stated, surveys have high representativeness, can gather statistics, and effectively analyze multiple variables. Surveys were ideal for this study because they provided all the participants with a standardized stimulus, the statistics were reliable, and the researcher's own biases were eliminated (Sincero, 2012; Cherry, 2020). Surveys were also known for providing uniform definitions to all the subjects to answer the questionnaires. Thus, there was greater precision in terms of measuring the data gathered.

Of all the data collection methods in place, survey research was probably best to use when the researcher wished to gain a representative picture of the attitudes and characteristics of a large group. Finally, survey research tended to be a reliable method of inquiry. This is because surveys were standardized in that the same questions, phrased in exactly the same way, are posed to participants.

Quantitative strengths

The statistical analysis utilized allowed this researcher to derive important facts from research data, including differences between groups when looking at attendance, discipline, and academic performance. The results achieved after applying the *t*-test were useful for understanding if the results were correct, and this data could then be applied to the entire study population. Additionally, the results were then assumed that the independent samples of two populations are normally distributed and have the same

variances. This quantitative study used an automated means of collecting static data, including academic performance in the form of grades, attendance records, and discipline numbers. Because this data is presented in a numeric way, this researcher was able to apply statistical tests in making statements about the collected data. The use of inferential statistics such as the *t*-test, allowed the researcher the ability to derive important facts from this research which included preference trends and quantitative strengths.

Weaknesses

This survey research came with several concerns. Surveys are generally flexible as researchers may ask a variety of questions on a number of topics; however, this research uses a twenty-question survey developed specifically for understanding the EPOCH design. One of my concerns as a researcher was that this study was limited to one survey instrument for collecting data, which was the 20-question questionnaire. Some of the survey questions may have confused participants, and that created a problem for this researcher, who had to explain that question and discuss with all participants, or just direct the participant to complete the survey to the best of their knowledge.

The depth of understanding could be a problem with surveys. This and other survey questions were standardized; thus, it can be difficult to ask anything other than very general questions that a broad range of people will understand. Because of the general nature of survey questions, the results may not be as valid as other data gathering methods.

Quantitative Weakness

The *t*-test helped a researcher to determine the differences between the sample groups of test and control. However, it does not help the researcher in controlling the

effects of the subject's surrounding environment. The *t*-test utilized was not appropriate for multiple comparisons, as it can result in type I errors. This researcher found it difficult to reject the null hypothesis when conducting a *t*-test among a group of samples.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study concluded that positive psychology did not have an effect on improving student grades, overall grade point average, attendance, and discipline. Further research into positive psychology should be conducted comparing schools where positive education is not seen, and positive education is part of the curriculum. In addition, studies needed to examine the extent to which the age and maturity level of the students affects behavior, with and without a positive education program in place. Another recommendation included conducting case studies of those students whose behavior did not change when exposed to positive education. Future studies should also focus on the teacher's influence, the home situation, how the positive education program was implemented, and the student. Other recommendations for further research are to look into studying the implementation of positive psychology.

When implementing the positive psychology program, it will be essential to bring together parents, teachers, and administrators into the program. Bringing those stakeholders will help encourage students to manifest those good values in their lives (Agboola & Tsai, 2012).

Positive Psychology was not a quick fix to improving students' behaviors because many other factors impact a student's behaviors, such as family, social, and cultural issues. Romanowski (2005) believed that a student's character is shaped by a social environment around them, which is beyond the scope of the educational settings. This

study of positive psychology in physical education was conducted during the fall semester. One semester of 30 class meetings does not provide enough time to detect the effectiveness of positive psychology. Further research should be conducted to determine if positive psychology can make a significant difference in student behaviors.

This researcher believed that along with a prolonged study, the incorporation of the entire school was needed; teachers should have been included and trained to initiate and follow through with implementing the positive psychology program. Teachers should have developed an understanding of the positive psychology program being implemented and know the materials and resources that were available to them. It was important to offer professional development opportunities for teachers to develop effective ways to ensure they understand the positive psychology program and effectively implement it into their classes.

This researcher also recommended that more study on positive psychology is needed. Those future studies should include various populations and diverse intervention formats to know what works for whom. Examples of other classes in which positive psychology should be studied are art, music, or general education classes.

Conclusion

Chapter Five reviewed the data analysis concerning two major questions regarding the effects of implementing a positive psychology curriculum in middle school physical education classes. The first research question focused on determining the outcome of instructing middle school students in positive psychology in physical education classes and its impact on trimester grades, overall grade point average, discipline, and attendance in treatment classes compared to classes that did not receive

positive psychology instruction. Additionally, the study analyzed the data on a second research question regarding the well-being attitudes/perceptions of these middle school students who received positive psychology instruction in their physical education class compared to control classes. A *t*-test with two independent means was conducted on pre- and post-application of the positive psychology instructional program, which spanned a 30-day trimester. The *t*-test was applied to the nine null hypotheses to determine the effectiveness of the positive psychology curriculum on middle school wellness and improving school academic outcomes. Hypotheses one through four focused on answering the first research question, and Hypotheses five through nine were analyzed to answer the second research question of student well-being. Pre- and post-archival data were employed to determine significance between treatment and control classes regarding trimester grades, overall grade point average, discipline, and attendance. A 20-question well-being survey on the following five areas of engagement, perseverance, optimism, connectedness, and happiness was employed. This survey was tested for reliability and validity by Kern et al., (2016) and used with permission. Each student with proper approval was given a pre-and post-EPOCH survey. Data were analyzed to determine if the results were significant. Kern et al. (2016) created the survey used in this study from 10 independent studies that included youth across the United States and Australia. The student sample was split between boys and girls, and the youth were primarily middle school-aged. The youth surveyed came from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds and demographics. One of the studies from the United States included 1,515 youth (801 males, 704 females, ten unknown) from cities across the United States.

Kern et al.(2016) validated the EPOCH survey using four estimates of internal consistency using Cronbach's Alpha and Guttman's Indices, minimum and maximum split-half reliability (b and l4), estimated using the software psych package by Revelle (2015) in R. The validation is based on 10,000 random draws from the data collected. Cross-time correlations using Pearson's r were calculated to estimate test-retest of the survey reliability. Kern et al. (2016) examined correlations with measures of similar and dissimilar constructs. In each sample, correlations were computed between the five EPOCH components. The effect sizes were meta-analytically combined across samples using a fixed-effects analysis. The effect sizes were transformed to Fisher Zr , average Zr , weighted by the sample size and were calculated, and the resulting values were changed back to r for presentation purposes (Rosenthal, 1991).

The researcher did not reject all four null hypotheses related to the first research question as having no difference between treatment and control groups. Research question two regarding student well-being and answered by null hypotheses five through nine allowed rejection of the null hypotheses. The null for hypotheses six through nine could not be rejected, as no significance level was achieved between treatment and control groups.

This researcher believed the results of this study need to be explored in many ways in the future. Positive psychology may be relatively new; however, Myung and Kimner (2020) stated that continuous improvement is a disciplined and ongoing approach to improving processes and systems that produce positive outcomes for students. Administrators must be the leaders in this endeavor and demonstrate a willingness to accept failure as a potential liability (Education Development Center, 1998).

As stated in Chapter Two, middle school students have complicated relationships that they face and a variety of needs. Along with complex relationships, finding and supplying a supportive environment where middle school students feel respected and safe is essential. (Wigfield et al., 2006; Damon et al., 2006; Shallcross, 2015). This researcher believed additional positive psychology studies were needed and important for the middle school student.

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Appendix A

Figure 2: Survey Format

		1	2	3	4	5
C1	When something good happens to me, I have people who I like to share the good news with.	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Almost Always
P1	I finish whatever I begin.	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Almost Always
O1	I am optimistic about my future	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Almost Always
H1	I feel happy.	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Almost Always
E1	When I do an activity, I enjoy it so much that I lose track of time.	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Almost Always
H2	I have a lot of fun.	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Almost Always
E2	I get completely absorbed in what I am doing.	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Almost Always
H3	I love life.	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Almost Always
P2	I keep at my schoolwork until I am done with it.	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Almost Always
C2	When I have a problem, I have someone who will be there for me.	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Almost Always
E3	I get so involved in activities that I forget about everything else.	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Almost Always
E4	When I am learning something new, I lose track of how much time has passed.	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Almost Always
O2	In uncertain times, I expect the best.	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Almost Always
C3	There are people in my life who really care about me.	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Almost Always
O3	I think good things are going to happen to me.	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Almost Always
C4	I have friends that I really care about.	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Almost Always
P3	Once I make a plan to get something done, I stick to it.	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Almost Always
O4	I believe that things will work out, no matter how difficult they seem.	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Almost Always
P4	I am a hard worker.	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Almost Always
H4	I am a cheerful person.	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Almost Always

Appendix B*Figure 3: t-Test Value*

$$T = \frac{\underline{mean1} - \underline{mean2}}{\frac{s(\text{diff})}{\sqrt{(n)}}}$$

- * *mean1* and *mean2* = The average values of each of the sample sets
 - * *s(diff)* = The standard deviation of the differences of the paired data values
 - * *n* = the sample size (the number of paired differences)
 - * *n-1* = **The degrees of freedom**
- (Kenton, 2020)