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AN EXAMINATION OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF AN EIGHT-MONTH HEALTH AND FITNESS BASED PRESCHOOL CURRICULUM

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Hannah J. Brewer

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

December 2011

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Title: AN EXAMINATION OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF AN EIGHT-MONTH

HEALTH AND FITNESS BASED PRESCHOOL CURRICULUM

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The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of an eight-month

health and fitness-based intervention program. Preschool children's preference for

healthy foods, reported enjoyment in physical activity, and Body Mass Indexes (BMI)

were examined to determine whether a highly structured health and activity curriculum

would impact children's overall health. Social cognitive theory served as the framework

for developing the program parameters as social learning plays a significant role in

children's acquisition of knowledge and behaviors (Bandura, 1986).

Mixed methodology was implemented to allow the researcher to examine multiple

facets of the health and fitness-based intervention program. Both quantitative and

qualitative data were collected. A non-randomized experimental and control group were

utilized as part of the quantitative data collection process, and eight preschool employees

working at the experimental site were among the qualitative study participants. Two sets

of individual interviews and two focus groups were conducted throughout the course of

the eight-month program. Data were analyzed post-intervention.

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Results of this study suggested that both good nutrition and vigorous physical activity must be comprehensive and consistent elements of intervention curricula. Children's reported level of enjoyment for physical activity improved over the course of the intervention program, and children attending the experimental preschool were more likely to improve their BMI than children attending the control preschool. Children's BMIs, preference for physical activity, and taste for nutritious foods can be improved through early education and intervention. Qualitative findings revealed that preschool employees were committed to improving children's health. However, finding time to integrate structured physical activity and health education in addition to adequately teaching academic concepts was staff members' greatest concern.