

## IMPACT OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION

# School Principals' Perceptions of and Expectations for Physical Education

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## Abstract

*The purposes of this study were to (a) examine 19 school principals' perceptions of and expectations for physical education (PE) and (b) describe the factors influencing school principals' perceptions of and expectations for PE. We collected data using an electronic survey that included questions on (a) the goals of PE, (b) pedagogies and curricula, (c) evaluation practices, (d) expectations for learning, (e) value of PE and extracurricular sport, and (f) factors within principals' pre-training biographies and training that shaped their beliefs and values about PE. We analyzed data using constant comparison and analytic induction. Principals had a limited understanding of the goals of PE, its curricula, and its pedagogies because their beliefs about the subject were largely shaped by their own experiences of PE and sport when they were children and youth rather than any formal training that they had received.*

Previous research on school principals' thoughts, perceptions, and views about physical education (PE) is limited. Much of the interpretive work conducted with young in-service PE teachers, however, suggests that the majority of principals have a poor understanding of the subject's goals, pedagogies, and curricula; do not regard it as being on the same level as other "academic" subjects; and see little educational value in it other than to keep students under control and entertained while teachers of other subjects take

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a break (Curtner-Smith, 1997, 1999, 2001; Curtner-Smith, Hastie, & Kinchin, 2008; Lee & Curtner-Smith, 2011; O’Sullivan, 1989; Smyth, 1995). In addition, there is some indication that principals are more concerned about PE teachers’ ability to coach extracurricular sport than their capacity to teach PE (Dillon, McCaughtry, & Hummel, 2010). Furthermore, principals with these faulty perceptions regarding PE are more likely to offer exemptions to the subject, even if they are trained physical educators themselves (Sims, 2003).

Conversely, some research indicates that more enlightened and knowledgeable principals positively affect PE teachers’ beliefs and curricula, providing that the teachers are innovatively oriented (Bechtel & O’Sullivan, 2007). Moreover, there appears to be a positive relationship between the extent to which principals support PE programs and the degree to which PE teachers follow state-mandated curricula and requirements (Sims, 2003).

Given principals’ obvious influence on the teaching of all school subjects and their duty to hold teachers accountable for delivering a high class curriculum, a potentially fruitful area for policy-oriented researchers hoping to improve the standard of PE is further investigation of how principals interpret, “read,” or perceive the subject (Curtner-Smith, 2009). The purposes of this study, therefore, were to (a) examine school principals’ perceptions of and expectations for PE and (b) describe the factors influencing school principals’ perceptions of and expectations for PE.

## **Theoretical Framework**

In prior sport pedagogical research, occupational socialization theory (Curtner-Smith, 2009; Richards, Templin, & Graber, 2014; Templin & Richards, 2014) has generally been used to explain the beliefs and actions of teachers (e.g., Curtner-Smith et al., 2008; Vollmer & Curtner-Smith, 2016). Within this study, however, we employed it in an attempt to explain school principals’ readings of and expectations for PE. Specifically, in line with the thinking of Gore (1990), we explored how principals’ beliefs about PE and the degree to which they value the subject were shaped by their *acculturation* (i.e., social and cultural influences prior to teacher education) and *professional socialization* (i.e., the influence of their formal teacher education and administrative training).

Past research suggests that the views of key socializing agents including parents, siblings, and peers are responsible for shaping future principals' values during the acculturation period. This research also suggests that future principals' own schooling, particularly their experiences of PE and school sport, is a major influence on their beliefs about the subject. For example, experiences during this "apprenticeship of observation" (Lortie, 1975) could lead to principals forming the view that PE is either a high or low priority subject and deciding what constitutes good or bad pedagogical practice within the subject.

Past research also suggests that future principals' professional socialization will have less effect on their values and beliefs about PE than acculturation will. Conversely, the degree to which future principals undergo specialist training in PE teaching during their initial undergraduate preparation, in any graduate work in a teaching field, and in administrative certification courses should increase the potential for alteration of beliefs about the subject that were formed during acculturation. High quality PE teacher education (PETE) is more likely to lead to the subject being valued by future principals and their improved understanding of its curricula and pedagogies. Low quality PETE is more likely to have the opposite effect.

Future principals who are initially trained as PE teachers and those who are trained to be elementary teachers and take a PE methods course (Xiang, Lowy, & McBride, 2002) are more likely to change their beliefs and values about the subject than are those who are trained to be secondary teachers in other subject matters. However, in their portrayals of PE, faculty who are responsible for preparation in these other subject matters may exert an overt or unconscious influence on their charges, which may serve to devalue or promote the subject (Curtner-Smith, 2007).

## **Method**

### **Participants and Setting**

Participants were 19 principals working in two school systems within one state in the southeastern United States. We purposefully selected these school systems because they included schools that catered to a wide range of students in terms of socioeconomic status and race. Each principal gave informed consent in congruence with

the requirements of the university's policy for conducting research with human subjects. Each principal was also assigned a pseudonym.

Table 1 shows key demographic and biographical data for these principals. Ten of the principals were between 35 and 44 years of age, five were between 45 and 54 years of age, three were between 55 and 64 years of age, and one was under 34 years of age. Twelve of the principals were female and seven were male. Seventeen were Caucasian and two were African American. Eight worked at elementary schools and 11 worked at secondary schools. Finally, only two of the principals were trained and certified to teach PE.

**Table 1**

*Key Demographic and Biographical Details for the Principals*

<b>Principal</b>	<b>Age range</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Grade level taught</b>	<b>PETE (yes/no)</b>
Rachel	35–44	Female	Caucasian	Secondary	No
Nathan	35–44	Male	Caucasian	Elementary	No
Michelle	55–64	Female	Caucasian	Elementary	No
Becky	55–64	Female	Caucasian	Elementary	No
Alan	45–54	Male	Caucasian	Secondary	No
Sarah	35–44	Female	Caucasian	Secondary	No
Darby	45–54	Female	Caucasian	Elementary	No
Randal	45–54	Male	Caucasian	Secondary	No
Norma	45–54	Female	Caucasian	Secondary	No
Tracy	35–44	Female	Caucasian	Elementary	No
Bobby	35–44	Male	African American	Secondary	Yes
Beth	55–64	Female	Caucasian	Elementary	No
Brandon	35–44	Male	African American	Secondary	No
Taylor	25–34	Female	Caucasian	Elementary	No
Hannah	35–44	Female	Caucasian	Secondary	Yes
Ryan	35–44	Male	Caucasian	Secondary	No
Craig	45–54	Male	Caucasian	Secondary	No
Grace	35–44	Female	Caucasian	Elementary	No
Kim	35–44	Female	Caucasian	Secondary	No

Additional demographic and background data gathered during the study indicated that 18 of the principals had received the majority of their formal education in the Deep South and one had

trained in the Midwest. Two of the principals had earned doctorates. The highest level of education achieved by the remaining 17 principals was the educational specialist degree ( $n = 12$ ) and the master's degree ( $n = 5$ ). Of the 17 principals not trained to teach PE, four had been certified as elementary teachers, two had been certified as early childhood specialists, and 11 had been trained to teach a variety of secondary subjects. All six of the principals certified to teach at the elementary or early childhood level had also taken one university course designed to give them some knowledge of PE pedagogy.

### **Data Collection**

All 19 principals completed a 21-item survey online using Survey Monkey (2012; see Table 2). Section A of the instrument was designed to generate demographic and biographical data. Section B included open-ended questions aimed at gaining data about principals' beliefs and values regarding PE. Specifically, principals answered questions about the goals of the subject; its pedagogies and curricula; its evaluation practices; what, if anything, they expected children and youth to learn from the subject; and the degree to which they valued curricular PE and extracurricular sport in their schools. Sections C, D, and E of the survey included a series of open-ended questions drawn from the literature on occupational socialization and was designed to discover the factors within principals' professional socialization (Section C) and acculturation (Sections D and E) that shaped their beliefs and values about PE.

**Table 2**  
*Principals' PE Survey*

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<b>Section and questions</b>
A. Background information
1. What is your age?
2. What is your gender?
3. What is your nationality?
4. What is your ethnic origin?
5. In which state did you receive the majority of your formal schooling?
6. Please list your formal postsecondary school educational qualifications starting with your bachelor's degree.

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**Table 2 (cont.)**

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**Section and questions**

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- B. Your current views and beliefs about PE
7. In the space below briefly describe what you believe the goals of your school's PE program to be.
  8. In the space below briefly describe the key teaching skills a PE teacher should possess.
  9. In the space below briefly describe the key elements of an excellent school PE curriculum.
  10. In the space below briefly describe how children and youth should be evaluated in PE.
  11. In the space below briefly explain how important you believe PE is compared to extracurricular school sport.
  12. In the space below briefly explain how important you believe PE is compared to other school subjects that students at your school are required to study.
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- C. Your views on and experiences of PE during your initial teacher preparation
13. In the space below list the subject matter(s) that you were initially trained to teach?
  14. In the space below briefly describe the extent to which those who trained you to teach valued PE.
  15. During your teacher preparation program, did you receive any training in teaching PE? If yes, please describe the training briefly in the space below.
  16. During your formal training to become a principal, did you receive any training in the supervision and support of PE programming? If yes, please describe the training briefly in the space below.
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- D. Your own experiences of PE and sport when you were a child/youth and as an adult
17. In the space below briefly describe your own experiences of school PE when you were a child and youth, emphasizing aspects that were positive (if any) or negative (if any).

**Table 2 (cont.)**

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**Section and questions**

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18. In the space below briefly describe the extent to which you participated in extracurricular sport at school and formal sport outside of school when you were a child and youth, emphasizing aspects that were positive (if any) or negative (if any).
  19. In the space below briefly describe the extent to which you participated in informal physical activity and sport outside school when you were a child and youth.
  20. In the space below briefly describe the extent to which you have participated in sport and physical activity as an adult.
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E. Participation levels and views of others

21. In the space below briefly describe the extent to which your parents, siblings, and peers participated in physical activity when you were a child and youth.
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*Note.* PE = physical education.

## **Data Analysis**

Data that indicated how principals perceived PE and what expectations they had for the subject were identified, coded, categorized, and reduced to meaningful themes through analytic induction and constant comparison (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). These techniques were also employed to reduce data identified as explaining how and why principals had been socialized into thinking about PE in the ways that they did. Credibility and trustworthiness of the analysis was established through the search for negative and discrepant cases (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). In addition, during the analysis process the second author served as a “critical friend” (Costa & Kallick, 1993) for the first author, who carried out the main analysis. Specifically, the second author examined and critiqued the analysis at regular intervals, discussed it with the first author, and debriefed her during the writing and editing of the manuscript.

## Findings and Discussion

### Principals' Perceptions of and Expectations for PE

**Goals of PE.** The key focus of the principals in this sample was one of the goals of PE: health-related fitness. Specifically, they emphasized that “lifelong fitness,” “healthy lifestyles,” “wellness,” and “general health” should be “promoted” within the subject. Students, they thought, should acquire the knowledge necessary to “create a sense” of health and wellness that they could “carry into adulthood” and should become “physically fit” and healthy by participating in at least a “moderate level” of physical activity during lessons. They also suggested that PE had a cathartic role in the lives of students, in that students needed to “release stress, and exercise, and physical activity is a wonderful place to do so.” The following data extracts are typical of the principals’ comments on this topic:

The goal for our program is to teach kids the importance of good health and physical activity to take with them into their real-world experience. . . . All students can eat healthy and do some physical activity to stay healthy. (Ryan)

I believe physical education programs assist in helping all students see the importance of health and wellness. This issue is a real issue that is affecting the national economy and the health industry. I feel students should be provided positive guidelines that promote healthy living, nutrition, and lifelong goals for fitness. (Kim)

A secondary and related goal for many of the principals was leisure education. Their initial aim was to “expose” students to “a wide variety of individual and group activities” to “allow them to discover their strengths” and “spark [their] interest” in and “enjoyment” of participating in “new and diverse activities” that they would “learn to love.” Their ultimate objective was to instill in students the “passion to be active” “for life.”

In addition, five principals also indicated that they thought personal and social development was a legitimate goal of the subject, describing it in terms of nurturing “sportsmanship,” “teamwork,” “interactive behavior,” “making good choices,” “respect for other stu-

dents,” and “cooperation” through physical activity. References to the development of skillful movement or learning movement concepts were rare and, when they were mentioned, were restricted to “motor skill development,” the “development of basic skills/techniques required for participation,” and “skill mastery.” They did not, however, reference students gaining knowledge and understanding of tactics and strategies of games and sports. Finally, although they did not directly reference the goal of cognitive development within and through PE, they suggested that PE teachers should be able to aid those teaching other subject matters by being proficient at “integrating other content areas” into PE instruction.

**How to achieve the goals of PE.** Despite their primary focus on health-related fitness, most principals favored the use of a traditional multiactivity curriculum in which students were “exposed” to a variety of sports, games, and traditional activities. In short, the curriculum they described was more suited to realize their secondary goal of leisure education. To this end, some principals noted that teachers needed to help their students develop a deeper understanding of the activities they were learning, to increase the likelihood that they would continue to participate. For example, they suggested that students be provided the opportunity to “master all objectives” within a variety of sports and activities while “having fun and learning to apply the skills to their individual lives.” They suggested that this course of action would increase the likelihood of “lifelong participation.”

The sports and activities they mentioned included soccer, basketball, volleyball, rhythm and dance, and badminton. Other than referring to “team and individual sports,” they did not categorize these sports or activities as, for example, those that might appeal to different groups of students because of their characteristics (e.g., competitive sports, aesthetic sports and activities, target games, net/wall games, striking/fielding games, invasion games, outdoor and adventurous activities, water-based activities). The following data extracts illustrate principals’ thoughts regarding the PE curriculum:

[An excellent physical education program involves] a curriculum that embodies active exercise and knowledge surrounding diverse learning in regard to various sports and activities. The goals of a school’s physical education program

should promote a healthy lifestyle and consistent exercise.  
(Brandon)

A comprehensive physical education program should provide all students with the skills and information needed to maintain an acceptable level of fitness for an entire lifetime. Sports programs are usually more narrowly focused toward the specific skill set needed or the sport or team activity.  
(Hannah)

In addition, they made few attempts at directly linking the exposure of students to these sports and activities to the goal of promoting health-related fitness. Eight principals, however, suggested that “healthy lifestyle choices” could be taught by requiring students to participate in a “variety of skills and activities” that would “keep [students] active and interested in physical fitness.” Others emphasized the need for teachers to keep their students “involved,” “moving,” and “engaged” with “hands-on activities” during the majority of lesson time, indicating that their main emphasis was on being healthy and fit rather than knowing about health, wellness, and fitness. Pointedly, other than several suggestions that students learn about “stretching,” “exercise concepts,” and “healthy eating habits” and that teachers “provide positive guidelines that promote healthy living, nutrition, and lifelong goals for fitness,” they did not describe and define the body of knowledge that should be taught as “health.” Furthermore, they did not mention incorporating a classroom component within PE to teach this kind of knowledge.

**Characteristics of effective PE teachers.** Principals focused on four elements when describing effective PE teachers. These were teachers’ character and behavioral traits, physical appearance and sporting skills, managerial skills, and instructional skills. Following Shulman (1986), we note an absence of references to teachers’ curricular and pedagogical content knowledge and knowledge of students, and different purposes and philosophies about PE.

**Character and behavioral traits.** The majority of comments concerning PE teachers’ effectiveness focused on character and behavioral traits as opposed to pedagogical skills or teaching behaviors. Principals suggested that effective teachers should be “motivating,” “enthusiastic,” “passionate,” “empathetic,” “patient,” and “caring.”

Moreover, effective teachers should be “effective communicators,” “respect . . . the learner,” and be able to form “a positive rapport with students.”

**Physical appearance and sporting skills.** Two principals emphasized the need for a PE teacher to be fit and healthy and the importance of the teacher modeling a “physically active lifestyle.” In addition, they suggested that PE teachers needed to be “able . . . to demonstrate appropriate skills and techniques.” The following extract was typical of the comments about appearance, modeling, and sporting ability: “A PE teacher should . . . be willing to model and demonstrate skills, and be a model of fitness him/herself” (Darby).

**Managerial skills.** Principals also focused on the ability of the PE teacher to be an “effective behavior manager.” Specifically, principals believed PE teachers should be able to “control,” “monitor,” “supervise,” and “manage” “large groups of students” in a fast-paced and fluid environment. Managerial comments indicated that the principals valued PE teachers whose managerial behaviors enabled them to “create a positive learning environment.”

**Instructional skills.** The principals made few comments about effective teaching behaviors, pedagogies, and skills. Nevertheless, a number of principals noted that to realize the goals of the subject, PE teachers needed to “understand teaching tactics” and “demonstrate the elements of effective instruction.” These elements included “providing feedback,” being a “reflective practitioner,” possessing adequate content knowledge, “incorporating technology,” and providing “learning goals that build on each other from unit to unit and year to year.” The collective inference of these elements was that most principals favored the use of direct pedagogies. Two principals, however, indicated that they also believed that effective physical educators needed to be able to employ more student-centered, indirect, “inquiry-based” teaching styles and be able to “differentiate their instruction.”

The principals’ beliefs about what PE teachers should focus on when evaluating students varied. Relatively few suggested that PE teachers’ focus should be on “what students should know and be able to do” in PE, including “the evaluation of physical performance” and “knowledge given to [students] by the instructor.” Instead, the majority suggested that in PE the teacher should focus on evaluating the students’ levels of “participation,” “effort,” and “cooperation.”

The implication being that it was unfair to evaluate students in PE based on what they had learned: “[Students] should be evaluated by their effort to learn and try the skills that they are being taught. Not all students will be at the same level, but all students can try” (Ryan). In addition, the principals offered few suggestions regarding how effective PE teachers should evaluate their students, offering only “observation,” the use of “rubrics,” and “anecdotal notes” as specific examples.

**Importance of PE.** Despite evidence to the contrary, such as views about the focus of evaluation in the subject, 16 principals stated that PE was as important as other “academic subjects.” Specifically, they noted that the subject was vital to the development of the “whole child” and “the overall success of the school program,” because “a healthy body and healthy mind go hand in hand”: “I believe physical education is just as important as any other class. I believe learning how to live a healthy lifestyle is an essential life skill” (Sarah). Further, one principal noted that despite her views about the importance of PE, she was forced to give priority to other subjects based on what those above her held her accountable for: “[PE] is important. It’s hard to say how [important] when schools are judged on academics only” (Darby).

Conversely, one principal categorically stated that PE was less important than other subjects in the curriculum: “While academics should always come first, physical education is important and quality in physical education should be a part of the daily schedule” (Alan). Two principals also implied that PE was less important than other subjects by labeling it as a “non-academic subject,” contrasting it with “academic subjects,” and by stating its “importance” was only inferred because it was “a requirement for graduation.”

**Relative importance of PE and extracurricular sport.** Although some principals recognized that extracurricular sport could be relatively narrow in scope because it “focuses on one set of skills,” a theme running through many of the surveys was that extracurricular sport was more important than PE. For example, a number of principals appeared to contrast the needs of students they labeled as “athletes” (i.e., students who played on extracurricular school teams) and the rest of the student body. The implication within this contrast was that

by participating in competitive sport, athletes somehow gained the knowledge, skills, and dispositions they could be taught in a good PE class and that PE was for “unathletic students” who, quite rightly, did not participate in extracurricular sport. The principals extended this thinking, noting that PE was merely a “foundation” or feeder system for school sport because “it lays the groundwork for athletic teams,” and that extracurricular sport was concerned with “excellence” in terms of “performance,” whereas PE was not.

If teamwork and sportsmanship are being instilled [in physical education], then it would greatly benefit extracurricular sports. Learning how to work cooperatively and how to manage one’s self (both behaviorally and physically) will benefit students in all sports. (Grace)

I believe physical education is a place for that student who may not be athletic enough to participate in an extracurricular sport, be given the opportunity to play a sport that he enjoys without the pressures of being good. The student is simply playing for the love of the game. I also feel athletics is important because it teaches life lessons and builds character and respect. (Bobby)

**Differences between principals’ perceptions of and expectations for PE.** Although they were not mutually exclusive, some trends in the data suggested that some principals had different perspectives about and conceptions of PE than others. Specifically, younger females were more likely to express a concern for healthy lifestyles and lifelong fitness, particularly the amount and intensity of physical activity that occurred in lessons. Older males were more likely to focus on the goal of leisure education. In addition, younger principals were more likely to suggest that PE was for students who did not have the ability to participate in extracurricular sport and that extracurricular sport was only for “athletes.” Moreover, elementary principals were more likely to focus on personal and social development and secondary principals were more concerned with health-related fitness and leisure education.

## Factors Influencing Principals' Perceptions of and Expectations for PE

**Acculturation.** Principals' acculturation appeared to exert a powerful influence on their conceptions of PE. Key factors influencing their thinking about the subject were their parents, experiences of their own PE when they were children and youth, participation in school sport and informal activity when they were children and youth, and participation in sports and physical activity as adults.

**Parents.** Most principals relayed that their family, in general, and parents, in particular, instilled in them a love for physical activity and stressed the importance of being and staying active. One principal said, "Physical activity has always been important to my family. We always enjoyed playing outdoors and making things with our hands. We also thoroughly enjoyed water skiing, fishing, and swimming" (Alan). Another principal noted, "[My] entire family participated in some type of activity. [It was] expected and supported" (Craig). Even parents who "worked very hard" and had no extra time for "outside activity" still "encouraged" them to "be active" and participate in "physical activity on a daily basis" and "forced [them] to go outside and play regularly." For this reason, principals saw the potential for sport and physical activity to have a positive effect on their students.

**Principals' experiences of PE when they were children and youth.** Thirteen of the principals also reported having a "good," "positive," "engaging," enjoyable, and "fun" PE experience when they were children and youth. They remembered their PE teachers fondly, for example, recalling that "they set the mood for the school." These principals tended to have a relatively high value for PE. Moreover, the curriculum for which they advocated in their own schools, the goals for that curriculum, and the characteristics they valued in their PE teachers were virtually identical to those they had encountered when they were children and youth:

I enjoyed learning the skills and playing the games. We also exercised every day. [I believe] the primary goal [of physical education] would be to develop active and healthful lifestyles to enhance the quality of life for each individual. [It should also] provide activities they enjoy, thus leading to learning the skills, and develop the knowledge and attitudes that will lead to enjoyment of physical activity for a lifetime. (Becky)

Conversely, six principals recalled having a negative experience during their own PE. Among their criticisms, they noted that “there should have been more direct instruction from the physical education teachers,” that they could “not recall any instruction on how to play a game,” and that they were told “here are the balls, go outside and play.” Moreover, they also remembered “being anxious about picking teams,” the failure of their teachers to provide “consistent” instruction, and not learning “lifelong fitness habits.” One principal recalled not having PE at all “in middle or high school due to being in the band/majorette.” As a result of her experiences, she was determined that what was delivered in her school in the name of PE would be superior in quality to what she encountered when she was a child: “PE should teach cooperation and teamwork; basic skills/techniques required for participation in lifelong activities. It should also promote healthy lifestyles. PE should also be required for people in the band” (Grace). Three principals, however, accepted that what they had suffered through was “normal” and so indicated that their value of PE and their expectations for the subject in their own schools were low:

I hated PE. I was not a great athlete and we didn't do much in class. We got to walk around the track or choose the game we played. As long as we did some type of exercise, we got a good grade. I expect my own students to get their daily exercise and be well-supervised by the teachers. (Michelle)

***Principals' experiences of school sport, organized youth sport, and informal activity.*** Most of the principals had participated in a good deal of informal physical activity when they were children. For example, they recalled “always being out in the yard playing ball” with siblings or “other kids in the neighborhood.” Moreover, they realized and recognized that they were more physically active when they were children than the current generation. For example, they noted that their students were “not as actively engaged” as past generations and instead favored being “on the computer,” “watching TV,” or “playing video games.” This appeared to be a key reason that they focused on health-related fitness, especially “being physically active,” and leisure education within their school PE programs:

Due to parents working all day and students staying at home by themselves, kids don't always go outside and play. They sit at the computer or watch TV. PE may be the only chance they have to get their daily exercise and learn to appreciate fitness. (Norma)

Most of the men and many of the younger women also recalled participating in extracurricular school sport and organized youth sport and physical activity with considerable "enjoyment" and "loving every minute of it." Men recalled participating in football, basketball, baseball, wrestling, and track. Women remembered participating in softball, volleyball, dance, cheerleading, karate, track, and tennis. The following extract was typical of their recollections: "I played rec league softball. I also earned a black belt in karate. I loved both activities" (Rachel). Moreover, these principals were enthusiastic about what they had gained from participating in sport. For example, they noted that "school sports teams were a vital part of . . . development as a student" and referred to lessons they had learned "for life and personal social skills" including "communication," "teamwork," "dedication," and "perseverance." These beliefs about organized sport clearly helped shape their views about the makeup of the PE curriculum and the relative value of PE and school sport.

Opportunities for one older female to participate in school and youth sport had been restricted because "youth sports were limited, especially for girls." This experience resulted in the principal giving PE more importance in her curriculum because she realized what she had missed.

***Principals' participation in sport and physical activity as adults.*** All but two principals continued to participate in physical activity as adults. Some continued to play sports such as softball, basketball, and tennis. Others had moved to "fitness activities" including walking, running, weight lifting, swimming, and aerobics. Moreover, they were quick to explain their commitment to and enthusiasm for being physically active, noting that it was "great for relieving stress" and added "enjoyment" to their busy day. Again, it appeared as if their own commitment to health, fitness, sport, and physical activity played some role in shaping their views about the PE curriculum.

**Professional socialization.** In contrast to the powerful effect of their acculturation on their beliefs about PE, the influence of their

professional socialization in the form of PETE, other educational coursework, and specific training to supervise PE teachers was negligible and weak.

**PETE.** The two principals who had been trained as PE teachers had different experiences in their PETE programs. Bobby recalled that PE “was always considered a ‘dumping ground’ for students who could not find a class to take. . . . It was always just supervise them and don’t let them get out of control. Do whatever you want down there.” Conversely, Hannah recalled her PETE having “great value in the teacher [she had] become.” In addition, she noted that she had learned “how to evaluate students,” how to “come up with activities to keep students focused and engaged in learning,” and how to “break down” skills and teach them.

The six principals who had been certified to teach elementary and early childhood confessed to not “remembering much” about the “few classes” that made up the PE component of their training. They did, however, recall being required to “write PE lesson plans,” “trying to teach” from these plans, and “briefly” learning how to “monitor a large group of students.” Not surprisingly, the data analysis failed to detect any more sophistication and depth in these principals’ beliefs about, values for, and conceptions of PE than in the beliefs of those principals who had not received any specific training in PE.

**Other educational coursework.** Ten principals reported having “no idea” about or being “unsure” of their initial teacher education instructors’ views and beliefs about PE. This suggested that these principals’ own perspectives on the subject were neither positively nor adversely influenced by this source. Six principals, however, recalled hearing positive portrayals of PE from their education professors:

Those who trained me had a lot of respect for physical education and valued that area. I believe we are all in the same “boat” when it comes to getting support for the two areas of band and physical education. We have to fight to show others the value of our programs. . . . When you look at those life learning skills that are taught in these activities such as teamwork, collaboration, discipline, organization, etc. you see the value in both. (Ryan)

In addition, three principals noted that their education professors “[living] healthy lifestyles themselves” suggested that they saw “physical education . . . as an important discipline.” Collectively, the messages sent through these portrayals and examples would likely have shaped the principals’ own views positively.

***Training to supervise PE.*** Only three principals indicated that they had received formal training about how to supervise PE teachers in their schools during their preparation to become principals or within in-service programs once they had become principals. Those who had received training indicated that it was fleeting and consisted of “lectures” and some “short observations” of “effective programs.” The main focus of this training had been on how “physical educators should supervise their classes” and “how to keep students active.” The training focused little on curriculum or pedagogy.

The principals who had not received training noted that they coped with PE by relying on their past beliefs and values and extrapolating from other coursework within their programs: “I had no training in supervising PE [but I was] told [that] per 50 children [there should be] one adult and monitoring was a priority” (Tracy).

There was not any specific formal training, but as I went through curriculum and supervision classes, I would always think how to use the supervision and evaluation techniques being taught and how they related to the non-academic subjects. Many times you can use the examples for a PE or band teacher as examples of excellent classroom management skills. (Ryan)

## **Conclusion**

The main conclusion to be drawn from this study is that the principals who participated had a limited and superficial understanding of the goals of PE, its curricula, and its pedagogies. The key influence on their conceptions of the subject was their acculturation, most important their own experiences of PE and sport when they were children and youth. Conversely, their professional socialization had little or no effect on their beliefs about the subject because it was nonexistent, was weak, or served to support views they had acquired through acculturation.

Not surprisingly, therefore, the principals misconceived some aspects of PE and had faulty, conflicting, and contradicting ideas about other components of the subject. This faulty thinking and these misconceptions and contradictions were similar to those espoused by preservice teachers beginning their PETE (e.g., Sofo & Curtner-Smith, 2010) and by principals (e.g., Curtner-Smith et al., 2008) in previous research. For example, although the main goal the principals emphasized was health-related fitness, the curriculum they advocated was the short exposure multiactivity model rather than a true health-related fitness model. This version of the multiactivity model has been highly criticized in the sport pedagogy literature for achieving little in terms of learning in general, failing low-skilled boys and girls of all abilities in particular, being gender segregated, and allowing high-skilled boys to negotiate a curriculum with teachers that suits them to the detriment of their peers (Ennis, 1999).

In addition, the principals appeared to know little about the different curriculum models available to PE teachers to realize different goals at different levels of schooling or about the variety of pedagogies that they could employ in the PE setting. For these reasons, they implied that PE and extracurricular sport were synonymous but for different groups of students, they focused on PE teachers' character and behavior traits rather than their pedagogical skill, and they advocated that students be evaluated based on effort as opposed to learning or performance. If these findings transfer to other groups and locations, a major implication of the study is that the training for those intending to become principals needs to include a stronger PE component. Such training should focus on conveying the full range of potential goals for the subject and informing about curriculum models, specific pedagogies, and evaluation techniques. In addition, every effort should be made to change faulty beliefs.

Future research examining the degree to which the results of this study transfer would be useful. Although it was beyond the scope of this study, future work might also investigate the degree to which another form of socialization, organizational socialization (i.e., the influence of the school culture while teaching and administrating; Richards et al., 2014), interacts with acculturation and professional socialization. Researchers could, for example, attempt to discover if

specific school cultures “wash out” (Zeichner & Tabachnik, 1981) and counter or serve to support values and beliefs espoused in formal training. In addition, they might examine the influence of superintendents, teachers, parents, and children on principals’ beliefs about PE.

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