

READINGS OF AND EXPECTATIONS FOR PHYSICAL EDUCATION OF  
PUPILS, PARENTS, AND PRINCIPALS

by

MEREDITH L. GEORGE

MATTHEW CURTNER-SMITH, COMMITTEE CHAIR  
JUDY GIESEN  
CECIL ROBINSON  
OLEG A. SINELNIKOV  
MARGARET STRAN

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## ABSTRACT

The influence of middle school pupils' acculturation on their readings of and expectations for physical education was studied. Utilizing socialization theory, findings indicated that the majority of pupils read the subject positively and in terms of four outcomes: learning and experiencing sports, health and fitness, socializing, and enjoyment and excitement. A minority of pupils, however, was more negative about physical education, viewing the subject as being of little worth. Key socializing agents that appeared to shape the beliefs and views of the pupils were their physical education teachers, peers, parents, coaches, and prevailing culture.

The socialization theory was used to examine how acculturation influences parents' readings of and expectations for the subject. Parents were found to be concerned with participating in sports, physical activities, health-related fitness, and personal and social development. These perceptions were shaped by parents' own experiences of physical education; participation in organized and informal sport and physical activity as children and youth; their own relatives and peers; participation in physical activity as adults; and the media. Collectively, while these factors led to many of the parents viewing physical education positively and being supportive of it, they also served to limit the ways in which they envisaged the subject might influence their children for the better.

Occupational socialization theory was used to explore what factors influenced principals' readings of and expectations of physical education. Findings indicated that principals had a limited and superficial understanding of the goals of physical education, its curricula, and pedagogies. This was because their beliefs about the subject were largely shaped by their own

experiences of physical education and sport as children and youth rather than any formal training received. These findings suggested that training for those intending to become principals needs to include a much stronger physical education component.

In summary, key findings across the three studies were that pupils, parents, and principals were all supportive of curriculum focused on sports and games and promoting health and fitness. All groups were strongly influenced by their acculturation. Worryingly, the parents and principals conceptions of physical education were less sophisticated than those of the pupils.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	iv
I. INFLUENCE OF MIDDLE SCHOOL PUPILS' ACCULTURATION ON THEIR READINGS OF AND EXPECTATIONS FOR PHYSICAL EDUCATION .....	1
REFERENCES .....	18
APPENDIX A: IRB Approval .....	21
APPENDIX B: Formal Interview Guide .....	29
II. INFLUENCE OF ACCULTURATION ON PARENTS' READING OF AND EXPECTATIONS FOR PHYSICAL EDUCATION .....	32
REFERENCES .....	53
APPENDIX C: IRB Approval .....	56
APPENDIX D: Parental Physical Education Questionnaire .....	62
III. PRINCIPALS' READINGS OF AND EXPECTATIONS FOR PHYSICAL EDUCATION .....	65
REFERENCES .....	85
APPENDIX E: IRB Approval .....	88
APPENDIX F: Principal Physical Education Survey .....	94

## CHAPTER I

### INFLUENCE OF MIDDLE SCHOOL PUPILS' ACCULTURATION ON THEIR READINGS OF AND EXPECTATIONS FOR PHYSICAL EDUCATION

#### **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of middle school pupils' acculturation on their readings of and expectations for physical education. The specific sub-questions that guided the study were (a) How do middle school pupils read physical education?, (b) What expectations do middle school pupils have for physical education?, and (c) What factors lead to middle school pupils' readings of and expectations for physical education? Participants were 94 pupils attending one public middle school. Data were collected using five qualitative techniques. They were analyzed by employing analytic induction and constant comparison. Findings indicated that the majority of pupils read the subject positively and in terms of four outcomes. These were learning and experiencing sports, health and fitness, socializing, and enjoyment and excitement. A minority of pupils, however, was more negative about physical education and viewed the subject as being of little worth. Differences in the ways in which pupils read and the expectations they had for physical education emerged based on age, gender, and ability. Key socializing agents that appeared to shape the beliefs and views of the pupils were their physical education teachers, peers, parents, coaches, and prevailing culture.

**Key Words:** Acculturation, pupils' expectations, physical education

## **Influence of Middle School Pupils' Acculturation on Their Readings of and Expectations for Physical Education**

While the earliest effectiveness studies within what has been termed the modern era of physical education research (Locke, 1977) focused on teacher behaviors, it soon became apparent that there was a need to examine the overt and discrete behaviors and actions of pupils (Metzler, 1989). Other researchers with an interpretive/critical leaning had the vision to examine the differing and overarching styles in which pupils participated during physical education lessons (Griffin, 1984, 1985; Pope & O'Sullivan, 2003). In addition, and arguably beginning with the *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education* monograph compiled by Graham (1995), some researchers began to include pupils' "voices" in their studies as they used qualitative techniques to investigate what they considered to be the missing link in research on physical education teaching—pupils' perceptions, opinions, and motivations about and for the subject. This line of interpretive work, in turn, spawned a new round of positivistic studies aimed at discovering how pupils' thought processes and actions mediated the effects of instruction (Silverman, Kulinna, & Crull, 1995), and, it could be argued, led indirectly to other psychologically based studies of pupils within physical education classes such as the large number employing achievement goal theory as a theoretical framework (e.g., Spittle & Byrne, 2009) and the relatively small number examining how pupils' perceptions of teachers influence their learning (Bryant & Curtner-Smith, 2008, 2009a, 2009b; Melville & Maddalozzo, 1988).

To date, the work on pupils' voices, perceptions, opinions, and motivations has included a wide variety of foci. For example, researchers have examined pupils' views and perceptions of physical education in general (Couturier, Chepko, & Coughlin, 2005) and assessed how their motivation for the subject changes across a school year (Gao, Lee, Solmon, & Zhang, 2009) or when they are given choices regarding curricular offerings (Ward, Wilkinson, Graser, & Prusak,

2008). Further, researchers have attempted to discover why some pupils dislike physical education intensely (Morey & Karp, 1998) and others are alienated during classes (Carlson, 1995). In addition, scholars have also investigated learned helplessness (Portman, 1995; Walling & Martinek, 1995), and the extent to which supportive environments in the physical education context influence pupil participation (Zhang, Solmon, Kosma, Carson, & Gu, 2011).

More recently, Curtner-Smith (2009) suggested that sport pedagogy researchers interested in doing policy-oriented research might do well to focus on how the subject of physical education is “read” by pupils. Following Gore (1990), the suggestion is that children interpret physical education as a subject due to the ways in which they have been socialized. In addition, and based on their differing socialization, it is possible that sub-groups of children read physical education very differently from each other.

In order to begin this work, the purpose of this study was to examine the influence of middle school pupils' acculturation on their readings of and expectations for physical education. The specific sub-questions that guided the study were (a) How do middle school pupils read physical education?, (b) What expectations do middle school pupils have for physical education?, and (c) What factors lead to middle school pupils' readings of and expectations for physical education?

### **Theoretical Framework**

To this point, socialization theory (Curtner-Smith, 2009; Lawson, 1983a, 1983b; Schempp & Graber, 1992; Stroot, 1993; Templin & Schempp, 1989) has largely been employed by sport pedagogy researchers to help explain why teachers and teacher educators think and act as they do (e.g., Curtner-Smith, Hastie, & Kinchin, 2008; Lee & Curtner-Smith 2011). During the present study, however, the theory was used as a framework to understand why pupils read physical education as they did and why they had specific expectations for the subject.

Extrapolating from the work on teachers' occupational socialization, the key form of socialization that was investigated during this study was pupil's *acculturation*. This stage of socialization starts at birth and, in the context of this study, included all the cultural and personal influences that served to shape a pupil's perceptions of and expectations for school physical education. Again, based on the research on the occupational socialization of physical education teachers, key personal influences thought likely to influence pupils' views of and expectations for the subject, as well as actions within classes prior to the study, were parents, siblings, peers, relatives, physical education teachers, sport coaches, and teachers of other subjects. Key cultural influences thought likely to have an influence on pupils' readings of physical education included experiences of school in general; experiences of physical education in particular; experiences of sport inside and outside of school; and television, film, and print media.

## **Method**

### **Participants and Setting**

Participants were 94 pupils attending one public middle school in a medium-sized town in the southeastern United States. Thirty-six of these pupils (31 girls, 5 boys) were in the eighth grade and aged between 13 and 14 years. Twenty-four (19 girls, 5 boys) were in the seventh grade (aged 12 to 13 years). Thirty-four pupils (29 girls, 5 boys) were in the sixth grade (aged 11 to 12 years). Thirty-three of the pupils in the study were Caucasian and 61 African American. Prior to their participation in the study, the pupils and their parents completed consent forms in congruence with the university's policy on human subjects in research (see Appendix A).

The school catered to children across a wide spectrum of social and economic background and included a number of pupils with European, Asian, and African heritage, as well as native Caucasians and African Americans.

The school was an academic magnet school committed to using progressive pedagogies, particularly project-based learning. Within the same building was the school system's elementary magnet school which fed directly into the middle school. Pupils from the school system's regular middle schools and within the fifth grade of the school system's elementary schools could attend the magnet school, although selection was competitive and based on being academically and socially successful relative to other pupils within each feeder school.

The school's physical education program at both the elementary and middle school levels was taught by two physical education teachers who were considered by regional university sport pedagogy faculty to be two of the best teachers in their state. Both teachers held master's degrees in sport pedagogy. The male physical education teacher was a veteran of over 10 years' experience. The female teacher was relatively inexperienced with 4 years of service. In addition, at the time data collection began, she was about to commence studying for a Ph.D. in sport pedagogy while continuing to teach full-time.

The middle school physical education program employed two main physical education curriculum models. These were sport education (Siedentop, Hastie, & van der Mars, 2004) and health-related exercise (Penney & Waring, 2000). Sport education units were orthodox, "full version" (Curtner-Smith et al., 2008), and included a variety of traditional and non-traditional sports and physical activities. The health-related fitness program was rather limited and activity-based.

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected using five qualitative techniques. *Non-participant observation* (Creswell, 2007) involved taking extensive field notes on pupils' actions, interactions, efforts, attitudes, and behaviors during 15 physical education lessons. Five lessons were observed for grades sixth, seventh, and eighth, and included all pupils in the study. Within these observations, pull-asides, or *informal conversational interviews* (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007), of some pupils were

conducted. In addition, prior to or following lessons and whenever the opportunity arose, pupils were *informally interviewed* about their expectations for ensuing lessons or their actions in recently completed lessons. Notes on these informal interviews were made as close to their completion as possible. *Focus group interviews* of approximately 30 minutes in duration were also employed during which groups of 5 to 10 pupils were asked about their perceptions of physical education, their expectations for the subject, and their opinions as to why they thought the way they did. All pupils in the study participated in one focus group. The script for the focus group interviews and protocol by which they were conducted were semi-structured (Patton, 1990) (see Appendix B). The same set of initial questions was posed to all groups of pupils. Following pupils' initial answers, the protocol permitted multiple follow-up prompts and questions. Notes on common themes and comments made during the focus groups were made during and at the completion of the discussions. Finally, pupils were asked to provide one page *fictional accounts* of "the ideal physical education lesson for middle school children." Fictional accounts were handwritten and provided to the researcher free of correction.

### **Data Analysis**

Initial analysis involved identifying data from all sources which indicated participants' readings of and expectations for physical education and the factors which lead to these readings and expectations. Analytic induction and constant comparison (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984) were then used to code and categorize the data within these two broad areas. Codes and categories were based on constructs from previous socialization research. Trustworthiness was established through member checking, a search for negative and discrepant cases, and triangulation (i.e., the use of five data collection techniques) (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984).

## **Findings and Discussion**

### **Readings of and Expectations for Physical Education**

**Positive outcomes.** The vast majority of pupils was very positive about physical education and expressed this reading in terms of four outcomes they expected to gain from the subject. These were learning and experiencing sports, health and fitness, socializing, and enjoyment and excitement.

*Learning and experiencing sports.* Most pupils viewed physical education as synonymous with “sport” and were quick to suggest that a key outcome for them was to “learn or experience more about sports.” The kind of enthusiasm displayed for this outcome is illustrated in the following data extracts:

PE is where we learn how to play different sports and train for different jobs in sports. We also practice how to get along with people on our teams so we can win championships. (Greg<sup>1</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> grade, informal interview)

In PE I expect to learn how to do different sports than the ones I already play and how to train my muscles for different sports. (Beth, 8<sup>th</sup> grade, focus group interview)

Sports mentioned by the pupils mainly mirrored those in which they had participated during sport education seasons at school or during formal youth sport experiences. They included basketball, football, soccer, ultimate frisbee, kickball, softball, golf, cheerleading, tennis, and gymnastics. In general, however, there was little mention of what exactly it was that the pupils thought they should learn about sports. Rather, the focus was on “experiencing” and “playing.”

If I was a PE teacher I think it would be important to teach my kids to have fun. I think it is important to teach them to have fun because otherwise they might always be bored and could fail. Also I think it is important to teach them to have fun because they would never be interested and think PE is always boring and never fun. Last, I think that [teaching how to have fun] is important because they would goof off and not do what they're supposed to do. (Mason, 7<sup>th</sup> grade, fictional account)

I don't think PE is for learning. I think we should just come and work out or play. (Sarah, 7<sup>th</sup> grade, focus group interview)

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<sup>1</sup> The names of all individuals in this paper are fictitious.

By contrast, a few pupils noted that they should be learning skills, tactics and strategies, and how to be sporting:

My perfect PE lesson would be about basketball. I would give them step-by-step on what to do for dribbles and stuff. I would give them like play lists on what plays that basketball has. Also, I would practice runs and . . . help them try to become better so they can get on a real basketball team. (Tiffany, 7th grade, fictional account)

I would teach everyone sportsmanship and how to get along, because it's not any fun when teammates fight all the time and don't get along. (Matthew, 8th grade, informal conversational interview)

We should learn sportsmanship, how to stay healthy, how to play a lot of different sports, and how to get bigger, faster, and stronger. (Mike, 7th grade, focus group interview)

Almost without fail, the levels of pupils' effort in sport education classes and their actions and interactions with each other and their teachers confirmed their enthusiasm for sport:

At the beginning of class there are several pupils (boy and girls) who are asking the teachers what they going to be doing for the day's activity. One of the teachers tells them they are starting handball. The pupils clap, jump up and down, or quickly turn to their friends to share this exciting news. There is no evidence of any pupils being displeased at the start of the new unit. (Field notes, sport education lesson on handball)

*Health and fitness.* A second key outcome focused on by pupils throughout the study was health and fitness. Pupils talked about the need to “be physically active every day,” “exercise and get a good workout,” “learn to stay in shape,” and “ stay healthy [because] people die of obesity.” In addition, and as illustrated in the extracts below, some pupils enthused about health and fitness in their fictional accounts:

If I was the PE teacher for a day, I would play fun games, but still have exercise in it. We would play the game Pac-Man. If the Pac-Man or woman gets you, you would go to the side and do ten jumping jacks. Or maybe, they could play Ships and Sailors. If they get out, they go to the side and do fifteen mountain climbers. We also could dance. Which is really called Zumba. In Zumba we dance while exercising. There are many, many more games my class could play while exercising. (Isabel, 8th grade, fictional account)

*Socializing.* Another important outcome valued by most of this group of pupils was the opportunity to socialize. Specifically, pupils mentioned how important to them it was to be grouped or play on teams with their friends and being able to mix with members of the opposite sex:

We should get to pick our own teams. When we get put on teams with people we don't usually talk to, everybody gets into fights and nobody has fun. We spend the whole time arguing and everybody has a bad attitude. When everybody is fighting, we don't work as hard. (Willa, 7th grade, focus group interview)

I think we should get to play some sports with the boys. Sometimes the girls aren't competitive and it would be fun if we could play with the boys. (Christine, 8th grade, informal interview)

This kind of activity might be viewed as negative if it occurs within traditional models of teaching physical education, as the student social system within these models usually competes with and detracts from teachers' instruction. Positive forms of socializing, however, are encouraged within the sport education model and are compatible with realizing instructional and affective goals (Hastie, 1996).

*Enjoyment and excitement.* At some stage during the course of the study, most of the pupils indicated that they expected their physical education to be highly enjoyable and "exciting" and perceived that their program had not disappointed in this respect. Indeed, mainly because of these features, they championed their school's program, indicating that they realized that it was different from physical education programs offered at other schools, suggesting that it was a model other schools should follow, and comparing it favorably with other "academic" subjects in the curriculum in terms of importance:

I think what we are doing [in physical education] is great! (Craig, 6th grade, informal conversational interview)

We should be doing what we're already doing, but in other schools they do nothing. (Emily, 8th grade, informal interview)

PE is more important than other subjects, because when you're in shape you can concentrate more and it can help us live longer. (Beth, 8th grade, focus group interview)

Enjoyment, more likely to be termed as “fun,” was mostly defined in terms of having “success” within the various “new” and interesting sports and activities included in the curriculum. In turn, success was defined in terms of winning important games or winning the championship in sport education seasons, positive interactions with peers, reaching goals in health-related fitness lessons, perceived athleticism, and the amount of physical effort exerted during class:

Yes, I feel successful because we don't just sit there and do nothing. We actually work together on an idea of what we should do in class. Like collaborating. (Tamar, 7th grade, focus group interview)

I feel successful when I come to PE because we always get good exercise and have awesome teachers who help make things fun, but still makes us exercise. (Tina, 6th grade, informal interview)

Excitement was most often defined in terms of being competitive and winning within sport education seasons:

My best experience [in physical education] was getting to go to the championships in softball in the 6th grade. (Karen, 7th grade, informal interview)

It was awesome when my team won the basketball championship last year. That was a lot of fun. (Seth, 8th grade, focus group interview)

**Negative readings of and low expectations for physical education.** A small minority of pupils in the study were much less positive about physical education than their peers. At best, these pupils viewed the subject as “free time,” a “break from [academic] work in the classroom,” and a process that produced “less energetic kids so they can concentrate in class.” This group of pupils also suggested that the subject was not necessary for all pupils in schools because it favored “athletes,” they could “find [their] own ways to stay healthy later in life,” and “playing [was] less important than learning [in other subjects].” In addition, some pupils noted that physical education interfered with learning in other subjects and argued that since they “[had] to do so much in [their] other classes, [they] shouldn't have to do anything in PE.” These pupils also explained that they had

friends in other schools who “did nothing in PE” and were irritated that they were required to “actually do something” during lessons. Not surprisingly, this group of pupils also indicated that they had been embarrassed or injured during physical education. Consequently, they had rarely enjoyed or been excited in the class and had very low or no expectations for the subject:

I don't feel successful in PE because I'm uncoordinated and untalented, and sometimes [P.E.] is horrible. (Rainey, 7th grade, focus group interview)

[Physical education is] not as important as other classes, because when I get older I'm probably not going to use what I learn in PE as much as I will with other subjects. (Mary Katherine, 6th grade, informal interview)

I don't like coming to P.E. sometimes, because I don't like some of the activities. Like cardioblast. It seems boring. (Amy, 7th grade, focus group interview)

Observations of pupils with negative readings of the subject also indicated that they were much more likely to be off-task and find ways of not participating in lessons:

Two pupils who had told me that they do not enjoy physical education yesterday are sitting in front of the stage in the gym. They are talking to one another . . . instead of participating in a variety of what the teacher calls “fun games” with the rest of their class. At the end of class I ask them why they did not participate and they tell me that they dislike the games and . . . would rather receive a bad grade for the day than participate. (Field notes, health-related fitness lesson)

A number of pupils who were enthusiastic about the health and fitness components of their program also indicated that they had a dangerously faulty perception of this outcome. Specifically, their main focus was on avoiding a negative body image and not “regretting how [they] looked when they [grew up]”:

PE is just to make us exercise and not be fat, but I think it's really important because I don't want to be fat and out of shape. (Amy, 8<sup>th</sup> grade, focus group interview)

PE is here to teach us how not to get fat like a lard. (Katie, 8<sup>th</sup> grade, informal interview)

Conversely, other pupils were concerned about the pressure to conform to societal views about health and fitness and believed that they “should have a choice to be fat or skinny.”

Finally, some pupils who were enthusiastic about physical education in general indicated that they also had a faulty perception of the subject by advocating activities and practices within their fictional accounts generally condemned as being uneducational, counterproductive, or dangerous by the profession:

I wish we could play more games like red rover or dodgeball. It would also be cool if we could have free day more often. (Carol, 6<sup>th</sup> grade, focus group interview)

PE would be so much better if we could have free day every day. That way the people who don't want to do anything don't have to and they will just get a bad grade. Everybody else can just play the sports they like. (Allison, 8<sup>th</sup> grade, informal interview)

**Differences in readings and expectations.** During the course of the study, differences in the ways in which pupils read and the expectations they had for physical education emerged based on age, gender, and ability. Specifically, older pupils, girls, and the less able were more likely to have negative readings of and expectations for the subject, while sixth grade pupils, boys, and the more able were more likely to be positive:

PE is just for the athletes. I'm not an athlete, I'm a dancer. I don't think that anything we do in PE helps me. All we do is play sports and run around the track. I wish I didn't have to do anything in here because I practice dance in the afternoons for three hours. I need time to rest and shouldn't have to do anything in PE since I workout on my own. (Rosa, 8<sup>th</sup> grade, focus group interview)

PE is my favorite subject. I love sports and getting to play against my friends. I'm usually really good at anything I try, so I like learning new sports and games. PE is the most fun part of the day. (Bobby, 6<sup>th</sup> grade, informal interview)

Moreover, older pupils, girls, and the less able were less likely to indicate that they perceived themselves to be successful during physical education classes or to have "athletic ability."

Boys were much more likely to perceive physical education to be concerned with sport regardless of age. Girls were more likely to view the subject as being concerned with health and fitness and this view appeared to strengthen as they aged. In addition, older girls were more likely to focus on their appearance when discussing the health and fitness outcome than boys. Further,

girls valued opportunities to socialize within physical education classes to a greater degree than boys within all three grade levels.

Importantly, there were no differences in readings of and expectations for physical education along racial or social class lines.

### **Factors Leading to Pupils' Readings of and Expectations for Physical Education**

The key influences on the pupils' readings of and expectations for physical education included their two physical education teachers; the pupils' peers, parents and sport coaches; as well as the prevailing culture as expressed through print, television, and film.

**Physical education teachers.** The key socializing agent for many of the pupils in this study appeared to be their physical education teachers. Much of what these pupils said about the subject, their enthusiasm for it, and the ways in which they acted within lessons mirrored the views of their teachers. Moreover, a number of positions taken by the majority of pupils, including those on the goals of the subject, the importance of physical education, and how the subject should be taught contradicted mainstream thinking about the subject:

I think the purpose of PE is to help us stay fit and exercise every day. I expect to learn things to stay fit while having fun and get an exercise while having fun. (Rebecca, 6<sup>th</sup> grade, informal interview)

PE is to get us in shape, have fun, help us relax, and teach us the importance of health related fitness. We also learn about teamwork, new sports, how to stay healthy, and how to challenge ourselves. (Chris, 6<sup>th</sup> grade, focus group interview)

The strength of the teachers' influence on their charges was explained primarily by the high value pupils attached to the school's physical education program and the degree to which they were respected and liked by the pupils:

My favorite part about PE is talking to Coach Jackson. (Lily, 8<sup>th</sup> grade, informal interview)

I spoke to five 6th grade girls at the end of class while waiting for the bell. They talked about Coach Jackson and how much they "really liked her" because she tried to make class

“fun” and they knew that she wanted “what was best” for them. (Field notes, sport education lesson on handball)

Nevertheless, the fact that they failed to influence all of their pupils and the degree to which their influence weakened as their pupils (particularly the girls) aged indicated that there were other powerful socializing agents in play.

**Pupils’ peers, parents, and sport coaches.** The views of some the pupils’ peers, particularly those who attended other schools with what appeared to be relatively weak physical education programs, served to dissipate the strength of physical education teachers’ influence. Evidence of this comes in the form of some of the comparative comments made by pupils alluded to in the preceding section. In addition, the views and actions of some of the pupils’ parents and sports coaches also undermined what the teachers were trying to achieve. For example, some pupils explained that their parents believed that physical education should only be taken by pupils who did not participate in extracurricular sport and physical activity. Moreover, other pupils explained that coaches had asked them not to participate in physical education on the same day that they were playing a game to prevent fatigue:

Immediately after today’s focus group session, four 8<sup>th</sup> grade girls talked to me about their frustrations surrounding physical education. One of the girls, a basketball player, told me that her basketball coach told her not to do anything strenuous during PE because he did not want her to “get hurt” on game day. She also told me that she was afraid to tell Coach Jackson about this conversation, so she just told her basketball coach that she sat out during physical education. Another girl, a dancer, told me that her mother did not think it was important for her to take physical education because she had long and hard dance practices after school almost every day and physical education was not giving her the workout she needed as a dancer. (Field notes, sport education lesson on handball)

By contrast, influence of the physical education teachers was given a boost by close in-school friends who read physical education positively and parents and out-of-school coaches who conveyed positive messages through their words and actions about the value of physical activity. For example, some pupils relayed how their parents emphasized that physical education was

“important” to “develop the whole person”; “encouraged [them] to do sports and helped [them] practice”; paid for them to participate in dance, karate, basketball, track and field, soccer, and boxing; and “made [them] go outside and play for one hour every day.” In addition, they described the kinds of physical activities in which their parents participated. These included weightlifting, walking and/or running, basketball, and taking different classes such as aerobics or yoga. Pupils also indicated that some of their out-of-school coaches had similar foci to their teachers, for example, “teaching [them] about teamwork and sportsmanship” and emphasizing the importance of “staying healthy and fit.”

My boxing coach always tells me how important it is to run and stay in shape. That is why I try so hard in PE when we are out on the track. (Kreston, 8<sup>th</sup> grade, informal interview)

**The prevailing culture.** The conservative nature of the prevailing culture also mostly served to negate the efforts of the physical education teachers and undermined them. For example, it was fairly clear that the messages received by some of the older girls about body shape and appearance led to their focus on body image. Similarly, the hierarchy of school subjects portrayed in the culture in which “academic” subjects were valued over others appeared to have a strong influence on many of those pupils with negative readings of the subject. In addition, the portrayal of some physical activities as feminine (e.g., aesthetic activities such as dance, gymnastics, cheerleading, and aerobics) and others as masculine (e.g., competitive team sports such as flag football) influenced both genders’ biases in terms of favored outcomes. These messages were likely to be received in the form of television and film watched by the pupils (e.g., *Shake it Up*, *Glee*, and *Cheer Perfection*) and to a lesser extent print (e.g., *Reddit*, *Sports Illustrated*, and the *Team Spirit* book series):

Most of the movies and TV shows make sports to be about boys and not girls. Maybe some girls want to play football, but according to TV we can’t. We are just supposed to dance or cheer.” (April, 8<sup>th</sup> grade, informal interview)

## **Conclusions**

The most important conclusion to be drawn from this study is that it illustrates that dedicated and skilled physical education teachers who construct progressive, interesting, and relevant curricula can enthuse and excite many of their pupils. The ways in which the physical education teachers at the school examined, interpreted, and delivered sport education and health-related fitness modules of instruction clearly had a positive impact on most pupils' readings of and expectations for physical education. In short, the physical education teachers were a major influence on their pupils and were able to overcome much of the negative socialization surrounding the subject that their charges encountered.

More negatively, the study also illustrates how other socializing agents including peers, parents, coaches, and the prevailing culture, as portrayed in television, film, and print, can compete with, detract from, and undermine the work that good physical educators do and are, at least partially, responsible for some pupils' alienation from the subject. Knowledge and understanding of how this competition is constructed and functions, and realizing that these socialization agents can also work in the teachers' favor, however, are key weapons for physical education teachers as they seek to intervene and battle to influence their pupils for the better.

Future research in this line might aim to replicate the current study in different settings. We suspect that teachers have more influence on elementary pupils' readings of and expectations for physical education than middle and high school pupils for whom other socializing agents become more powerful and negative. Confirming or refuting this suspicion and discovering the best ways to intervene and shield pupils from negative socialization is obviously valuable work. Depressing as it may be, it might also be useful to illustrate the negative influence poor or non-physical education teaching has on pupils' reading of the subject in that it supports or fails to compete with other negative forms of socialization.

At this juncture, we should also acknowledge the limitation of the current study's design. Specifically, its cross sectional nature meant that we could only infer change among our participants over time. Researchers employing longitudinal interpretive designs would be able to confirm these changes actually happen and tease out how specific socialization agents have differing effects on pupils as they move through their schooling.

Finally, it is important to remember that some of the pupils involved in these studies will become physical education teachers themselves. For this reason, this work should also help those studying physical education teacher socialization in terms of providing them with an improved understanding of the perspectives with which pre-service teachers enter teacher education programs.

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APPENDIX A

IRB Approval

Office in Person  
1800 East Administration Building  
Department of Human Subjects

THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**ALABAMA**  
RESEARCH

November 16, 2012

Meredith George  
Department of Kinesiology  
College of Education  
Box 870512

Re: IRB # 12-OR-376, "Influence of Middle School Pupils' Acculturation on their Reading of and Expectations for Physical Education"

Dear Ms. George:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your proposed research.

Your application has been given expedited approval according to 45 CFR part 46. Approval has been given under expedited review category 7 as outlined below:

*(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.*

Your application will expire on November 15, 2013. If the study continues beyond that date, you must complete the IRB Renewal Application. If you modify the application, please complete the Modification of an Approved Protocol form. Changes in this study cannot be initiated without IRB approval, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants. When the study closes, please complete the Request for Study Closure form.

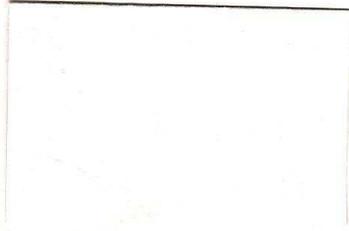
Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this application, please include the assigned IRB application number.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,



1800 East Administration Building  
Box 870512  
Tuscaloosa, Alabama 35896-0512  
(205) 348-5400  
or (205) 348-7155  
fax: (205) 348-7055



Dear Parent,

My name is Meredith George and I am a doctoral student in the Department of Kinesiology at the University of Alabama. I am conducting a study of the reading of and expectations for physical education among middle school students. I will come to the school and conduct passive observation in your child's physical education classes during the fall semester. I would like your permission for it as well. The passive observation will only involve me sitting on the side of the room and handwriting notes on my notebook. My visits will be random, depending on my schedule. I will not interrupt the class at all.

In addition, for one of the classes, I will need to videotape a lesson, which your child will be in the video. There will be no compensation for your child presenting in the video, neither will they receive punishment for the removal from the videotaping. The physical education teacher will instruct your child to do other physical activities on the side of the room so they will be considered present like others in the same room. Please sign the permission form whether or not you want your child to be videotaped. This video will only be shown to the physical education teacher, a small select group of students in the class, and myself as we will be examining students' reactions to the lesson. The videos will be destroyed after analysis of the data has been conducted.

Next, I will be asking a few students to write a fictional lesson plan of what they would consider to be the perfect physical education lesson. I will be the only one reading the accounts and they will be used to determine what factors they believe to be essential in a quality lesson.

Lastly, I will be conducting informal interviews and focus groups to get the opinions and beliefs of students as it relates to their physical education experiences. These interviews will be audio recorded for accuracy. The tapes will be destroyed after the data is analyzed.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and there is no penalty for not participating. Please see the attached consent form and check the appropriate statements and return to the school with your signature. I appreciate your help in this matter. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any other questions.

Best Regards, Meredith George Doctoral Candidate  
Department of Kinesiology  
The University of Alabama  
Cell phone: (205) 420-8414  
Email: mlgeorge@crimson.ua.edu

SUBJECT CONSENT FORM FOR  
PARTICIPATION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS IN RESEARCH  
UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA

**Your child is being asked to be a participant in a research study.**

**The name of this study is** "Influence of Middle School Pupils' Acculturation on their Reading of and Expectations for Physical Education."

**This study is being done** by a doctoral student, Meredith George and her faculty advisor, Dr. Matthew Curtner-Smith, from the University of Alabama, Department of Kinesiology.

**What is the purpose of this study-what is trying to be learned?**

I hope to learn what students expect from their physical education class and how their acculturation influenced their beliefs.

**Why is this study important-what good will the results do?**

The data collected from this study will give a better understanding of what students expect to do and learn in physical education and factors that lead to their beliefs. This information will give a better understanding of how physical educators can meet the needs of students and have a better grasp on why students have certain expectations of the teacher and what they learn in class.

**Why has my child been asked to be in this study?**

Your child was selected as a possible participant in this study because of his/her participation in a high quality physical education program.

**How many other people will be in this study?**

All students enrolled in this school will be asked to participate.

**What will my child be asked to do in this study?**

As part of the study, your child will be asked to be observed and videotaped. Neither data collection procedure will interrupt the class. I will also ask to pull some of the students who agreed to participate in the study aside for either an informal interview, focus group, stimulated recall or to have them write a fictional account of a perfect physical education lesson. Focus groups and stimulated recalls will be audio recorded to assure accuracy of the data. The interview questions and focus groups will be used to explore the students' family and their interest in activities, participation in sports, how important he/she feels physical education is, and what type of topics and activities should be taught in the class.

**How much time will my child spend being in the study?**

This study will require no more than an hour outside of physical education class for those students who are asked to write a one page fictional account of a perfect physical education lesson. All other data collection will take place during school time. The informal interviews will last no more than ten minutes. The stimulated recalls and focus groups will last no more than twenty minutes.

**Will being in this study cost us anything?**

The only cost to you is the time your child spends during the study.

**What are the benefits of being in this study?**

This study will provide data to other teachers who teach middle school physical education and give them a better idea of what their students expect from their class. The goal is to make physical education meaningful for all students.

**What are the risks (dangers or harms) to my child if they are in this study?**

The nature of the data collection ensures that there is no physical or psychological risk of any kind to your child.

**How will their privacy be protected?**

Only the researcher will know the identity of the participants and all data will be kept in a secure place for a maximum of three years at which time it will be destroyed.

**How will their confidentiality be protected?**

The audio recording of the interviews will be erased immediately after transcription. During that time the tapes will be stored in a locked cabinet in the principal investigator's office. The data will be retained by the principal investigator for a period of three years. It will be kept locked in the principal investigator's office during that time. After three years, all data will be destroyed. The information provided by your student will be confidential. In the event that the information collected is published in a professional journal, their confidentiality will be protected by referring to you only by pseudonym. On completion of the study the results will be made available and explained to you if you so desire.

**Does my child have to participate in this study?**

No. Your child's participation is voluntary and they do not have to participate. If they start the study, they can stop at any time. There will be no effect on your child's relationship with the University of Alabama.

**What if we have questions, suggestions, concerns, or complaints?**

If you have any questions about this research contact: Meredith George at (205) 420-8414 or [mlgeorge@crimson.ua.edu](mailto:mlgeorge@crimson.ua.edu) or Matt Curtner-Smith at 205-348-9209 or [msmith@bamaed.ua.edu](mailto:msmith@bamaed.ua.edu) . If you have questions or complaints about your rights as a research participant, call Ms. Tanta Myles, the Research Compliance Officer of the University at 205-348-8461 or toll-free at 1-877-820-3066. You may also ask questions, make a suggestion, or file complaints and concerns through the IRB Outreach Website at [http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO\\_Welcome.html](http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO_Welcome.html). After you participate, you are encouraged to complete the survey for research participants that is online there, or you may ask the researcher for a copy of it. You may also e-mail us at [participantoutreach@bama.ua.edu](mailto:participantoutreach@bama.ua.edu).

AUTHORIZATION: I have read this consent form. I have had a chance to ask questions. I agree to allow my child to participate in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_ I give my permission for the interviews to be audio recorded and my child to be videotaped.

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not give my permission for the interviews to be audio recorded or my child to be videotaped.

\_\_\_\_\_ I would like to know the results of the study and this is how you can contact me.  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not want to know the results of the study.

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Investigator Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Dear Student:

I am from the University of Alabama. I am doing a study to find out how kids in middle school feel about their physical education class, what they expect to learn from the class, and how things in their past influence how they believe. This study will help P.E. teachers understand what they need to be teaching in their classes and how to meet the needs of their students.

I picked your school to be in the study because of the great P.E. program you have. I am going to ask you and all of your classmates to participate in the study. I am going to send your parents an email explaining what the study means and why it is important. I am going to have to have yours and your parents' permission for you to participate.

If you decide to be in the study, I will be observing and videotaping a few of your P.E. lessons. While I am observing the class, I will be taking notes on what I see like how students are participating in the lesson, whom seems to be having fun, and if any parts of the lesson is not working so well. During my observations, I may come up to you before or after class and ask you a few simple questions about the class. Then you may be asked to be in a discussion group at school (before or after classes) with about 4-6 other kids your age. You will be asked to talk about sports you have participated in, your thoughts and feelings about P.E., and a few simple questions about your family.

We will audio-record the meetings so that we have an accurate record of the discussion. These tapes will be typed up after the meeting but no names will be used. The tapes will be destroyed as soon as the typed record is made. If you do not want to be in a tape-recorded discussion, you should not be in this study. A few students will also be asked to write the perfect P.E. lesson if you had a chance to be the teacher for the day. Finally, other students will be asked to watch the video of the class that was just recorded and asked to tell the researcher what they were thinking at certain times during the lesson.

We will not tell anyone outside the study what you or any other particular person said. We will write a report on the study that just talks about what the group said or didn't say, but no one will be able to recognize you. We will ask kids in the groups not to talk about what was said outside of the meetings (to keep the discussion confidential) but we cannot promise this. You can control this by not saying something you would not want to have repeated. We will not tell your parents or teachers what you said.

You are a volunteer. You are helping us but you do not have to unless you want to. This is your free choice. If you start the study and decide you don't want to continue, just let me know. No one will be mad at you. If you do not want to talk about a certain topic in the discussions or answer a certain question, you do not have to.

We do not think there are any risks or harm to you in this study.

If you have any questions about this study, please ask me now. If you have questions later, you can call Meredith George at the University of Alabama at 205-420-8414. You can also ask your parents questions if you wish. If you have questions or concerns about your rights in a research study, please contact Ms. Tanta Myles, the University of Alabama Research Compliance Officer, at (205) 348-8461.

You may also ask questions, make a suggestion, or file complaints and concerns through the IRB Outreach Website at [http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO\\_Welcome.html](http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO_Welcome.html). After you participate, you are encouraged to complete the survey for research participants that is online there, or you may ask the researcher for a copy of it. You may also e-mail us at [participantoutreach@bama.ua.edu](mailto:participantoutreach@bama.ua.edu).

If you agree to be in this study, please sign your name on this letter below. You can have a copy of the letter to keep.

Thank you very much for your interest.

Sincerely, Meredith George

---

Name of Participant

---

Date

---

Person Obtaining Consent

---

Date

\_\_\_\_\_ I give my permission to be video recorded.

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not give my permission to be video recorded.

\_\_\_\_\_ I give my permission to be audio recorded.

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not give my permission to be audio recorded.

APPENDIX B

Formal Interview Guide

## Formal Interview

The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of middle school pupils' acculturation on their readings of and expectations for physical education. There are not right or wrong answers; be honest and direct in your responses.

### **Background information** (multiple prompts allowed)\*

- What grade are you in?
- How long have you been in this school?
- What is your race?
- Where were you born?
- What is your gender?
- What is your ethnic origin?

\* No need to ask questions in this section when answers are obvious

### **Experiences in sports and extracurricular activities**

- Do you play any school sponsored sports? Which ones? What is your opinion of your coach?
- Do you play any city or rec league sports? Which ones? What is your opinion of your coach?
- Do you like to participate in any recreational activities after school or on the weekends? Which ones?

### **Social Influences**

- Do you participate in activities with your family or friends? Which ones?
- Do you parents/guardians participate regularly in physical activities or exercises? Which ones?
- What do you typically do every day after school?
- Are most of your friends a part of an athletic team or participate in some sort of physical activity? Which ones?
- Do your friends like physical education? Why or why not?
- Do your parents/guardians care about your grade in physical education?
- Do you ever do make-up work for your other classes during your physical education time? Why?

### **"Reading" of and expectations of physical education**

- If you could describe physical education in one word what would it be? Why?
- What is your favorite part of physical education? Why?
- What is your least favorite part of physical education? Why? How would you make it better?
- Do you expect to "learn" anything in physical education? What?
- What activities do you expect to do when you come to physical education?
- If you could pick the activity for one day what would it be?
- Is physical education as important as your other classes? Why?
- Why do you think you have to take physical education?

- Would you take physical education if it were a choice? Why?
- Do you often feel successful in physical education? Why or why not?

## CHAPTER II

### INFLUENCE OF ACCULTURATION ON PARENTS' READING OF AND EXPECTATIONS FOR PHYSICAL EDUCATION

#### **Abstract**

There is a need to improve our understanding of how parents perceive physical education and to discover why parents perceive physical education as they do. The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of acculturation on parents' reading of and expectations for physical education. The specific sub-questions that guided the study were (a) How do parents read physical education?, (b) What expectations do parents have for physical education?, and (c) What factors lead to parents' readings of and expectations for physical education? Participants were 39 parents of pupils enrolled at one public middle school. Data were collected with two qualitative techniques and analyzed using constant comparison and analytic induction. Key findings were that the parents perceived physical education to be concerned with playing sports and participating in physical activities, health-related fitness, and personal and social development. These perceptions were shaped by parents' own experiences of physical education; participation in organized and informal sport and physical activity as children and youth; their own parents, relatives, and peers; participation in physical activity as adults; and the media. Collectively, while these factors led to many of the parents viewing physical education positively and being supportive of it, they also served to limit the ways in which they envisaged the subject might influence their children for the better.

Key Words: Acculturation, parental expectations, physical education

### **Influence of Acculturation on Parents' Reading of and Expectations for Physical Education**

Research which sheds light on why children and youth react to and perceive physical education programming as they do should be of use to teachers, policy makers, and those who carry out physical education teacher education (PETE) (Curtner-Smith, 2009). Given that they have such a strong influence on their children's behavior and development in educational settings (Chen, Dornbusch, & Liu, 2007), a primary influence on these reactions and perceptions is likely to be the beliefs and perceptions of parents.

To date, there has been little direct research of parental beliefs about and perceptions of physical education. There are, however, some data suggesting that parents have a greater influence than peers on their children's motivation to participate in physical education and leisure activities (Pihu & Hein, 2007). Furthermore, there is some evidence suggesting that parents are somewhat concerned about various aspects of their children's physical and health education although their understanding of these curricular areas is limited (Murnan, Price, Telljohann, Dake, & Boardley, 2006; Sheehy, 2006). Specifically, these researchers discovered that a sample of parents from the state of Ohio believed that the elementary school experience should contribute to their children learning how adopt a healthy lifestyle. For example, there was a strong belief that access to vending machines selling unhealthy snacks should be limited. Parental recommendations for the amount of physical education in which their children should participate, however, were much lower than those made by various professional groups (e.g., Alabama Department of Education, 2003; National Association of Sport and

Physical Education, 2004). Further, there was little support for the more controversial suggestion that the body mass index of all children be measured in schools, primarily because parents did not believe that they had the knowledge and skills required to successfully intervene in their children's behaviors when data suggested that this course of action was necessary.

There is also some research indicating that parents have a significant impact on their children's self-efficacy which, in turn, influences the degree to which they participate in physical activity (Troost, Sallis, Pate, Freedson, Taylor, & Dowda, 2003). Specific ways in which parents can increase their offspring's self-esteem and self-image and, thus, facilitate participation in physical activity, include moderating television consumption (Schooler, Kim, & Sorsoli, 2006).

The degree to which parents participate in physical activity and their beliefs and values regarding being physically active have also been shown to greatly impact the thoughts and behaviors of their children (Clement, Brooks, & Wilmoth, 2009; Sigmund, Turoňová, Sigmundová, & Přidalová, 2008). This research reveals that children of active parents are more likely to participate in physical activity themselves, although the effect appears to be more pronounced for boys than girls. Conversely, children of less active parents are more likely to be sedentary and this effect is more pronounced for girls. Moreover, although research indicates that girls' participation in physical activity decreases more markedly than boys' participation as they age, strong family support for physical activity can counter this trend (Dowda, Dishman, Pfeiffer, & Pate, 2007; Ornelas, Perreira, & Ayala, 2007). Finally, research on participation in youth sports and in family-based physical activity programs has indicated that positive parental attitudes

toward and beliefs about physical activity have a major influence on their children's athletic competence. A lack of facilities, poor academic performance, and concerns about safety, however, can negate this impact (Davison, 2009; Eriksson, Nordqvist, & Rasmussen, 2008).

### **Purpose**

There is a clear need to improve our understanding of how parents perceive physical education, the extent to which they value it, and what, if anything, they expect their children to learn or gain from the subject. There is also a need to discover why parents perceive physical education as they do. As well as illuminating a potentially significant impact on pupils' perceptions of the subject (and, therefore, their willingness to participate within it), research in this area might also provide valuable information for those seeking to enlist the support of parents for policy changes that are pro-physical education (American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance, 2012). The purpose of this study, therefore, was to examine the influence of acculturation on parents' reading of and expectations for physical education. The specific sub-questions that guided the study were (a) How do parents read physical education?, (b) What expectations do parents have for physical education?, and (c) What factors lead to parents' readings of and expectations for physical education?

### **Theoretical Framework**

Previously, sport pedagogists have used socialization theory (Curtner-Smith, 2009; Lawson, 1983a, 1983b; Schempp & Graber, 1992; Stroot, 1993; Templin & Schempp, 1989) to explain why teachers and teacher educators think and behave as they do (e.g., Curtner-Smith, Hastie & Kinchin, 2008; Lee & Curtner-Smith, 2011). Researchers

employing this theoretical perspective recognize that different “readings” of the same physical education setting are possible and that these readings depend on the individuals’ varying socializations (Curtner-Smith et al., 2008). Within this study, a part of the same theoretical framework was employed in an attempt to determine why parents hold certain beliefs about and perceive physical education as they do. Specifically, the goal was to examine parents’ *acculturation* for influences on their beliefs and values regarding the subject. This process begins at birth and, for the purposes of this study, included all personal and cultural influences that served to form and shape an individual’s perceptions and beliefs about physical education. Extrapolating from the research on the socialization of teachers and teacher educators prior to the study suggested that personal influences on parents’ beliefs about and values for physical education were likely to include the views of their own parents, siblings, relatives, and peers; their experiences of physical education and sport; the actions of their physical education teachers and sport coaches; and the messages conveyed about physical education by school administrators. Cultural influences were likely to include portrayals of sport and physical education in film, television, and the print media (see, for example, McCullick, Belcher, Hardin, & Hardin, 2003).

## **Method**

### **Participants and Setting**

Thirty-nine parents of pupils in the sixth, seventh, and eighth grade of one public middle school in a medium-sized town in the southeastern United States were the participants in the study. Thirty-two of these were mothers and seven were fathers. Twenty-six of the parents had daughters, nine had sons, and four had both a son and daughter attending the school. Seventeen of the parents in the study were European

(Caucasian) American, 19 were African American, 1 was Native American, 1 was Greek American, and 1 was African. Twenty-three of the parents were 40 to 49 years of age, 12 were 30 to 39, and 4 were 50-59. Nineteen of the parents had completed their formal education in the Deep South. In line with the university's human subjects policy, each parent completed a consent form before the study commenced (see Appendix C).

Although the school was publicly funded, it was also a selective magnet school and enrolled pupils from within and across the district who excelled academically and socially within the district's other schools and in comparison to other children within those schools. Included in the school's enrollment were pupils from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. The majority were native Caucasian and African American. Also enrolled at the school were Africans, Europeans, and Asians. The majority of the school's pupils had attended the school district's elementary magnet school housed in the same building.

Central to the mission of both the elementary and middle magnet schools was the commitment to employ more progressive and less direct self-paced pedagogies. Within core academic subjects, for example, project-based learning featured heavily.

The physical education program developed for the middle school by Jimmy<sup>2</sup> and Betty featured two primary curriculum models. First, they taught a wide variety of traditional American and non-traditional sports and games (e.g., soccer, basketball, floor hockey, rugby, and cricket) through what Curtner-Smith (2012) described as the "full version" of the sport education model (Siedentop, Hastie, & van der Mars, 2004).

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<sup>2</sup> The names of all individuals in this paper are fictitious.

Second, they taught a relatively conservative and limited activity-based set of health-related fitness units (Penney & Waring, 2000).

### **Data Collection**

Two qualitative techniques were used to collect data. First, parents were asked to complete a *22-item questionnaire* (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007) (see Appendix D). The first part of the questionnaire included questions aimed at generating demographic data on the parents' gender, age, national and ethnic origin, location of schooling, and educational level. The second part of the questionnaire included open-ended questions designed to elicit parents' perceptions of physical education, the degree to which they valued the subject, and what, if anything, they expected their children to learn or gain from the subject. The third part of the questionnaire included open-ended questions designed to discover the factors that shaped parents' readings of and expectations for physical education. A hard copy of the questionnaire was sent home with all 146 sixth, seventh, and eighth grade pupils together with a request that the pupils return the completed instruments in an envelope provided by the lead researcher. Three follow-up requests for the questionnaire to be returned were sent to parents in the subsequent 2 weeks.

Seven *formal follow-up interviews* were also conducted with parents purposefully selected based on their answers to the questionnaire. The aim of these interviews was to explore differing and diverse exemplars of parental views about physical education and the factors that appeared to shape these perceptions. Formal interviews were conducted through e-mail.

## **Data Analysis**

During the first phase of analysis, descriptive data from the demographic section of the returned questionnaire were computed. The second phase involved identifying data from all sources that indicated (a) the various ways in which parents read physical education, (b) the expectations they had for physical education, and (c) the factors that led to these readings and expectations. The third phase involved using constant comparison and analytic induction (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984) to code and categorize the data and then reduce them into meaningful themes. Trustworthiness and credibility was established through the search for negative and discrepant cases (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984) and member checking during formal follow-up interviews.

## **Findings and Discussion**

### **Parental Readings of and Expectations for Physical Education**

Significantly, 32 of the parents in this study believed physical education to be as important as other “academic” subjects, 1 parent believed it to be the most important subject in the curriculum, while 6 parents believed the subject was less important than other subjects. Those parents who valued the subject least believed that “the base curriculum [was] more important,” and “other academic courses [were] more necessary for [children] to become productive citizens.” Parents of this persuasion were also more likely to explain that their beliefs were partly driven by their own greater “passion for academics.”

The parents’ conceptions of physical education and their expectations for what their children would gain by participating in it were expressed within three areas. These

were playing sports and participating in physical activities, health-related fitness, and personal and social development.

**Playing sports and participating in physical activities.** Most of the parents wrote about the importance of “exposing [their children] to different sports, games, and activities” or their children gaining a “good knowledge of different sports.” Some also listed a rather narrow range of sports and activities that they thought should be included in the curriculum including softball, basketball, football, soccer, tennis, and frisbee. The main criteria for including the various physical activities and sports in the curriculum were that they should be “enjoyable” and “fun,” and taught in such a way that their children gained “a love for sports and physical activities” and got “an equal chance to participate.” The inference was that enjoyment and participation were crucial if children were to be turned on to sport and physical activity and participate for a “lifetime.” Parents also emphasized the importance they attached to “understanding rules” and “playing in a safe manner.” Typical of comments on the need for including sport and physical activity in the curriculum were the following:

The goal of PE is to gain team sport knowledge. Students should learn how to play different sports, the rules of the games, and the skills needed to play such sports. (James, questionnaire)

I think PE is a place to learn a variety of sports (ex. basketball, softball, tennis, etc.) by utilizing the proper equipment, follow the proper rules, and promoting individual and team effort. (Emma, questionnaire)

When asked to relate what they thought a typical physical education lesson should include, most parents wrote about the components of a sport/physical activity lesson and championed traditional, direct, and teacher-centered pedagogies such as “no self-

policing,” “demonstrating proper use of equipment,” and the teacher “choosing teams.”

For example, one parent provided her description as a list:

1. Present overview of game/sport/activity
2. Apply broken down elements of #1.
3. Combine elements - practice the game
4. Remind kids of key important benefits of activity or physical/social/historical significance of this activity (Olivia, questionnaire)

**Health-related fitness.** The majority of parents also emphasized that they expected their children to make gains in the area of health-related fitness:

I think physical education should be about stretching, exercise, and the overall well-being of your physical being. I think sports are important, but secondary to your health. [Pupils should learn] exercising techniques that they can carry with them through life. (Michelle, questionnaire)

A few thought this goal was “important since physical education is not really encouraged at the high school level.” Some expressed this goal in terms of “learning about health,” “[making] kids knowledgeable of the benefits of keeping physically fit,” and understanding “the need for physical activity.” Comments from those in this camp were concerned with “teaching children about the importance of being active and eating healthy,” “[preparing] the student for lifelong fitness,” “promoting fitness,” and combating “the ‘inactivity’ of today’s youth and the obesity problems [because] good physical activity/health tendencies at this age are so important.”

As illustrated in the following data extract, a second group of parents focused on the importance of their children participating in levels of physical activity likely to promote wellness:

I expect [my children] to be physically active in at least moderate activity. I am more concerned about my child being physically active for fitness. I don’t really care about competitive sports. (Shelia, formal interview)

Some parents with this focus saw no purpose for the subject other than to provide an opportunity to participate in health-promoting physical activity and believed that there was no need for children engaged in this kind of activity outside of school to take physical education. These parents argued that physical education should be provided only for “children who do not get exercise outside of school [because] PE offers a time for students to get their daily exercise:”

My child has a minimum of three hours per day of dance, so she gets more than enough exercise. For children who are not active out of school, PE is critical to their health and for some the only exercise they get. So for these children [physical education is] very important. (Beth, questionnaire)

A final group of parents indicated that they thought physical education could also play a major role in promoting “mental health,” “mental stability,” and “mental strength.” The suggestion was that the cathartic properties of physical activity and “exercise” could help their children “manage stress early in life” by providing a “balance” with the demands of “academic work” and so keep them in “good shape mentally.” A few of these parents advocated a physical education program which would “relieve excess energy that the children have built up,” and “give [children] a break and time to exercise outside of regular classrooms.”

**Personal and social development.** A smaller number of parents also expected their children to learn personal and social skills through physical education. These parents believed that the subject was a medium within which their children could “enhance related social and personal skills,” become “socially strong,” and improve their “teamwork,” “sportsmanship,” “competitiveness,” “cooperation,” and “determination.” In addition, parents saw the subject as being one in which children could “work hard” and

learn to “push [themselves] past what [they think their] limits are.” The following data extract illustrates beliefs typical of this group of parents:

I think it’s important for my daughter to learn the importance of teamwork and to learn sportsmanship. It is also important for her to learn related social and personal skills. I want her to have a positive attitude about working with others and giving 100% in everything she does. (Karen, questionnaire)

**Differential readings and expectations for physical education.** Trends in the data indicated that different groups of parents tended to read physical education differently and, consequently, have different expectations for the subject although these groups were not mutually exclusive. Specifically, parents of both genders were more likely to focus on health-related fitness and personal and social development when their children were girls. Conversely, they were more likely to focus on learning and playing sports when their children were boys. In addition, fathers who expressed an interest in health-related fitness were more likely to focus on the need for their children to participate in health-promoting physical activity, while mothers who emphasized the same goal were more likely to focus on their children “learning” about health and fitness. No differences between parents of different ages or racial backgrounds were evident.

### **Influences on Parental Readings of and Expectations for Physical Education**

Five key factors in the parents’ acculturation were identified as influencing their readings of and expectations for physical education. These were their own experiences of physical education as children and adolescents; participation in organized and informal sport and physical activity as children and youth; their own parents, relatives, and peers; participation in physical activity as adults; and the media.

**Parental experiences of physical education.** Thirty-six of the parents in the study were very positive about their own physical education as children and youth. Not

surprisingly, the programs that they had experienced were the same traditional sport-dominated multi-activity programs they were advocating for their children. Reasons these programs were perceived as successful included participating in “a variety of different sports and games” that were “fun” and presented in such a way that “it was like we were just outside playing.”

The attitude and behavior of the parents’ physical education teachers was also crucial in shaping their perceptions of the subject. Parents of both genders admired teachers who were “funny,” “energetic,” “easy going,” “community-oriented,” and “positive role models” who “wanted you to succeed for yourself.” Conversely, they noted that they were turned off the subject by teachers who “had no drive,” “seemed tired,” and were “stereotypical, yelling and belittling students.”

Also important to several of the mothers were the appearances of their teachers. In congruence to the studies of Melville and Maddalozzo (1988), teachers were perceived as having a negative influence when “they were not always the picture of health,” “not physically active role models,” “overweight or out of shape” or, in the case of female physical education teachers, that had a “masculine” appearance:

[My] elementary PE teacher [was] nice, pretty, feminine, someone I wanted to be like. [My] middle school PE teacher [was] female, but masculine in appearance. Not someone I wanted to be like. (Christine, questionnaire)

Parents also mentioned pedagogies employed by their teachers and organizational strategies that had been counterproductive. These included teachers focusing on “physically gifted” “athletes” and “winning,” evaluating pupils “based on how ‘good’ or ‘skilled’ [they] were, not for effort,” and employing “singling out activities” which forced

children to “perform in front of peers.” Parents also recalled being taught within “large classes” being unhelpful.

Also congruent with their belief that health-related fitness should be emphasized within their children’s physical education was the fact that many of the parents, particularly mothers, recalled a decline in their enthusiasm for competitive sport as they aged:

I liked elementary PE because I liked the activities: kickball, field day, relays, four square, etc. As PE became more focused on competitive sport in middle school, I lost interest. (Anna, formal interview)

Often, it appeared that this decline was caused by their teachers’ use of the aforementioned negatively perceived pedagogies and an overemphasis on “winning the game” in middle and high school, while the “the benefits of exercise were never discussed.” Furthermore, some female parents appeared to hold this opinion because by high school their physical education was “a joke” as it consisted primarily of “stretching” and “walking the rest of the period.”

Finally, just under a third of the parents in the study indicated that they believed that the administrators of the schools they had attended valued physical education to a lesser extent than other subjects and “had not been involved” with it, despite “the PE teachers working very hard.” Moreover, there was a feeling that, in general, school administrators’ “emphasis is and always has been for the sports teams representing the school and less on the physical education of all other students.”

**Participation in formal and informal sport and physical activity as children and youth.** A second reason why many of the parents in the study, particularly the parents who had sons, may have advocated a sport and physical activity-based program

was due to their own extensive experience in extracurricular school sport and formally organized sport and physical activity outside school. Again, the majority of these experiences in sports such as volleyball, soccer, basketball, tennis, swimming, cheerleading, dance, football, baseball, horseback riding, karate, and gymnastics were recalled as being positive. This was because of the relationships formed with coaches, because they learned “the need of different exercises for different sports,” and experienced how “success in sports [could transfer] to other aspects of life.” Typically fond recollections of sports in which they participated and the people who coached them are illustrated in the following extracts of data:

All of my coaches were encouraging, patient, and treated each team member as an individual. (Mary Ann, questionnaire)

[My] synchronized swimming coach was fit. She could demonstrate stunts and movement. She would get in the water with us. She was encouraging. [She] gave us positive feedback when we did well. (Tina, questionnaire)

Negative experiences of extracurricular school sport and organized community youth sport, though relatively uncommon, were also disproportionately experienced by mothers. They included “coaches” who were “unfair,” pedagogically inept because they “may not have had experience with sports” and “only paid attention to the athletic kids.” Additionally, some remembered not being able to participate at all due to the “associated costs” or for “religious reasons.” Other parents recalled giving up extracurricular sport because they were “made fun of,” “picked on” by other children, felt “unsuccessful,” and due to “a lot of screaming” from the coaches. These experiences appeared to drive some parents toward the view that a focus on health-related fitness or personal and social development was more appropriate when it came to their own children’s physical education.

In contrast to their memories of formal organized school and youth sport and physical activity, all of the parents had fond memories of participating in informal physical activity and sport with their friends and relatives often “until the sun went down” and after being forced “out of the house” by their own parents. Activities and sports the parents recollected participating in informally included swimming, “playing tag,” “riding bicycles,” “tetherball,” and “surfing.” Typical of these recollections was the following:

All neighborhood kids would get together and go to the park, play basketball, baseball, jump rope, ride bikes, skateboard, roller skate, football, etc. Boys and girls played together. (Elizabeth, questionnaire)

Again, these positive memories appeared to play a part in parents’ preference for a sport and activity-based physical education curriculum, particularly as a number of them lamented that children no longer participated in this kind of activity to the extent that their generation had done because “technology is slowly taking sports/physical activities away,” “it’s not safe to go outside,” and there is “no one to supervise the kids because most parents work.” These memories may also have helped shape some of the suggestions that the pedagogies employed during physical education should include a “play” element.

**Parents, relatives, and peers.** The majority of parents in the study also explained that their own parents, other adult relatives, siblings, and friends had participated on a regular basis in formal or informal physical activity and sport on a regular basis when they were children and adolescents and that this “modeling” was a positive influence on their views and values concerning physical activity:

Now, playing in the neighborhood was very rewarding where we were children. We had lots of activities in the neighborhood. Our parents or aunts/uncles were our coaches and biggest fans. (Cindy, questionnaire)

Moreover, if their own parents were inactive, most of the parents in the study indicated that they still advocated their children being active, or that they had other adult role models within their immediate family who were active:

My parent (mother) didn't do any physical activities, but her sister/brothers were very active, which was a good influence on me. They had formed a softball team in our neighborhood. (Christine, questionnaire)

**Participation in physical activity as adults.** The parents' patterns of participation in sport and physical activity as adults also appeared to influence their views on what their own children should be receiving in the form of physical education. Nine of them indicated that despite being active as children and youth, they had never participated in physical activity as adults. At the time of data collection, however, the number of inactive parents in the study had grown to 14. Among the reasons given for not participating in physical activity by inactive parents were "time restraints," "never having enough energy," and their devotion to their "children's social lives." Most in this group of parents, however, recognized that their non-participation in physical activity could well have a negative impact on their health and appeared motivated to make sure that their children did not follow the same path:

Even though I can't exercise because of my bad back, I encourage my kids to play and stay active as much as I can. (Ricardo, formal interview)

Six parents in the study who were still active at the time data were collected indicated that they continued to participate in competitive sport including "church league softball," baseball, basketball, and "road races in running and cycling." Others,

particularly mothers, explained that they had shifted from sport-related activity to “fitness activities:”

I played volleyball, tennis, and was on the swim team [as a child]. We had fun, made friends, and sometimes won. [As an adult] I was a fitness instructor (spinning, sculpting, swimming, and yoga) to stay active. (Jessica, formal interview)

Both of these perspectives were reflected in parents’ recommendations for their children’s physical education programming.

**Portrayal of physical education in the media.** All but four of the parents in the study perceived physical education to be portrayed negatively in television, film, and print. Physical education or “gym class” was, they agreed, largely “misunderstood” and misrepresented in the media. Moreover, teachers of the subject were often maligned as “dumb jocks,” and “mean,” “abusive,” and “ridiculous.” The extent to which this portrayal of physical education and those who taught it influenced parental views of the subject was unclear, particularly as virtually all indicated that the portrayal was largely “unfair” and a characterization physical education “didn’t deserve.” Nevertheless, it did appear to at least partly explain why some parents viewed physical education as a “less important” subject within the curriculum.

Conversely, the fact that virtually all of the parents in the study noted that “health,” “fitness,” and “wellness” were topics that were receiving increasing amounts of coverage in the media also appeared to have a major influence on their views on what should be taught in the curriculum. Understandably, and as illustrated by the data extract below, this kind of media coverage seemed to have most influence when it focused specifically on the health of children and youth.

Recently the benefits of physical activity have been highlighted, in part due to Michelle Obama's platform and the epidemic of ailments that are preventable. (Cynthia, questionnaire)

### **Summary and Conclusions**

The parents in this study had fairly traditional readings of and expectations for physical education. These were concerned with playing sports and participating in physical activities, health-related fitness, and personal and social development. Key influences that appeared to shape parents' readings of and expectations for the subject were their own experiences of physical education; participation in organized and informal sport and physical activity as children and youth; their own parents, relatives, and peers; participation in physical activity as adults; and the media.

Collectively, while these factors led to many of the parents viewing physical education positively and being supportive of it, they also served to limit the ways in which they envisaged the subject might influence their children for the better. This was particularly (and understandably) so for those parents who had suffered negative experiences in physical education and youth sport settings as children and adolescents. For example, in congruence with the findings of Sheehy (2006), a significant number of parents contrasted physical education with "academic subjects" and appeared to see little or no possibility of their children "learning" anything useful within the subject. Even parents with more positive views about physical education read the subject as being relatively lightweight, superficial, and more concerned with "play," "exposure" to sport and physical activity, "being active," and "effort."

By contrast there was little or no suggestion that the subject could be about learning how to participate in sport and physical activity with a reasonable level of

competency and skill or learning about movement, health, wellness, and fitness in considerable depth. Consequently, there were few references to physical education teachers' pedagogical skill or content knowledge. Moreover, and, in contrast to teachers of other subjects, physical education teachers were more likely to be branded as "good" or "bad" based on characteristics of their personality and their physical appearance. In addition, there was no suggestion that the physical education curriculum could be broader and, for example, include different types of sports and physical activities that might be attractive to different groups of pupils (e.g., the inclusion of a variety of different team and individual sports, aesthetic sports, and outdoor and adventurous activities); health-based content taught within high quality, rigorous, classroom-based lessons; and the subdisciplines of exercise and sport science as occurs in many other countries.

Surprisingly, one factor that appeared to have little or no impact on the parents' views about physical education was the curriculum that their own children were following at the time the study took place. For example, while the parents mainly advocated a traditional multi-activity model of instruction in which more direct, teacher-centered pedagogies would be employed, the physical education teachers working with their children were employing the sport education model and the indirect pupil-centered pedagogies necessary to deliver this type of physical education effectively.

Parental support for physical education programs is essential if the subject is to survive, grow, and continue to make a positive contribution to the lives of children and youth. Understanding how parents view the subject and why they think as they do provides physical educators with clues as to how to this kind of support can be strengthened. The results of the current study suggest that the cycle of socialization that

leads to faulty or limited conceptions of physical education can be broken in two ways. First, and obviously, school physical education must be high class so that pupils continue to value them when they are parents themselves. Second, in congruence with the suggestion of Moore and Gray (1990), physical educators need to make strenuous efforts to explain their goals to parents as well as how they are going about attempting to realize these goals.

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APPENDIX C

IRB Approval

Office for Research  
Institutional Review Board for the  
Protection of Human Subjects



December 7, 2012

Meredith George,  
Department of Kinesiology  
College of Education  
Box 870312

Re: IRB # 12-OR-393-ME: "The Influence of Acculturation on Parents'  
Reading of and Expectations for Physical Education"

Dear Ms. George,

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for  
your proposed research.

Your application has been given expedited approval according to 45 CFR part  
46. You have also been granted a waiver of written documentation of informed  
consent for the survey phase. Approval has been given under expedited review  
category 7 as outlined below:

*(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but  
not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity,  
language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or  
research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program  
evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.*

Your application will expire on December 6, 2013. If the study continues  
beyond that date, you must complete the IRB Renewal Application. If you  
modify the application, please complete the Modification of an Approved  
Protocol form. Changes in this study cannot be initiated without IRB approval,  
except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants.  
When the study closes, please complete the Request for Study Closure  
(Investigator) form.

Please use reproductions of the IRB-stamped consent forms.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this  
application, please include the assigned IRB application number.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,



258 West Administration Building  
Box 870127  
The University of Alabama  
206 885-5461  
Fax: (205) 245-2155  
or (205) 245-3865



SUBJECT CONSENT FORM FOR  
PARTICIPATION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS IN RESEARCH  
UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA

**You are being asked to be a participant in a research study.**

**The name of this study is** “Influence of Parents’ Acculturation on Their Reading of and Expectations for Physical Education.”

**This study is being done** by a doctoral student, Meredith George. She is being assisted by her faculty advisor, Dr. Matthew Curtner-Smith, from the University of Alabama, Department of Kinesiology.

**What is the purpose of this study—what is trying to be learned?**

I hope to learn what parents want from their child's PE class. I am also interested in how their childhood experiences shaped these beliefs.

**Why is this study important-what good will the results do?**

This study will give a better understanding of what parents expect their child to learn in PE. It will also explore factors that lead to these beliefs. This information will give a better understanding of how PE teachers can meet the needs of all students.

**Why have I been asked to be in this study?**

Because you are the parent of a middle school student at the Tuscaloosa Magnet Middle School.

**How many other people will be in this study?**

Up to 350 parents will be invited to be in this study.

**What will I be asked to do in this study?**

You will be asked to fill out a survey. The survey asks questions about your background in sports and your experiences in PE as a child. It will also ask about your expectations of your child's PE class. About ten parents will be asked to participate in an interview to further explore their thoughts and beliefs.

**How much time will I spend being in the study?**

It will take no more than 15 minutes to fill out the survey. If chosen for the interview, no more than 30 minutes are required.

**Will being in this study cost us anything?**

Only the time spent participating in the study. More time may be spent with the possible interview.

**What are the benefits of being in this study?**

There will be no direct benefits to you. However, it will provide PE teachers a better idea of what parents expect from PE class. The goal is to make PE meaningful for all students.

**What are the risks (dangers or harms) to me if I am in this study?**

There is no physical or psychological risk of any kind to you

**How will my privacy be protected?**

You may choose to do the survey at a time and place of your choice. If selected for the interview, you will be interviewed in private by Ms. George in the location of your choice. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to.

**How will my confidentiality be protected?**

The information will be kept by Ms. George for three years. All electronic information will be kept on Ms. George's personal computer. After three years, all information will be destroyed. If the data collected is published in a professional journal, your identity will be protected by referring to you only by another name. When the study is finished, the results will be made available to you if you so desire.

**Do I have to participate in this study?**

No. Your participation is voluntary. If you start the study, you can stop at any time. There will be no effect on your job or the relations with the University of Alabama.

**What if we have questions, suggestions, concerns, or complaints?**

If you have any questions about this research contact: Meredith George at (205) 420-8414 or mlgeorge@crimson.ua.edu. You may also contact Matt Curtner-Smith at 205-348-9209 or msmith@bamaed.ua.edu. If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about your rights as a person in a research study, call Ms. Tanta Myles, the Research Compliance Officer of the University of Alabama, at 205-348-8461 or toll-free at 1-877-820-3066. You may also ask questions, make suggestions, or file complaints and concerns through the IRB Outreach website at [http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO\\_Welcome.html](http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO_Welcome.html). You may also email the Research Compliance Office at participantoutreach@bama.ua.edu.

AUTHORIZATION: I have read this consent statement. I agree to take part in this research study. I understand that I may print off a copy of this statement to keep for my records.

I hope to learn what parents want from their child's PE class. I am also interested in how their childhood experiences shaped these beliefs.

**Why is this study important-what good will the results do?**

This study will give a better understanding of what parents expect their child to learn in PE. It will also explore factors that lead to these beliefs. This information will give a better understanding of how PE teachers can meet the needs of all students.

**Why have I been asked to be in this study?**

Because you are the parent of a middle school student at the Tuscaloosa Magnet Middle School.

**How many other people will be in this study?**

Up to 10 parents who completed the survey will be invited to do a follow-up interview.

**What will I be asked to do in this study?**

You will be asked to participate in an interview. The interview will last no more than 30 minutes. You will be asked to further explain your views and expectations of PE.

**How much time will I spend being in the study?**

No more than 30 minutes and may be conducted over the phone or in person.

**Will being in this study cost us anything?**

The only cost to you is the time spent during the study.

**What are the benefits of being in this study?**

There will be no direct benefits to you. However, it will provide PE teachers a better idea of what parents expect from PE class. The goal is to make PE meaningful for all students.

**What are the risks (dangers or harms) to me if I am in this study?**

There is no physical or psychological risk of any kind to you.

**How will my privacy be protected?**

You will be interviewed one-on-one with Ms. George in a location of your choice. You may also choose the time. You will not have to answer any questions that you may not feel comfortable answering.

How will my confidentiality be protected?

The information will be kept by Ms. George for three years. After three years, all information will be destroyed. If the data collected is published in a professional journal, your identity will be protected by referring to you only by another name. When the study is finished, the results will be made available to you if you so desire.

Do I have to participate in this study?

No. Your participation is voluntary. If you start the study, you can stop at any time. There will be no effect on your job or the relations with the University of Alabama.

What if we have questions, suggestions, concerns, or complaints?

If you have any questions about this research contact: Meredith George at (205) 420-8414 or [mlgeorge@crimson.ua.edu](mailto:mlgeorge@crimson.ua.edu). You may also contact Matt Curtner-Smith at 205-348-9209 or [msmith@bamaed.ua.edu](mailto:msmith@bamaed.ua.edu). If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about your rights as a person in a research study, call Ms. Tanta Myles, the Research Compliance Officer of the University of Alabama, at 205-348-8461 or toll-free at 1-877-820-3066. You may also ask questions, make suggestions, or file complaints and concerns through the IRB Outreach website at [http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO\\_Welcome.html](http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO_Welcome.html). You may also email the Research Compliance Office at [participantoutreach@bama.ua.edu](mailto:participantoutreach@bama.ua.edu).

AUTHORIZATION: I have read this consent form. I have had a chance to ask questions. I agree to take part in this research study. I will receive a copy of this consent form to keep.

Yes, you may audiorecord my interview.

No, I do not want my interview recorded.

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Investigator Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX D

Parental Physical Education Questionnaire

## **A. Background information**

1. What is your gender? (circle the correct response)  
Male  
Female
2. What is your age? (circle the correct response)  
20-29  
30-39  
40-49  
50-59  
60-Older
3. What is your nationality? (e.g., American, English, Spanish etc.)
4. What is your ethnic origin?  
African American  
Asian  
Caucasian  
Hispanic  
Other (explain)
5. In which state or country did you receive the majority of your formal schooling?
6. What gender(s) is/are your middle school aged child/children?  
Male  
Female  
I have male and female middle school aged children

## **B. Your views and beliefs about physical education**

7. In the space below briefly describe what you believe the goals of middle school physical education to be.
8. In the space below briefly describe what you would expect your son/daughter to learn or gain from participating in middle school physical education.
9. In the space below briefly explain how important you believe physical education is compared with other school subjects your child is required to study in the middle school curriculum?
10. In the space below briefly explain what you believe should happen within a typical middle school physical education lesson.

### **C. Your own experiences of physical education and sport as a child/youth**

11. In the space below briefly describe your own experiences of school physical education as a child and youth emphasizing aspects that were positive (if any) or negative (if any).

12. In the space below briefly describe your own physical education teachers when you were a child and youth emphasizing aspects of their teaching that were positive (if any) or negative (if any).

13. In the space below briefly describe the extent to which you participated in extracurricular sport while at school emphasizing aspects that were positive (if any) or negative (if any).

14. In the space below briefly describe the extent to which you participated in formal organized sport outside school when you were a child and youth (e.g., [provide two examples here]).

15. In the space below briefly describe your own sport coaches both inside and outside school when you were a child and youth emphasizing aspects of their coaching that were positive (if any) or negative (if any).

16. 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.

### **D. Your own experiences of sport and physical activity as an adult**

17. In the space below briefly describe the extent to which you have participated in sport and physical activity as an adult.

18. In the space below briefly describe the extent to which you currently engage in physical activity and sport.

### **E. Participation levels and views of others**

19. 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.

20. In the space below briefly describe the extent to which physical education was valued by teachers and administrators at your own middle school.

21. In the space below briefly describe the extent to which you believe physical education is valued by school administrators and officials in general.

22. In the space below briefly describe how you think physical education is portrayed on television, in film and in the print media.

## CHAPTER III

### PRINCIPALS' READINGS OF AND EXPECTATIONS FOR PHYSICAL EDUCATION

#### **Abstract**

School principals have considerable influence on how school subjects in their schools are perceived and taught. The purposes of this study were to (a) examine how principals read and what expectations they had for physical education and (b) describe the factors that shaped these readings and expectations. Participants were 19 principals from two school systems. Data were collected with an electronic survey and analyzed using constant comparison and analytic induction. Key findings were that principals had a limited and superficial understanding of the goals of physical education, its curricula, and pedagogies. This was because their beliefs about the subject were largely shaped by their own experiences of physical education and sport as children and youth rather than any formal training that they had received. These findings suggested that training for those intending to become principals needs to include a much stronger physical education component.

Key Words: Principals, occupational socialization, expectations for physical education

#### **Principals' Readings of and Expectations for Physical Education**

Previous research on school principals' thoughts, perceptions, and views about physical education is limited. Much of the interpretive work conducted with young inservice physical education 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 pupils under control and entertained while teachers of other subjects take a break (Curtner-Smith, 1997, 1999,

2001; Curtner-Smith, Hastie, & Kinchin, 2008; Smyth, 1995; O'Sullivan, 1989). One study of the process of hiring physical education teachers also indicates that principals often focus on interpersonal and teaching skills when hiring physical education teachers at the elementary level, but are more concerned with applicants' abilities to coach extracurricular activities at the secondary level (Dillon, McCaughtry, & Hummel, 2010). Conversely, another study shows that it is possible to train a principal to give feedback aimed at improving physical education teacher behaviors (Ratliffe, 1986). Some research also indicates that principals can have a positive impact on schools' wellness policies, in terms of mode of implementation and effects on pupils (Agron, Berends, Ellis, & Gonzalez, 2010), and on physical education teachers' beliefs and curricula, providing the teachers are innovatively oriented (Bechtel & O'Sullivan, 2007). Moreover, Sims (2003) revealed a positive relationship between the extent to which principals supported physical education programs and the degree to which physical education teachers followed state-mandated curricula and requirements. On the downside, Sims (2003) also found that principals who were themselves certified to teach physical education were much more likely to offer exemptions from physical education for pupils than principals who had no background in the subject at all.

Given their obvious influence on the teaching of all school subjects, a potentially fruitful area for policy-oriented researchers hoping to improve the standard of physical education is to conduct further investigation of how principals interpret or "read" the subject (Curtner-Smith, 2009). The purposes of this study, therefore, were to (a) examine how school principals read and what expectations they had for physical education and (b) describe the factors that shaped these readings and expectations.

### **Theoretical Framework**

In prior sport pedagogical research, occupational socialization theory (Curtner-Smith, 2009; Lawson, 1983a, 1983b; Schempp & Graber, 1992; Stroot, 1993; Templin & Schempp, 1989) has generally been used to explain the beliefs and actions of teachers (e.g., Curtner-Smith et al., 2008; Lee & Curtner-Smith, 2011). Within the present study, however, it was employed in an attempt to explain school principals' readings of and expectations for physical education. Specifically, in line with the thinking of Gore (1990), we explored how principals' beliefs about physical education, and the degree to which they valued the subject were shaped by their *acculturation* (social and cultural influences prior to teacher education) and *professional socialization* (the influence of their formal teacher education and administrative training).

Extrapolating from past research suggests that key socializing agents responsible for this shaping of future principals' values during the acculturation period include the views of their parents, siblings, and peers. This research also suggests that future principals' own schooling, particularly their experiences of physical education and school sport, will be 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 physical education 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 their professional socialization will have less impact on future principals' values and beliefs about physical education than their acculturation. The degree to which future principals undergo specialist training in physical education teaching during their initial undergraduate preparation, any graduate work in a teaching field, and administrative certification courses will also obviously influence the chances of beliefs about the subject formed during acculturation being altered. High-quality physical education 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.

Those future principals who initially train as physical education teachers and those who train to be elementary teachers and take a physical education methods course (Xiang, Lowy, & McBride, 2002) are more likely to change their beliefs and values about the subject than those who train to be secondary teachers in other subject matters. The ways in which faculty responsible for preparation in these other subject matters portray physical education can, however, 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. These school systems were purposefully selected because they included schools that catered to a wide range of pupils in terms of socioeconomic status and race. Each principal gave his or her informed consent in congruence with the requirements of the university's policy for conducting research with human subjects (see Appendix E).

Twelve of these principals were female and seven male. Seventeen were Caucasian and two were African American. Ten 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. Eighteen of the principals had received the majority of their formal education in the Deep South, and one had trained in Iowa. Two of the principals had earned doctorates. The highest level of education achieved by the remaining 17 principals was the educational specialist degree (12) and the master's degree (5). Two of the principals were trained and certified to teach physical education. Four had been certified as elementary teachers, two 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 physical education pedagogy.

### **Data Collection**

All 118 principals working in the two school districts were asked to complete a *21-item survey* (Appendix F) online using Survey Monkey (2012). One follow-up reminder was sent to each principal who failed to respond to the initial request. This process yielded 19 completed surveys.

Section A of the instrument was designed to generate demographic data. Section B included open-ended questions aimed at gathering data about principals' beliefs and values regarding physical education. Specifically, principals were asked 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 physical education and extracurricular sport in their schools. Sections C to E of the survey included a series of open-ended questions designed to discover the factors within principals' acculturation and professional socialization that shaped their beliefs and values about physical education.

### **Data Analysis**

Descriptive statistics were computed for the answers provided in the demographic section of the survey. Data which indicated how principals read physical education and what expectations they had for the subject were then identified, coded, categorized, and reduced to meaningful themes using 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 physical education 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).

## **Findings and Discussion**

### **Principals' Readings of and Expectations for Physical Education**

**Goals of physical education.** The key focus of the principals in this sample was on one of the goals of physical education—health-related fitness. Specifically, they emphasized that “lifelong fitness,” “healthy lifestyles,” “wellness,” and “general health” should be “promoted” within the subject. Pupils, they thought, should both acquire the knowledge necessary to “create a sense” of health and wellness that they could “carry into adulthood” and become “physically fit” and healthy by participating in at least a “moderate level” of physical activity during lessons. There was also the suggestion that physical education had a cathartic role to play in the lives of pupils in that they needed to “release stress and exercise and physical activity is [*sic*] 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<sup>3</sup>)

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. The initial aim here was to “expose” pupils to “a wide variety of individual and group activities” so as to “allow them to discover their strengths” and “spark [their] interest” in and “enjoyment” of participating in “new and diverse activities” which they would “learn to love.” The ultimate objective was to instill in pupils the “passion to be active” “for life.”

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<sup>3</sup> The names of all individuals in this paper are fictitious.

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 students,” 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.” There was, however, no reference to pupils gaining knowledge and understanding of tactics and strategies of games and sports. Finally, while there was no direct reference to the goal of cognitive development within and through physical education, there was some suggestion that physical education teachers be able to aid those teaching other subject matters by being proficient at “integrating other content areas” into physical education instruction.

**How to achieve goals of physical education.** Despite their primary focus on health-related fitness, most principals favored the use of a traditional multi-activity curriculum in which pupils 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 pupils develop a deeper understanding of the activities they were learning in order to increase the likelihood that they would continue to participate. For example, they suggested that pupils 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.” This course of action would, they suggested, increase the likelihood of “lifelong participation.”

Sports and activities mentioned included soccer, basketball, volleyball, rhythm and dance, and badminton. Other than referring to “team and individual sports,” however, there was

no attempt to categorize these sports or activities as, for example, those that might appeal to different groups of pupils 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 physical education curriculum:

[An excellent physical education program involves] a curriculum that embodies active exercise and knowledge surrounding diverse learning in regards 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, there were relatively few attempts at linking the exposure of pupils to these sports and activities directly to the goal of promoting health-related fitness. Eight principals, however, suggested that "healthy lifestyle choices" could be taught by requiring pupils 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 pupils "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 pupils learn about "stretching" "exercise concepts," and "have knowledge of healthy eating habits" and that teachers "provide positive guidelines that promote healthy living, nutrition and lifelong goals for fitness," there was no attempt to describe and define the body of knowledge that should be taught as "health." Furthermore, there was no mention of incorporating a classroom component within physical education in order to teach this kind of knowledge.

**Characteristics of effective physical education teachers.** Principals focused on four elements when it came to describing effective physical education teachers. These were teachers' character and behavioral traits, physical appearance and sporting skills, managerial skills, and instructional skills. Following Shulman (1986), notably absent were references to teachers' curricular and pedagogical content knowledge and knowledge of pupils, and different purposes and philosophies about physical education.

*Character and behavioral traits.* The majority of comments concerning physical education teachers' effectiveness focused on character and behavioral traits as opposed to pedagogical skills or teaching behaviors. Effective teachers, principals suggested, would be "motivating," "enthusiastic," "passionate," "empathetic," "patient," and "caring." Moreover, they should be "effective communicators," "respect . . . the learner," and be able to form "a positive rapport with students."

*Physical appearance and sporting skills.* Two principals also emphasized the need for a physical education teacher to be "a model of fitness him/herself" and the importance of the teacher modeling a "physically active lifestyle." In addition, there was a suggestion that physical education teachers needed to be "able and willing to demonstrate appropriate skills and techniques." Typical of the comments about appearance, modeling, and sporting ability was the following:

A PE teacher should . . . be willing to model and demonstrate skills, and be a model of fitness him/herself. (Darby)

*Managerial skills.* A third focus of the principals was on the ability of the physical education teacher to be an "effective behavior manager." The focus here was on the teachers' ability to "control," "monitor," "supervise," and "manage" often "large groups of students" in a fast-paced and fluid environment. Managerial comments indicated that the principals had

particular value for physical education teachers whose managerial behaviors enabled them to “create a positive learning environment.”

*Instructional skills.* Comments about effective teaching behaviors, pedagogies, and skills were relatively few. Nevertheless, a number of principals noted that in order to realize the goals of the subject, physical education 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” pedagogies, and be able to “differentiate their instruction:”

There was also some variance in the principals’ beliefs about what physical education teachers should focus on when evaluating pupils. Relatively few suggested that the focus should be on “what students should know and be able to do” in physical education, including “the evaluation of physical performance” and “knowledge given to [students] by the instructor.” Instead, the majority suggested that in physical education, rather than evaluating what pupils learned, could do, or knew, the focus should be on evaluating the pupils’ levels of “participation,” “effort,” and “cooperation.” The implication of this was that it was unfair to evaluate pupils in physical education 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)

They should be evaluated by their teachers for effort, attempt, participation, and level of improvement. (Alan)

In addition, the principals offered few suggestions as to how effective physical education teachers should evaluate their pupils, offering only “observation,” the use of “rubrics,” and “anecdotal notes” as specific examples.

**Importance of physical education.** Despite some evidence to the contrary, such as views about the focus of evaluation in the subject, 16 principals stated that physical education 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)

[It] is very important for each child to become “physically educated.” Every child does not participate in after school active sports or activities. Our children are just not as actively engaged after school these days. They had rather be on the computer, playing video games, or viewing TV. (Becky)

Further, one of these principals noted that despite her views about the importance of physical education, 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 physical education 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 physical education was less important than other subjects by labeling it as a “non-academic subject” and contrasting it with “academic subjects,” or by stating its “importance” was only inferred because it was “a requirement for graduation.”

*Relative importance of physical education and extracurricular sport.* While 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, despite the principals’ claims to the contrary, was that extracurricular sport was more important than physical education. For example, a number of principals appeared to contrast the needs of pupils they labeled as “athletes” (i.e., those pupils who played on extracurricular school teams) and the rest of the student body. The implication within this contrast was that athletes somehow gained the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that a good physical education could give them by participating in competitive sport and that physical education was really for “unathletic students” who, quite rightly, did not take part in extracurricular sport. Extensions of this kind of thinking were that physical education 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” while physical education 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’ Readings of and Expectations for Physical**

**Education.** Although they were not mutually exclusive, there were some trends in the data suggesting that some groups of principals had different perspectives about and conceptions of physical education 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, and older males were more likely to focus on the goal

of leisure education. In addition, younger principals were more likely to suggest that physical education was for pupils 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, while secondary principals were more concerned with health-related fitness and leisure education.

### **Factors Influencing Principals’ Readings of and Expectations for Physical Education**

**Acculturation.** Principals’ acculturation appeared to exert a powerful influence on their conceptions of physical education. Key factors were their parents, experiences of their own physical education as children and youth, participation in school sport and informal activity as children and youth, and participation in sports and physical activity as adults.

*Parents.* Most principals relayed that their families, in general, and parents, in particular, had instilled in them a love for physical activity and stressed the importance of being and staying active:

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)

[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 of sport and physical activity to have a positive impact on their pupils.

*Experiences of physical education as children and youth.* Thirteen of the principals also reported having a “good,” “positive,” “engaging,” “enjoyable”, and “fun” physical education experience. They also recalled their physical education teachers fondly, for example, recalling that “they set the mood for the school.” These principals tended to have a relatively high value

for physical education. Moreover, the curriculum that they advocated for their own schools, the goals for that curriculum, and the characteristics they valued in their physical education teachers were virtually identical to those they had encountered as 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 [sic] 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 physical education. 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 recalled “being anxious about picking teams,” the failure of their teachers to provide “consistent” instruction, and not learning “lifelong fitness habits.” One of these principals also recalled not having physical education 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 physical education would be superior in quality to what she encountered as child:

PE should teach cooperation and teamwork; basic skills/techniques required for participation in life-long activities. It should also promote healthy lifestyles. PE should also be required for people in the band. (Grace)

Three principals, however, just accepted that what they had suffered through was “normal” and so indicated that their value of physical education 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)

*Experiences of school sport, organized youth sport, and informal activity.* Most of the principals had participated in a good deal of informal physical activity as 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 as children than the current generation. For example, they noted that their pupils 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 why they focused on health-related fitness, especially “being physically active” and having leisure education within their school physical education 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)

Virtually all 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.” Among the sports men recalled participating in were football, basketball, baseball, wrestling, and track. Those the women remembered included softball, volleyball, dance, cheerleading, karate, track, and tennis. Typical of their recollections were the following:

I was on the volleyball team. [I] enjoyed [it] very much. I was selected to the State All Star Team. (Becky)

I played rec league softball. I also earned a black belt in karate. I loved both activities. (Rachel)

Moreover, these principals were very 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 beliefs about the make-up of the physical education curriculum and the relative value of physical education 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 physical education more importance in her curriculum because she realized what she had missed.

*Participation in sport and physical activity as adults.* All but two principals had 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 physical education curriculum.

**Professional socialization.** Data clearly indicated that in contrast to the powerful impact of their acculturation on their beliefs about physical education, the influence of their professional socialization in the form of any PETE, other educational coursework, and specific training to supervise physical education teachers was negligible and weak.

*Physical education teacher education.* The two principals who had been trained as physical education teachers had different experiences in their PETE programs. Bobby recalled that:

Physical education 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. (Bobby)

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,” “come up with activities to keep students focused and engaged in learning,” and “breakdown” skills and teach them.

Those 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 physical education 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 physical education than those principals who had not received any specific training in physical education.

*Other education coursework.* Ten principals reported having “no idea” about or being “unsure” of their initial teacher education instructors’ views and beliefs about physical education. This suggests 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 physical education from their education professors:

I believed they valued PE highly. They believed in developing the whole child. (Beth)

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, but 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 the fact that their education professors “lived healthy lifestyles themselves” suggested that they saw “physical education . . . as an important discipline.” Collectively, the messages these portrayals and examples sent would seem likely to have shaped the principals’ own views positively.

*Training to supervise physical education.* Only three principals indicated that they had received formal training in how to supervise physical education teachers in their schools during their preparation to become principals or within inservice programs once they had become principals. Those who had received this kind of 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 pupils active.” There had been little focus on curriculum or pedagogy.

Those principals who had not received any of this kind of training noted that they coped with physical education by relying on their past (sometimes faulty) beliefs and values and extrapolating from other coursework within their programs:

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)

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)

### **Conclusions**

The main conclusion to be drawn from this study is that the principals who participated in it had a limited and superficial understanding of the goals of physical education, its curricula, and pedagogies. This was because the key influence on their conceptions of the subject was their acculturation, most importantly their own experiences of physical education and sport as children and youth. Conversely, their professional socialization had little or no impact on their beliefs about the subject because it was either non-existent, weak, or served to support views they had acquired through acculturation.

Not surprisingly, therefore, the principals misconceived some aspects of physical education 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., Sofu & Curtner-Smith, 2010) and by principals in previous research (e.g., Curtner-Smith et al., 2008). For example, while the main goal the principals emphasized was health-related fitness, the curriculum they advocated was the short exposure multi-activity model rather than a true health-related fitness model. This version of the multi-activity 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 sex-segregated, and allowing high-skilled boys to negotiate a curriculum with teachers that suits them to the detriment of their peers (Curtner-Smith & Sofu, 2004; Ennis, 1999). In addition, the fact that the principals appeared to know little about the different curriculum models available to physical education teachers, focused on different goals at different levels of schooling, or teaching styles employed in the physical education setting (Mosston & Ashworth, 2008), implied that physical education and extracurricular sport were synonymous but for different groups of pupils, focused on physical education teachers' character and behavior traits rather than their pedagogical skill, and advocated that pupils 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 much stronger physical education component. Such training should be focused on conveying the full range of the subject's potential goals as well as different 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 obviously be useful. Although it was beyond the scope of the current study, this 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) (Lawson, 1983a, 1983b) interacts with acculturation and professional socialization. Researchers could, for example, attempt to discover whether specific school cultures “wash out” (Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1981) and counter values and beliefs espoused during formal training or serve to support them. In addition, they might examine the influence of superintendents, teachers, parents, and children on principals’ beliefs about physical education.

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APPENDIX E

IRB Approval

November 29, 2012

Office of Institutional Review  
Institutional Review Board for the  
Protection of Human Subjects

Meredith George  
Department of Kinesiology  
College of Education  
Box 870312

THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**ALABAMA**  
R E S E A R C H

Re: IRB # 12-OR-389: "Influence of Administrators' Acculturation on their  
Reading of and Expectations for Physical Education"

Dear Ms. George,

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for  
your proposed research.

Your application has been given expedited approval according to 45 CFR part  
46. You have also been granted a waiver of written documentation of informed  
consent for the survey participants. Approval has been given under expedited  
review category 7 as outlined below:

*(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but  
not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity,  
language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or  
research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program  
evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.*

Your application will expire on November 28, 2013. If the study continues  
beyond that date, you must complete the IRB Renewal Application. If you  
modify the application, please complete the Modification of an Approved  
Protocol form. Changes in this study cannot be initiated without IRB approval,  
except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants.  
When the study closes, please complete the Request for Study Closure  
(Investigator) form.

Please use reproductions of the IRB-stamped consent forms.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this  
application, please include the assigned IRB application number.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,





105 Scott Hall Administration Building  
Box 870127  
Tuscaloosa, Alabama 35487-0127  
Phone: 205-884-6466  
Fax: 205-884-6469  
URL: [www.ualab.edu](http://www.ualab.edu)

SUBJECT CONSENT FORM FOR  
PARTICIPATION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS IN RESEARCH  
UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA

**You are being asked to be a participant in a research study.**

**The name of this study is** "Influence of Administrators' Acculturation on Their Reading of and Expectations for Physical Education."

**This study is being done** by a doctoral student, Meredith George and her faculty advisor Dr. Matthew Curtner-Smith from the University of Alabama, Department of Kinesiology.

**What is the purpose of this study-what is trying to be learned?**

I hope to learn what principals expect from their physical education class and how their acculturation influenced their beliefs.

**Why is this study important-what good will the results do?**

The data collected from this study will give a better understanding of what principals expect physical educators to do and teach in physical education and factors that lead to their beliefs. This information will give a better understanding of how physical educators can meet the expectations of principals and have a better grasp on why administrators have certain expectations of the teacher and their class.

**Why have I been asked to be in this study?**

You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are an administrator in the Shelby County and Tuscaloosa City school systems.

**How many other people will be in this study?**

Up to 120 principals will be involved in this study.

**What will I be asked to do in this study?**

As part of the study, you will be asked to do an online survey that covers your educational background, your expectations of physical educators, and your personal experiences in sports and physical activities. A small selection of principals who complete the survey will be asked to participate in a follow-up interview.

**How much time will I spend being in the study?**

This study will require approximately 10-15 minutes to complete the survey. A small selection of principals will be asked to participate in a follow-up interview. This interview will take no more than 60 minutes and may be conducted over the phone or in person.

**Will being in this study cost us anything?**

The only cost to you is the time spent during the study.

**What are the benefits of being in this study?**

There will be no direct benefits to you. However, this study will provide data to other teachers who teach middle school physical education and give them a better idea of what their principals expect from their class. The goal is to make physical education meaningful for all students, with the support of all principals.

**What are the risks (dangers or harms) to me if I am in this study?**

The nature of the data collection ensures that there is no physical or psychological risk of any kind to you.

**How will my privacy be protected?**

To protect your privacy, the survey will be completed online at the time and place of your choice. Additionally, you will not have to answer any questions that you may not feel comfortable answering.

**How will my confidentiality be protected?**

Ms. George will be the only person with access to the returned surveys and will be the only one with knowledge of the true identities of the participants. The data will be retained by the principal investigator for a period of three years. After three years, all data will be destroyed. The information provided by you will be confidential. In the event that the information collected is published in a professional journal, your confidentiality will be protected by referring to you only by pseudonym. On completion of the study the results will be made available and explained to you if you so desire.

**Do I have to participate in this study?**

No. Your participation is voluntary and you do not have to participate. You can refuse to be in it at all. If you start the study, you can stop at any time. There will be no effect on your job or relations with the University of Alabama.

**What if we have questions, suggestions, concerns, or complaints?**

If you have any questions about this research contact: Meredith George at (205) 420- 8414 or [mlgeorge@crimson.ua.edu](mailto:mlgeorge@crimson.ua.edu) or Matt Curtner-Smith at 205-348-9209 or [msmith@bamaed.ua.edu](mailto:msmith@bamaed.ua.edu). If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about your rights as a person in a research study, call Ms. Tanta Myles, the Research Compliance Officer of the University of Alabama, at 205-348-8461 or toll-free at 1-877-820-3066.

You may also ask questions, make suggestions, or file complaints and concerns through the IRB Outreach website at [http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO\\_Welcome.html](http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO_Welcome.html) or email the Research Compliance office at [participantoutreach@bama.ua.edu](mailto:participantoutreach@bama.ua.edu).

**AUTHORIZATION FOR EMAIL SURVEY ONLY:** I have read this consent statement and agree to take part in this research study. I understand that I may print off a copy of this statement to keep for my records.

**SUBJECT CONSENT FORM FOR  
PARTICIPATION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS IN RESEARCH  
UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA**

**The name of this study is** "Influence of School Administrators' Acculturation on their Reading of and Expectations for Physical Education."

**This study is being done** by a doctoral student, Meredith George and her faculty advisor Dr. Matthew Curtner-Smith from the University of Alabama, Department of Kinesiology.

**What is the purpose of this study-what is trying to be learned?**

I hope to learn what principals expect from their physical education class and how their acculturation influenced their beliefs.

**Why is this study important-what good will the results do?**

The data collected from this study will give a better understanding of what principals expect physical educators to do and teach in physical education and factors that lead to their beliefs. This information will give a better understanding of how physical educators can meet the expectations of principals and have a better grasp on why administrators have certain expectations of the teacher and their class.

**Why have I been asked to be in this study?**

You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are an administrator in the Shelby County and Tuscaloosa City school systems.

**How many other people will be in this study?**

Up to 9 administrators who completed the online survey will be asked to do a follow-up interview.

**What will I be asked to do in this study?**

You are being asked to participate in an interview as a follow-up to the survey you completed. The interview will last about an hour and will consist of questions about your views and experiences of physical education during your initial teacher preparation, during your teaching career, and during your administrative career.

**How much time will I spend being in the study?**

This interview will take no more than 60 minutes and may be conducted over the phone or in person.

**Will being in this study cost us anything?**

The only cost to you is the time spent during the study.

**What are the benefits of being in this study?**

There will be no direct benefits to you. However, this study will provide data to other teachers who teach middle school physical education and give them a better idea of what their principals expect from their class. The goal is to make physical education meaningful for all students, with the support of all principals.

The nature of the data collection ensures that there is no physical or psychological risk of any kind to you.

**How will my privacy be protected?**

To protect your privacy, you will be interviewed one-on-one with Ms. George in a private office of your choice and at a time that is convenient for you. Additionally, you will not have to answer any questions that you may not feel comfortable answering.

**How will my confidentiality be protected?**

The audio recording of the selected interviews will be erased immediately after transcription. During that time the tapes will be stored in a locked cabinet in the principal investigator's office. The data will be retained by the principal investigator for a period of three years. It will be kept locked in the principal investigator's office during that time.

After three years, all data will be destroyed. The information provided by you will be confidential. In the event that the information collected is published in a professional journal, your confidentiality will be protected by referring to you only by pseudonym.

On completion of the study the results will be made available and explained to you if you so desire.

**Do I have to participate in this study?**

No. Your participation is voluntary and you do not have to participate. You can refuse to be in it at all. If you start the study, you can stop at any time. There will be no effect on your job or relations with the University of Alabama.

**What if we have questions, suggestions, concerns, or complaints?**

If you have any questions about this research contact: Meredith George at (205) 420- 8414 or mlgeorge@crimson.ua.edu or Matt Curtner-Smith at 205-348-9209 or msmith@bamaed.ua.edu. If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about your rights as a person in a research study, call Ms. Tanta Myles, the Research Compliance Officer of the University of Alabama, at 205-348-8461 or toll-free at 1-877-820-3066.

You may also ask questions, make suggestions, or file complaints and concerns through the IRB Outreach website at [http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO\\_Welcome.html](http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO_Welcome.html) or email the Research Compliance office at participantoutreach@bama.ua.edu.

**AUTHORIZATION FOR FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEWS:** I have read this consent form. I have had a chance to ask questions. I agree to take part in this research study. I will receive a copy of this consent form to keep.

If selected for the interview, please indicate your preference for audiorecording by checking one of the two options below.

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes, you may audiorecord my interview.

\_\_\_\_\_ No, I do not want my interview recorded.

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Investigator Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX F

Principal Physical Education Survey

**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 post-secondary school educational qualifications starting with your bachelor's degree.

**B. Your current views and beliefs about physical education**

7. In the space below briefly describe what you believe the goals of your school's physical education program to be.
8. In the space below briefly describe the key teaching skills a physical education teacher should possess.
9. In the space below briefly describe the key elements of an excellent school physical education curriculum.
10. In the space below briefly describe how children and youth should be evaluated in physical education.
11. In the space below briefly explain how important you believe physical education is compared with extracurricular school sport.
12. In the space below briefly explain how important you believe physical education is compared to other school subjects students at your school are required to study.

**C. Your views on and experiences of physical education during your initial teacher preparation**

13. In the space below list the subject matter(s) which you were initially trained to teach?
14. In the space below briefly describe the extent to which those who trained you to teach valued physical education.
15. During your teacher preparation program, did you receive any training in teaching physical education? 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 physical education programming? If yes, please describe the training briefly in the space below.

**D. Your own experiences of physical education and sport as a child/youth and adult**

17. In the space below briefly describe your own experiences of school physical education as a child and youth emphasizing aspects that were positive (if any) or negative (if any).

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.

**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.