



PHENex Journal/Revue phénEPS

Pre-service Physical Education Teachers' Perceptions of their Skills, Qualities, and Experiences: Snapshots from the Past Three Decades

*Perceptions des étudiants-maîtres de leurs habiletés, qualités et expériences:
Un survol étalé sur trois décennies*

Nancy Melnychuk*
University of Alberta

Daniel Robinson*
St. Francis Xavier University

The purpose of this investigation was to examine the perceptions of female and male pre-service physical education teachers regarding the skills and qualities they possessed, and the coaching and instructional experiences in which they engaged, that would support them as future physical education teachers. Furthermore, the intent was to investigate their expectations for the final Advanced Professional Term (APT) of their physical education teacher education (PETE) program; this APT encompassed the integration of three physical education curriculum and instruction courses followed by a nine-week field experience. The perceptions of 173 pre-service teachers from three different decades (1988/1989, 1998/1999, 2008/2009) were obtained through written responses to three open-ended questions. In response to the first question (What are the skills and qualities you possess that make you think that you have the potential to become a secondary school physical education teacher?), the emergent themes of Relations, Caring, Know and Perform Sports, and Organized and Adaptable were dominant. Coaching, Camp Leadership, Teaching, and School Experience emerged as central themes in response to the second question (What previous instructional, teaching, and/or coaching experiences have you engaged in that you consider helpful as you prepare to become a secondary school physical education teacher?). The major themes that emerged from responses to the third question (What are your expectations for your final APT?) were How to Teach PE, Novel Ideas, Classroom Management, Curriculum, and Planning. Of particular interest were the similarities and differences that existed between the genders and time periods. Accordingly, the results and discussion of this investigation are purposely situated around these two notions: gender and time. The findings of this investigation might inform local, national, and international PETE programs, providing insights for potential program practice and/or reform. Such insights are offered, especially as they relate to possible practices that might be adopted by physical education pedagogues themselves.

* Co-authors, in alphabetical order

Cette enquête examine les perceptions qu'ont de leurs habiletés et qualités les étudiants-maîtres des deux sexes, ainsi que les expériences d'entraînement et d'éducation qu'ils vivent et qui pourraient les aider dans leurs futures tâches d'enseignantes et d'enseignants d'éducation physique. Elle examine aussi leurs attentes à l'égard de la dernière session professionnelle avancée (SPA) de leur programme d'enseignement de l'éducation physique. Cette SPA intègre trois programmes-cadres d'éducation physique et des cours instructifs, le tout suivi d'un stage de neuf semaines sur le terrain. Dans le cadre de l'enquête, on a donc compilé, au fil de trois décennies (1988-1989, 1998-1999 et 2008-2009), les réponses de 173 étudiants-stagiaires à trois questions ouvertes par écrit. En réponse à la première question (Quelles qualités et compétences possédez-vous qui vous donnent l'impression d'avoir le potentiel requis pour devenir un enseignant d'éducation physique au secondaire?), les thèmes dominants étaient les suivants : relations, sollicitude, connaître les sports et en faire, organisé et adaptable. La deuxième question (Examinant vos expériences passées en entraînement et en enseignement, qu'est-ce qui pourrait vous être utile, alors que vous vous apprêtez à devenir un enseignant d'éducation physique au secondaire?) a suscité les réponses suivantes : entraînement, leadership au camp, enseignement et expérience scolaire). Les réponses à la troisième question (Qu'attendez-vous de votre dernière SPA?) faisaient ressortir les grands thèmes suivants : comment enseigner l'éducation physique, idées innovatrices, gestion de la classe, programme-cadre et planification. Il était particulièrement intéressant de constater les similitudes et les différences entre les sexes et entre les époques. Par conséquent, les discussions et résultats de cette enquête tournent autour de deux notions – le sexe des répondants et l'époque à laquelle ils ont fourni leur réponse. Les résultats de cette enquête pourraient s'avérer utiles au niveau des programmes de formation des enseignants d'éducation physique locaux, nationaux et internationaux, puisqu'ils font ressortir diverses pratiques et proposent des idées de réforme. Ces observations sont d'autant plus précieuses qu'elles pourraient inspirer les pédagogues qui donnent les cours de formation des maîtres.

Context of the Study

Most individuals from the western anglosphere who enter physical education teacher education (PETE) programs might most aptly be referred to as white Caucasians (Halas, 2006; Tinning, MacDonald, Wright, & Hickey, 2001). In addition to these individuals' Anglo-Saxon origins and pale skin colour, many of them evidently also share other defining skills and characteristics. For example, they are most often able-bodied, they often possess the ability to perform one or more sports at an elite level, they have enjoyed physical education classes as students themselves, and they have usually participated in competitive interschool athletics (Cardinal, 2001; Melville & Hammermeister, 2006; Petersen, Byrne, & Cruz, 2003; Richardson & Watt, 2006). As pre-service teachers, they may believe that such personal performance expertise as skilled athletes has them well prepared and ideally suited for becoming effective physical education teachers.

Most have also experienced positive relationships with their teachers and coaches through a process previously labelled by Lawson (1988) as occupational socialization. This socialization process initially influences persons to enter the

field of physical education and later contributes to their perceptions and actions (as cultural reproductions) as teachers (Brown & Evans, 2004; Lawson). Similarly, pre-service teachers often believe their coaching orientations and coaching experiences have prepared them well for the teaching profession (Brown, 1999; Curtner-Smith, 2001). Indeed, within the North American context, pre-service physical education teachers are essentially ipso facto engaged in the “institutionalized combination of the teacher-coach” who end up “oriented toward acts of curriculum maintenance, resulting in the continuing dominance of the sport education model” (Lawson, 1988, p. 274).

According to Hopper and Sanford (2006), such favouritism toward sports, and games in particular, celebrates male physicality and male dominance, and thus, is responsible for the marginalization of females and the perpetuation of masculine physical culture and a subsequent gender (dis)order. In this regard, a coaching orientation embodies masculine attributes of competitiveness, strength, and power (Hopper & Sanford, 2005), characteristics and qualities not often valued by many female (and some male) participants in physical activity settings and physical education learning environments (Gibbons, 2008; Gibbons & Humbert, 2008; Humbert, 1995; Robinson, 2009).

Tinning et al. (2001) further suggests that pre-service physical education teachers experience induction into a subject community that observes and participates within a physical education culture, a culture which has traditionally privileged performance discourses over participation discourses. This emphasis is reinforced as PETE programs “continue to produce physical education teachers who conceive of teaching as essentially a technical matter with little sense of the social, moral, and political aspects of their work” (Tinning, 1991, p. 1). Consequently, the science of movement and the science of teaching, with technical and instrumental knowledge and skills at their core, dominate physical education teacher preparation. Despite this utilitarian focus, many pre-service teachers still complain of a theory-practice “gap” that exists within their teacher preparation program, claiming that they do not learn sufficient “hands-on” material (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Pre-service teachers hope to learn survival skills and “tricks of the trade” (Carson, 1997), believing that the acquisition of the technical skills of teaching is of utmost importance. They may believe that they are not adequately prepared to face the “real world” of teaching that confronts them first during their field experience and then again in their first years of teaching. Referring to Aoki’s (2005) understanding of competency in teaching, these pre-service teachers often live within a framework of competence or technique as instrumental action (whereby theory and practice exist in a linear relationship) as opposed to dwelling within a world where competence is viewed and experienced as thoughtful and practical action, wherein theory and practice exist within a dialectical relationship. In order for pre-service teachers to move beyond the limiting framework of everyday instrumental action, Aoki suggests they be provided with opportunities for deeply meaningful reflection to become “aware of the personal, social, cultural, and political context in which praxical activity is conducted” (p. 135). Similarly, Freire (2000) also recognized that addressing social injustices might be more fully realized through the informed action characteristic of praxis, whereby a *balance* between theory and practice is achievable. Aoki’s suggested deep and meaningful reflection does not come easily, nor does it come without questioning long-held assumptions and beliefs.

One potential space this might occur would be within teacher education programs where physical education pedagogues have both the expertise and opportunities to push and pull their university students to learn and unlearn as they engage in meaningful and liberating praxis.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of pre-service physical education teachers within three different decade “cohorts” in order to describe, analyze, and compare their beliefs about the skills and qualities which they believed would support them as soon-to-be secondary physical education teachers. Additionally, a description, analysis, and comparison of the perceived contributions of pre-service teachers’ previous coaching and instructional experiences and their expectations for the final Advanced Professional Term (APT) were also equally important. Specifically, the three research questions posed to students were:

- What are the skills and qualities you possess that make you think that you have the potential to become a secondary school physical education teacher?
- What previous instructional, teaching, and/or coaching experiences have you engaged in that you consider helpful as you prepare to become a secondary school physical education teacher?
- What are your expectations for your final APT (referring to three courses and following field experience)?

Of particular interest was an examination of any similarities and differences between the genders and three decade cohorts that might exist in the pre-service teachers’ perceptions. Accordingly, the results and discussion of this investigation are purposely situated around these two constructions: gender and time.

Methodology

Participants

The participants in this study were 173 pre-service physical education teachers from three different decade cohorts in the past twenty years. The three time periods were 1988/1989, 1998/1999, and 2008/2009. Although pre-service physical education teachers from almost all years between 1988 and 2009 completed the surveys, the researchers limited their participants to those within these particular three time periods (which included the earliest and most-recent cohorts). In 1988/1989 there were 61 participants (26 female and 35 male), in 1998/1999 there were 61 participants (25 female and 36 male), and in 2008/2009 there were 51 participants (24 female and 27 male). All of the participants were enrolled in the final term of their PETE program at a large western Canadian university (herein Canada West University) with degree-granting status. This final term (the Advanced Professional Term [APT]) was comprised of the integration of three physical education curriculum and instruction courses (9 credits) for six weeks, followed by a nine-week field experience in a junior (grades 7-9) or senior (grades 10-12) high school where pre-service teachers taught in their subject specialization of physical education.

Data Collection and Analysis

Applying case study methodology (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002), researchers examined the written responses of the pre-service teachers to gain an in-depth understanding of their perceptions of their own skills, qualities, and experiences for becoming a physical education teacher. The instrumental case, or entity (Creswell, 2003, 2005), in this investigative research was delimited to six classes of pre-service teachers enrolled in their final APT of their PETE program; these were individuals who could provide insight into the issue of perceived preparedness for teaching physical education. All consenting students completed surveys during the first day of their APT terms. A detailed analysis and interpretation of their responses to three of the survey's open-ended questions was intended to influence future practice and research, thus fulfilling another essential criterion of case study research (Merriam, 1988). Indeed, students' responses to the survey questions influenced course content for particular (and in some respects, subsequent) classes.

It is important to note that although the survey responses were appropriate for effectively gathering important information related to the research questions, such a data collection method was certainly not without limitations. Surveys have long been accepted as data collection tools for investigations involving large numbers of participants and for studies extending over periods of time (Creswell, 2005). This study reports on 173 pre-service physical education teachers' responses over a period of 20 years. Consequently, the decision to collect data by use of a survey instrument was, quite honestly, based partly on feasibility. Nonetheless, recognizing the richness of the data collected through this method, the researchers are very much aware of the potential for future interviews' contribution to, and enrichment of, this type of inquiry.

In qualitative research, the quality of the data collected and analyzed often depends on the understanding, experiences, and abilities of the researcher (Patton, 2002). Both of the researchers are former physical education teachers and current physical education pedagogues. Moreover, both have earned three degrees in education and have considerable experience teaching within the PETE program at Canada West University. This expertise and experience likely provided the added benefit of initial, and achieved, deeper understanding, which, in turn, enabled connections among ideas and the categorization of responses into appropriate emergent themes.

Initially, all responses to each of the three questions were recorded verbatim, indicating the pre-service teachers' gender and year of response. Then, as suggested by Tesch (1990), content analysis was completed by each researcher. In this process, both researchers independently read the list of written responses to each of the questions. Repeated statements that possessed significant meanings were highlighted with different codes and assigned a name or phrase based on visible content information (Morse & Field, 1995). After several readings, the systematic coding process became deductive as the researchers searched for similar themes derived from the written responses; categories and sub-themes were evaluated, renamed, and grouped with others if similarities prevailed (Morse & Field; Patton, 2002). The researchers then collaborated with one another to determine if the information they initially discovered, grouped, and named was similar (Patton). Through this process, almost all of the categories and sub-themes were the same or very similar. In the small number of occasions

where one researcher recognized something that was neglected by the other, purposeful follow-up collaborative sessions resulted in a category or sub-theme being entirely included or excluded. A decision was then made to count the number of responses representing each theme to determine the frequency of responses and to allow for greater clarity and insight in the representation and interpretation of data.

Results and Discussion

Results from this study indicate that within the past twenty years, Canada West University's PETE program has continued to attract and recruit similar types of individuals who might be described as "young, able-bodied [and] athletic" (Tinning et al., 2001, p.81). Regardless of the time period of teacher preparation, the pre-service teachers indicated possessing similar skills and qualities, and prior experience in coaching and instructional settings. They also shared common expectations for the final APT of their PETE program, suggesting that they tended not to think beyond their own positive experiences in physical education, physical activity, and sport. Lastly, they appeared to be primarily concerned with acquiring the technical skills of teaching.

The Pre-service Teachers

Over the past twenty years, Canada West University's PETE program has typically (i.e., in all six of the six years examined) attracted fewer female secondary school pre-service physical education teachers than males. The masculine majority within this PETE program occurred despite females comprising the majority of students at American (Peter & Horn, 2005) and Canadian (Christofides, Hoy, & Yang, 2006) universities throughout this particular time period. It is also noteworthy that the male majority in physical education occurred at the same time females made up the majority of those within teacher education programs (Panzer, 2006). However, that this gender gap has seemingly been minimized in the most recent cohort would be, to many, a promising observation.

The notion of hegemonic masculinity in physical education continues and still exists in many forms (Lesko, 2000; MacDonald, 1997). Constructions of masculinity tend to dictate the types of activities (e.g., competitive) and teaching models (e.g., sport education) students experience in their schools' physical education programs; this may consequently influence a female's interest in pursuing a profession as a physical education teacher. Counter arguments suggesting that some/all females are equally (cap)able and interested in such activities and teaching models, quite frankly, miss the point. Although it is recognized that *some* females do succeed and excel (and, perhaps equally important, enjoy physical education) within such masculine models, situating and normalizing the current masculine model as the ideal (to which females must adapt) is a problematic scenario for both female and male students. Dewar (1990) has previously addressed these observations; for example, the "jock" label applied by students to their peers-with-power within physical education is a "celebration and symbol of heterosexual masculinity" (p. 81). While male jocks might celebrate their enabling athletic bodies, for female jocks the opposite occurs (Dewar). Although such females might provide potential "challenges to patriarchal images of women as weak and inferior to men" (Dewar, p. 87), they

do not “really threaten male hegemony...because they develop their identities in ways that ultimately accommodate patriarchal definitions of gender” (p. 88). Also consider that while competition continues to exist within games/sports-dominated physical education programs, males’ strong win-orientation carries more capital than does females strong goal-orientation (Gill, 1986). The past and present gender order in physical education with males at its centre perpetuates a link between generations of physical education discourse, producing and negatively impacting females’ perceptions of physical education (Brown, 1999; Gibbons, 2008; Gibbons & Gaul, 2004).

As physical education majors, the pre-service teachers in this study came together in the fall APT from three different possible streams. As illustrated in Figure 1, most students typically were enrolled in a Bachelor of Education (BE) degree program in 1988 with the remainder in the Bachelor of Physical Education (BPE) after degree program, whereas by 1998 there was a marked increase in the student enrolment in the BPE/BED combined degree stream.

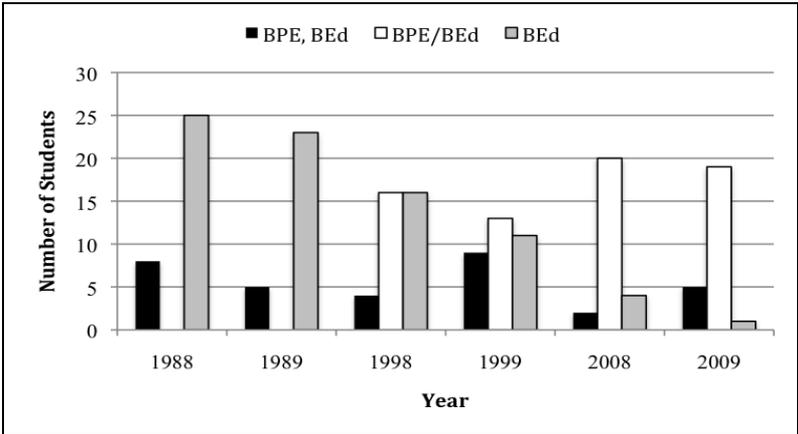


Figure 1. Enrolment in PETE through various degree programs.

This change may mean that most recently more students knew at the outset that they desired to be a teacher. In this sense, they would be able to make the initial commitment “required” of the combined degree rather than “defaulting” into an education program after completing a Kinesiology or Physical Education degree. Alternatively, perhaps they preferred to be in a stream that allowed them to continue as student athletes in more physical activity courses and performance discourses rather than engage in learning provided by compulsory and optional education courses with more participation discourses related to such topics as social, cultural, and inclusive education. And of course, as a third possibility, perhaps the increasing enrolment in the combined stream has been due to the introduction of the “new” stream some time after the 1988/1989 cohort.

Possession of Skills and Qualities (Survey Question 1)

According to Lortie (1975), due to twelve years of elementary and secondary schooling (and consequently twelve years of apprenticeship through

observation), pre-service teachers believe they already possess many of the skills and qualities necessary for teaching physical education. Perhaps unknowingly, the pre-service physical education teachers within this study had been acculturated and socialized through years of positive experiences and relationships in physical education, physical activity, and sport (Lawson, 1988). The perceptions of the participants in this study reinforced this notion of socialization as the analysis of their written responses to the first question resulted in the emergence of nine most telling themes (see Figure 2).

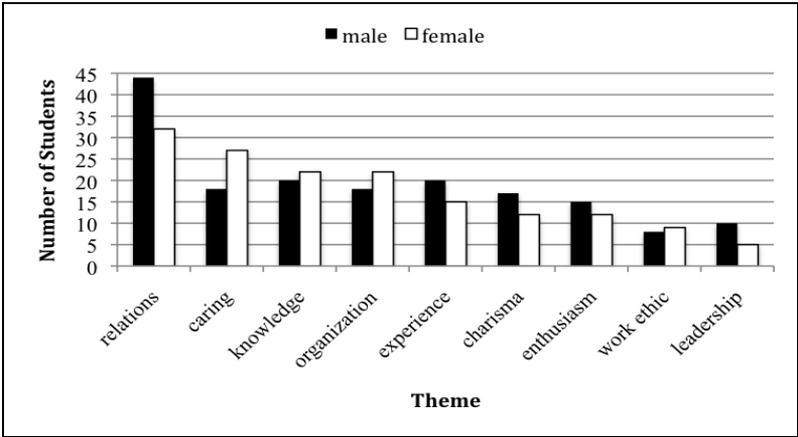


Figure 2. Themes related to perceived skills and qualities by gender.

Approximately 44% (76 responses) of pre-service teachers stated that their abilities to build *Relations* with others was evidence that they had the potential to become secondary school physical education teachers ($n_f = 32$, $n_m = 44$). They believed that they communicated well with children, youth, and/or adults and they enjoyed working with people. The following verbatim quotes reiterate these beliefs:

I can relate well to adolescents, especially boys (M, 1988).

I am able to build good relationships with youth (F, 1998).

I believe that I have a good ability at connecting with students (M, 2008).

Chorney's (2005) study of exceptional physical education teachers revealed similar findings. In his study, exceptional teachers' shared characteristics were categorized in four categories with "relating to/with students" emerging as the most important quality, followed by "student experiences gained through teaching," "self-awareness," and "passion for the field of physical education."

In relation to the pre-service teachers' perceptions of their possession of skills and qualities, the second greatest number of responses ($n_f = 27$, $n_m = 18$) were grouped under the theme, *Caring*. As evidenced by their comments, these pre-service teachers perceived themselves as caring, empathetic, compassionate, approachable, patient, and calm:

I am very approachable (F, 1988).

I feel that I am empathetic to students' needs (M, 1998).

I think that I am approachable, kind and caring (M, 2008).

There were more male than female responses regarding their perceived abilities to relate well to others and although fewer males believed that they possessed the qualities of *Caring*, the numbers increased in each time period (see Figure 3). Perhaps this increase was due to a change in traditional male roles and responsibilities within the family. For example, becoming more participatory and involved with youngsters, and thus, being perceived as more “caring” has become more acceptable and more expected of males than in the past (Oskamp & Schultz, 2005). However, given that the number of females who indicated *Caring* also increased over these three time periods, it is difficult to speculate further on this possible/potential trend; further research might be needed with respect to this observation.

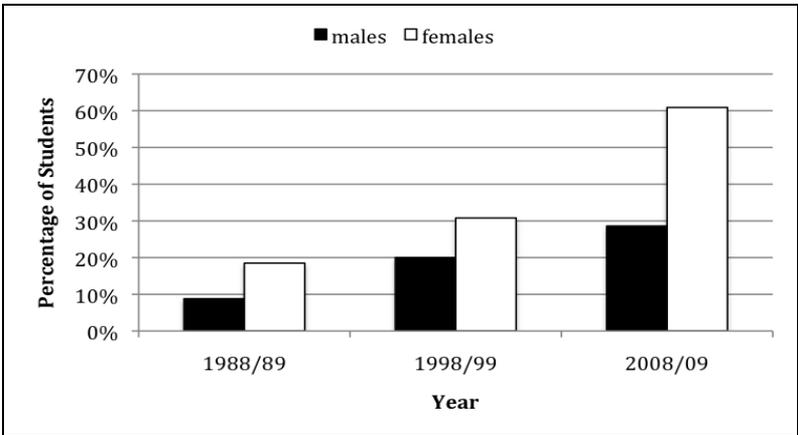


Figure 3. *Caring* responses by decade cohort for male and female students.

The theme, *Know and Perform Sports* (Figure 4), emerged as the third most popular response ($n_f = 22, n_m = 20$), with comments such as:

I know quite a bit about the core sports typically offered at a school (M, 1988).

I am an all around athlete (M, 1998).

I have skills in a variety of sports and I feel I can easily transfer my knowledge to students” (F, 2009)

Of notable interest is the decline in males’ responses and the increase in females’ responses in recent years with respect to the perceived importance of their knowledge and skills in performing sports (see Figure 4). The increase in the percentage of females indicating this theme might be related to the relative abundance of sporting opportunities available to contemporary female students. For example, in the last decade, more community and school opportunities have existed for females to engage in sport (Seefeldt & Ewing, 1999; Vest & Masterson, 2007) and more elite opportunities have been available through local, provincial, and national clubs and systems. Within urban centres, an increasing number of females have also had the opportunity to graduate from public school alternative sports programs - including ice hockey and soccer programs (Melnychuk, 2005). The simultaneous decline in the number of male students

citing their knowledge and ability related to sports (particularly evident in the inverse relationship existing within the most recent decade) may be a response to their female peers' empowerment. That is, as male students became increasingly aware of their female peers' knowledge and abilities, they may have become less inclined to indicate a particular strength in this area.

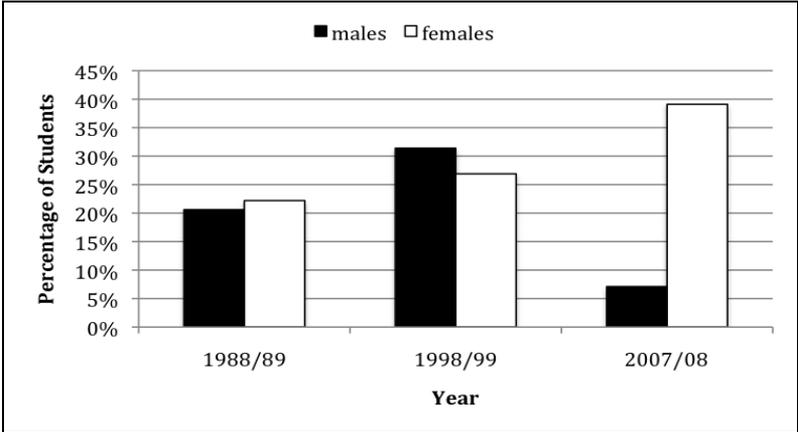


Figure 4. Know and Perform Sports responses by decade cohort for male and female students.

Coaching and Instructional Experiences (Survey Question 2)

Approximately two thirds (145 responses) of all pre-service teachers in this study have had experiences coaching in the school or community or instructing at youth sports camps. As illustrated in Figure 5, “traditional” sports such as volleyball, basketball, hockey, and soccer have dominated their coaching and instructing of physical activities and thus comprise the emergent theme of *Coaching*. This same trend is typical of the traditional games-dominated physical education curriculum found in many schools (Robinson, 2009; Spence et al., 2004).

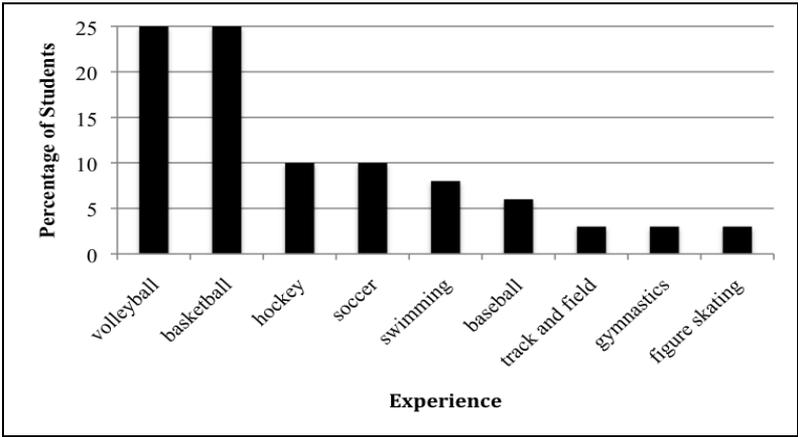


Figure 5. Previous coaching and instructing experiences.

Experiences as *Camp Leaders* (counsellors or directors and playground leaders - 42 responses), as well as *Teaching* (student teaching and/or teaching abroad - 41 responses), and *School Experiences* (study buddy, school volunteer, teacher's aide and tutor - 30 responses) were reported several times and therefore were categorized to make up the remaining three aforementioned themes (representing the responses to the second question [see Figure 6]).

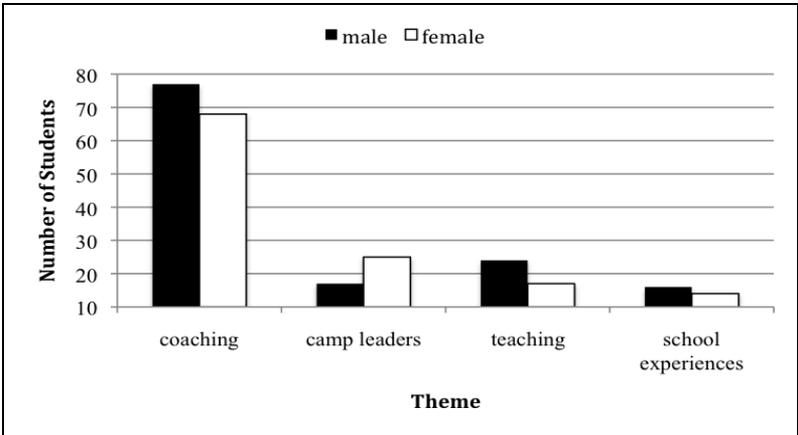


Figure 6. Previous experiences with children and/or youth by gender.

When comparing the time period and gender for the school experiences mentioned (see Figure 7), it is evident that these females tended to volunteer more frequently, with their volunteerism peaking in 1998/1999, with both males' and females' experiences in schools dropping drastically in 2008/2009. General societal trends may be responsible for this recent decline or perhaps pre-service teachers may have a different attitude regarding the need for these types of

experiences in securing a permanent teaching position upon graduation. Alternatively, given personal financial circumstances (and the significant rise in undergraduate tuition fees in the past 10 to 15 years), some of the pre-service teachers may find it necessary to work rather than to volunteer while enrolled in university classes.

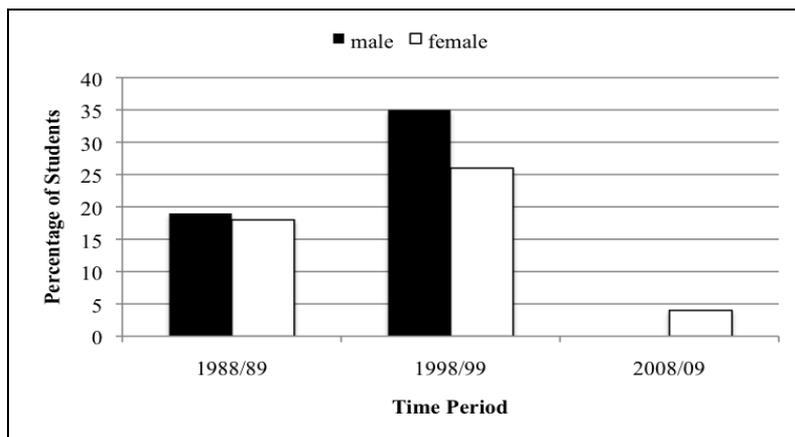


Figure 7. Percentage of pre-service teachers volunteering by gender.

Expectations for the Advanced Professional Term (Survey Question 3)

The pre-service teachers' responses to the question inquiring about their expectations for the final APT of their PETE program resulted in the emergence of seven themes (see Figure 8). Representing the most common theme, *How to Teach PE* (60 responses), were comments such as:

How to teach students in the "real" world; how to teach in special ed (M, 1988).

To learn and develop effective ways of teaching phys ed (M, 1999).

To increase my knowledge in teaching and phys ed; to improve my ability to teach skills in sports (F, 2008).

With respect to this theme, a higher percentage of males (37% as opposed to 23% for females) indicated the importance of learning how to teach. That many more males cited this as a primary course expectation might speak to their greater focus on the technocratic, performance, and utilitarian aspects of teaching.

The theme *Novel Ideas* (43 responses), incorporated statements such as:

I want to learn new activities to teach as my experiences have been dominated by hockey (M, 1988).

To learn new and interesting games/sports to play with my classes (M, 1999).

To get some new ideas for teaching physical education to secondary students (F, 2008).

The pre-service teachers also expressed an interest in learning more diverse physical activities appropriate for teaching physical education classes. As public school students, they may have participated in physical education programs with a limited number of predictable staple activities such as volleyball, basketball,

track and field, and soccer (Robinson, 2009; Spence et al., 2004). With provincial physical education (and athletics) programs typically limited in such a way (Spence et al.), it is possible that these pre-service teachers were responding to the fact that many of their personal playing and coaching experiences lacked such diversity and variety. That is, they may have been aware that their experiences were limited and that gaining knowledge of, and exposure to, a broader range of activities had the potential to benefit both themselves and their future students. Closer examination of the data revealed that, regardless of the time period, females expressed a greater interest in acquiring novel ideas related to ways of teaching as well as exposure to new activities. By 2008/2009, less need to learn new/novel activities is indicated by both genders; this may be attributed to the fact that their experiences in secondary school physical education may have included more variety and diversity as many of their teachers would have graduated more recently from a PETE program similar to the present one.

References to learning *Classroom Management* techniques (33 responses) as an expectation for their PETE program were grouped together as another theme. Typical of many beginning teachers (Kagan, 1992; Wodlinger, 1990), these pre-service teachers expressed a desire to become more adept at managing students in the various learning environments. Some of their comments were:

Classroom management techniques so positive experience for all (M, 1988).

I am expecting some class interaction and a chance to learn some practical advice on managing a class during a phys ed session (F, 1998).

To learn a few management strategies for physical education (F, 2008).

Statements that directly related to the curriculum as course content mandated by provincial government comprised the theme, *Curriculum*. The pre-service teachers expressed the following desires:

To learn more about the curriculum and how to implement it (F, 1988).

To learn more about curriculum and how to go about setting up for your first year of teaching (F, 1998).

To understand how the PE curriculum can be implemented to fit all lesson plans and how it can be covered in one year (F, 2009).

Closely related was another theme, *Planning*, which included specific comments about lesson, unit, and yearly planning. Some examples were:

Become better at lesson planning but particularly learn how to plan a whole unit (M, 1988).

To learn about unit plans (M, 1998).

That I learn how to develop and implement a quality semester-long PE program (M, 2009).

Those pre-service teachers' responses (19) that reiterated a hope to improve as a result of the courses and field experience of their final APT were categorized under the emergent theme of *Self-Improvement*. Representing this theme were statements such as:

I want to learn to teach to the best of my abilities with a constant emphasis on growing as a teacher (M, 1988).

To gain confidence/momentum to get into a classroom (F, 1998).

To help get 'polished' as a teacher and to prepare me to transition into the work force (F, 2008).

A final group of responses (11) expounding a similar idea of "wanting to enjoy it" (F, 1989) and "wanting to have fun" (F, 1999) were collected under the

theme, *Have Fun*. As in previous studies involving school students (Gibbons, 2008; Humbert, 1995; Park & Wright, 2000), more female respondents indicated that a physical education experience must be fun. Historically, within physical education, female students' notion of fun calls for non-traditional activities, reduced emphasis on competition and the use of more individualized assessment techniques (Gibbons, Wharf Higgins, Gaul, & Van Gyn, 1999; Humbert, 2006). However, Robinson (2009) cautions that the idea of fun as an explicit goal of a quality physical education program ought not to supersede the prescribed student learning outcomes related to knowledge, skills, and attitudes. The following figure (Figure 8) illustrates these seven emergent themes and compares the frequency/popularity of male and female responses for each theme.

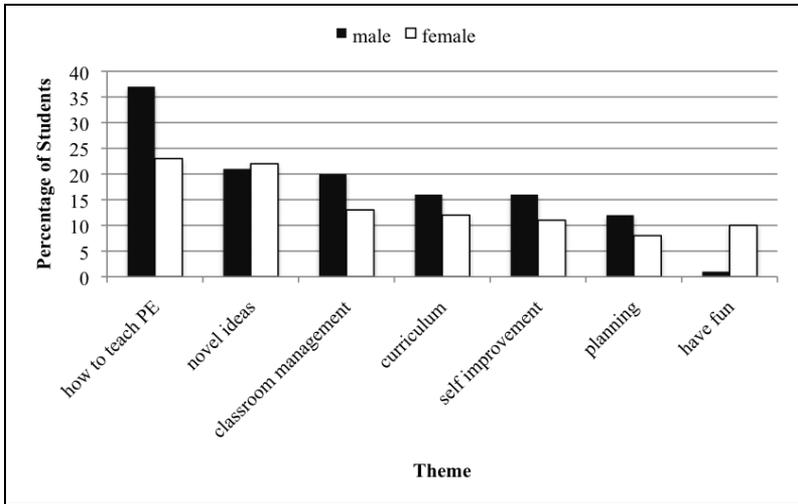


Figure 8. Students' expectations for APT by gender.

When all responses from the four themes that related to acquiring “teaching knowhow” are combined (i.e., *How to Teach PE*, *Classroom Management*, *Curriculum*, and *Planning*), the emphasis on the need for the acquisition of technical skills is prevalent. It appears that males were more concerned with technical skills as, regardless of the time period, the frequency of their responses were greater than those of the females. Nonetheless, both male and female pre-service teachers' comments reflect an interest in learning the “survival skills” of teaching.

It is likely that the pre-service teachers' responses reflect engagement at the instrumental level wherein most appear to perceive the world of teaching through a technical lens. At this stage, according to vanManen (1977), the teacher as technician is concerned with describing, analyzing and evaluating instructional skills or competencies and providing suggestions for improvement. Some of the “student” teachers are concerned with goals, assumptions about learners, subject matter and milieu, thus representing the practical level. Yet very few indicated that they perceived themselves as being focussed on moral and ethical considerations, taking into account the broader historical, social and political

context, wherein the teacher is concerned with developing a humane learning environment where all learners are included and treated with respect and dignity (vanManen).

Insights and Recommendations for PETE

The successes that motivate students to become physical education teachers may be the same factors that lead them to perpetuate a white, male, able-bodied dominant culture within the physical education field and learning environments. Moreover, pre-service physical education teachers are being educated by teacher educators who are also most often of Anglo-Saxon origin (Halas, 2006). As the results of this study indicate, pre-service teachers have persisted over time in considering their personal knowing and performing of sports important to the teaching of physical education. They have maintained these preferences in teaching their students, thus continuing, and contributing to, a recurring cycle of masculine domination in sport. In both the past and present, the results of many studies have revealed the negative effects of a male dominated philosophy prevalent in planning, teaching, and assessing in the physical education teaching-learning environments (Gibbons & Gaul, 2004; Hopper and Sanford, 2006).

Brown (1999) argues that neophyte physical education teachers, in an effort to accommodate the social expectations placed upon them, draw upon their background experience, and, in so doing, shift their identities towards a complicit masculine teaching identity. Gender as a social construction has had a powerful impact on the way that physical education in schools has evolved throughout history and continues to shape the way physical education is offered in schools today (Brown & Evans, 2004; Curtner-Smith, 2001). Although unintentional, this situation presents a dilemma that serves to perpetuate a link between generations of physical education discourse and practice, helping to reproduce and legitimize masculinity and the gender order in physical education (Brown).

Although several pre-service teachers stated that their ability to build relationships with others supported their belief in already possessing appropriate skills and qualities for teaching, they did not express any interest in acquiring knowledge concerning diversities among students and within society. That these types of comments were absent might indicate that they may be less concerned about learning about their students' diverse needs and abilities or that they were unaware of a necessity to do so. Rather, they perceived that learning about the technical skills of teaching was more important. It is also possible that in recent years, pre-service teachers have personally experienced relations with fellow students of diverse socio-cultural backgrounds, who exhibit a wide variety of needs, skills, abilities, and interests. Yet personal information gathered from these pre-service teachers' surveys state that 90% are from predominantly white, rural regions. Their written responses indicate that they want to learn about "what" to teach and "how" to teach but are unaware of the significance of learning about today's Canadian¹ students who live within a more global, multicultural, multi-gendered, and multi-abled society.

In light of the findings of this study, PETE programs should be open to revisitation and reform. It is essential that pre-service teachers are provided with opportunities to build upon their skills and attributes in creating positive relationships with others. Knowledge, skills, and attributes can be enhanced by the ongoing integration of a focus on diversity throughout an entire program of

theory and practice. Such integration might complement an existing course on diversity and inclusion, often taught in isolation if they, in fact, presently exist (Melnychuk, Robinson, Randall, Chorney, & Lu, 2007). School-based experiences that consider differences in gender, ethnicity, and (dis)ability, and that enable practice in motivating *all* students should be an integral component of PETE programs. Perhaps then the cycle may be broken. Students other than those who are white, able-bodied males will become physical education teachers of children and youth. The performance-based discourses which overshadow participation discourses in PETE programs across Canada might be tempered to include a pedagogical, socio-cultural, inclusive focus with less emphasis on skilled performance (Melnychuk et al., 2007). With this, pre-service teachers may then be more inclined to enrol in physical activity courses other than those with which they are already highly familiar and in which they demonstrate expertise. Such revisions would require the inclusion of more cultural, sociological, and politically-oriented courses, thus increasing students' awareness, knowledge, and understanding of participation discourses (Tinning et al., 2001) necessary for acquiring and applying understanding of students and diverse teaching strategies and styles. Teacher-educators would promote more successfully competence and confidence in student-centered teaching styles through modelling, and providing more opportunities for pre-service teachers to practice with "real" students. These changes could provide pre-service teachers with alternative views to teaching that do not reinforce particular coaching orientations often associated with traditional (male) sports such as basketball, volleyball, soccer, and hockey. Requiring volunteer school experience other than in coaching may also expand their worldview and practice.

There is a need to recognize some of the consequences of pursuing performance pedagogy within its technocratic discourse. Beginning teachers are presently confronted with situations that bear little relevance for which they have been trained. In this sense, the technocratic discourse characterizing teacher education programs does not adequately prepare pre-service teachers for the "complicated resistances [they] bear when they confront the imperatives of social change" (Britzman, 1992, p. 153). Tinning (1991) suggests PETE programs "may be producing and reproducing many of the unjust social practices that characterize many contemporary education experiences" (p. 17). Changes in practice in the field, as well as within university coursework, could help dissuade pre-service teachers from perpetuating technical skills-oriented teaching practices within non-inclusive learning environments in physical education. The cycle needs to be interrupted and changes need to be implemented to entice all students to consider a career as a physical education teacher, rather than only student athletes and student coaches.

Let us learn from our history. While building upon the skills and qualities that pre-service teachers already often possess, we need to enlighten them to participate in authentic reflective practice and assist them in developing beyond the initial instrumental stage while they are still pre-service teachers. Throughout their field experiences, teacher candidates need be encouraged to experiment with a variety of teaching styles without fear of reprimand or failure. They should have opportunities to observe inclusive student-centered teaching by their mentor teachers, as well as by their teacher educators. School districts might also help by hiring new physical education teachers on the basis of effective teaching and not

on successful coaching or playing history in a traditional sport. Continued investigative collaborative research among teachers, pre-service teachers, and teacher educators could provide greater insight into the effects of realizing such possibilities.

Today's (as yesterday's) pre-service physical education teachers come from a largely homogenous group; this is problematic. In an effort to attract pre-service physical education teachers who are more representative of the diverse student populations (and, in turn, also of society), perhaps teacher educators could engage in a more proactive advocacy and recruiting role to attract future students. As teacher educators, we might better serve our end users, students themselves, through such actions. By attending to how pre-service teachers are chosen, by focusing on participation discourses at the purposeful expense of performance discourses within their teacher education programs, by encouraging pre-service teachers to explore and understand diversities in their students (and their teaching), and by challenging their worldviews, future physical education teachers might be more able to encounter, and excel in, the post-modern world in which they soon find themselves.

References

- Aoki, T. T. (2005). Competence in teaching as instrumental and practical action: A critical analysis (1984). In W. F. Pinar and R. L. Irwin (Eds.). *Curriculum in a new key: The collected works of Ted T. Aoki* (pp. 125-136). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Britzman, D. (1992). Decentering discourses in teacher education: Or, the unleashing of unpopular things. In K. Weiler and C. Mitchell (Eds.). *What schools can do: Critical pedagogy and practice* (pp. 151-176). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Brown, D. (1999). Complicity and reproduction in teaching physical education. *Sport, Education and Society*, 4(2), 143-160.
- Brown, D., & Evans, J. (2004). Reproducing gender? Intergenerational links and the male PE teacher as a cultural conduit in teaching physical education. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, 23(1), 48-70.
- Cardinal, B. J. (2001). Role modeling attitudes and physical activity and fitness promoting behaviors of HPERD professional and preprofessionals. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 72(1), 84-90.
- Carson, T. (1997). Reflection and its resistances: Teacher education as a living practice. In T. Carson and D. Sumara (Eds.) *Action research as a living practice* (pp.77-91). New York: Peter Lang.
- Chorney, D. (2005). *A case study of exceptional physical education teachers*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Alberta.
- Christofides, L. N., Hoy, M., & Yang, L. (2006). *The gender imbalance in participation in Canadian universities (1977-2003)*. Department of Economics, University of Guelph working paper, pp. 30.
- Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Thousand Oakes, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. W. (2005). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.

- Curtner-Smith, M. (2001). The occupational socialization of a first-year physical education teacher with a teaching orientation. *Sport, Education and Society*, 6(1), 81-105.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2006). Constructing 21st-century teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 57(3), 300-314.
- Dewar, A. (2000). Oppression and privilege in physical education: Struggles in the negotiation of gender in a university programme. In D. Kirk & R. Tinning (Eds.), *Physical education, curriculum and culture: Critical issues in the contemporary crisis* (pp. 67-100). Bristol, PA: The Falmer Press.
- Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum.
- Gibbons, S. (2008). Female student perceptions of grade 5 physical education. *Physical & Health Education Journal*, 74(3), 14-19.
- Gibbons, S. L. & Gaul, C. A. (2004). Making physical education meaningful for young women: Case study in educational change. *AVANTE*, 10(2), 1-16.
- Gibbons, S. L., & Humbert, M. L. (2008). What are middle girls looking for in physical education? *Canadian Journal of Education*, 31(1), 167-186.
- Gibbons, S., Wharf Higgins, J., Gaul, C., & Van Gyn, G. (1999). Listening to female students in high school physical education. *AVANTE*, 5(2), 1-20.
- Gill, D. L. (1986). Competitiveness among females and males in physical activity classes. *Sex Roles*, 15(5), 233-247.
- Halas, J. (2006). Developing a white race-consciousness: A foundation for culturally relevant physical education for Aboriginal youth. In E. Singleton & A. Varpalotai (Eds.), *Stones in the sneaker: Active theory for secondary school physical and health educators* (pp. 155-182). London, ON: The Althouse Press.
- Hopper, T., & Sanford, K. (2005, April). *'Teacherly conversations' within school integrated teacher education courses: Creating intersecting communities of practice for transformative education*. Paper presented at the meeting of the American Education Research Association, Montreal, PQ.
- Hopper, T., & Sanford, K. (2006). Masculinity in physical education: Socialization of new recruits. In E. Singleton & A. Varpalotai (Eds.), *Stones in the sneaker: Active theory for secondary school physical and health educators* (pp. 255-276). London, ON: The Althouse Press.
- Humbert, M. L. (1995). On the sidelines: The experiences of young women in physical education classes. *AVANTE*, 1(2), 58-77.
- Humbert, M. L. (2006). "Listening for a change": Understanding the experiences of students in physical education. In E. Singleton & A. Varpalotai (Eds.), *Stones in the sneaker: Active theory for secondary school physical and health educators*. London, ON: The Althouse Press.
- Kagan, D. M. (1992). Professional growth among preservice and beginning teachers. *Review of Education Research*, 62(2), 129-169.
- Lawson, H. (1988). Occupational socialization, cultural studies, and the physical education curriculum. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, 7(4), 265-288.
- Lesko, N. (2000). Preparing to teach coach: Tracking the gendered relations of dominance on and off the football field. In N. Lesko (Ed.). *Masculinities at school* (pp. 187-212). London, UK: Sage.
- Lortie, D. (1975). *Schoolteacher: A sociological study*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

- MacDonald, D. (1997). The feminisms of gender equity in physical education. *CAHPERD Journal*, 63(1), 4-8.
- Melnychuk, N. (2005, August). *Female physical education student teachers at a sport alternative public school*. Paper presented at the 15th Congress of the International Association of Physical Education and Sport for Girls and Women, Edmonton, AB.
- Melnychuk, N., Robinson, D., Randall, L., Chorney, D., & Lu, C.. (2007, October). *Researching physical education across Canada: Socially and culturally responsive physical education*. Paper presented at the Historic Traditions and Future Directions of Research on Teaching and Teacher Education in Physical Education Conference, Pittsburgh, PA, October 11.
- Melville, D. S., & Hammermeister, J. (2006). Pre-service physical educators: Their demographics, wellness practices, and teaching interests. *Physical Educator*, 63(2), 69-77.
- Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Boss.
- Morse, J. M., & Field, P. A. (1995). *Qualitative research methods for health professionals*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Oskamp, S., & Schultz, P. W. (2005). *Attitudes and Opinions*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Panzer, A. (2006). *Gender differences in university graduates by field of study*. OECD Education at a Glance 2006. Paris: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.
- Park, R., & Wright, J. (2000). Through their eyes: An investigation into the physical activity needs and interests of young women. *ACHPER Healthy Lifestyles Journal*, 47(3-4), 15-20.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Peter, K., & Horn, L. (2005). *Gender differences in participation and completion of undergraduate education and how they have changed over time*. National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, DC: U. S. Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences.
- Petersen, S., Byrne, H., & Cruz, L. (2003). The reality of fitness for pre-service teachers: What physical education majors "know and can do." *The Physical Educator*, 60(1), 5-14.
- Richardson, P. W., & Watt, H. M. G. (2006). Who chooses teaching and why? Profiling characteristics and motivations across three Australian universities. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 34(1), 27-56.
- Robinson, D. B. (2009). *Understanding physical education attitudes: An investigation of students' experiences, beliefs, feelings, and motivations*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Alberta.
- Seefeldt, V. D., & Ewing, M. E. (1999). Youth sports in America: An Overview. *The President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports Research Digest*, 2(11), 1-19.
- Spence, J. C., Melnychuk, N., Mandigo, J. L., Marshall, D., Schwartz, M., Thompson, L., et al. (2004). A descriptive profile of physical education teachers and related program characteristics in Alberta. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 50(1), 87-102.

- Tesch, R. (1990). *Qualitative research: Analysis types and software tools*. New York: Falmer.
- Tinning, R. (1991). Teacher education pedagogy: Dominant discourses and the process of problem setting. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, *11*(1), 1-20.
- Tinning, R., MacDonald, D., Wright, J., & Hickey, C. (2001). *Becoming a physical education teacher: Contemporary and enduring issues*. Frenchs Forest, AU: Pearson Education.
- vanManen, M. (1977). Linking ways of knowing with ways of being practical. *Curriculum Inquiry*, *6*(3), 205-228.
- Vest, B., & Masterson, G. Title IX and its effect on sports programs in high school and collegiate athletics. *Coach and Athletic Director*, *77*(5), 60-62.
- Wodlinger, M. G. (1990). A case study in the use of guided reflection. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, *36*, 115-132.

¹ The authors recognize the irony in this use of language. By “Canadian students” the authors are speaking of those students taught in schools within Canada, regardless of citizenship.