

## **SUMMARY REPORT OF KEY FINDINGS**

### **New South Wales Catholic Education Primary Schools**

#### **How are Primary Education Health & Physical Education (HPE) teachers' best prepared?**

Dr. Timothy Lynch – Monash University, Faculty of Education.

#### **The Context of the Research**

This project investigates Primary School Principal perceptions of a University Pre-service Teacher Education course where the graduate teacher is qualified as a generalist primary classroom teacher and a Health and Physical Education specialist. Health and Physical Education (HPE) as an Australian curriculum learning area is associated with holistic lifelong health and wellbeing.

Research suggests that the optimum time for children to learn and refine their motor skills and to be introduced to positive HPE experiences is during preschool and early primary school years. This project investigates such research through the perceptions of principals within the context of Catholic Education Schools in New South Wales.

The overarching research question is:

1. What are Primary School Principals' perceptions of a Bachelor of Primary Education (Health and Physical Education) course and testamur? (A course where graduate teachers are generalist primary teachers and specialist Health and Physical Education teachers).

Supplementary research questions that generated data include:

1. Who teaches HPE in Primary schools?
2. If a HPE teacher is employed, do they have HPE specific qualifications?
3. Do Principals prefer to have a HPE specialist teacher to teach HPE?
4. Would a testamur/ certificate that read "Bachelor of Primary Education (Health and Physical Education)" assist Principals with the employment of staff?
5. Do Principals find a course that qualifies teachers to be generalist classroom teachers and HPE specialists of value?

## Significance of Research

The Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) key responsibilities inform outcomes that the Department strives to achieve within its birth-to-adulthood learning and development agenda. The first listed outcome for Children 0 – 8 years is:

- Children have the best start to life to achieve optimal health, development and wellbeing  
(<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/department/Pages/default.aspx>)

The Western Australian Government Physical Activity Taskforce developed the Active Living for All: A Framework for Physical Activity in Western Australia 2012-2016. This Framework and strategies within were designed to increase physical activity amongst children. The Framework was prioritised after the ‘WA Child and Adolescent Physical Activity and Nutrition Survey’ indicated that less than half of all WA students achieved the National Australian Physical Activity Guidelines recommended levels of 60 minutes per day. The New South Wales Education & Communities Department state that “the health of students is relevant to their learning and is important to schools” and that “Principals, staff, parents, health professionals and students all have a role to play in the effective support of students’ health needs” (<http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/studentssupport/studenthealth/>).

Furthermore the department explicitly lists the Personal Development, Health and Physical Education key learning area as how schools support and develop students’ health.

Australian Education Departments’ health and wellbeing outcomes, Frameworks and statements all directly relate to the Health and Physical Education learning area:

In Health and Physical Education students develop the knowledge, understanding and skills to support them to be resilient, to develop a strong sense of self, to build and maintain satisfying relationships, to make health-enhancing decisions in relation to their health and physical activity participation, and to develop health literacy competencies in order to enhance their own and others’ health and wellbeing. (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2012, p. 2).

Health and Physical Education (HPE) as a learning area in Australia was embedded in phase three of the recent national curriculum reform. Within New South Wales both Catholic Education and government schools use the Australian Curriculum as the basis for their teaching and learning programs. There is potential for the national framework ‘Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education’ (AC:HPE) to enable curriculum change and quality HPE for all children across Australia’s geographically large country. This research investigates principals’ perceptions of a university pre-service primary teacher course designed specifically for this purpose. Such a course would involve for the first time in Australia’s history, primary education pre-service teachers being given the opportunity within their university courses to specialise in developmentally appropriate ‘Health and Physical Education’.

Principals' experiences and insights matter. "We know that school leadership must be at the centre of our reform effort. In our decentralised system where principals have a high degree of autonomy it is they who have the power to improve the quality of teaching." (DEECD, 2012, p. 3). Furthermore, such a course would be timely as there has been growing concern for universities improved preparation of teachers for the school environment (DEECD, 2012). A survey conducted by McKenzie, Rowley, Weldon and Murphy (2011) found that less than 30 per cent of principals felt that graduate teachers had acquired important skills for effective teaching and learning. It is pertinent that Principals are considered and opinions valued.

## Literature Review

The Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) draft shape paper for HPE, espouses quality experiences for children and the importance of having these from the very beginnings of schooling. What is accentuated within this paper is one particular aspect of quality HPE; that it is 'developmentally appropriate'. The priority for Health and Physical Education is:

to provide ongoing, developmentally appropriate opportunities for students to practise and apply the knowledge, understanding and skills necessary to maintain and enhance their own and others' health and wellbeing. (ACARA, 2012, p. 4).

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the HPE school curriculum within Australian schools was considered to have been in crisis (Tinning, Kirk, Evans and Glover, 1994; Dinan-Thompson, 2009). Curriculum research indicates that the 'crisis' was experienced at an international level also (Dinan-Thompson, 2009, p. 4). 'In-house' discussions of crisis at HPE conferences and in journals led to a Senate Inquiry (Commonwealth of Australia, 1992) into the state of physical education and sport within Australian Education systems. The findings in the report by the Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Recreation and the Arts (Commonwealth of Australia, 1992) confirmed the 'in-house' discussions of crisis (Dinan-Thompson, 2009). The findings included that there was in fact a decline in the opportunities for quality HPE in Australian schools although paradoxically there was unanimous support for the learning area. The problems were mainly with resources and the time allocation to the key learning area which resulted in a drastic decline in children's skill levels and physical fitness (Tinning, Kirk, Evans, and Glover, 1994). Another major problem was that "suitably qualified physical education teachers were not being employed to teach physical education and school sport to all children" (Commonwealth of Australia, 1992, p. xiv). There was also no required accreditation or formal training in physical or sport education as a condition of employment for graduating primary school teachers (Moore, 1994). Webster (2001, p. 1) recommended that "pre-service education of primary school teachers include mandatory units directly related to the content strands of the syllabus, with further opportunities for teachers to specialize in PE courses".

These issues, according to the Australian Council for Health, Physical Education and Recreation (ACHPER) still exist today. "It is true that some schools struggle to

provide quality PE and sport, in particular in primary schools” (2011). Furthermore, some graduate teachers have recently completed teaching degrees without studying any units in Health and Physical Education and are then responsible for implementing this learning area in schools. Health and Physical Education primary specialist teachers are only employed sporadically within primary schools across Australia with, according to Dinan-Thompson (2009, p. 48) questions often raised about “who is teaching HPE, and who is deemed competent to teach HPE in schools”. Hence, the recommendations of a Senate Inquiry made 20 years ago appear to not have been achieved.

A study released in 2013, ‘The wellbeing of young Australians’, conducted by Australian Research Alliance for Children & Youth (ARACY) involved over 3700 people. This study evidenced that Australian children and youth are not doing as well as they should. Australia ranked in the top third of OECD countries for around one-quarter of the indicators (12 out of 46). Areas of concern where Australia was ranked in the bottom third included “jobless families, infant mortality, incidence of diabetes and asthma, young people in education, 3-5 year olds in preschool and carbon dioxide emissions” (ARACY, 2013, p. 4). Despite the rhetoric about children wellbeing and social justice, this report indicated that there has been no improvement in the majority of areas from the previous report in 2008. The report summary states:

if we want to change – to improve – we need to measure and report on the things we believe are most important for a successful Australian society. Few would disagree that one of the most important of these are the environments we can influence to help parents and others ensure our children have the opportunity to be healthy and to develop well. (ARACY, 2013, p. 26).

It is axiomatic that primary schools’ play a key role in children’s health and wellbeing. Kirk (2005) argues that early learning experiences are crucial to continuing involvement in physical activity and that currently only particular sections of the population are in a position to access quality experiences in schools and sport clubs. Furthermore, “the contribution of PE specialists in secondary schools may come too late to impact a majority of children in relation to their competence, perceptions and motivation” (Kirk, 2005, p. 240). Hence, Health and Physical Education teachers (primary specialist or generalist classroom) need to be prepared to deliver quality Health and Physical Education lessons across all strands, which include Physical activity, Health and Personal/Social Development. This involves the teacher having the knowledge and understanding of the various pedagogies that exist in HPE and the awareness to choose the most appropriate for each particular learning experience (Tinning, 1999). This often involves choosing critical, socially just pedagogies rather than the traditional dominant science and performance-based pedagogies for HPE. Critical socially just pedagogies will necessitate teachers being trained and educated in this mode of teaching (Tinning, 2004).

Physical Education (PE) courses specifically tailoring to children in the 3-11 age range, where teachers are qualified generalist classroom teachers with a specialism in PE are offered in the United Kingdom. What at times has been offered in Australia are quasi HPE courses where pre-service primary teachers may be able to choose electives in general sport often relating to industry or secondary physical education.

While these offer opportunities for enthusiasts to study areas of interest, ideal candidates for primary HPE specialists, unfortunately they lack the ‘developmentally appropriate’ key aspect that the AC:HPE emphasises. Hence, specialist HPE teachers working within primary schools are often not qualified generalist classroom primary teachers (often secondary trained), and may not have had opportunities to develop pedagogy specifically for teaching children in the primary school sector, or they are generalist classroom teachers with no HPE specialisation.

### *Catholic Education*

Research suggests that the HPE key learning area is particularly significant within Catholic schools. It is argued that in the physical dimension students can be presented with many practical and social experiences that require living and reflecting upon Catholic religious traditions and gospel values (Lynch, 2004).

Research indicates there are strong connections made by teachers and students between HPE and the Religious Education curriculum (Lynch, 2013). Furthermore, literature evidences physicality having strong connections to spirituality, both throughout the history of Catholic education and in contemporary curriculum documents (Lynch, 2014). “Data gathered in a qualitative study supported the literature, evidencing that physical activities, and personal development strands in the HPE learning area are closely associated with children’s everyday school community and culture. Thus, offering potential, arguably more so than other learning areas, for the development of spirituality” (Lynch, 2014, p. 17).

Within Catholic schools principals play a major role in the success of the implementation of the HPE program as they are directly responsible for supporting the development, implementation and monitoring of the curriculum (Brisbane Catholic Education, 2006). Principals decide whether or not to employ a HPE specialist teacher, who that person will be, their required qualifications and experiences (Lynch, 2007).

## Summary Report

This study indicates two key findings:

1. Principals in New South Wales Catholic Education primary schools of various sizes and locations were split on whether they preferred to have specialist HPE teachers in their schools. Comments strongly supported HPE specialists in primary schools although only just over half preferred to have a HPE specialist teacher in their school (52.4%).
2. Principals in New South Wales Catholic Education primary schools were in strong support of a course that qualifies teachers to be generalist classroom teachers and HPE specialists

Principals surveyed represented eight New South Wales Dioceses, and schools of various enrolment sizes (Table 1).

Table 1 QLD Dioceses represented by Catholic Education school principals surveyed

Diocese	Size of school enrolment				
	Small schools (less 100)	Medium (100-300)	Large (300 – 600)	Very large (more 600)	Total
Wilcannia Forbes	1	1	0	0	2
Wagga Wagga	1	0	0	0	1
Bathurst	2	1	0	0	3
Parramatta & Broken Bay	0	1	2	0	3
Maitland- Newcastle	1	2	0	0	3
Armidale	1	2	1	0	4
Lismore	1	1	2	1	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>21</b>

- 11 principals surveyed (18 answered the question) preferred to have HPE specialist teachers in their school (61.1%).

Comments supported HPE specialists in primary schools although only just over half of New South Wales Catholic Education principals preferred to have a HPE specialist teacher in their school (52.4%). Principals who did not prefer to have a specialist HPE teacher were from rural and regional areas where availability of HPE specialists may be limited. One principal shared that “using specialist teachers in small schools cuts down the flexibility to offer PE/ sport and other activities”.

Comments suggested that quality was provided by HPE specialist teachers through expertise, knowledge of the subject, priority of the learning area, skill development and passion. Principals believed these qualities enabled a comprehensive and safe program. Also, it was mentioned that most classroom teachers have many areas to cover and that it would be “one less task”. HPE specialists can also provide teachers with non-contact time, referred to as relief from face (RFF).

- 90.5% of principals, believed a course that qualifies teachers to be generalist classroom teachers and HPE specialists would be or would probably be valuable

No	0	
Maybe	2	(9.5%)
Probably	5	(23.8%)
Yes	14	(66.7%)

- 80.9% of principals believed a testamur/ certificate that read “Bachelor of Primary Education (Health and Physical Education)” would assist or probably assist them with the employment of staff?

No	1	(4.8%)
Maybe	3	(14.3%)
Probably	5	(23.8%)
Yes	12	(57.1%)

- There were 4 schools (19.0%) where a HPE specialist teacher (or teacher in the role) was responsible for part or all of the implementation of the learning area

This included:

Classroom teachers	14	(66.7%)
Classroom and outsourced	3	(14.3%)
Specialist HPE	2	(9.5%)
Specialist HPE and classroom	2	(9.5%)

- 3 principals (14.3%) stated that their HPE specialist teacher was a qualified specialist, 8 principals (38.1%) stated that their HPE/PE specialist did not have specific qualifications and 10 did not answer the question.
- When employing staff, 18 principals (85.7%) indicated that they look at the university degree certificate/ testamur of potential staff.
- When employing staff, 2 principals (9.5%) said they do not peruse university transcripts.

A high number of principals do peruse transcripts (90.5%).

- Principals' commented on key attributes of a good HPE teacher. The top responses were:

HPE curriculum knowledge & dev appropriate pedagogy	13 (mentions)
Passion/ interest/ enthusiasm (children)	7
Introduce/knowledge a variety of physical activities/skills	6
Good teacher/ classroom	6
Rapport /communication and management skills	5
Planning/ assessment and flexibility (organised)	4
Athletic/ fitness/ stamina/ active/ skill level	4
Liases well with other staff, schools & parents (network)	4
Hard worker/ drive	4
Cater for all learning needs (empathy & support)	3
Engaging & fun for students	2
Team player/ team work/collaboration	2
Contemporary knowledge	2
Sport knowledge/ qualifications	2
Safety awareness/ implementation	2
Role model for healthy living	1
Holistic approach	1
Support & upskill staff	1
Professional	1



- 7 schools gave details of HPE being outsourced (33.3%)

Dance is outsourced. Qualified dance instructors from a specialist school delivery company

Swimming instruction to infants outsourced

Gymnastics – fully qualified organised from Sydney

Gymnastics - accredited

Swimming – Austswim accredited staff

Swimming - accredited

YMCA – Gymnastics

Australian Dance

Gym Academy - Gymnastics is outsourced to specialist teachers

Hold relevant qualifications. Gym program for 10 weeks a year.

Dance Fever – outsource dance to a dance group

Support comes from local health agencies

Bachelor Exercise Science, Grad Dip Ed. Cert RE

- Principals' thoughts on quality HPE for children in schools

Catholic Education principals in small schools (less than 100 children) shared the importance of having a quality teacher. "It is great when there is an expert instructor." And that quality is not always offered; "An area which is often placed in the too hard basket for teachers, relying on easy games not skills." Professional development from sporting organisations was valued, "Active After School trained big bonus".

Catholic Education principals in medium sized schools (100-300 children) shared the importance of teachers having "Knowledge and skills in sport and ability to see students achieve to their best level". Furthermore, it was shared that "Outsourcing becomes too expensive – we need HPE graduates".

Catholic Education principals in large sized schools (300-600 children) shared that HPE is "Often neglected in favour of Literacy/ Numeracy focus". Within very large schools (600 children and more) principals remarked that within New South Wales there are "Limited opportunities of PE teachers in primary schools".

## Recommendations

It is recommended that pre-service Catholic Education primary teachers have the opportunity to specialise in HPE, specifically developmentally appropriate for the primary school. Having opportunities for pre-service teachers to become generalist classroom teachers and specialise in HPE is supported by a high majority of principals surveyed. Such a course enables primary teachers passionate in health and wellbeing, and who want to specifically teach primary aged children, to develop appropriate pedagogy and a holistic health understanding. Thus, pre-service teachers are fully prepared for teaching HPE in Catholic Education schools throughout the state of New South Wales. This would be a directional step towards the DEECD outcome 'children having the best start to life to achieve optimal health, development and wellbeing', towards the aim of the WA Government's Physical Activity Taskforce and the New South Wales Education & Communities position statement stipulating "the health of students is relevant to their learning and is important to schools". (<http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/studentssupport/studenthealth/>). Furthermore, this course assists teachers to optimise children's practical and social experiences that require living and reflecting upon Catholic religious traditions and gospel values (Lynch, 2004).

The second recommendation is for a Bachelor of Primary Education (Health and Physical Education) testamur and course to be developed within teacher education. With 90.5% of principals perceiving generalist/ HPE specialist teacher courses as valuable, 80.9% of principals stating they would be assisted by a Bachelor of Primary Education (Health and Physical Education) course and testamur, and principals' asserting the importance of HPE specialists also being good classroom teachers, such a course seems timely and relevant. This would enable schools of various sizes in rural, regional and remote New South Wales to have, in time, a specialist HPE teacher to support teachers and community. This directly relates to the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (MCEETYA, 2008) and the recommendations of the Gonski Report (ABC, 2012).

## Reference List

- Australian Broadcasting Corporation. (2012, August 27). Why does school funding need to be reviewed? *ABC News*. Retrieved from <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2012-08-27/whats-in-the-gonski-report/4219508>
- Australian Council for Health, Physical Education and Recreation (ACHPER). (2011). *ACHPER supports AFL statement on need to strengthen PE and sport in primary schools*. Retrieved from <http://www.achper.org.au/files/f/27583/ACHPER%20Media%20Release%2027%2005%2011.pdf>
- Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority. (2012). *Draft shape of the Australian curriculum: health and physical education*. Retrieved from <http://www.acara.edu.au/hpe.html>
- Australian Research Alliance for Children & Youth. (2013). *Report card – the wellbeing of young Australians*. Retrieved from <http://www.aracy.org.au/documents/item/104>
- Brisbane Catholic Education. (2006). *Eligibility criteria for the position of Principal*. Brisbane: Author.
- Commonwealth of Australia. (1992). *Physical and sport education - A report by the senate standing committee on environment, recreation and the arts*. Canberra: Senate Printing Unit.
- Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. (2012). *New directions for school leadership and the teaching profession discussion paper*. East Melbourne: State Government Victoria.
- Department of Education – The Government of Western Australia. (2012, March/April). *School matters magazine*, 40-41.
- Dinan-Thompson, M. (2009) *Health and physical education: issues for curriculum in Australia and New Zealand* (South Melbourne: Oxford University Press Australia and New Zealand).
- Lynch, T. (2004). A Catholic education perspective on the importance of the HPE curriculum in schools. *ACHPER Healthy Lifestyles Journal*, 51(2-3), 7-11.
- Lynch, T. (2007). Health & Physical Education Teachers: What should Brisbane Catholic Education (BCE) Primary Principals look for? *Journal of Catholic School Studies*, 79(3), 3-10.
- Lynch, T. (2013). Exploring religious education and health and physical education key learning area connections in primary schools. *The International Journal of Humanities Education*, 10(2), 11-23.

- Lynch, T. (2014). Investigating children's spiritual experiences through the health and physical education learning area in Australian schools. *Journal of Religion and Health*, 52(4), 10.1007/s10943-013-9802-2.
- McKenzie, P., Rowley, G., Weldon, P. & Murphy, M. (2011). *Staff in Australia's schools 2010; Main report on the survey*. Retrieved from <http://www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/Documents/SiASMainReport.pdf>
- Kirk, D. (2005). Physical education, youth sport and lifelong participation: the importance of early learning experiences. *European Physical Education Review* 11(3), 239-255.
- Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs. (2008) *Melbourne declaration on education goals for young Australians*. Retrieved from [http://www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/resources/National Declaration on the Educational Goals for Young Australians.pdf](http://www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/resources/National_Declaration_on_the_Educational_Goals_for_Young_Australians.pdf)
- Moore, D. (1994, Autumn). The challenges for sport and physical education in schools. *ACHPER Healthy Lifestyles Journal*, 41(1/143), 23-28.
- Tinning, R. (1999). *Pedagogies for physical education - Pauline's story*. Geelong, VIC: Deakin University Press.
- Tinning, R. (2004). Rethinking the preparation of HPE teachers: Ruminations on knowledge, identity, and ways of thinking. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 32(3), 241-253.
- Tinning, R., Kirk, D., Evans, J., & Glover, S. (1994). School physical education: A crisis of meaning. *Changing Education*, 1(2), 13-15.
- Webster, P. J. (2001). Teachers' perceptions of physical education within the k-6 personal development, health and physical education key learning area. *Theses: University of Wollongong*. Abstract retrieved June 28, 2004, from Informit database.