“Go Where the Big Challenges Are”: Preserve Physical Educators as Change Agents

Corrine M. Wickens and Jenny Parker
Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, IL, USA

Purpose: This study explored the tensions around physical and literacy integration initiatives from the view of physical education teacher education candidates. Method: We situated our data collection in qualitative case study methodology, emphasizing data from focus group interviews conducted during the final month of physical education teacher education candidates’ programs. Results: We demonstrated candidates’ recognition of the role of literacy integration within physical education in relation to (a) candidates’ feelings of pride and defensiveness of their field, (b) the importance of teacher collaboration, (c) teachers’ responsibility to support school goals and the students themselves, and (d) the potential of candidates to become change agents and leaders in their future school environments. Discussion/Conclusion: We assert that collaboration is required, and it must transpire within and among multiple educational contexts spaces, including K–12 settings, among teacher education faculty and programs, and across K–12 and higher education divides.

Keywords: literacy integration, professional socialization, PETE programs

In recent years, researchers have challenged the effectiveness of physical education teacher education (PETE) programs to meet the multifaceted challenges in schools (Richards et al., 2013). Despite extensive research associating high-intensity physical activity and improved cognitive function (Booth et al., 2014; Mandolesi et al., 2018), academic performance (Howie & Pate, 2012), and other social-emotional factors (Ash et al., 2017), many school districts continue to reduce time allocated for physical education and physical activity. As a result, many physical educators have sought to bolster the role of physical education by integrating academic content into physical education settings, including literacy (McMullen et al., 2019).

Widespread adoption of the Common Core and similar state standards has prompted many physical educators to determine ways to support students’ academic achievement by integrating other academic content into physical education settings (James & Bullock, 2015). Integration refers to the combination of two or more mutually reinforcing content subjects that support student learning through different modalities (Martinen et al., 2017). The integration could center around any of three educational approaches: (a) the incorporation of concepts from other disciplines into physical education (Scrabis-Fletcher, 2016); (b) the inclusion of physical activity into regular classroom settings; or (c) a thematic, interdisciplinary approach in which integration equally supports learning in two or more disciplines and may involve integration in more than one context or classroom setting. The first two are unidirectional in the integration, that is, content from one discipline is incorporated into another; the third approach is bidirectional in that no single discipline benefits at the expense of another. Having reviewed 23 integration studies incorporating Common Core disciplinary subjects, Martinen et al. (2017) found only three studies that involve the integration of English Language Arts (ELA) to some degree with physical education. One study focused on introduction of new information through physically active games (for example, Cardiac Relay) and repetitive drills and practice of ELA skills (for example, Spelling Freeze Tag) (Bartholomew & Jowers, 2011). Another study focused on mutually reinforcing development of fundamental movement concepts, such as body awareness and locomotor skills while simultaneously using appropriate terminology and syntax (Derri et al., 2010). Regardless of approach or format, these modes of integration encourage dialogue and collaboration among educators.

In this article, we explore the tensions around physical and literacy integration initiatives from the view of PETE candidates, individuals who will be mainly negotiating these tensions in the near future. However, to more adeptly address issues of physical education and literacy, one would have had to experience a range of literacy integration activities. As PETE candidates, students in this study experienced models of literacy integration in physical education settings including thematic, interdisciplinary approaches across multiple semesters. Grade bands for such activities ranged from early childhood through secondary level. Thus, we specifically addressed the question: How do PETE candidates who have experienced literacy integration activities across the K–12 grade range understand literacy integration in physical education?

To examine tensions around physical education and literacy integration, we place this study within teacher socialization frameworks. More broadly, socialization indicates the mechanisms and interactions through which individuals learn new skills, knowledge, and dispositions for participation in a given society (Sallee, 2011). Individuals not only assimilate the explicit knowledge and practices necessary to effectively engage within specific cultural settings, but also the implicit norms and mores that define expected behavior within such contexts. Professional socialization involves both the shaping of professional identities, practices, and cultures as well as cultural and institutional reproduction (Everitt & Tefﬁ, 2019).

Three distinct phases comprise teacher socialization: (1) acculturation, (2) professional socialization, and (3) organizational socialization. The first phase, acculturation, refers to the time period up until an individual decides to enter a teacher education
program. During this period, which Lortie (1975) described as "apprenticeship of observation," K–12 students spend upward of 13,000 hr interacting with teachers. These early experiences and perceptions form the foundation for future identities as teachers. The second phase, professional socialization, begins upon entering a PETE program, during which teacher candidates are expected to acquire the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to teach physical education (Lawson, 1983). Primary functions of PETE programs include (a) encouraging PETE candidates to question and critique the subjective warrants and beliefs about physical education programs established during their years in K–12 schooling, and (b) prepare PETE candidates for their careers as a PE teacher, including both the technical aspects of teaching as well as social and political contexts within different school cultures (Richards & Ressler, 2016). The third phase, organizational socialization, refers to the process in which individuals learn and acclimate to the culture of a given organization (Schein, 2010). Teacher inductees must learn to negotiate the values, beliefs, and skills of a specific school setting (Richards et al., 2014).

Significant to teacher education are the set of expectations developed during PETE candidates’ own years as a student, which then impact what they believe they should learn and gain from the PETE program. These PETE candidates then exercise their own agentive capacity, filtering and discarding what does not align with their own preconceptions (Graber et al., 2017). Thus, much of the professional socialization that occurs in PETE programs involves a dialectical process between the PETE faculty and students regarding what students will and will not accept and what beliefs they will or will not change. Teacher educators must acknowledge PETE candidates’ expectations about what it means to be a PE teacher and promote dialogue around those expectations, particularly in relation to the realities of teaching (Richards et al., 2013).

Method

This study is part of a larger longitudinal mixed-method study of the perceptions of PETE candidates about the integration of physical education and literacy. The research occurred at a regional midwestern university that supported the largest population of PETE candidates in the state at the time of the study. As required by the state, all PETE candidates enrolled in a content area literacy (CAL) course. However, given the larger number of PETE candidates, they participated in a content literacy course with a section specifically designated for physical education, health education, and family, consumer, and nutrition science students. Any particular semester, approximately 88%–100% of the students in those sections were PETE majors.

Moreover, a 10-year collaboration between literacy education and physical education faculty enabled PETE candidates to experience different examples of physical education and literacy integration activities. These activities comprised a wide range of CAL, disciplinary literacy (DL), and interdisciplinary literacy approaches. CAL generally refers to tools and aids that can purportedly be applied unilaterally across the curriculum to promote general reading comprehension (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). Some widely applied CAL tools include K-W-L (Ogle, 1986), Cornell notes (Pauk, 2001), and Frayer model vocabulary squares (Frayer et al., 1969).

In contrast to CAL, which favors reading development over subject matter content, DL emphasizes disciplinary objectives (McConachie, 2010). For instance, building confidence and competence in engaging in physical activity represent core aims of physical education. Thus, DL approaches would alter tools and strategies (or create new ones) to support these core disciplinary objectives. Interdisciplinary approaches combine and support learning in two or more disciplines, such that a single discipline is not privileged at the expense of another (Cecchini & Cariedo, 2020; Chen et al., 2007; Kaittani et al., 2016).

While we did not specifically differentiate these approaches for our PETE candidates as they engaged in them, they practiced applying all three. For instance, PETE candidates learned to use multiple CAL tools to support vocabulary development in physical education (Wickens & Parker, 2019). They often practiced DL approaches by modifying well-established literacy tools, for example, anticipation and prediction guides, to activate background knowledge and pique interest (Wickens & Parker, 2021). They employed interdisciplinary approaches by incorporating integration through literature for children and young adults that supported both skill acquisition in physical education and the development of fundamental literacy skills (Wickens & Parker, in press).

In this study, we focused upon the qualitative data found in the focus group interviews when candidates were approximately a month away from graduating and obtaining their professional educator license in physical education. Twenty-one individuals participated across four semesters in four separate focus groups that included 15 men and six women.

Recognizing that qualitative research is inherently an interpretivist process, we began our discussion of data analysis with descriptions of the research team. Member 1 (Author 1) is a literacy educator, specializing in content and disciplinary literacies (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2012). She is White, a monolingual English speaker, and a native U.S. citizen. Member 2 (Author 2) is a former PETE faculty member and advisor. Originally born in the United Kingdom, she is White, a monolingual English speaker, and has lived in the United States for 32 years. Member 3’s expertise is in physical education at the elementary level, with a specific focus in interdisciplinary approaches. He is Korean, speaks English as a second language, and has lived and worked in the United States for many years. Thus, we acknowledge the ways in which our respective backgrounds inform our analysis of the data (Armstrong et al., 1997).

As mentioned, qualitative data originated from three points within the PETE program, two during coursework and one from focus group interviews during student teaching. Data analysis involved creation of an evolving code list that began with analysis of open-ended response questionnaires and continued through analysis of focus group interviews. If a concept arose from the data for which there was no code, the team would discuss their respective interpretations and collectively determine both a code title and definition (Campbell et al., 2013).

For the focus groups specifically, data were audio recorded and transcribed. From the transcriptions, Author 1 then unitized the data into a table from which each research team member independently evaluated the data units based upon the code list. Afterward, each team member reported their coding that was then recorded on a shared Google document (Campbell et al., 2013).

From these individual codes, we organized PETE candidates’ ideas around physical education and literacy integration into the following broader categories: perceptions of literacy, perceptions of physical education, positive and negative perceptions of literacy integration in physical education, roles and responsibilities of teachers in general, and physical educators more specifically. We focused upon the PETE candidates’ perspectives on schooling and youth, the nature of physical education itself, and their future roles as physical educators.
Results

Teacher socialization theories emphasize the role of the acculturation period in which teacher candidates start forming subjective warrants during their K–12 schooling experience about what it means to be a teacher. For those going into physical education, acculturation leads to specific concepts about what it means to be a physical educator. Findings from our study likewise acknowledge the significance of the acculturation period, and how PETE candidates can reflect on those experiences in relation to lessons in their PETE program to become highly metacognitive and reflexive preservice educators. In the following sections, we demonstrate their recognition of the role of literacy integration within physical education in relation to (a) PETE candidates’ feelings of pride and defensiveness of their field (“It’s a pride thing”), (b) the importance of teacher collaboration (“Just work together”), (c) their responsibility to support school goals and the students themselves (“I’m there for the kids”), and (d) the potential to be change agents and leaders in their future school environments (“We’ve got to prove it first”).

“It’s a Pride Thing”—Darryl

As PETE candidates, one of the most pressing concerns related to the integration of physical education and literacy regarding the nature of physical education itself. Major concerns involved perceptions of disrespect from other teachers toward physical education and the potential for integration to increase the field’s perceived legitimacy.

One of the most recurring challenges discussed by the PETE candidates involved their collective resentment around the perceptions of disrespect for physical education and, by extension, for themselves as physical educators. “I think a hard part of it, being a PE teacher, is that other teachers don’t really have that respect for you sometimes,” commented Max. For instance, one PETE candidate Brianna commented how the art teacher requested that the PE teacher end class early, because the elementary students needed to go to the bathroom between classes and continually arrived late to her art class. Responding to Brianna’s example, Max commented, “And they feel that, you know, like they’re a teacher where let’s leave your class early because it doesn’t really matter as much.”

Such feelings of disregard for their discipline often prompted responses of defensiveness and irritation. The candidates expressed frustration at the utter disregard for physical education, the need for physical activity, and the role it plays in stemming childhood obesity (Kahan & McKenzie, 2015; Laureano et al., 2014) and its contributions to cognition, including increased focus and comprehension (Erickson et al., 2019; Zeng et al., 2017). Rather, PETE candidates described perceptions by other teachers of physical educators as mere “helpers.” Derek commented, “In physical education, we are the extra support, the extra time, the extra practice for those students. So I feel like physical education has become the helper of the content areas. We’re always looked to be the helper.” Instead of being significant in their own right, PETE candidates perceived their value by other school personnel only in their ability to “help.”

While recognizing that physical education should be sufficient on its own, several PETE candidates acknowledged the possibility of gaining credibility as a field through integration efforts. “Because PE is looked down as like an understudy if you will, we try to integrate everything else to get credibility,” commented Owen. Mason summed up a common sentiment regarding physical educators’ need to “justify their existence”: “I certainly see the value in literacy, and how it can enhance student learning when integrated into PE. However, it seems like the push for it is a result of PE having to justify what we do.” The PETE candidates struggled with the tension around the need to justify their discipline and, by extension, themselves.

Most significantly in regard to literacy integration, many PETE candidates reinforced their primary concern about time for physical activity. Similar to Bryan’s comment about integration improving comprehension, Robert underscored the potential positives of integration—as long as it did not decrease the priority, including time involved, of physical activity. “Literacy integration in PE can be a good thing as long as the class remains a PE class with literacy integrated, and it does not become a literacy class with some PE integrated.” While the concepts in the bell ringers connected to physical education objectives, time for actual physical activity needed to take precedence.

“Just Work Together”—Dustin

Despite ongoing concerns about the devaluing of physical education, many PETE candidates recognized the need to collaborate with other content area teachers. In fact, a couple of PETE candidates discussed how their district emphasized collaboration at recent institute days. For instance, Brianna discussed a district initiative that challenged teachers to increasingly collaborate and her resulting confusion and dismay when teachers simply closed their door and did not want to be bothered.

So if you had a whole like hour-long conversation about why you should collaborate and why it’s important and how it benefits your students, and I think that part of being in a workplace is collaborating with other people... you should collaborate with the other teachers.

Dylan also attended institute days in which collaboration was a central topic. Significant to him was the real-world expectations around integration and collaboration by many local districts. He commented, “They’re always talking about, like, integrating different subjects and collaborating with other teachers. And so it’s not just what we learn here at [our university], I mean, that’s really what they want to do.”

Integrating different disciplines into physical education prompted some anxiety about expertise of content. For instance, Jenna expressed concern about potentially needing to reinforce academic concepts, particularly scientific principles, in which she did not feel confident. Rather than being an obstacle that might preclude integration, Darryl viewed such concerns rather as opportunities for collaboration. “Getting with the teachers, going okay, I don’t know enough about earth science—But I would like to incorporate that. How can I do that? Am I touching on the right subjects? Am I getting the principles right?” While integration of different academic content prompted some nervousness among PETE candidates about “getting it right,” as well as the responsibility of physical educators to “support” other academic subjects in the first place, many of these PETE candidates viewed such integration in line with school district expectations around teacher collaboration.

“I’m There for the Kids”—Chelsea

Significantly, many of these PETE candidates recognized the unique position they held as physical educators to help young
people develop and grow in multiple ways, including achieving literacy skills. For instance, Chelsea commented, “I love PE, that is my expertise, but I think you need to be able to help your kids. Yeah, they can be good athletes, but if they can’t read, they can’t read the warm-up on the board.” Rebecca similarly reiterated the significance of physical education as a discipline, but also acknowledged the importance of helping students. “It’s not like, oh, PE by itself is like a stand-alone. No, if you can incorporate other things to make it better for the students, why not?”

The PETE candidates also viewed physical education as an opportunity to reinforce other academic content, but to communicate it in a vastly different learning environment. Several different candidates underscored how games, relays, and other physical activities in physical education could assist in processing academic content. For Owen, physical educators could help students because of the sense of play “and the way that things are absorbed by playing, like the learning aspect of it.” Students might not necessarily understand a given concept in science or language arts, but framed within a physical active game, the concept might then make sense. According to Owen, “There are some things that maybe they overlooked in the classroom they’ll be able to absorb this time around. And it’s a second look at it.” Alex agreed, observing how they, as future physical educators, could help make and reinforce those connections for students:

But if you can make the connection, it’s—I mean, and it’s correct and they understand it, then, like, why wouldn’t you? If it’s going to benefit them here as well as there, I feel like that’s a good enough reason to start doing it.

For these candidates, physical education could help students understand potentially challenging academic content through more physically active learning environments and by the reinforcement of such content.

Likewise, candidates recognized the importance of reinforcing academic content due to the then emerging nation-wide initiative of Common Core State Standards (CCSS). In fact, Dylan noted how fortunate the candidates were to be enrolled in a program highlighting different kinds of integration efforts because of Common Core. Paraphrasing CCSS’s focus on college and career readiness, Dylan emphasized, “I mean, I think the number one goal of every school is for people to be—students to be able to read, you know . . . . The hope is for the kids to be overall better.”

Because of the literacy activities they had learned, they would know different activities to help their students “achieve that overall goal of literacy,” Dylan concluded.

Several PETE students reflected on their own learning experiences, recalling negative experiences with literacy and how integration could have made a difference. For instance, Dylan and Derek described similar struggles with reading. “I did not like to read,” Derek confessed. “So when you put it to a physical education setting, you don’t realize that you are learning about literacy, you’re actually just thinking, oh, we’re doing fun things.” Dylan agreed, underscoring the ability to share content literacy strategies that worked for them as college students and could help secondary students as well:

And I think even us, as PE teachers, we struggled through a lot of that stuff in reading when we were kids. So now we’ve learned some strategies, why not share that with our high schoolers. Because guaranteed, when we’re college students and we’re struggling with that? Our high schools are going to be struggling with it. So we can give them strategies for that.

Moreover, these candidates noted how the framework of physical education easily lent itself to literacy integration and thereby supported young people’s literacy development. In fact, Darryl expressed a common presupposition of PETE candidates that physical education is one of students’ favorite classes. Physical educators could build upon these positive attitudes to help students: “If you can bring [literacy] into their favorite subject, you might be encouraging them to even go further with that since it’s in PE, oh, how great is that?” Thus, physical education could provide an opportunity to reinforce other academic content, but in a different format that did not register to young people as typical school and learning, but rather simply as fun.

“We’ve Got to Prove It First”—Dylan

Because of their primary focus on students rather than the discipline, several of these PETE candidates underscored the need for them to initiate the integration and collaboration efforts with colleagues. For instance, Brianna recalled an empathetic teacher’s reluctance to integrate due to disrespect shown to physical education by other teachers. However, Brianna noted how she expected more of herself and physical education. Likewise, Jenna and Alex commented how such intentional efforts to integrate might lead to change in other teachers’ attitudes toward physical education and assist PETE candidates in getting hired. “So if you go out and get a name from everyone else, there’s other people who will vouch for you or say, oh my gosh, our student teacher last semester was awesome.” Alex concurred, saying, “If we show them how we’re helping their kids learn in their class by teaching them their same content while they’re in PE, and how that helps, that they might respect us a little more.”

Rather than wait for others to change, many of these PETE candidates understand this to be their responsibility. For instance, with physical educators resistant to content integration due to concerns of devaluing physical education and time for physical activity, they noted ways in which literacy was already involved in the discipline such as reading labels in a health and fitness unit. As younger physical educators, both Dylan and Darryl noted how they could show other physical educators ways in which teachers were already integrating literacy in different ways. Then, as a result, physical educators might be less resistant because “if they know they’re already doing something, then it’s not overwhelming.” PETE candidates did not only see themselves modeling the advantages of integration for other physical educators and coaches, but also teachers in other content areas as well. As PETE candidates debated potential challenges of integrating topics from other disciplines and related expertise, many nevertheless recognized the need to take the lead anyway. Recognizing that not all teachers would respond to their efforts as physical educators to integrate other content, Dylan affirmed, “we’ve got to prove it first.” Dustin reiterated the sentiment for physical educators—and educators in general—to support each other and their students, commenting, “Just always go where the big challenges are. I would always like to come back with whatever they’re doing at same (sic) doing where we could help each other. I mean, we’re not just teaching our own things.” For Dustin and other PETE candidates, integrating literacy and other academic content may require them to initiate collaboration. More significantly, in their willingness to take the “first step,” these candidates set themselves up to be change agents.
Discussion

Teacher socialization literature has repeatedly noted the acculturation period as the greatest influence on prospective teachers’ perceptions of education; professional socialization is considered the weakest influence (Richards et al., 2019). During the acculturation period, candidates form subjective warrants about what it means to be a teacher, and for PETE candidates, what it means to be a physical educator. A critical component of PETE candidates’ subjective warrants is their conceptualizations of the discipline itself, which generally entails strong impressions that physical education involves movement. Thus, in comparison with literacy, the two often appear dichotomous: literacy (reading) is perceived as a sedentary activity and physical education regarded as a physical activity. However, with programmatic intention, PETE candidates can alter their perceptions of the discipline and themselves as physical educators to become highly metacognitive and reflexive preservice educators.

As future physical educators, these PETE candidates recognized the frequent disrespect shown to their discipline and, by extension, to themselves. They bemoaned frequent lack of respect by other teachers and perceptions of physical education as the context for “extra support” and the “helper.” They debated assumptions around integration of other academic content into physical education and the presumed unidirectionality of such integration without commiserate respect for physical education and its merits within schools. For example, increasing physical activity can improve students’ attention and focus (Erickson et al., 2019). Nevertheless, they generally concurred that if literacy could be integrated without detracting from the discipline’s key mission to support students to develop physical literacy and “move with competence and confidence in a wide variety of physical activities,” then such integration could be accepted.

Despite frustration about disdain toward their discipline, and by proxy, to themselves, many PETE candidates focused on broader school and district goals, particularly around teacher collaboration. Several candidates described recurring school and district conversations around collaboration. For Dylan, the real-world emphasis served to solidify the integration activities he had learned. “And so it’s not just what we learn here . . . . I mean, that’s really what they want to do.” Nevertheless, PETE candidates realized the willingness to reach out to regular classroom teachers for content suggestions, and that such efforts were not necessarily time-consuming or arduous.

More importantly, these PETE candidates emphasized how such collaborations could be meaningful for students. Through collaborations, PETE candidates recognized the relative ease of integrating other academic content into physical education and thereby reinforce that content for students. Through varied games, relays, and other physical activities, physical educators could support student learning of academic content but in different modalities that might “stick with them better,” as Samantha commented. Through game play, physical educators could create additional associations and connections that would assist the encoding of the information into long-term memory (Sadoski & Paivio, 2013). Additionally, the idea of reinforcing academic content in physical education resonated strongly with many of the PETE candidates as they reflected on their own past struggles, particularly with reading. Students who may otherwise not like reading, for instance, might gain important skills in more physically active formats—or, in other words, where reading does not seem like the conventional reading activity they dislike. If, as physical educators, they could help their future students who might struggle with reading (as many of them did) by integrating literacy content into physical education, then they saw integration as a worthwhile endeavor.

Nevertheless, these PETE candidates did not dismiss the challenges of collaboration and integration. They acknowledged some of the potential resistance they would encounter from both regular content teachers and from other physical educators. Rather than getting subsumed in the debate around disciplinary importance, they focused on being leaders and change agents in their respective school environments. Such recognition by other physical educators could then ameliorate some of the general hostility, grounded in defensiveness of their discipline. Through their commitment to broader school initiatives, particularly focused in literacy and their commitment to helping students, many of these PETE candidates indicated that integration of literacy into physical education would likely increase their value as educators and their job security. Most significantly though, these PETE candidates viewed integration efforts as the right thing to do because it provided opportunities to improve their students’ education.

Implications and Conclusion

In this study of the challenges and debates around their discipline and literacy integration in physical education, PETE candidates maintained immense pride in their discipline, while simultaneously critiquing other physical educators’ reactionary stances to integration. They agonized over ongoing marginalization of and disrespect for their discipline and also acknowledged the need to reach out and collaborate with colleagues in other academic disciplines. They acknowledged potential challenges to integration but emphasized the need to support their students and their literacy development. Moreover, they understood the opportunity for them to enter their future school settings as leaders and agents for change.

However, teacher socialization models have repeatedly highlighted the limited sustainability of altered belief systems among teacher candidates once they enter the workforce. Socio-political constraints and pressures from school settings often cause educators to revert to teaching practices first learned and experienced during the acculturation period. “Overtime, the practices taught during teacher training may become washed out . . . . as teachers adjust to the micropolitical reality of working in their context and adopt the practices embraced in the official and unofficial discourse of the school” (Richards et al., 2013, p. 445). We contend that limited effectiveness of professional socialization within teacher education programs derives from the highly independent and partitioned nature of disciplines most notable in higher education but also frequently present in K–12 settings. We assert that countering this trend—just as our PETE candidates indicated—by collaborating is required. It must transpire within and across multiple educational contexts and spaces: in K–12 settings, among teacher education faculty and programs, and across the divide of K–12 and higher education.

Collaboration Within K–12 Settings

Cross-disciplinary collaboration in K–12 settings is needed to effectively support students in the acquisition of academic content and skills as well as development of the desire and competence to engage in physical activity across the lifespan (Whitehead, 2010). While physical educators often report positive experiences with physical activity and physical education, many college students...
reported highly negative experiences. Such negative experiences have been then linked with adult sedentary behavior (Ladwig et al., 2018). Conversely, early reading experiences demonstrated strong effects on development of reading attitudes as well as the likelihood of PETE candidates to integrate literacy into physical education (Wickens et al., 2020). Collaboration across K–12 disciplines could potentially mitigate negative experiences in both disciplines and potentially enhance the perceived status of physical education and physical educators (Hollett et al., 2016; Lux, 2011).

Collaboration in Teacher Education Programs
Collaboration across disciplines in higher education is needed to create meaningful and iterative experiences for integration. As with the K–12 context, collaboration requires teacher education faculty to forego traditional disciplinary silos and connect with faculty with complementary expertise. Referencing the authors’ own decade-long collaboration, Author 1 experienced a critical need for the expertise and assistance from PETE faculty in her early years of teaching in higher education. When teaching upward of 75–80 PETE candidates a semester, it was clear that traditional methods of teaching content and DL were going to be ineffective (Wickens et al., 2015). With insights and assistance from PETE faculty, Author 1 completely reimagined literacy instruction to foreground PETE candidates’ background knowledge, experiences, attitudes, and self-efficacy in both physical education and literacy.

Collaboration Between K–12 and Higher Education
Collaboration between PETE programs and K–12 school settings is also critical as PETE candidates transition into organizational cultures of different schools and maintain their intentions to be leaders and change agents within their schools.

Thus, collaboration should occur throughout the duration of candidates’ PETE programs and early years of teacher induction. Collaboration during PETE programs can promote a “shared technical culture” that emphasizes a common language and a set of guiding principles for effective teaching (Curtner-Smith et al., 2008; Richards, Gaudreault, et al., 2018). Collaboration during early years of teacher induction can mitigate the “washout effect,” help new teachers effectively adapt the research-based practices developed during their PETE experience, and contend with the contextual demands of their settings. As part of their faculty teaching load, PETE faculty could work with new teacher inductees and localized teacher mentoring programs through sustained induction assistance, seminars, and professional development. As Richards, Gaudreault, et al. (2018) noted, “coordination and discussion among stakeholders [schools, PETE programs, government agencies, and local constituents] is especially important because if one group pushes for change and others continue with business as usual, changes are unlikely to take hold” (p. 341).

Conclusion
In going “where the big challenges are,” these PETE candidates are once again reimagining the nature of physical education and their roles in school systems. Standards-based physical education previously transformed recess-oriented “roll the ball out” physical education programs (Gaudreault et al., 2018; Richards, Gaudreault, et al., 2018). Now, cross-disciplinary, integrative approaches demonstrate opportunities for physical educators to revolutionize their discipline again. In so doing, physical educators may more fully manifest the philosophical bases of physical literacy, including embodied cognition and teaching the whole child (Landi et al., 2021; Whitehead, 2010).

By advocating for integrative approaches, we do not suggest that physical education is “lesser than” other disciplines or that physical education should carry this banner alone. On the contrary, we have shared important assumptions held by most physical educators that students can and should be active the majority of the time (Wickens et al., 2015). While teachers in most disciplines begin with deficit-based assumptions around what students can’t do and don’t know, “notions of participation, physicality, and movement are integral to the field [of physical education] and demonstrate an assets perspective toward students” (Wickens et al., 2015, p. 79). Future work in this area should target additional lessons and activities that could be incorporated by other content area teachers.

Moreover, integrative and collaborative approaches to physical education provide important new opportunities for physical educators to feel like they matter (Richards, Housner, & Templin, 2018). Feelings of marginalization have long plagued physical educators (Ward et al., 2021). However, physical educators described important contributing factors that diminished such feelings of isolation and alienation, notably relationship building with colleagues, administrators, and students, and advocacy for their discipline (Richards, Housner, & Templin, 2018). Through the multiple sites of collaboration, integrated lessons are possible—and in those spaces, we can create opportunities in which young people and physical educators alike can flourish and thrive.

References


