

<b>Project ID number:</b>	<b>2012_001497</b>
<b>Research title:</b>	<b>How are Primary Education Health &amp; Physical Education (HPE) teachers' best prepared?</b>
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Please keep this report no longer than 2-3 pages in length.

If you have agreed to make this report visible to the public it will appear on the Department's online Research Register with the project title, aim and research questions. No personal details are provided. If you are keen to share more detail of the findings or from publications arising from this project please include your contact details **in this report**.

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<b>Research abstract</b> <i>(no more than 100 words)</i>
<p>This project investigated Primary School Principal's 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.</p> <p>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 Victoria.</p>

<b>Summary/Discussion of findings</b> <i>(no more than 100 words)</i>
<p>This study indicates two key findings:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Principals in Victorian government primary schools of various sizes and locations, strongly desire to have specialist HPE teachers in their schools</li> <li>2. Principals in Victorian government primary schools want HPE specialist teachers who are interested and want to be working with primary aged children. Furthermore, HPE specialists who are able, willing and qualified to teach as generalist classroom teachers</li> </ol>

<b>Generalisability and significance for the settings in your study or for the Victoria Government Department of Education and Early Childhood</b>
<p><b>Significance of Research</b></p> <p>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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children have the best start to life to achieve optimal health, development and wellbeing</li> </ul>

(<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/department/Pages/default.aspx>)

This outcome sits within and directly relates 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 is embedded in phase three of the current national curriculum reform. There is potential for the national framework currently being developed to enable curriculum change and quality HPE for all children across our geographically large country. This research investigates Principals' perceptions of a structural change within university pre-service primary teacher courses. Such a structural change 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.

Principals surveyed represented schools from seven Victorian regions and schools of various enrolment sizes (Table 1).

Table 1 Victorian regions represented by school principals surveyed

Victorian Region	Size of school enrolment				
	Small schools (less 100)	Medium (100-300)	Large (300 – 600)	Very large (more 600)	Total
West	7	4	0	0	<b>11</b>
Inner West	0	8	3	1	<b>12</b>
North Central	6	3	0	1	<b>10</b>
Inner North	3	3	2	0	<b>8</b>
Melbourne	1	25	33	6	<b>65</b>
Inner East	4	7	2	0	<b>13</b>
East	6	11	2	0	<b>19</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>138</b>

It is recommended that pre-service 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 teachers who want to specifically teach primary aged children, have a developmentally appropriate pedagogy and holistic health understanding, and are passionate in Health and Physical Education to be employed in schools throughout the state. This would be a directional step towards the DEECD outcome 'children having the best start to life to achieve optimal health, development and wellbeing'.

Furthermore, this would enable schools in rural, regional and remote Victoria to have a HPE specialist teacher and thus have the same opportunities as metropolitan schools, which is currently not the case. This directly relates to the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (MCEETYA, 2008) and the recommendations of the Gonski Report (ABC, 2012).

It is alarming the number of HPE specialists who are not qualified as specialists working in Victorian government primary schools and the number of principals who do not check for evidence of HPE units successfully completed. However, it is understandable as no specific primary HPE specialist course exists in Australia. Bachelor of Primary Education (Health and Physical Education) course and testamur would assist in improving this situation and is the second recommendation.