University/Elementary School Partnerships in Physical Education: Strategies and Benefits

By Clayre Petray and Grant M. Hill

During the past decade, numerous university teacher preparation programs have created partnerships with local school districts to provide field-based experiences for future teachers (Ambrose, Natale, Murphey & Schumacher, 1999; Etzel-Wise & Mears, 2004; Glow & Sperhac, 2003; Gottlieb, Keogh, Jonas, Grunbaum, Walters, Fec, Saunders & Baldyga, 1999; Harper & Sadler, 2003; Jenkins, Eman & Black, 2002; Kirkwood, 1999; Maxson & Schwartz, 2001; Rothstein, 2002). In addition to student teaching, these programs have incorporated structured field experiences early in teacher education coursework, often at schools identified as exemplary. These field experiences provide pre-service teachers with valuable experiences through which they apply subject matter content and pedagogical knowledge. Siedentop and Locke (1997) have encouraged university physical education teacher education (PETE) programs to work together with the public schools to prepare K-12 physical education teachers.

"PETE can only fulfill its responsibility if it does so in collaboration with good schools in which there are good physical education programs. If there are not enough good clinical sites...then PETE must assume responsibility for helping to develop and sustain school physical education programs directly." (p.27)

University PETE programs in many states face unique challenges in the preparation of pre-service elementary school physical education teachers. In some states such as Arizona, the majority of elementary schools employ full-time physical education specialists, while, in other states such as California, the majority of elementary schools do not employ a physical education specialist. When elementary schools do not employ physical education specialists, classroom teachers have the primary responsibility for physical education instruction. Schools without physical education specialists present an additional challenge for university PETE programs; not only must they prepare PETE majors to become elementary school physical education specialists, they also have the critical responsibility of preparing future K-6 classroom teachers to provide quality physical education instruction (McCullick and DeMarco, 2003). Furthermore, when local elementary schools do not employ physical education specialists, it can be difficult, if not impossible, to provide high quality elementary school physical education field experiences for pre-service teachers.

One approach university PETE programs may use to insure high quality elementary school physical education field experiences is to develop partnerships with elementary schools where there is sufficient support for physical education, as well as openness to university leadership. The university PETE faculty, working together with district leaders, elementary school administration, and school faculty, may create a reciprocal partnership through which pre-service teachers conduct on-site physical education instruction and physical activity and fitness assessment with elementary school students. This article describes the framework of a model for establishing such a partnership consisting of the following: purpose, need, description, development, implementation, and benefits.
Partnership Purpose
The primary purpose of a reciprocal physical education partnership is for the university PETE program and the elementary school to work collaboratively to provide:

- PETE pre-service teachers with quality field-based experiences in physical education lesson planning, teaching, self-evaluation of teaching, and physical fitness and activity assessment.
- Elementary school classroom teachers with the opportunity to observe and participate in quality physical education lessons and physical fitness and activity assessment, review accompanying lesson plans, and conduct follow-up lessons.
- Elementary school students with quality physical education lessons and physical activity experiences.

Need for the Partnership
Reciprocal partnerships have the potential to meet the field experience needs of PETE pre-service teachers, the instructional needs of elementary school teachers, and the learning needs of elementary school students. Schools provide an ideal setting in which pre-service teachers can meaningfully apply course content, particularly in the areas of lesson planning, teaching, self-assessment of teaching, and physical fitness and activity assessment. This partnership model provides classroom teachers with opportunities to expand their knowledge of both physical education curriculum and teaching methodology; this is a valuable process for classroom teachers who may not feel qualified to teach physical education lessons because of inadequate background in physical education content and physical education pedagogy. Finally, this partnership model provides an enriched physical education learning environment for elementary school children.

Partnership Description
In this model, an undergraduate university elementary school PETE course with fieldwork components is conducted on an elementary school campus. The instructor holds weekly class lectures/discussions in a vacant classroom, the library or other appropriate setting, and uses elementary school students for physical education lessons and physical fitness and activity assessment. University pre-service teachers attend class meetings on the elementary school campus and obtain hands-on experiences with elementary school students, as well as experience a real world elementary school setting during each class meeting. The university PETE faculty, the district physical education coordinator, the elementary school principal and classroom teachers’ collaboration may also be indirectly involved in these lessons to maximize learning experiences for the pre-service teachers, classroom teachers and the elementary school students.

Partnership Development
The university PETE director assumes a leadership role in creating the partnership. The PETE director works with district personnel to identify a school, works collaboratively with the elementary school administration to establish principal responsibilities, and assists in the creation of a physical education partnership team to carry out school-site tasks prior to implementation.

Contact and Collaborate with School District Personnel
The university PETE director is responsible for contacting the district physical education coordinator to discuss the proposed university/elementary school physical education partnership and become familiar with the district’s physical education curriculum and safety regulations. Additionally, the university PETE director and district physical education coordinator must discuss liability insurance; often, the university provides coverage for courses in which pre-service teachers participate off-campus on elementary school sites. All legal issues, including liability insurance, must be addressed and agreed upon prior to partnership implementation. For the partnership to be successful, it is essential that the district coordinator support development of the partnership concept, assist in initial planning, and participate in problem solving.

Identifying Schools
The university PETE director and the district physical education coordinator collaborate to identify prospective partnership schools. Additionally PETE pre-service teachers may recommend local elementary schools at which they have previously worked or volunteered that might be receptive to developing a physical education partnership. To minimize student travel time, priority is given to schools in close proximity to the university. The university PETE director and the district physical education coordinator interview principals at targeted schools to determine the most appropriate elementary school site.

Establish Elementary School Principal Responsibilities
After selection of a school site, the university PETE director and the school administration work together to develop the principal’s responsibilities. The principal can be instrumental in supporting the elementary school teachers’ efforts to participate in the physical education program and to plan and teach follow-up lessons. The principal has the authority to implement necessary recess and lunch scheduling modifications and authorize custodial support needed to facilitate this process. The principal can ensure that the university class has access to necessary facilities and equipment including, but not limited to, the following: an indoor area appropriate for classroom work, adequate physical education equipment and storage, and necessary outdoor space for conducting physical education lessons. The principal can also support and facilitate parent communication related to the partnership. Working hand-in-hand with the PETE director, the principal can be a proactive and integral member of the partnership team.
Develop the Physical Education Partnership Team

After establishing the principal's role in the partnership, the university PETE director, district coordinator, and principal work together to select faculty to join the physical education partnership team. They select faculty representatives based on their physical education background, support for the partnership, diversity of students taught (e.g., special education) and leadership skills. The university PETE director, district physical education coordinator, elementary school principal, and selected classroom teachers then form a team to accomplish the following tasks.

1. Establish the day and time of the university course. The team needs to consider school start, lunch, teacher release, and school end times to make this determination. For example, some elementary schools have early release while others have late start days. The team will need to select a day and time that will minimize conflict with these scheduling considerations.

2. Review curricula. The team reviews district and school physical education curricula as well as state [e.g., California Physical Education Standards and Physical Education Framework (California State Department of Education, 2008)] and national [e.g., National Standards for Physical Education (NASPE, 2004) and Fitnessgram/Activitygram Test Administration Manual (Meredith & Wolk, 2005)] documents to determine the activities needed to meet grade level standards.

3. Identify and order physical education equipment. The team then identifies equipment needed to deliver the planned curricula. After taking inventory of existing resources, the team orders new equipment and insures that a sufficiently large and secure area is available for storage. The team may decide to order a large storage bin if none is available. The team can explore a variety of options for funding equipment and storage, including: a) the university and elementary school can each examine their budget, and if adequate funds exist, split the cost; b) the university and elementary school can collaborate on a fund-raiser (e.g., jog-a-thon); or c) the team can investigate available grant opportunities and co-author applications to appropriate sources.

4. Meet with elementary school faculty. The team can accomplish the following at a school faculty meeting:

- Introduce the physical education partnership team
- Introduce university department chair, elementary school PETE director and PETE faculty
- Express appreciation for support of quality physical education
- Present and describe the partnership objectives
- Discuss state and national physical education standards
- Discuss county, district, and school physical education curricula
- Explain grade level appropriate lesson plans
- Discuss physical fitness and activity assessment
- Discuss elementary school PETE director responsibilities
- Discuss PETE pre-service teachers’ responsibilities
- Discuss elementary school classroom teachers’ responsibilities

Although only select faculty members participate on the partnership team, all faculty may participate in the partnership activities on an equitable rotation basis.

Physical Education Program Implementation

After the partnership team has completed preliminary preparations, the team collaborates to carry out the following steps to implement the program.

1. Label, organize and store physical education equipment.

   The pre-service teachers label, organize, and store the physical education equipment in a sufficiently large, secure area. Course activities can include such procedures as opening boxes and inflating balls, or assembling, organizing, and storing equipment. Ideally, physical education equipment is designated solely for use during physical education instruction, and not for recess or free play.

2. Create a physical education equipment check-out procedure.

   All classroom teachers have access to equipment to teach quality physical education lessons; however, it may be most efficient to designate one or two teachers to coordinate equipment checkout and return. In small schools, one teacher may serve as physical education equipment checkout coordinator; in larger schools, one K-3 and one 4-6 teacher may share coordinator responsibilities.

3. Conduct university class meetings at the elementary school site.

   The university PETE director obtains university permission to conduct course meetings at the elementary school. The instructor may hold the first course meeting on the university campus to minimize confusion. At this meeting, the instructor provides the course outline and specific information about the elementary school including directions, parking, school rules and procedures, dress codes, and location of course meeting room. The second class meeting and all subsequent meetings are held at the elementary school.

4. Prepare for pre-service teachers to teach physical education lessons.

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Participating classroom teachers carry out the following responsibilities:

- Insure that parent permission is obtained and medical screening is provided so each student can be cleared for participation in the program.
- Divide students into physical education groups of 10 to 12 (equal in gender and ability) so that several pre-service students can teach at the same time.
- Provide a list of the students in each group.
- Make nametags for each student.
- Insure that students’ shoes are tied and pockets are empty.
- Provide restroom time for students prior to and following physical education.
- Insure that students are on time.
- Walk students (wearing nametags) to teaching area five minutes prior to physical education class start time.
- Clear classrooms for rainy day lessons.
- Participate in physical education lessons with students.

Classroom teachers need to provide all students with equal opportunity to participate in the physical education lessons. Teachers must never use participation in physical education classes as a reward for good behavior or withhold participation in physical education classes as a punishment.

5. **Mainstream students with special needs.**

The university PETE personnel, elementary school principal, classroom teachers and special education teachers must collaborate to include special needs students into appropriate physical education classes. Some school districts employ adapted physical education specialists who can be involved and provide expertise.

6. **Plan physical education lessons.**

PETE pre-service teachers are responsible for planning quality physical education lessons that incorporate the curricular objectives and available physical education equipment. The PETE course instructor regularly reviews lesson plans as they are developed.

7. **Teach physical education lessons.**

Working in partners, pre-service teachers video record each other teaching physical education lessons to the elementary school students. Following each lesson, they analyze their teaching videos for behaviors identified as indicators of effective teaching. Following a self-assessment of each lesson, pre-service teachers reflect on their teaching in a journal and set goals for the next lesson. Pre-service teachers also provide copies of their lesson plans to classroom teachers and offer suggestions for follow-up lessons.

8. **Organize and conduct physical fitness and activity assessment.**

The partnership team collaborates to develop a plan for conducting physical fitness and activity assessment. They may send an informational letter home to parents and conduct a parent information meeting. Formal assessment includes a pre-assessment in the fall and post-assessment in the spring. Pre-service and classroom teachers may set up assessment stations and administer each of the fitness items in relative privacy (Petray-Rowcliffe, 2007). Utilizing peer monitoring, students may be encouraged to informally self-assess their fitness periodically during the year (Hill, 2003). Additionally, to determine their individual progress, students’ scores may be recorded on personal fitness record cards (Petray-Rowcliffe, 2007) and graphed using computer software (Meredith & Welk, 2005; Winnick & Short, 1998). Students may complete pre-, post-, and self-assessments of physical activity in the classroom using the ActivityGram. Daily physical activity may also be measured using pedometers, with student progress documented over time.

**Benefits of the Partnership**

This type of reciprocal partnership insures benefits for the university PETE program, PETE pre-service teachers, elementary school classroom teachers and students. PETE programs can provide pre-service teachers with an elementary school setting where they apply course content in a real world setting. This model also allows university elementary school PETE faculty direct access to children and elementary school facilities.

Under the guidance of a PETE professor, pre-service teachers are required to develop the following skills:

- Labeling and organizing physical education equipment
- Gaining experience teaching elementary school age children
- Developing, teaching, and analyzing quality physical education lesson plans
- Self-evaluating, personal goal setting, and pursuing those goals in subsequent lessons
- Graphing their progress in selected teaching behaviors
- Conducting valid and reliable physical activity and fitness assessment with elementary school children
- Reflecting on their strengths, identifying areas for improvement and recording their progress in an ongoing journal and final reflective paper

Elementary school classroom teachers receive assistance with purchasing, labeling, organizing, and storing the physical education equipment necessary to conduct a quality program. They are also allowed the opportunity to observe and participate in model lessons and receive lesson plans to conduct follow-up lessons. In addition, classroom teachers receive detailed instruction regarding how
to promote and assess physical activity and fitness.

Elementary school students benefit from this partnership because they participate in quality physical education lessons taught by PETE pre-service teachers. They also continue to receive follow-up instruction by classroom teachers using developmentally appropriate lesson plans and optional equipment. In addition, they experience accurate, individualized physical fitness and activity assessment focused on education and self-improvement with the ultimate goal of learning the importance of establishing a physically active lifestyle.

In addition to the direct benefits that students and elementary school personnel receive from a school/university collaborative physical education program, there are other, indirect benefits. Specifically, these collaborative programs serve as “flagships” for other elementary schools who may wish to emulate their practices (e.g., equipment procurement and storage, fitness and activity assessment procedures, physical activity and fitness promotion, curriculum development, and instructional methodology). Principals and district curriculum leaders may facilitate this process by publicizing these programs, utilizing them during in-service sessions, providing multimedia presentations highlighting key features, and encouraging other administrators and teachers to visit their schools. Ultimately, the intent of school-university partnerships is to empower everyone associated with the physical education enterprise so that elementary school children will derive the multitude of benefits associated with a quality physical education program.

References


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