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Published on: 03 Apr 2017 - Quest (Routledge)

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NATIONAL CURRICULUM FOR PHYSICAL EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES

BY

JUNGHWAN OH

DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Kinesiology
in the Graduate College of the
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2018

Urbana, Illinois

Doctoral Committee:

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ABSTRACT

In response to the global pressure that has led to an increased emphasis on international comparisons of student achievement since the 1990s, multiple federal reforms aimed at producing greater consistency in curricula have been initiated in the United States (US). Establishing a national curriculum is, by nature, a complex and often debatable topic. The purpose of this study was to investigate physical education teacher education (PETE) leaders' perceptions of the acceptability and achievability of a unified, national physical education curriculum in the US where the longstanding tradition of local and state control is deeply embedded, and where disparate interests and needs deriving from sociocultural and contextual diversity, traditions, and social classes coexist. After obtaining IRB approval, 28 PETE faculty leaders were interviewed using formal and informal techniques. Interviews took place in person during the annual meeting of SHAPE America and through telephone interviews thereafter. Interview transcripts were analyzed using open and axial techniques (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) and triangulated by comparing the perspectives of individual participants employed at different types of colleges/universities. The results indicated that nationalizing the physical education curriculum has the potential to provide explicit learning goals, substantive instructional guidelines, and valid assessment measures consistent with designated program outcomes. The majority of participants, however, suggested that a national curriculum would not be acceptable or achievable due to current polyphonic federalism and anti-federal sentiments, sociocultural and geographical diversity and disparities, and strong beliefs of an idiosyncratic curricular implementation. The present study concluded that the term, national curriculum, is variously construed in different spaces and times; and its relevance depends primarily on what a national curriculum might look like and how it is operationalized in practice.

Acknowledgements

The completion of this dissertation would not have been possible without the tremendous support and guidance of several people. First and foremost, I thank my advisor *Dr. Kim C. Graber*, who has consistently mentored me and helped me to grow as an independent professional in academia. You have always given me the patience and flexibility to pursue my interests and have shown what is “professional” through your exemplary attitude. You have always supported, advocated, and trusted me whenever I encountered challenges. Words cannot express the extent of my gratitude, Dr. Graber. You are always in my heart wherever you are.

I would also like to thank *Dr. Amelia Mays Woods*, another respectable advisor. Thank you, Dr. Woods, for establishing and maintaining a safe and flexible learning environment where graduate students can continue to focus on research, freely pursue their interests, and fulfill their scholarly needs. I extend my sincere appreciation to *Dr. Wojtek Chodzko-Zajko* and *Dr. Thomas J. Templin* who have both graciously served on my dissertation committee. It is my lifetime honor that you, prominent scholars, have served on the committee; you have provided powerful energy and the impetus to keep me going.

I would like to extend a very special thank you to *the Graduate College, Julie Jenkins, Tina Candler, Tammy Winterbottom, and Linda West* for their continuous support while I was at Illinois. I am grateful to my graduate student colleagues with whom I had the pleasure of spending time: *David Daum, Jenny Linker, Jamie O’Connor, Julia Valley, Chris Gentry, Benjamin Kern, Doug Ellison, Tom Trendowski, Chad Killian, Gabriella McLoughlin, Susan Shelley, Jeongkyu Kim, Chris Kinder, Mengyi Wei, Katie Green, and Carol Kay*. Finally, I offer my sincere thanks to my family; *Kitaek Oh, Soonyul Lee, Hyeryang Kim, Youngrok Kim, Kyunhwa Kwon, Dongwoo Kim, Minhye Oh, Minji Kim, and Minwoo Kim*.

For my parents, *Kim C. Graber, Kitaek Oh, Soonyul Lee*, and my wife, *Hyeryang Kim*

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Chapter One: Introduction¹

Education reform has been at the center of political and academic debates for several decades. Specifically, curriculum improvement for meeting learning standards has been at the top of the agenda. In 1983, President Ronald Reagan's National Commission released a report titled *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education [NCEE]). This document reported that American schools were failing to develop a competitive workforce, and that establishing standards to assess the quality of teaching and learning at the national level was essential (Hursh, 2008; Ravitch, 2010; US Department of Education, 2009). More recent reforms, such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) proposed by the George W. Bush administration in 2001, accelerated the notion that setting high standards and establishing measurable goals can improve student outcomes in education. Therefore, there has been a growing sense by some scholars in education that a national set of standardized curricular guidelines, goals, and testing are necessary for holding schools accountable for high achievement and ultimately raising educational standards (Apple, 1996).

Despite the reform efforts of the 1980's, little improvement in the educational system was achieved. In fact, few significant gains were made in student learning by the end of the decade, and little had been done to improve the quality of instruction (Mullis, & Jenkins, 1990). The lack of results have been attributed by many educators to reforms that focused primarily on basic skills and an incoherent and fragmented education system (David, Cohen, Honetschlager, & Traiman, 1990; Smith & O'Day, 1991). Polyphonic policy structure, with a number of independently constituted centers of authority at each level, impedes purposeful coordination and results in poor quality of curriculum materials (Newmann, 1988), conflicting goals and policies,

¹ *Note.* Parts of this chapter were used to publish the article that appears as Chapter 4 in this dissertation.

and dissatisfaction of school personnel who feel accountable for educational improvement (Smith & O'Day, 1991). In addition, the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) criticized the policy fragmentation that diverted teachers' attention and provided little or no support for raising learning standards (Goertz, Floden, & O'Day, 1995).

National Curriculum

Most countries have some form of a national curriculum, but national curriculum may have a different meaning in different locations (Smith, O'Day, & Cohen, 1991). In England, for example, a national curriculum generally sets forth the subjects to be taught, the necessary knowledge and skills, and the standards and achievement targets that students should be encouraged to meet for each subject (Department for Education and Employment & Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 1999). In this respect, it can be seen as a common foundation to enable teachers to efficiently assess their progress and plan the next steps in the learning process.

The concept of a national curriculum is based on the idea that learning is most effective when all components of the education system work together towards a uniform set of curricular frameworks (Smith & O'Day, 1991). Different countries typically structure their national curriculum around particular goals and values and subject content and skills, although they do so with varying levels of detail. Therefore, most people may think of a national curriculum as rigorous, rigid, or inflexible. In fact, the idea of developing a national curriculum in the United States (US) was rejected in the last decade of the 20th century due to the belief that it restricted learning, prevented flexibility, and therefore would not be able to embrace culturally diverse students (Sleeter, 2005). Thus, an important question that remains to be answered is whether a national curriculum currently implemented in other countries really circumscribes student

learning and violates the home cultures and languages of students.

In fact, the introduction of a national curriculum does not mean an adoption of the same curriculum for every student in all schools (Kirk, Penney, Burgess-Limerick, Gorely, & Maynard, 2002). For example, the British government passed the national curriculum introduced in the 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA), as a response to somewhat of a ‘crisis’ in education. The goal of the national curriculum was to “set out clearly and simply a minimum entitlement for every child” (House of Commons, 2009, p. 3), and the framework was intentionally designed for flexibility in the adoption of statutory requirements in different schools (Department for Education and Employment & Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 1999; Kirk et al., 2002). The national curriculum in Britain, therefore, is quite adaptable.

In the traditional system in the US, individual states and local governments are responsible for schools and their performance. Unlike some countries that employ a national curriculum, most states adopt content standards broadly describing skills and knowledge for every student to achieve, while following fairly independent guidelines for development of curricula. As a result, schools and teachers are relatively free to plan and organize teaching and learning in a way that best meets both national and local requirements. What should be clarified here is that standards do not constitute a curriculum. Rather, they are part of a framework that broadly describes “knowledge and skills students should acquire in a particular subject area” (Goals 2000: Educate America Act of 1994, Pub. L. No. 103-227, § 3[4], 108 Stat. 129).

The concept of “standards” became the central vision which guides current state education policy. Ambitious rhetoric has emphasized “coherent, nationwide, and systemic education reform” (Goals 2000: Educate America Act of 1994, Pub. L. No. 103-227, § 2[1], 108 Stat. 128) and profound changes in curriculum and assessments to both accomplish academic

excellence and offer better learning opportunities for every student (educational equity). Since the 1994 reauthorization and modification of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), now called Improving America's School Act (IASA), states have adopted academic standards prescribing what schools are expected to teach and students are expected to master (Hamilton, Stecher, & Yuan, 2008). Therefore, conversion to a new system of national goals, curricular guidelines, and tests may prove to be redundant and unnecessary. A number of complex questions must be answered before a national curriculum could be established or implemented. What should a national curriculum in the American context look like? How do we establish a nationwide, coherent system of instructional guidance with which everyone can agree? Who would construct and determine its content, scope and sequence, assessments, and pedagogical requirements? How much detail would these components specify? Would this constitute a wise and successful reform, considering the United States' strong tradition of freedom of choice, the diversity of cultural and religious values, and the increase in language diversity among students?

Arguments regarding National Curriculum

There is some evidence of a growing movement in the direction of establishing a national, standardized form of curricular frameworks. National goals, testing activities, and efforts to reform teacher education can be seen as evidence of an overall trend in the direction of a national curriculum (Smith et al., 1991). The George H. W. Bush administration announced a broad proposal, America 2000, for education reform during the last decade of the 20th century, designed to expand national influence in American education (Eisner, 1991). Six goals were cited as well as national standards and a voluntary set of national tests (the American Achievement Tests) to be given in certain core subjects in the fourth, eighth, and twelfth grades. The goals to

be attained by the year 2000 focused on the demonstration of competency in challenging subject matter in certain disciplines, the improvement of problem-solving, and the expansion of the percentage of students who are competent in more than one language (US Department of Education, 2009).

In the same year, the concept of “systemic reform” first appeared in the form of widespread public discussion. Smith and O’Day (1991) proposed a coherent system that combines sound reform efforts with a supportive structure at more centralized levels of the policy system, while emphasizing equitable improvement for all. Later that same year, Smith et al. (1991) further suggested an advisable form of national curriculum that might lessen the enormous variation among states (e.g., coverage, rigor, or specificity) while preserving the democratic context of education by making teaching strategies and instructional materials flexible. This includes consistency of subject area content, assessments, and teacher education; an emphasis on local and state responsibility; and the construction of a cooperative system between schools and educational professionals.

Views about the implementation of a national curriculum and national testing, however, are not always positive. An emphasis on high-stakes testing and school accountability and calls for reform (e.g., NCLB) contributed negatively to teaching and education by focusing on learning that was narrowly defined by test scores (Hursh, 2008). A number of educators were particularly concerned that students, teachers, school and school districts are evaluated by a standardized testing system, and subsequently focus on preparing their students to pass the tests within narrow and simplified curricula (e.g., Hursh, 2008; McNeil, 2000; Sleeter, 2005).

In addition, in-depth debates during the 1990s concerning a common foundation were held with sociocultural, political, and economic ramifications. Apple (1996) strongly warned of

the danger of educational rationalizations for a national curriculum and national testing. He suggested that a predominantly monocultural national curriculum deals with diversity by referencing the plural “we” with all of its ideological implications. It recreates the hegemony of existing hierarchies of official knowledge and encourages the implementation of a rigid and disciplined teaching methodology. As Johnson (1991) claimed, culture can be thought of as a homogenous way of life that includes language, social beliefs and values, and other elements that are common to a group of people. A uniform culture is difficult to associate with a society in which traditions from cultures all over the world have been melded together. Such is the case in the United States, where a pre-selective version of knowledge has never truly existed (Apple, 1996).

Ideological polarization is also a product of the neoliberal view of school privatization (including voucher and choice plans), albeit from a different perspective. Basil Bernstein (1990) is instructive here regarding the complexities and consequences involved, noting that an opposition is likely to occur between certain pedagogical and curricular practices, and racial, gender, and class-based disparities. As he states it, “the pedagogic practices of the new vocationalism (neoliberalism) and those of the old autonomy of knowledge (neoconservatism) represent a conflict between different elitist ideologies, one based on the class hierarchy of the market and the other based on the hierarchy of knowledge and its class supports” (as cited in Apple, 1996, p. 63). Thus, there has been a constant debate between the public and free-market approaches to education since the 1990s.

National Curriculum in K-12 Physical Education

While educational reform and especially national curriculum have been debated in education for many years, physical education has not been without struggle and scrutiny. In the

1980s, there was a lack of a clear, conspicuous notion of sequential curriculum structure, skill and knowledge acquisition, and goals, as well as rubrics and outcomes—in fact there was no real understanding of what students were expected to learn. Regarding the problems, some educators stated, “Physical education communities have failed to take seriously the teaching and learning” (Taylor, 1986, p. 71), and “we have failed provide an experience that our students perceive as meaningful” (Griffey, 1987, p. 21).

In response, a 1986 issue of the *Journal of Physical Education Recreation and Dance* (JOPERD) discussed the need for a national curriculum focusing on the question, “Should AAHPERD attempt to develop a national curriculum in physical education?” (p. 18) Belka suggested that the establishment of a national curriculum could simultaneously provide a common foundation of skills and knowledge and local flexibility in culturally diverse US contexts. Johnson also emphasized developing a sound national curriculum involving “workable curriculum guidelines and achievement standards for physical education programs” (1986, p. 19). Both scholars supported a national curriculum that acts as a common foundation rather than a rigid structure that standardizes teachers’ thought and eliminates local school board decisions.

Shortly after, a special feature in *JOPERD* discussed problems and future directions in secondary physical education. Some authors argued that physical education in secondary school curricula not only is thought to be “an endangered species” engendering low expectations and indifference (Siedentop, 1987), but is also not perceived as important and relevant by most students (Griffey, 1987; Templin, 1987). In light of this marginalization, Taylor and Chiogioji claimed that “if the physical education program is to regain its relevance in the school curriculum, goals and practice need to be aligned” (1987, p. 23).

In spite of the call to reform the programs of secondary physical education, the majority

continued to be perceived as not meeting students' needs. Overall, secondary programs were not seen as a relevant or positive educational experience (Rink, 1992). The issue of secondary physical education was illuminated by keynote presenters at the 1992 "Critical Crossroads Conference" – the first to focus on secondary programs. Siedentop (1992) stated that school programs should entail "long-term instructional activity classes where students work seriously towards mastery goals" (p. 70), while Ennis (1992) emphasized the importance of developing a physical education curriculum based on viable learning goals. These suggestions followed the demand for more aligned and clearer curricular guidelines and attainment goals.

Are NASPE Standards Enough?

In 1986, the National Association for Sport and Physical Education [NASPE] designed the "Outcomes Project" to answer the question, "What should physically educated students know and be able to do?" The Outcomes Project committee rejected the idea of developing a national curriculum because of its rigidity and inflexible learning and instruction. Instead, they specified five major focus areas of a physically educated person with 20 outcome statements that include grade-specific competencies (NASPE, 1992; Zieff, Lumpkin, Guedes, & Eguaoje, 2009). This was the first NASPE publication that identified benchmarks of a physically educated person.

Soon after, in response to the passage the year before of the Goals 2000: Educate America Act that emphasized a national commitment to educational standards, the NASPE released *Moving into the Future: National Standards for Physical Education: A Guide to Content and Assessment* (NASPE, 1995). The initial version described seven content standards that identified what students should know and be able to master as a result of participating in a quality physical education program; with sample benchmarks and assessment examples. In a subsequent revision (2004), the standards were reduced to six, and assessment sections were

removed because of the availability of other tools that schools and educators could choose individually (Zieff, Lumpkin, Guedes, & Eguaaje, 2009). In addition, a national-level task force was appointed to develop valid and reliable assessments that would match the 2004 national standards (NASPE, 2010; 2011).

As guidelines for curricula to establish quality PE programs, NASPE standards have become the central framework for many states, schools, and teachers to follow. In addition, the flexibility of the standards provided teachers with greater instructional leeway with suggested performance outcomes suitable for their specific classroom situations and favorite interests. Thus, the flexibility of the standards is seen by many in a positive light especially in the American school context.

What should be contemplated here, however, is whether the standards are adequate to guide American physical education. In fact, the standards do not identify specific content for lessons. Rather, they provide broad descriptions of skills and knowledge for every student to achieve. In addition, the standards specify basic movement skills and knowledge for each grade level, but specific content beyond that is not specified (Humphries, Lovdahl, & Ashy, 2002). Because of their flexibility, the standards are compatible with curricula emphasizing fitness, responsibility, game play, and other appropriate goals of physical education (Humphries et al., 2002). They do not, however, constitute a curriculum, only a framework. As Hamilton et al. (2008) have pointed out, standards alone can neither change the content of instruction nor influence practice in a significant way without efforts at curriculum reform.

Although there has been a great effort to implement a national curriculum in education as well as physical education, the issues involved are still debated. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate whether conversion to a national curriculum is the appropriate and feasible reform in

the United States where the tradition of local control and state responsibility dominates. Specifically, it explored whether a national curriculum can provide efficient instruction, effective learning, and equitable educational opportunities for all students, while achieving high standards through a balanced curriculum. The advantages, disadvantages, and achievability of a unified, national physical education curriculum were examined. The specific research questions which guided the study are:

1. What are the perceptions of leaders in the field related to a national curriculum?
2. Is a national curriculum the desirable and relevant reform in the socio-culturally and contextually diverse US educational contexts?
3. Would a national curriculum improve effectiveness and efficiency of education?
4. Is a national curriculum feasible and achievable in the US where the longstanding tradition of state and local curriculum control has been deeply embedded?
5. What are the advantages and disadvantages of a national curriculum and what challenges may be anticipated in the process of its establishment and implementation?

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Chapter Two: Review of Literature²

National Curriculum and Ideology

Education is deeply tied to the politics of culture (Apple, 1996). Recognizing differences in children and providing a neutral core of knowledge can bring about positive change in learning, while adopting and legitimating some group's vision of curricula sometimes perpetuates cultural and political ideologies (Apple, 2004). It is, therefore, important to understand the meaning and role a national curriculum would have in the large social milieu and how a national curriculum and national testing work in practice.

Although a national curriculum may have varied meanings in different countries (Smith, O'Day, & Cohen, 1991), it is nevertheless a framework that is universally employed in those countries to maintain schools and ensure that teaching and learning are consistent. It also sets forth the knowledge, skills, and understanding required for each subject and provides standards and attainment targets at each level (Department for Education and Employment & Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 1999). Since the English government introduced a national curriculum in the Education Reform Act (ERA), as a response to somewhat of a "crisis" in their education system, it has addressed the standards of provision and learning, and the efficiency of the education system (House of Common, 2009; Kirk, et al., 2002). Attainment targets and programs of study were developed for each of the key stages in education for all subjects. It was designed to ensure the provision of a "broad and balanced" curriculum for all students (Department for Education, 2013). Kirk et al. (2002) stated that the introduction of the national curriculum did not signal the introduction of the "same curriculum" for all students in all schools. Rather, the aim was to establish a standard framework for curricula and to ensure a

² *Note.* Parts of this chapter were used to publish the article that appears as Chapter 4 in this dissertation.

minimum entitlement for all students.

The framework of specific attainment targets, programs of study, and developmental stages has been adopted by both England and Wales, but each country has developed different ways of implementing the framework (Kirk et al., 2002). Both, however, are good examples of how a national curriculum can guide education standards. The curriculum in both countries allows for cultural differences in that culture-specific activities can fulfill the requirements. For example, the Curriculum Council for Wales [CCW] (1992) stated that students could “study the history and evolution of Welsh dance and perform a selection of Welsh dance” (p. 8) to fulfill the requirements, or that an appreciation of the Welsh landscape could be fostered by walking or hiking on nature trails.

As discussed above, many believe the national system appears to improve student performance and school quality by assessing students, schools, and employees with objective goals and guidelines in the interest of social cohesion. Others, however, have argued that a national curriculum reinforces social antagonism between social classes, ethnic and racial groups, and major and minor groups (Apple, 1996).

This nostalgia for “cohesion” is interesting, but the great delusion is that all pupils – black and white, working class, poor, and middle-class, boys and girls – will receive the curriculum in the same way. Actually, it will be read in different ways, according to how pupils are placed in social relationships and culture. A common curriculum, in a heterogeneous society, is not a recipe for “cohesion”, but for resistance and the renewal of divisions. (Johnson, 1991, p. 79)

It may be inferred that curriculum is not easily perceived as a neutral or objective, especially in a complex society in which divergent interests are inextricably intertwined due to

diverse ethnic groups, a disproportion of power, and economic differences. Therefore, some scholars believe it is necessary for the curriculum content to be individualized by acknowledging these differences and inequalities (Eisner, 1991; Yosso, 2002). This would be the only way to embrace the diverse cultures of all students while preventing a simplified uniform approach to teaching.

The nature of curriculum, and national curriculum in particular is described by Michael Apple as “never simply a neutral assemblage of knowledge, somehow appearing in the texts and classrooms of a nation. It is always part of a selected tradition, someone’s selection, some group’s vision of legitimate knowledge.” (Apple, 1996, p. 22, Apple, 2004). He further argues that the national curriculum might serve, in part, to acknowledge differences, but at the same time it reaffirms the supposed consensus about what should be learned. It is part of an attempt to reassert the hegemony that has been fractured by social movements (Apple & Christian-Smith, 1991). Apple (1996) reminds us that the primary role of national curriculum and national testing can be a mechanism for differentiating and measuring children and schools more rigidly against fixed norms with standardized social meanings. Indeed, curriculum, especially at the national level, tends to unify the vast universe of knowledge, including social meanings, culture, and history, into an ideological sense.

National Curriculum in United States

Education and its policies are deeply embedded in culture, economics, and politics (Apple, 1996); and they change in response to social flux. Although local control and state responsibility are the American tradition in education, various policies and reforms (e.g., America 2000, ESEA, or NCLB) have been proposed under different regimes. With the retrogression of the social democratic policies that had guided the United States for much of the

last century and which improved overall education and economic levels for Americans, the neoliberal movement with the New Right began to thrive in the 1980s (Hursh, 2008). President George W. Bush succinctly stated, “Trade and markets are freedom” (Fischer, 1999, as cited in Hursh, 2008, p. 2), implying that social democratic policies interfere with individual liberty and the efficiency of the marketplace.

The reformers’ desire at this time was to implement policies that support markets and privatize public services. Voucher and choice plans were an intermediate step between total marketization and public schools (Hursh, 2008). In the response to the criticism regarding the failure of American education, however, strident calls arose for higher standards, uniform testing, and increased accountability (Eisner, 1991; Smith & O’Day, 1991). The 1983 “*A Nation at Risk*” (National Commission on Excellence in Education [NCEE]) released by the Reagan administration was a response to these calls emphasizing “raising standards” through quality of teaching and learning and “a nationwide system of standardized tests” derived, in part, from the sense that the United States was losing its edge in the arena of international economic competition (US Department of Education, 2009).

National influences on education have accelerated since the reform efforts of 1980s’ (Smith et al., 1991). In 1991, the Bush administration presented the America 2000 proposal to expand national influence in American education. It proposed the creation of national standards and voluntary national tests (American Achievement Tests) to be given in five core subject areas—math, science, English, history, and geography—in the fourth, eighth, and twelfth grades. These tests consisted of a system of examinations to be administered by states. A national examination was planned as a calibration mechanism, allowing for the comparisons of state results. Its goals also involved direct federal grants to develop new schools, provide local support,

and generate report cards to measure the progress of schools and districts (US Department of Education, 2009). More recently, the NCLB legislation proposed in 2001 expanded the federal role in public education through annual testing, periodical academic progress report cards, and teacher qualifications. The act, however, did not establish national achievement goals (US Department of Education, 2009).

In fact, the US already has a national test, the National Examination of Educational Progress (NAEP), which is an assessment system of what all students should know in core subjects. It has periodically collected and reported academic achievement data at the national, state, and local level, in order to measure the condition and progress of education nationally (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2005). The NAEP reports the findings for the nation by comparing student achievement across states and monitoring different demographic groups including race/ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status. The content frameworks and proficiency standards aligned with the assessments can be viewed by some as the initiative to nationalize the curriculum in the US (Smith et al., 1991).

Regardless of what one might believe, state responsibility and local control are perceived by many as the American way; which may preclude a national set of goals, curricular guidelines, and testing. In addition, it would be a highly complex undertaking to determine what a national curriculum might look like and whether it is a wise reform in American education. In this regard, Smith et al. (1991) have suggested a practical and suitable form for national curriculum taking into account cultural, regional, and ethnic differences. Their primary emphasis was the creation of educational contexts where all components of the education system including instructional materials, teacher education, and assessments and testing work in alignment. They further argued that the success of adopting a national curriculum depends upon the joint effort of

educational professionals, content experts, and private and public agencies. The flexibility to be granted to states, local districts, schools, and teachers would also promise its success as a meaningful reform.

Standards-based Movement in the United States

Since the 1990s, the concept of “standards” has been deeply embedded in the central framework that dominates current state education policy (Shepard, Hannaway, & Baker, 2009). Many states are now adopting content standards and aligned assessments to improve overall education. Thus, it is important to highlight the standards-based vision to understand the dynamics of US education reform efforts. In addition, a critical analysis will provide a baseline for comprehending the influence of the NASPE standards and the present state of US physical education.

Standards-based Education (SBE)

With the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, there has arisen rhetoric about “raising standards” in response to failure of American education and the lack of fundamental skills that should be achieved upon completion of high school (Futrell & Brown, 2000; Ravitch, 2010, Wiener & Hall, 2004). This led to the justification of clearness, consistency, and rigor in curriculum and pedagogical practices and to schools held accountable for academic excellence. The concept of “standards” has now become the central framework that guides current state education policy.

The standards-based vision is the most prominent and complex reform in contemporary US education. In the face of the incoherence of the educational system at the time and the fact that it focused on minimum competencies that had done little to enhance the quality of learning and teaching, government and educational leaders called for the establishment of academic

standards that students should achieve and be able to do (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Hursh, 2008; Shepard et al., 2009; Smith & O'Day, 1991). As a result, almost every state government has adopted content standards that all students are expected to master and that teachers are expected to teach.

Standards-based reform does not have a single, commonly understood definition. In fact, standards can mean different things. As Wilson and Floden (2001) have discussed, "... and SBR spread widely in 1990s, but the meaning varied across contexts" (p. 195). Not only is there enormous variation among states in the design of their reform plans (i.e., coverage, rigor, specificity, and clarity), but notions of what constitutes effective standards-based education have also changed over time (Hamilton, Stecher, & Yuan, 2008). Complicating the situation even more, policymakers and educators have often used other similar terms which differ somewhat in connotation or emphasis, to describe standards-based reform (Hamilton et al., 2008). There are, however, common core components that characterize the vision (Wikipedia, 2015).

- (1) curriculum frameworks which state specific knowledge and skills students should master at each grade level
- (2) an emphasis on criterion-referenced assessments rather than norm-based rankings which compare one children with others
- (3) high-stakes tests such as examinations for graduation that require high standards of achievement to obtain a diploma, consequently making teachers and schools accountable for student achievement
- (4) efforts to enhance the capacity of schools to enable all students meet standard goals regardless of sociocultural status (e.g., race, gender, social class)

A standards-based vision has been featured in federal legislation since the 1994 reauthorization and modification of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), now called Improving America's School Act (IASA), and carried forward under President George W. Bush's administration with the NCLB legislation of 2001 (Pub. L. No. 107-110, 115 Stat. 1425). It should be noted, however, that Title I, an original provision of the ESEA passed in 1965, had already permitted states to use achievement standards and assessment tests, although funding to implement the Act was primarily limited to schools and school districts with high percentages of students from low-income families to enable all students to meet the standards (US Department of Education, 2009). The requirement for standards and their aligned assessments, which were proposed in the IASA, later become the centerpieces of the 2001 NCLB legislation.

The standards-based vision also had been highlighted with the passing of President William J. Clinton's first legislative proposal, Goals 2000: The Educate America Act. The act defined content standards as "broad descriptions of the knowledge and skills every student should acquire in a particular subject area" (Goals 2000: Educate America Act of 1994, Pub. L. No. 103-227, § 3[4], 108 Stat. 129). Emergence of these standards marked an important shift from a center on input, such as quality of instruction, to a concentration on output—what children need to learn or how their performance should be assessed (Murnane & Levy, 2001).

The vision "standards" comes from the premise that individuals are capable of academic excellence if adequate learning conditions exist and opportunities are offered (Odden, 2003). Thus, the ultimate goal of standards-based education is to simultaneously achieve academic excellence and educational equity by helping all students meet standards regardless of race, gender, or socioeconomic status (Hamilton et al., 2008; US Department of Education, 2009). Ambitious rhetoric called for systemic reform and profound changes in curriculum and

assessments to enable higher levels of learning. The actual implementation of standards, however, has often brought about a policy of test-driven accountability, whereby schools and individual teachers are rewarded or punished by student performance scores (Shepard et al., 2009).

Race to the Top Program

The traditional system in American education has been largely based on state accountability and local control, with some financial support offered by the federal government. In recent years, however, the federal government has taken on increasing influence and leadership in education by assessing its effectiveness through standard measures nationally administered (US Department of Education, 2009). In the same manner, the President Barack H. Obama administration has initiated remarkable educational policies and reforms for various purposes at different times.

In 2009, President Obama signed historic legislation, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), to stimulate the economy and support critical sectors, including America's K-12 education. The act invested over \$4.35 billion for the Race to the Top fund, designed to reward states that established the conditions for educational reform, realized significant, substantial improvement in student achievement, and ensured every student is prepared for success in job market and college (US Department of Education, 2013). The framework characterizing the Race to the Top consists of four main reform areas: "Adopting rigorous standards and assessments that prepare students for success in college and the workplace; Building data systems that measure student success and inform teachers and principals how they can improve their practices; Recruiting, developing, retaining, and rewarding effective teachers and principals; and Turning around the lowest-performing schools" (US Department of Education, 2013, p. 2).

Most states including the District of Columbia have competed to obtain the comprehensive statewide reform grants under the Race to the Top legislation, and nineteen states have been awarded grants thus far. Forty-eight states are now working together to establish a voluntary set of standards for college- and career-preparation (The White House & US Department of Education, 2014).

National Physical Education Curriculum

“Frankly, it is rather amazing that physical education has no uniform curriculum. Can you imagine such disorganization in math, science, or English? The very fact that we are permitted by students, parents, school administrators, and school boards not to have an organized and known curriculum infers a low level of expectation and esteem for what we do.” (Berg, 1988, p.

70)

The call for a state- or nation-wide curriculum by some scholars in physical education arose in response to the low expectations for the subject matter and the negative perceptions of students, parents, and school administrators (though the idea of developing a national curriculum for physical education has also been rejected by many because of its rigidity). For a long time, the profession of physical education has suffered from a lack of expectations for a significant outcome in K-12 education (Griffey, 1987; James, 2011; Sheehy, 2006). It has been regarded as a special, extracurricular subject within school cultures, often ridiculed and devalued by those outside the schools (Siedentop, 1987; 1992). In addition, the media including TV shows and movies, still portrays physical education class and its teachers negatively as frivolous, non-challenging, or militaristic (Duncan, Nolan, & Wood, 2002; Sheehy, 2011). As a result, physical education continues to suffer from reduced credit and minimal requirements, cutbacks in funding and resources, misunderstanding by the public and exclusion from national reform movements

(e.g., America 2000, NAEP, and NCLB).

In an attempt to fight against this marginalization, a 1986 issue of *JOPERD* dealt first with the feasibility of a national curriculum for physical education. The perspectives of six professionals were presented that argued for and against a national curriculum. The majority who were against the idea maintained that developing a national curriculum would divert energy away from student learning and instead focus on a philosophical debate about the ideal curriculum, preventing local flexibility, and creating redundant efforts. In contrast, Belka and Johnson (1986) suggested that developing a national curriculum would provide a “common foundation” (p. 19) and workable guidelines for America’s physical education, where unorganized, unknown curricula and inconsistent instruction are accepted without scrutiny. The form of a desirable national curriculum they suggested was a common foundation allowing for diversity and local flexibility rather than a narrow curriculum which standardizes teacher instruction and eliminates local school board decisions.

The marginalization of physical education has long been of concern to physical educators. Historically, physical education has neither been given the same status as other academic subjects nor held in high esteem by the educational mainstream (Collier, 2011; James, 2011; Sparks, Templin, & Schempp, 1993). Government leaders and educators have made constant efforts to raise academic standards for over three decades in core subjects, but physical education has not been part of the reform movement (e.g., America 2000, NCLB). Unstructured and undervalued, secondary physical education programs have been a particular irritation in our profession for a long time (e.g., Beyer, 2008; Ennis, 1992; Rink, 1992; Siedentop, 1992).

In response to the inherent problems encountered by physical education, many highly-regarded scholars have argued about the challenges and issues of curriculum, instruction, and

assessments in secondary physical education. Siedentop (1992) described “long-term instructional activity classes where students work seriously towards mastery goals” (p. 70), and he advised physical educators to “learn from what is being done in other parts of the world” (p. 70). Ennis emphasized developing a physical education curriculum based on viable learning goals. In addition, Taylor and Chiogioji (1987) claimed “if the physical education program is to regain its relevance in the school curriculum, goals and practice need to be aligned” (p. 23). Those suggestions were evidence of the demand for clearer and more aligned common frameworks for learning goals, curricula, and instructional guidelines in school physical education.

Physical education continues to be devalued in K-12 schools (Henninger & Carlson, 2011) in spite of the multidimensional efforts such as promoting quality teachers, designing curricular and instructional models, establishing clear standards, and other national efforts spearheaded by the NASPE to improve the status of physical education. Interestingly, physical education researchers have long attempted to find the root causes of their marginal status. For example, Griffey (1987) identified the fundamental problems that have plagued secondary physical education for years: physical education has failed to provide an in-class experience that students perceives as meaningful and has failed to convince students that skill mastery is important. His insight has been recalled by other researchers such as Kretchmar (2006), Doolittle (2007), and Sheehy (2011).

Limited research, however, has been published about the potential for developing a national physical education curriculum in the United States. Perhaps this is because the development of a national curriculum that circumscribes flexibility and opposes the traditional American education philosophical ideal has been rejected by education professionals (Zieff,

Lumpkin, Guedes, & Eguaaje, 2009). The majority of publications covering a national curriculum for physical education that are written in English are limited to Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand, and other countries that have implemented such a curriculum. Nevertheless, a few scholars have discussed the possibility of a national physical education curriculum in U.S. schools. For example, Berg (1988) emphasized the establishment of a unified, sound curriculum to be employed throughout all US schools, claiming that P-12 programs should help students acquire relevant levels of grade-specific skills and knowledge. He further identified five steps to implement a national curriculum properly: (1) building a realistic curriculum for K-12 physical education by connecting the expertise of individual teachers with that of educational professionals on the college and university level, (2) establishing a comprehensive curriculum to be tested and evaluated in certain pilot schools, (3) evaluating the results of pilot testing prior to large-scale implementation and assessing its applicability to schools, (4) securing sufficient funding through public campaigns, and (5) widely publicizing and encouraging the curriculum.

Upon analysis of national curricula currently implemented in other countries (e.g., Great Britain and China), Davis (1995) also discussed the plausibility of a national curriculum for physical education in the United States. The research identified two advantages of a national curriculum: providing some security and credibility for the profession by resisting the perception that physical education is nonacademic or “academically soft” (p. 680); and (2) offering a focus, unity, and fundamental agreement on goals, content, and assessments.

A recent article provided a blueprint for building a model physical education curriculum. According to Moore (2012), an exemplary curriculum begins with a common curricular foundation that incorporates clear, concise goals, the alignment between daily lesson plans and state or national content standards, and the use of an objective assessment system that guides

instruction and defines attainment goals. Although the curriculum alignment the author proposed does not imply total standardization for physical education curricula, nor a national curriculum, the curriculum does address the integration of goals, content, and assessments within the profession. Aligning instruction—an integral part of facilitating learning (Rink, 2010)—could ensure that goals and objectives for student learning match the series of instructional tasks given to students and the assessment of student achievement (Cohen, 1987; Henninger & Carlson, 2011).

Grounding Framework

The model selected for the present study is Smith and O’Day’s Systemic Reform (SR) framework. In brief, SR posits that a coherent, uniform set of visions, goals, and instructional guidance systems improves clearness, efficiency, and effectiveness in teaching and learning by facilitating purposeful coordination of educational components. Its origin, historical background, concept, and primary elements are described in this section.

Historical Background of Systemic Reform

Since the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education [NCEE]) in 1983, government leaders, educators, and policymakers during the mid-1980s addressed the need for raising standards for high school graduation by improving the quality of teaching and learning. All stages of education have been targeted from pre-school to the transition from school to work. Reform efforts have been focused on almost every aspect of the public school systems, including curriculum and accountability, school management, preservice teacher education, and community and parental involvement (Goertz, Floden, & O’Day, 1995).

In spite of the impressive reform efforts of the 1980s, few significant gains were made in

the quality of instruction and learning. The unintended results of the reform attempts have been attributed by professionals to their “top down and more of the same” (Smith & O’Day, 1991, p. 2) nature. Among the failed programs were longer school days, increased high school graduation requirements, higher standards for classroom teachers, and testing activities focused primarily on proficiency in basic skills (Smith & O’Day, 1991). Further, content instruction was not revised and teachers were never directly involved in the reform process. The prevalent concepts of teaching and learning remained unchanged (David et al., 1990).

Against these deficiencies of earlier reform efforts, a “second wave” of efforts began to build in the late 1980’s. Rhetoric focused on the fundamental restructuring of education rather than on bolstering up the previous system; and key concepts were bandied about such as decentralization and a bottom-up approach with the schools as the target of change (Smith & O’Day, 1991). Successful schools were cited as exemplars. Their attributes, suggested by research, included a group of high-quality teachers who well-understand both subject matter and pedagogical knowledge; challenging standards and use of curricula relevant to embrace cultural diversity and disparities; and a high level of teacher-student involvement in a common educational mission (Smith & O’Day, 1991). Few substantial changes, however, were effected. Smith and O’Day (1991) attributed this lack to two major factors; fragmented policy structure and an emphasis on basic skills pervading both policy and practice.

What is Systemic Reform?

Systemic school reform is an educational strategy that has emerged since the early 1990’s in response to the criticism that reform approaches seen in the 1980’s did little to alter the content of instruction or improve quality of teaching and learning. Some analysts believe that the meager outcomes of the 1980’s have primarily stemmed from incoherent and fragmented

education system. In particular, Goertz et al. (1995) argued that policy fragmentation provides teachers and local schools with considerable discomfort and frustration over the disparate, overlapped administrative requirements. Accordingly, there arose a consensus that school reforms are most likely to be effective when elements of the education system (e.g., goals and vision, instructional and curricular guidelines, and teacher training programs) work in alignment. The SR model embodies three major components: (a) a unifying vision and goals, (b) a coherent pedagogical guidance system, and (c) a restructured policy and governance structure.

The proposal for SR cited barriers to educational change as the result of a fragmented, complex, and multi-layered system (Goertz et al., 1995). Partly to blame for the low quality of the curriculum in many US schools is policy fragmentation which engenders unclear responsibility for goal setting and articulation, the implementation of curriculum, and textbook selection. In addition, fragmented policy result in disconnections between educational goals and policy and between content and instructional practice (Goertz et al., 1995). The descriptions provide some clear evidence of the need for a coherent systemic strategy that improves clearness, efficiency, and effectiveness in learning and teaching by aligning all components of education system.

The SR model would provide a clear structure within which other important educational components may be organized (Smith & O'Day, 1991). For example, textbook and curricular materials, assessment and testing systems, teacher professional development programs including both pre- and in-service, and teacher licensing programs could all comprise the content of the frameworks. To ensure adequate guidance to improve instruction, the frameworks must be of the highest quality possible. Furthermore, local school personnel must have the freedom to interpret and implement instructional strategies that most effectively meet the particular needs of their

students (Smith & O'Day, 1991). In summary, the primary emphasis of the supporters of SR was the establishment of educational circumstances where all of the components, including content, instruction materials, teacher professional development, and assessments, are coherently arranged.

This investigation, which is grounded in SR model, sought to explore whether establishing a national curriculum is an advisable and feasible reform in the US education system where there is a strong tradition of local and state control. Physical education teacher education (PETE) faculty leaders from colleges and universities were interviewed regarding national physical education curriculum. The specific research questions that guide this study are:

1. What are the perceptions of leaders in the field related to a national curriculum?
2. Is a national curriculum the desirable and relevant reform in the socio-culturally and contextually diverse US educational contexts?
3. Would a national curriculum improve effectiveness and efficiency of education?
4. Is a national curriculum feasible and achievable in the US where the longstanding tradition of state and local curriculum control has been deeply embedded?
5. What are the advantages and disadvantages of a national curriculum and what challenges may be anticipated in the process of its establishment and implementation?

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Chapter Three: Method

Despite a movement toward establishing a standardized set of frameworks for curricula and national tests since the 1980s, investigations of the potential for a national curriculum in the U.S. have been lacking, particularly in the field of physical education. To capture the voices of physical education teacher education (PETE) faculty about the effectiveness, feasibility, and achievability of a national curriculum, a qualitative approach to data collection was employed.

As Patton (2002) suggests, the quality and viability of qualitative research depends to a great extent on the integrity, sensitivity, and methodological skills of the researcher(s). Producing credible and useful qualitative findings through interviewing, content analysis, and observation requires discipline, knowledge, creativity, and training and practice. In addition, qualitative data must encompass in-depth and rich descriptions of the people under investigation, including their environments and interactions. For example, skillful interviewing entails much more than merely asking questions and listening to answers. Interviewers must document direct quotations verbatim with a clear understanding of participants' knowledge, perspectives, experiences, and feelings of the context.

The stated purpose of a study helps researchers to organize their research questions and direct the methodology and design (Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007). The present study explores whether the implementation of a national curriculum is a relevant and achievable reform effort in the US. The investigation addresses the advantages, disadvantages, and challenges of a national system and lays out considerations for its proper construction. The specific research questions arising from the purpose of this study were:

1. What are the perceptions of leaders in the field related to a national curriculum?
2. Is a national curriculum the desirable and relevant reform in the socio-culturally and

contextually diverse US educational contexts?

3. Would a national curriculum improve effectiveness and efficiency of education?
4. Is a national curriculum feasible and achievable in the US where the longstanding tradition of state and local curriculum control has been deeply embedded?
5. What are the advantages and disadvantages of a national curriculum and what challenges may be anticipated in the process of its establishment and implementation?

Sampling

There have been impressive efforts to comprehensively document institutions of higher learning in the US, starting with the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education in 1970. The commission has established an empirical data base of institutions of higher learning, originally published in 1987 (with changes updated through 2015), that classifies four-year colleges and universities in the areas of faculty, undergraduate and graduate programs, and institutional size and setting (Carnegie Foundation, 2015). The Carnegie data base provides updated information about institutions of higher learning and has been a useful guide for ones who need information about different types of colleges/universities.

Using the Carnegie Classifications as a guide, faculty and graduate students at the University of Illinois conducted an Internet search to determine which colleges and universities listed in the guide offer teacher certification programs in PETE. In total, the names and contact information for faculty from 599 different PETE programs were located and entered onto an Excel spreadsheet (Graber, Erwin, Woods, Rhoades, & Zhu, 2011). For the present study, a stratified and purposeful sample of PETE faculty from different Carnegie Classifications was selected from the University of Illinois data base. Four classifications were represented in this

study; (a) very high research activity universities, (b) high research activity universities, (c) doctoral/research universities, and (d) large and medium program master's colleges and universities. The aim of a *stratified* sample was to increase confidence in the generalizations (Patton, 2002) made by PETE faculty with regard to national curriculum reform. It also allowed the comparison of statements from faculty from different types of institutions (data triangulation). The reason for using a *purposeful* sample was to select PETE faculty who are considered leaders in the field.

Participants and Settings

As Patton (2002) emphasizes, there are no fixed rules for the number of participants in a qualitative investigation. Rather, a significant component in qualitative inquiry is to determine and justify the selected sample size according to what the researcher wants to know based on the purpose of the investigation, what is likely to be credible and useful, and what can be accomplished within the available time. Open-ended questions and discerning probes from a small number of people can yield important, in-depth responses about participants' opinions, perceptions, knowledge, and experiences (Patton, 2002). In addition, in-depth information from a smaller sample requires considerable effort and time to analyze a large amount of verbatim data produced from open-ended interviewing.

Participants in this study were limited to PETE leaders who hold a doctorate of philosophy or doctorate of education degree. Specifically, they were scholars who had served or were currently serving in a leadership capacity at the state or national level in a primary professional organization (e.g., Society of Health and Physical Education (SHAPE) America [formerly the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance]); Special Interest Group: Research on Learning and Instruction in Physical Education of the

American Educational Research Association; National Association for Sport and Physical Education [NASPE]), or had published 3 or more articles in the past 5 years in leading research journals (e.g., *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*). In total, 28 PETE leaders (14 female, 14 male) from four different Carnegie Classifications of colleges and universities across the United States were purposefully selected: very high research activity universities (n = 10), high research activity universities (n = 7), doctoral/research universities (n = 5), and large and medium program Master's colleges and universities (n = 6).

Based on their collected curriculum vitae, participants included were 26 national leaders, one state leader, and one researcher who met the qualification criteria for publications. Most had been directly or were currently involved in the determination, administration, and implementation of major PE policies, legislation, or acts. Therefore, they served as living witnesses of the growth and change in the field of physical education. Specifically, of the national leaders, 15 were past or current presidents in primary professional organizations, 7 have chaired various scholarly and administrative groups within the national organizations, and 4 were editors for major journals. As major committee members, consultants, and publishers in the field, they have served in multiple leadership roles at the national as well as state and regional/district levels by developing or being engaged in content standards, curriculum guidelines and frameworks, and/or assessment for K-12 physical education. Most were currently serving as presidents, chairs, committee members, and/or editors of one or more primary professional organizations and leading research journals, or they had done so in the past. In addition, almost all of the participants (27) also met the qualification criterion for the number of peer-referred articles published in the past five years.

Distinctive information about each participant, however, is not described specifically in this study to avoid revealing private identities. Further, all participants were assigned fictitious names. Demographic information includes gender, type of institution, rank, years teaching in higher education, and number of referred publications.

In order to fulfill the purpose of this investigation, PETE faculty leaders who were most likely to understand and show interest in the topics of curriculum, reform, and policy in physical education were invited to participate. The “information rich” sample from which “one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research” (Patton, 2002, p. 46) yielded in-depth results. As a way to maximize data from the purposefully selected sample, Lincoln and Guba (1985) advise leaving the sample size open until no new information from newly sampled participants emerges showing redundancy. Interviewing 28 PETE leaders allowed the researcher to reach redundancy with regard to emergent information.

Recruitment took place through e-mail (see Appendix A) or by phone contact after all necessary training and approvals were obtained from the University of Illinois Institutional Review Board. The email included an informed consent query to determine willingness to participate in the study (see Appendix B, C). Non-responsive participants received the email a maximum of three times.

Formal and informal interviews occurred in person during the 2014 annual meeting of the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance, now SHAPE America, in St. Louis, Missouri. Twelve leaders participated in in-person interviews lasting up to two hours in length during the period from April 1st through 5th. The date, time, and location for each interview were scheduled at the participant’s convenience in advance. For those (n = 16) unable to attend the conference or participate in interviews during the conference, in-person

interviews were scheduled at participants' home institutions or by telephone if distance was an issue. In addition, participants were asked to share a recent copy of their professional curriculum vita for purpose of acquiring demographic information and to determine participation eligibility.

Interviews

A combination of formal and informal interview techniques with open-ended questions was used to evoke in-depth responses about participants' perspectives (Patton, 2002). A standardized format was employed in the early part of the interview, leaving the researcher free to later address unanticipated issues or new questions that emerged. The consistent use of uniform questions facilitated the analysis and comparison of interview responses within the various groups designated by the Carnegie Classification. All formal interviews were taped and later transcribed using fictitious names and locations.

In addition to the formal interview approach, the informal conversational technique was employed (Patton, 2002). This type of interview—the most unstructured and open-ended—allowed the researcher to cover “the spontaneous generation of questions” (p. 342) that emerged from the natural flow of the interaction. This technique required the expenditure of a great deal of time and effort in the analysis of the different interview responses. This portion of the interview, immediately following the standardized interview, was also taped and later transcribed.

Some participants were informally interviewed in a setting outside the taped format. For example, participants who wished to share additional information after the taped interview could supplement their responses during the course of the AAHPERD conference or afterward. In order to effectively record these informal responses, the researcher maintained an interview log immediately following conversations with participants. The name of the interviewee, date, time, and location of the informal interview were recorded along with general notes. Overall, the

combined strategy used in the study offered flexibility in determining when to explore respondents in greater depth, as well as helped the interviewer avoid deviating from the prescribed format through the explicit, deliberate, and accurate wording of each question in advance.

Interview questions were grounded in the previously determined theoretical framework of the research project. In other words, the interview questions were carefully established and worded in alignment with the theoretical model of systemic reform and research questions (see Appendix D). Once the interview questions had been scripted, they were edited and refined by a panel of experts for clear, accurate, and proper wording. After this critique, a pilot interview was conducted to determine the arrangement and delimitation of questions and the approximate interview length.

Data Analysis

All formal and informal interviews with PETE faculty were tape-recorded and transcribed for analysis. Verbatim data from interviews was analyzed by open and axial techniques (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Open coding is explained as a process of breaking apart, conceptualizing, and categorizing data. Interview transcripts were analyzed multiple times, each in order to identify and qualify concepts/categories that emerged from the raw data. In addition, axial coding was used to reassemble “data that were fractured during open coding” (Strauss, & Corbin, 1998, p. 124) and to build up a compact texture of links between categories. According to Corbin and Strauss (2008), axial coding is the process of crosscutting or relating concepts/categories to each other along the lines of their dimensions and properties. The researcher repeatedly attempted to link categories to subcategories in order to build comprehensive connections and interactions among them.

Data analysis was divided into two phases. Interview transcripts were analyzed inductively in the early stage to discover possible themes and patterns. Once these themes and categories had been found through inductive content analysis, a deductive approach was used to test and verify the appropriateness and authenticity of the core concepts and themes based on the theoretical model of systemic reform. Thus, the themes identified through inductive analysis were then re-analyzed according to the model that had been established in advance.

Analytical procedures were based on grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) emphasizing the interplay of deductive and inductive reasoning (Patton, 2002). According to the theory, a researcher, during the initial stage of analysis, must perceive and understand perspectives, experiences, feelings, and thoughts of a people by “becoming immersed in the data” (Patton, 2002, p. 454). During the inductive phase, the researcher must also become absorbed in the data such that core meanings and concepts of participants within the study can emerge. Grounded theorizing then involves the deductive process in order to examine how well the emergent patterns and themes fit into the theoretical propositions. All of these procedures help provide systemic rigor and thoroughness to the analytical process as well as generate “explanatory propositions that correspond to real-world phenomena” (Patton, 2002, p. 498).

Trustworthiness

The following sections discuss operational techniques taken to establish the trustworthiness of the data. The primary intent of trustworthiness is to ensure that the findings of an inquiry are internally and externally valid, reliable, and objective. Thus, it includes persuading readers that the study is worthy of attention and that the findings can be trusted (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility (internal validity), transferability (external validity), dependability (reliability), and confirmability (objectivity) are major components that ensure the trustworthiness of a

qualitative investigation.

Establishing Credibility

Credibility, which refers to internal validity in qualitative inquiry, ensures that processes of data collection and analysis, findings, and interpretations are credible and reliable. Peer debriefing, member checking, negative case analysis, and triangulation were conducted to build credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Peer debriefing. Peer debriefing involves a process of probing and clarifying ideas, decisions, and interpretations that may emerge in the inquirer's mind to help maintain truthfulness, accuracy, and authentication during an investigation. During this phase, data, analytic procedures, and researchers' perspectives are exposed to an unbiased, neutral peer "for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 308). A colleague familiar with qualitative inquiry was asked to scrutinize and evaluate all aspects of the data and its interpretation for this study.

As Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe, the peer debriefer should be neither a subordinate (whose opinions may be disregarded) nor someone whose comments are considered as mandates. The debriefer must be willingly absorbed into the role. The individual for this project was a doctoral student in the field of pedagogical kinesiology, who was familiar with qualitative methodology. The peer debriefer assumed the task of "devil's advocate" to help the researcher clear his mind of emotions that could cloud reasonable and proper judgment.

Negative case analysis. It is essential for a qualitative inquirer to provide readers with reasons and alternate explanations for deviant or exceptional cases that do not adhere to major patterns (Patton, 2002). Thus, this study employed negative case analysis to openly expose such

exceptional instances. The technique begins with the belief that “a single negative case is enough to require the investigator to revise a hypothesis” (Kidder, 1981 referred from Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 310). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Patton (2002), negative case analysis is a process designed to make data more credible by continuously refining patterns and trends previously established until no further negative or deviant cases are searched. Thus, the researcher continually revised patterns until all known cases were sufficiently explained without exception, thereby lessening the number of deviant cases to zero.

Member checks. Lincoln and Guba (1985) have stated that the “member check” procedure, whereby collected data and its interpretations are reviewed with participants, is a crucial means for establishing credibility. The technique allowed individual respondents to confirm what had been said and intended during the interviews, provided an opportunity to react to and amend incorrect interpretations of data, and helped interviewees recall additional information not previously mentioned. A copy of the individual transcript, initial patterns and themes, and the results of the interpretations were sent to each participant selected for an interview, allowing each the opportunity to discuss opinions and offer disagreements. The transcript was then reviewed and correlated prior to analysis. The process helped the investigator reexamine the raw data and categories established in the early stages of analysis and correct any misunderstandings or inaccuracies.

Triangulation. The notion of triangulation stems from the assumption that a single method is often biased or misinterpreted and is ultimately inadequate to establish confidence in the results drawn. According to Patton (2002), triangulation helps find inconsistencies, reveals different features of empirical reality, and builds credibility by comparing and contrasting different types of data. It is also known as cross-data analysis. There are four different kinds of

triangulation: the use of different and multiple methods, data or sources, theories, and investigators (Denzin, 1978; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002).

This study employed data triangulation, involving comparison and cross-testing of data from different sources for consistency. With this in mind, data gathered during the interviews was triangulated by comparing and contrasting the responses of the PETE leaders sampled at different types of institutions. In addition, participants' vitas were thoroughly examined, and two investigators, plus the peer debriefer, had access to all data.

Establishing Transferability

In qualitative research, transferability refers to the degree to which results can be generalized to situations with similar populations or characteristics. A quantitative researcher would make precise statements about external validity based on the statistical analyses of numerical data. Quantitative investigators, for example, seek to increase external validity by having a relatively large number of participants. In contrast, a qualitative researcher using a smaller sample is required to provide deeper and richer descriptions so that transfer of results can be deemed as a possibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Thus, transferability required the researcher to offer readers as wide a range of information as possible. This qualitative project, with a small number of purposefully sampled participants, provided greater depth of information about their experiences, perceptions, and knowledge.

Establishing Dependability and Confirmability

A qualitative researcher is required to measure both dependability and confirmability. Dependability refers to whether the design, data, and findings of an inquiry are acceptable, fair, or reliable to readers. Confirmability seeks to evaluate and attest to the objectivity of the data and its results. This study addressed dependability and confirmability through a thematic log,

reflexive journal, and inquirer bias techniques.

Thematic log. The thematic log is a way to find and test themes that have surfaced during the course of qualitative data collection. In order to describe participants' ideas, feelings, perceptions, and experiences thoroughly, all possible themes that emerged from verbatim data obtained during the interviews were recorded during and after data collection. Themes identified were tested and retested so that inconspicuous themes were not ignored or overlooked. The thematic log was maintained throughout the duration of data collection.

Reflexive journal. This study employed a reflexive journal technique that met the criteria of all four areas of trustworthiness. On a daily basis, the researcher created a diary to record diverse information about himself and the methods used in the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Entries included the investigator's own thoughts, values and preferences that may influence the results and interpretations, as well as information about methodological decisions and the robust rationale for making them. Thus, recording a journal offered a basis for clearer judgment on the procedures ranging from study design to forming conclusions.

Investigator bias. In qualitative interviewing, investigators are the key instrument through whom data is obtained from respondents. They create specific sets of questions for interviews and are accountable for establishing a context in which respondents can share thoughts and perspectives. While they do facilitate interaction, qualitative investigators may also jeopardize the trustworthiness of their research (Chenail, 2011; Poggenpoel & Myburgh, 2003) because "every researcher brings preconceptions and interpretations to the problem being studied" (Patton, 2002, p. 569). Therefore, it is essential for investigators to recognize and examine personal bias through the exercise of describing their own experiences, preconceptions about results, and any predispositions that may influence the data and its interpretation.

I am currently a 35 year-old male graduate student in the Department of Kinesiology and Community Health at the University of Illinois, with a focus on pedagogy. After completing my master's degree in Korea, I traversed the Pacific Ocean to pursue a Ph.D. in the United States. Therefore, I am already familiar with the relatively inflexible, rigorous Korea educational system that involves a government-centralized and standardized curriculum. I do not, however, have a preference regarding the implementation of a national curriculum. I am aware that it is a complex issue and that judging the success or failure of educational policies is difficult due to the diverse contexts in which they are employed. Nevertheless, maintaining complete neutrality and impartiality is not a simple task, as Denzin and Lincoln (2000) emphasize. In fact, it is simply not possible, and perhaps not even desirable, to remove all aspects of human character from a study. Thus, when necessary, investigator bias that affects the interpretation of the results was noted.

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Chapter Four: Article One

Abstract

Since the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, some scholars have argued that a national curriculum and national testing are necessary to hold school personnel accountable for student achievement and ultimately to raise educational standards. The idea of developing a nationwide curriculum has been widely debated in the United States where the tradition of local control and state responsibility are dominant. Thus, this paper examines the relevance and feasibility of a uniform curriculum in physical education. A core curriculum for physical education has the potential to provide clear goals, coherent instructional guidelines, and relevant assessments aligned with designated program outcomes. A more advanced curricula framework with clear guidance for P-12 curricula and pedagogical practices could promote system-wide changes in school-based physical education (SBPE). In contrast, the adoption of an overly rigid national curriculum would create a stifling educational context where cultural differences and local flexibility are not allowed.

Keywords: national curriculum, physical education, national standards, curriculum reform

National Curriculum for Physical Education in the United States³

The past two decades can be viewed as a period of educational reform in many academic disciplines (Graber & Woods, 2013). For example, educational reforms have been enacted to prescribe what should be taught in K-12 education, how curricula and teaching practices should be monitored within the classroom, and how to improve the quality of teaching and learning nationwide. Specifically, curriculum change and its emphasis on accountability are two of the most hotly debated and primary centerpieces of the reform movement.

Beginning with the release of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), it has been argued that schools in the United States (U.S.) are in decline and should be remediated by establishing explicit and rigorous standards, uniform standardized testing, and accountability (Hursh, 2008; Lockwood, 1998; Ravitch, 2010). In particular, the call for a nationwide system of standardized testing has been an indicator that highlights the need for establishing a common foundation in education (U. S. Department of Education, 2009a). In addition, many national initiatives such as America 2000, Goals 2000: Educate America Act, and National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) have accelerated the notion that establishing coherent, nationwide, and measurable goals, and a standardized set of curricular frameworks and tests, are the primary keys to accomplishing academic excellence. Such reform efforts have led to the justification of clarity, consistency, and rigor in curriculum and pedagogical practice and to holding schools accountable. There has been a growing response in the educational community that a nationwide curriculum and national testing are necessary to

³ *Note.* From “National Curriculum for Physical Education in the United States,” by Junghwan Oh and Kim C. Graber, 2017, *Quest*, 69, pp. 220–235. Copyright 2017 by Taylor and Francis. Reprinted with permission (see Appendix E).

hold schools accountable for high achievement and ultimately to raise educational standards (Apple, 1996).

The Obama administration announced the Race to the Top (RTTT) fund, which is part of the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, granting states \$4.35 billion to innovate K-12 education and promote significant, substantial improvement in student achievement. The RTTT includes a heavy emphasis on using student assessment data as a way to hold teachers accountable (U. S. Department of Education, 2009b). Many states and local schools have been responding to this reform movement by altering the criteria utilized to evaluate teacher effectiveness to include student achievement scores in teacher evaluation systems. Unfortunately, there exists a lack of consensus among those in the field of physical education as to subject matter outcomes (Rink, 2014). As a result, assessments of student performance that are the most viable indicators for evaluating teacher accountability are largely nonexistent (Rink, 2013) or even ignored in some P-12 programs. Furthermore, there is lack of congruence between physical education goals and developed assessments (Collier, 2011; Mercier & Doolittle, 2013).

Much of the discussion regarding teacher accountability and teacher effectiveness in the field has been prompted by the recent reform movement that utilizes student achievement data in determining teacher effectiveness (e.g., Mercier & Doolittle, 2013; Rink; 2013, 2014; Solmon & Garn, 2014). Rink (2013) asserts that if physical education is to be accepted as an important subject area in school curricula, program outcomes and rubrics to measure those outcomes must be outlined, while aligning teacher evaluation systems and student assessment with program outcomes. Although Rink does not suggest total standardization for P-12 curricula, she does call for aligning program goals with instructional practices and developing assessment tasks that

match designated outcomes, thereby building a clearer and more aligned common foundation in the field.

Determining the relevance of educational policies and anticipating the success or failure of a particular reform not yet implemented is not a simple task. A number of sociocultural, environmental, historical, and educational factors must be considered, especially within the larger educational community in the United States in which divergent interests are inextricably intertwined due to cultural, racial, and geographical differences. In particular, a number of questions must be answered in order to discuss the possibility of a core curriculum for physical education. Although these questions cannot be adequately addressed within the confines of a single manuscript, there are some important overarching questions that are discussed in this paper: Would a national curriculum substantially improve outcomes in physical education? What would a national curriculum in the context of the U.S. look like? Who would construct and determine its content, summative assessments, and pedagogical requirements? How much detail would these components specify? Would this constitute a wise and successful reform, considering the United States' strong tradition of freedom of choice, the diversity of cultural and religious values, and the increase in language diversity among students?

Thus, the purpose of this paper is to discuss whether establishing a nationwide curriculum for physical education would be considered reasonable and feasible in the U.S. educational context in which local and state governments have traditionally had control over curricular decisions. Specifically, this paper presents both sides of the debate by introducing national curricula currently implemented in other countries; describing reform efforts and calls for conversion to a unified curriculum for the U.S. educational mainstream and P-12 education;

and discussing whether national standards are adequate to guide the development of P-12 curricula, instruction, and assessment.

Arguments Regarding National Curriculum

The concept of a national curriculum is based on the idea that learning is most effective when all components of the education system work together towards a uniform set of curricular frameworks (Smith & O’Day, 1991). Although national curriculum has varied meanings in different countries (Smith, O’Day, & Cohen, 1991), it is nevertheless a common foundation that is universally employed in those countries to ensure that learning and instruction are consistent. Different countries typically structure their national curriculum around particular goals and values, subject content, and standards to attain targets that every student should be encouraged to meet at each level (e.g., Department for Education, 2013), although they do so with varying levels of detail (e.g., rigor, specificity, coverage). Thus, an important question remains to be answered as to whether or not a national curriculum such as currently implemented in other countries really circumscribes student learning and violates the home cultures and languages of students.

Arguments in Favor

Some might perceive a nationwide curriculum as an attempt at ‘one-size-fits-all’ that inculcates the same content, thoughts, and learning experiences for every student, thereby creating a stifling educational context wherein individual interests and needs are not taken into account. The introduction of a national curriculum, however, does not necessarily mean an adoption of the same curriculum for all students in all schools (Kirk, Penney, Burgess-Limerick, Gorely, & Maynard, 2002). Since the British government introduced a national curriculum with the 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA) as a response to somewhat of a “crisis” in their

educational system, it has addressed standards of provision and learning and the efficiency of programs. Attainment targets and programs of study were developed for each of the key stages in education for all subjects. The goals of the national curriculum were to “set out clearly and simply a minimum entitlement for every child” (House of Commons, 2009, p. 3), and the framework was intentionally designed for flexibility in the adoption of statutory requirements in different schools (Department for Education and Employment & Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 1999).

The framework of specific attainment targets, programs of study, and developmental stages has been adopted by both England and Wales, but each country has developed different ways of implementing the curriculum. Both, however, are good examples of how a national curriculum can guide educational standards. The curriculum in both countries allows for cultural differences in that culture-specific activities can fulfill the requirements. For example, the Curriculum Council for Wales (1992) notes that students can “study the history and evolution of Welsh dance and perform a selection of Welsh dance” (p. 8) to fulfill the requirements, or that an appreciation of the Welsh landscape could be fostered by walking or hiking on nature trails. The national curriculum in the United Kingdom is therefore quite adaptable.

In addition to the national curriculum in the UK, the Australian government has recently adopted one that is still being finalized by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA). Since the Hawke Federal Labor government had first produced a draft for a nationally consistent curriculum framework in the late 1980s (though the initiative had been abandoned at that time due to the failure to achieve political consensus on its enactment), the Australian government has devoted over 30 years to developing and implementing a single core curriculum (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). The process of developing the Australian Curriculum is not

isolated, but is extensive, collective, and consultative, involving the following stages: curriculum shaping and writing, implementation, and review and evaluation (ACARA, 2016). Diverse advisory groups of experts from states and territories across the country and the ACARA curriculum staff were all involved in drafting the curriculum, and thousands of opinions and feedback from the public were considered for the review and modifications in order to establish a more comprehensive form of national curriculum. Currently, most educational jurisdictions have started to implement fully the Foundation to Year 12 (F-12) Australian Curriculum, while two states, New South Wales and Victoria, have adopted it with an eye toward integrating the newly developed curriculum content into the existing one (Australian Government, 2014).

The Australian Curriculum outlines expectations for what all students from F-12 should know, understand, and be able to do in a given learning area/subject, regardless of their backgrounds or where they live. This includes content descriptions of skills and knowledge, and the achievement standards that every child should accomplish at each grade level (ACARA, 2013). Similar to the British national curriculum, the Australian Curriculum also allows flexibility for states, schools, and teachers and takes into account cultural, linguistic, and religious diversity in order to meet the individual student's needs and interests. For example, the present national curriculum recommends that individual schools and teachers use pedagogical approaches that reflect students' backgrounds and interests (Australian Government, 2014). In addition, the *Shape of the Australian Curriculum version 4.0* (ACARA, 2012) that underlies the current Australian Curriculum, points out that states and local school districts are able to have flexibility in curricular implementation as individual schools and teachers determine pedagogical strategies and other delivery considerations. The Australian Council for Health, Physical Education and Recreation (ACHPER) (2008) states that, as the action plan for the national

curriculum, the HPE programs should “incorporate flexibility to enable education in the States and Territories to be responsive to and provide for distinct local learning needs and contexts” (p. 20). This implies that the Australian Curriculum focuses primarily on specifying what should be taught throughout F-12 education, and not in detailing how a particular content is taught in ways such that students achieve the learning goals—referred to as pedagogy or instruction.

Arguments Against

Views about the implementation of a national curriculum and national testing, however, are not always positive. In fact, the issue of a uniform set of curricular frameworks is problematic and frequently has been the target of much debate and criticism by many not only in the United States, but in other countries that have adopted a core curriculum such as Australia. In fact, the idea of developing a national curriculum in the United States was rejected in the last decade of the 20th century due to the belief that it restricts learning, prevents flexibility, and therefore, would not be able to embrace culturally diverse students (Sleeter, 2005). A number of educators argued that an emphasis on high-stakes testing, school accountability, and calls for reform have contributed negatively to educational practices by focusing on learning that is narrowly defined by test scores (Darling-Hammond, 2007; Hursh, 2008; McNeil, 2000; Sleeter, 2005). There is concern that students, teachers, and schools are evaluated by a standardized testing system, and subsequently focus on preparing students to pass tests within narrow and simplified curricula.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), the first legislative proposal of the George W. Bush administration, was intended to close the student achievement gap and raise educational accomplishment for all groups of students, including children traditionally left behind such as racial/ethnic groups, students relegated to low socio-economic status, those with

limited English proficiency, and students with special needs. Its provisions primarily emphasized challenging standards, rigorous periodic assessments to monitor progress, and critical evaluations of the educational system and its employees by rewarding or sanctioning schools and teachers with the ultimate goals of motivating them (National Academy of Education, 2009).

Unfortunately, the heavy requirements of the Act resulted in some unintended negative consequences like simplified curricular and pedagogical practices that typically focus on high-stakes testing; inappropriate assessments and increased drop-out rates of the subgroups the reform is intended to help; a punishment-driven approach to school accountability; and numerous ideological debates, in part, stemming from an increased emphasis on standardized testing (Darling-Hammond, 2007; Hannaway & Hamilton, 2009; Novak & Fuller, 2003; The White House & U. S. Department of Education, 2014). Many educators reported that the reform had largely failed to accomplish Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) that the nation's schools were meant to achieve by 2014 (Sunderman & Kim, 2004).

In addition, in-depth debates during the 1990s concerning a common foundation had sociocultural, political, and economic ramifications. Apple (1996) strongly warned of the danger of educational rationalizations for a national curriculum and national testing. He claimed that a predominantly mono-cultural national curriculum deals with diversity by referencing the plural “we” with all of its ideological implications. He argued that it recreates the hegemony of existing hierarchies of official knowledge and encourages the implementation of a rigid and disciplined teaching methodology. Further, Johnson (1991) suggested that culture can be thought of as a homogenous way of life that includes language, social beliefs and values, and other elements that are common to a group. A uniform culture is difficult to associate with a society in which

traditions from diverse cultures all over the world have been melded together. Such is the case in the United States, where a pre-selection of knowledge has never truly existed (Apple, 1996).

Reform Efforts to Nationalize the Curriculum in the United States

Education and its policies are deeply embedded in culture, economics, and politics; and they change in response to social flux. Although local control and state responsibility are the educational tradition in the U.S., various federal policies and reforms have been proposed under different governmental administrations. With retrogression of the social democratic policies that had dominated the overall U.S. education and economy for much of the twentieth century, the neoliberal movement with the New Right began to thrive in the 1980s. President George H. W. Bush articulated, “Trade and markets are freedom” (Fischer, 1999; Schwarz, 2005, as cited in Hursh, 2008, p. 2), implying that social democratic policies disrupt individual liberty and the efficacy of free-market.

Governmental leaders sought at this time to promote market-driven policies while privatizing public services. Voucher and choice plans were an intermediate step between total marketization and public schools (Hursh, 2008). In the response to the criticism regarding the failure of education in the U.S., however, strident calls arose for higher standards, uniform testing, and increased accountability (Ajayi, 2016; Kober & Rentner, 2011; Smith & O’Day, 1991). The 1983 “*A Nation at Risk*” report released by the Reagan administration was a response to calls that emphasized “raising standards” through quality of teaching and learning and a nationwide system of standardized tests originated, in part, from the sense that the United States was falling behind in the arena of international economic competition (U. S. Department of Education, 2009a).

National influences on education with an emphasis on establishing a nationwide, standardized set of curricular frameworks have accelerated since the reform efforts of the 1980s. National goals, testing activities, and efforts to reform teacher education (Burks et al., 2015; Education Week Research Center, 2014) can be viewed as indicators of an overall trend in the conversion to a national curriculum. In 1991, the Bush administration announced the America 2000 proposal for education reform during the last decade of the 20th century to expand national leadership in education. Six goals to be attained by the year 2000 were cited as well as national standards and a set of voluntary tests (the American Achievement Tests) to be given in five core subject areas—math, science, English, geography, and history—in the fourth, eighth, and twelfth grades. Its goals also involved direct federal grants to develop new schools, provide local support, and generate report cards to measure the progress of schools and districts (U. S. Department of Education, 2009a). More recently, the NCLB legislation has expanded the federal role in public education through annual testing, periodic academic progress report cards, and teacher qualifications (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, 2002). The act, however, did not establish national achievement goals.

In point of fact, the U.S. already has a national test, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which is an assessment system of what all students should know in terms of core subjects. The development of the assessments is primarily overseen by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), while the valid assessment instruments are built through the extensive reviews of multiple advisory groups which include educators, policymakers, representatives of states and educational jurisdictions, and the general public (NCES, 2016). Academic achievement data are collected and reported at the national, state, and local level in order to measure the condition and progress of education nationwide (NCES, 2005).

To reliably assess student performance, the NAEP employs and trains experienced, qualified scorers and periodically evaluates the consistency of scorer decision making. The NAEP reports its findings by comparing student achievement across states and monitoring different demographic groups including race/ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status (NCES, 2016). The proficiency standards and content frameworks aligned with the assessments can be considered as the beginnings of a national curriculum framework.

Common Core State Standards Initiative

The issue of developing a unified curriculum in the United States cannot be discussed without addressing the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), a single set of ‘college- and career-ready standards’ for kindergarten through 12th grade in mathematics and English language arts/literacy (ELA). Recognizing the importance of coherent learning goals across states, in 2009, education chiefs and governors from forty-eight states, through their memberships in organizations such as the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) launched a state-led effort to establish unified core standards. In the process of establishing the standards, a few states ceased implementation due to uncertainty about the consequences and several challenges encountered (e.g., resistance to change from inside and outside the system, securing CCSS-aligned curricular materials, and providing quality professional development) (Ajayi, 2016; Eppley, 2015; Rentner & Kober, 2014c). Currently, forty-two states and the District of Columbia have voluntarily adopted the Common Core and are incorporating it into their curricula.

The CCSS serve to outline the knowledge and skills that every student is expected to master at the end of each grade that are necessary to succeed in college, career, and life after graduation from high school, regardless of where an individual lives (CCSSI, 2016). Many

supporters of the standards assert that the Common Core standards would offer students, regardless of their circumstances, access to rigorous, consistent core content, while still allowing flexibility for local schools and individual teachers in curricular implementation (Rentner & Kober, 2014a). Arguments in favor of the standards express the view that expectations for academic mastery should not rely on where students live (Burks et al., 2015). The Kentucky Department of Education (2012) suggested that the CCSS ensure every child has the opportunity to gain the skills and knowledge “deemed most important and relevant to the world today.”

Unlike the previous disparate academic standards that have varied from state to state, the Common Core enables collaboration across states in terms of resources and policies such as developing CCSS-aligned curricula and assessments; reforming teacher evaluation systems; and preparing classroom teachers for teaching to the standards (CCSSI, 2016; Polikoff, 2014; Rentner & Kober, 2014b). In this regard, the Common Core standards can be viewed by some as an attempt to nationalize curriculum, which would control local decisions about what and how subject content is taught to meet the CCSS. In fact, many districts in those states that have adopted the standards have already begun to implement a CCSS-aligned curriculum in English language arts (82%) and mathematics (83%) (Rentner & Kober, 2014a). The standards, however, do not specify particular pedagogical methods and materials to accomplish the CCSS goals. As Rentner and Kober (2014a) and Watt (2015) suggest, many school districts are still using a localized approach to developing CCSS-aligned curriculum.

Overview of the National Curriculum in K-12 Physical Education

While educational reform and national curriculum in particular have been debated in the education mainstream for many years, physical education has also been very much challenged with struggle and scrutiny. As Berg states,

Frankly, it is rather amazing that physical education has no uniform curriculum. Can you imagine such disorganization in math, science, or English? The very fact that we are permitted by students, parents, school administrators, and school boards not to have an organized and known curriculum infers a low level of expectation and esteem for what we do. (1988, p. 70)

The call for a state- or nation-wide curriculum by some scholars in physical education has been heard since the mid-1980s, primarily in response to low expectations for the subject matter and negative perceptions of students, parents, and school administrators (though the idea of developing a national curriculum for physical education has also been rejected by many because of its rigidity and inflexibility). For many years, the profession of physical education has suffered from a lack of expectations for significant outcomes in K-12 education (James, 2011; Rink, 2014; Sheehy, 2006) and has been regarded as a special, extracurricular subject within school cultures, often ridiculed and devalued by those outside the system (Beddoes, Prusak, & Hall, 2014; Siedentop, 1992). In addition, the media, including TV shows, movies, and comic strips, continue to portray physical education class and its teachers as frivolous, non-challenging, or militaristic (Duncan, Nolan, & Wood, 2002; Sheehy, 2011). As a result, physical education continues to suffer from reduced credit and minimal requirements (Hall, Little, & Heidorn, 2011; Thomas, 2004), low levels of enrollment (Tassitano et al., 2010), shortage of funding and resources (Barroso, McCullum-Gomez, & Hoelscher, 2005), and misunderstanding by the public (Doolittle, 2014).

In an attempt to fight against this marginalization, a 1986 issue of *Journal of Physical Education Recreation and Dance* (JOPERD) addressed the feasibility of a standardized curriculum focusing on the question, “Should AAHPERD attempt to develop a national

curriculum in physical education?” The majority of six professionals who were against the idea maintained that establishing a nationwide curriculum would divert energy and attention from student learning and instead focus on a philosophical debate about the ideal curriculum, preventing local flexibility, and creating redundant efforts. In contrast, Belka (1986) and Johnson (1986) suggested that developing a national curriculum would provide a common foundation and workable guidelines for K-12 physical education, where disorganized and unreliable programs have been accepted without scrutiny. The form of the desirable national curriculum they suggested was a common foundation allowing for diversity and local flexibility rather than a narrow curriculum which standardizes pedagogical practices and eliminates local school board decisions.

The marginalization of the field has long been of concern to physical educators. Historically, physical education has neither been given the same status as other academic subjects nor held in high esteem by the educational mainstream (Beddoes, Prusak, & Hall, 2014; Collier, 2011; James, 2011). Government leaders and educators have made constant reform efforts to raise academic standards for over three decades in core subjects, but physical education has not been part of the movement (e.g., America 2000, NAEP, and NCLB). Interestingly, physical education researchers have long attempt to find the root causes of its marginal status. For example, Taylor and Chiogioji (1987) pointed out the questionable and ambiguous outcomes (Taylor, 1986) and dichotomy between goals and practice as the primary reasons for lack of credibility in the physical education curriculum. In the same year, Griffey (1987) identified the fundamental problems that have plagued secondary physical education for years suggesting that it has failed to provide an in-class experience that students perceive as meaningful and has failed

to convince students that skill mastery is important. His insights have consistently been recalled by other researchers such as Kretchmar (2006), Doolittle (2007), and Sheehy (2011).

There has been limited scholarly discussion about the potential for developing a national physical education curriculum. Perhaps this is because the development of a core curriculum that circumscribes flexibility and opposes the traditional U.S. education philosophical ideal has been rejected by education professionals (Zieff, Lumpkin, Guedes, & Eguaoje, 2009). Nevertheless, a few scholars have discussed the possibility of a standardized, uniform curriculum in physical education. Along with an analysis of national curricula currently implemented in China and Great Britain, Davis (1995) discussed the feasibility and pros and cons of a national curriculum for physical education in the United States. Two possible advantages are found from the discourse. First, it could provide some security and credibility for the profession by resisting the perception that physical education is nonacademic or “academically soft” (p. 680). Second, it could offer a focus, unity, and fundamental agreement on goals, content, and assessments.

A recent article provides a blueprint for building a model physical education curriculum. According to Moore (2012), an exemplary curriculum begins with a common curricular foundation that incorporates clear, concise goals, alignment between daily lesson plans and state/national content standards, and the use of objective student achievement data that guides instruction and defines attainment goals. Although the curriculum alignment the author proposes does not imply total standardization for physical education curricula, nor a national curriculum, it does address the integration of program goals, curricular content, and measures of student performance within the profession. Aligning instruction—an integral part of facilitating learning (Rink, 2010)—could ensure that goals and objectives for student learning match the series of

instructional tasks given to students and the assessment of student achievement (Cohen, 1987; Henninger & Carlson, 2011).

Interestingly, the agenda for a national curriculum for P-12 program recently reemerged in a special section of the *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation and Dance* (Do We Need a National Curriculum for K-12 Physical Education?, 2016). Opinions from diverse groups of professionals in the field of physical education, including two faculty members, a teacher, and several undergraduate and graduate college students, participated in the debates to clarify the relevance and feasibility of a unified curriculum. Although there were many pros and cons within these inconclusive debates, the majority advocated the need for a standardized physical education curriculum. Their rationale was that a national curriculum for physical education would help provide common learning goals and assessments that are consistent throughout the country; align teacher evaluation systems with the unified student assessments; build a bridge between the academic arena and states; and finally enhance the status of the field as an important subject in K-12 education. In contrast, those who opposed the idea of developing a national curriculum claimed that having a unified curriculum is not the optimal way to establish quality physical education programs in light of socioeconomic, cultural, and geographical differences stemming from the country size and its enormous populations. Others argued that a curriculum would not be feasible since the U.S. Constitution generally gives governance of education to state and local entities. Despite inconclusive debates on the agenda of national curriculum, an overarching fact was extracted from the discussions: the opponents who criticized adopting a uniform curriculum treated national curriculum as ‘one-size-fits-all,’ ‘dictating how to teach,’ or ‘inculcating the same thing for every student,’ whereas advocates perceived it as general and

broad guidelines for P-12 curriculum, assessment, and instruction, allowing flexibility and creativity for both students and teachers.

Are National Standards Enough?

Since the 1994 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), now referred to as Improving America's School Act (IASA), the concept of standards has been deeply embedded in the central vision which guides current state education policy. Ambitious rhetoric has emphasized "coherent, nationwide, and systemic education reform" (Goals 2000; Educated America Act of 1994, Pub. L. No. 103–227, § 2[1], 108 Stat. 128) and profound changes in curriculum and assessments to both accomplish academic excellence and offer better learning opportunities for every student (Hamilton, Stecher, & Yuan, 2008). In the area of physical education, NASPE responded to the reform movement by releasing the first national content standards for physical education (National Association for Sport and Physical Education [NASPE], 1995) and two subsequent revisions (NASPE, 2004; Society of Health and Physical Educators (SHAPE) America, 2013). As guidelines for curricula to establish quality physical education programs, NASPE standards (now referred to as the SHAPE America standards) have become the central framework for many states, schools, and teachers to follow. Currently, 48 states (92 percent) have their own standards for physical education, and the six standards are generally addressed within these state standards (NASPE & American Heart Association [AHA], 2010).

In the traditional system in the United States, education policy is largely built at the state level (Rink, 2014), and specific decisions and implementation are typically deferred to local school districts or even individual schools. Unlike those countries that employ a prescriptive national curriculum, most states adopt content standards broadly describing skills and knowledge

for every student to achieve, while following fairly independent guidelines for development and implementation of curricula. As a result, schools and teachers are relatively free to plan and organize teaching and learning in a way that best meets national, state, and local requirements. Thus, the adoption of standards that are broad in the longstanding tradition of local control over education would be seen by many in a positive light, especially in the culturally and regionally diverse U.S. school contexts.

What should be contemplated here, however, is whether the standards are adequate to guide K-12 physical education. In fact, they do not identify specific content for lessons. They specify basic movement skills and knowledge for each grade level, but specific content beyond that is not described (Humphries, Lovdahl, & Ashy, 2002). The flexibility of the standards provided greater instructional leeway with suggested performance outcomes suitable for specific classroom contexts and favorite interests. Because of their flexibility, the standards appear to be compatible with curricula (Humphries et al., 2002) emphasizing health-related fitness (McKenzie, 2003), sport education (Hastie, de Ojeda, & Luquin, 2011; Siedentop, 1994), personal and social responsibility (Hellison, 2003; Wright & Burton, 2008), tactical games (Mitchell, Oslin, & Griffin, 2013), and other appropriate goals that largely encompass the psychomotor, cognitive, and affective domains of physical education. They do not, however, constitute a curriculum, only a framework broadly describing skills and knowledge every student should master. As Hamilton, Stecher, and Yuan (2008) have pointed out, standards alone would neither change the content of instruction nor influence practice in a significant way without efforts at curriculum reform.

The longstanding tradition of local control of education has resulted in very diverse patterns of implementation for standards within states (NASPE & AHA, 2010). National standards are usually modified or sometimes even transformed into their own guidelines for

development of curricula at the state level, after which they are, once again, reinterpreted and operationalized by local schools and individual teachers, partially with the intent of utilizing the curriculum most relevant to their own educational contexts and in the interests of individual students. Therefore, behind this embedded educational pattern, there are some important overarching questions that arise regarding teacher proficiency as well as accountability in the use of the physical education content standards: How many P-12 teachers really understand the national standards and grade-level outcomes? How many teachers actually teach based on the standards in their daily lessons? And, how many teachers interpret and deliver them appropriately and effectively?

Chen (2006) investigated teacher knowledge about and implementation of the physical education standards and found that only 9 out of 25 elementary and secondary teachers were intimately familiar with the content standards, while only 4 of the 9 employed the standards appropriately in practice. This implies that most teachers did not integrate the standards into their curricula and pedagogical practices, thereby leading to a discrepancy between the endorsed standards and the actual curriculum used in school physical education programs. Bulger, Housner, and Lee (2008) attributed this misalignment in part to low proficiency of teachers in the field with regard to the core competencies that form the theoretical foundation for advocating a physically active lifestyle. In addition to investigations of teacher competency, Graber, Woods, and Castelli (2007) examined if students were progressing toward attainment of the standards. They concluded it was not possible to ensure whether standards-based learning has occurred at the national level due to, in part, lack of reliable nationwide assessments.

More recently a task force addressed this concern by publishing valid and reliable assessments designed to match the national physical education standards (NASPE, 2010, 2011).

The assessments, however, seem neither to be widely used in P-12 programs nor do they promote substantive and meaningful change for school physical education curricula. Many physical education programs are still struggling with a lack of appropriate assessment systems to measure student performance (Rink, 2013), although some states (19) require local schools to assess and report student performance (NASPE & AHA, 2010). In addition, many P-12 teachers are still not incorporating standards into their curriculum. This may imply that the current national content standards are not adequate to serve the substantive outcomes for physical education curricula.

Conclusion

The authors understand the difficulty and complexity of evaluating the relevance and feasibility of a national curriculum in the U.S., because the agenda of a uniform set of curricular frameworks, by nature, is problematic for diverse groups of students and prevents local control. Moreover, the term, national curriculum, is value-laden, having different meanings in different countries based on respective cultures or educational contexts, while those in the U.S. also have their own set of perceptions and images. For these reasons, we are not suggesting or even advocating total standardization for physical education curricula. The authors do not disagree with the current model—providing individual schools and teachers freedom in what and how they teach. It must, however, be emphasized that more advanced curricular frameworks with clear guidelines for school curricula and pedagogical practices could promote system-wide change and ultimately help establish quality physical education programs in general.

In point of fact, the idea of having a common curriculum in the United States would not be readily accepted due to the longstanding tradition of state and local control and the anticipated resistance of states, local schools, and teachers to change (Burks et al., 2015; Rentner & Kober,

2014c). Nevertheless, if a national curriculum for physical education were to be developed, it would seem to be desirable for that curriculum to be adopted and implemented voluntarily at the state level in a similar manner as the NASPE/SHAPE America standards and Common Core. The U.S. is not a country that dictates to states and teachers what and how to teach. In addition, the curriculum would need to be broadly conceived and emphasize fundamentals, so that it would be possible to maintain both educational consistency and flexibility. As the development process of the Australian Curriculum has shown, the process of developing a national curriculum would have to be extensive and consultative, requiring long-term planning and considerable efforts that entail collaboration between school administrators, state legislators, and diverse advisory groups of experts in higher education. It would have to reflect opinions and feedback from classroom teachers, parents, and the public and involve collective, evidence-based reviews and revisions of drafts based on the results of quality pilot testing and international benchmarks.

Regardless of what reforms for physical education are to come, the school physical education curriculum must provide clearer goals and instructional guidelines, define student performance indicators, and include relevant assessments aligned with expected outcomes of the program. It will also have to allow for flexibility for individual teachers in various educational contexts to establish the best type of curriculum for students.

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Chapter Five: Article Two

Abstract

Given criticism of P-12 physical education and wide variability in instructional quality and subject matter outcomes in the United States (US), a national curriculum has been debated by some scholars as a mechanism for improving the status of the subject matter. Grounded in the Systemic Reform (SR) model (Smith & O'Day, 1991), the purpose of this study was to explore physical education teacher education (PETE) leaders' perceptions regarding the implementation of a national curriculum. In total, 28 individuals participated in in-depth interviews that were inductively/deductively coded and triangulated. The results indicated that nationalizing the curriculum has the potential to offer explicit educational goals, substantial pedagogical guidelines, and valid assessments aligned with designated program outcomes. Despite recognizing the potential benefits of national curriculum, however, the majority of participants were opposed because of the inflexibility of such a system in the culturally and geographically diverse school contexts across the US.

Keywords: curriculum, national curriculum, physical education, national standards

Education reform has been at the center of political and academic debates over the past two decades. Specifically, curriculum improvement and emphasis on accountability have been at the top of the agenda. In 1983, a document titled ‘*A Nation at Risk*’ (National Commission on Excellence in Education) reported that the academic progress of students in the United States (US) was in decline and failing to prepare graduates to compete in a rapidly changing job market within the global economy (Ajayi, 2016; Kober & Rentner, 2011). Many government leaders and educational professionals argue that establishing challenging academic standards, unified standardized testing, and accountability measures are essential remedies (Hursh, 2008; Ravitch, 2010). In response, several educational initiatives such as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), Common Core State Standards (CCSS), and the Race to the Top (RTTT) were implemented.

It is widely recognized that a good portion of college freshmen are inadequately prepared for high-level academic work and require remedial coursework (Achieve, 2016). Some scholars believe that a root cause of the lagging progress of student performance is attributed to disparate content standards that vary widely from state to state (Porter, Polikoff, & Smithson, 2009). For example, NCLB legislation signed in 2002 by the George W. Bush administration was grounded on the standards-based system outlined by the 1994 reauthorization of Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The act called for challenging standards and rigorous, extensive assessment measures to not only monitor student progress but also hold school personnel accountable for student achievement. The lack, however, of a mandatory set of standards underpinning the NCLB Act resulted in highly uneven consequences in implementation and student performance across states (Savage, 2016). The absence of consistency is a primary reason explaining why states developed “Common Core” standards. The

CCSS effort, led jointly by state leaders including school chiefs, administrators, and governors from forty-eight states comprising the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers, represents one step toward a national curriculum (Burks et al., 2015; Porter, McMaken, Hwang, & Yang, 2011).

Common Core standards are a uniform set of shared expectations for skills and knowledge that all students from kindergarten through grade 12, regardless of background or home location, should acquire at the end of each grade in English language arts/literacy (ELA) and mathematics. The standards were to build upon the best facets of international and previous state standards with the goal that all graduates should be prepared to succeed in college and the workforce after graduation from high school (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2017). Unlike previous disjointed academic standards, the Common Core allows for state collaboration in implementing policies and affording resources such as securing CCSS-aligned curricular materials, reforming teacher evaluation systems, and providing quality professional development (Polikoff, 2014; Rentner & Kober, 2014b). For this reason, some researchers often regard the standards as an initiative to standardize curriculum which would control local and teacher decisions about what and how content is taught in such ways that students fulfil the goals of the CCSS (Rentner & Kober, 2014a).

Furthermore, the Race to the Top federal fund, initiated in 2009 by the Obama administration, encouraged states developing and adopting CCSS-aligned goals, curriculum, and assessments to raise educational standards and offer every student a better learning opportunity. This undermined the state-led nature of the Common Core, thereby instigating misperceptions among members of public that the standards are a federal-led initiative to nationalize curricula across states (Savage & O'Connor, 2015).

Although educational leaders and federal administrations have wrestled with the prospect of raising academic standards in core subjects, physical education has often been excluded from reform efforts (e.g., National Assessment of Educational Progress, NCLB). In response, professionals in physical education debated the need for a national core curriculum in the “Issues” commentary section of a 2016 issue of the *Journal of Physical Education Recreation and Dance* (JOPERD). Some who favored a uniform curriculum maintained that a common curriculum for physical education would enable the field to establish coherent learning goals throughout the country, offer students equitable opportunities across states, develop unified assessments to ensure that students achieve suggested performance outcomes, and finally gain national stature for the field as a core subject. Those opposed argued that the embedded, longstanding tradition of state and local governance of education would not allow for nationalizing the P-12 curriculum and that it could cripple local flexibility and teacher creativity.

Oh and Graber (2017) debated the relevance of adopting a national curriculum in K-12 physical education concluding that the concept of national curriculum can be variously interpreted in different countries in terms of sociocultural, historical, and contextual factors, and that its relevance relies primarily on one’s perceptions (see Curtner-Smith, 1999). In particular, the authors pointed out that a unified, core curriculum has the potential to provide substantial, meaningful outcomes and relevant assessment systems aligned with designated outcomes in school-based physical education programs. However, they also argued that it would not be easily accepted in a country like the US in which constitutional governance and responsibility are split between federal, state, and local governments.

Scholarly investigation about the feasibility and drawbacks of a national physical education curriculum in the US is timely, particularly because there have been increased calls for

aligning pedagogical practices with program goals, student assessments and accountability systems connected with designated program outcomes; and establishing a more explicit, common foundation in the field (France, Moosbrugger, & Brockmeyer, 2011; Moore, 2012; Rink, 2013). Local control and state accountability (with some financial support offered by the federal government), however, are largely perceived as the “American way” in education, which may preclude a nationwide, uniform set of curricular guidelines and testing. The idea of conversion to a nationwide curriculum is, by nature, controversial. It is a highly complex undertaking to determine whether or not a uniform curriculum is a desirable change, especially in the US where different interests and needs from diverse populations and circumstances coexist.

Grounding Framework

In the early 1990’s, the concept of Systemic Reform (SR) first appeared in the form of widespread public debate. It was suggested that a coherent system of all components of education provides clarity, effectiveness, and efficiency in teaching and learning by facilitating purposeful coordination. Conceptualized by Smith and O’Day (1991), this vision for system-wide improvement emerged in response to the criticism that the reform efforts of the 1980s, including both top-down and bottom-up approaches, did little to improve the quality of teaching and learning (David, Cohen, Honetschlager, & Traiman, 1990; Mullis & Jenkins, 1990).

A multi-layered governance structure with independent and disjointed centers of authority at each level impedes purposeful coordination and results in low-quality curriculum materials (Newmann, 1988), conflicting goals and policies, and dissatisfaction with schools and classroom teachers who feel accountable for educational achievement (Smith & O’Day, 1991). The Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) criticized the policy fragmentation that created complex pedagogical and administrative requirements and provided teachers with

almost no support in raising learning standards (Goertz, Floden, & O'Day, 1995). The SR model embodies three major components: a unifying vision and goals, a coherent instructional guidance system, and a restructured governance system.

The SR model has the potential to provide a clear structure within which other important educational components may be organized (Smith & O'Day, 1991). For example, textbook and curricular materials, assessment and testing systems, teacher professional development programs including both pre- and in-service, and teacher licensing programs could all comprise the content of the frameworks. According to Smith and O'Day (1991), to ensure adequate guidance to improve instruction, the frameworks must be of the highest quality possible. Furthermore, local school personnel must have the freedom to interpret and implement instructional strategies that most effectively meet the particular needs of their students.

For purposes of this study, the model was used to assist in the formation of formal and informal interview questions to understand physical education teacher education (PETE) leaders' perceptions regarding the acceptability of a national physical education curriculum in the US, where the longstanding tradition of state and local control is dominant. A qualitative approach to data collection was employed.

Method

Participants and Settings

Leaders in PETE were purposefully selected from a data base of four-year colleges and universities across the US holding different Carnegie Classifications. Participants had previously served or were currently serving in leadership capacities at the state and national level in a primary professional organization (e.g., Society of Health and Physical Educators (SHAPE) America; Special Interest Group: Research on Learning and Instruction in Physical Education of

the American Educational Research Association) or had published 3 or more articles in the past 5 years in leading research journals (e.g., *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*).

A stratified sampling was employed using Carnegie Classifications. This strategy enabled the investigators to compare and contrast the responses from PETE leaders employed in different types of colleges and universities. In total, 28 faculty (14 female, 14 male) from four different types of colleges were invited to participate: very high research activity universities (n = 10), high research activity universities (n = 7), doctoral/research universities (n = 5), and large and medium program master's colleges and universities (n = 6). Interviewing 28 PETE leaders allowed the researchers to reach redundancy with regard to emergent information (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Participants included 26 national leaders, one state leader, and one researcher who met the qualification criterion for publications. Most had been directly or were currently involved in the determination, administration, and implementation of major PE policies or legislative acts. Of the national leaders, 15 were past or current presidents of primary professional organizations, 7 were chairs of various scholarly and administrative groups within national professional organizations, and 4 were editors of major journals. Nearly all of the participants (27) had published at least 3 peer-referred articles in the past five years.

Recruitment took place through e-mail or by phone contact after obtaining clearance from the investigators' Institutional Review Board. All participants provided consent and were assigned fictitious names. Distinctive information such as professional title is not described for purposes of maintaining confidentiality, but demographic information including gender, types of

institutions, rank, years teaching in higher education, and number of referred publications can be found in Table 1.

Data Collection

Formal and informal interviews served as the primary method of data collection. In addition, a document analysis of each participant's curriculum vita was conducted. Twelve individuals participated in formal and informal interviews during the annual meeting of SHAPE America. For those (n = 16) unable to participate at this time, in-person interviews were conducted at the participants' home institutions or by telephone if distance was a precluding factor. Interviews lasted approximately two hours and were subsequently transcribed using fictitious names. The name of the interviewee, date, time, and location of the formal/informal interview were recorded in a research log along with general notes.

Formal interviews. Formal interviews (Patton, 2015) were utilized to evoke in-depth responses about participants' perceptions regarding the feasibility of a nationwide curriculum for P-12 programs. A standardized format was used to enable the investigators to compare and contrast responses of individuals employed at colleges/universities with different Carnegie Classifications. In addition, the informal conversational technique was employed (Patton, 2015) to enable researchers to spontaneously ask questions that emerged from the natural flow of the interaction.

Prior to implementation, formal interview questions were refined by a panel of experts, and a pilot interview was subsequently conducted to determine the arrangement and delimitation of questions and approximate interview length. Grounded in the SR model (Smith & O'Day, 1991), interview questions focused primarily on (a) knowledge about and familiarity with a national curriculum, (b) perceptions of a national curriculum, (c) relevance and feasibility of a

national curriculum in educational mainstream and P-12 education, and (d) what a national curriculum for P-12 physical education might look like.

Informal interviews. The researchers also engaged participants in informal conversations prior to and after formal interviews. For example, participants who wished to share additional information after the taped interview ended could supplement their responses during the course of the SHAPE America conference or afterward. In order to effectively record these informal responses, the researchers maintained an interview log.

Document analysis. Participants were asked to share a recent copy of their curriculum vitae for purposes of acquiring demographic information, understanding participants' professional affiliations and involvements, and determining participation eligibility.

Data Analysis

Verbatim data from formal and informal interviews were coded using open and axial techniques (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Open coding is described as a process of breaking apart, conceptualizing, cross-checking, and categorizing data. Themes, concepts, and categories from the interview transcripts were identified and qualified through multiple reviews and analysis of the raw data. In addition, axial coding was used to “reassemble data that was fractured during open coding” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 124) and to build a dense texture of relationships between categories. During the axial phase of coding, related concepts and thematic categories were connected to each other in relation to their properties and dimensions.

Analytical procedures were based on Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) which emphasizes the interplay of inductive and deductive reasoning. Data were analyzed inductively in the early stages to discover possible themes, patterns, and categories. Subsequently, a

deductive approach was used to test and verify the appropriateness and authenticity of the SR model. This procedure provided rigor and thoroughness to the analytical process (Patton, 2015).

Peer debriefing, negative case analysis, member checking, and triangulation were used to establish trustworthiness, credibility, and dependability as recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Denzin and Lincoln (2000) emphasize that maintaining complete neutrality and impartiality is not a simple task. It is simply not possible, and perhaps not even desirable, to remove all aspects of human character from a qualitative investigation. Thus, investigator backgrounds and biases were noted.

Results

In order to generate knowledge about the desirability and overall feasibility of a national curriculum, PETE faculty leaders who were knowledgeable about the topic of curriculum, curricular reform, and policy in physical education were interviewed. Notable anecdotes and powerful testimonies related to past efforts to reform curriculum in the field of physical education are included in the results. Five primary themes are discussed here.

Range of Knowledge: Explicit to Conversational

Although participants had a range of knowledge about national curriculum in accordance with research interests, teaching experiences, and professional careers, in general they were familiar with the concept and principles. Knowledge ranged from “very little” (B. Reid) to specific recall of previous conversations with committee members in a national organization regarding a national curriculum for P-12 physical education. One participant with over 40-years of teaching experience in the field stated:

In the early 90s when NASPE was beginning to form a committee to develop national standards, one of the main curriculum people opposed the idea of developing a national

curriculum because there has been a strong history of local curriculum. From her perspective and most of us early in our careers were taught that each school should develop their own curriculum because the needs and context in which physical education is taught are unique to a particular school. (J. Scott)

Some participants had cursory knowledge of national curricula that existed in other countries. For example, one participant stated, “I’m probably most familiar with the English national curriculum, but not familiar in a detailed way, so I would say that I’m just familiar with some of the general principles” (E. Nelson). Others had inaccurate knowledge, believing that a national curriculum did not exist in countries where one has in fact existed for many years:

I had the chance to spend some time in Australia and I don’t think they have a national curriculum... Um... two years ago... Singapore didn’t have a national curriculum, but they were in the process of trying to develop a curriculum. (S. Elliott)

Despite having a range of knowledge, most participants easily answered interview questions because they had acquired conversational knowledge through active engagement at the national and international levels by attending conferences, presenting papers, reading the literature, and previously living in other countries:

I talked with the people from Greece at a conference about their national curriculum and they showed me a number of the texts that they had written. And this past summer I was associated with the national curriculum in Brazil. Also, I’ve been reading about the national curricula in Australia and England. (C. Green)

I attended the Australian national physical education conference in November and I talked about a national curriculum with leaders from Australia, New Zealand, and the U.K. (A. Murray)

Although the institutions in which participants were employed did not appear to be a factor influencing their knowledge level of national curriculum, two who were the most knowledgeable came from a country where a national curriculum had been in existence for many years. One of these participants stated:

All my undergraduate education and my own physical education were based on a national curriculum. I was actually going through teacher education in the early nineties when it was first put into practice. So, I was taught how to do and teach physical education through the original national curriculum document in _____, which was very extensive and prescriptive. (H. Mason)

National Curriculum Could Provide Consistency and Explicit Guidance for P-12 Programs

The majority of participants believed that consistency was the primary benefit of a national curriculum. For example, participants stated:

...having a national, standardized curriculum would ensure consistency for teaching and learning. (B. Reid)

I like the consistency of national curriculum. Consistency could give more credibility to the profession. It is more likely that kids will reach what they should be learning at appropriate age. (B. Davis)

Regardless of whether or not participants supported the implementation of a national curriculum, many expressed the view that the adoption of a core curriculum would provide clear guidance for P-12 programs and pedagogical practices in general by clarifying what every student is expected to learn at each grade level:

One good thing is that we can ensure what every American child should be taught. In order for students to be successful in many of the lifetime activities taught in schools and

demonstrate that our programs have been successful in promoting students' active lifestyles, they have to at least be able to throw and catch. At the present time, however, many American students graduate from schools not being very skilled throwing and catching... I think this because there aren't clearly articulated guidelines for physical education programs... (S. Griffin)

If a national curriculum emphasized fundamental skills and knowledge, it could be beneficial, because fundamental motor skills and basic movement that young children should develop should be uniform throughout the country. (T. Miller)

In particular, participants were concerned that students are not demonstrating competency in fundamental motor skills essential to be considered physically active during their lifetime.

Participants also expressed frustration about teachers' inadequate knowledge of the physical education content standards and a lack of accountability, both of which could potentially be addressed with a national curriculum.

Nobody decides what physical education programs should look like, so teachers do whatever they want when teaching... For example, if you asked ten teachers, maybe two of them would know what the standards are or could describe them... Most teachers aren't really worried about it... there's also no evidence that students are achieving the standards. (O. Richards)

There is no accountability... When I ask them (teachers) if they're aware of their district, state, and the NASPE standards, they'll tell me 'yes'... and then I ask them 'Does this impact their teaching?', and they say 'no'... the standards are written so vaguely that you

don't know what you should essentially do and you can't ensure that you're meeting the standards. (C. Andrews)

The primary challenges participants identified with current standards-based physical education were disorganized, unreliable teaching practices; nonexistence of accountability measures to evaluate teacher effectiveness; and lack of evidence of student achievement. Participants attributed the poor quality of physical education programs in general to a lack of substantive, systematic guidance for P-12 programs and instructional practices, while suggesting that using a unified core curriculum for physical education could be a way to remediate these problems.

The majority of PETE leaders stated that PE teachers typically employ idiosyncratic or discretionary approaches in curricular implementation without any explicit guidelines for teaching. They indicated that many teachers do not use the content standards to guide their daily lessons, and some are not even familiar with them. One participant stated, "Standards are so broad that people can pick and choose what they want... but, nowhere does it say how you teach to the standards" (C. Green). Another stated, "How many people know those national standards and grade-level outcomes that were recently published at our national convention? Probably not very many... (PE) teachers just sort of exist in a state of ignorance... we have to have coherent guidelines" (L. Dixon).

Some participants perceived that mixed signals, policy fragmentation, and inconsistent pedagogical requirements from the polyphonic policy structure between federal, state, and local entities were another primary factor that has resulted in low quality physical education programs:

We have national standards. And, states adopt their own standards modified or completely different. So, we already have our first fracture at the state/national level.

Then at the school level we have: “Do I use the state standards or national standards? Do I try both?” There’s no guidance, support, directional involvement given out across those levels. I think it’s difficult for anybody to figure out what best practice looks like. (M. Dawson)

Most of the states have adopted versions of the NASPE standards, but those vary widely across states. And again, at the state level, there’s just not a whole lot of rigor and follow-up support. (G. Morris)

These statements illustrate frustration with the current multi-layered governance structure—often referred to as problematic levels of split responsibility between government entities—that “impedes efficient teaching and learning” (M. Spencer) and results in teachers receiving mixed signals and inconsistent administrative and pedagogical guidelines. As B. Davis commented, “Absolutely... Mixed signals from multi-level governance make it even more difficult for the kids who are 21 or 22, brand new teachers...” In support, another participant stated, “When you transfer anything from one level to the other, it gets diluted, it gets misinterpreted, and it gets ignored” (E. Nelson).

Although participants were not necessarily supportive of the implementation of a national curriculum for many reasons, many PETE leaders perceived that a national curriculum could provide substantive outcomes for P-12 curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Some even believed it would be preferable to the current system of local and state governance:

I think individual (PE) programs don’t have the outcome we are seeking for kids to be physically active... They (teachers) aren’t given expectations for teaching, and these expectations are not clear... I’m not sure there are any other subject areas out of physical education where teachers just get to choose their content, but pretty much everybody else

has clearly-defined outcomes... So, I like more prescription because it enables us to have some clear expectations. (S. Griffin)

If it (national curriculum) focuses on core outcomes that everyone can agree upon... and if the core is assessed in a reasonable and authentic ways, I think we would benefit from it. It would certainly be a first step of taking content in curricula... because if we don't have outcomes and high quality assessments, we don't have curriculum. (E. Nelson)

Rigidity of National Curriculum and a “One-Size-Fits-All” Approach

Although PETE leaders recognized the benefits of consistency that a national curriculum would provide, disadvantages were also documented, particularly in relation to its inflexibility; which would be enough to offset any advantages. Most believed a national curriculum can be “differently interpreted at different times and places” (G. Morris), but expressed that it seems rather conceptually rigid. There was concern that a uniform curriculum creates an oppressed educational context where individual needs and interests are ignored:

I don't think there is a 'one size fits all.'... it assumes that the curriculum is fixed.

National curriculum doesn't allow for anything like a social perspective, private need, or public hope. It leaves out what the student brings to the educational environment. (O. Kelly)

Many PETE leaders warned of the danger of educational rationalization for curriculum standardization, emphasizing that a core curriculum is to be too rigid to be useful. In particular, cultural and geographical differences were frequently addressed:

There are idiosyncratic, unique opportunities within states that need to be embraced. For example, in _____, we have a lot of outdoor adventure activities such as backpacking, whitewater, hunting, and fishing that are done by many adults and young people. There

are cultural differences, too. I had worked in _____ a lot of my career, 10 years, and there are certain activities that are common to Hispanic students... We need to be sensitive to those cultural and geographical differences. (E. Nelson)

In countries as vast and diverse as the US, in both geography and population, the implementation of a national curriculum is often perceived by scholars as unacceptable. Participants in the present study expressed similar perspectives. In addition, they cited disparities in funding and available resources as reasons for why it would fail:

For example, I'm teaching at a gym in the inner city, as opposed to living in the area where we have outdoor space. Maybe this school district can't afford all the equipment required in addressing a national curriculum. There are different levels funding and facilities available in different schools. (B. Davis)

The resources provided to schools are locally limited with some regulation and funding by individual states. Thus, we have a wide disparity in the funding and support for resources in schools. (D. Jenkins)

The majority of PETE leaders were skeptical and even vehemently opposed to adopting a standardized curriculum for physical education in the US that would not allow for local flexibility. Instead, they suggested that a common curriculum is more reasonable in smaller countries with culturally homogenous populations. The longstanding tradition of local control of education was another noticeable factor that contributed to the belief that a national curriculum is too rigid to be implemented throughout the nation:

The concept of local control is so prevalent. The local districts will have a difficult time accepting a national curriculum... because of the governance system and political history

where governance is structured from the federal government on down to states and local districts. (P. Duncan)

I don't know if anyone would ever allow themselves to be assigned to teach such a curriculum... Local control is all part and parcel of the American independent spirit. I think school stakeholders and teachers, as well as state-level policy makers, are not going to give up their independence. (D. Jenkins)

With concerns about noncompliance and nonconformity at each level, PETE leaders emphasized there would be strong resistance and fear of change expressed from teachers, schools, and states. In addition, participants understood that educational policy is largely built within states and that states are the level of the system that can significantly influence all parts of P-12 education. For this reason, the majority supported statewide curricular reform rather than nationwide change.

It's the Devil!

Most PETE leaders perceived the concept of national curriculum as "value-laden" (P. Duncan) and suggested that it would be differently interpreted in relation to how it is established and operationalized in practice (e.g., specificity, rigor, or coverage). Nevertheless, many used negative terms or phrases like "very rigid," "strict," "restrictive," "completely identical," along with "devil" and "nightmare" when describing different aspects of its potential implementation. One participant provided a notable anecdote:

The first national standards committee was interesting. When a committee to develop national standards was formed in NASPE, not only did a lot of people not want to serve on it, but they didn't want any part of it because they thought it (national standards) was national curriculum. (J. Scott)

In addition, several were reluctant or even refused to answer hypothetical questions about the enactment of a national curriculum. For example, when P. Duncan was asked to describe what types of resources/support would need to be available to ensure the success of a national curriculum (should one ever be enacted), he promptly responded, “That’s not even a question... It’s non-question because it won’t work.” Another stated, “I’ll not answer those questions that assume that we might have a national curriculum or imagine what it would look like if we had” (O. Kelly).

Several PETE leaders associated a national curriculum with being simplified, suppressing, or even socialistic. They emphasized it teaches the same content and experiences to every student, while restricting both teaching and learning. They believed it would result in strict mandates that every school throughout the nation would need to precisely follow.

That everybody gets a particular curriculum seems rigid. Everybody is going to learn the same thing at the same time. (C. Green)

That we say very definitively that all second graders must do this, this, and this during the first week of school... in fact, is not probable.... We’re not in a country that likes to be dictated to in terms of ‘This is what you’ll do.’ (T. Miller)

The negative image of a national curriculum appears to stem, in part, from a longstanding conviction to an idiosyncratic approach to curricular implementation:

My advisor, Dr. _____, a curriculum theorist, was very strongly opposed to a national curriculum. She believed that curriculum should be developed by individual teachers who are as close to the students as possible. So if I want to develop the right curriculum for you, I would know you... know the skills you do or do not have... know what you like and are interested in... I believe that is the best type of curriculum. (C. Green)

Finally, one participant suggested that resistance to a national curriculum would arise because of preference for the existing content standards: “I would bet that people who have worked harder with the standards would be more critical of a national curriculum because of their preference toward the standards and what they’ve invested in them” (M. Ryan).

Previous Exposure to a National Curriculum Influences One’s Perspectives

While there were no visible differences between participants employed in institutions holding different Carnegie Classifications, those raised in countries outside the US had notably different perceptions than those raised in the US. These individuals were not averse to the implementation of a national curriculum in the US, perceiving it would provide a common foundation or broad guidelines. They suggested their colleagues raised in the US have misconceptions about a national curriculum:

When you say ‘national,’ people in the United States think it becomes nationalistic or socialistic like, ‘Oh! The meaning’s that I have to be...’ However, is just a standard set of goals and assessments... It would provide more of a framework, but it’s not a constrictive rule that must be followed. So, it’s somewhat in between... (H. Mason)

Some think of it (national curriculum) as something that would have been taught in a socialist or communist country where everybody does the same thing on the same day at the same time. And, folks who interpret it in that way would suggest that it wouldn’t work in this country for a variety of reasons... But I think the problem here is their interpretation of what we mean by national curriculum. (S. Griffin)

Discussion

Due to increased emphasis on school and teacher accountability, lack of consensus about subject matter outcomes, and concerns about the quality of physical education in US schools, it

is not surprising that a conversation about a national curriculum would emerge (e.g., Do We Need a National Curriculum for K-12 Physical Education?, 2016; Oh & Graber, 2017).

Establishing a unified, common curriculum including systematic assessments, accountability measures, and instructional practices that are aligned to nationally benchmarked core content,—merits attention and discussion within the profession. Although the authors neither advocate for or against a national curriculum, they believe it is timely to investigate the perceptions of PETE leaders with regard to this debatable and often divisive topic.

Participants were relatively familiar with the basic concepts and principles of a national curriculum, and they were aware of its existence in other countries. Many, however, had difficulty accurately and specifically describing all of the elements of a national curriculum in detail (e.g., process of its development and implementation, rigor, and specificity). Some scholars might argue that lack of knowledge and first-hand exposure are partially responsible for its rejection in the US, whereas others might argue it is due to a model that would narrow school curricula options and circumscribe teacher and local flexibility (Sleeter, 2005; Zieff, Lumpkin, Guedes, & Eguaoje, 2009).

Based on the results of this investigation, the most noticeable benefit of adopting a national curriculum was consistency. Although the current polyphonic governance structure at each level has allowed for local and teacher flexibility, it has also led to disparate educational policies, standards, assessments, accountability measures, and teacher education programs across the nation. This implies that student learning and achievement in physical education class varies widely and can be heavily influenced by where individuals live and who teaches the classes. The principle of contemporary standards-based reforms (e.g., the reauthorization of ESEA, CCSS, RTTT), however, is based on the notion that every student has equitable learning opportunities to

master knowledge and skills deemed most relevant and important, regardless of where they reside. Some educational professionals believe that unnecessarily complex, blurred, and overlapped policies and guidelines from differing levels of authority could result in an educational system less effective, efficient, and equitable than the reforms would create (Keating, 2009; Savage, 2016).

In relation to systemic reform (SR), quality programs are built in supportive environments where states, local school districts, and individual schools from a multi-layered governance structure are purposefully coordinated and mutually cooperative. In contrast, policy fragmentation can distract school personnel and lead to confusion and discomfort. The principle of local autonomy and state ownership of education has led to diverse patterns of delivery, interpretation, and implementation of the physical education content standards across states and local schools (see National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) & American Heart Association [AHA], 2010). This policy structure has enabled local schools and teachers to develop and employ curricula pertinent to the interests and needs of individual students and their own educational settings. It also, however, has resulted in a misalignment between suggested standards and the actual curriculum used in school-based physical education (Bulger, Housner, & Lee, 2008; Chen, 2006) by prompting incoherent and overlapped standards' goals and guidelines. According to the SR model, curriculum alignment for P-12 education might provide a pragmatic educational base to promote collaboration, align policies and guidelines among multiple governments, and help to systematically assess students and school personnel based on aligned standards and guidelines (Henninger & Carlson, 2011; Oh & Graber, 2017; Moore, 2012).

A uniform curriculum for physical education, however, appears to be too rigid to be adopted in the US, in the light of cultural and contextual differences arising from the country's

size and enormous population. Education scholars postulate that placing pupils within a standardized cultural and social norm in an ideological sense, a simplified, uniform curriculum and standardized tests could prompt resistance and the renewal of divisions between ethnic/racial groups and between socioeconomic classes, especially in a heterogeneous, large community with diverse cultures and divergent interests and needs (Apple, 2004; Sleeter, 2005; McNeil, 2000). The nature of curriculum, and a national curriculum in particular, is described by Michael Apple as “never simply a neutral assemblage of knowledge... It is always part of a selected tradition, someone’s selection, some group’s vision of legitimate knowledge” (Apple, 1996, p. 22). An overly rigid national curriculum and national testing is viewed by many as a stifling attempt to reaffirm the supposed consensus about what should be taught.

Although both the advantages and disadvantages of a national curriculum in the US were addressed in the results, it would not be readily accepted in the educational community for two primary reasons. First, the tradition of local and state control over curricular decisions has been deeply embedded; therefore, resistance, reluctance, or even fear of states, local schools, and individual teachers would be expected, and this is a primary reason why curriculum reform at the national level is difficult to realize (Bulger & Housner, 2009; Burks et al., 2015). Second, a strong conviction to an idiosyncratic approach to curricular implementation is prevalent among professionals in the US educational mainstream as well as those in physical education. Many educational professionals early in their careers are taught that curriculum should be developed by smaller levels of governance and by those (schools and individual teachers) who are closer in proximity to students, as they best understand their students’ needs and interests.

Curricular alignment across the nation is a “double-edge sword”—it would offer greater educational coherence yet inhibiting local autonomy and teacher creativity. The concept of

national curriculum varies widely in terms of time and space, and its relevance often relies on one's perceptions and previous experiences (Curtner-Smith, 1999; Oh & Graber, 2017; Wagner, 2008). Although total standardization of the P-12 curriculum is unlikely to be successful, if the quality of P-12 physical education is to improve, it must offer more explicit and substantive goals, guidelines, and outcomes and establish relevant assessments and accountability systems aligned with suggested program outcomes. It will also need to be nested in a flexible educational setting where local and teacher autonomy in curricular development and implementation is allowed.

Limitations and Future Research

Limited research has been conducted on the topic of a national physical education curriculum in the US, and this study represents only the perspectives of PETE leaders in the field. The perceptions of other teacher educators, legislators, administrators, and P-12 teachers are not addressed yet warrant investigation.

Although there were no apparent differences in participants' perspectives based on Carnegie Classifications of institution in which participants were employed, there did appear to be differences between PETE leaders raised in the US and those in raised other countries. Thus, the perspectives of these two groups of individuals should be compared, particularly in relation to PETE leaders living in countries that have similarities to the US (geographically and culturally diverse). As Siedentop (1992) once advised, it is necessary for us to "learn from what is being done in other parts of the world" (p. 70).

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Name	Gender	Carnegie Classifications ^a	Rank	Years of Teaching in Higher Education	# of Referred Articles
A. Murray	M	VHRAU	Professor	20	65
K. Jones	M	VHRAU	Professor	20	52
A. Mary	F	VHRAU	Professor	26	17
G. Morris	F	VHRAU	Professor	22	47
P. Duncan	M	VHRAU	Professor	34	62
E. James	F	VHRAU	Professor	28	35
J. Scott	F	VHRAU	Professor Emeritus	41	49
A. Edward	F	VHRAU	Professor	27	77
M. Spencer	F	VHRAU	Professor	21	99
T. Miller	M	VHRAU	Professor	41	60
C. Green	F	HRAU	Professor	33	60
E. Nelson	M	HRAU	Professor Emeritus	35	52
O. Kelly	F	HRAU	Professor	21	15
C. Andrews	M	HRAU	Assistant Professor	6	12
O. Richards	M	HRAU	Professor	30	119
J. Bruce	M	HRAU	Professor	13	25
M. Dawson	F	HRAU	Professor	17	21
M. Ryan	M	DRU	Associate Professor	7	14

Table 1 (Cont.)

H. Mason	M	DRU	Professor	14	10
D. Todd	M	DRU	Associate Professor	15	23
D. Jenkins	F	DRU	Professor	31	17
J. Simpson	M	DRU	Professor	39	27
B. Davis	M	LMPMCU	Professor	31	Not Provided
L. Dixon	F	LMPMCU	Professor	28	18
K. Brown	F	LMPMCU	Professor	20	9
B. Reid	F	LMPMCU	Associate Professor	11	13
S. Griffin	M	LMPMCU	Professor	35	22
S. Elliott	F	LMPMCU	Professor	17	8

Note. ^aParticipants were grouped into four different types of colleges/universities using Carnegie Classifications. VHRAU = Very High Research Activity Universities; HRAU = High Research Activity Universities; DRU = Doctoral/Research Universities; LMPMCU = Large and Medium Program Master's Colleges and Universities.

References: Chapter Five

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Chapter Six: Article Three

Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to examine the achievability of a national curriculum and whether it has the potential to improve the quality of physical education in the United States.

Method: Twenty-eight leaders in physical education teacher education (PETE) were purposefully selected from colleges and universities across the US to participate in formal and informal interviews (Patton, 2015). **Results:** Grounded in the Systemic Reform model, the themes that emerged indicated a unified, common curriculum has the capability to broaden experiences of learners regardless of where individuals reside and promote quality P-12 programs that emphasize lifelong participation in physical activity. The majority of participants, however, believed that a national curriculum would not be readily realized or successfully implemented in the US due to the polyphonic governance structure and anti-federal sentiment; and widespread convictions among the educational community about an idiosyncratic curriculum approach. **Discussion:** Physical education must provide a more advanced curricular framework with explicit, rigorous guidance for curricula, instruction, and assessment tasks in order to promote substantial change in the field.

Keywords: curriculum alignment, standardized curriculum, national standards

Educational policies and reforms intended to push for greater national influence in curricula are a global tendency with several countries attempting to standardize or even nationalize curricula and assessments over the last three decades (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2004; Savage, 2016). For example, British and Australia governments have developed unified, common sets of goals and curricular frameworks, and nearly all states and jurisdictions in both countries are now either fully implementing their national curricula or incorporating the newly-designed curricular content into the existing one. In the United States (US), since the 1980s, multiple federal initiatives such as the America 2000, the 1994 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, and the Race to the Top (RTTT) fund have been designed to yield greater national consistency in schooling, including the establishment of nationwide goals and vision, development and revisions of nationally benchmarked content standards, and an increased emphasis on standardized assessments, ultimately raising educational standards across the nation. These reforms have largely stemmed from concerns about what should be taught in schools to secure competitiveness in a rapid, ever-changing global market.

Shared global pressure in education is illustrated by an increased emphasis on international comparisons of student performance scores through standardized testing (e.g., the Program for International Student Assessment). The increased pressure of international comparisons has been driven by the widespread acknowledgement of “economic potential of education,” and student test scores echo the nation’s future capacities of being economically productive in a period of global economic uncertainty (Savage, & O’Connor, 2015). In addition, this pressure has prompted a fresh view of the equity that every student, regardless of where they live or the background from which they come, has to master common sets of apposite skills and

knowledge to raise the nation's economic and social position. The competitive global pressure and social and economic imperatives have fueled the nationalization of particular assemblages of content and knowledge in K-12 schools, although the development and process of national curriculum reforms in different countries are not explained in a uniform manner.

In this global context, the George H. W. Bush administration proposed America 2000, which included six national goals to be achieved by the year 2000 in five core subjects and a voluntary testing program (the American Achievement Tests). In the Clinton era, the Goals 2000: Educate America Act and the reauthorization of ESEA, now known as the Improving America's School Act (IASA), were enacted in 1991 and 1994 respectively to encourage states to develop academic standards and summative assessment systems. This standard-based movement later became the centerpiece of the 2001 NCLB legislation. Unlike previous national reforms, however, the NCLB Act required greater emphasis on standardized testing and accountability measures, resulting in a much more familiar policy of test-based accountability (Shepard, Hannaway, & Baker, 2009), wherein student performance scores become ad-hoc indicators for punishing or rewarding schools and school personnel.

There is an unprecedented state-led initiative regarded by some as an attempt to nationalize the curriculum in the United States—internationally benchmarked “college- and career-ready standards” for students to achieve by the end of high school for English language arts/literacy (ELA) and mathematics. That is the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) spearheaded by governors and education leaders from forty-eight states through their membership organizations, the National Governors Association for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO).

For years, the absence of an obligatory set of national standards created a fragmented, overlapped, and blurred system of educational policy causing highly uneven results in implementation and achievement across the nation (National Association for Sport and Physical Education [NASPE] & American Heart Association [AHA], 2010). In recognition of negative consequences from many states' disparate standards, the Common Core was intended to offer all young people the knowledge and skills deemed most relevant and important to the world today (Kentucky Department of Education, 2012), and the ultimate goal was to promote greater national unity in curriculum and assessment. Therefore, the gist of the standards is in line with a new interpretation of equity that student learning should not depend on their living and contextual factors.

While the development and implementation of the CCSS are not overseen by the federal government, in 2009, the President Barack Obama administration launched the Race to the Top (RTTT) program with the aim to reward states that achieved substantive improvement in student performance and encourage them to adopt the common standards. While the RTTT program led to increased state support for the standards, it diminished the state-led nature of the CCSS system. As a result, some perceive the Common Core as a federal government initiative to control the curriculum across the nation (Savage & O'Connor, 2015).

In addition to the US educational mainstream, there has also been debate about aligning the curriculum among professionals in the field of physical education. Since a 1986 special issue of the *Journal of Physical Education Recreation and Dance (JOPERD)* first discussed the notion of a nationwide curriculum and national assessment, the issue has recently reemerged through a heated debate of diverse groups of professionals including faculty, physical education teachers, and graduate students (Do We Need a National Curriculum for K-12 Physical Education? 2016).

Although the debate culminated inconclusively with several advantages and disadvantages, many of the professionals suggested that curriculum alignment throughout the nation would provide programs with fundamental consensus and unity on learning goals and assessments, offer all pupils equitable opportunities to learn regardless of their backgrounds, and enhance the position of the field as a relevant, important subject within school curriculum. In response to the debate, Oh and Graber (2017) addressed the possibility and relevance of a unified, common curriculum for K-12 physical education. They concluded that although nationalizing the P-12 curriculum has the potential to offer substantive outcomes and relevant assessments aligned with those outcomes, the achievability of adopting a national physical education curriculum is problematic due to the deeply embedded educational pattern of local and state controls and the anticipated fear/resistance from individual states, local schools, and teachers to reform.

Physical education has traditionally undergone a lack of systematic student assessment measures and the absence of reliable accountability systems to ensure that teachers are effective. Furthermore, while many P-12 programs are still relying primarily on sport-driven contents, especially team sports (Ferry & McCaughtry, 2015; McCaughtry, 2009), many teachers, although not all, do not offer a diverse and meaningful learning experiences that promote physically active lifestyles due, in part, to lack of explicit, substantial guidance for PE programs and pedagogical practices (Bulger & Housner, 2009; Oh, & Graber, 2017; Richardson, 2011). Extensive transformation, including curriculum alignment and the establishment of relevant assessment systems and accountability connected with designated program outcomes, is needed to improve the quality and stature of overall P-12 physical education. Education in the US, however, has traditionally had a strong history of local and state governance since the beginning of schooling in the American colonies, a primary factor that would make the implementation of

national curriculum reform difficult and contentious. For this reason, the plausibility of a national curriculum has been given only limited attention in the literature, and there has been a paucity of research, especially in the area of physical education. The agenda of conversion to a national curriculum is, by nature, problematic for many, including both students and teachers.

Grounding Framework

A Systemic Reform (SR) framework was used as the theoretical model to guide the present research. Smith and O'Day first conceptualized the vision for system-wide improvement (in the early 1990s) designed to improve educational effectiveness and efficiency by aligning core elements of education, including curriculum, assessment tasks, teacher education programs, and administrative and community supports. Despite the unprecedented reform efforts of the 1980s such as top-down and bottom-up tactics, little improvement in quality of teaching and learning were achieved by the end of the decade. The meager results of the reforms have been attributed by many educators to inconsistent and uncoordinated policy structure.

The disparate, mixed signals and policy fragmentation from differing levels of authority make it difficult to realize substantive, system-wide change and have resulted in disconnections between goals and policy, poor-quality curricular and pedagogical practices, and inexplicit, blurred accountability among governmental entities (Smith & O'Day, 1991). Goertz, Floden, and O'Day (1995) have noted that policy fragmentation can prompt unnecessarily complex administrative and instructional requirements and lead to discomfort and confusion of school personnel. The SR model emphasizes three major components including a unified, common vision and goals, a consistent pedagogical guidance system, and a purposefully coordinated governance structure at each level.

According to the SR model, effective and quality programs begin with mutually cooperative environments where multiple governmental entities at national, state, and local levels are purposefully coordinated. Further, to develop and sustain successful schools, Smith and O'Day (1991) suggested that school curriculum should embody explicit learning goals, challenging standards, and coherent instructional guidelines, and that all other primary educational components should be cohesively organized. Of significance is that the model is not to set specific curricular scope and sequence or dictate particular pedagogy in ways that students achieve learning goals; rather, it is to build a systematic and supportive educational base by unifying policy and guidelines among multiple levels of government entities, while simultaneously promoting culturally and regionally responsive learning environments that embrace local flexibility and the autonomy of school personnel.

The purpose of this investigation was to examine the achievability of a national curriculum and whether it has the potential to improve the quality of physical education in the US where the longstanding tradition of state governance and local autonomy of education has been deeply embedded. The SR model was used to guide formal and informal interview questions to investigate participants' perceptions and insights about national curriculum reform for school-based physical education. The results are derived from a large data set in which earlier analysis found that PETE leaders (a) have a range of knowledge about national curriculum, (b) believe that it has potential to provide guidance for K-12 programs, (C) are concerned, however by its rigidity and "one-size-fits-all-approach," and (d) hold strong feeling about its implementation, many negative, unless they had prior exposure to a national curriculum while living in another country (Oh & Graber, in review).

Method

Despite growing scholarly and public discourse in the educational community aimed at establishing a standardized set of curricular frameworks and nationwide assessments since the 1980s, investigations of the possibility of a national curriculum in the US have been lacking, particularly in the field of physical education. A qualitative research paradigm was employed to elicit PETE leaders' theoretical and empirical perspectives with regard to this debatable topic.

Participants and Settings

PETE leaders were purposefully selected from an empirical data base of institutions of higher education representing different Carnegie Classifications. Participants were scholars who had previously served or were currently serving in leadership capacities in primary national organizations (i.e., NASPE; Society of Health and Physical Educators (SHAPE) America) or had published three or more articles in the past five years in leading research/theoretical journals in the field (i.e., *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*; *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*; *Quest*).

Recruitment occurred through e-mail after receiving Institutional Review Board approval. As recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985), the present study left the sample size of participants open until no new themes from newly interviewed participants emerged, thus demonstrating redundancy. In total, 28 leaders (14 female, 14 male) from four-year colleges and universities across the US that offer teacher certification programs in PETE were invited to participate. Based on the primary inclusion criteria, participants included 11 past or current presidents of national professional organizations, 7 editors of major journals, one researcher, 6 chairs and 3 committee members of diverse scholarly and administrative groups within national organizations. As primary advisory members, consultants, and well-published researchers in the field, they have served in multiple leadership roles at the national as well as state levels by being

directly engaged in the development and implementation of major PE policies, curricular frameworks and guidelines, and assessment tasks. Upon obtaining informed consent, all participants were assigned fictitious names for the purpose of maintaining confidentiality.

A stratified sampling was used based on the 2017 Carnegie Classifications. This technique facilitated comparing and contrasting of PETE leaders' perspectives from different types of institutions. For data triangulation, participants were grouped by four different types of colleges and universities: (a) Doctoral Universities/Highest Research Activity (n = 10), (b) Doctoral Universities/Higher Research University (n = 7), (c) Doctoral Universities/Moderate Research Activity (n = 5), and (d) Master's College and Universities: Large and Medium Programs (n = 6). Each leader's information including demographics, professional title and serving years, is not tabulated because the sample could be detected by readers.

Data Collection

Formal and informal interviews were used as the primary approaches of data collection. In addition, participants' curriculum vitas were collected and analyzed to obtain demographic information, evaluate participation eligibility, and determine the institutions and professional affiliations in which the participants had been or were currently engaged. In total, 12 PETE leaders participated in formal and informal interviews during the annual meeting of SHAPE America. The date, time, and location for each were scheduled at the participants' convenience in advance. Those (n = 16) who did not attend the conference were subsequently interviewed in person at their home institutions or by telephone if an in-person interview was inconvenient due to distance. Interviews lasted up to 2 hours and were tape-recorded and subsequently transcribed using fictitious names.

A combination of the interview guide and standardized open-ended interview technique was employed (Patton, 2015), and the investigators were free to interject unscripted questions based on interviewee responses. The utilization of a standardized format with uniform questions facilitated the comparing and contrasting of responses of individuals employed at both similar and different types of colleges and universities. Prior to interviews, standardized interview questions were carefully developed, refined, and tested by a panel of experts to determine the delimitation, arrangement, and relevance of questions. Based on the SR model (Smith & O'Day, 1991), formal interview questions addressed perspectives about enacting a nationwide physical education curriculum in the US.

In addition to formal interviews with scripted questions, the informal conversational interview approach was also utilized (Patton, 2015). Informal conversations primarily took place after the formal interviews had been conducted. For instance, participants who desired to provide additional information contacted the investigators with further comments and insights. All of the general information (e.g., name, location, and time) and interviewees' specific comments from the informal interview were noted in an interview log.

Data Analysis

Verbatim data from all open-ended interviews with PETE leaders were coded using open and axial techniques (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). During the coding process, primary themes and concepts from raw data were identified through multiple reviews and then linked to each other along the categories of their properties and dimensions. In addition, a constant-comparative process whereby the investigators repeatedly visited data was used to maintain accuracy and give rigor to the analytic process (Patton, 2015). Interview transcripts were analyzed using Grounded Theory, which emphasized the interaction of inductive and deductive reasoning (Glaser &

Strauss, 1967). Concepts, thematic categories, and patterns were discovered, tested, and verified throughout the phase of inductive analysis. Subsequently, deductive analysis was conducted to evaluate the appropriateness and viability of the SR model.

Multiple techniques were employed to establish the trustworthiness, credibility, and dependability of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2015). First, a colleague familiar with naturalistic inquiry was asked to assume the task of peer debriefer to evaluate the procedures and processes of data collection, analysis, and interpretations. Second, interview transcripts were reviewed and refined with each participant to ensure that individual responses were explicitly and accurately transcribed, delivered, and interpreted. Third, participant responses from four different types of colleges/universities were continuously compared and triangulated during the analytic process. Fourth, negative cases were searched to explain exceptional instances that were incoherent with emerging themes. Fifth, to acquire greater credibility in relation to all aspects of data and discern investigator bias, researcher logs were maintained. The utilization of these strategies helped ensure methodological rigor and acquisition of accurate findings.

Results

To evaluate the achievability of a national curriculum and whether it has the potential to improve the quality of physical education in the US, leaders in PETE who were knowledgeable about curriculum and policy were invited to interview. Five primary themes are described in this chapter.

It Could Broaden the Experience of Learners

Although participants acknowledged that the implementation of a unified curriculum would impede local control and teacher creativity, they also noted that it could provide every pupil with an equitable learning opportunity and broader range of experiences. This perception

stems, in part, from their belief that many of the current school PE programs are still focusing primarily on sport-driven content and activities, especially team sports:

Now, while we need to continue to focus on individual and team sports in some manner, we're overemphasizing them... We have to have programs that offer diverse PA opportunities for children to be physically active when they become adults. I mean team sports are not the kinds of things that we do as adults. (Michael)

One of the concerns I have with physical education programs is the over-emphasis on team sports... Most activities they employ are very sports-driven, and I don't think that appeals to most of the students who take physical education and who do not see themselves as athletes... When the students become adults, they may have lesser opportunities for PA or even may not want to play team sports. (Sophia)

Leaders in the field suggested that the overemphasis on "basic sports like football, volleyball, or basketball" (Ethan) does not encourage students to become physically active during their lifetime. In addition, they attributed the narrow range of P-12 programs in general to the current physical education content standards that focus heavily on sport-oriented motor skills. One participant stated, "...the current standards unfortunately embrace the 'old' physical education that is dominated by sports. Look at how much time and energy are supposed to be spent on skills leading to sports. They're a massive enterprise in terms of the Standards One" (Michael).

In the traditional system in the United States, curriculum and policy are largely established at the state level, and specific decisions and actual implementation are typically deferred to lower levels of authority such as local schools and individual teachers. This policy structure "allows teachers to teach what they like from personal choice" (Evan). For this reason,

another concern of the PETE leaders was teacher expertise in relation to developing effective curricula based on the suggested standards and guidelines. Most suggested that P-12 teachers neither appropriately nor effectively delivered and interpreted policy and requirements suggested by federal and state governments. They were also concerned that teachers lacked sufficient proficiency to integrate a broad range of lifetime activities for students into their curricular practices. Many participants commented that a nationwide core curriculum could be an effective way to remediate these issues through providing substantial, explicit guidance for teachers with limited proficiency:

We have good standards, but it depends on how they're interpreted. That's the problem. I don't think that a lot of teachers have the expertise to effectively deliver them and... really don't know what they should do to achieve them... There urgently needs to be some direction to teachers... A national curriculum would in fact improve that. (Kayla)

To me, the primary goal of physical education is to help students find something that individuals want to continue doing in order to be active for their lifetimes. But... no one is telling teachers that this is how you teach it. A lots of PE teachers neither put variety of lifetime activities into their classes nor offer broad range of experiences for students... Especially, if guidance for general areas (e.g., safety, life skills) is not given to teachers, they wouldn't do it and once again fall back on choosing whatever they want to do. I don't disagree with the system giving individual teachers freedom to teach the way they want; but clearly, having a national curriculum framework wouldn't allow teachers to stick with teaching one thing. (Evan)

Participants were concerned that a narrow range of teaching practices stems from (a) lack of explicit guidance, (b) teachers' limited expertise at integrating lifetime activities into the

curriculum, and (c) noncompliance and resistance of teachers to change, due in part to the longstanding tradition of local control over curricular decisions. Although many acknowledged some of the merits of a national curriculum in improving the quality of existing physical education, they also recognized that its implementation would be difficult. For example, Ethan stated that some teachers might not like being told what to teach and would respond by stating, ‘Hey, this is our responsibility. We have the right to teach in our ways. Don’t tell us what to do.’ (Ethan) Overall, however, participants suggested that a well-rounded curricular framework with clearer, mandated guidelines for P-12 programs would broaden the experience of learners that would promote engagement in lifetime physical activity.

National Curriculum as a Way to Offer Substantive Outcomes in P-12 Programs

One of the primary concerns of the PETE leaders relative to school physical education is a lack of substantive outcomes to guide programs and individual teachers. One participant who has served on various scholarly and administrative leadership capacities in the field at the national and state levels over the last 3 decades stated, “I made the decision to chair the committee for _____, because I think the profession nationally, as well as statewide, should designate outcomes... defining outcomes allows schools to basically achieve designated goals” (Ashlyn). Many of the participants also expressed the need for more explicit, substantive outcomes for P-12 curriculum, assessment, and instruction, while they continuously alluded to a national curriculum as a remedy to address the absence:

I would love it if some create a national curriculum and the summative assessments to go with it... I’m aware that the NASPE standards and our state standards as well are broad and may not provide enough specification, which is why creating assessments for them is so difficult... The downside of fuzzy standards is the difficulty in creating assessments.

So again, I think writing a national curriculum with very clear outcomes defined in a way that could be measurable, would be great. (Emily)

What they (standards) do allow is a lot of flexibility, which also allow for lack of accountability. What I mean by that is... when you look at the content standards, they're free. So, teachers can claim that they're meeting them, but there are no real assessment procedures and accountability measures... There also is no evidence that students are achieving the standards... (Benjamin)

Many of the PETE leaders suggested that the current physical education content standards are too broad to offer substantial outcomes for P-12 programs. In particular, they attributed the broad content standards as a primary factor that make it difficult to establish relevant assessment systems to ensure that students accomplish the standards-aligned goals. Participants also believed that reliable and meaningful student assessments—the most powerful and useful source for evaluating teacher accountability (Lund & Veal, 1996)—are largely nonexistent within many programs and P-12 teachers frequently ignore evaluating student achievement. Furthermore, one participant lamented the lack of agreement among professionals in the field related to subject matter outcomes, “There’s a group of people that are focusing on outcomes like health-related fitness. There’s another group who focus on personal and social responsibility as a primary outcome of PE... There are other people focusing on other outcomes” (William).

Most leaders did acknowledge some of the merits of the broad physical education standards, in part, due to their strong convictions about an idiosyncratic approach to curricular implementation: “People in this country like independent... less federal government control. They believe that local communities should choose their curricular contents and direct their

schools in terms of their own values” (Emily). The leaders also pointed out, however, the ambiguity of the standards while stating that the current national content standards might not be adequate to guide the curriculum of school physical education. For those reasons, they emphasized the need to establish more explicit curricular frameworks with relevant program outcomes that would substantially ground P-12 curricula and pedagogical practices.

Cultural and Contextual Diversity Wouldn't Allow the Implementation

Regardless of whether or not conversion to a national curriculum is a desirable change, most of the participants affirmed that it could not be easily enacted or successfully implemented in the US. The leaders were aware that the concept of national curriculum can be differently interpreted in various spaces and time and in terms of how it is established and implemented in practice. One PETE leader stated, “The concept... depends on what a national curriculum might look like” (Joshua) and another stated, “how it’s constructed and how you follow up on it...” (Bella). Nevertheless, they perceived that a national curriculum is conceptually inflexible. There was concern that a unified national curriculum creates a stifling educational setting where cultural and regional differences and individual interests and needs are not taken into account.

Participants commented:

I think the idea of a national curriculum is dangerous and irresponsible. There is no a uniform curriculum totally allowing for diversity... When teachers hear the term, national curriculum, they think ‘we have to do A, B, C, and D,’ stop thinking, and finally don’t pay attention to the kids they’re teaching. (Maria)

If you were to say that there would be one uniform curriculum for all the elementary school children, one uniform curriculum for all middle school students, and one uniform curriculum for all high school students, I think that would be quite a challenge. (Henry)

Many leaders associated the term, national curriculum, with inculcating the same experiences and knowledge for all learners or simplifying what is to be taught. Furthermore, they regard a uniform curriculum as a rigorous set of rules that every school and teacher must precisely follow throughout the nation. Such negative sentiments concerning national curriculum appear to arise from cultural and geographical diversity. Participants described:

I think that a national curriculum, given the size of this country, would be too rigid. Each school district is different with unique needs for its community... One problem with a curriculum is how variable areas of the country are. Not only are there 316 million people, but there are urban and rural situations with different geography... for example, in the western part of the country, you have lots of mountains that lend different opportunities... orienteering, canoeing, and adventure activities. But if you are in the city, you can't do those activities. (Alexander)

If we're going to have it (national curriculum), we miss cultural diversity. I live in a Hispanic population. What they need is not the same with black or white populations. So, curriculum should have flexibility for cultural and geographical differences. I don't think that curriculum is a thing simplified. It's a way of working to help diverse groups of people develop knowledge. You can't get that in a curriculum. (Maria)

It is claimed that it would be impractical for a prescriptive national curriculum to be adopted in countries as diverse and enormous as the US in population and geography. Specifically, participants stated that activities and learning opportunities available for different geographical locations differ, and that there are unique interests and needs for each demographic of individuals (e.g., racial/ethnic groups). Further, participants pointed out that disparities in

available resources and funding allocated to local schools would make the implementation of a national curriculum more difficult.

Finally, two participants cited the widespread conviction for an idiosyncratic curricular approach among professionals in the area of physical education as a reason for why it would not be acceptable:

I think a standardized curriculum wouldn't be probable in the US because of the way of individualized education. (Victoria)

There is a strong history and culture that teachers and program in PE have been allowed to basically do whatever they want... We've been allowed to fly under the radar, basically. (Logan)

Polyphonic Federalism and Anti-Federal Sentiment Would Exert Significant Limits on National Curriculum Reform

In addition to cultural and contextual differences, another primary factor that has influenced the belief that standardizing curriculum throughout the nation would not be achievable is the longstanding tradition of state and local control of curriculum. Many participants stated:

First of all, I assume that it will not ever be implemented. I don't think that policy structure would promote the curriculum either at the federal, state, or local level. It would be filtered down to so many school systems even within a state. (Henry)

I think the political system, governance structure of education, wouldn't simply allow for a national curriculum where everyone gets taught the same content... A uniform curriculum might be able to occur only to the degree to which individual states set curriculum, but is not possible in the United States. (Logan)

Because of the current US governance system of education, we don't have the infrastructure, funding, and a powerful organization to implement it, so let's assume it is impossible to be enacted (Bella)

Education in the US has traditionally used a localized approach, with relatively independent voices of federal, state, and local governments administering funding and policies—often referred to as 'polyphonic federalism.' The statements above indicate the current multiple governance structure as a primary factor that exerts significant limits on a sort of national reform, making it difficult to secure national consensus about what should be taught. Furthermore, leaders anticipated that an adoption of a national curriculum would prompt strong resistance among multiple governments to change due to the local and state entities and even classroom teachers who would be unwilling to abandon their control over curriculum:

They (state and local governments) wouldn't accept it if we laid out a national curriculum... Even our national standards are not mandated by anyone. We have state and national standards, but we don't have the standards police to monitor and force to do them. If we develop a national curriculum, we would have to say to all the teachers in a state, "This is what you're going to do. This is what we mandate." I don't think that works. There would be lots of issues in terms of conformity and compliance. (Henry)

I think there probably would be some resistance of teachers, principals, school districts, and even states. They have never had a standardized curriculum. I think it would have to happen within a school district or state for substantial changes. (Michael)

Teachers and school administrators are not likely to embrace the change, because teachers very often enjoy what they're teaching in their own ways... I think teachers would refute national curriculum when it comes. (Jackson)

As many participants stated, “States are more the place where education policy is made” (William), and “All policies are filtered to the state to interpret” (Kate). For this reason, they supported curricular change at the state level more than nationwide reform. In addition, some leaders suggested that a national curriculum is more achievable in smaller countries due to the readiness of curriculum control: “If we are in a small country like England, Japan, or Korea, a standard curriculum would probably make more sense because of the existence of a main agency that administers education of the country” (Victoria).

Lack of Consensus about Implementation and Effectiveness

Although some participants had strong opinions about the implementation of a nationwide curriculum in the US, the majority were ambivalent (see Oh & Graber, in review). Regardless of the Carnegie Classification of the institution in which PETE leaders were employed, most did not express decisive opinions, and some had mixed opinions in which they perceive both advantages and disadvantages. This appeared to be attributable to the number of sociocultural, geographical, and educational factors (e.g., diversity, country size, teacher expertise) that leaders considered when expressing their opinions about the effectiveness and achievability of a national curriculum which made their decision complex. Alexander commented at the beginning of the interview, “I don’t think I could agree or disagree... Having a national curriculum in the United States is a complex issue to talk about. There are obviously pros and cons to any type of reforms that you would do.” The description below shows a typical example of why most of the leaders hesitated to provide a clear decision in relation to the achievability and potential success of implementing a uniform curriculum:

If we came up with this national curriculum, it wouldn’t automatically give funding to every school in order to have four ball fields, two gyms, and a pool. So, the details of a

national curriculum are very, very hard to implement... (But) without clear guidelines to promote a quality program, it becomes problematic because teachers are left wondering what is the most important part of their job. (Victoria)

Another noticeable factor impacting their hesitation is that a national curriculum presupposes certain values, and the concept and meaning vary in different places and times. For example, one of two participants who most severely opposed the idea of developing a uniform curriculum, stated, "If this was an interview held in China, my response might be different because they have a governance structure sufficient enough to control the nation" (Logan). Participants also perceived that the concept of a national curriculum can be differently interpreted in terms of how it is established and enacted (e.g., specificity, rigor, or coverage). Specifically, when the interviewees were asked to describe potential effectiveness of a national curriculum in physical education, they responded:

I think a national curriculum could be either restrictive or flexible, depending on how specific it is. If it provided a broad and comprehensive framework, it would be good. Otherwise, if it's too specific, then it might limit appropriate learning choices by local entities. (Avery)

It depends on how the level it's built. If it specifies certain activities, then I see this as somewhat rigid. But, if it's built at a conceptual level, it's probably a good idea. (Kayla)

I think that a national curriculum could work in the United States, but I would have a lot of 'ifs'; if there was follow through (e.g., accountability), if there were valid and reliable assessments, if there were well-organized training programs for pre- and in-service teachers, or if there was student choice... Unfortunately, there are a lot of 'ifs' when talking about the effectiveness of a national curriculum (Jackson)

Discussion

In response to an increased emphasis on accountability and standardized assessments from recent reform movement (e.g., NCLB, RTTT), there has been debate in the educational community about national curricular reform, establishing a common set of curricular frameworks and standardized testing, aligning educational goals with pedagogical practices, and building a more explicit and aligned common curricular foundation (Moore, 2012; Oh & Graber, 2017; Rink, 2013). Few empirical studies, however, have been conducted on the topic of adopting a national curriculum for P-12 programs. The present investigation highlighted the perspectives of PETE leaders about the achievability and potential success of a national curriculum in the culturally and contextually diverse US school contexts and whether it would improve overall program quality.

Based on the results of this study, a uniform curriculum has the potential to broaden student experiences and provide equitable learning opportunities for students. Although the historically-embedded pattern of multi-layered governance structure at each level has allowed for teacher creativity and local flexibility (Humphries, Lovdahl, & Ashy, 2002), the system has also resulted in varying program quality along with disparate educational policies and guidelines including standards, assessments, and teacher evaluation system across the nation. As a result, student experiences and learning differ widely based on who teaches physical education classes and where students reside. Ironically, this contrasts with the principles of equity from recent standards-based movement that all students, regardless of where they live, have equitable opportunities to learn the skills and knowledge regarded as most relevant and important.

In the traditional system in the US, educational policy is largely established at the state level and specific decisions and curricular implementation are typically deferred to local schools

or individual teachers at their discretion. As a result, concern can arise about teacher proficiency and accountability because they have final say for interpreting, operationalizing, and implementing educational policies (Oh & Graber, 2017). Although there has been dramatic growth in the knowledge base in effective teaching and programming in physical education over the last three decades, many physical education teachers are still focusing primarily on sport-driven activities, especially team sports (Ferry & McCaughy, 2013, 2015). Supporting the existing literature (Burks et al., 2015; Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2018; Chen, 2006; Rentner & Kober, 2014), the results of this study demonstrate that the narrow range of programs and poor quality of teaching seem to derive from three major factors; (a) disparate instructional guidance from a polyphonic governance system, (b) teachers' limited expertise in multiple curricular areas, and (c) noncompliance and resistance of teachers to change.

Promoting quality teacher education programs is necessary to accomplish system-wide change for P-12 programs (Richardson, 2011). Reforming teacher education alone, however, is unlikely sufficient to enhance the overall quality of instruction or influence practice in a significant way because of the resistance/fear of teachers to change due, in part, to their beliefs about K-12 physical education accumulated from years of participation and experience as students (Bulger & Housner, 2009; Richards, Templin, & Graber, 2014; Stroot & Whipple, 2003). A more advanced curricular framework with explicit, substantial guidelines for P-12 programs and instructional practices is needed to promote significant change; ultimately this could provide students with better opportunities to experience a variety of essential activities, skills, and knowledge necessary for the promotion of an active and healthy lifestyle.

A primary concern of PETE scholars is the lack of the subject matter outcomes that are widely used throughout P-12 programs (Rink, 2014). In particular, absence of agreement among

professionals in the field about program outcomes has resulted in difficulties in establishing relevant assessments of student performance (see Rink, 2013). As a result, there is no reliable, substantial way to ensure that students are achieving the designated program outcomes nor to objectively evaluate that school personnel are using appropriate curricula based on the standards' guidelines (James, 2011).

According to the systemic reform (SR) model, effective, successful schooling is sustained within a purposefully supportive setting where differing levels of authority, as a unified whole, are mutually cooperative, and where learning goals and vision are aligned with other components of education including curricular content and materials, instructional practices, and assessment tasks. In contrast, unnecessarily disparate, overlapped guidelines and policies from multiple levels of governance create inefficient school systems with teachers feeling confusion and discomfort. Although the current polyphonic federalism has offered state and local governments adaptability in curricular and pedagogical practices, it also has led to complex and mixed patterns of educational policies across states and local school districts, thereby resulting in dichotomy between suggested educational goals and practice (Collier, 2011; Mercier & Doolittle, 2013). In accordance with the SR model, aligning goals and curriculum across nation might function well in establishing an efficient and cooperative educational base that would promote purposefully coordinated policy and guidelines that are aligned among these levels.

A uniform curriculum, however, seems restrictive in the context of the US in light of cultural, geographical, and socioeconomic diversity and disparities. In a previous analysis of the large data set that emerged from this investigation, despite acknowledging that a national curriculum might provide consistency and explicit guidance, PETE leaders expressed concern about the rigidity and lack of flexibility that would result and believe that loss of local control

would be problematic. Regardless of whether or not adoption of a uniform curriculum is achievable, they deemed it an attempt at a “one-size-fits-all” approach and most were vehemently opposed (Oh & Graber, in review). In a heterogeneous, large society with various needs and interests stemming from disparate traditions, culture, regions, and social classes, standardizing learning goals, content, and levels of achievement would not be acknowledged among those groups of students as an ‘equitable’ because a particular assemblage of preselected knowledge can be differently viewed and interpreted as to how they are placed in their own culture and social relationships (Apple, 1996; Sleeter, 2005). Apple (2004) emphasizes that although a national curriculum seems to embrace partly diversity, it, in fact, will reincorporate differences within the supposed consensus about what is to be taught and prompt resistance, division, and segregation between different groups of students. Such a centralized system of education is difficult to operate in the culturally and contextually diverse school settings where different needs and interest are mixed together.

Although the results of this investigation highlight some potential benefits of a unified core curriculum, it does not appear that it could be successfully implemented in the US for three primary reasons. First, as discussed, the American educational context is socio-culturally and regionally diverse, and differences attributed to the vast population and country size would make it difficult to attain national consensus about content. Second, longstanding tradition of local autonomy and state control of education has been deeply embedded in the US educational community; therefore, widespread anti-federal sentiment among member of public would likely emerge (Savage & O’Connor, 2015). Skepticism, fear, or resistance from differing levels of authority to change would make its success highly unlikely. Third, strong belief about the idiosyncratic curricular approach exist among educational professionals. They believe teachers

have the best understanding of the skill-level, needs, and interests of individual students in their classes. Therefore, curricular reform appears to be more reasonable and realistic at the state or local level for effective and substantive change.

Determining the effectiveness and achievability of a uniform curriculum is a complex and difficult task. The concept of national curriculum can be interpreted variously in different time and places. Furthermore, its relevance would rely primarily on how it is operationalized in practice (i.e., rigor, scope, specificity). For these reasons, the authors do not necessarily argue for or against the national standardization of school physical education curriculum. Instead, we argue for establishing clearer, more coherent and substantive guidance for P-12 curriculum development, implementation, and assessment. Finally, additional studies that examine the effectiveness of standards and guidelines promoted by national educational organizations need to occur in order to determine how best they can be improved to guide high quality curricular development and implementation in the future.

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Appendix A: Recruitment E-mail

Dear _____:

This study is being conducted by Dr. Kim C. Graber, a professor in the Department of Kinesiology and Community Health at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and myself, Junghwan Oh, a doctoral student in the same department and University. My doctoral advisor, Dr. Kim C. Graber, and I are interested in conducting a study that examines whether establishing a national physical education curriculum is a reasonable and appropriate reform in the United States, where the tradition of local control and state responsibility dominates. I would like to request your participation in the study which would require a 30-60 minute interview.

I am hoping to interview you at the AAHPERD National Convention in St. Louis during the dates of April 1-5, 2014. If you agree to participate, what day and time would work best for you? I am happy to meet at whatever location is most convenient. If it is not convenient for you to be interviewed during the convention, is there a day and time where I could interview you over the telephone? I will provide you with an informed consent document explaining more details about the study at that time.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. I look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience. You can reach me at: oh35@illinois.edu or 217-552-5358.

Appendix B: Informed Consent Form



Perspectives of Physical Education Teacher Educators on a National Curriculum in Physical Education

You have agreed to participate in the above titled research project that is being conducted by Dr. Kim C. Graber, a professor in the Department of Kinesiology and Community Health, and her doctoral candidate, Junghwan Oh. The purpose of this project is to investigate whether establishing a national curriculum for physical education is a reasonable and appropriate reform in the United States, where the tradition of local control and state responsibility dominates. Your involvement requires participation in an audio-recorded interview that will last approximately 30-60 minutes.

There are no foreseeable risks other than responding to questions you may not be comfortable answering. In this case, you may choose not to answer specific questions. You also may discontinue participation in the project at any time without prejudice. You must be 18 years of age or older to participate in the investigation. While you will not derive any direct benefits from your participation in the project, you will be contributing information that may lead to better directions for education reforms.

The materials from this study will be used primarily for publications in professional journals, dissertation, and research presentations. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be used to identify you will remain confidential. Your interview responses will be transcribed under a fictitious name and the tapes will subsequently be erased.

If you have any questions about the research at any time, please call or write Dr. Kim C. Graber, Department of Kinesiology, 127 Freer Hall, University of Illinois, 906 S. Goodwin Avenue, Urbana, IL 61801 (Phone: 217/333-2697 or E-mail: kgraber@illinois.edu). If you desire additional information about your rights as a participant, please feel free to contact the UIUC IRB Office at 217-333-2670 or irb@uiuc.edu. Collect calls will be accepted if you identify yourself as a study participant.

By signing below you are indicating that you have read this document and are voluntarily agreeing to participate in the study. (You will be provided with a copy of this consent document).

Participant's Signature

Date

Please check one of the following:

_____ I agree to be audio-taped
_____ I do not agree to be audio-taped

Appendix C: Informed Assent Form



Perspectives of Physical Education Teacher Educators on a National Curriculum in Physical Education

You have agreed to participate in the above titled research project that is being conducted by Dr. Kim C. Graber, a professor in the Department of Kinesiology and Community Health, and her doctoral candidate, Junghwan Oh. The purpose of this project is to investigate whether establishing a national curriculum for physical education is a reasonable and appropriate reform in the United States, where the tradition of local control and state responsibility dominates. Your involvement requires participation in an audio-recorded interview that will last approximately 30-60 minutes.

There are no foreseeable risks other than responding to questions you may not be comfortable answering. In this case, you may choose not to answer specific questions. You also may discontinue participation in the project at any time without prejudice. You must be 18 years of age or older to participate in the investigation. While you will not derive any direct benefits from your participation in the project, you will be contributing information that may lead to proper directions for education reforms.

The materials from this study will be used primarily for publications in professional journals, dissertation, and research presentations. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be used to identify you will remain confidential. Your interview responses will be transcribed under a fictitious name and the tapes will subsequently be erased.

If you have any questions about the research at any time, please call or write Dr. Kim C. Graber, Department of Kinesiology, 127 Freer Hall, University of Illinois, 906 S. Goodwin Avenue, Urbana, IL 61801 (Phone: 217/333-2697 or E-mail: kgraber@illinois.edu). If you desire additional information about your rights as a participant, please feel free to contact the UIUC IRB Office at 217-333-2670 or irb@uiuc.edu. Collect calls will be accepted if you identify yourself as a study participant.

Appendix D: Interview Questions

- 1) How familiar are you with national curriculum? Do you know about any national curricula that are employed in other countries (e.g., England, Australia, New Zealand, China, or Japan)?
- 2) To what extent do you agree with the concept of national curriculum (e.g., rigid/inflexible, standardized, or consistent/coherent) and why?
- 3) Why do you agree or disagree with establishing, implementing, and employing a national curriculum in the United States instead of the current model in which local and state government have had more control of curriculum?
- 4) How would school context influence the development and implementation of a national curriculum?
- 5) Describe why you believe or do not believe that the current NASPE standards are adequate enough to establish quality physical education programs in the United States?
- 6) Describe why you believe or do not believe that the NASPE standards provide an adequate framework, in terms of breadth and flexibility, to provide common learning goals, efficient instructional guidelines, and equitable opportunities for all pupils in the culturally diverse U.S. school context?
- 7) Why do you believe or not believe that a national curriculum could provide clear, effective, and efficient teaching and learning?
- 8) Why do you believe or not believe that the implementation of a national curriculum and national testing would negatively contribute to teaching and learning?
- 9) Within a culturally diverse school context, do you think a national curriculum would produce inequalities related to race, ethnicity, gender, or social class, such that it would prevent an equitable learning opportunity for all pupils? Why?
- 10) Do you think a national curriculum could be flexible enough to embrace culturally diverse students? Why?
- 11) Do you think that the multi-level governance structure and policy fragmentation impede effective and efficient teaching and learning? Why or why not?
- 12) In your opinion, what are the advantages and disadvantages of a national curriculum?
- 13) Based on your knowledge, what challenges might you anticipate if a national curriculum was established and implemented?

- 14) If a national curriculum were established and implemented, who should be involved in developing a national curriculum for physical education?
- 15) If a national curriculum were established and implemented, what accountability measures should be in place to ensure that it is implemented effectively?
- 16) If a national curriculum were established and implemented, what should be considered regarding the following elements in the process:
- (a) Specificity
 - (b) Scope and sequence
 - (c) Depth and breadth
 - (d) (Local) Flexibility
 - (e) Curriculum materials (e.g., textbook)
 - (f) Testing and assessment
 - (g) Pre- and in-service professional development
- 17) What are desired directions for a national curriculum?
- 18) What considerations would be paramount in developing and implementing a national curriculum?
- 19) How do you think other scholars in the field would respond to enacting a national curriculum? Would they feel positively or negatively and why?
- 20) Who should make the decision about whether a national physical education curriculum should be mandated in the U.S.?
- 21) If a national physical education curriculum were to be developed, who should take responsibility for its development?
- 22) How do you imagine physical education teachers and principals would respond to a mandate to implement a national curriculum?
- 23) What types of resources/supports would need to be available in order to ensure the success of a national curriculum should one ever be enacted?
- 24) Is there anything that I have not asked that you might like to mention?

Appendix E: Permission Letter to Post and Reproduce a Published Article



Our Ref: P032118-01/UQST

27 March 2018

Dear Junghwan Oh on Behalf of the University of Illinois,

**Material requested: Junghwan Oh & Kim C. Graber (2016)
National Curriculum for Physical Education in the United States
Quest, 69 (2): 220-235.
DOI: [10.1080/00336297.2016.1218776](https://doi.org/10.1080/00336297.2016.1218776)**

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Permissions Coordinator

E-mail: maryann.muller@taylorandfrancis.com

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