

# “I Could Have Been More Indirect”: The Influence of Occupational Socialization on Preservice and Cooperating Teachers Use of Teaching Styles in Elementary Schools

Craig Parkes, Shelley L. Holden

Department of Health, Kinesiology, and Sport, University of South Alabama, Mobile, USA  
Email: [cparkes@southalabama.edu](mailto:cparkes@southalabama.edu)

**How to cite this paper:** Parkes, C., & Holden, S. L. (2024). “I Could Have Been More Indirect”: The Influence of Occupational Socialization on Preservice and Cooperating Teachers Use of Teaching Styles in Elementary Schools. *Advances in Physical Education*, 14, 131-148.  
<https://doi.org/10.4236/ape.2024.144010>

**Received:** September 10, 2024

**Accepted:** October 13, 2024

**Published:** October 16, 2024

Copyright © 2024 by author(s) and Scientific Research Publishing Inc.  
This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0).  
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Open Access

## Abstract

The aim of this study was to investigate what occupational socialization factors influenced preservice teachers (PTs) and cooperating teachers' (CTs) use of teaching styles within an elementary school setting. Participants were seven PTs teachers who were enrolled in an elementary physical education methods course, and seven CTs in the Southern United States. Data were collected through lesson plans, field experience journal entries, field teaching observations, and stimulated-recall interviews. Participants primarily employed the command and practice style to deliver physical education lessons. Organizational socialization factors that influenced the use of command and practice styles included class size, student behavior, and academic semester. Acculturation factors that influenced PTs and CTs to teach in a direct manner included teachers, coaches, and parents. In line with prior research, professional socialization continues to be the weakest stage of occupational socialization. It is suggested that physical education teacher education (PETE) faculty focus on school class sizes and student behavior and not just PT and CT compatibility when organizing student teaching and early field experiences. The academic semester timing of methods courses should also be considered if the use of indirect teaching styles in K-5th grade setting is an objective for PETE programs.

## Keywords

Teaching Styles, Preservice Teachers, Cooperating Teachers, Occupational Socialization

## 1. Introduction

The Spectrum of Teaching Styles (Mosston & Ashworth, 2002), often referred to

as “The Spectrum”, is a pedagogical theory based on the premise that physical education teaching is governed by a chain of decision making. Decision making in the context of the spectrum is related to the “pre-impact,” “impact,” and “post-impact” decisions that are made before, during, and after the movement execution occurs. The spectrum represents a continuum of 11 different teaching styles ranging from teacher centered (command style) to learner centered (learner-designed individual program style). The left side of the spectrum identifies teaching styles that are more direct in nature, such as command and practice. These styles are categorized as the teacher making most of the decisions in a hands-on manner. These direct approaches are known as the “reproduction” cluster of teaching styles, where the expectation of the learner is to reproduce or replicate a movement response that has been presented by the teacher. In contrast, the right-hand side of the spectrum contains teaching styles that are more indirect in nature, such as divergent or convergent discovery. These indirect approaches are referred to as the “production” cluster of teaching styles. The expectation within these styles is that the learner makes most of the decisions in more of a self-guided manner, with the teacher transitioning to the role of a more of a hands-off facilitator.

The spectrum has influenced physical education pedagogical practices for over 50 years. Recommendations from college and university faculty suggest that implementing the spectrum framework in a PETE program can enhance student teachers’ pedagogical skills while also providing them with opportunities to demonstrate pedagogical accountability (Curtner-Smith, 2021; Pill & Rankin, 2021). However, despite its importance to the field, research into the use of teaching styles within physical education remains somewhat limited. The prior research available suggests that physical educators primarily employ the more direct “reproduction” teaching styles such as command, practice, and reciprocal (Cothran et al., 2000; Kulinna & Cothran, 2003; Xu et al., 2024). In addition to understanding the preferred teaching styles physical educators prefer, it is equally as important to identify the factors that influence teachers use of these teaching styles. One teacher behavior framework that has saturated physical education pedagogy literature in recent years is Lawson’s occupational socialization theory.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

The occupational socialization theoretical framework has been utilized to underpin a significant amount of research investigating the careers of physical education teachers over the past 40 years (Lawson, 1983a, 1983b). According to Lawson (1986) occupational socialization “includes all the kinds of socialization that initially influence persons to enter the field of physical education and that later are responsible for their perceptions and actions as teacher educators and teachers” (p. 107). The theory is based upon three distinct stages that physical educators undergo throughout their careers known as acculturation, professional, and organizational socialization.

## 2.1. Acculturation

Most of the research conducted prior to Lawson's theory focused on in-service teachers, because the formal training of physical educators was initially credited to PETE programs (Schempp, 1989). However, socialization research over the past four decades leads us to believe that the mind of a PT is not a blank canvas when they enter PETE. The acculturation stage of teacher socialization occurs long before enrollment in PETE, beginning with one's youth and adolescent physical education and sporting experiences that are often influenced by their parent (Authors, in review; Curtner-Smith et al., 2008; O'Bryant et al., 2000). During this stage individuals begin to develop socialization orientations of the teaching profession that have been heavily influenced by their childhood experiences of physical education and sport (Betourne & Richards, 2015; O'Leary, 2016; Parkes & Hemphill, 2023). This stage of socialization typically has the most powerful influence on individuals pursuing physical education as a profession and the beliefs they possess when they enter a formal PETE program (Parkes & Hemphill, 2020).

## 2.2. Professional Socialization

The professional socialization stage occurs when recruits formally enroll in an undergraduate PETE program and officially become PTs (Lawson, 1983a; 1983b). During this stage individuals should acquire the content knowledge, and pedagogical skills deemed necessary for teaching physical education. For many years, this stage was seen as the place where teachers learned what to teach and how to teach it. However, physical education socialization research from recent years suggests that the acculturation stage typically has a more powerful influence on teacher's beliefs and behaviors. As a result, higher education faculty often have the difficult task of trying to undo 13 years of acculturation experiences in a few academic semesters of PETE. However, faculty have the potential to positively influence PTs during the professional socialization stage if they address recruit's acculturation experiences and orientations at the first opportunity (Richards et al., 2013).

## 2.3. Organizational Socialization

Organizational socialization takes place within the school environment (Lawson, 1983a). It begins when in-service teachers enter the workforce and ends when they either retire or leave the profession. During this stage individuals execute the daily duties of a physical education teacher while also attempting to understand the school culture and the philosophies held by their colleagues (Russell et al., 2016). It is suggested that teachers may face challenges during this stage because of reality shock (Lynch et al., 2018), washout (Blankenship & Coleman, 2009), subject marginalization (Ferry & Westerlund, 2023), and feelings of isolation (Curtner-Smith, 2001). Student misbehavior frequently reduces the effectiveness of the physical education learning environment (Kulinna, 2008) and the enjoyment of teaching (Carson et al., 2016). Managing disruptive student behavior has been reported as being one of the most prominent roles in teacher commitment, satisfaction, stress,

and burnout (Tsouloupas & Carson, 2017). Disruptive behavior in physical education can take many forms including distracting others, low levels of engagement, defying class protocols, and physical violence (Kulinna et al., 2003). Research suggests that instances of disruptive behavior in physical education occur frequently, but that most are mild to moderate in nature (Cothran & Kulinna, 2013; Kulinna et al., 2013; Jiménez et al., 2016). However, student disruption does still have a negative impact on class time, lesson content, teachers' attitudes (Cothran et al., 2009).

### 3. Research Purpose and Questions

In recent years, the field of physical education pedagogy has seen a significant amount of research investigating the influence of occupational socialization (Lawson, 1983a; 1983b) on how PTs and in-service teachers perform their teaching duties. Socialization studies have primarily investigated the delivery of games centered approaches (Parkes & Hemphill, 2023), with some investigation into curriculum design (Prior & Curtner-Smith, 2020), and teacher coach role conflict (Richards, 2015). However, to date there is limited data available on how occupational socialization influences PTs and in-service teachers' use of teaching styles. The overarching purpose of this study was to investigate how PTs and CTs employ the Spectrum of Teaching Styles (Mosston & Ashworth, 2002) as part of an elementary physical education methods course.

This study had several aims. First, to investigate how PTs and CTs employ teaching styles during K-12 early field experiences. Second, to investigate what occupational socialization factors influence how PTs and CTs employed teaching styles in an elementary school setting. The study will aim to answer the following research questions:

- 1) How do PTs and CTs employ teaching styles in an elementary school setting?
- 2) What socialization factors influence how PTs and CTs employed teaching styles in an elementary school setting?

### 4. Method

#### 4.1. Setting and Participants

The research setting was an accredited undergraduate PETE program located in the Southern United States. The research sample consisted of physical education PTs and CTs. Seven PTs enrolled in an elementary methods course as part of an undergraduate PETE degree program during the Fall 2023 semester were recruited into the study (Table 1). The seven CTs who were formally supervising the PTs during the methods course were then recruited into the study (Table 2). Field placements took place across two school districts within the Southern United States. The PTs consisted of three males and four females and the CTs consisted of four males and three females. Letters of support were provided by the school districts department of research activity as part of the Institutional Review Board protocol. Once ethical research approval was granted all 14 participants provided

written consent prior to data collection taking place.

**Table 1.** Preservice teacher biography.

Pseudonym	Age	Class Standing	Field Experience Teaching Styles Employed
Alfie	21	Senior	Practice
Thea	25	Senior	Command/Practice
Colin	21	Senior	Practice
Nicole	19	Junior	Practice
Brad	23	Senior	Practice
Jenny	23	Junior	Command/Practice
Abby	21	Senior	Practice

**Table 2.** Cooperating teacher biography.

Pseudonym	Age	Experience	Average Class Size vised	Teaching Styles Employed	Super
Dennis	36	11 years	85	Practice/ Self-Check/Command	Alfie
Clarissa	51	25 years	60	Practice	Thea
Douglas	44	9 years	120	Command/Practice	Colin
Elaine	28	6 years	180	Command/Practice	Nicole
Mike	28	1 year	140	Command/Practice	Brad
Ray	42	10 years	60	Command	Jenny
Patricia	35	12 years	60	Practice	Abby

## 4.2. Course Description

The elementary methods course in question is underpinned by the skill theme (locomotor, nonmanipulative, manipulative), movement concept (space, effort, relationships), and instructional (direct versus indirect) approaches to teaching (Graham et al., 2020). In addition, the “Becoming a Master Teacher” textbook is also utilized to cover topics such as differentiation, feedback, assessment, and classroom management (Graham, 2008). To ensure the participants have the knowledge and skill necessary to deliver a variety of teaching styles several hours of instruction are dedicated to the spectrum of teaching styles (Mosston & Ashworth, 2002). Teaching styles course content includes textbook chapter and journal article readings, power point lectures, class discussions, and practical activity examples in the gymnasium. The total contact time for this course is 40 hours, and approximately 7 hours is allocated to the spectrum of teaching styles and indirect versus direct teaching approaches. A requirement of this methods course is that PTs must complete 50 hours of field experience observations within an

elementary school setting under the supervision of a CT. At the end of these field hours PTs must deliver three scaffolded field teaching lessons within a K-5<sup>th</sup> grade physical education lesson.

In addition to this course, the PTs were all previously enrolled in two additional courses that address a variety of instructional styles. First, a middle school games methods course was delivered to these PTs during the Spring 2023 semester. This course is underpinned by the tactically focused teaching games for understanding framework (TGfU). During this course, PTs experience additional indirect teaching content that aligns with the learner centered TGfU framework such as open-ended questioning techniques and providing decision making opportunities for learners. This course also has a requirement of 50 hours of field and teaching observations. Second, a health education course taken during the same Fall 2023 semester addressed both direct and indirect classroom teaching approaches including lectures, cooperative learning, class debates, and role plays.

### **4.3. Data Collection**

Several sources of data consistent with prior occupational socialization research were collected during the Fall 2023 academic semester. The PTs data sources included three field lesson plans, field experience journal entries, one field teaching lesson observation, and a stimulated-recall interview. The CTs data sources included one K-5<sup>th</sup> grade lesson observation and a stimulated-recall interview. Stimulated-recall interviews were the final pieces of data collected once all other data sources had been collected and analyzed. Interviews lasted between 30 - 60 minutes, and questions asked participants to reflect upon how they had delivered their observed field and K-5<sup>th</sup> grade lessons. Examples of questions asked during these interviews included, “Can you explain why 10 minutes of the lesson was used to address the importance of students following the rules and protocols? Why did you demonstrate and count out the number of repetitions the students needed to complete? Why did you prefer to make the class decisions instead of the students?” Interview data was audio recorded and transcribed verbatim to text using Temi transcription software. Transcriptions were cross checked against the audio recording to identify any possible transcription errors which were then corrected before the final stages of data analysis took place.

### **4.4. Data Analysis and Trustworthiness**

NVivo software was employed to manage and code all sources of data. Analytic induction and constant comparison techniques were utilized to analyze the data (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). Data analysis was split up into three phases. During the first stage of analysis, the researchers analyzed the lesson observation data to identify which types of teaching style had been employed. The second stage of data analysis used all data sources to develop stimulated-recall interview questions to identify what factors had influenced the participants to adopt those teaching styles. During the final stage of analysis, key themes and subthemes were created

through the development of a qualitative codebook (Richards & Hemphill, 2018).

During data analysis data triangulation, searching for negative cases, and peer debriefing techniques were employed to enhance trustworthiness (Richards & Hemphill, 2018). Data triangulation consisted of collecting data from multiple sources, utilizing multiple data collection methods, and validating data by cross checking the themes and subthemes within the data set (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). A risk of course instructors conducting research with their undergraduate students is the influence of subjectivity. Peer debriefing was employed to reduce this risk. The co-investigator who was not affiliated with the elementary methods course checked that data collection procedures employed were consistent with other studies. They also made sure that the themes formed during data analysis were influenced by the data set and not by the course instructor's experiences of working with the participants. To address researcher effect, it is unclear to what extent PTs and CTs responses were influenced by the fact that they all have professional working relationships with the investigators. However, it can be suggested that because the investigators are PETE faculty, this assisted in both the development of the research design and gaining the trust of the participants (Hemphill & Richards, 2016).

Several attempts were made to decrease the risk of researcher effect, and the investigators believe that studentship (Graber, 1989) was not evident during data collection. First, the PTs course assignments were all graded in accordance with assignment rubrics that had been established in the course several years prior to this study taking place. Second, PTs were not interviewed until after all course assignments had been graded and final course grades had been posted. Third, all participants were informed that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time. Two techniques that were used to limit researcher bias including obtaining permission to employ data collection techniques from comparable studies and utilizing stimulated-recall interview questions developed from the previously analyzed data for that specific participant.

## 5. Results

### 5.1. Teaching Styles Employed

The teaching styles that were employed by the PTs and CTs' were predominantly direct. The teaching style primarily employed by the PTs was the practice followed by command (Table 1). In contrast, the teaching style most utilized by the CTs was command followed by practice (Table 2).

#### 5.1.1. Practice Style

The practice teaching style was the preferred method for PT's. During the field lessons, all seven PTs utilized the practice teaching style, with six CT's also utilizing this approach during their elementary school lessons. Practice style is the second most direct style on the teaching styles spectrum (Mosston & Ashworth, 2002), where the teacher makes decisions at the pre and post impact stages of



learning. The practice style approach is defined by the learner individually and privately practicing reproductive tasks, which gives them some decision-making opportunities during the impact stage of learning. This was evident in most of the lessons that were observed when the learner was asked to replicate a movement or skill after being given verbal cues and visual demonstrations. Examples of this included learners hitting and catching a volleyball to one another during field Brad's field lesson, chest passing a basketball back and forth during Alfie's field lesson, and small groups bumping a giant volleyball up as many times as possible during Patricia's 5<sup>th</sup> grade lesson. All these skill development activities took place after the teacher had provided the learners with visual demonstrations, verbal instructions, cues, and told them to practice those repetitions repeatedly. Once the learners were engaged in "practice mode" the teacher would frequently move around the gym and give both individual and group psychomotor feedback to the learners.

### **5.1.2. Command Style**

The command style was employed by PT's four times during per teaching lessons and twice during field lessons. It was also utilized five times by CT's during their elementary lessons. The command teaching style is the most direct teaching approach on the spectrum (Mosston & Ashworth, 2002). The anatomy of the style is categorized by the teacher making all the decisions at the pre impact, impact, and post impact stage, with the learner reproducing a predicated response. One of the main criteria that distinguishes command from practice style is the "*command signal*" that is used to inform the learner to execute a skill or movement. In practice style, the learners are typically given visual demonstrations and verbal instruction before being allowed to go and execute repetitions of that movement in a personal space. However, during command teaching, the learners only execute the skill or movement once a command signal, such as "when I say go" or "blowing a whistle" has been given by the teacher. This is what Dennis referred to in his interview as "military old school teaching". In line with the command teaching style characteristics, little to no feedback was given to learners when this approach was used.

This approach was not as evident as the practice style, but it was still utilized in half of the observed lessons and was the favored approach for most of the CT's. Examples of the command style being utilized included performing jumping jacks and squats on Ray's whistle, or ten toe touches and side bends when Dennis counts one through ten. Thea used command style in a more creative manner by playing a spin the wheel warm up activity where the game dictated what exercise and how many repetitions should be completed. Field notes from Jenny's field lesson also highlight how command style was employed by the PT's.

Students are in small groups facing each other. The teacher demonstrates how to dribble in a straight line on the teachers' whistle (command). Bounce with right hand only. Bounce with left hand only. Get low while dribbling. Chest pass. Only start on the teacher's whistle or when she says go. (Jenny, 4<sup>th</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> grade field lesson



notes)

## 5.2. Factors Influencing Teaching Styles

Stimulated-recall interviews and journal entry data provided detailed explanations of the factors that had influenced PTs and CTs to utilize the practice and command teaching styles. The organizational socialization factors that influenced both PTs and CTs teachers to primarily utilize these two teaching styles were student class size, student behavior, and academic semester. The acculturation factors that influenced PTs and CTs to teach in a direct manner were their teachers, coaches, and parents.

## 5.3. Organizational Socialization

### 5.3.1. Class Size

The biggest influences on why participants chose to utilize the direct command and practice teaching styles all occurred during the organizational socialization stage. The strongest factor to influence PTs and CTs use of direct teaching styles was large class sizes. Elementary school class sizes in this study ranged from a ratio of 60 students to one teacher and one paraprofessional to a ratio of 180 students to three teachers and one paraprofessional (See [Table 2](#)). The data identified class sizes as a major factor in PTs and CTs delivering the more direct command and practice teaching styles. The majority of CTs highlighted the difficulties they often had with managing such large class sizes. As Mike stressed, “in this environment, with such large class sizes, we go direct because we have so many students.” Safety issues were a major concern with such large class sizes, especially when physical education lessons took place in the gymnasium:

*I'm aware of using the whole command and practice style because I just have such a large class. It's more about safety, and being able to say, "I need you to do this", and they go and do it. I need them to be able to understand that my voice means something and it's very important if I ask you to do something directly. I'm almost forced to because there's just so many of them. (Elaine, Interview)*

To support the theme of large class sizes influencing command and practice teaching, several CTs stated that smaller classes would allow them being able to be more indirect in their teaching. Patricia primarily utilized the practice style with her 60 students and stated she was now “more indirect” in her teaching than she had been in the past when she had over 100 students in a class. Her PT Abby also touched on that same topic in her interview, “It's nice not having a hundred plus kids in one class. Like I only have like 50 or so in each class, which is really great.” Douglas typically has around 120 students in his lessons, but recalled how much easier it was to teach indirectly when he taught much smaller summer school classes:

*I worked here this summer, and we had class sizes of maybe 25 students. You can relax a little bit more. But when you're teaching 150 students you had better have some kind of command style or you're going to be in trouble. (Douglas,*

*Interview)*

Class sizes and safety issues associated with large class sizes were also concerning for the majority of PTs. Alfie described dealing with so many kids as “quite a learning experience,” Brad was initially “scared to take on all these kids,” and Jenny stated that “you’re not always able to look at every single child moving around so something bad could happen.” The PTs also felt that being direct with so many students also made sure that they were kept on task. Nicole stated it was “the best way to get things accomplished,” while Brad felt it was the only way to “keep them all involved,” Nicole also stated that, “there are over one hundred students in each class, so direct teaching is ideal in order to accomplish the activity for the day.” Colin expressed his initial shock at the class size and how that influenced his CT’s behavioral protocols during his journal entry:

*Today was my first day at [the school]. When I first walked in, I was simply overwhelmed by the number of kids in the gym. I had a tough time understanding how they managed to keep all the kids under control. I then looked at the other side of the gym where about 10 kids were sitting out. I asked Coach [Douglas] why, and he said it was because they were misbehaving and the only way to fix it was by using a strict no tolerance policy which forces the kids to behave. Although it seemed harsh, with such large classes it may have been necessary. (Colin, Journal Entry, 9.5.2023)*

### 5.3.2. Student Behavior

The second biggest influence on PTs and CTs use of direct teaching styles was student behavior. If the student behavior was perceived to be “good” then the CT and PT were more likely to primarily use practice and self-check style over command style (see **Table 1** and **Table 2**). Abby (PT) was supervised by Patricia (CT), Alfie (PT) was supervised by Dennis (PT), and Thea (PT) was supervised by Clarissa (CT). All six participants suggested that the students in their classes had relatively good behavior. Abby felt that student behavior was good in comparison to other schools, “They are honestly really well behaved from what I’ve heard from my classmates placed in other schools.” Clarissa had 25 years of teaching experience stated, “we definitely have good kids.” This good behavior was witnessed by the researchers during the lesson observations where very few students were sat in timeout, and little to no behavior related incidents had to be dealt with by the teachers and paraprofessionals.

In contrast, the remaining CTs (Douglas, Elain, Mike, and Ray) stated that behavioral issues were evident at their schools, and that this influenced them to employ more command style teaching. These CTs discussed several behavioral issues in their schools including excessive talking, clowning around, rough housing, cussing, and physical altercations. Many of these behavioral events were mentioned in the PT’s daily journals with some PT’s witnessing their CT’s having to make phone calls to parents due to poor behavior during physical education that day:

*The coaches had to call a large group of students’ parents due to disruptions*

*and misbehavior. During the activity, the students chose to get in a group and were being very disrespectful to the teachers. They were not listening and were being overly rambunctious during the game. The teachers were not able to give their full attention to the lesson because they had to correct behavioral issues. Then when getting in trouble they thought it was humorous and were being disrespectful to the coaches. (Nicole, Journal Entry, 9.19.2023)*

Many of the CTs felt that the students causing behavioral problems had little structure and discipline in their lives outside of school, and they felt it was part of their role to instill some consistency and structure regarding right and wrong behavior. Douglas stated that he found it very difficult to manage student behavior in his early years, and found that setting boundaries and building relationships was crucial to maintain class control:

*My first year and a half here I did a lot of screaming and I wanted to quit. I couldn't spend my whole career just yelling. But it was the only thing that halfway got their attention. I have a philosophy that if you can't control them, you can't teach them. (Douglas, Interview)*

Field notes from his observed lesson highlighted the importance he places on appropriate classroom behavior:

*Teacher reinforces the rules and protocols for the lesson such as the boundaries, expected behavior, timeouts, etc. Around 10 minutes of the lesson is the teacher discussing the protocols and the rules. Quite a strict discussion regarding the rules and the behavior. (Douglas, 3<sup>rd</sup> grade field lesson notes)*

Several of these CTs suggested that behavior issues were often enhanced due to the large class sizes they were teaching. Mike felt this way, believing that student behavior and the previous theme of large class sizes were connected because one could negatively impact the other:

Class size and behavior kind of go hand in hand. The behavior can get out of control quickly, but if we didn't have behavior problems, then the class size wouldn't be an issue. If I had 150 perfect kids, no problem, I could do that. But I have 150 kids and 30 or 40 of them can really be an issue. When you have that, it's not necessarily the class size, it's the behavior combined with the class size. (Mike, Interview)

The combination of large class sizes and behavioral issues faced by these CTs had a big influence on the PTs' use of direct teaching styles also. The PTs felt that they must adhere to the messages the CTs were giving them regarding class management, strict protocols, and addressing poor behavior. They understood that the CTs were teaching this way for a reason, and not necessarily because they wanted to, and they echoed that sentiment by not wanting to go against the CTs direct approaches in case they lost control of the class:

*They don't listen very well at all, even the paraprofessional told me this. They don't listen and they don't follow directions. I needed to practice working with them and keep telling them to follow the directions. Giving them different orders, different rules, how to do the technique, how to practice the skill. (Jenny, Interview)*

And:

*I'm not really a fan of command, but like I said, I had to use that. If you're not direct, if they don't know you're the person in charge, they'll just walk all over you and it won't be an effective classroom where the kids can learn. It'll just be chaos. (Colin, Interview)*

### 5.3.3. Academic Semester

Due to the timeline of the grant funding that sponsored this project the data for this study was collected in the Fall academic semester, primarily between September and November 2023. The school districts that were used as the research sites have an academic calendar that runs from mid-August to late-May, so it was relatively early in the school year when the data was collected. Many of the CTs stressed that they were purposefully more direct with the students in the first half of the school year, and that they would become more indirect with them as the academic year progressed. They stated that because the students had just been out of school for around 10 weeks for the summer break that they had to almost start all over again with getting structure and discipline back in place. Clarissa said that she would “go in hard up until December, and then after December you can loosen up.” Elaine also followed a similar approach by evaluating the students after the end of each academic quarter and adjusting her direct approach based on how the students were doing. Douglas and Elaine both aired on the side of caution regarding being too indirect too soon, even though they did like to make that transition eventually. They both felt it was better to be strict from day one and then slowly allow the learners more freedom in the classroom:

*See what your class is like and see what you can and can't do. Like for example, I may start off real strong, but if I see I can kind of relax up and they're getting it, I'll give you all the freedom that you allow me. (Douglas, Interview)*

And:

*In the fall when we get here, it's very much, I'm making the decisions, and you need to follow. I know I do the command and practice right now, but when I get closer to March and May with this group, and especially my first graders, I do let them be more independent. (Elaine, Interview)*

Many of the PTs also felt that transitioning from a very direct to a less direct approach over time was a good teaching strategy. As Colin stated during his interview:

*I'll start off as direct. Then after I gain their respect, I can give them more independence and freedom. I would let them do what they want to do and give them certain days when they get to pick what they would like to do and let them go at their own pace. (Colin, Interview)*

## 5.4. Acculturation

### Teachers, Coaches, and Parents

In line with prior socialization research, the use of direct teaching for PTs and CTs had also been influenced by their former physical education teachers, sports coaches, and their parents (Curtner-Smith, 2017; Curtner-Smith et al., 2008).

Many of the participants retrospectively recalled their childhood experiences of physical education, with most of them having experienced direct teaching in their K-12<sup>th</sup> grade schooling. Terminology that described the command and practice style approaches such as “direct,” “military style,” “structured,” and “discipline,” were frequently mentioned during the interviews:

*“Observing [my teachers] and watching them at such a young age and taking on some of that direct learning helped me to feel comfortable enough to maintain class routines and expectations as far as behaviors the skills that they are learning. [My teacher] was so direct and commanding in the way she taught us and how we were supposed to perform each specific skill. The control and the commanding approach she had influenced me” (Jenny, Interview)*

Participants had also been influenced by their exposure to direct sports, dance, and cheer coaches during the acculturation stage. Direct terminology such as “practice,” “repetition,” “strict,” and “drills,” were used to explain how they had been coached during their adolescent years. As CT Patricia and her PT Abby discussed about their former dance coaches during their interviews:

*They were direct in the way they spoke to us and handled us. We would learn things and then practice it, until it's perfection, and then you go on stage and compete. That definitely has stuck with me while I teach because I really work with them and try to get them to get the skill as perfect as possible. With dance everything has to be very precise and very specific, and you want everybody to almost look identical. (Patricia, Interview)*

And:

*“Dance teams are definitely stricter and tell you exactly how they want you to do it.” They are literally telling you that “your fingers are blazed” or your “fingers are out.” It's down to the nitty gritty of how tight your fingers are. (Abby, Interview)*

Several participants also discussed how having strict parents, of which some were teachers themselves, played a part in them adopting a more direct teaching approach. Terminology such as “routine,” “structured,” “old school,” and “on task,” were used to describe the influence their parents had on them. Douglas said his mom and dad's approach to parenthood was “do this or else”, and Dennis's parents were both direct teachers were also direct parents at home:

*Both of my parents were teachers. My mom was a middle school teacher. It was very structured old school, get your work done, and if not, you're going to be disciplined. My dad was an algebra teacher in high school, and it was the same way. Military style is what I like to call it, and I guess that is where I get my teaching style from. When I went to my mom's class, I knew the structure was there. You better be on task not talking with your friends and making sure you're doing your schoolwork. It seemed like you could get through your lessons a little bit better. (Dennis, Interview)*

## 6. Discussion

The findings of this study support prior research because the teaching styles that

were utilized by the PTs and CTs were the practice and command styles. The decision making process of “what to do” and “when to do it” was controlled solely by the teachers, who asked the learners to copy or replicate skills that they initially demonstrated. This may not be surprising information, as the prior literature has found that physical educators primarily employ direct teaching styles such as command and practice (Cothran et al., 2000; Kulinna & Cothran, 2003; Xu et al., 2024). However, most of the participants stated that in an ideal teaching scenario they would prefer to use a mix of indirect and direct teaching.

The unique and more understudied element of this study was that occupational socialization theory was employed to identify what past and current factors had influenced PTs and CTs to deliver their lessons in a direct only manner. The data highlighted that the organizational stage of occupational socialization, that occurs within the school environment, had the biggest impact on PTs and CTs use of teaching styles. Class size was the biggest influence on PTs and CTs decisions to employ direct teaching approaches. As seen in **Table 2**, four of the schools had class sizes between 85 - 180 students, which caused a lot of safety concerns for the individuals in charge. In line with prior research (see Kulinna, 2008) negative student behavior played a role in PTs and CTs being forced to adjust the learning environment. Most of it could be considered mild to moderate in nature (e.g., talking, not listening) (see Cothran & Kulinna, 2013; Kulinna et al., 2013; Jiménez et al., 2016). However, there were some severe incidents including fights and verbal abuse that left teachers feeling worried about giving the learners any degree of freedom or responsibility. Those PTs who had to contend with both large class sizes and poor student behavior felt they had no choice but to adhere to the disciplinarian approach taken by the CTs and understood this was “how it had to be” rather than how the CTs wanted it to be.

The timing of the data collection may have played a role in the findings of this study. Several CTs suggested that they were currently much more direct in their teaching because the school year had just started after summer break. These CTs explained that they are typically tough and direct until Christmas, at which point they begin to relax more as the students fully understand how to behave in class by the middle of the school year. This approach was also something the PTs planned to adopt in the future once they had gained the learner’s respect.

In line with a significant amount of prior occupational socialization research the acculturation stage had an impact on how PTs and CTs employed teaching styles (see Curtner-Smith, 2017; Curtner-Smith et al., 2008). The participants had primarily been exposed to direct physical education teachers in school, direct coaches in extra-curricular and community sport, and even direct parents at home. Direct teaching terms such as “discipline” and “structure” were frequently mentioned during the interviews.

## 7. Conclusion

The findings of this study lead the authors to some recommendations for PETE

faculty members. First, careful consideration should be given when placing PTs for field placements and student teaching. Instead of focusing on pairing the PT and CT based on personality or like-mindedness, they should consider placing the PT within a school environment that matches their preferred teaching approach. For example, placing a PT who favors indirect teaching at a school with large class sizes and poor student behavior is probably not going to facilitate indirect teaching practices. Second, the timing of field placements should be taken into consideration. Although this may not always be a viable option due to degree programming and scheduling issues, it is suggested that indirect teaching will be better suited to spring semesters than fall semesters. Finally, as with prior occupational socialization research, faculty should address some of the orientations and beliefs that PTs possess when they enter PETE, including the years of direct teaching and coaching they have been exposed to during their childhood and adolescent years.

## **8. Study Limitations and Future Research Recommendations**

The authors consider there to be several minor study limitations. First, the timing of the data collection due to the external grant start and end dates meant that only elementary school field observations could be investigated during the Fall 2023 semester. Therefore, a future research recommendation is to conduct a similar study in a middle school and high school setting to investigate if these environments influence how PTs and CTs utilize teaching styles. Second, only one field lesson observation was conducted for PTs and CTs, and ideally multiple lessons across multiple grades would have been preferred. However, it was evident that collecting more lesson observation data would have potentially resulted in recruiting less participants. Specifically, PTs were nervous about being formally observed teaching more than once in the school setting prior to student teaching. Finally, data was collected early in the academic school year (September to November). A clear theme was that CTs felt that they typically taught more direct in the first half of the academic year to set clear boundaries and transitioned to more indirect in the second half of the academic year once students understood the classroom expectations. This belief was also shared by several of the PTs. It could be suggested that collecting data in the Spring 2024 semester may have led to more indirect teaching styles being employed by the participants. Therefore, collecting data later in the academic year is also a future research recommendation.

## **Acknowledgements**

This work was supported by funds received from the Spectrum Institute of Teaching and Learning, Research Grant Program.

## **Conflicts of Interest**

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.



## References

- Betourne, J. A., & Richards, K. A. R. (2015). Using Autobiographical Essays to Encourage Student Reflection on Socialization Experiences. *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance*, 86, 34-40. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07303084.2014.988376>
- Blankenship, B. T., & Coleman, M. M. (2009). An Examination of “Wash-Out” and Workplace Conditions of Beginning Physical Education Teachers. *Physical Educator*, 66, 97-111.
- Carson, R. L., Hemphill, M. A., Richards, K. A. R., & Templin, T. (2016). Exploring the Job Satisfaction of Late Career Secondary Physical Education Teachers. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, 35, 284-289. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jtpe.2015-0131>
- Cothran, D. J., & Kulinna, P. H. (2013). Students’ Reports of Misbehavior in Physical Education. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 78, 216-224. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02701367.2007.10599419>
- Cothran, D. J., Kulinna, P. H., & Garrahy, D. A. (2009). Attributions for and Consequences of Student Misbehavior. *Physical Education & Sport Pedagogy*, 14, 155-167. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17408980701712148>
- Cothran, D. J., Kulinna, P. H., & Ward, E. (2000). Students’ Experiences with and Perceptions of Teaching Styles. *The Journal of Research and Development in Education*, 33, 93-102.
- Curtner-Smith, M. D. (2001). The Occupational Socialization of a First-Year Physical Education Teacher with a Teaching Orientation. *Sport, Education and Society*, 6, 81-105. <https://doi.org/10.1080/713696040>
- Curtner-Smith, M. D. (2017). Acculturation, Recruitment, and the Development of Orientations. In K. A. R. Richards, & K. L. Gaudreault (Eds.), *Teacher Socialization in Physical Education: New Perspectives* (pp. 33-46). Routledge.
- Curtner-Smith, M. D. (2021). Featuring the Spectrum in an Eclectic PETE Program. In B. Suesee, M. Hewitt, & S. Pill (Eds.), *The Spectrum of Teaching Styles in Physical Education* (pp. 95-105). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429341342-9>
- Curtner-Smith, M. D., Hastie, P. A., & Kinchin, G. D. (2008). Influence of Occupational Socialization on Beginning Teachers’ Interpretation and Delivery of Sport Education. *Sport, Education and Society*, 13, 97-117. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13573320701780779>
- Ferry, M., & Westerlund, R. (2023). Professional Networks, Collegial Support, and School Leaders: How Physical Education Teachers Manage Reality Shock, Marginalization, and Isolation in a Decentralized School System. *European Physical Education Review*, 29, 74-90. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1356336x221114531>
- Goetz, J. P., & LeCompte, M. D. (1984). *Ethnography and Qualitative Design in Educational Research*. Academic Press.
- Graber, K. (1989). Teaching Tomorrow’s Teachers: Professional Preparation as an Agent of Socialization. In T. J. Templin & P. G. Schempp (Eds.), *Socialization into Physical Education: Learning to Teach* (pp. 59-80). Benchmark Press.
- Graham, G. (2008). *Teaching Children Physical Education: Becoming a Master Teacher* (3rd ed.). Human Kinetics.
- Graham, G., Hale, S. H., Parker, M., Hall, T., & Patton, K. (2020). *Children Moving: A Reflective Approach to Teaching physical Education* (10th ed.). McGraw Hill.
- Hemphill, M. A., & Richards, K. A. R. (2016). Without the Academic Part, It Wouldn’t Be Squash”: Youth Development in an Urban Squash Program. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, 35, 263-276. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jtpe.2015-0109>

- Jiménez, J. L., Valero-Valenzuela, A., Anguera, M. T., & Díaz Suárez, A. (2016). Disruptive Behavior among Elementary Students in Physical Education. *SpringerPlus*, 5, Article No. 1154. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40064-016-2764-6>
- Kulinna, P. H. (2008). Teachers' Attributions and Strategies for Student Misbehavior. *Journal of Classroom Interaction*, 42, 21-30.
- Kulinna, P. H., & Cothran, D. J. (2003). Physical Education Teachers' Self-Reported Use and Perceptions of Various Teaching Styles. *Learning and Instruction*, 13, 597-609. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0959-4752\(02\)00044-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0959-4752(02)00044-0)
- Kulinna, P. H., Cothran, D. J., & Regualos, R. (2013). Teachers' Reports of Student Misbehavior in Physical Education. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 77, 32-40. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02701367.2006.10599329>
- Lawson, H. A. (1983a). Toward a Model of Teacher Socialization in Physical Education: The Subjective Warrant, Recruitment, and Teacher Education 1. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, 2, 3-16. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jtpe.2.3.3>
- Lawson, H. A. (1983b). Toward a Model of Teacher Socialization in Physical Education: Entry into Schools, Teachers' Role Orientations, and Longevity in Teaching (Part 2). *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, 3, 3-15. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jtpe.3.1.3>
- Lawson, H. A. (1986). Occupational Socialization and the Design of Teacher Education Programs. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, 5, 107-116. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jtpe.5.2.107>
- Lynch, S., Andrew, K., Richards, R., & Pennington, C. (2018). "What's the Middle Ground? Am I Ever Going to Be the Perfect Teacher?:" Self-Study of a Doctoral Student's Acculturation Process. *Studying Teacher Education*, 14, 194-211. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17425964.2018.1462154>
- Mosston, M., & Ashworth, S. (2002). *Teaching Physical Education* (5th ed.) Benjamin Cummings.
- O'Bryant, C. P., O'Sullivan, M., & Raudensky, J. (2000). Socialization of Prospective Physical Education Teachers: The Story of New Blood. *Sport, Education and Society*, 5, 177-193. <https://doi.org/10.1080/713696033>
- O'Leary, N. (2016). Learning Informally to Use the "Full Version" of Teaching Games for Understanding. *European Physical Education Review*, 22, 3-22. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1356336x15586177>
- Parkes, C., & Hemphill, M. A. (2020). What Occupational Socialization Factors Influence Preservice Teachers to Possess Fitness Orientations? *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, 40, 199-206. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jtpe.2019-0178>
- Parkes, C., & Hemphill, M. A. (2023). Hardcore Coaching and Hardcore Fitness-Oriented Preservice Teachers Delivery of Teaching Games for Understanding. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17408989.2023.2194908>
- Pill, S., & Rankin, J. (2021). Using the Spectrum to Ground PETE Students' Pedagogical Footings. In B. Suesee, M. Hewitt, & S. Pill (Eds.), *The Spectrum of Teaching Styles in Physical Education* (pp. 48-59). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429341342-5>
- Prior, L., & Curtner-Smith, M. (2020). Influence of Occupational Socialization on Elementary Physical Education Teachers' Beliefs and Curricula. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, 39, 9-17. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jtpe.2019-0013>
- Richards, K. A. R. (2015). Role Socialization Theory: The Sociopolitical Realities of Teaching Physical Education. *European Physical Education Review*, 21, 379-393. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1356336x15574367>
- Richards, K. A. R., & Hemphill, M. A. (2018). A Practical Guide to Collaborative Qualitative

- Data Analysis. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, 37, 225-231.  
<https://doi.org/10.1123/jtpe.2017-0084>
- Richards, K. A. R., Templin, T. J., & Gaudreault, K. L. (2013). Understanding the Realities of School Life: Recommendations for the Preparation of Physical Education Teachers. *Quest*, 65, 442-457. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00336297.2013.804850>
- Russell, J., Gaudreault, K. L., & Richards, K. A. R. (2016). Doctoral Student Socialization: Educating Stewards of the Physical Education Profession. *Quest*, 68, 439-456.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00336297.2016.1234963>
- Schempp, P. G. (1989). Apprenticeship of Observation and the Development of Physical Education Teachers. In T. J. Templin, & P. G. Schempp (Eds.), *Socialization into Physical Education: Learning to Teach* (pp. 13-38). Benchmark Press Inc.
- Tsouloupas, C. N., & Carson, R. L. (2017). Catching Fire without Burning out: Socialization of Teacher Efficacy in Handling Student Misbehavior and Emotion Regulation in Physical Education. In K. A. R. Richards, & K. L. Gaudreault (Eds.), *Teacher Socialization in Physical Education: New Perspectives* (pp. 114-129). Routledge.
- Xu, H., Albattat, A., Phuoc, J. C., & Wang, B. (2024). The Effect of Physical Education Teaching Style on Exercise Habits of College Students. *Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education*, 16, 150-168. <https://doi.org/10.1108/jarhe-10-2022-0323>