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# Teacher training should give students a healthy chance.

Lynch, TJ

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# Teacher training should give students a healthy chance

**14 November 2013**

Changes to primary teacher pre-service preparation could ensure better health and wellbeing outcomes for young children, according to a new survey of Australian government primary school principals.

With increased government focus on the amount of time students spend exercising, a Monash University researcher looked at how best to prepare teachers of health and physical education (HPE).
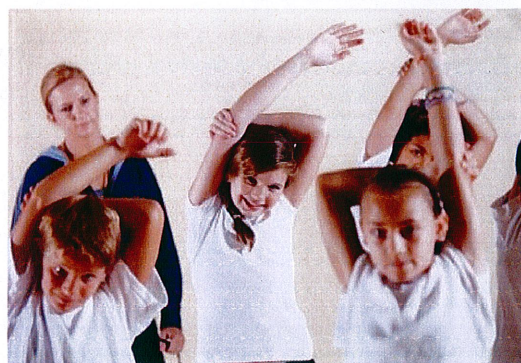
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In the national survey, Dr Tim Lynch from the Faculty of Education looked at the benefits of a teaching degree that would qualify graduates as both generalist primary classroom teachers and developmentally appropriate primary HPE specialists.

Dr Lynch said the current lack of suitably qualified and prepared primary HPE teachers was due to the absence of such courses in Australia.

"The optimum time for children to learn and refine their motor skills and to be introduced to positive HPE experiences is during preschool and early primary school years and many children are missing out because of the absence of appropriately qualified teachers," Dr Lynch said.

"Specialist HPE teachers working within primary schools are often not qualified generalist classroom primary teachers and may not have had opportunities to develop appropriate pedagogy. Generalist classroom teachers usually have no HPE specialisation."

The survey found more than 80 per cent of principals believed a course giving skills in both areas would be valuable.

"Many principals linked quality HPE to improved academic performance as well as the health and fitness of students so there is definitely a need for this type of course," Dr Lynch said.

"It would enable teachers who are passionate in health and wellbeing, and who want to teach primary-aged children, to develop appropriate teaching and holistic health understanding across all strands. It would also enable schools in rural, regional and remote Australia to have, in time, a specialist HPE teacher who was also able to teach across the curriculum."

It is not financially viable for many schools to have HPE specialists on staff, although 82 per cent of principals surveyed said it was desirable. Principals wanted HPE specialist teachers who were passionate about working with primary-aged children in their field as well as qualified to teach more generally.

"Budgetary restraints often stop schools from employing a HPE specialist; the size of the school is also another contributing factor," Dr Lynch said.

"If all HPE specialists were also trained as generalist teachers, these problems would be negated."

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