

## A longitudinal examination of preservice teachers' beliefs toward implementation of competitive activities

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### Abstract

**Problem Statement:** Competitive activities are widely used in physical education class. Preservice teachers enter teacher training programs with a background in a variety of sport experiences. The beliefs that preservice teachers hold regarding competitive activities can influence their instruction. This longitudinal study examined how preservice teachers' (PSTs) beliefs influenced instruction of competitive activities during 6-8 grade physical education (PE) classes while enrolled in a preservice program. PSTs entered this study upon enrollment in the program and completed the study during student teaching. **Approach: Participants and Settings:** Eight males and one female PST, enrolled in a large, urban university teacher training program, participated. Piloted qualitative methods were used to uncover PSTs' beliefs during instruction of competitive activities in middle school PE classes. Data collection included field notes, four interviews, comprised of a background interview and three, 20–25-minute, semi-structured interviews, informal interviews, and collected lesson plans. **Purpose:** The Theory of Reasoned Action was the theoretical framework used to guide the study. Data were analyzed using N-Vivo 10. Data analysis focused on teachers' beliefs regarding competition. The constant comparative method was used to examine teachers' beliefs and how these beliefs influenced instruction during their preservice program. **Results:** Three themes emerged, the first theme was PSTs prior beliefs about competition were identified and were part of their instruction. The second theme was PSTs used coursework to modify game play. The final theme was skill and age matter. **Conclusion:** This study identified the strong beliefs that PSTs held about competitive activities and how those beliefs influenced instruction. The PSTs became aware of these beliefs during student teaching.

**Keywords:** physical education, beliefs, sport, instruction, preservice teachers

### Introduction

Preservice teachers (PSTs) are often placed in schools that offer competitive activities as a curricular focus during their student teaching experiences. Although structured through various curricular models, competitive activities have been identified as an important part of the physical activities offered in physical education (PE) programs both in the United States and world-wide (Dyson et al., 2016; Lund & Tannehill, 2015; Metzler, 2017). These activities can be classified in several ways: zero sum activities, where one person wins and the other person loses, negative sum activities, where there are many losers and few winners, and contingency activities, in which a student's playing is dependent upon their success during the activity, for example, how many points are scored. During middle school, a formative time for building student interest in physical activities, there should be a variety of presented movement experiences, including applying strategies and tactics related to competitive activities (Society of Health and Physical Education [SHAPE], 2013). To reach this goal, several competitive activities can be offered, including a variety of sport activities.

PSTs may enter teaching programs with only their life experiences to inform their views. It has been shown that PSTs have prior experiences and hold strong beliefs regarding competitive activities (Bernstein et al., 2013; Romar et al., 2016; Tannehill & MacPhail, 2014). These beliefs about sport can provide a foundation for teachers' beliefs regarding the purpose of PE (Gerdin & Pringle, 2017) and can influence how PSTs think about their choices in teaching competitive activities (Curtner-Smith et al., 2008; Harvey & O'Donovan, 2011). Beliefs may guide the thoughts and actions that teachers have regarding instruction (Pajares, 1992; Richardson, 2003). As beliefs may influence instruction, understanding the beliefs that teachers have about competition, and how these beliefs affect instruction, is critical when structuring teacher education programs (Matanin & Collier, 2003; McCaughtry et al., 2004). Teachers, however, may not realize these beliefs, and can take for granted how their beliefs and previous knowledge affect their instruction (McCaughtry et al., 2004). Identifying these beliefs and how they influence instruction is important to consider when instructing students in middle school, as several competitive activities are offered, and physical activity dramatically declines during adolescence (Sallis, et al.,

2000). Therefore, understanding how PSTs are interpreting competitive activities may supply valuable information and can improve areas of teacher training and instruction (Philpot & Smith, 2011).

The theoretical framework guiding this study is the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010), which suggests that both beliefs and previous knowledge regarding a subject, may affect behavior. This may be important in PE class, where the attitudes may affect teachers' perceptions and beliefs about PE, and these perceptions and beliefs may affect how a teacher behaves or the way they may implement a lesson focusing on competitive activities (Petty & Cacioppo, 2018). Intention to perform a behavior, precedes that certain behavior. This behavioral intention is formed by beliefs, and these beliefs will lead to certain actions. Teachers may hold salient or strong beliefs, and they may play an important part in how attitude is shaped. Salient beliefs may change over time (Ajzen, 2005), depending upon the experiences that teachers have during their own PST.

While teachers' beliefs may change over time, there has been interest for longitudinal research to be completed regarding what these beliefs are during preservice instruction (Fletcher & Mandigo, 2012). Examination of elementary PE teachers' beliefs and how these beliefs develop has been examined (Chróinin & O'Sullivan, 2016; Matanin & Collier, 2003). Further studies, however, are needed in this under-explored area. In addition, there are no previous studies, specifically, focused on PSTs' beliefs regarding instruction of competitive activities during middle school. Middle school is a pivotal time when students shape their interests and may be experiencing competitive activities for the first time. These experiences, therefore, should be positive. It is during this time teachers should be aware of how their beliefs are influencing instruction. The purpose of this longitudinal study was to investigate the beliefs of PSTs and examine whether their experiences in the preservice program influenced their beliefs and, ultimately, their instruction of competitive activities during student teaching of middle school PE classes.

## Method

### Procedures

**Setting.** The study took place in a large, public university that offered teacher training in PE. PSTs enrolled in the program were required to take coursework in the sciences, physical activities, general education, pedagogy, and theory in PE. PSTs spent over 150 hours of observation in school settings and were required to teach a minimum of five lessons in actual PE settings before entering student teaching. The coursework prepared the PSTs to instruct at the elementary and secondary levels, acquire the appropriate content knowledge for all grade levels, and to properly reflect on teaching experiences to ascertain that student learning occurred. PSTs are required to complete courses in skill-based and developmental age-appropriate courses in soccer, basketball, volleyball, softball, badminton, tumbling, and dance.

**Participants.** The study received clearance from the New York City Department of Education and institutional clearance. Nine preservice PE teachers (8 males, 1 female) enrolled in the physical education teacher education (PETE) major consented to participate in this study. Both the volunteer participants and the participating urban and suburban schools' administrators signed consent forms. All participants chose a pseudonym.

**Semi-Structured Interviews.** The volunteer participants who took part in the study completed four, 20-25 minute, semi-structured interviews. The piloted interview guide used in the longitudinal study was developed after an extensive review of literature focusing on teachers' beliefs (Pajares, 1992; Subramaniam & Silverman, 2002), semi-structured interview protocol (Patton, 2015; Seidman, 2013), and teachers' beliefs regarding competition (Bernstein et al., 2011; Bernstein et al., 2013). The semi-structured interview questions were first piloted with teacher educators in the field of PE. The questions were further pilot tested with two PSTs, one male and one female. These piloted questions were then used in a cohort study with PSTs near the end of their student teaching experiences (Bernstein et al., 2013).

Each of the four interviews was digitally recorded. The PSTs' first interview was a background interview, when they declared their major in the PST program. The teachers had described their background in sport, and all were observed teaching competitive lessons (see Table 1). The background interview included questions regarding the participants' beliefs about competition and was held before the observed lesson. These questions related to their background in competitive activities, their views on competition, and their views on teaching competitive activities. Two interviews were completed with each PST during their student teaching experience. These interviews were held prior to teaching the two observed lessons and included the following questions: What types of competitive activities have you planned during the school year? What competitive activities have you planned for today? What would you like the students to gain from these activities? How have your own experiences influenced the way you planned this lesson? What have you incorporated from your academic experiences in terms of competition? Have you planned for different types of students, and how?

After the final observation, one more interview was held with each PST. This post-observation interview, after the second lesson, included questions, such as: What were your beliefs regarding competition in primary, middle, and secondary school? Did your preservice beliefs about competition affect your instruction? Did you use ideas from the preservice coursework? Had your view about competition changed after student teaching? Finally, how might you plan for future competitive activities?

**Non-Participant Observations and Field Notes.** Piloted non-participant observations and field notes (O’Hearn-Curran, 1997) were used. The researcher wrote notes, with a diagram of the competitive lesson that was taught, on one side of the observation notes and a detailed description of the teacher’s instruction on the other side. There were two observations of each teacher instructing competitive activities during scheduled middle school classes. The observations of the classes were scheduled for the convenience of the volunteer participants. The observed lessons were 45-50 minutes in length. Observations were held in the fall and spring semesters. After each observation, researchers wrote notes on their thoughts. Lesson plans of the observed competitive activities were collected prior to each lesson.

**Informal Interviews.** Informal interviews lasted 5-10 minutes and were conducted after the observed lesson. During these short interviews, the researchers asked clarifying questions, regarding activities during the observed lesson. The responses were then written down in the field notes.

**Data Collection.** Candidates were first interviewed with a background interview at start of the fall semester. For each subject, data collection took a period of two to two and a half years. The PST program requires two years of study between the initial course and student teaching. In some cases, participants took an additional semester to reach student teaching. They were interviewed upon taking the introductory foundation course, and then, finally, in the student teaching experience. During the student teaching experience, they were interviewed prior to teaching the two observed lessons. A final interview took place as they were nearing the end of their student teaching experiences. The candidates’ beliefs regarding competitive activities were assessed before they were fully established in the program and then during the student teaching experience. The data were then examined to see if their beliefs regarding competitive activities had changed after their preservice experience. Data collection included interviews, using a semi-structured interview guide that was pilot tested, non-participant observations and field notes of two classes of competitive activities (per PST), informal interviews that asked clarifying questions, and lesson plans collected for each observed lesson.

All the interviews were transcribed, and member checked by the participants (PSTs). The data were member checked two separate times, after the background interview and after the final interview. The background interview was member checked immediately, so that it would not influence the participants’ interviews focusing on their student teaching, approximately a year and half to two years later. After the final interview, three interviews were member checked, the two pre-lesson observation interviews and the final interview. In their final interview, the students were not allowed to refer to their background interview. In both cases, the researchers met with the participants, gave them a paper copy of their transcript(s) to check, which were returned with corrections, if necessary.

**Data Analysis.** The first two authors of the study collected the data and carried out the data analysis. To make sure that the researcher checked bias, the third author served as an independent peer reviewer. After the data were collected, and PSTs member checked their interviews, all data, interviews, observations and field notes, and lesson plans were then entered into N-Vivo 10. The coding definitions were introduced. These definitions focused on the teachers’ beliefs regarding competition. The research team read each response, and the responses were then coded using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 2017). The data were coded by comparing the participants’ first interview at the start of the PST program, the background interview, with their two pre-lesson observation interviews and the final interview at the end of the PST program. This was done to identify PSTs’ beliefs regarding competitive activities, how those beliefs were incorporated into their teaching, and if those beliefs changed from when they first started the PST program. Observations and field notes and lesson plans were analyzed to identify how they approached teaching during competitive activities, and specifically, how they incorporated instructional practices learned in their PST program.

The themes emerged, and to ensure trustworthiness and credibility, data were triangulated and checked for negative cases. In addition, the volunteer participants were sent the conclusions and were then encouraged to agree, disagree, or elaborate on the specific conclusions reached by the researchers. All participants agreed with the findings as presented. In addition, an independent peer reviewer, the third author, was assigned to review the themes. The document went through several rounds until the process was completed.

**Researchers’ Backgrounds.** The authors are professors in a large, public, urban university. The first two have extensive experience teaching PE with diverse populations in large urban settings, and both have extensive experiences in competitive activities and sport. The third author has extensive experience in teacher education, and had played professional, competitive basketball.

## Results

Three themes emerged during data analysis regarding the PSTs’ beliefs on competitive activities and the way they implemented their lessons. The first theme was PSTs prior beliefs about competition were identified and were part of their instruction. The second theme was, eureka! PSTs use coursework to modify game play. The final theme was skill (development) and age (appropriateness) matter.

### PSTs’ Prior Beliefs About Competition Were Identified and Were Part of Their Instruction

PSTs were asked about their beliefs regarding competition when they entered the program and then during student teaching, approximately two years later. The teachers’ beliefs when they started the program, and

which they shared in their background interviews, filtered into their instruction. Carmen, for example, felt that her background in competitive activities helped her “understand what children, or what [her] students are going through.” Carmen wanted to encourage students, “I can only tell them and then hope and encourage them... ‘Listen you’re a really good volleyball player. You might want to look into getting onto a team.’ That’s all I can do on my part.”

This encouragement was clearly seen in a sixth-grade lesson of volleyball as she emphasized that students should clap, if they did a good job. In addition, in a seventh-grade handball lesson, if sportsmanship was not shown, she stopped the game. Therefore, students encouraged each other during the lesson, when they had done a good job or when trying to improve in skill development.

Encouragement was important to Carmen as an athlete, and she had wanted to continue encouraging her students, as it would,

motivate them to... continue trying. Because when you are competing, you reach a plateau. And you feel like you're going to stay there. You're not going to advance...further past that. But sometimes, if you continue, you're able to break through that barrier and get to that side where, now, you're increasing...your abilities.

When asked if her views on competition had changed much during student teaching, Carmen answered, “I don’t think they have changed so much.”

Jose had the belief that competition was very important in his life, as he stated “...I love it. It’s great. I believe the whole world is based on it, with being competitive, and trying to get to the next level with everything.” Like Carmen, he believed that he could encourage students, as he thought he knew what they were going through when participating in competitive activities. In his background interview, he related his future teaching experience to his present experiences.

Just knowing the background and going through pretty much what the kids are doing at the same age. I feel that I have a relationship with them already, because I know what they are going through. I understand how...if you have practices five days a week, and school on top of it, there is [sic] a lot of things going on. I feel like I can relate to them that much easier.

During his student teaching experience, he used the exact same words as he did in his initial interview. He wanted students to be brought to a higher level, so “if [the students] continue to show me [they] can move to the next level, I will be more than happy to... bring [them] up to the higher-level game, the more challenging level game, more competitive.”

One teacher explained the importance of teams in competitive activities. In his background interview, Billy stated that teams allowed a place for respect, “...where you can respect the other team, as well as yourself.” This respect was reinforced, during student teaching, as he made sure that students called their teammates by name, while practicing basketball, before passing to each other. Each team member had to pass to a new person. This allowed students to not only work together, but also to acknowledge other students respectfully, and to know who was on their team.

Juan felt strongly during his initial background interview that the environment in PE class should be positive during competitive activities, and no trash talking should occur. He believed, if “they talk trash inside the field,” he would stop them from doing that and “hopefully, they can learn from [their experience]” not to do that again. He felt that creating an environment where no trash talking occurred was important, as he did not appreciate it during his competitive experiences. This belief regarding creating an environment during competitive activities, where trash talking did not take place, was also apparent in his final interview, as he stated it was important to know, “how to lose, how to handle a loss. I think it is important overall.” In his lesson, Juan emphasized that the students should motivate each other and help each other understand the strategies involved in moving and playing in different areas and positions on the soccer field. His belief carried into his teaching, as students were not observed talking disrespectfully, while winning or losing games.

Personal behavior was also important for Sam. He spoke about competitive activities and wanting to have “certain qualities in [his students],” qualities that would “make them shine.” In the background interview, he said how as a child, he and his friends played with a friend, who had multiple sclerosis. Modifying the activities, so that his friend could play, was an important memory for him, because,

Obviously, he was not able to do a lot of physical stuff, but we worked with it. He had a basketball hoop in his yard and one of those nerf balls. We’d be playing with the regular ball, and he would be playing with the nerf ball. Being a physical education teacher, that is our job to motivate people... to understand where a person is coming from. Then creating some kind of plan that would boost their physical attributes, but also make them feel better about themselves...I would like to plan my activities to have the student feel like they are worth something. That they belong.

This experience was so important to Sam that he brought it up again in his final interview, mentioning that he and his friends “never wanted to keep him out of the activities, so even if we were running on the playground, we would have X in the wheelchair with us, and we would be pushing him with us.” This influenced Sam in his teaching in that he wanted to “listen more from the student’s side, meaning be more student-centered. Teaching in this way goes back to communication and cooperation as opposed to ‘I’m going to be the dictator and tell you how it’s gonna be done.’” This strong belief was apparent in his student teaching, when during

European handball, he emphasized communication and cooperation and mentioned communication several times throughout his lesson.

Finally, Al's prior views were also part of his instruction. He thought that the "high school or middle school atmosphere, where they kind of know all the basics and see where they need the fine tuning, then they'll be able to [be] competitive." After his student teaching experience, he stated, "I think fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth is when gameplay can start. Like real gameplay, modified basketball, modified soccer, like we are doing here." In his observation, he went over basic skills, and reinforced these skills in gameplay.

### **Eureka! PSTs Use Coursework to Modify Game Play**

Teachers utilized what they learned in their coursework regarding competition, such as modifying gameplay and changing the structure of the games, so that all students would be able to participate. These experiences were assimilated into their teaching of competitive activities. Teachers, after participating in their preservice training courses, realized that their previous beliefs regarding competitive activities might not work for the middle school students they were instructing, so modification was necessary to be able to have full participation in their classes. In some cases, this reinforced the PSTs previous beliefs, and in others, the modification of competitive activities challenged their beliefs. The modifications, however, were implemented when control of a class was lost. This implementation had the PSTs reflect on what they had learned in their coursework.

Carmen believed, initially, that motivation and encouragement were very important during the instruction of competitive activities. This belief guided her teaching, and she did incorporate elements of her coursework to accomplish this. During her final interview, Carmen stated that when the class became too competitive, she stopped the class, realizing that,

my primary focus is not the competition, but that they learn adequate skills, and they're able to develop those skills. So, I'm not going to allow a student to perform something incorrectly, and let it go. That's why I stopped the class...at this point with my sixth-grade class [and] even seventh grade... I want them to enjoy the sport.

She continued to add, "...I just am unable to let them just, kind of, go on their own. I still have to provide them with the tools that they need to improve." Carmen recognized that although motivation and encouragement were necessary, it was not enough to overcome students' lack of skill.

Carmen stated that her coursework helped students "move their skills into thinking about how [they] would use this skill in a sport." Her instruction would "help them through the process." This was observed when Carmen stopped the class to modify the forearm pass to have it done from a stationary position. She gave high fives to some students, who clapped for each other ...as they performed the [forearm pass] and the serve properly. She stopped the class on one occasion to compliment a team for a proper serve reception and again on the use of encouragement for one another. This was an example of her beliefs that encouragement was vital, intersecting with the need for modifying the game play activity.

Billy stressed tournament play as one of his interests in his initial interview. He organized structured games that would lead to a tournament. Tournament play can be most competitive, where students go all out in effort and forget their newly learned skills. During an observation of his seventh-grade class, it was apparent that the requirements of his lesson were that students could not switch positions during the basketball game. The offense stayed on offense, and the defense stayed on defense. This required students to use and concentrate only on their specific offense or defensive skills, without everyone moving all over the court, converging on the ball, and not properly executing the skills learned in class.

In the preservice teaching program, the structure of competitive tournament play was strengthened, as Billy stated, "I used a 4 vs. 4 European handball game...because it keeps [the students] working hard, and it motivates them to become better as an individual." Throughout the lessons he taught, he specifically had the students work on the individual skills of dribbling and defense, and then had them employ those skills in a modified game of European handball. Later, he stated, "[Learning]...physical education at X College, we learned different positioning... and there was never any positioning [when I played]...European handball."

John realized that the program had taught him "all about progressions" and "having children involved." His basketball lesson planned to use these progressions during student teaching in a "a racing activity, ...a modified [one] with some dribbling, and then progress to some shooting." In the observation of his class, however, the students were unable to correctly participate in the relay activity that John developed. There were two teams. Students were expected to run around the gym while dribbling the ball and then pass it to the next person online. Most of the students were waiting for a turn, rather than practicing dribbling with the ball. They also did not get to the next activity in the lesson plan, which included dribbling and shooting. John stated after the lesson, "My goals were not that specific. They were just running around. I think I would have to be more specific." He realized that the competitive nature of the dribbling task overshadowed the ability of the students to accomplish the skills.

My lesson did not go very well. I don't think I put enough thought into it. I think it would have gone differently, if I had planned differently. I had a lot of off-task children. I don't think it was the way to

go, the way I did the lesson. If I were to change it, I would have more children involved. Probably have a different activity planned where...they would all be involved.

After the lesson, he decided to modify the competitive activity, so students could be on-task, involved, and working as a team. He later referred to his lesson plan diagram to add more equipment throughout the gym to increase participation.

In a soccer lesson, where the goal was to “push up” the ball, the students did not understand the activity. Some of the students dominated, while others were lost. In Juan’s lesson plan, it noted that during the soccer lesson “students will be able motivate each other and guide each other on different positioning during a soccer game that focused on pushing up the ball.” The game was stopped, because it became too competitive, the students were not working together, and a few dominated the activity. Sportsmanship was not being practiced, and sportsmanship had been important to Juan in his initial interview. When Juan gathered the students to discuss the lesson, the physical activity of “pushing up” the ball was discussed. Juan’s solution was to modify the activity, as he had learned in the preservice program. He stated,

I kinda generalized their skill level, and I noticed not everyone is a soccer player. Most of the time I tried to do the soccer stuff, the drills that we did. I definitely modified it and [made it] a little bit less hard, because it did not go as well as I have seen with same age kids.

He realized that he planned a lesson for a skill level that most of his class had not yet attained, so modifications would be used in his next lesson.

Other teachers also realized that their own students’ skill levels were not as advanced as their skill level when they were in middle school. During his student teaching experience, Sam said,

Ugh...when you think about it from what you know, you tend to realize [the students] are further behind than where you were...when I was their age. I was playing little league baseball, and I was bowling, and I was doing a lot of rec-center type of activities in group atmospheres or [on] teams... It blows my mind that seventh grade kids can’t throw straight...or they don’t know how many innings are in a baseball game? It kind of changes the way I have to go about my lesson planning, because everything that I’m developing, even though in my mind it tends to be simplistic, it’s still way too hard for them to get in one period, yet alone a number of periods.

This was observed during his first lesson on team handball, when students had a hard time following the progression of taking three steps, and then making a pass. Either the students took too many steps, or the pass was not performed correctly. Sam thought of what he learned in his coursework, and prior to his second lesson, modified the rules, as inclusion has been important to him. Students then were required to work on the skills of passing and shooting properly, without worrying about how many steps they took.

### **Skill (Development) and Age (Appropriateness) Matter**

In background interviews, teachers discussed competitive game situations and student behavior, rather than skill development and differentiating specific age appropriateness of those activities for the students. The realization for one teacher, Jeff, that during competitive situations some of the students might not have the skills, was apparent in his comment after his lesson. He stated, “Competition is an important part of physical education, but it is not the most important part, as the development of basic skills had been stressed in the classes he had taken. I believe, that...”[it] belongs in physical education to motivate children during game play...but the most important thing [is that] students should be learning skills.”

After the preservice program coursework and more experience in teaching competitive activities at the P-12 level, the teachers were clear in the role of skill development and distinguishing the levels at which competitive activities should be taught. Jeff stated that the preservice program had changed his view of how competitive activities should be structured, “I used to focus on winning, but as I went through the program, and I saw different lessons...I figured that [winning] is not a good way for students to think,” but skill was, and learning proved to be more important.

Winning was a very important belief for him, as he stated in his background interview, “there was nothing you could do to get me away from the basket to score.” His view on winning evolved as he continued, “I like to tell them that I hope they understand, it is not only about winning but [about] having a good time as well.” During his lesson in basketball, he had an assessment sheet that students filled out to highlight give-and-gos, screens, and protecting the ball from the defender. He also stressed skills by having stations where students could work with other students on the basic skills needed to complete the tasks. His beliefs now included skill development, as he noted, “...when you are watching games, you see it differently. It’s not all about winning. You have to make sure that there is learning involved and acquiring different skills.”

When Juan started the program, he felt that in the elementary grades, competition was “healthy for [the students], if they don’t want to lose or something, so they try harder.” When teaching middle school, he felt that he wanted the students to “try [their] hardest, but if they are not grasping [the skills], and they’re just trying to win, and trying to bully others in order to win, I felt like you got to teach them that it’s not all about winning, but it’s also about the experience.”

His view of how competitive activities should be introduced to middle school students was explained that although competition is important, a safe environment is more important. He continued, “when it gets

to...teasing...I don't believe that's good for competition at a younger age." After student teaching, his views were more specific, and he explained how the preservice training changed his opinion, as "[the College] taught us what not to do about competition and what age it's okay to do competition. The college was good at that. I think the older ages, starting at middle school, you can start to be more competitive little by little."

Carmen stated that younger students would not have the skills to compete, but she became more specific as she stated, "K to three should not play any competitive games. They can learn skills towards competitive games, but as far as having an all-out competitive match or sport, I disagree with that. I don't think they are mentally prepared to really handle failure." By fourth grade, she suggested "...they are now developing. They understand how the game works. So, I think at fourth grade up until eighth, they are able to handle competition better, and they understand the rules of the game." This was reflected in Carmen's lesson as the objective was to have students "...play in a modified game with a three-serve limit in volleyball" and cognitively to be able to "understand the rules of this modified game with a three serve limit."

Billy stated in his background interview, "K through five shouldn't have as much competition as sixth to twelfth, because I feel that [in] sixth to twelfth [grade] the students should be able to understand a little bit more." After his student teaching experience, Billy was able to specifically,

work on the skills and then focus that skill in a competitive nature for sixth, seventh, and eighth grade, because it [kept] their attention, and it [kept] them working hard, and it [motivated] them to become better as an individual with passing, dribbling, and all the above.

During his lessons with middle school, he used rules to structure the games, so that competition was not the major focus. Students were required to follow the rules for where to be on the court. He again reflected on tournament play, as he stated,

I believe because of the college and my experience with competitive activities when I was younger...[it is] not good just to play basketball, when [one is] in third, fourth, and fifth grade. We would have...tournament play, but now...I don't think I would do that.

Before student teaching, Jose did not think about building a foundation of skill. He felt that in middle school he would,

teach the kids something new, a different sport each day. [He] would first explain to them the basic rules and from there let them divide into however many equal teams ...and let them play a game for the last 20 minutes of class.

During student teaching, his lesson focused on passing in basketball and progressing that lesson to passing while moving. Jose's views on teaching competitive activities to middle school students changed, as he stated, "we need to just focus on skills. In the phys. ed. class, there are different skill levels [that students] we need to meet [during competitive activities]."

Julian felt that as students matured, they would "understand [competition] better." He went on to explain, "I guess as you get older, you get a better idea of listening to the rules in any game or sport. Then you start becoming more competitive. And during grades "sixth through eighth, you can actually start [playing] team against another team." When Julian started teaching, he realized,

I did not see the level of how unskillful the students are nowadays. I feel that sometimes, being athletic myself, everyone is almost the same. But, after student teaching, I have seen so many high levels and low levels of students. So, the competition levels change in the sense [that] we need to focus on not competing but making [the students] more equal. It is not fun playing some competitive sport, if nobody is at the same level.

There were two teachers, who believed from their background interviews that skills were necessary for competitive activities, and that elementary schools should focus on the development of those skills. Jeff stated, in his background interview that skills were needed when students were young, as well as in middle school, as competition was "for the most part to win, but most important [to] try to learn the activities and do something that you are not good at, and work on skills that you are good at." During his student teaching, he continued to focus on skill development. He stated that in his lesson, he "tried to stress that if they were trying to win the game, at the same time [they should] work on their skills and have a good time."

## Conclusion

As the Theory of Reasoned Action, or Attitude Theory, suggests, cognition, prior knowledge, and salient or strong beliefs may influence and guide behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010). These salient beliefs can, however, change over time, given the experiences that a person might have (Ajzen, 2005; Marttinen et al., 2018; Silverman, 2017). Previous lived experiences can play a critical role in the development of future teachers (Curtner-Smith et al., 2008) and can be important during their teacher-training program (Philpot & Smith, 2011). Teachers may have prior beliefs before they enter preservice programs (Matanin & Collier, 2003), and their lived experiences can then shape their instruction in the gymnasium (McCaughy et al., 2004; Sofo et al., 2010).

PST programs can build confidence and can offer support in different modes of instruction (Kenny et al., 2015). While providing support, however, PSTs may revert to their experiences of sport when placed in instructional situations. It has been shown that PSTs have strong beliefs regarding competitive activities that can

translate into instruction (Bernstein et al., 2013; Harvey & O’Donovan, 2011). Many PSTs, placed in an applied setting for the first time, may not be able to reflect on their instruction and both prior experiences, and how those beliefs might influence their teaching (Dillon et al., 2017). This study, while on a small scale, a limitation, showed specifically, what those beliefs were, and how those beliefs are translated during their student teaching practices.

The PSTs’ salient beliefs can, however, change over time, given the experiences that a person might have (Ajzen, 2005; Marttinen et al., 2018; Silverman, 2017). Their beliefs may change due to the learning opportunities that they had throughout their preservice programs (Azzarito & Solomon, 2005; Chróinín & O’Sullivan, 2016; Linker & Woods, 2018). Thus, this study showed the areas where preservice teaching experiences added to a more complex understanding of instructional methods during competitive activities.

While it was indicated that beliefs regarding competitive activities remained strong, instructional beliefs, however, started to change. Modification of competitive activities (Ward, et al., 2018), skill development (Hulteen, et al., 2017), and age-appropriate activities (Kirk, 2005) have been shown to be important during instruction. This study indicated that PSTs were unaware of these specific elements during the instruction of competitive activities, and they reflected on their beliefs. As their teaching and beliefs were challenged, they began to rely on their coursework to guide them and improve their instruction. The proactive reflection of effective instruction is especially crucial during middle school as physical activity declines for adolescent students (Corder et al., 2019). PST awareness of instructional methods that can increase skill development and successful experiences for middle school students can encourage increased future participation in physical activities (Lee et al., 2017; Scrabis-Fletcher & Silverman, 2017).

As Attitude Theory suggests, teachers’ beliefs can change over time, and this study shows that understanding and identifying those beliefs can help improve instruction. By reflecting on traditional instruction of competitive activities, task structure and presentation can be improved. Teacher preparation programs should consider reviewing teachers’ strong beliefs (O’Sullivan, 2005) early in teacher training programs. Traditional instruction of competitive activities can be examined and challenged, as teachers understand how to counter their previous beliefs of those activities. This practice may combat washout effects and socializations that can occur during in-service teaching (Richards et al., 2018). Competitive activities that have been presented to students can be re-examined, in terms of newer curricular approaches (Macdonald, 2015), thus giving PSTs a new sense of self-awareness during instruction. Rather than the activity being the focus, the needs of the students become paramount. This can become a priority as teachers reflect on how traditional sport has been taught and shift the focus from teaching the “activity,” to individual students’ needs (Bernstein, 2020).

Future studies could focus on how teacher training programs integrate a more reflective process, specifically, during the instruction of competitive activities. By offering a more reflective approach to sport, teachers may re-examine their instructional choices during student skill acquisition and task presentation. Integrating these newer curricular approaches can challenge PSTs to modify their instruction of these activities. This, in conjunction with understanding specific instructional choices during competitive activities, can create a more productive learning experience for PSTs and, ultimately, for their students. In addition, changes in instruction can provide insight to future curriculum design and help to inform educated decisions on building effective PST programs.

Table 1  
*Competitive Background and Activities*

Participant	Background in competitive activities	Grade taught	Activity taught
Jeff	Basketball	7 <sup>th</sup> grade	Basketball
Billy	Baseball, Basketball	6 <sup>th</sup> grade	European Handball
Jose	Baseball, Basketball	6 <sup>th</sup> grade	Basketball/ Bowling Basketball
Julian	Water Polo	6 <sup>th</sup> grade	Capture the Flag with Fitness
Juan	Soccer	6 <sup>th</sup> /8 <sup>th</sup> grade	Soccer
Carmen	Swimming	6 <sup>th</sup> and 7 <sup>th</sup> grades	Volleyball
Al	Football	7 <sup>th</sup> grade	Soccer
Sam	Bowling, Soccer, Softball Karate	7 <sup>th</sup> grade	European Handball
John	Basketball, Baseball, Softball	6 <sup>th</sup> grade	Basketball

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