

## METHODOLOGY

# Early Field Experience in an Elementary Physical Education Methods Course: Creating and Implementing a Field Day for Homeschoolers

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## Abstract

*An early field experience (EFE) is a platform for pre-service teachers (PTs) to put theory into practice. It is typically conducted in a K-12 school setting. Over the years, several scholars have experimented with the effectiveness of EFEs that were carried out virtually, over a summer term, with homeschoolers, or at a juvenile delinquent facility. This study examined another atypical EFE where the PTs in an elementary physical education (PE) methods course planned and implemented a field day for a group of homeschoolers. Field day instruction documents and two sets of reflection assignments were collected and analyzed using the standard interpretive methods of analytic induction and constant comparison in three stages. Findings indicated that the PTs' field day experience as elementary school students had an influence on how they carried out the homeschool field day. Along with the event itself, the unexpected weather conditions helped them acquire many skills that they could use in teaching PE and running their own field day in the future. This EFE has given them profound perspectives about the value of organized field days and elementary PE teachers. Practical implications and study limitations are discussed.*

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## Introduction

In the field of physical education teacher education (PETE), a typical early field experience (EFE) occurs in K-12 school settings where pre-service teachers (PTs) observe or assist in-service teachers delivering a lesson, and, when appropriate, team-teach or solo teach a small group of students in physical education (PE). The purpose is to provide real-world opportunities for PTs to have first-hand experience running a PE class. Quality EFEs have a positive impact on PTs' professional development (Barney & Christenson, 2009; Barney & Pleban, 2006; Curtner-Smith, 1996; Curtner-Smith & Sofo, 2004; O'Sullivan & Tsangaridou, 1992). For instance, the 39 PTs in O'Sullivan and Tsangaridou's (1992) study recognized that quality lesson planning and effective classroom management are essential for a successful lesson. Those in Barney and Christenson's (2009) study, on the other hand, acknowledged the importance of gym voice, and over-planning for PE is usually taught in an open space and how students react to the planned activities can be quite unpredictable, especially to novice teachers.

Over the years, several PETE faculty and scholars have introduced their PTs with EFEs outside of the typical K-12 PE settings. In reaction to the global COVID-19 pandemic, the PTs in Chen's (2022) 200-level PETE activity class were required to search for a minimum of a one-hour video related to sports on the internet, watch it, and report why they chose the video and what they learned from it on a weekly basis. This virtual EFE appeared to help the PTs acquire content knowledge, make game-related observations, and furnish entertainment. In addition, to accommodate the PTs who were unable to attend classes during the regular academic terms, Stephenson et al. (2022) set up an EFE at a Boys and Girls Club. Over the five-week summer term, the three PTs reported the absence of appropriate assessment exposure and role modeling due to the lack of typical organizational structures in K-12 school settings. Moreover, instead of taking PTs to a school site, Chen (2020, 2021) brought homeschoolers on campus and created a student-teacher ratio of 1:1 or 2:1 EFE. The setup was found to be beneficial for both lower- and upper-division PTs as they practiced instructional and managerial tasks and bonded with the kids during the experience. Most recently, Project FLEX (Wahl-Alexander et al., 2024) provided

a unique experience working with incarcerated youth. Not only did this EFE give the PTs a platform to practice their teaching skills with at-risk youth, but it also gave the incarcerated youth an opportunity to experience a college life on Northern Illinois University campus.

Regardless of the site and student population, most EFEs deal with teaching PE, but there are responsibilities outside of teaching in a school setting. Running a field day, for example, may be considered an implied duty for some PE and related arts teachers. PTs who student-teach in the fall do not have the opportunity to experience it because field days are typically a spring event. Not all student-teachers in the spring get to experience a field day because they may be in their secondary school placement, or the university calendar ends before public schools do. All these reasons prompted a different form of EFE where PTs created and implemented a field day for a small group of homeschoolers on university campus. This study aimed to examine the participants' experiences from the creation and fulfillment of the event. Specific research questions (RQs) included:

1. What were the PTs' field day experiences as elementary school students?
2. What did they learn from the planning and implementation phases?
3. How did this particular EFE shape them as future professionals in PE?

## **Methods**

### **Participants**

The participants included 13 PTs, four female (30.8%) and nine male (69.2%), enrolled in an elementary PE methods course at a regional university in the mid-eastern region of United States. Three of the PTs were African American (23.1%), nine were Caucasian (69.2%), and one was of Asian and American descent (7.7%). Out of the 13 PTs, seven were in their last semester before student-teaching (53.8%), while the other six had one more semester to take classes (46.2%), one of which was a secondary PE methods course.

As part of the course requirement, the PTs were scheduled to do four observations and teach five lessons at a local elementary school.

They also took turns teaching a one-hour lesson to 24 upper elementary homeschoolers on university campus. A lead teacher for each PE lesson was randomly selected out of the 13 names, and a back-up lead teacher was also randomly assigned in case the former was absent that day. During the one-hour timeframe, the lead teacher delivered a lesson off of a plan created by the course instructor while the other 12 PTs partnered with two homeschoolers and underwent the planned activities.

The last part of the EFE in this elementary PE methods course was the creation and fulfillment of a field day. The event was scheduled during the time of the methods course and the subsequent PETE course on the last Friday of the semester. Ten out of the 13 PTs were enrolled in the subsequent PETE course, and the other three PTs had a break between classes during that time. The class was instructed to take charge of a station in pairs and elect an organizer for the event. The course instructor provided a list of 17 popular field day activities for them to choose from but emphasized the autonomy of exploring other activities or games they wanted to host. An internal grant of \$3,000 USD was funded to run the field day.

## **The Field Day**

The field day was a culminating event of the Holistic Health and Physical Education Program for the Homeschoolers, which consisted of four mini-programs. The PreK Movement Education Program (PKM) was designed for children three to five years old and overseen by a Child and Family Services (CFS) faculty. The Early Childhood Movement Education Program (ECM) was designed for children five to eight years old and overseen by an Elementary Education Teacher Education (EETE) faculty. Along with the Physical Education Program (PEP; designed for eight to 11 years old, mentioned in the previous section), the course instructor oversaw the Health Education Program (HEP) designed for children 11 to 15 years old.

Sixty-one homeschoolers registered, and 23 college students (not including the 13 PTs) volunteered for the event. Table 1 illustrates the group assignment and the number of people in each group. The nearly 1:1 child-college student ratio in the PKM groups was designed for the college students to assist the young children during an activity and for behavior management purposes. As the age of the

**Table 1**  
*Field Day Group Assignment*

Group	# of Children	# of College Students	# of Preteens/Teenagers
PKM 1	7	6	
PKM 2	7	6	
ECM 1	8	3	
ECM 2	9	4	
PEP 1	7	1	2 from HEP
PEP 2	7	1	3 from HEP
PEP 3	8	1	3 from HEP

children increased, less assistance was believed to be needed from the college students, hence the reduced number of college students in the ECM and PEP groups. The eight homeschoolers from HEP were divided into three PEP groups and participated in each station to make the games more fun and competitive for the older children.

According to the number of PTs in class, there were six physically active stations, and there were water balloon tosses, relay races, sponge squeeze, rubber duck relay, whack-a-mole, and space invaders. Two sedentary stations were added as a break for the rotation. The two sedentary stations were arts and crafts (i.e., coloring cardboard circles that later made into two running and jumping figures as murals) staffed by the EETE faculty and a college student, and temporary tattoo station facilitated by the CFS and PETE faculty. As the field day organizer, Braelyn drew a map for the station layout, direction for rotation, and where each group would start their first station.

Because of other materials to be covered in this class, the PTs did not officially start planning the event until five weeks out, during which the course instructor gave them 20-30 minutes each time they met in the university classroom. According to the time available for the field day, Braelyn made an executive decision for each group to stay at a station for 10 minutes. Station leaders specified equipment, set-up, activity procedures, and modifications in writing and turn it in to Braelyn, who consequently composed all documents into one and shared it with the college students and faculty members who were not involved in the planning phase. Approximately half of the

**Figure 1**  
*Field Day Map with the First Station Assignment*



\$3,000 USD was spent on equipment and supplies for the stations, and the other half went to participant incentives (i.e., popsicles for homeschoolers, box lunches for adults, and field day design t-shirts for all).

The event was scheduled to start at 9:15 a.m. At check-in, homeschoolers received a T-shirt and a colored wristband indicating the group they were assigned to. The PTs were asked to arrive an

hour early and the other personnel by 8:45 a.m. They also received a T-shirt and a colored wristband upon arrival. The first station was set to start at 9:30 a.m. After eight 10-minute rotations, all homeschoolers would receive one or more popsicles around 11 a.m. with parental permission on site. Homeschool families were encouraged to bring snacks and join the adults for a picnic on the quad. On the day of the event, however, it started raining and thundering around 8 a.m., forcing the field day to be moved inside the recreation center. All water-related stations were told to run it as a dry station because water was forbidden inside. With all the last-minute modifications, the PTs managed to start the event on time. All groups went through the eight stations and had time for popsicles. It wrapped up around 11:15 a.m. without a picnic at the end because the sky was still cloudy and the grass was wet on the quad.

## Data Collection

The *field day instructions* document that Braelyn compiled and two reflection assignments were used to answer the RQs. Eight guided questions in the *pre-field day reflection assignment* were used to prompt the PTs to describe their field day experience as elementary school students, any positive attributes while planning the event with others, and any challenges or obstacles they faced before the field day. Another eight questions in the *post-field day reflection assignment* were used to guide the PTs to express what they did, what worked well and what surprised them during the field day, and how running this event changed their view about field days in any way.

To reduce the possibility of “studentship” (Graber, 1998) or “impression management” (Lawson, 1983a, 1983b) where the PTs might provide information that was aligned with the course instructor’s perspectives so as to win favor, each assignment was worth 24 points, which was only 8% of the course evaluation. Another strategy to warrant honest responses for the purpose of the study, since the course instructor also served as the researcher/author, was that the assignments were graded by a graduate teaching assistant who was instructed to make sure all questions were answered within two to three pages following the correct spacing and formatting requirements. Although four pages or longer were allowed, all assignments were between two to three pages. All but one PT received full credit

on both assignments. The one PT missed 10% of the grade on the post-field day reflection due to late submission penalty.

## **Data Analysis**

Data collected from the field day document and two sets of reflection papers were analyzed using the standard interpretive methods of analytic induction and constant comparison in three stages (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). In the first stage, all 26 papers were carefully read; statements related to the PTs' field day experience, lessons learned from planning and implementing the field day, and how this EFE affected them as future PE teachers were highlighted. Stage two involved transferring the highlighted statements into codes and categories; the recurring ones were then put under preliminary themes. In the third and last stage, statements categorized in the same preliminary theme were read repeatedly and compared with those in another theme, ensuring they were placed in the proper category and consistency in each theme was met. At this time, relatively small categories were collapsed into overarching themes.

## **Findings**

### **RQ #1: What were the PTs' field day experiences as elementary school students?**

#### *Water and Competition*

When asked to recall their own field day experience, most participants favored activities that involved water and competition. Since it was always hot outside when they had field days in elementary school, every chance they had to cool off was considered a treat. Whether it was shooting water blasters at a beach ball or tossing water balloons with a partner, several participants thought it was the highlight of their day. As Mason stressed, "a game where we could get soaking wet was all we cared about." In a game that involved transporting water from a full bucket to an empty one using a sponge, Sophia shared a light-hearted dilemma between cooling off and winning the game:

I remember having to pass the sponge over our heads to get it to the other end. We wanted to squeeze the sponge over our heads to cool down, but we couldn't because we were trying

to keep as much water in the sponge as possible so we could fill up the other bucket before the other teams did.

While some participants enjoyed their small doses of fun from water shooters, water balloons, sponges and buckets, Owen shared, in his opinion, “the most entertaining activity” from his fourth-grade field day:

The waterslide was set up on top of a huge hill and constructed by a very large tarp that was at least 20 yards wide and 70 yards long. The water was from a fire truck, and it was full of soap to make it slippery. It was something that we looked forward to throughout the year because it was something that only the fourth graders got to do. The fact that we were allowed to come to school with swimming clothes and get wet was a huge attraction to us.

In addition to water, activities with a competition element where they could earn prizes or receive recognition as winners appeared to be memorable to the participants. Jayden recalled, “at my school, every field day event had a 1st, 2nd and 3rd place winner. If you placed, you received a ribbon. To small kids, those were like Olympic gold medals.” Their competitive nature was displayed not only in individual events (e.g., 100-yard dash, sack race, hula hooping) but in team games (e.g., tug of war, kickball, soccer) also. Eli wrote:

All the boys would come together and play 2-hand touch football. We would create 2 super-teams and have our own Super Bowl. It was the last showdown before the school year ended. Nothing in the entire school year meant more to us, as we had this planned since day 1 of the school year.

The competition was even more fun when the teachers were involved. Competing with or against their teachers was something they did not get to do on a regular basis. Ben remembered the laughter of the entire school when students and teachers fell from the dizzy bat, which was, “a meaningful experience because it created a bond when everyone was laughing together.” Sophia got to dump a bucket full of water on her teacher’s head because her team won the water

relay game. Examples like Ben's and Sophia's apparently brought joy to their field days.

### **Field Day Equals Free Day**

Four of the participants did not have organized or structured field days in elementary school. It was a day that they had free rein to do whatever they wanted and had completely freedom to choose how they would spend their time. Lucas recalled:

We would be released to the playground at the start of the day and have free will to do whatever. The whole grade would rush to the playground, and we would all find the best spot to set up camp. We would bring blankets and things of that nature and almost make a little campsite of sorts. We would run around and play games, but nothing was very organized.

Similar to Lucas' experience, Braelyn would, "bring tents, towels, snacks, sit around with friends, and hang out." Michael and his schoolmates would, "bring snacks, balls, and any games from home that [they] wanted to play throughout the day." When they felt like it, they would get up and play games like red rover, kickball, or two-hand touch football. Amelia expressed a bit of sadness when her peers talked about their field day experience because all she could remember were, "free play on the playground," "fun snacks," and, "the Fire Department came in and sprayed us with their fire hose."

### **RQ #2: What did they learn from the planning and implementation phases?**

#### *Game Design and Modification*

Four pairs of participants picked the games from the list that the course instructor provided and added multiple modifications to keep most people active and make the tasks challenging for the wide range of age groups. Grace and Amelia, for example, added, "crab crawl, bear crawl, hula hoop pass, and egg and spoon balance" into the original running relay race. They also set up zigzag pathways and cones for the homeschoolers to go around instead of the traditional out-and-back straight-line running pattern. Lucas and Mason, on the other hand, listed, "bean bags, foam balls, and frisbees" as the objects for throwing. Based on the skill level of the groups, they also

made the target requirements of, “making a contact to the discs or cones → knocking the discs off the cones → knocking the discs off the cones and knocking the cones down” and adjusted the throwing distances from short-to-long.

Two pairs of participants either found their game elsewhere or created it on their own. Owen and Jayden originally wanted to do tug of war, but after discussing the game design with each other and their peers, they settled with rubber duck relay, “because we have a way less risk of injury in this activity compared to tug of war... activities with water and competition are a field day environment the kids are bound to enjoy (Owen).” Having a similar mindset about incorporating water in their station and combining it with one of his favorite childhood games (dunk tank), Eli explained how he came up with the game:

I got the idea when I went to this arcade with a friend back at home. We were playing whack-a-mole when a kid walked in front of us and she said, “that kid was about to get whacked if he got any closer.” That sparked the idea of a human version of whack-a-mole. I figured why not combine it with one of my favorite activities, throwing, and then I naturally came to water balloons because it is field day.

The construction of Eli and Ben’s human whack-a-mole consisted of taping nine 30” diameter hula hoops in the three-by-three pattern and using four bamboo sticks to hold up the hoops on the grassy ground. Homeschoolers were to stand in all four directions from the same distance to them. On signal, they would throw water balloons (four were thrown at a time) to Eli or Ben who stood in one of the nine hoops. The next person in line would grab new water balloons, wait for the signal, and throw. When Eli or Ben got hit by a water balloon, they would move to another hoop for the next round.

## **Event Logistics**

As the event organizer, most before-field day tasks fell heavily on Braelyn. She, “created a map layout of the quad,” “assigned a spot for all eight stations and labeled the equipment needed for them,” “assigned a station for the seven groups to start at, along with the direction which they would rotate to.” She also, “labeled five speakers for

everyone to hear the music no matter where they were and a water cooler for hydration.” Her peers noticed and appreciated her hard work; Lucas noted, “choosing [Braelyn] as our leader worked well. She is very organized and responsible. She made the entire planning period go smoothly.” Mason echoed:

[Braelyn] is one of the best people for this position. She stays vigilant at watching how everyone moves around and makes sure they have plenty of room at each station. Having a visual layout for how everything is set up and how everyone rotates to the next station is very helpful. I think these are very important factors for the success of the field day.

Another aspect of organizing this field day was determining how to spend the \$3,000 USD as a group. Many participants agreed equipment and supplied for running the stations should come first. Liam recalled:

Something I didn't know about planning a successful field day was the amount of money spent on the equipment. Seeing us having to make a list for equipment and then order it online showed me the amount of money that is put into a field day so students can have fun and really enjoy themselves.

Many participants agreed that the equipment and supplied purchased should have a long-term value for the PETE program rather than the one-time usage for a field day that might not occur in the future. This decision was hard for Eli and Grace to hear because the former, “initially planned on doing a dunk tank” and the latter wanted, “a bouncy house or obstacle course that was an inflatable.” Ideas like these were shut down because, “it costs too much and we can't use it in teaching [PE]” (Braelyn). Almost equally important, at least by its monetary value, the participants thought having a special field day t-shirt made and giving out popsicles and box lunches were attractive incentives for all that were involved. Ben justified the situation after his partner's dunk tank idea was voted down:

I didn't know how much it cost to make T-shirts, but it was something cool to have and be reminded of what we did for the kids. As a college student, I go to events that give out free

shirts and food, so I guess it was worth it to have those for the other [college] students who came out to help us.

Change of the event location was one thing that the participants did not foresee. They were given two basketball courts, but it was still much smaller than the quad. Station layout stayed the same, but there was less space for the groups to move within and rotate through the stations. Because water was not allowed on the courts, four water-related stations had to modify their games at an hour's notice. Instead of water balloons, Michael and Sophia used rubber chickens, fish, and pigs for the throwing and catching games. Instead of having the rubber ducks floating on water inside a kiddie pool, Owen and Jayden simply lay the ducks in a hula hoop. Eli and Ben used chairs to hold up the bamboo sticks that supported the three-by-three hula hoops and different size/material balls (rather than water balloons) for throwing at their whack-a-mole station. Leo and Liam's sponge squeeze station was replaced with a scooter relay race. The last-minute change of location caused by the unexpected weather conditions was a stressful situation, even to the two non-water stations, but all of them expressed a sigh of relief when they saw how much fun the homeschoolers had at their stations. The following data snippets illustrates Eli's and Grace's reflection, respectively:

I fully anticipated using those bamboo sticks and just stick them in the ground, but we had to find another way because we moved inside... We got a lot of compliments from group leaders and even some parents joined in on the fun. Although the setup was a pain, we managed to make it work. It was a simple game and definitely worth doing again.

I was impressed by how well my classmates were able to adapt to moving inside and getting everything set up. Some of them had to change their games in very little time, but they all worked out pretty well... The kids really enjoyed the egg and spoon race. Truthfully, I didn't think that game was going to work that well, but it was a hit.

## Pedagogical Skills

The unexpected weather conditions taught the participants the importance of a rainy-day plan that they would not have learned otherwise. Many of them were like Eli who ,“checked the weather every day last week and it said no rain until later on in the day after field day,” so an alternative plan did not cross their mind. They had no plan of what they were going to do if the field day had to be moved inside because of the weather. Amelia felt lucky for her relay race station because, “it was easy to adjust from outside to inside so the rain was not a huge deal for [her] group,” but seeing how stressful her peers were from the, “unfortunate last-minute changes they had to make, a proper back-up plan would be beneficial.” Mason echoed that a contingency plan would have not only saved them from the unnecessary stress but also provided a better field day experience for the homeschoolers:

The groups who had water-based games had to choose a different game in a short amount of time, which is extremely stressful. I feel like a contingency plan could have saved a lot of unwanted stress on everyone. I also feel like if [Eli and Ben]’s group had some better equipment in case we were inside, their game could have been even better.

Lucas wished he and his partner had, “at least discussed what we were going to do in case of rain, because without it, things could get unorganized and become a mess quickly.” As PE teachers, weather is always something they must consider when planning an outdoor unit or, in this case, a field day. It was worth noting that the participants were able to make the connection from hosting an event to teaching in PE. In reaction to this unfortunate turn of events, some participants suggested planning two separate activities, one inside and one outside, while the others thought equipment modification would suffice.

Communication was another skill that many participants learned from this EFE. They valued the time in class to share ideas amongst each other and make group decisions such as game selection, existing equipment allotment, and budgetary items. They listened to each other’s ideas carefully to create suitable activities for the homeschoolers, and they felt everyone was very respectful about

the critics and suggestions. Outside of class, they continued to communicate with each other via phone/video calls, text messages, and in-person meetings. Collectively, open-mindedness, availability and having a unified goal contributed to the success of the field day. The following data extracts illustrate these key elements:

Everyone was open to ideas. I mean actually open to them, not just listening and doing them your own way. I used to struggle with that, but I understand that some people are after the same feeling of accomplishment that I'm after, so I can afford to put my pride aside and have some leeway when it comes to something like this. (Lucas)

I almost always have my phone on me, so I'm just a call or text away, and that helps a ton. My partner was pretty good about this too, and we got things situated pretty quickly, given the fact we didn't have too much time to get things done in class. (Eli)

We are very communicative with one another, and we both want to succeed. We work very hard and hold each other accountable, constantly checking in to make sure we are getting our work done because we want the kids to have the best experience at our field day. (Grace)

The importance of communication was extended to verbal and nonverbal delivery during the event. They noticed that, like many of the students they had encountered in public schools, the homeschoolers did not want to listen and had a short attention spans, so they learned to go through the rules quickly and just let them play. Some of them also found it useful to, "cut down the talking time and just show them how to play because [they] can always stop the game and repeat the rules" (Sophia). The nonverbal communication also covered their enthusiasm and encouragement toward the homeschoolers' performance during gameplay. Michael noted, "it does not matter if you think the activity is boring. The kids will love it as long as you are excited and cheering for them."

Adaptability is the third pedagogical skill they acquired. In addition to the last-minute game modifications and replacements caused by change of location, the participants became more competent in making the activity more age/skill appropriate while keeping most homeschoolers engaged during the 10 minutes. This task was particularly challenging with the PKM groups because they were not familiar with young children's locomotor development. Amelia reflected, "it is impossible to get the younger students to do any sort of organized game so realistically we should have a separate activity for them." In congruence with Amelia's point of view, Jayden noticed the parents were essentially the ones who were playing their rubber duck game and, "should just not include them [i.e., PKM children] in the field day." Regardless, it was their attempt to, "modify our game on the fly" (Jayden) that demonstrated their acquisition in the skill of adaptability. The following data passages illustrate their attempts catered to the young children and in general:

They were supposed to pick up two ducks, look at the numbers on the bottom. If they match, they keep the ducks and run back. If they don't match, they put them down and run back. They [i.e., PKM children] would have struggled with it, so we switched the basis to matching 2 ducks with the same color. It was not something that we thought about until they arrived at our station. (Owen)

When we saw them getting bored with throwing and catching, we told them to put a spin on it [i.e., throwing] or try to catch it [i.e., rubber chicken, fish or pig] behind their back or under their legs... We also used the squeaky chicken as a baton for relay race when they got tired of the [original] game. (Michael)

### **RQ #3: How did this particular EFE shape them as future professionals in PE?**

#### *Value of Organized Field Day*

According to the participants, field day was a day to celebrate the end of the school year, a break from learning, and a fun time to play

games and eat snacks that they did not get to play or eat on a regular basis. After planning and implementing one themselves, the participants believed that a structured field day with organized games could be beneficial for elementary school students' physical and social well-beings as it promoted physical activity, teamwork, cooperation, and good sportsmanship through fun and friendly competition. Now standing on the other side and walking in the shoes of their elementary school teachers, several participants realized that it was not easy to run a field day like the ones they had experienced before, but they were confident to accomplish the mission when an opportunity presents itself in the future:

This experience is beneficial to me because I was able to see how a field day was really run. I was able to see the planning side of things. I learned to plan months ahead, get help from others... This is a great first-time field day for me, and I plan on using everything that I learned in my future field day at my school. (Liam)

Participating in this field day is super helpful for me because I will be running my own field day someday. I've learned how to set up and organize games and activities, talk to people, and solve problems on the fly. Plus, when things don't go as planned (which happens a lot!), I've had to be flexible and come up with solutions on the spot. (Ben)

This EFE gave the four participants who did not experience organized field days another layer of realization. Instead of telling his future students to, "bring stuff from home to play on a free day," Michael now knew, "how to set up different games and activities, how much time to spend at each station, and how to rotate from station to station." Moreover, not knowing field days were more than free play, fun snacks, and getting sprayed by a fire hose, this experience gave Amelia, "a real inside look at how planning needs to happen for [her] future students to have a safe and active field day." Same as Michael and Amelia, this EFE had changed Lucas' view about field day, "This is very different from the free-for-all recess that I experienced as a kid. I value the organization and competitiveness of a field day over what I was used to." The experience was especially meaningful for

Braelyn because, unlike her peers who were only in charge of one physical activity station, she ran this event in the leadership position:

I am a natural leader and being our field day coordinator proved that. I enjoyed planning, setting up, and instructing my classmates on what to do during the field day... I look forward to doing it for my students in the future. I will find cost-efficient ways to play fun games and get everyone involved.

## **Profound Perspectives**

Most participants realized that it must take a village to run a field day because it was a time-consuming mission that required a substantial amount of financial and personnel support. They had no idea how much time, effort, and resources that were poured into the planning and organization in order for a fun and safe field day to occur. Jayden recalled, “as a small child I didn’t know the logistics involved in making an event run smoothly. Now I understand how many people, how much time, effort, and money that goes into a field day especially at a large school.” Owen seconded Jayden’s opinion, saying, “There’s a number of things that they have to consider whenever planning the field day and that is something that can easily be looked past if you are not a teacher.” The following data extracts highlight the needs for financial and personnel support:

Planning a field day takes a lot because if you want to have prizes, you have to budget for that. To have inflatables, you’ll need money for the rental and they aren’t cheap... If you want to provide snacks for the students, you need to go back into budgeting again. (Grace)

I will have to rely on a lot of co-workers’ help because it is definitely not a one-teacher job, so getting all staff members on board is critical to having a successful field day... A lot of these classroom teachers see their students every day so they also have a good knowledge of what would work best for their students. (Amelia)

The participants expressed much higher respect for their elementary PE teachers. They now understood their teacher's hard work to make their field days memorable and believed that the teachers who planned and coordinated field days like how they did for the homeschoolers deserved all the recognition for the long planning hours and thoughtfulness they put into it. By comparing to his high school PE teacher who, "never did anything except for rolling out the basketballs and having us run the mile in the first week of school," Mason claimed, "my respect for them has increased drastically. In elementary school, I never thought about what my teachers had to do for field days. Going through the classes to become a PE teacher myself, I'm inspired to be like them." Sophia recognized the field days that some elementary PE teachers put on were on a much larger scale. The smiles on their students' faces must be rewarding enough for them to keep going:

Our field day was only like 60 students, and a lot of teachers had to plan for over 800 students. I can't even imagine the stress had on those teachers, but I understand why they were so proud of the field days they did, because when they planned something that big and that hard and it was a hit for all students, it must make them feel so proud to be a physical educator. (Sophia)

## Discussion

Collectively, this EFE was a meaningful experience for the 13 participants. First, their past field day experience helped them create games involving water and competition because they were what made their elementary school years memorable, at least to the nine participants who had structured field days growing up. Through game design and modification, the participants were able to plan a variety of equipment, rules, and challenges to keep all homeschoolers at their stations occupied for 10 minutes. During the planning stage, the participants demonstrated effective communication skills both in and out of the classroom. They were also respectful during the discussion of budgetary items and open-minded about sharing ideas, critiques, and suggestions.

If the weather had held up, they would not have learned the importance of a contingency plan. Many participants had no back-up plan in case of rain; hence, the change of event location at an hour's notice caused some unwanted stress on them. However, it served as a teachable moment for them to acquire the pedagogical skills of planning and adaptability. To their own surprise, they showed impressive last-minute adjustments to the game design upon learning water was forbidden inside the recreation center. They were able to change the rules "on the fly" based on the age or skill level of the homeschoolers. It was also during this implementation stage that the participants gained another opportunity to practice their verbal and nonverbal communication skills with the homeschoolers.

After all, this EFE had prepared the participants to plan fun and safe activities, set up and rotate stations, organize staff members for different tasks, budget necessary equipment and supplies, and deal with other event logistics. It had changed or emphasized their perspectives about an organized field day. Feeling competent to lead one field day upon becoming an elementary PE teacher, this experience was especially valuable for the four participants who had a free day of doing whatever they wanted outside as a field day. Furthermore, realizing all the time, effort, and resources required to put on a successful field day, they now had a much higher respect for elementary PE teachers. Speaking from their own experience, these teachers deserved much more praise than students had given them. In return, the participants were inspired to put on a field day in the future and felt proud of being a physical educator.

## **Conclusion**

This study showed that, in addition to observing and teaching PE classes at a school site, planning and implementing a field day could be a beneficial and meaningful EFE for PTs enrolled in an elementary methods course. In this case, a group of homeschoolers were brought to the university campus, and the class had complete control over how the event was to be run. On top of the elements discussed in this research, PETE faculty members who are interested in incorporating such EFE may consider the following recommendations. The first was to have the class start the planning process earlier than five weeks. The more time for them to hash things out, the better

the event will turn out. The second was to seek interdepartmental collaboration, especially when the students attending the field day were outside of the PT's certification grade level. In this case, the PETE faculty could have invited the CFS faculty and students to officially join the planning and implementation phases. The third was to expand the field day to all homeschoolers in the community. This could be a difficult task to tackle, compared to the first two, but including more homeschoolers in the surrounding area would give the PTs several students similar to that at a typical elementary school.

This research was limited to the data collected from 13 PTs from a PETE program in the mid-eastern region of the country. The generalization of findings presented in this study should be drawn cautiously. Replication studies from different regions of the country would help create a clear trend on the value of using field day as an EFE. Besides, data collection tools were limited to two forms of written documentation from the participants. Other qualitative (e.g., formal interviews, informal discussions) or quantitative (e.g., value inventory survey, best practice questionnaire) methods may be able to provide richer data from the participants' perspectives. Data collected from other stakeholders could be collected also, for the comparison between the two or amongst multiple disciplines.

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