The purpose of this study was to examine teachers’ social and emotional knowledge of students and how it functioned within the wider context of their daily work lives. Five elementary school physical education teachers participated in six rounds of observations with formal and informal interviews over one school year. Data were analyzed through constant comparison and inductive analysis. We identified four key junctures where social and emotional knowledge of students played a critical role in teachers’ work. The results of this study and previous literature point to the complex interconnections between teachers’ social and emotional knowledge of their students and teaching practices.

Keywords: Physical Education, Teacher Knowledge

Many scholars in education have explored the relationship between teachers’ knowledge and effective teaching, suggesting that expert teachers possess considerable and diverse knowledge and skill (Grossman, 1990; Rovegno, 2003). As McCaughtry (2004, 2005) contends, however, research into the knowledge that enables effective teaching has disproportionately focused on how teachers understand content, curriculum and pedagogy, and less so on what effective teachers know about students, unless that inquiry has been focused on teachers’ understanding of children’s motor development, prior knowledge, common learning patterns and errors, and learning styles (e.g., Marks, 1990). Increasingly scholars are finding that the social and emotional knowledge good teachers possess of their students does not exist separate from thinking and decisions about their teaching, rather, it is an integral part of their work (Hollingsworth, Dybdahl, & Minarik, 1993; Rosiek, 2003; Tirri & Husu, 2002; Webb & Blond, 1995).

By social and emotional knowledge, we are referring to all the knowledge a teacher may accumulate of their students as it pertains to their engagement within the school environment, and includes three interconnected parts. The first part concerns teachers’ interpersonal relationships and knowledge of individual students’ personal characteristics, such as their dispositions, temperaments, tastes, and (dis)abilities. This knowledge is crucial for teachers when they attempt to enter into relationships of ‘care’ with their students (Noddings, 2005). According to Noddings...
caring is a reciprocal relationship, and the amount and accuracy of the social and emotional knowledge teachers’ possess of their individual students will decrease the likelihood that their efforts to enter into caring relationships will be rejected. The second part of teachers’ social and emotional knowledge is their understanding of students’ peer relations, such as which students are ‘leaders’ and ‘followers’, which ones get along or dislike one other, who likes to dominate social settings, which students are members of particular peer groups, and how those groups interact with one another. It is important for teachers to understand these dynamics, as their students’ social interactions will likely influence the larger class ecology and other aspects of their work (deMarrais & LeCompte, 1999; McCaughtry, Tischler, & Flory, 2008). Third, teachers’ social and emotional knowledge of students includes seeking to understand the influence of wider sociocultural spaces, such as students’ embodied sense of race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, family life, physical (dis)ability, and religion. This sample of emotionally mediated social domains will inevitably have a bearing on students’ experiences in school physical education, and as such, must be discussed together (Evans & Davies, 2006; Shilling, 2005). Teachers who use this knowledge in their teaching affirm their students’ embodied identities and increase the likelihood they will successfully learn in ways that are culturally relevant (Flory & McCaughtry, in press; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

In physical education, work by McCaughtry (2004, 2005) and his colleagues (McCaughtry, Barnard, Martin, Shen, & Kulina, 2006a; McCaughtry, Martin, Kulina, & Cothran, 2006b) represents an important line of inquiry into physical education teachers’ social and emotional knowledge of students and their complex connections to teaching. Using sociology of emotion and Deweyan frameworks, this line of inquiry has cast light on the complex dynamics that teachers face in understanding and relating to students and crafting effective pedagogy. McCaughtry (2005), for example, presented one teacher’s knowledge of her students’ demoralizing home lives and experiences within the context of social and popular culture. The teacher’s social and emotional knowledge of her students impacted her selection of content and pedagogies to “create a different class ethos” that met students’ “combative relationships head-on,” as she created an ecology of caring, compassion, and cooperation (p. 384).

Collectively, research into teachers’ social and emotional knowledge has predominately focused on two areas. One, ‘what’ (content) good teachers know about students’ social and emotional lives. And two, ‘how’ (process) that knowledge affects teachers’ thinking and decisions about pedagogy. This work, while important, may not fully explain the complex role that social and emotional knowledge plays in the whole of teachers’ work.

Hargreaves suggests that teaching is an emotional practice (1998; Day & Leitch, 2001), and that we need look at social and emotional dimensions as they permeate the entirety of teachers’ work. Research on teachers’ work lives provides us with a variety of perspectives on how larger social contexts (school and other) influence this experience, and impact the development of personal and professional identities (Day, Stobart, Sammons, & Kington, 2006; Flores & Day, 2006; Gu & Day, 2007). Specifically, this literature points to teacher-student relationships serving as an important “emotional filter” (Hargreaves, 1998; McCaughtry, 2004) that can positively impact their professional identity (Flores & Day, 2006), and can help bolster resilience against undesirable features of teaching and the larger school context (Gu & Day, 2007). Previous research in physical education on teachers’
work lives has often done so with an eye on the larger educational/institutional context, and often reveals teachers experiencing an occupational socialization littered with perceived constraints (Lawson, 1989; Stroot, Collier, O'Sullivan, & England, 1994); leaving some teachers treated less like professionals and more like proletariat (Macdonald, 1995). Furthermore, given the present discourse concerning ‘obesity’ and increasing physical activity, there are those who conceive it as the physical education teacher’s work to teach in spaces and during times outside of traditional PE (i.e., recess, after school, lunch time, at home, etc.) (Wright & Harwood, 2009[AUQ1]).

While this literature makes clear the social and emotional nature of teachers work and the role students play, unlike McCaughtry’s work (2004, 2005), it doesn’t offer any perspective on the social and emotional knowledge of students that is acquired or how it is specifically used in teaching. In addition, none of this work shows ‘how’ or ‘where’ the processes of acquiring this information and its application take place.

To develop a wider understanding of how this social and emotional knowledge functions more broadly in teachers’ practice we may need to approach the issue by blending an idiosyncratic perspective, like those provided by McCaughtry (2004, 2005) and his colleagues (McCaughtry, et al., 2006a; McCaughtry et al., 2006b), with a broader perspective, like those provided by Hargreaves (1998), Day and their colleagues (Day & Leitch, 2001; Day et al., 2006; Flores & Day, 2006; Gu & Day, 2007). Still, this blending might not be enough to get a significant sense of how this knowledge functions in teachers’ daily work. Just as Clandinn and Connelly (1986) were able to identify ten interconnected rhythmic cycles (annual, holiday, monthly, weekly, 6-day, duty, day, teacher, report, and with-in class) in their work with Stephanie, we might be served well by approaching the issue temporally as well as contextually. This way, if a systematicity, or rhythm, exists in how the teachers’ social and emotional knowledge of students is integrated into their disciplinary teaching, we will be able to identify this process more readily.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine physical education teachers’ social and emotional knowledge of their students and how it functioned within the wider context of their work lives. First, we wanted to know the key geographic locations and times within teachers’ workdays where social and emotional issues were at the forefront. Second, we wanted to learn how these varying moments and spaces flowed from and to one another as teachers’ school days unfolded.

Methods

Participants and Context
This study used interpretive theory and methods to examine five elementary physical education teachers’ social and emotional knowledge of their students. (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). We purposefully recruited these teachers because they were widely considered quality teachers, as evidenced by state level teacher of the year awards, high praise from school administrators, and our observations of their teaching. Four of the five teachers were graduates from the same teacher education program as the first and third authors. The first author, however, did not know them before the study. We secured their informed consent along with permission from their principals, the school district, and the University IRB board.
The teachers (three men and two women) ranged in teaching experience (15–28 years, $M = 24$, $SD = 4$) and ethnic backgrounds (3 Caucasian, 2 Hispanic/American). Four had Master’s degrees in physical education or a related area, and had class sizes between 20–27 students ($M = 25$, $SD = 1.2$). About fifty percent of the students who John and Mary taught reported Hispanic ethnicities, while Ruth, Tom and Dan reported between 16–25%. Four teachers attended the same Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE) program, and all five reported that the Dynamic Physical Education for Elementary School Children curriculum (Pangrazi, 2007) heavily influenced their teaching. Each teacher taught between five and eight 30 min lessons each day, saw each class two times per week, had planning periods throughout the week, and had a variety of nonteaching duties. The teachers’ gymnasia walls had signs and bulletin boards promoting PE and their curriculum. Weekly activities were posted, sometimes by developmental level. Four gyms had a climbing wall, tile floor, and were well equipped. A fifth gym was its own separate building, was considerably larger, carpeted, not used for lunch, and well equipped.

John is a Hispanic American male and as the school’s head teacher, sometimes assumed the role of school administrator when administrators were not present. This role, along with his teaching responsibilities, required John to be involved with “numerous police visits” regarding students’ home lives, which he attributed to the socioeconomics of his school’s diverse population.

Dan, also a Hispanic American, was his school’s chair-person of the master schedule for art, music, and physical education. Dan was also a member of the school climate committee, overseeing life skill education focused on teaching students “appropriate behavior…cooperation and teamwork, respect, responsibility.” He was also a district mentor for newer teachers.

Tom is a Caucasian male and was very active in his school by organizing the lunch time intramural sport program, a fall fun run, and physical education demonstration nights. Even though 25% of his students were Hispanic American, he reported that there were few students who do not understand and speak English.

Ruth is a Caucasian female who teaches in a high socioeconomic status (SES) school with plenty of community resources and parental support. She has been influential in her school by organizing and developing the structured recess program, after-school golf and tennis, and Fall and Spring fun-runs.

Mary, a Caucasian female, is a member of the Career Ladder Advisory committee, Project Adventure committee, and her district’s Crisis Response Team. She was also very involved in professional organizations and her local Parent Teacher Organization (PTO). While about half of Mary’s students are Hispanic-American, she notes that most of her students speak English.

Data Collection
We collected data over an eight month span as nonparticipant observers (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993) with each teacher on six occasions ($N = 30$ research visits). The first author completed all the data collection. All three authors completed data analysis and trustworthiness techniques together. This process was focused on our coming to understand some of the ways teachers knew their students socially and emotionally and how this knowledge permeated their work. Each research visit lasted between three and half and five hours, with the total time spent with all the teachers combined equaling 112 hr. Each visit included the following elements and
procedures. One, before each visit, and guided by our research questions, we
constructed observation and semistructured interview guides (Patton, 2002). Two,
field notes were taken during the observation of at least three 30 min lessons, a
planning period or lunch, and two sets of duties, either before, during or after school.
Three, field notes were taken during the informal conversations that took place
throughout each visit (e.g., between classes or during duties, lunch, planning
periods). Four, we collected any pertinent documents such as lesson plans,
newsletters, etc. Five, after all observations and informal conversations, a formal
open-ended interview was conducted using the semistructured interview guide
(Patton, 2002), digitally recorded, and ranged from 30 to 90 min. We spent one
month completing each round of data collection and a couple of weeks in between
for analysis and preparation for subsequent visits. Subsequent rounds of research
visits did not begin until previous rounds were completed with all teachers.

Data Analysis
Data were analyzed using constant comparison (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). After
each data collection session, all field notes and all formal interviews were
transcribed. Next, we read the data several times to gain familiarity. Then, the first
author performed the initial coding of each segment of data according to its narrative
content, with the second and third authors reviewing the analysis. Each excerpt of
coded data were merged into a category with other similarly coded data or a new
category was created if the code had emerged for the first time. As we sectioned
similarly coded data into coherent categories, overarching themes were gradually
developed that explained important ways the teachers’ social and emotional
knowledge of students functioned during their school days. These themes were
checked within each teacher’s data set and also across teachers to compare for
similarities and differences. Data analyses occurred throughout collection, in
particular between each round of school visits (LeCompte & Pressile, 1993). Finally,
based on what we learned relative to our research questions, we constructed
semistructured interview guides for the next round of data collection. This process
was followed six times over the eight-month study.

We sought trustworthiness in several ways. We triangulated findings across
and within multiple participants, as well as across multiple data sources
(observations, field notes, pertinent documents, and informal conversations). We
conducted three forms of member checks. First, transcribed interviews were sent to
the participants for verification of accuracy. Second, we included member checking
questions into interview guides used in later rounds of data collection. Third, after
the study was concluded, we sent the participants our final interpretations and
conducted a member checking interview to (dis)confirm our findings. A peer
debriefee with expertise in qualitative methodology and sociological theory was
consulted regularly. A researcher journal aided us in being reflexive, conscious, and
as open as possible to listening for and identifying the diverse and complex ways
that the teachers demonstrated their social and emotional knowledge of students.
Last, we conducted negative case analyses to identify data that would disconfirm our
interpretations.
Findings

The Rhythm and Junctures of Social and Emotional Pedagogy
While the teachers in this study readily voiced the importance of knowing the physical dimensions of their students, our foremost finding was these teachers’ work was informed by a rich and sophisticated social and emotional understanding of their students. As the teachers described their work as an ever-evolving process of reflecting, planning, reading emotional tenor, teaching, and building relationships beyond the classroom, we were able to identify four key junctures where social and emotional knowledge dimensions played critical roles. These included: (1) social and emotional preparation, (2) acquiring an emotional pulse, (3) maintaining an emotional pulse, and (4) extending social and emotional pedagogy. We found that social and emotional pedagogy is not a core set of things a teacher knows or is able to do; rather, it describes a way in which they operate and function within the rhythms of their work.

Juncture 1: Social and Emotional Preparation
Long before students enter the gym these teachers spent considerable time reflecting on a wealth of knowledge as they prepared lessons. They discussed planning in a host of different locations and times, such as, in their offices, at home, in the teacher break room, and in their cars driving to and from school. When we observed teachers working during their planning periods we noticed a much more relaxed, yet focused, demeanor. They were able to sit down, talk with us in much slower, quieter, and conversational voices, and focus almost solely on planning. As we discussed these planning efforts, knowledge of students’ physical development was clearly present. They considered students’ skill levels, content knowledge, prior activity experiences, and activity limitations. For example, John discussed, “it’s important to know where students are at physically and developmentally…with their skills and abilities…this helps me prepare for students who may need more individual instruction.” Likewise, Mary talked about a boy who had Marfans Syndrome, “he is not allowed to raise his hands above his head for any extended period of time, so I have to remember that when I plan lessons for his class.”

Beyond physical development, however, these teachers also reflected on a host of social and emotional issues as they planned lessons. From their perspectives, social factors such as physical activity opportunities outside of school, community demographics and values, immigration status, languages spoken, family lives, and religious affiliations mediated students’ emotional connections and engagement in physical education and warranted attention during planning. For instance, John and Ruth considered the wide wealth disparities among their students’ home communities as a result of integrated bussing with their planning. John said,

I have students living in million dollar homes and students that live in government subsidized housing. . . those kids who live in mansions have personal trainers, coaches and experiences that the other kids don’t have. . . so it’s important to plan lessons in a way that motivates and challenges those who have a lot of experience with something and those who haven’t.

Similarly, all the teachers felt it was crucial to integrate some activities that every student’s home communities valued. For example, Tom and Mary included a lot of traditional team sports in their curriculum to reflect community values. Tom
said, “this is a sport oriented community and when developing curriculum I think it’s important to acknowledge what parents and students value.” Dan often reflected on his school’s seasonal migrant families from Mexico and “their love for soccer” and planned to teach it when he expected them to be in school to acknowledge their cultural connection to that activity. Similarly, Ruth considered the emotion of fear when designing a series of track and field lessons.

In the past students have expressed to me a fear of jumping over the high jump bar. So instead, we use a rope that is diagonal for those who want to jump low and those who want to jump higher. . . when we do the hurdles I’ve had students who are afraid they will fall and trip over them, so I create clear lanes and give students the choice to run and jump along the side or over the hurdles.

Language dynamics was another dimension that influenced teachers’ reflection during lesson planning. For example, Ruth was in the midst of altering her teaching signs so that one side was in English and the other in Spanish. John also mentioned, “About 80 to 85 percent of what I teach I can teach by showing them… I always plan to have the kids demonstrate more, I’ll demonstrate extra myself, or plan to have any bilingual students help explain things.” In some lessons, abstract concepts sometimes had to be “watered down,” “because it’s hard for them to understand strategies and complicated rules, they can visually see what you want them to do, but when you try and play the game that the strategy involved it makes it a little bit harder.”

Another social factor considered was students’ religious affiliations. For example, Mary discussed, “Around holidays I used to teach little holiday related games but don’t anymore. Times have changed and I’m very careful that no students feel alienated or left out.” Some teachers who had students fasting for Ramadan (John, Ruth, Dan) planned light activities or had students “sit and observe,” out of concern for their health.

Other issues such as parents’ marital status, lifestyle dynamics, incarceration, child-parent/step parent relationships, informed teachers’ general awareness when preparing to teach. Ruth said, “When I’m planning there are certain things I need to remember and those things can determine if a class goes smooth or not.” She said,

One boy has been hard to teach all year. . . and two weeks ago the teacher shared with us that he is with one parent one week and the other the next. When he’s with one of the parents he’s kind of discombobulated and when he’s with the other he’s much better behaved and his hair is always perfectly combed. And now after all of these weeks I realized it’s the family life he has inside the home.

Mary provided another poignant example,

One boy has a dad in prison and his older 6th grade brother was recently sent to a juvenile facility. In addition, his mom now has a different lifestyle and her girlfriend lives with his mom, sister, and himself. One day in PE class, he just all of a sudden burst into uncontrollable tears and went and sat on the side.

Mary further explained that reflecting on these types of student issues and having them “on the forefront of your mind” when she plans and goes into lessons helps her proactively prepare to deal with issues that could arise. Collectively, this first juncture demonstrates when planning lessons these teachers thought about physical dimensions of student development right along-side social and emotional dimensions.
Juncture 2: Acquiring an Emotional Pulse

The second juncture in the teachers’ social and emotional pedagogy involved acquiring an emotional pulse during the first few minutes of a class’s arrival. They argued that what they did and did not do in these first few minutes was absolutely crucial to determining a lesson’s success. Here, their foremost focus was not content, but instead quickly reading the emotional and social tenor of students’ attitudes and dispositions. We observed the teachers employing various strategies to acquire this initial pulse, such as standing by the door, waiting out in the hallway facing the direction students would come from, talking with the classroom teacher briefly, and standing back to watch students initial movements Dan discussed,

. . . as they come down the hall and enter I’m looking to get a feel for what the class looks like. . . Are they excited, are they chatty, are they touching each other, are they dragging in, what do kids who are tougher to teach look like, those students that you have a history of correcting, what do they look like? . . . You’re listening for what the teacher is saying. Is she saying things like “thank you for coming down the hallway quietly,” or “this is the third time we’ve had to stop and talk about this,” so you pick up on those things.

During this juncture the teachers demonstrated a remarkable ability to quickly and repeatedly glean information from students by simultaneously observing and conversing with the classroom teacher, the whole class, various groups of students, and individual students. We witnessed them quickly moving around the room, using students’ names, giving high fives, saying quick hellos, smiling at students, and having quick informal conversations with students who appeared to be sad, off task, or “a little off” all while continuously moving their eyes around the class. Tom demonstrated and discussed this process as keeping a “global perspective,” or having “with-it-ness” (John, Ruth, Dan, Mary). This helped the teachers formulate teaching behaviors that “may be a little bit off normal delivery” but were important in “getting students to participate in a positive manner.” Tom explained,

As they come in, you just look at individual kids and the class as a whole. . . you need to keep a global perspective so you can take care of things as they arise, whether it is with an individual, a group of students, or the class as a whole. Keeping this perspective helps me act more quickly to what is going on.

After students entered class, the pulse is refined as teachers make snap judgments about whether to persist with their planned lesson or adjust their teaching. John discussed classes that were “way too high” and had to be brought “back in managerial wise with a lot of quick freezes to focus them.” Conversely, “if classes are down or listless, then you change your strategy. . . You’re more energetic in your presentations and you do a lot of activities to get them stimulated.” Ruth discussed having to deal with a group of girls that had a “ring leader” who tried to convince her friends to not listen to her directions,

I had this girl that for whatever reason did not like me and would try to get other girls to follow her in not listening to directions. . . when that class comes in I keep a close eye on those girls in particular.?”

Mary shared how she dealt with students who embodied emotional extremes,
I try and pull that student to the side and talk with them about what is going on. I ask them what is bothering them, or what they are so excited about. Then depending on what they say I try and give them a positive in to the class by matching them to an appropriate activity, or partner or group to work with... whatever I can do to help that student find a measure of success.

In this juncture the teachers demonstrated the ability to acquire the social and emotional pulse of each class during a very intense transition bounded in a short span of time. The importance of this pulse was evidenced by the energy and attention given to its acquirement.

**Juncture 3: Maintaining an Emotional Pulse**

As classes settled in, all the teachers described a unique switch from acquiring the emotional pulse to maintaining it so they could focus more on teaching the content of their lessons. John discussed, “after you get an immediate sense of the class it is much easier to start really teaching what you have planned.” Tom also shared, “soon after those first few minutes I usually have things where I would like them and can get into the heart of the lesson’s activities.”

Despite shifting their primary attention to teaching the content of their lessons, the teachers were still very much connected to the pulse of the class and continued to quickly move around the room and provide feedback, direction, and counsel to students. They would ask themselves: Are all students being successful? Who is struggling and getting frustrated? Who is bored? Do they understand me? Are any students bullying others? Are any students distracted or off-task? The teachers’ awareness of the social and emotional pulse sometimes signaled a need to intervene. For example, Ruth shared how the emotional instability of a student led her to alter that students’ engagement, “I had to let her work with just one scarf, and then two while I was working with three scarves with everyone else, because that is all she could handle without breaking down.”

The teachers often found that students’ engagement with lessons hinged on social group dynamics within classes. For example, when it came to grouping students, Tom explained,

I don’t have a problem with students working with their friends in partners and groups, but you have to be careful that those kids not everyone likes or are less popular don’t get ostracized socially and from the lesson’s activities. In those cases you have to find ways to maintain the lesson, address the issue and not point it out further all at the same time.

Language posed another consideration in grouping students. Here, teachers might “look to pair a bilingual student with a student whose primary language was not English” (Dan) so they could translate directions to that student. In addition, we observed that teachers would use more self and student demonstration when classes contained multiple students beginning to learn English.

Racial segregation sometimes played an equally pivotal role in lessons. For example, Dan explained how his students who migrated from Mexico immediately segregated themselves from the other students when given the chance which hindered class dynamics,

It’s funny because they love it [soccer] so much and are really good at it, but specifically they really love playing with each other... I have to be careful that
they don’t fully remove themselves from the larger class by partnering and grouping only with each other because they are more likely to do their own thing. . . it can be challenging to provide them with tasks that challenge them and yet are similar to what everyone else is doing.

Similar to how cultural and ethnic dynamics require sensitive consideration, religious affiliations and customs can provide a unique wrinkle to the emotional tenor of a class. Ruth discussed when teaching floor hockey how she addressed some of her students’ yearning to participate despite fasting for Ramadan,

These girls were saying “no we want to play” and I had to call their parents to make sure it was ok that they play. It was indoors and I was really careful with them because they wanted to play, but I only let them play every second or third rotation because they could not drink [water].

This pedagogical juncture suggests that even when the movement content of a lesson moves to the forefront of teachers’ attention, social and emotional considerations do not cease; rather, they become a background for interpreting what goes on during the remainder of the lesson. Teachers remain acutely aware of an array of social and emotional dimensions at whole-class, peer-subgroup, and individual student levels.

**Juncture 4: Extending Social and Emotional Pedagogy**

These teachers’ social and emotional pedagogy included a juncture that extended beyond the gym and had two parts. First, they were always seeking more information about students’ cultural, social, and emotional lives to reinvest into their teaching. Second, they made many concerted efforts to connect with students and families outside their classes to build interpersonal connections and extend PE instruction.

**Social and emotional learning.**

From our time in the field, it became clear that the teachers were always mining the school environment for social and emotional information about their students, and did so in a variety of locations and ways. We observed all the teachers and discussed their seeking interactions with students outside PE, such as, on the playground, in the halls, and during various duties (hallway, playground, recess, lunch, bus). A couple of teachers also discussed talking with students about their peers in an effort to better understand specific situations (Ruth, John, Mary). Teachers also described connecting with students outside of the regular school day, at extracurricular activities (Mary, Tom, Ruth, Dan, John), physical activity events outside of school (Tom, Ruth), physical education demonstration nights (Mary, Tom, Ruth, Dan, John) district presentations of familial demographics (Dan), crossing paths in the community (Mary, Ruth, John), and attending students’ first communions (Ruth). From these observations and discussions it was clear to us that students were the most significant sources of information about both themselves and their fellow peers.

The teachers also discussed learning about students from classroom teachers, resource teachers, the school nurse, administration, school counselor, school psychologist, cafeteria workers, and secretaries. Of these, the most valuable source of information was most often the classroom teachers. John argued, “next to the parent, they [the classroom teacher] can probably tell you more about that child than
anybody, so the classroom teacher is a fantastic resource for us.” Furthermore, a
couple of the teachers (Dan, Mary) discussed keeping their “ears perked” when
moving through staff rooms, the front office, hallways, and various school offices in
case something pertinent regarding a student or students(s) was being discussed..

Parents proved to be yet another valuable source of information for these
teachers, particularly, at functions like “family fitness nights” and PTO events.
Better yet, teachers would seek out interactions with parents at these nonacademic
school functions as they allowed for more casual and free flowing conversations.
These conversations, coupled with observations of the social dynamics between
parents and their children, often provided “insight” into classroom events.

Extending the PE curriculum.
More than seeking out information, these teachers actively searched for and
developed ways to bridge activities into students’ lives outside PE, especially when
it involved connecting with families and communities. Some of these efforts
included sending home newsletters (Tom, Dan, Ruth, Mary), positive phone calls
(Mary, John), being available for conferences and appointments (Dan, John, Mary),
organizing community 5K fun runs (Tom, Ruth, John), PE homework (Ruth), field
days (Dan, John, Ruth, Mary, Tom), a recess walking/jogging/running program
(where parents were invited to participate; Mary), and by hosting PE demonstration
nights (John, Dan, Tom). Tom discussed his PE demonstration as, “an opportunity to
showcase for parents what we consider a quality program and it’s a good opportunity
to show the parents how this program is different than the one they may have
experienced as children.”
Tom acknowledged that living in a sports oriented community led him to
create a lunch-time sports program that included softball, soccer and basketball.
Ruth was also in the process of developing a recess program that included “activity
zones” filled with activities for students she identified as “not interested in sports.”
Dan, discussing the wide span of his school’s boundaries and the economic
hardships some families faced, shared how he helped organize a bus to bring parents
and children to and from school for special events as a way to make them feel like,
you know, it’s their school too.” In another matter related to economics, the first
time we visited John we saw about 30 backpacks in his equipment room. When we
asked him about them, he said,

Well I took a look at our students and as I mentioned before some live in
mansions and some live in government subsidized housing. There are families
that are just so busy and have so many things going on. So I tried to think of a
way to get those kids that don’t have a lot of resources to be more active at
home, and to be active with their parents. So I thought of sending home
backpacks with equipment and games and information, and so I wrote a grant
and got it!

These teachers also shared stories of how sensitive knowledge of students’
lives and emotions informed efforts to reach out to those children. To reach out to
his “Cinderella girl,” Dan created a small card to take home and hang up reminding
her to wear appropriate shoes on the day she has PE. John shared a very similar
effort to reach out to a student who had lost a parent. Ruth shared a story about a
student who often appeared sad and disengaged. In an effort to “show students I care
about their academics” Ruth decided to serve as a judge in a school poetry contest.
After reading his poem, Ruth learned this boy was, “a dark and sad young man.” After this realization Ruth decided to tell him that she “read his poem and that [she] liked it. Ever since then he has been a little more engaged and responds to me much better, not perfect, but better.”

Through our observations and discussions of these efforts it was clear that these efforts took place in a wide variety of spaces, and had a more communal and interpersonal feel. From our observations and conversations, we felt the teachers had more time to play, experiment, and develop their efforts to acquire information and extend their teaching, as opposed to being bounded by calendars, clocks, and the gym walls. The larger point is that pedagogy for these teachers did not end at the gym walls; rather, they were always looking to learn more about their students and their families. Whether the intent is to extend their PE instruction outside the gym, or to simply learn more about students’ lives to enhance their wealth of social and emotional knowledge, these teachers were committed to enacting a contextually driven and wide-spread pedagogy.

Discussion

Consistent with the literature (Day & Leitch, 2006; Hargreaves, 1998; Hollingsworth, Dybdahl, & Minarik, 1993 McCAughtry, 2004, 2005; McCAughtry et al., 2006a, 2006b; Rosiek, 2003; Tirri & Husu, 2002; Webb & Blond, 1995), the teachers in this study demonstrated that social and emotional knowledge of students played a crucial role in their pedagogy. The findings from this study, however, offer some new insights into exactly how this knowledge functions during physical education teachers’ daily work.

The Process of Social and Emotional Pedagogy

The findings of this study provide us with a more nuanced understanding of how social and emotional pedagogy takes place. Similar to McCaughtry (2004, 2005), we found teachers who were in tune with, and reflected on, their students’ emotions and social positionalities throughout their planning and instructional practices. We also found, however, a process that took place at various times and in multiple locations, or junctures, with each juncture signaling a need to shift how social and emotional knowledge functioned, that is, how it was filtered (Hargreaves, 1998; McCaughtry et al., 2006). We hold the view that teachers can move between junctures in a linear manner as well as in various and unpredictable ways. (See Figure 1.) For instance, (as discussed below) our teachers spent much of their day moving back and forth between junctures two and three.

The knowledge in juncture one served as a reflective filter as teachers planned and prepared content and curriculum (McCaughtry, 2004, 2005). We find it prudent to point out that three interrelated yet distinct elements of social and emotional knowledge (students’ religion, immigration status, and language spoke) were considered and accommodated in ways that were not judgmental, at least not in any overt way we witnessed. We point out these instances as examples where potentially divisive political topics were processed in ways that, as much as possible, resulted in the teachers planning to accommodate the students for whom these social and emotional elements were salient (Flory & McCaughtry, in press).
In juncture two, the initial actions of students are filtered through the teachers’ store of social and emotional knowledge during a time that saw a significant increase in intensity. With a limited amount of time, these teachers felt it was crucial to gain an immediate pulse of the class before they could move forward with their lessons. Very quickly, these teachers sought to connect their previous stores of social and emotional knowledge with all the new knowledge presently coming from multiple sources, and then to immediately make decisions and enact a course of action. The energy and focus of this juncture points to its importance as a lynchpin for the day’s lesson, that without spending the time and energy in it, success was significantly jeopardized. The benefits of successfully navigating this juncture are significant given teachers’ previous concerns over teaching a “congested” schedule (Macdonald, 1995; Stroot & Whipple, 2003, p.317).

In juncture three, interpretation of student actions continue but the focus is shifted from initial and general actions to how students were engaging with the planned lesson content. During this juncture teachers regularly demonstrated drawing on social and emotional knowledge as they interpreted student behaviors on individual, peer group, and whole class levels. Specifically, the actions and requests of students were not treated as atypical behaviors exhibited by most all students; instead, students’ engagement with each other and the lesson content was filtered through what the teachers knew about them socially and emotionally, and influenced their pedagogy accordingly (Flory & McCaughtry, in press; McCaughtry, 2004, 2005; Noddings, 2005; Webb & Blond, 1995).

In juncture four, social and emotional knowledge serves as a filter when carrying out efforts to extend teaching outside the traditional PE setting. In addition, during juncture four the filter is refined and altered as teachers sought to learn more about their students. This juncture appears to have much in common with Wright’s (2009) discussion of biopedagogy as a way to encompass “multiple pedagogical sites—that is, sites that have the power to teach, to engage ‘learners’ in meaning making practices [about the body and movement]” (p.7). As such, scholars suggest that pedagogical concern of the body and movement cannot be confined to traditional modes of schooling, and must account for any space that looks to teach about corporeality (Wright, 2009). We see the teachers in this study as employing a social and emotional pedagogy that takes much of this to heart, as they did not view their “work” with-in the confines of the traditional PE teaching.

The Spatial and Temporal Aspects of Social and Emotional Pedagogy

The findings provide us with perspective on how the geographic spaces and temporal junctures of teachers’ work, and how the social and emotional knowledge of students prevents repetitive dullness and adds rhythm. During the first juncture of social and emotional pedagogy the teachers’ work is calmer, quieter, and happens in mostly personal spaces (e.g., offices, cars, at home, in the gym setting up) where reflection on prior social and emotional knowledge informs their work of planning. As the teacher and classes transition to the gymnasium, juncture two sees a significant “intensification” of teachers’ work as they have only a few precious minutes to gain the social and emotional pulse of a class that is colored with children moving and embodying an array of emotions, desires, and concerns. Hargreaves (1992) characterizes the “intensification” of work as conditions that remove power and control of planning, fosters dependency on external direction, reduces or eliminates
time during the work day for relaxation or reflection, and sets up the likelihood for chronic and persistent overload (p.88). The intensification of juncture two is highly influenced by the reality that all these teachers taught many thirty minute PE classes day in and day out, and that acquiring an emotional pulse was key to students’ successful class entry and the teachers’ movement to the third juncture.

Moving to juncture three, however, did not allow for time to “relax” into lessons or slow down the pace of instruction, as there was precious little time and lots to teach. Shortly after a class would enter they would soon leave, because another was waiting, which meant little or no time to reflect before a quick return to juncture two. As the teachers in this study were likely to teach anywhere between six and eight classes a day, many back to back, to many different grade levels, we began to see junctures two and three form a repeating rhythm that is full and fast in nature, has rapid and abrupt breaks. As highlighted in Figure 1, we speculated that the toggling between junctures two and three would form a routine that would be emotionally draining and create a sense of boredom as the teachers repeated this day in and day out. While one might view these demands as undesirable (Macdonald, 1995), we were not able to identify any significant signs of burnout or displeasure among these teachers. There has been a hint in the literature to the role that knowledge of, and rapport with, ones students may play in teacher resilience and effectiveness (Gu & Day, 2007). Furthermore, it might be possible that the social and emotional engagement the teachers’ had with their students functioned to “penetrate cyclic repetition” which “with their endless repetition of events would ultimately lead to a dulling of experience” (Clandinn & Connelly, 1986, p.379). To investigate the role that social and emotional knowledge of students plays in physical education teacher resilience and effectiveness might be beneficial.

While this study has much in common with Clandinn and Connelly’s (1986) notion of rhythms in teaching, the contrasts between classroom-based teaching and PE are readily seen with the PE teachers in this study experiencing the repeating and intensity of junctures two and three, teaching a variety of classes at varying developmental levels, and sometimes in multiple locations; compared with classroom teachers, who mostly work in one teaching location, with the same students, for multiple hour stretches, each and every day.

Juncture four carried a distinctly slower rhythm than junctures two and three, and was more social and interpersonal than juncture one. These teachers employed a variety of strategies to learn more about their students, and extend their teaching outside traditional notions of physical education by participating in and attending extracurricular activities, and organizing programs that took place outside the gym, and outside of structured school time. It might be possible that with these teachers expanding their conception of when and where their work took place, there was less emotional stock placed on the “successes” and “failures” that would occur in the regular hectic PE classes. Furthermore, increased contact and dialogue with the wider community that resulted in positive connections may have affirmed emotional feelings of one’s value and empowerment, again, possibly functioning to break cyclical monotony.

Conclusion

The findings of this study provide a more expansive and holistic view of teachers’ social and emotional work by describing concrete spaces and temporal points that
are both inclusive of, and also outside, traditional notions of pedagogy. We witnessed a distinct rhythm to how these teachers understood social and emotional issues with their students that included four key junctures. These findings add richness between the broad perspective research on teachers’ work lives and research on teachers’ social and emotional knowledge of their students by providing a nested picture of how social and emotional knowledge of students functions throughout the daily work of teachers.

Possibly, the idea with the most congruence to Clandinn and Connelly’s (1986) notion of rhythm in teaching comes in how rhythm can inform teacher preparation, in particular student teaching, as the rhythms of teaching “are not known by the novice teacher as part of their personal practical knowledge of classrooms; a knowledge which is embodied, experiential and reconstructed out of the narratives of their classroom lives” (p.383). The realities associated with student teaching (temporary positions, juggling of schedules, concurrent coursework) might lead to an inability in developing an adequate sense of rhythm in teaching. If we find the junctures of social and emotional pedagogy to be of significant relevance to the preparation and professional development of physical education teachers then we might start by working to create as authentic opportunities as possible for our professionals to develop, identify, and feel their own sense of rhythm in their emerging teaching practice.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Study

We might have expected that the social and emotional knowledge would be different according to the personal characteristics of the teachers (gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, religion, etc.), but we did not find significant variation. Irrespective of the teachers’ personal characteristics, however, we found they emphasized and used the social and emotional knowledge of their students at similar junctures. A follow-up study might examine how the personal and social characteristics of teachers influence the content and process of their social and emotional knowledge.

Another area of future inquiry that might prove beneficial could include the accuracy of teachers’ social and emotional knowledge. As Hargreaves (1998) warns, misunderstanding students socially and emotionally can seriously limit teachers’ abilities to develop caring relationships, as well as fostering educative experiences for students. To address this concern, future research might study students and teachers simultaneously to gain a better understanding of the degree of accuracy of teachers’ social and emotional knowledge.

References


Figure 1 — Junctures of Social and Emotional Pedagogy

Author Queries

[AUQ1] The in-text citation "Wright & Harwood, 2009" is not in the reference list. Please correct the citation, add the reference to the list, or delete the citation. Should ref be Wright only?

[AUQ2] The in-text citation "Pangrazi, 2007" is not in the reference list. Please correct the citation, add the reference to the list, or delete the citation.

[AUQ3] The in-text citation "Day & Leitch, 2006" is not in the reference list. Please correct the citation, add the reference to the list, or delete the citation. 2001 in refs.