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1 Running head: Physical education teachers' career intentions

2 Should I Stay or Should I Go? Physical Education Teachers' Career Intentions

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## Abstract

3 Purpose: This study investigated Finnish physical education (PE) teachers' intentions to leave  
4 the profession and the reasons behind them.

5 Method: A large sample ( $N=808$ ) of PE teachers who graduated between 1980 and 2008  
6 (women 432, men 376) answered a modified job satisfaction and teacher follow-up  
7 questionnaire that elicited career perceptions, intentions and current work duties.

8 Results: In this sample, 26% of the respondents were contemplating leaving their jobs as PE  
9 teachers and an additional 13% were actually in the process of transferring from PE teaching,  
10 but planned to remain in school teaching. To determine the reasons for considering leaving  
11 the PE teaching profession, principal axis factoring (PAF) with direct oblimin rotation was  
12 performed on the 35 items of the questionnaire. These factors were labeled as status of the PE  
13 teaching profession, pupils, working conditions, colleagues, expertise, workload,  
14 administration, and stress. The most influential factors were poor facilities, equipment, and  
15 isolation from the peers. Additional factors included working conditions, low status of the PE  
16 teachers, and workload. For women, workload and stress were more significant reasons for  
17 leaving the profession than for men ( $p=.010-.040$ ,  $d=0.34-0.43$ ). PE teachers in the age  
18 group of 40–44 years old constituted the largest group who were considering leaving the  
19 profession.

20 Conclusion: Thirty-nine percent of the PE teachers considered leaving the profession. Even  
21 though PE teachers face a variety of challenges in their work, the majority intend to remain in  
22 the teaching profession. Improved resourcing and collegial support could potentially reduce  
23 PE teachers' intention to leave.

24 *Keywords:* Career intention, physical education teacher, turnover, attrition, area transfer

1           Should I Stay or Should I Go? Physical Education Teachers' Career Intentions  
2   Recent studies have reported how teachers' working environment have intensified. Teachers  
3   face a school world that is more challenging than any previous generation. For example,  
4   classes are more heterogeneous, including pupils with identified learning difficulties, varied  
5   cultural backgrounds, and different languages (Billingsley, 2004; Webb et al., 2004). High  
6   expectations and goals, a wide range of students' needs and bureaucratic requirements are  
7   driving some teachers to high levels of stress and burn-out. As a result of these pressures,  
8   some teachers are leaving the profession, a phenomenon commonly known as turnover  
9   (Billingsley, 2004). In Finland, a relatively small proportion (7.2%) of teachers are reported  
10   to leave the profession (Itkonen & Jahnukainen, 2007) annually, while in the USA the  
11   numbers are much higher and teacher careers are shorter (Billingsley, 2004).

## 12   **Teacher career cycle**

13           The intentions of teachers to stay in or leave the profession can be viewed through the  
14   lens of the teacher career cycle model (Fessler & Christensen, 1992). A teacher's career cycle  
15   may be a linear progression, but this is not necessarily an accurate picture of how all teachers  
16   experience the cycle. Instead, environmental influences from both the personal and  
17   organizational dimensions serve to influence teachers' careers with the teachers moving in  
18   and out of the stages (Fessler, 1992). According to the model, the pre-service stage is  
19   comprised of professional preparation at the college or university and can also include  
20   retraining for a new role. The induction stage usually encompasses the first years of  
21   employment as a teacher during which time the individual adjusts to school life, seeking  
22   acceptance from students, colleagues, parents and others (Fessler & Christensen, 1992;  
23   Lawson 1989). However, if teachers do not gain acceptance or they perceive that a certain  
24   level of competence is expected of them, they might move straight to the end of the cycle and  
25   the career exit stage. In the competence building stage teachers continue to develop their

1 teaching skills and abilities through courses, workshops and collaboration with experienced  
2 staff. Those who are successful in building their competence are likely to move to the next  
3 stage, but those who are unable to build their competence are likely to exit the profession or  
4 move to the frustration or stability stages (Burke & McDonnell, 1992). At the enthusiasm  
5 and growth stage, teachers possess a high level of competence, but they are still developing  
6 their knowledge (Fessler & Christensen, 1992). At this point, PE teachers have been  
7 described as achieving veteran teacher status and their skills, knowledge, values and  
8 sensitivity are said to be valued by school administrators and other teachers (Lawson, 1989).

9         After the growth stage, Fessler and Christensen (1992) identify a career frustration  
10 stage. During this stage PE teachers commonly feel job dissatisfaction and face limited  
11 resources, large classes, isolation, marginalization and low salary in the PE teaching  
12 profession (Lynn, 2002; Lynn & Woods, 2010). For some PE teachers these dissatisfying  
13 factors along with the repetitiveness of teaching PE, leads their job satisfaction to wane and  
14 eventually results in a decision to leave the profession (Lynn & Woods, 2010). The nature of  
15 support from administration and peers may play a crucial role in determining whether  
16 teachers stagnate at the frustration stage, remain at the stability stage, enter the future stages,  
17 or exit (Fessler & Christensen, 1992). In the career stability stage, teachers are still  
18 committed to the profession or they might still be teaching, but have lost their enthusiasm.  
19 Teachers are doing what is expected, but nothing more. In the career wind-down stage  
20 teachers prepare for retirement or change their profession. They reflect on their careers and  
21 they feel positive emotions, being excited but also relieved that it is time to move on (Lynn,  
22 2002). This is followed by the career exit stage (Fessler & Christensen, 1992). But as  
23 previously mentioned, the teacher career cycle is not linear. The career exit may occur, for  
24 example, after the induction stage.

## 1 **Teacher turnover**

2           Teacher turnover has become a major concern in recent decades (Boe, Cook, &  
3 Sunderland, 2008). Teachers might consider changing schools (migration), or teaching in a  
4 different subject area (area transfer) or moving into school administration. Teachers who  
5 attempt these changes are commonly called *movers*. Unlike *movers*, those who leave to work  
6 outside of the teaching profession (attrition) are classified as *leavers* (Boe et al., 2008). The  
7 problem of turnover has also been identified in PE. Evans and Williams (1989) reported that  
8 nearly 80% of men and 40% of women considered leaving the profession, and 85% of PE  
9 teachers could name at least one colleague who had already left the profession. Nevertheless,  
10 according to LeCompte's longitudinal study in the USA (1991), only 29% of the teachers  
11 who had considered leaving the teaching profession actually left.

12           Considerable literature has been published on teacher attrition and intention to leave  
13 the profession (Boe et al., 2008). Billingsley (2004) identified reasons for teachers wanting to  
14 leave or stay, proposing four domains: teacher characteristics, work environment, affective  
15 responses to work, and teacher qualifications.

## 16 **Teacher characteristics**

17           Teaching experience is commonly linked to the intention to leave the profession.  
18 According to Mäkelä, Hirvensalo, Whipp and Laakso (2013), those who choose to leave the  
19 PE teaching profession (*leavers*), do so earlier than those who choose to move (*movers*). PE  
20 teachers with less teaching experience are more likely to leave the profession and more  
21 experienced teachers tend to stay (Mäkelä et al., 2013).

22           Along with teaching experience, gender is one of the most studied variables of  
23 teachers' careers. Previous research suggests that male and female teachers perceive their  
24 work differently. Female employees tend to choose the teaching profession because the  
25 working conditions are perceived to suit the traditional female roles, whereas males tend to

1 view teaching as a means of social mobility. Therefore, it is hypothesized that females tend to  
2 stay in teaching whereas males tend to leave the profession (Cushman, 2005). On the other  
3 hand, in a recent study of Finnish PE teachers by Mäkelä et al. (2013), no differences related  
4 to gender among those leaving the profession.

### 5 **Working environments**

6 Data from several sources have identified the working environment as a reason to  
7 leave the PE teaching profession (Mäkelä et al., 2013; Woods & Lynn, 2001). PE teachers'  
8 intentions to leave have been reported to be exacerbated by inadequate support from school  
9 administration or colleagues, professional and personal surveillance, workload, insufficient  
10 teaching facilities and equipment, and student misbehavior (Macdonald & Kirk, 1996).

11 Potentially, the most common reason for leaving the PE teaching profession is  
12 inadequate support from administration (Whipp, Tan, & Yeo, 2007). One outcome from the  
13 inadequate support of administration may be isolation, especially for early career PE  
14 teachers. Lack of collegiality is also reported as a reason for PE teachers leaving the  
15 profession (Macdonald, Hutchins, & Madden, 1994; Woods & Lynn 2001). According to  
16 Macdonald and Kirk (1996), lack of support may also manifest itself in controlling PE  
17 teachers through rules and regulations, thus reducing their perceived level of autonomy. The  
18 visibility of PE teachers' work makes the profession a particularly easy target for criticism  
19 and control (Macdonald & Kirk, 1996).

20 The workload of contemporary PE teachers has been reported to be demanding. PE  
21 teachers often coach school sports teams or organize extracurricular activities after school  
22 (Armour & Yelling, 2004; Richards & Templin, 2012; Templin, 1989). Some PE teachers  
23 have described the workload as unbearable, and the demands on their time and energy have  
24 driven them away from the profession (Whipp et al., 2007). Early career teachers identify  
25 different workload-related concerns during the first years. In particular, they experience

1 pressure, exhaustion, a lack of tools and time and inability to escape these demands (Shoval,  
2 Erlich, & Fejgin, 2010).

3 PE also features certain unique working conditions. For example, insufficient  
4 facilities and equipment can lead to frustration, because teachers struggle to generate learning  
5 outcomes and to meet curriculum expectations with minimal resources (Kougioumtzis,  
6 Patriksson, & Stråhlman, 2011). This in turn has been identified as a reason to leave the  
7 profession (Bain, 1990).

8 Even though working with young people has been identified as a major source of  
9 professional satisfaction (Moreira, 1995), a connection has been reported between student  
10 discipline problems and PE teachers' intention to leave the profession (Macdonald et al.,  
11 1994). Teaching and controlling students' demands considerable energy and time, and these  
12 requirements leave teachers frustrated and desperate (Shoval et al., 2010). The challenges of  
13 student discipline are reported by some as the major reason for leaving the profession  
14 (Sparkes, 1991; Templin, 1989). Koustelios and Tsigilis (2005) found that PE teachers' job  
15 satisfaction is connected to the job itself rather than the salary. In contrast, some former PE  
16 teachers have identified low salary as a significant reason to leave the profession (Mäkelä, et  
17 al., 2013).

18 PE teachers face marginalization and perceived lack of power in their profession. PE  
19 is seen as a marginal subject that tends not to be central to the function of schools (Sparkes,  
20 Schempp, & Templin, 1993) and PE teachers report feeling disrespected (Macdonald, 1999).  
21 In addition, a lack of teaching efficacy or ability to positively influence student learning (e.g.,  
22 Henninger, 2007) and an inability to participate in decision making or a lack of opportunities  
23 for professional advancement are common for PE teachers (Whipp et al., 2007). The lack of  
24 power is closely associated with status that can be divided into formal and semantic  
25 dimensions. Legislation and curriculum are connected to the formal status, whereas semantic



1 status is associated with authentic school settings (Hardman, 2008). According to some PE  
2 teachers, peers and community members rate PE, like music and art, as a subject that lacks  
3 academic status. However, some PE teachers have recently suggested that associating PE  
4 with health promotion has increased respect for the subject (Kougioumtzis et al., 2011).

### 5 **Affective responses to work**

6 According to Rusbult (1983), the job motivation elements of commitment are  
7 clustered around three key themes: job satisfaction, personal investment and career  
8 alternatives. When considering changing their profession, PE teachers tend to evaluate their  
9 current job and other jobs within a benefit/cost framework (Sparkes, 1991). Commitment to  
10 school-based physical activity and to students are seen as key motivational factors to continue  
11 teaching despite the routinization and pervasiveness of PE teachers' work (Macdonald,  
12 1999). Many factors that influence PE teachers' intentions to leave also affect teachers'  
13 professional burnout. Other factors reported to contribute to burnout include behavior  
14 problems, unsuitable sporting facilities, insufficient professional support, time allocation, and  
15 problems in class organization (Fejgin, Talmor, & Erlich, 2005).

### 16 **Teacher qualifications**

17 In the PE teaching profession, opportunities to advance within the schools are  
18 generally limited to positions with greater administrative duties (Moreira, 1995). Moreover,  
19 PE teachers have commonly reported a lack of potential career mobility (Whipp et al., 2007).  
20 With career advancement and experience, some PE teachers seek more intellectual challenges  
21 or new lines of work in which they can utilize their skills (Macdonald et al., 1994; Whipp et  
22 al., 2007). PE teachers also report a need for professional development and new challenges to  
23 advance their PE teaching capabilities. Professional development can come via in-service  
24 experiences, but previous studies have reported a lack of in-service training or its  
25 ineffectiveness (Armour & Yelling, 2004; Bain, 1990). If the possibilities for professional

1 development via in-service training are lacking, teachers may be motivated to seek other  
2 professions in which they can develop and use their capabilities better (Mäkelä et al., 2013).

3 A number of studies have suggested that early career teachers face a reality shock  
4 during their first years of teaching. This term refers to the conflict that emerges when a  
5 teacher moves from their initial teacher education into authentic school settings where  
6 combined with the marginal status of PE, there is a lack of instructional time, large class  
7 sizes, inadequate facilities and equipment, and public ignorance of PE (Armour & Yelling,  
8 2004; Bain, 1990; Lawson, 1989).

### 9 **Purpose**

10 In this study we examined the level of Finnish PE teachers' intention to leave the  
11 profession and the factors influencing this intention. Most research on PE teachers' careers  
12 has been carried out with qualitative methods and therefore this study aimed to fill the gap in  
13 quantitative research literature. First, our hypothesis for this study was that the reasons  
14 Finnish PE teachers wanted to leave the profession varied for those with differing experience  
15 and gender. Second, we hypothesized that PE teachers in Finland face some of the same  
16 problems as elsewhere, such as working conditions and workload. However, it may be that  
17 there are some cultural differences in the reasons for leaving the profession. It can also be  
18 assumed that PE teachers are considering moving inside the teaching field and hypothesized  
19 the proportion of teachers who are considering leaving PE will be smaller than in other  
20 countries.

### 21 **Method**

#### 22 **Participants**

23 This research is part of the Education and Job Satisfaction Research project at a major  
24 university in Finland. The ethical committee of the university approved this research. A total  
25 sample of 1,408 PE graduates received an invitation by mail to participate in this study. The

1 recipients were PE teachers who had graduated from the University in Finland in 1980–2008.  
2 Having read the information document that accompanied the questionnaire, the teachers'  
3 confirmed their informed consent to participate in this research by completing and returning  
4 the questionnaire. The last known address could be found for 1,394 graduates from the  
5 Population Register Centre of Finland and 24 letters were returned as undeliverable. The  
6 letter was resent to non-responders three times. In total, 1,084 respondents (response rate  
7 78%) completed the questionnaire. The distribution of respondents across the career patterns  
8 was as follows: working as a PE teacher =808; retired =20; left PE teaching =256. Among the  
9 808 PE teacher respondents, 39 were on maternity leave or nursing leave at the time of  
10 answering the questionnaire, 5 were on leave of absence and 4 declared they were not  
11 teaching for other reasons. The sample of participants for this study ( $N=808$ ) provided a  
12 representative sample for the study of Finnish PE teachers' intention to leave the profession.  
13 The total of 808 respondents included 78 respondents who only answered a shortened version  
14 of the questionnaire. This version was sent to those who had not answered the questionnaire  
15 after two reminder letters and it included questions about their present job, job satisfaction  
16 and the intention to leave PE teaching. The shorter version of the questionnaire also included  
17 questions about background information, intention to leave and general job satisfaction. The  
18 request for reasons for intention to leave and the rating of job satisfaction factors were  
19 omitted from the shortened version to encourage participation.

## 20 **Questionnaire**

21 The questionnaire used in this study included a modified version of the survey on the  
22 job satisfaction of PE teachers by Nupponen et al. (2000; 2004) (Mäkelä, Hirvensalo,  
23 Palomäki, Herva, & Laakso, 2012) in combination with a modified version of the Teacher  
24 Follow-up Survey (Keigher, 2010) first implemented for US teachers. The final version was  
25 modified after consultation with a reference group of experienced Finnish Physical Education

1 Teacher Education (PETE) academic staff. The modifications included the addition of  
2 questions relating to the following: equipment and facilities provision, workload, working  
3 ability, status of PE teachers, schedules, and perceived levels of isolation. The final version  
4 of the questionnaire included the following variables.

5 *Intention to leave.* Respondents confirmed that they had an intention or willingness to  
6 change their career in the past year when answering the first question: "I have not considered  
7 changing my career / I have considered changing my career but remain in teaching".

8 Respondents who had considered changing their profession were asked to clarify their  
9 intention from the following alternatives to PE teaching: principal / class teacher / study  
10 advisor / other subject teacher / special education teacher / other. The respondents who  
11 identified a willingness to move within the teaching profession were classified as a *movers*. A  
12 respondent who had not considered changing careers inside the teaching profession was  
13 asked a second question measuring the respondent's intention to leave the teaching  
14 profession: "Have you considered changing your profession to move outside of teaching?"  
15 The response options ranged from (1) often, (2) now and again, (3) seldom, to (4) not at all.  
16 Responses 1–2 were categorized as *leavers* and responses 3–4 as *stayers*. At times, for  
17 purposes of analysis, the *movers* and *leavers* were merged and classified as changers and they  
18 were compared with the *stayers*. However, comparisons were consistently made between  
19 *leavers*, *movers*, and *stayers*.

20 *Questions relating to reasons for leaving the profession* required the respondents to  
21 indicate if specified aspects were affecting their intention to leave the profession. These  
22 included questions relating to administration, pupils, colleagues, respect, status, workload,  
23 stress factors and working conditions. The 5-point scale ranged from (1) not affected at all,  
24 to (5) affected very markedly.

1        *Job satisfaction* questions asked respondents to rate their satisfaction with their work. The  
2 5-point scale ranged from (1) very dissatisfied to (5) very satisfied (Appendix 1).

3        *Commitment* was evaluated with the following question: “If you could go back to your  
4 college days and start over again, would you become a PE teacher or not?” The teachers who  
5 responded “unsure” were omitted from the analysis.

6        *Background information* included gender, school level, place of residence, years of  
7 teaching PE, teaching hours and overall working hours.

## 8        **Data analysis**

9        Principal axis factoring (PAF) was performed on the 35 items of the questionnaire to  
10 determine the reasons for considering leaving the profession. Correlations between variables  
11 were moderate to strong requiring direct oblimin rotation in the analysis (Tabachnick &  
12 Fidell 2013). Item loading .30 or higher were retained on each factor. An eigenvalue greater  
13 than 1.00 was used as a criterion for the initial number of factors and eight factors were  
14 initially extracted accounting for 62.0% of the total variance. Factors were labeled as follows:  
15 status of the PE teacher (item loadings .314–.737), pupils (item loadings .335–.866), working  
16 conditions (item loadings .509–.852), colleagues (item loadings .500–.842), expertise (item  
17 loadings .678–.722), workload (item loadings .388–.675), administration (item loadings  
18 .762–.925), and stress (item loadings .374–.669). Test-retest for the reliability of the reasons  
19 for leaving the teaching profession was assessed among 30 persons in duplicate  
20 questionnaires carried out two weeks apart. The 35 items yielded a Cronbach's alpha  
21 coefficient of 0.93, and a mean interclass correlation of .95 ( $F=5.41$ ,  $p<.001$ ), which  
22 confirmed reliability.

23        The data analysis began with descriptive statistics, representing the means and  
24 standard deviations for *leavers* and *movers* and background variables. The differences in  
25 intention to leave and job satisfaction between background variables were analyzed with

1 independent samples *t*-tests and chi-square tests. The reasons for leaving the profession were  
2 first compared between potential *changers* and *stayers* with Mann-Whitney U-test (due to  
3 deviations from normal distribution) and secondly, between *leavers*, *movers* and *stayers* with  
4 ANOVA. Cohen's *d* statistic was used to report the effect size of differences. It was  
5 considered large when .80 or higher, moderate at about .50 and small when it was .20 or less.  
6 ANOVA was also used to determine differences between the factor scores that were  
7 generated in PAF.

## 8 **Results**

9 Of the 808 PE teachers who graduated between 1980 and 2008, a total of 307 (39%)  
10 teachers expressed their intention to leave the profession frequently or occasionally. The  
11 majority of these (67%) considered moving outside of teaching (*leavers*), whereas 33%  
12 considered moving but remain inside the teaching profession (*movers*). Of the *movers*, the  
13 majority considered a career move to teaching another subject (34%) or to the role of  
14 principal (31%). A quarter of those wishing to leave the profession intended to become a  
15 study advisor (a person who helps students choose courses, future studies, etc.). Some of the  
16 *movers* considered becoming a class teacher (8%) or special education teacher (2%). Men  
17 mainly considered moving to the role of principal (51% of men) whereas women favored  
18 moving to another school subject area (38%), study advisor (31%), principal (16%) or class  
19 teacher (12%).

## 20 **Teacher characteristics**

21 PE teachers who had been working for 16 to 20 years in PE contained the largest  
22 group who considered leaving the teaching profession (46% of the group). There was no  
23 difference between men and women reporting an intention to leave the profession ( $p=.237$ ,  
24  $d=0.13$ ). However, workload and stress factors impacted more women than men in their  
25 intention to leave the profession ( $p=.010-.040$ ,  $d=0.34-0.43$ ). *Stayers* and *leavers* had more

1 teaching experience than *movers* ( $p = .004-0.08$ ,  $d=0.30-0.33$ ). *Movers* had less teaching  
2 hours per week (23.9 hours) than *stayers* (25.3 hours) ( $p=.035$ ,  $d=0.28$ ), but more time  
3 allocated to other work (11.2 hours) than *stayers* (8.7 hours) ( $p= .042$ ,  $d=0.28$ ) (Table 1).  
4 *Leavers*, *movers* and *stayers* did not differ from each other concerning the level of school  
5 ( $\chi^2(6)=7,298$ ,  $p=.294$ ,  $d=0.21$ ) or size of the town ( $\chi^2(10)=9,467$ ,  $p=.488$ ,  $d=0.06$ ) in which  
6 they taught.

7 Table 1.

### 8 **Working environment**

9 Factor analysis identified five categories within the working environment: working  
10 conditions, colleagues, administration, pupils and workload. For working conditions there  
11 was a significant statistical difference ( $p=.010$ ,  $d=0.45$ ) between *changers* and *stayers* (Table  
12 2). The impact of workload also differed significantly between *changers* and *stayers* ( $p=.033$ ,  
13  $d=0.36$ ). Moreover, half of the respondents reported that diminished work ability had added  
14 to their consideration to leave the profession. Further comparison of the factors that  
15 potentially influence *leavers*, *movers* and *stayers* did not produce significant findings (Table  
16 2).

17 Table 2.

18 Factor analysis identified two categories that were related to rewards. The first was  
19 the status of the PE teaching profession with a significant difference noted between *changers*  
20 and *stayers* ( $p=.025$ ,  $d=.035$ ); that is, *changers* reported higher intention to leave because of  
21 perceptions of low status. Lack of respect ( $p=.011$ ,  $d=0.25$ ) and lack of recognition ( $p=.002$ ,  
22  $d=0.31$ ) differed significantly between those intending to change and those staying. Again,  
23 for *changers* these reasons increased intention to leave the profession more so than for  
24 *stayers*. Further investigation did not reveal any other differences between the PE teachers  
25 intending to leave or move. The expertise of the PE teacher was the second construct related

1 to rewards and consisted of perceptions of teachers' own capability and lack of opportunities  
2 for advancement. These were both significantly different for those intending to change or  
3 stay ( $p<.001-.009$ ,  $d=0.25-0.35$ ). Changers identified these reasons influencing more to their  
4 intentions to leave the profession (Table 2). When comparing *leavers* and *movers* there was  
5 no difference in the participants' responses to these statements.

### 6 **Affective responses to work**

7 *Stayers* were more committed to their work than *changers* ( $p<.001$ ,  $d=0.69$ ). *Movers*  
8 were more committed to the PE teaching profession than *leavers* ( $p=.025$ ,  $d=0.44$ ). There was  
9 a significant difference between *stayers* and *changers* in job satisfaction ( $p <.001$ ,  $d=0.97$ ).  
10 Further examination between *leavers* and *movers* revealed that *movers* were more satisfied  
11 with their job than *leavers* ( $p=.002$ ,  $d=1.02$ ). Factor analysis identified three items related to  
12 teacher stress. *Changers* reported that stress and busy schedules had significantly impacted  
13 their intention to leave when compared to *stayers* ( $p = .007-.022$ ,  $d=0.28-0.22$ ). In contrast,  
14 there was no difference between *changers* and *stayers* for the statement "testing of pupils is  
15 causing stress" ( $p =.595$ ,  $d=0.05$ ) (Table 2).

### 16 **Discussion**

17 This study examined teachers' intention to leave the PE teaching profession. We  
18 found that 39% of Finnish PE teachers were considering or had considered leaving the  
19 profession. The majority had considered leaving to work outside of teaching (26%), whereas  
20 fewer had considered moving within teaching (13%). These data are substantially lower than  
21 those reported for British PE teachers, where 80% of men and 40% of women identified their  
22 intention to leave the profession (Evans & Williams, 1989). One possible reason for lower  
23 levels of intention to leave the profession in Finland is the definitive focus of the work. In  
24 comparison to North American teachers, Finnish PE teachers do not have dual roles (e.g., as  
25 PE teacher and head coaches), that has been reported to cause role conflict and enormous



1 workloads (Richards & Templin, 2012). The relatively good status of teachers in Finland and  
2 high-quality pre-service training (Heikinaro-Johansson & Telama, 2005) may also explain the  
3 lower levels of intention to leave.

#### 4 **Teacher career cycle**

5 A teacher's career begins in the pre-service stage and continues with the induction  
6 stage. During this period, the teacher is socialized into the system and strives for acceptance  
7 from administration, students and peers (Fessler & Christensen, 1992). Previously, early  
8 career teachers have been reported to be the most likely to leave the profession because of  
9 difficulties encountered in the early phase of their teaching careers (Billingsley, 2004). These  
10 problems include role uncertainty, role conflict, harassment from colleagues, isolation, poor  
11 resources and difficult first assignments (Macdonald et al., 1994). If these problems are too  
12 difficult for beginning teachers, their competence building may be insufficient and they may  
13 become motivated to exit the profession (Fessler & Christensen, 1992).

14 Early career teachers, unlike mature age teachers, may have fewer financial  
15 obligations or they may not have settled into some specific occupation or location and are  
16 therefore potentially more comfortable than older PE teachers when considering a change of  
17 job. On the other hand, these younger teachers may already have left the PE teaching  
18 profession, and those who remain may have already established themselves in the teaching  
19 profession or some specific location. Further support for this consideration is found in a  
20 recent study on Finnish PE teachers' attrition rates (Mäkelä et al., 2013) where 38% of the  
21 Finnish PE teachers who had left the profession, had done so within their first five years of  
22 teaching. Nevertheless, in the current study early career teachers (i.e., those with teaching  
23 experience of 1 to 5 years) were not over-represented among those who were intending to  
24 leave. This might be explained with the quality of PETE program, which produce well  
25 prepared and competent PE teachers (Heikinaro-Johansson & Telama, 2005). Competent and

1 well-prepared teacher training may facilitate the progress of PE teachers from the induction  
2 stage and to the competence-building stage.

3         During the competence-building stage teachers strive to improve their teaching. It is  
4 also important during this stage to have support from administration (Fessler & Christensen,  
5 1992). In the present study we found that administration was a significant factor affecting PE  
6 teachers' consideration to stay in the profession or leave it. If teachers feel valued, supported  
7 and respected, they may continue to remain in PE teaching. In the enthusiastic and growing  
8 stage, teachers reach a high level of competence. In addition, at this stage administration  
9 support is important for allowing teachers to have in-service possibilities and sufficient  
10 autonomy to carry out their job. If administration fails to support teachers' during their  
11 enthusiastic and growing stage, teachers may enter the frustration stage (Fessler &  
12 Christensen, 1992).

13         We observed clear signs of career frustration among those teachers who had been  
14 teaching for 16 to 20 years. At this stage it is most likely that PE teachers have gained their  
15 professional competence. Some of these PE teachers are still excited and committed to their  
16 job. However, nearly half of the teachers in this group were looking for other career options.  
17 At this stage it is not uncommon for teachers to feel trapped in an unfulfilling job (Fessler &  
18 Christensen, 1992). According to Henninger (2007), some teachers at this stage of their  
19 careers can be referred to as "lifers". They are committed to and express sustained  
20 enthusiasm for what they are doing and they believe they are making a difference. On the  
21 other hand some teachers are "troopers", these being teachers who have lost their  
22 commitment and enthusiasm for teaching and are looking for challenges outside of the  
23 profession. In response to entering the frustration stage, some of the teachers may exit the  
24 profession; others may change their subject focus and go back to the induction stage. Those  
25 who still remain in the profession may move to the career stability stage. Having entered the

1 career stability stage, PE teachers choose to stay in the profession, some because they just  
2 love to teach PE, and some because there are no possibilities for promotion (Lynn, 2002).  
3 However, if the possibilities appear, teachers in this stage may choose to leave the profession.  
4 These differing paths were also seen in this study; some teachers were clearly looking for  
5 new challenges, but others were committed to teach until retirement. After the career stability  
6 stage, a wind-down stage occurred, where the intention to leave the profession decreased  
7 among those aged 50 years and older. It might be that some of the teachers still have  
8 intention to leave, but along with retirement nearing, opportunities to leave the profession are  
9 decreasing. It has been found that the percentage of PE teachers who leave the profession  
10 after age of 50 is relatively low (Mäkelä et al., 2013).

### 11 **Teacher characteristics**

12 The results of this study did not reveal gender-related differences in teachers'  
13 intention to leave the profession. However, women reported that workload and stress were  
14 significantly more influential in their intention to leave the profession than men. This could  
15 be explained by the differences in the PE offered for boys and that offered for girls. In  
16 Finland, there is a wide range of games for boys, but girls' options are centered on dance,  
17 aerobics (rhythmic aerobic exercise), and gymnastics. Instructing dance or aerobics is  
18 potentially more physically demanding than refereeing games. This may explain why female  
19 teachers feel they are more impacted by their workload. Female teachers are also reported to  
20 seek more of a balance between work, family, and home life than male teachers (Smethem,  
21 2007), and this may lead to feelings of being overworked or experiencing burnout.

### 22 **Working environment**

23 Perceptions of the working environment were strongly associated with the intention to  
24 leave, with working conditions identified as the most important factor. Consistent with  
25 previous studies (Kougioumtzis et al., 2011; Mäkelä et al., 2013; Shoval et al., 2010),

1 respondents highlighted concerns related to poor resources and lack of facilities or  
2 equipment.

3 As previously reported (Macdonald et al., 1994), the respondents identified isolation  
4 as a common problem for PE teachers. When compared to those intending to stay, those  
5 considering a change in profession more consistently identified that they felt isolated from  
6 the others. This isolation may present itself as a lack of collegiality, which has been  
7 previously reported as a reason for leaving the teaching profession (Macdonald, 1999).

8 The third working environment factor was pupils. In this study, those intending to  
9 change professions identified the students' lack of respect for PE and the students' lack of  
10 basic skills more often than *stayers*. The perception that students lack basic skills may be a  
11 consequence of the polarization of students' fitness levels (Huotari, Nupponen, Laakso, &  
12 Kujala, 2010). Contrary to expectations, this study did not find significant differences  
13 between *leavers* and *movers* for the pupils factor.

14 There was no statistically significant difference in the perceptions of administration  
15 between those intending to change professions and *stayers*. However, it could be argued that  
16 administration had an indirect influence on teachers' intention to leave the profession. Busy  
17 schedules, minimal resources and lack of recognition are all potentially related to school  
18 administrators. In recent times (Mäkelä et al., 2013), it has been found that administrative  
19 factors strongly affect the decision to leave the teaching profession in Finland. It is also  
20 notable that the general status of PE may be influenced by school administrators. For  
21 example, if public support for PE is low, a school administration may be inclined to have  
22 relatively high staff–student ratios in PE classes (Bain, 1990; Woods & Lynn, 2001).

23 Workload markedly impacted teacher's intention to leave the profession. These  
24 perceptions are interesting given the fact that unlike other countries (Templin, 1989) there are  
25 no coaching duties for PE teachers in Finland. Perceptions of an excessive workload are

1 consistent with previous studies (Shoval et al., 2010; Whipp et al., 2007) and are seen to be  
2 affecting teachers' work and quality of life. It is worth noting that half of the respondents  
3 reported that diminished capacity for work (e.g., injuries or diseases that weaken work  
4 ability) had contributed to their intention to leave the profession. Of these potential *leavers*,  
5 more than one-in-ten reported that diminished working ability had influenced their  
6 considerations markedly or really markedly.

7 Working environment includes variables that could be influenced by school policy  
8 makers and administrators. In this study working conditions and poor scheduling were related  
9 to the intention to leave. By concentrating on these variables and improving them in the  
10 working environment, schools could potentially maintain their quality teachers, an essential  
11 part of providing a high-quality PE experience for all pupils (Whipp et al., 2007).

12 PE teachers said that they perceived PE teaching to have a relatively low status, a  
13 perception that contributed to their intention to leave. The relatively low status of PE teaching  
14 and concerns associated with it when compared to other teachers has also been reported in  
15 Britain and Australia (Moreira, 1995; Whipp et al., 2007). Recent work (Mäkelä et al., 2013)  
16 has concluded that low status is a significant reason for the early exit of PE teachers in  
17 Finland, a problem that should receive further attention. The attitudes of non-PE teachers,  
18 administration, parents and students influence the status of PE. Some experienced PE  
19 teachers, however, have gained respect and status during their career (MacDonald, 1999).  
20 Further understanding of all stakeholders' perceptions related to PE and PE teachers' status  
21 and strategies to enhance these perceptions are needed if a positive attitudinal change towards  
22 PE is to be realized along with improved PE teacher retention.

### 23 **Affective responses to work**

24 Traditionally, the major source of teacher satisfaction has been working with young  
25 people in a context that is mutually enjoyable (Hargreaves, 1998; Palomäki & Heikinaro-

1 Johansson, 2011). The results of this study confirm that PE teachers in Finland are relatively  
2 committed to their profession. However, despite the positive responses to their work, there  
3 are concerns. Teaching PE is a demanding job, with the respondents identifying the physical  
4 load of the job to be taxing. When compared to other occupations the physical load can be  
5 considerable, because it includes activities such as warm-up exercises, instructing aerobics  
6 and walking or running (Sandmark, Wiktorin, Hogstedt, Klenell-Hatschek, & Vingård,  
7 1999). The emotional load can also be considerable because of misbehavior, lack of  
8 motivation among students and other conflict at work. Teachers have identified conflict to be  
9 the strongest source of negative emotions (Hargreaves, 2001). In Finland, the number of  
10 pupils who are reported to be antagonistic toward PE is about 7% (Palomäki & Heikinaro-  
11 Johansson, 2011). Similarly, in Australia less than 10% of Year 6/7 and Year 8/9/10 male and  
12 female students have declared a dislike for PE (Whipp & Taggart, 2003).

13 For PE teachers time allocation is problematic (Armour & Jones, 2004). PE teachers  
14 often have to move from one teaching place to another during the breaks. Consistent with  
15 these findings, busy schedules affected the decision to leave the profession. Moreover, work  
16 stress was found to be a common and a significant influence on PE teachers' intention to  
17 leave, especially for women. Without adequate time, teachers cannot establish emotional  
18 bonds and achieve understanding with their students, and if they are not so committed to their  
19 students (Hargreaves, 1998), the learning outcomes may potentially be diminished.

## 20 **Teacher qualifications**

21 The decision to leave is linked to the perceived opportunities available. According to  
22 Rusbult (1983), available job alternatives increase over time for some workers, and for  
23 others, alternatives increase in response to the development of skills and reputation. In  
24 contrast, for some workers these opportunities decrease over time. Likewise in Australia  
25 (Macdonald et al., 1994), the role of the "head of department" is an attractive option for many

1 PE teachers. In some countries, the fitness industry has also been an attractive alternative for  
2 PE teachers (Macdonald et al., 1994); however, only a small proportion (<1%) of PE teachers  
3 in this study had considered a move to the fitness industry. Nevertheless, it could be assumed  
4 that the proportion of PE teachers moving to the fitness industry will increase if, in the future,  
5 the industry expands.

6 In this study, the majority of PE teachers who intended to leave the profession, had  
7 considered professions outside of the school world. It is noteworthy that the number of PE  
8 teachers who considered a move was lower than the number of PE teachers who had actually  
9 left the profession (23%; Mäkelä et al., 2013). According to LeCompte (1991), the actual  
10 turnover of teachers who had considered leaving the profession was only 29%. Because there  
11 are relatively limited alternative career possibilities, it could be speculated that the actual  
12 turnover of PE teachers in Finland will be lower than 39%.

### 13 **Implications of this study**

14 Further research to investigate the actual attrition and area transfer of the PE teachers  
15 and to clarify the working ability of PE teachers may help develop strategies to enhance  
16 quality of work life and teacher retention. One solution to minimize the early exit of teachers  
17 could be mentoring programs. In Finland, there is no systematic mentoring or in-service  
18 training for teachers. With a mentoring program and a formalized opportunity to facilitate  
19 lifelong learning, PE teachers could access reinforcement of their occupational identity,  
20 receive encouragement from fellow PE teachers and have the possibility to share common  
21 concerns (Whipp, Pengelley, Gordon, & Deowski, 2010). During such programs, PE  
22 teachers could explore innovative ideas and thereby minimize routinization and the repetitive  
23 nature of their work. More attention could also be focused on recruiting students to enroll in  
24 PETE programs. It is important to determine the annual attrition rate of PE teachers. This  
25 information could aid government when establishing the number of students who can enroll

1 in PETE programs. At this point in time, the number of graduating PETE students seems to  
2 be insufficient to fill all available PE teaching positions in Finland.

### 3 **Limitations**

4 This study included PE teachers who had graduated from a major university in  
5 Finland. There are also PE teachers who are unqualified (lacking a teaching degree) or who  
6 have qualified as class teachers. These PE teachers are not included in this study. The  
7 possibility of the potential influence of critical or political circumstances at the time of  
8 collecting the data should also be kept in mind. This may have caused potential variation in  
9 teachers' professional intentions during the time the data was collected. The sample of this  
10 study is specific to Finland and may not be comparable to other contexts or countries.

### 11 **Final thoughts**

12 This research provides new information about PE teachers' career intentions and the  
13 reasons behind their intentions to leave. Even though research of teachers' attrition, area  
14 transfer and migration is widespread, this study utilizes an extensive sample of Finnish PE  
15 teachers ( $N= 808$ ) to provide a clear picture of PE teachers' career intentions in Finland. The  
16 present study also identified PE teachers' preferred career plans (principal, study advisor,  
17 other subject teacher, class teacher). The findings provide important information about the  
18 factors that cause dissatisfaction among teachers and the key reasons that drive them away  
19 from PE. We found that better resources and more support from peers and administration  
20 could significantly influence the quality of PE teachers' working lives.



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4

1

2 **APPENDIX 1**

3 **1. In the past year have you considered a change from your current PE teacher**  
 4 **job:**

5

6 ( ) Not at all –please go to Question X

7 ( ) Seldom – please answer Questions X-X

8 ( ) Now and again – please answer Questions X-X

9 ( ) Often – please answer Questions X-X

10

11 **2. If you have considered a change from your current job, your intention is to**

12

13 ( ) **Remain in school and change focus to**14  Administration (principal)15  Class teacher16  Another subject teacher17  Study advisor18  Special education teacher19  Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

20

21 ( ) **Move outside schools to a another profession, please specify one profession**  
 22 **that you have considered**

23

24

25 **3. If you have considered changing your focus or a change in profession, how**  
 26 **have the following aspects influenced your consideration to change? (Please use**  
 27 **the scale provided and circle one response only)**

28

29 **1= not at all, 2= incidentally, 3= to some extent, 4= markedly, 5= very markedly**30 *Administration does not respect PE* 1 2 3 4 5 7\*31 *Students do not respect PE as a school subject* 1 2 3 4 5 232 *Society does not respect PE teachers* 1 2 3 4 5 133 *Low status of PE teachers* 1 2 3 4 5 134 *Students do not respect PE teachers* 1 2 3 4 5 2

35

36 *A desire to better use my own expertise* 1 2 3 4 5 537 *Repetitive nature of the work* 1 2 3 4 5 638 *Poor working conditions* 1 2 3 4 5 339 *Insufficient equipment* 1 2 3 4 5 340 *Insufficient facilities* 1 2 3 4 5 3

41

42 *Unpleasant working environment* 1 2 3 4 5 343 *Too many disturbing factors in the working environment* 1 2 3 4 5 344 *Isolation from the colleagues* 1 2 3 4 5 445 *Poor opportunities for promotion* 1 2 3 4 5 546 *Lack of feedback on my performance as a PE teacher* 1 2 3 4 5

1							
2	<i>Diminished work capacity</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
3	<i>Lack of support from colleagues</i>	1	2	3	4	5	4
4	<i>Jealousy of colleagues</i>	1	2	3	4	5	4
5	<i>Colleagues do not respect PE</i>	1	2	3	4	5	4
6	<i>Poor relationship with colleagues</i>	1	2	3	4	5	4
7							
8	<i>Salary is too low</i>	1	2	3	4	5	1
9	<i>Workload is too high</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
10	<i>Work stress is too high</i>	1	2	3	4	5	8
11	<i>Lack of time allocated to complete work /too tight schedules</i>	1	2	3	4	5	8
12	<i>Disobedient pupils</i>	1	2	3	4	5	2
13							
14	<i>Testing of students causes stress</i>	1	2	3	4	5	8
15	<i>Lack of parent co-operation</i>	1	2	3	4	5	2
16	<i>Lack of co-operation from colleagues</i>	1	2	3	4	5	4
17	<i>Administration do not support teachers</i>	1	2	3	4	5	7
18	<i>Inflexibility of administration</i>	1	2	3	4	5	7
19							
20	<i>Incapability of administration</i>	1	2	3	4	5	7
21	<i>Limited trust in administration</i>	1	2	3	4	5	7
22	<i>Poor student learning outcomes</i>	1	2	3	4	5	2
23	<i>Pupils lack the basic skills</i>	1	2	3	4	5	2
24	<i>Poor student material</i>	1	2	3	4	5	2

25

26 *NOTE.* \*Factors: status of the PE teacher =1, pupils=2, working conditions=3, colleagues=4,  
 27 expertise=5, workload = 6, administration=7, and stress=8.

28



1 Table 1. Age, years of teaching experience and teaching and other than teaching hours of changers and stayers and significance (t-test).

	N	Intention to change		Cohen's d	Intention to stay		p-value	Cohen's d	
		M (SD)	p-value		M (SD)	p-value			
Age	724	43.5 (6.5)			44.7 (7.8)		.032	0.17	
Men	344	42.8 (6.22)	.134	0.19	44.8 (7.72)	.728	.016	0.29	
Women	380	44.0 (6.60)			44.5 (7.88)				.461
Teach. Experience	764	13.7 (7.0)			14.4 (8.6)		.208	.009	
Men	347	12.8 (6.5)	.05	0.20	14.4 (8.1)	.978	0.55	.045	0.22
Women	417	14.4 (9.0)			14.4 (7.29)				
Teaching hours	714	24.5 (5.5)			25.3 (4.8)		.054	.015	
Men	335	24.5 (6.0)	.879	0.02	26.1 (4.8)	.002	0.30	.013	0.29
Women	379	24.6 (4.55)			24.6 (5.11)				
Other working hours	732	10.3 (8.4)			8.7 (8.5)		.033	.018	
Men	295	10.3 (8.7)	.989	0.001	8.3 (9.0)	.336	0.11	.076	0.23
Women	337	10.1 (8.2)			9.2 (8.0)				

- 1 Table 2. Comparison of the influences on teachers intending to change or move in relation to  
 2 the working environment (Mann-Whitney U-test).

	Changers	Stayers	<i>p</i> -value	Cohen's d
	M (SD)	M (SD)		
<b>Working conditions</b>	.219 (1.01)	-.207 (0.86)	.010	0.45
<b>Colleagues</b>	-.072 (0.97)	.068 (0.93)	.374	0.15
<b>Pupils</b>	-.008 (1.01)	.007 (0.91)	.925	0.02
<b>Administration</b>	.095 (0.97)	-.091 (0.97)	.247	0.20
<b>Workload</b>	.163 (0.96)	-.154 (0.77)	.033	0.36
<b>Status</b>	.165 (1.00)	-.156 (0.85)	.025	0.35
<b>Expertise</b>	.134 (0.95)	-.127 (0.81)	.075	0.30
<b>Stress</b>	.124 (1.00)	-.117 (0.76)	.101	0.27

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