INTRODUCTION

Physical education plays an important role in a holistic approach to education and has the potential to positively influence student learning in other subject areas due to connections between physical activity and academic achievement (Centeio et al., 2021; Lubans et al., 2016). School-based programs have similarly been identified as an important intervention that may help to curb rising rates of childhood obesity (McKenzie & Lounsbery, 2009) and can help children develop the knowledge and skills associated with lifelong engagement in physical activity that can prevent the likelihood of obesity in adulthood (World Health Organization, 2012). Despite the potential of physical education to positively impact many aspects of student learning, in many respects the field has fallen short of capitalizing on its public promise. Through a public health lens, these circumstances led McKenzie and Lounsbery (2009) to characterize physical education as “the pill not taken” in U.S. schools.

Unfortunately, there continue to be negative public perceptions of physical education (Walton-Fisette et al., 2017), some of which can be explained by a continued curricular emphasis on team sport content delivered through teacher-centered instructional practices that neglect students’ needs and preferences (Ferry & McCaughtry, 2013; Flory, 2016), the neglect of social justice and sociocultural issues within the discipline (Walton-Fisette & Sutherland, 2018), and challenges related to the ways in which individuals are recruited and socialized into their roles as teachers (Richards et al., 2014). The largest issue facing the profession, however, may be attributed to the inability of disciplinary leaders to develop consensus on the structure, purpose, and goals of physical education (Lawson, 2018). This lack of consensus results in infighting, disciplinary disputes, and competitions with the goal of identifying one best approach to delivering physical education content (Lawson et al., 2022).

We believe lack of consensus poses significant challenges that require disciplinary scholars to convene in a focused and intensive format to discuss research trends that have the potential to change the future of physical education in a manner that will simultaneously improve public perceptions about the discipline, foster more inclusive and effective instruction in schools, and develop better connections to education more broadly. While physical education teachers and other stakeholders must be involved in these conversations, faculty members serve in an important capacity as disciplinary stewards who have a responsibility for helping pursue a favorable future for the discipline (Golde & Walker, 2006; Lawson, 2016). As a result, while discussions about the future of the field should not end in higher education environments, they may begin as conversations among faculty members. It is important that space is created for these conversations on a regular basis so as to continuously consider the future of the field in light of changing and evolving social norms and the needs and interests of young people.

In March of 2000, 10 prominent physical education faculty members gathered at the University of Nebraska for what became known as the Janus Conference. Hosted by Phil Ward and Panayiotis Doutis, conference attendees included Kate Barrett, Patt Dodds, Catherine Ennis, Amelia Lee, Larry Locke, Thom McKenzie, Mary O’Sullivan, Judith Rink, Inez Rovegno, and Daryl Siedentop. The conference was named for Janus, the Roman God of “Good Beginnings.” Janus was also recognized as the guardian of gateways and doors and was depicted as having two faces with one looking to the past and one to the future. The conference organizers chose this depiction because it aligned with their belief that the future should be informed by the past. Papers presented at the conference, as well as a transcription of dialogue that ensued, were published as an edited book (Ward & Doutis, 2001) and helped to develop consensus around key research areas that guided scholarship for the first part of the 21st century. Eight years later, the Historic Traditions conference organized by Lynn Housner, Mike Metzler, Paul Schempp, and Thomas Templin was hosted in Pittsburgh in 2008. This conference similarly invited participants to present papers related to key areas for physical education research and practice that were subsequently edited into a book of conference proceedings (Housner et al., 2009).

While these conferences, and other such gatherings, have served as important flag posts for conversations concerning the future of the discipline, we felt it was time to revisit the conversation. In 2019, we submitted a proposal to the American Educational Research Association Conference grant to fund a 2-day, 3-night conference at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. Picking inspiration from the Janus Conference, and targeting a fall 2020 conference gathering, we named the proposed meeting the Janus 2.0 conference. The proposal was funded, and the planning process finally convened in the fall of 2022. In addition to funding from American Educational Research Association, the Department of Kinesiology and Community Health, as well as the College of Applied Health Sciences, at University of Illinois Urbana–Champaign helped to fund and support Janus 2.0. This special issue of Kinesiology Review includes the 10 papers presented at the conference, which have been revised and edited based on discussions at the conference. For framing, we begin with an overview of the Janus 2.0 conference before introducing the topics and contributors.

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Overview of the Janus 2.0 Conference

Janus 2.0 sought to engage both disciplinary leaders and emerging scholars who were identified as highly promising young professionals with strong potential to contribute to the scientific knowledge base in physical education. This approach sought to capitalize on the experience of senior leaders while also providing a platform for emerging leaders to contribute to the conversation. This was important, in our view, because emerging scholars are the future of the discipline who will become disciplinary stewards (Golde & Walker, 2006) as senior leadership retires from the academy. Inspired by other scholarly activities that have sought to promote conversations among emerging and senior scholars (Armour & Macdonald, 2012), we established teams to collaborate in presenting and writing papers based on a preidentified topical area important to the field. Armour and Macdonald (2012) note that “this pairing approach . . . adds richness . . . because the emerging scholars . . . offer engaging and sometimes intimate insights into their research experiences” (p. 13).

In total, 10 senior leaders and 10 emerging leaders were invited to present at the Janus 2.0 conference. One senior leader was paired with one emerging leader and assigned to address one of 10 pressing research areas within the field. Although physical education is an international field of study, we focused this conference on trends and issues related to U.S. physical education. This approach poses some limitations but also allows for a more focused conversation on the U.S. context. Authorship teams were given flexibility in developing their manuscript, but each was asked to send a complete draft prior to the conference for review, feedback, and editing. Authors were also asked to develop manuscripts that: (a) were approximately 10,000 words in length; (b) overviewed the history of research in the designated area; (c) discussed contemporary trends and proposed future directions for scholarship; (d) identified implications for teaching practice; (e) proposed connections to education, health, and physical activity in a broader sense; (f) listed two to four questions for discussion; and (g) posed pressing research questions that have yet to be addressed. In some instances, additional authors were added to the final manuscripts based on significant contributions to their development.

The conference, held from October 19 to 22, 2022, on the University of Illinois Urbana–Champaign campus, was organized around the 10 preselected research topics with junior and senior scholars collaboratively giving a 30-min presentation based on their co-authored manuscript. Each presentation was followed by 30 min of group discussion. This scholarly discourse was central to the conference experience because it provided a platform to discuss topics in relation to the future of the field and as part of the larger education and public health agendas. All conversations began with the questions posed by the article authors and evolved based on the direction taken by the group. Building from the first Janus conference (Ward & Doutis, 2001), all conversations were recorded so that a digital record could be maintained for archival purposes.

Janus 2.0 Conference Topics and Presenters

With the overarching goal of providing new directions for scholarship in the field of physical education, the conference was organized around 10 key research themes. These themes were grounded in research reviews and empirical investigations published in leading disciplinary journals, such as the Journal of Teaching in Physical Education and Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport, as well as current and past summaries of research and edited books (e.g., Ennis, 2017; Graber, 2001; Hemphill et al., 2012; Kirk et al., 2006). While each theme addressed a distinct topic, the 10 conference themes overlapped and were interrelated to capture multiple levels of a socioecological framework for understanding physical activity participation (Castelli & van der Mars, 2018). Some themes focused on specific interactions between youth and physical activity leaders, whereas others considered preparation and professional development, or larger policy and health implications that frame the physical education profession. The papers are presented in accordance with how they were ordered at the conference.

Article 1, which focuses on curriculum, was written by Pamela Hodges Kulinna, Zachary Wahl-Alexander, Kahiun Nam, and Christopher J. Kinder. It summarizes research related to instruction, assessment, and pedagogical models that have increasingly become a focus in P–12 school research in recent years (Kirk, 2013; Land & Tannehill, 2010; Starck et al., 2018). Article 2, on teacher knowledge, written by Phil Ward and Insook Kim, addresses knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, and technological–pedagogical content knowledge applied to physical education (Kelly, 2008; Sinelnikov et al., 2015). Article 3, which focuses on continuing professional development, by Ben D. Kern and Kevin Patton, describes effective models of professional development, including their effectiveness related to teacher change (Armour & Yelling, 2007; Kern & Graber, 2017).

Article 4, on policy and advocacy, by Risto Marttinen and Aaron Beighle, examines the influence of policy on physical education and the effectiveness of programs that target policy change (Lawson, 2018; Louonsbery, 2017). Article 5, focusing on motivation and achievement, authored by Senlin Chen and Melinda Solmon, focuses on teacher and student motivation processes (Carson & Chase, 2009; Leptokaridou et al., 2016). Article 6, on physical activity and health promotion, by Erin E. Centeio and Timothy A Brusseau, focuses on models and practices that have contributed to physical education and other school-based programs (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2013; McKenzie et al., 1997). Article 7, authored by Dillon Landi and Sue Sutherland, addresses the integration of social justice in physical education environments (Azzarito et al., 2017; Walton-Fisette & Sutherland, 2018).

Article 8, focusing on teacher socialization, written by Kevin Andrews Richards, Christopher J. Kinder, and Thomas J. Templin, addresses recruitment into physical education teacher education, preparation for life in schools, and career-long socialization influences (Richards & Gaudreault, 2017; Templin & Schempp, 1989). Article 9, on social and emotional learning, by Michael A. Hemphill and Paul M. Wright, discusses pedagogical approaches that build personal and social responsibility through physical education and physical activity (Hellison, 2011; Jacobs et al., 2017). Article 10, which focuses on physical education teacher education, by Matthew D. Curner-Smith and Tim Fletcher, focuses on the manner in which teachers are educated and trained for their roles as instructional leaders in schools (Armour, 2006; Graber, 2001). Finally, Kim C. Graber, Amelia Mays Woods, Christopher J. Kinder, and Kevin Andrews Richards provide closing comments that connect the articles and address the future of research in physical education.

Conclusions and Final Thoughts

With that initial framing, we are excited to present the 2022 Janus 2.0 Conference Papers, with a few final caveats. First, the research
enterprise in physical education has diversified substantially over the last several decades. While this diversity enriches the field, it also makes it difficult to identify a finite number of topics for a conference such as Janus 2.0. Although the topics selected were broad in scope, we acknowledge that important areas of research focus were omitted. For example, adapted physical education, technology integration in physical education, and school–university partnerships are a few areas that were considered but not included in the conference for logistical reasons. Accordingly, while the manuscripts included herein address critical topics for physical education research, they are not inclusive of the considerable and important research being conducted in the field. Second, participants were initially recruited for this conference in Spring of 2019 with the goal of convening in October 2020. It took 2 years, however, before the relaxation of COVID-19 restrictions allowed us to host the meeting. As a result, some of the scholars identified as emerging leaders have now progressed into mid-career, tenured positions.

We close this introduction to the special issue with an aspiration. Rather than being viewed as a destination or final product, we encourage readers to view the Janus 2.0 papers as a point of departure for digging deeper into the fascinating realm of physical education research, discussing the role of research in building a more favorable future for physical education, and engaging other stakeholders (e.g., physical education teachers, professional association leaders, and policy actors) in conversations about that future (Lawson et al., 2022). Pursuing a favorable future for the discipline will require coordinated efforts, and impetus for initial momentum needs to come from somewhere. We hope the Janus 2.0 Conference and the papers published in this special issue serve to fuel that motivation.

References

