

Professional Growth and Development in Physical Education: A Focus on PETE Students

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Based on a recent editorial titled “Professional Growth and Development in Physical Education” (Heidorn, 2014), this current editorial focuses on a similar theme. I previously discussed the need for continued professional growth and development for current teachers through instructor-led workshops, seminars, physical activity sessions, additional certifications and educational opportunities, webinars, blogs, and SHAPE America – Society of Health and Physical Educators member forums. In addition, I encouraged all of us professionals to continue reading scholarly and practitioner-based articles written to enhance our teaching and our programs. I focused on three different works developed by Rink (2003), Siedentop (2002) and Silverman (2011), respectively, and specifically described how these works influenced my teaching and research-based practices.

In this editorial my aim is to continue the focus on professional growth and development, but through a slightly different lens: the physical education teacher education (PETE) student. The emphasis here is to encourage professional growth and development among PETE students. For a quick background, a brief excerpt from the editorial mentioned above is highlighted here:

In the physical education teacher education (PETE) program in which I teach, the students are also expected to participate in professional development opportunities. We provide chances for the physical education teacher education candidates to assist with 5K road races, seek volunteer and/or paid coaching opportunities, referee local sport activities, support the Special Olympics events, and participate in recreational and community settings in multiple ways. The program faculty members also promote active participation through the professional state, regional

and national associations. Ultimately, we aim to encourage professional growth and development opportunities throughout the program, hoping to foster a significant level of interest in the profession both now and in the future. For the most part, none of the professional development opportunities we promote contribute toward the overall academic grades of the students. In other words, the students have ways to grow as a professional, without receiving academic credit for their efforts. We hope to develop within the teacher candidates (our future physical education teachers) an intrinsic motivation to continue moving forward in an exciting career. (Heidorn, 2014, p. 3)

With that said, the remainder of this editorial focuses on professional growth and development through our professional organizations — more specifically, participation at the national, district and state conferences. After reviewing recent accountability measures with undergraduate students (forms verifying their attendance and participation) and follow-up discussions from two state and regional conventions, I highlighted the sessions that students perceived as most enjoyable and found the following themes that emerged from the undergraduate student perspective.

Theme 1: Games for Use in Elementary Physical Education Programs

The most prevalent theme that emerged from the review of session participation by PETE students was the inclusion of “fun games” for use in physical education programs. The students seemed to especially value new ideas and activities, and different ways to get K–12 students physically active in the physical education environment. Other concepts, including integrating academics, organizing participants, developing fitness

and teaching large classes were valued in the games sessions.

Theme 2: Outdoor Education

Students also valued participating in sessions focusing on outdoor education or similar activities. They described how many activities related to outdoor education are often overlooked in the K–12 physical education environment. They also believe that K–12 learners are highly interested in outdoor education and skills. Activities such as rock climbing, orienteering, kayaking, fishing and archery with low-cost options and fundraising strategies were especially helpful for the PETE students. In addition, they recognized the importance of “team-building” opportunities and social-skill development through outdoor education. Finally, many students articulated how several “challenges” are easy to set up, can be modified for different class sizes, and could be used as warm-up activities on a regular basis.

Theme 3: Technology in Physical Education

As we know, our students value and use technology regularly in their everyday lives. As they attended and participated in technology-based sessions, the introduction of smartphone apps for use in physical education classes was especially positive for them. In addition, learning to navigate through different web sites was beneficial and provided them with a tremendous amount of resources for future use in their own programs.

Theme 4: Skill Development in Physical Education

Within this theme students valued attending sessions that focused specifically

on teaching sport units in physical education programs (e.g., tennis, basketball, team handball). Some students mentioned learning new strategies or activities to better teach the fundamentals of the game. Others mentioned participating in sessions that included activities in which they were not as comfortable, hoping to increase their own knowledge of and skills in the game. Still others valued learning new activities that focused on teaching the skills of the game, while at the same time incorporating moderate-to-vigorous physical activity and making skill connections from one sport/unit to another.

Theme 5: Health Education

Related to health education, students gained valuable information pertaining to nutrition for athletes, specifically what to eat before, during and after physical activity. They recognized how this knowledge could be helpful in future teaching and coaching endeavors. In addition, students learned different ways to create hands-on activities and inexpensive visual aids for their health education classrooms.

Mostly Positive, Some Negative

In addition to the five themes highlighted here, PETE students valued the professional development opportunities and specifically mentioned the positive experience of participating in a state, regional or national convention. Of particular note, they were impressed by the presenters, who demonstrated the energy, enthusiasm, skill and knowledge needed for quality physical education. Students also gained simple strategies modeled by presenters for managing physical activity settings. They also appreciated the opportunity to make connections with other teachers, receive handouts from sessions, learn new dances, and gain knowledge about writing grants for physical education.

Less than five percent of all comments were negative, but they also need our attention. First, PETE students mentioned experiencing some difficulty in navigating through the convention hotels and dealing with local traffic, an important

concept to consider when planning conventions. Second, students recognized that some sessions at the conventions required a lot of equipment. This frustrated the PETE students since some schools simply do not have the financial resources for expensive purchases. Finally, it was noted that some physical education professionals were unengaged and seemed to be in attendance only for the credit (e.g., continuing education units, professional learning units). Perhaps this notion contributes to the overall marginalization of our field.

I encourage you to reach out to college/university physical education majors who are looking to us for modeling, advice, teaching tips and networking opportunities.

However, most of the comments from PETE students were extremely positive, such as:

- “The conference was a really good experience as a future teacher because I was exposed to a variety of new information.”
- “The people presenting the material seemed very enthusiastic about health and physical education, which only fueled the fire, so to speak, in wanting to become a great teacher.”
- “The presenters were very knowledgeable of their material.”
- “The presenters were very skilled at the content they were teaching.”
- “I loved meeting new people at the conference, and the best thing was that I

was able to bring something back for my students.”

- “It is a great way to be around people who have the same passion as you.”

- “I am thrilled to have experienced some of the workshops at this conference.”

- “The entire atmosphere was electrifying for me. I felt like I was in my element and have never been more eager to be a physical educator.”

- “I look forward to going to more conferences in the future.”

Summary

So what does all of this mean for us? I hope you attend and participate in professional conferences at the national, regional and state levels; if not, I encourage you to get involved. It does not take much to see the enthusiasm and tremendous learning potential available for all of us. Further, I encourage you to not only be a participant at a convention but also to find ways to become even more connected to the profession by serving on a planning committee or presenting in an area of your expertise; consider the themes described in this document. Finally, I encourage you to reach out to college/university physical education majors who are looking to us for modeling, advice, teaching tips and networking opportunities, so that they, too, can begin a successful career in an exciting field.

References

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