

Practitioners Speak Out on Teacher Education Preparation

In 2004, Collier and Hebert surveyed K-12 physical education teachers in five states through direct mailings (N=256) and at a professional physical education conference (n=103). The 24-question survey covered teacher demographics and the value of various teaching approaches, teaching skills, and preservice course work.

Demographics showed 44 percent of respondents held at least a master's degree, 67 percent had more than 10 years of teaching experience, and 40 percent reported having more than 20 years of experience. Forty-nine percent of the teachers taught in rural settings, while the others were equally distributed throughout suburban and urban locations. When asked what teaching approach was most important for the physical education profession, 63 percent of the high school teachers, and 35 percent of K-8 teachers chose lifetime activities. Secondary (24%) and elementary school teachers (21%) selected fitness activities as the second most important teaching approach. Other survey choices included adventure education, low-organized games, team and individual sports, and movement education.

Teachers believed the two most important skills needed for effective teaching were classroom management skills (38%) and behavior management skills (29%). Both ranked well ahead of the third most important teaching skill, fitness skill evaluation (10%), while other skills such as providing feedback on behavior, personal skill proficiency, assessment measures and evaluation, providing feedback on skill performance, and personal-fitness-level role-modeling ranked even lower.

Participants also selected what

areas should receive the most emphasis in undergraduate physical education teacher education programs. Broken down by grade level, 44 percent of K-8 teachers valued competencies in fundamental motor skills, while only 16 percent of high school teachers viewed them to be important. Forty-five percent of the high school teachers valued lifetime activity skills, as did 35 percent of K-8 teachers. Both K-8 teachers (30%) and high school teachers (26%) valued exercise and health-related fitness. Other choices included sports and games (6%), dance and rhythms (1.5%), and adventure education (1%). Additionally, 38 percent of high school teachers and 27 percent of K-8 teachers cited exercise physiology as the most important preparation course. Twenty-six percent of elementary and middle school teachers felt that motor development courses were most important; however, only 10 percent of high school teachers felt the same. History, sociology of sport, exercise and sport psychology, and philosophy were viewed as less important. Less than one percent of the teachers selected these as the most important subjects in teacher preparation.

As physical education preservice instructors, we may be perpetuating an unfit and inactive society by teaching sports and games that will rarely be used outside of school except by athletes. Physical education teacher education programs should present a varied curriculum of lifetime activities including yoga, martial arts, aerobics, fitness training, and individual activities, with little emphasis on team sports. The teacher demographics in this study demonstrated several years of experience, indirectly indicating the time elapsed

since their undergraduate training. Preservice training has evolved over the years; however, these changes have been less than sensitive to the dynamic needs of the professionals and the students.

This article demonstrates, in part, what undergraduate physical education teacher preparation should reflect. In an era of budget cuts and subsequent program cuts, the candid responses from the practicing teachers should send a vital message to undergraduate physical education preparation departments with professors who may need to be reminded what is pertinent to K-12 physical education. Teachers in the gyms and on the fields can provide feedback about how they wish they were better prepared. It is never too late to listen, to learn, and to apply.

References

- Collier, D., & Hebert, F. (2004). Undergraduate physical education teacher preparation: What practitioners tell us. *Physical Educator*, 61(2), 102-113.

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