Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE) Majors' Perceptions and Opinions of Appropriate Instructional Practices: A Qualitative Approach

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Abstract

Physical education (PE) teachers are responsible for helping students learn in their classes. Unfortunately, many students have been exposed to games and activities that were inappropriate, thus negatively affecting their learning in PE class. Inappropriate instructional practices have been a common occurrence for many students. One group that can help curb the inclusion of inappropriate instructional practices are Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE) majors. This study investigated PETE majors’ beliefs of certain instructional practices that have been implemented in PE games and activities. Many of the instructional practices were inappropriate. The PETE majors’ felt that dodge ball, relay games, and elimination tag were appropriate for students to participate in.
Many Pre-Service Teachers (PST) enter their teacher education courses with preconceived beliefs regarding how to teach and teaching in general (Pajares, 1992). This also applies to physical education teacher education (PETE) majors. For many PETE majors, they have attended 13 years of schooling (K-12), being exposed to certain instructional practices, which in some cases were inappropriate. For example, PETE majors witnessed/experienced captains picking teams in full view of the rest of the class. Another example of an inappropriate instructional practice was for students to participate in a game or activity in which the class was divided in half and only one ball was used during game play. When this would take place, a majority of the students would have minimal interaction with the ball or very little physical activity because of the students standing around and watching the game go on around them.

Research has been conducted looking at specific instructional practices that students participated in and how it has affected them and their attitudes towards PE. One study investigated the effects of captains picking teams on junior high school students’ situational motivation (Barney, Prusak, Beddoes, & Eggett, 2016). For this study, the students participated in two separate studies dealing with four different curriculum units. For each study, students participated in captains picking teams and the teacher overseeing a private draft. The first study’s curriculum units were soccer and flag football. The second study curriculum units were volleyball and basketball. The results of the two studies were that the student’s motivation was not positively or negatively affected by captains picking teams or by the teacher overseeing a private draft. Overall, they were neutral. These results surprised the researchers which led to adding a qualitative component to the study. With the neutral attitudes of the participants, the researchers interviewed a number of the participants. Through the interviews three themes emerged. The first theme was the selection motives. For example, one participant stated, “It
[team selection] is determined by skill level. If you have a captain that is athletic, he will choose athletic kids to be on his team...so they can win!” Another student stated, “I was just hoping to have some of my friends on the team. Some kids may be going for their friends first. Or if they want to win, they will go for the better kids.” Another theme from the interviews was a differentiation of conceptions of ability. One student stated, “If you are not picked first in soccer, how do you feel? It could be upsetting. But I know why. Because I am no good at that. I accept that.” Another student stated, “[Not a big deal] because I knew I would be one of the last ones picked. So, I really don’t care.” A last theme from the interviews dealt with empathy. One student said, “It can be [a big deal] because it excludes people, if you are the last picked.” Another student stated, “Do you feel sorry for those students that were picked? Yes, because I would not want to be in their position. It is not fun being the last one picked. It means you don’t have any friends or you are not very good.”

Another study investigating a specific instructional practice in PE dealt with student’s exercising as punishment for misbehavior in class (Barney, Pleban, Fullmer, Griffiths, Higginson, & Whaley, 2016). For this study college-aged students were surveyed regarding their experiences with exercise as punishment in their PE classes. The survey consisted of yes/no statements with open-ended follow up questions. The results of this study found that the participants generally did not enjoy exercising as punishment in their PE classes. Participants were asked how they felt when they or classmates had to exercise as a form of punishment. They used words like “humiliated”, “it was awkward to watch”, and “it changed the mood in the class.” Another statement participants were asked was regarding the effects of exercise as punishment had on the participants own exercise. One participant stated, “Why choose to do something that you’ve learned is a punishment.”
The results from these two studies hint as to how negatively instructional practices can affect a students’ attitude toward their PE class and possibly lifelong physical activity. Luckily, there are documents that have been created by the Society of Health and Physical Educators, also known as SHAPE America. There are documents for elementary (NASPE, 2009a), middle school (NASPE, 2009b), and high school (2009c) PE. The purpose of these documents is to give specific guidelines for recognizing and implementing developmentally appropriate physical education activities and practices … practices that are in the best interest of children (appropriate) and those that are counterproductive or even harmful (inappropriate) need to be identified for benefits of the students (NASPE, 2009b, p.7).

These documents are written for parents, school administrators, and policymakers. The documents allow PE teachers to assess the quality of their instructional practices. One of the most beneficial uses of these documents is that it provides school administrators and parents a guide for what should be taking place in PE class.

A series of studies have been conducted to assess certain populations knowledge of appropriate and inappropriate instructional practices in K-12 PE. Three studies in particular studied PETE majors’ knowledge of appropriate instructional practices in PE (Barney, Christenson, & Pleban, 2015; Barney & Christenson, 2013; Barney, Christenson & Pleban, 2015). The population for these three studies were PETE majors from seven universities in the United States. Three were located in the south and four were located west of the Rockies. The three studies assessed PETE major’s knowledge of elementary, middle school, and high school PE. The results of the three studies revealed that PETE majors found the following instructional practices appropriate in PE class, Curriculum should consist of large and competitive team games, Teachers should administer physical fitness tests once or twice a year for the purpose of
identifying children to receive awards that meet state or district requirements, dress and
attendance and effort should be graded, activities such as relays, dodge ball and elimination tag
should be used to provide opportunities for everyone in class, and one method for teachers to
implement social interactions among students is to let them randomly select teams with captains
picking teams in front of the whole class. The three studies were quantitative in nature, thus
informing the researcher that a majority of the PETE majors misidentified instructional practices.
Thus, the purpose of this study was to investigate PETE majors’ beliefs of certain instructional
practices that have been implemented in PE games and activities.

Methods

Participants

Participants in this study were 30 undergraduate PETE majors (9 males and 21 females)
from a private university in the western region of the United States. The participants ages ranged
from 19 to 25 years of age. The participants ethnicities were either Caucasian or Hispanic. The
researcher chose this population because the PETE majors were at the beginning of their PETE
course of study. Thus, they had not been exposed to appropriate instructional practices in PE.
For this reason, their opinions towards what is appropriate in PE pedagogy had not been affected.

Instrumentation

Through the Appropriate Instructional Practices (AIP) literature (Barney & Christenson,
2013), interview questions were formulated. For this study, the researcher developed nine-
opened-ended survey statements for the PETE majors to answer regarding inappropriate
instructional practices in PE (See Table 1). To establish content validity, the researcher had a
different group of PETE majors review the open-ended survey questions for clarity and for
understanding. For reliability, the instrument was further pilot tested to another group of
college-aged students who did not participate in the study. This group found the survey to be reliable.

**Procedures**

Upon gaining IRB approval, the lead researcher recruited PETE majors for participating in the study from a class he taught over a three-year period. Participation in the study involved responding to the survey statements. The survey the participants took was a paper and pen instrument. Before students agreed to take the survey, the researcher explained the study to the students. PETE majors were assured that their voluntary decision to participate or not participate in the study would not negatively affect their grade in their classes or class standings. For this study 98% of the students over the three-period agreed to participate in the study.

**Data Analysis**

For the open-ended statements, student responses were correlated for each survey statement and reviewed to generate preliminary coding categories, with the framework analysis methodology for participant responses as outlined by Check and Schutt (2011). Framework analysis incorporated the stages of 1) familiarization, 2) thematic, 3) identification, and 4) charting and interpretation (Rabiee, 2004).

**Results**

Themes emerged from each of the nine survey statements. Themes ranged from agreement/support for the statement to disagreement/disapproval. These will be discussed by statements in the sections that follow. Participants actual names were not used, pseudonyms are used.
Curriculum Should Consist of Large Groups and Competitive Team Games

The main theme from this survey statement was the lack of participation on the student’s part. A majority of the participants (21) felt this was appropriate. Sally stated:

“Think that large groups often lead to many people standing around only a few participate, which is not the result I want. When I was in PE, the teacher would make us dribble a basketball up and down the court, people would mess around when we did this.”

Along these lines Cindy stated:

“This is not appropriate (large teams & competitive games) and won’t benefit student learning. With large groups, there is significantly less participation from each student as it is mainly a couple dominant students that overtake the group, while others stand around.”

Yet, John said, “I think that this is an important part of PE because students can learn a lot from working with their peers.

Administration of Physical Fitness Tests

The theme that came forward from this survey statement was fitness testing is important and should be done, but awarding students is not the best practice to do. For this statement 20 students felt this statement was appropriate. Stan stated, “I think administering regular fitness tests are good and needed because it tracks your progress. I don’t think you should give additional rewards. You don’t do that in other classes.” Along this same thought, Heather stated,

“The tests should be administered, but not so students get rewarded. They should be tested and shown their progress so they understand that they have made improvements, and encouraged one-on-one with the PE teacher to continue making improvements.” Frank had a
contrasting opinion, when he stated, “Helps motivate kids. I lost a lot of weight in middle school and got awarded and it was awesome.”

Calisthenics/Mass Exercises should be the Arena for Fitness Development

The theme for this survey statement was doing calisthenics/mass exercises are fine to do, yet having variety would be better for students. For this statement, it was almost split (16 felt this was appropriate) in half. Stephanie stated:

“I do think that it is important to vary the exercises so that students do more than only calisthenics to ensure that students are still having fun in education. When I was in elementary school I was grateful for the variation in routines.”

Roberta stated:

“Maybe you could demonstrate and have the lads try it out just so you can see them all at once, but variety is good. Also, it is easy for students to hide (not work hard, mess around, talk) in large groups they are hard to monitor and kids get distracted and bored easily.”

Dress, Attendance, and Effort should be Graded as a Portion of a Student’s Grade

When reading through the participants responses a majority (28 participants) felt that dress, attendance and effort should be graded as a portion of a student’s grade. Patty plainly stated, “I believe grading students for dress, attendance and effort is fair in a PE class.” Heather said;

“I do believe in grading on effort, because sometimes a student will not have skills but they will be trying their hardest and should be rewarded for that. Effort will in part encapsulate their attendance and dress and are trying in class, but not as a focus.”

Stan stated;
“Students are graded on these things in other classes, so why not PE? These should be expectations in your class as appropriate dress allows for maximum participation and safety. Attendance allows students to learn and develop new skills and effort should be a given! I do not think it’s okay to just show up! You must at least try out the activity!”

John stated: “Absolutely. I think students who come prepared and participate should receive a good grade in PE. It’s not about being the best, it’s about effort and progress.” And finally, Stephanie said: “Effort is slightly different since it is not as easy to measure, so I think that program practice sheet (assessment form) are a great way to go when looking at effort and grading it.”

**Students should be Graded by Dribbling a Basketball Through a Line of Cones**

The theme that came from participants responses regarding this survey statement was that this practice of dribbling a basketball through a line of cones was inappropriate, with no real-life application. Twenty-eight participants did not think this practice was appropriate. Kevin said:

“I think that it is inappropriate for students to be graded by dribbling through a line of cones. I think it’s possibly more beneficial that they be graded in their improvement on dribbling a ball through a line of cones. I could be biased though because dribbling was not my strong suite.”

Susan said:

Dribbling through cones is not necessarily a skill that will help a student when actually playing basketball. I think students should be graded as skills that develop their ability in a game setting allowing them to participate and understand the focus of the unit in real life.”
Large Groups in which Student Participation is based on Individual Competitiveness.

For this survey statement the participants felt this instructional practice was appropriate. For this statement 19 participants felt this was an appropriate practice. Stan stated:

“I think this is good because it can teach group skills and teamwork, but still allow students to be independent. Sometimes good students are penalized because of a bad group, so this way prevents that to a degree. A lot of my PE teachers used this and other students actually encouraged their teammates to play and learn the game,”

Sally stated, “I agree with this because it is all about the individual not the group.” And Sarah plainly stated, “Yes, I think that this is fine.”

Relays, Dodge Ball and Elimination Tag

For this survey statement the participants overwhelmingly felt (29 participants) that relays, elimination tag, and especially dodge ball are appropriate to have students participate in. Adam stated:

“I think this statement is appropriate. I mostly agree with this statement because I loved playing dodge ball and doing relays in PE. But I also agree that it is a great way to get everyone involved. Dodge ball can be a little more difficult with that just because you have those kids that stand in the back corner or try to get out right away, but a relay is a great way to have everyone involved. But I like dodge ball because it is a game that most students really enjoy and so you know that kids will try. It was one of my favorite things to do in high school PE and there were usually only a few kids in the class who didn’t participate.”

Frank felt these activities were appropriate when he stated:

“I actually agree with this! I understand the safety concerns and because of that I would
modify dodge ball, but I believe that this is actually appropriate and professional because it teaches the students real life things! I think we are being too nice and coddling to our kids, which does not prepare them for the real world! They will have relays and competitions later and I think the sooner they learn how to handle disappointment and how to lose. The better adjusted they will be for their futures and more successfully.”

John stated, “I was always a fan of those games so I say let them keep coming! They are a great way to elevate heart rate and provide entertainment to the students.”

Full-Sided or Large-Sided Games

The theme that came forward from the survey statement was that it would not benefit students. Twenty-four participants agree that this was appropriate. Heather said:

“I think that generally this is not a good method because it will be hard for all students to get “touches” in a game if it is so crowded. I think it would be best to divide into smaller groups and have rotations and the teams sitting out can be doing another activity.”

Patty stated:

“Too many people on a team means that only the kids who exert more effort will get touches on the ball and the others will passively stand and not participate. In my PE classes we had no larger than six players to a team.”

Steve felt differently when he stated, “I think it would be better to split into smaller groups. It encourages more participation and doesn’t leave the good kids out of activity.”

Captains Picking Teams in Front of the Whole Class.

Generally speaking the participants felt that captains picking teams in front of the whole class is not an appropriate instructional practice. All but one student felt this practice was inappropriate. Adam stated:
“I do not like captains picking teams at all. I feel like it is an awkward situation for everyone, especially the kids who get picked last. It also puts the captain in a difficult situation where they choose favorites and might offend some of their friends.”

Cindy added:

“I don’t think this is ever a good idea because there are always kids that get left out of the team they want to be with and it can be humiliating for the kids who get picked towards the end.”

John concluded by saying:

“We used this method of choosing teams all the time. But it really is just not a good way to go. It builds up kids who already feel good about themselves and it tears down the kids who already feel bad about themselves there is really just no winning in the situation. It’s so much better for the teacher to strategically or randomly determine teams.”

**Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to investigate PETE major’s beliefs of certain instructional practices that have been implemented in PE games and activities. For example, PETE students as a whole felt that dress, attendance, and effort should be part of a student’s grade. Putting students in large groups to participate in activities is appropriate. Likewise, overall PETE students felt that having students participate in such activities as elimination tag, relays, and dodge ball are also appropriate for students to participate in class activities. However, PETE students did not feel that having students dribble through cones was an appropriate form of assessment, nor did they feel students picking teams was appropriate. When looking into the instructional practices that were misidentified, the researchers noticed that the participants had
been exposed to them as K-12 students in their PE classes. This finding parallels Calderhead and Robson (1991) findings where pre-service teachers stated that past events and experiences influence how they will teach. Thus, in this study the PETE majors felt that a number of instructional practices were appropriate to implement in their teaching.

One of the practices that PETE majors felt was appropriate was dress, attendance and effort should be a part of a student’s grade. Miller (2002) has stated that by basing grades on dress, attendance, and effort undermine the true purpose of a PE class. These categories of assessment are not relevant assessments or students’ affective skills related to PE. Effort is a subjective measure for the fact that the PE teacher might interpret one students’ effort as casual. Yet, in the students’ mind he/she is giving his/her best effort in the given activity. Because effort is a subjective assessment, parents and administrators may call into question the validity of a students’ grade. If PE teachers assess students this way, they are demonstrating to parents and administrators that K-12 PE is glorified playtime.

A second instructional practice that many of the PETE majors felt was appropriate was that PE teachers may use large groups in which student participation is based on individual competitiveness. Once again participants felt this instructional practice was “completely acceptable” and “there will be plenty of chances for students to participate in this situation.” Interestingly, the researchers noticed that for a previously addressed survey statement of “Curriculum should consist of large groups and competitive team games,” participants must feel that an occasional activity or game with large teams of students competing against one another are appropriate. Yet, a curriculum that has units or extended periods of time with students in large groups is inappropriate. When PE teachers put students in teams with large numbers they are setting themselves up for the strong possibility of students misbehaving and typically have
those students that are more skilled taking over the game or activity. Thus, the less skilled
students usually stand around not learning or benefitting from the activity, and in some cases
being off-task or misbehaving. These results align with previous research (Barney &
Christenson, 2013).

One of the last and commonly misidentified instructional practice is using activities such
as relay races, elimination tag, and dodge ball to be used to provide opportunities for everyone in
the class. Of these three activities dodge ball is the most identifiable game. The media has
glamorized dodge ball as an activity that should be played by all students in PE class (Cooper,
Dobkin, & Gillespie, 2007). When discussing dodge ball with someone it is the activity that
stands out in their mind that defined their PE experience. In many cases their experience has
been negative. At this time in society dodge ball could be considered as a form of bullying
(Jensen, Cushing & Elledge, 2014). Because of this it could negatively affect long-term physical

Implications

After analyzing the survey statements from PETE majors, it should give PETE faculty a
better idea of the importance of instructing PETE majors on appropriate and inappropriate
practices in their content area. One of the main goals of PE is to teach students the importance of
being physically active throughout a lifetime and giving students the tools (knowledge) to be
able to successfully do it (Pangrazi & Beighle, 2013). PETE faculty have a serious responsibility
to teach their PETE majors why it is so important for them to implement appropriate practices in
the curriculum and lessons they will be teaching after they graduate. During the process of
course work it would be wise for PETE faculty to get copies of the Appropriate Instructional
Practices documents (Elementary, Middle School and High School) to the students (Barney &
Strand, 2006). Also, PETE majors need to be reminded that they need to do what is best for the students, not what they want or like (Prusak & Vincent, 2005). Courses preparing PETE majors are a good starting point to teach and implement appropriate instructional practices in PE.

**Study Limitations**

The researchers have noted limitations to this study. Because the participants came from one university, it may not allow a representative sampling of participants from other colleges, universities or geographic regions, thus limiting the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the research study was conducted at a private university, which may further limit the generalizability of the findings. Thus, the conclusions and implications are mostly applicable to those participants’ demographics.
References


Table 1
PETE Majors’ Perceptions of Appropriate Instructional Practices in Physical Education

Male _____ Female _____

Please take a moment to answer the following statements regarding appropriate instructional practices in physical education. When writing your responses to the statements, please discuss why you feel the statement is appropriate or inappropriate instructional practice in physical education, how it can benefit or not benefit students learning and experience in physical education. Also discuss any experiences you may have had when you were a K-12 student in physical education for the specific statement you are writing about. Thank you.

1. Curriculum should consist of large groups and competitive team games.

2. Teachers should administer physical fitness tests once or twice each year for the purpose of identifying children to receive awards that meet a requirement of the school district or a state department.

3. Calisthenics/mass exercise should be the arena for fitness development.

4. Dress, attendance and effort should be graded as a portion of a student’s grade.
5. Students should be graded by dribbling a basketball through a line of cones.

6. Teachers may use large groups in which student participation is based on individual competitiveness.

7. Activities such as relays, dodge ball and elimination tag should be used because they provide opportunities for everyone in the class.

8. Teachers may organize full-sided or large-sided game (e.g., the class of 30 students split into two groups of 15 that play against each other).

9. One method for teachers to implement social interaction among pupils is to let them randomly select teams with captains picking teams in front of the whole class.