



An Examination of PETE Field Experiences within Afterschool Program Contexts

Eugene T. Moore School of Education
Debbie A. Stevens-Smith, Ed.D. and David S. Fleming, Ph.D.



Introduction

Traditional field experiences for Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE) courses use local physical education (PE) teachers and classrooms as the instructional venue. These authentic contexts are desirable for PE majors, but can be challenging for elementary majors in terms of numbers of students and availability of suitable PE classrooms. The Elementary Physical Education Methods class at the participating university collaborated with an externally funded afterschool program implemented at seven local schools for this project. The purpose of this inquiry was to examine the implementation of a PETE field experience in an alternative venue. Emphasis was placed on understanding the experience of the PETE students as well as the afterschool program staff.

Guiding Questions

1. What is the experience of a PETE student in an afterschool environment?
2. What facilitators and hindrances to learning to teach physical education were experienced by the PETE students?
3. How did the experience impact PETE students' development as a teacher and as a professional?

Methods/Procedures

This inquiry employed a phenomenological perspective, describing rich detail of the experience from various individuals. A pilot study was conducted in a previous semester to refine the areas of inquiry and parameters of requisite data. Participating PETE students completed a nine-week instructional experience within the afterschool program. Pre and post reflections of the experience were combined with formative peer assessments. Observations within the field were conducted at each venue and with each group of students. Informal interviews were completed with the PETE students as well as afterschool program staff. The data were analyzed via constant comparison and included triangulation of the document analyses, interview notes, and field notes from observations. Additional methods of data trustworthiness included peer review, low-inference descriptors, and negative-case sampling.

Participants

Undergraduate education majors: N = 60
Program staff members: N = 23



Results

Facilitators of PETE Learning (AKA: Unshackled freedom to explore)

| | | |
|--|---|--|
| Small classes, "safe" environment to learn | Creativity of lessons | Ability to connect with kids |
| Instructional (non-PE) feedback | Freedom and flexibility with lesson plans | Kids eager to have fun with different (new) teachers |

"This program really allowed for some new teaching experiences and many learning opportunities".

"Although the students look forward to and enjoy their afternoons at GP, most enjoy the enrichment activities, want to be active and are eager to complete their homework"

Hindrances of PETE Learning (AKA: I need structure and support)

| | | |
|---|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Lack of prepared/accessible equipment | Lack of PE content feedback | Different kids each time |
| Lack of interest in PE student learning at site | Behavior issues | Different schedules each time |

"There was not enough support from the supervising teachers in the area of discipline and management, more feedback needed to help CU students grow to be better teachers [of PE]."

"...no equipment or not enough, like inflated basketballs."



Results (cont.)

Experience and Growth as a Professional (AKA: Wow, teaching PE is tough...but rewarding)

| | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|--|
| Importance of motivation | Developmentally appropriate lessons are key | Reflection and change in instruction warranted |
| Management and discipline techniques | Consistency, consistency, consistency | In-class adjustment skills developed |

"...if you do not plan for your students, then they will plan for you!"

"I learned that firmness and consistency increases the efficiency of management and discipline."

"I am cut out to be a teacher, most weeks I left GP feeling empowered and confident."

Staff perceptions of PETE students (AKA: A tale of two cities)

| | |
|---|---|
| PETE students' reflection and development | PETE students' restrained by context |
| Altered lessons and explored management techniques | Challenged lessons attributed to kids or context rather than lesson environment created |
| Connected with kids and accomplished learning through fun | Feedback selectively used |

"In observing lessons for the PE Methods course in the GoalPOST program, students either tend to show an internal or external locus of control when it comes to the success of their lesson. Typically, those students whom I have observed deliver successful, engaging lessons to students attribute their success to their ability to maintain effective classroom management, the high interest factor of their content in the lesson, etc. Similarly, I observed students, who deliver lessons that experience failure or difficulties, attribute their lack of success to the students, for example they were not paying attention or being disrespectful, to the environment. Some examples would be the equipment was not up to standard, the gym was not large enough, the observing teacher did not intervene when they should have, and more."

Conclusion

The field experiences within afterschool programs provided more opportunities to teach and scheduling flexibility for the participating students. In addition, class sizes were suitable for an initial PETE instructional experience and the participating students experienced variability with instructional options. However, the level of pedagogical feedback from the program staff was often limited and devoid of PE instructional context. In addition, lessons were sometimes compromised in terms of time or schedule as the flexible nature of the program sometimes competed with field experience objectives. Since this was an initial field experience for most students, any change in the schedule, venue, or student group was particularly challenging for some students. Constant communication with each site was an integral part of developing the experience and addressing any challenges. In summary, afterschool programs can provide a beneficial context for PETE field experiences. However, much effort must be placed in the planning, communication, and maintenance of these alternative venues to realize their true potential.