

A Profile of the Introduction to Adapted Physical Education Course within Physical Education Teacher Education

Ding Yan¹

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Abstract:

The purpose of this study was to describe the profile, content, delivery mechanism, and application of teaching standards, National Association of Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) and Adapted Physical Education National Standards (APENS), within the Introduction to Adapted Physical Education (APE) course for college/university PETE preparation programs. Participants were 136 faculty members who taught the Introduction to APE course representing 129 different colleges/universities from 41 states. Participants representing 129 (response rate of 38%, 136 different faculty) colleges/universities from 41 of the 50 states in the U.S. completed an online survey of 40 questions. Student population was cross disciplined (i.e. teacher education, exercise science, athletic training) with the majority enrolled at the junior level. Content areas identified as a major emphasis (5 or more hours of lecture) were Disabilities (72%), Instructional and Motivational Strategies (70%), Modifications (70%), Physical fitness, Motor skills, and Motor development of students with disabilities (59%), and Writing and Implementation of Individual Education Plans (52%). Practicum experiences were included within 84% of the introductory courses. The courses were taught by professionals without Ph.D's in APE (60%). Participants indicated they addressed NASPE standards and APENS.

Introduction:

Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE) preparation programs are challenged to meet the demands of how best to prepare highly qualified professionals, which includes the ability to teach students with disabilities in physical education. During the 1990's it was noted that prospective physical educators often lack the confidence to teach students with disabilities (DePauw, 1996). Now, more recently, when examining the perceived needs of practitioners who have completed their

undergraduate degrees in physical education one of the most important instructional areas identified was programming for students with special needs (Collier & Hebert, 2004; Hill & Brodin, 2004). When general physical education teachers have to teach students with disabilities it is likely to be in an inclusive setting. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2003), 88% of students with disabilities at the secondary levels (Junior and Senior High school) are receiving physical education in the general setting. However, general physical education teachers are delivering service

to students with disabilities with likely only one course in professional preparation devoted to adapted physical education (APE). This limited preparation for general physical education teachers is likely due to the fact that 38 of 50 states in the U.S. do not require professional training beyond one course regarding teaching physical education to students with disabilities (Wetzel, 2007; Wetzel, Tymeson,, Felix,, Mikat, & DiRocco, 2010). Most college/university PETE preparation programs are guided by professional standards and related competencies (i.e., state teaching standards, national teaching standards, and professional organization standards). The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) standards are used in Teacher Education programs in all 50 of the United States and over two thirds of newly licensed teachers are graduates of NCATE approved programs (Butler, 2006). NCATE has created Specialized Professional Associations (SPAs) for specific specializations and the SPA for physical education is NASPE who published the Beginning Physical Education Teacher Standards in 2003 to help address professional development. These standards were meant to serve several roles, including the delimitation of content, direction for program development, framework for organizing components of effective teaching based on theory and empirical evidence, and direction for professional improvement throughout a career (NASPE, 2003). The NASPE Beginning Physical Education Teacher standards were meant to form the foundation for PETE preparation programs by providing a guide to what beginning teachers should know and could apply in the field, while learning how to be competent professionals. The NASPE Beginning Physical Education Teacher Standards of 2003 consisted of 10 different standards, including one specific standard to address teaching students with disabilities, entitled Diverse Learner. This standard supported that beginning physical education teachers should understand how individuals differ in their approaches to learning and emphasized the need for physical education teachers to be able to create appropriate instruction adapted to these learning differences (NASPE, 2003). Within the Diverse

Learner standard, the knowledge indicator suggested the beginning teacher should have a knowledge base in the areas of special needs, including physical and emotional challenges, learning disabilities, sensory difficulties, and language barriers. Additionally, the matching performance indicator identified that the teacher should be able to use appropriate strategies, services, and resources to meet special and diverse learner needs (NASPE). The purpose of including the diversity standard was to facilitate the physical educator's ability to foster an inclusive and appropriate environment for students with diverse needs and enhance the physical educator's appreciation of diversity (Ayers & Housner, 2008). The diversity standard is likely applied within PETE preparation programs through a course designated to address an introduction to the area of adapted physical education; hereafter referred to in this article as the Introduction to APE course. As of October 2008, the NASPE Beginning Physical Education Teacher Standards were modified. This modification resulted in the Diverse Learner standard no longer being addressed as a single standard, but instead infused throughout the remaining standards (NASPE, 2008). This revision presents an even greater challenge for PETE programs to address teaching students with disabilities.

In an Introduction to APE course because there is no longer one specific standard for diverse learners. Other professional standards might need to be considered to help guide the PETE programs to address teaching students with special needs in physical education such as the Adapted Physical Education National Standards (APENS). There are 15 standards within APENS established on five levels representing knowledge and practical competencies for teaching both students with and without disabilities (Kelly, 2006). The first three levels of APENS have indicators to address the knowledge base of general physical educators working with students without disabilities. The fourth and fifth levels have indicators that address knowledge and practical application for teaching students with disabilities (Kelly, 2006).

College/university PETE programs may choose one or both sets of standards (NASPE and/or APENS) to help guide and measure student competencies as outcomes for the Introduction to APE course. Research in PETE programs has focused on curriculum alignment (Bulger, Housner, & Lee, 2008); general description of the curriculum, coursework, and practical experience of the teacher candidates (Ayers & Housner, 2008; Hetland & Strand, 2010); and the infusion of diversity within the curriculum (Burden, Hodge, O'Bryant, & Harrison, 2004). Ayers and Housner reported PETE programs do place an emphasis on multiculturalism or diversity (84%), but instruction and practica in APE were limited to less than 25% of the curricular focus (2008). More specifically, with regards to the Introduction to APE course, there has been a paucity of literature that reports an overall profile to include discussion of content, methodology, or student competency (Folsom-Meek, Nearing, Groteluschen & Krampf, 1999; Folsom-Meek, Nearing, & Kalakian, 2000). Research has been documented related to practicum experiences and general course content but more is needed (Hodge, Davis, Woodard, & Sherrill, 2002; Hodge & Jansma, 1999; Hodge, Tannehill & Kluge, 2003). If the Introduction to APE course is designed to serve as preparation for future physical educators to teach students with disabilities in physical education, continued review of this course is needed. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to describe the course profile, course content, mechanism of delivery, and the application of teacher standards on content for the Introduction to APE course within college/university PETE preparation programs. Specifically, the research questions for the study included: (a) What is the overall profile of the Introduction to APE course? (i.e. who is teaching the course, who is taking the course, when is the course offered in the PETE curriculum, is the course required, etc.), (b) What is the content of the Introduction to APE course? (c) What is the mechanism of delivery for the Introduction to APE course? (d) Does the content included in the Introduction to APE course align with the teaching standards? And (e) how do the faculty perceive student competency for teaching

students with disabilities after completing the course.

Method:

Participants Participants were recruited from three sources using convenience sampling; (a) professional contact at a national PETE convention; (b) published PETE national directory; and (c) a list of PETE programs provided by the (NCATE). There was no one single comprehensive list of PETE programs in the United States available to the authors. The main criterion for selection was that the programs had a PETE program at the undergraduate level. In total, 349 college/university PETE programs of the reported 700 PETE programs (Bain, 1990) were contacted and invited to participate in this study. Convenience sampling was used due to lack of a comprehensive listing of all PETE programs in the United States.

Data Collection:

Instrument The data collection instrument was a descriptive online survey set up through Survey Monkey (<http://www.surveymonkey.com>). The survey consisted of six different sections in an effort to answer each of the five research questions. Section I consisted of demographic questions about the university, the department and its majors, the APE program within the department, and the APE programs in the public schools (PK-12) within the state. Section II focused on the faculty member teaching the course and his/her educational background. Section III focused on the APE course(s) offered, including questions about credits, hours dedicated to lectures, practica offered, numbers of students taking the course, students required to take the course, and other APE courses offered at the undergraduate level. Section IV sought information specific to delivery of the Introduction to APE course in regards to how it was offered (i.e., online, hybrid, inclass), and the lecture hours spent on specific content areas. Section V was specific to practica experiences that were offered/required as part of the Introduction to APE course. Questions were specific to the number of hours expected to be completed, the type of interaction with individuals with disabilities, the

purpose of the practicum, and the grading of student experiences. Section VI requested participants to provide their perceptions of students' competence and application of standards following course completion. Some of the questions allowed participants to answer or select more than one response; thus, impacting the percentages when they are reported later in the paper. For example a question may read "what level of students take the course: Freshman, Sophomore, Junior, Senior" and participants could indicate each of the levels in which they have students taking the course. Another instrument that was used in this research project was a validity rating form. A 14 item validity rating form that was developed by the authors followed the rules for survey construction to establish content validity of the survey (Thomas, Nelson, & Silverman, 2005). The survey was completed by "experts" as they reviewed the questions for the data collection survey. Seven Kinesiology/Physical Education faculty (5 Adapted Physical Education Specialists, 1 General Physical Education Pedagogist, and 1 Exercise Science Specialist) completed the validity rating form. The responses were measured using a 5 point Likert-type scoring scale (1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = undecided, 4 = disagree, and 5 = strongly disagree). The reviewers agreed (85% or higher for each of the items) that the survey followed the rules for construction and the content was valid by definition. All procedures related to data collection and human subjects (i.e. consent, confidentiality and implementation) met university IRB regulations. The survey was completed online by participants who were sent an email message inviting them to participate. The email messages were sent to the faculty member known to teach, or had taught, the Introduction to APE course. If that person was not initially identifiable, the invitation to participate was sent to the chair of the department asking him/her to forward it to the faculty member currently teaching the Introduction to APE course. It was explained in an introductory email message that participation was voluntary and that information specific to the individual and the college or university would be kept confidential. The participants choosing to be a part of the study

would then click on a "link" sent in the email message to connect to the survey which took approximately 10 minutes to complete.

Statistical:

Analysis Data analysis was completed using SPSS 16.0. Descriptive statistics were used to report the results (i.e. means, frequencies, and percentages) (Thomas, Nelson, & Silverman, 2005).

Results Participant:

One hundred and thirty six of the 349 faculty members completed the survey (response rate of 38%) representing 129 different colleges/universities from 41 states. More than one college or university was represented in 36 of the 41 states. Profile of the Introduction to APE course. Ninety-one participants (69%) indicated only one course in APE was offered at their college/university. Thirty-one percent of the university PETE programs offered additional courses in APE, but only six indicated that the additional courses were required for PETE majors. Many PETE programs offered the Introduction to APE course both fall and spring semesters (49%). The average credit load was 3 hours, and student enrollment ranged from 10 to 31 students per course offering (Table 1). The remaining section of this manuscript will be presented according to the five research questions used to guide this study. What is the overall profile of the Introduction to APE course? The Introduction to APE course was primarily required for PETE majors (95%). Exercise Science majors were the second most frequent group required to take the Introduction to APE course (24%). Other majors required to take the course included: (a) Athletic training; (b) Coaching; (c) Therapeutic Recreation; and (d) Special Education. Some participants indicated all majors in the department were required to enroll in the course. Participants indicated that the students enrolled in the Introduction to APE course were primarily juniors (86.59%) and seniors (59.7%). Faculty teaching the Introduction to APE course represented a wide range of professional backgrounds and training. Seventyeight percent of the faculty teaching the course had a terminal

degree (i.e. Ph.D. or Ed.D.), 21% had a master's degree, and one faculty member had a Bachelors degree. There was a disparity in the training/specialization of faculty teaching the Introduction to APE course. Less than half (48%) of all participants who responded and were teaching the Introduction to APE course had their Ph.D. with a specialization in APE

What is the content of the Introduction to APE course? The following content areas received the majority of lecture time, defined as 5+ hours each per semester: (a) disabilities; (b) instruction and motivation strategies; (c) physical fitness, motor skills and motor development; and (d) modifications (Figure 3). Areas receiving the least amount of lecture time were: (a) consulting in APE; (b) curriculum; (c) legislation and history; (d) social and cognitive delays of students with disabilities; (e) assessment; (f) behavior management; and (g) Individual Education Plans (IEPs)

What is the mechanism of delivery for the Introduction to APE course? Format for the course within a majority of the PETE programs (93%) was a face-to-face classroom setting. Time spent on lecture during a week was usually 3 hours (51%), although some (29%) spent 2 hours a week in class lecturing. A practicum experience was offered by 84% of participants to supplement the lecture format. Practica experiences varied from onsite (23%), to offsite (48%), and a combination of the two (30%). The most frequent number of hours required for the practicum ranged from 11 – 20 hours (54%). The range of required hours for practicum went from less than 5 hours (6%) to more than 30 hours (5%) across the semester. The majority of practica experiences were with children with disabilities from grades K12; however, some provided experiences with individuals at the Pre-Kindergarten and adult level. The main purpose for practicum was to provide a hands-on experience with the goal to change attitudes (56%). The expected role of the PETE student during the practicum was to be directly involved with teaching and assisting with activities. In most practica settings students were interacting one-on-one or in

small groups with individuals with disabilities (84%) Does the content included in the Introduction to APE course align with the teaching standards? The final research question of the study was meant to report how the NASPE and/or APENS standards were addressed in the course. To be clear, the authors interpreted which reported content area appeared to be aligned with a corresponding NASPE standard(s) as part of the descriptive analysis; participants were not asked to make this association. Based on this interpretation, content reported by participants appeared to address 4 of the 6 NASPE standards (the 2008 version) and 9 of 15 APENS. The information reported in Table 4 represents only the content areas reported being addressed at least 5 hours per semester and how they aligned with the NASPE and APENS standards. The content areas of: (a) disabilities; (b) modifications; (c) instruction/ motivation; and (d) physical/motor fitness were addressed by 30 - 63% of participants for this time allotment. The remaining content areas were addressed by less than 30% of the participants for 5 hours per semester. When the authors cross referenced NASPE standards to the reported content areas the following NASPE standards were addressed by 30 - 60 % of participants for approximately 5 hours per the semester: (a) Planning and Implementation; (b) Scientific and Theoretical Knowledge; and (c) Instructional Delivery and Management. When cross referencing the content areas with the APENS standards the following APENS standards were addressed by 30 – 60% of the participants for 5 hours per semester: (a) Unique attributes; (b) Instructional planning and design; (c) Teaching; (d) Motor behavior; (e) Exercise Science; (f) Measurement and evaluation; (g) History and philosophy; (h) Curriculum theory and development; and (i) Assessment

Do faculty perceive students to be competent after completing the course to teach students with disabilities? All participants were asked if they perceived their students to meet some level of competency for APENS standards 1-10 as they completed the Introduction to APE course content. APENS standards 1-10 were selected for cross-

comparison with the NASPE standards according to Kelly (2006). Participants used the following scale to indicate their perceived level of student competence: 1 =not competent, 2 =below target, 3 = target, 4 = above target or 5 = very competent. Results revealed that the majority of faculty felt they addressed 9 of the 15 APENS standards throughout their course content. Of those 9 APENS standards, the standards of: (a) unique attributes; (b) motor behaviors; (c) exercise science; and (d) human development were each perceived by at least 60% of the participants to be of target level or higher for student competence. The APENS standards of (a) teaching and instructional design, and (b) planning, were perceived by at least 30% of participants to be above target level for student competence. The APENS standards of (a) teaching, (b) instructional design and planning, and (c) assessment were perceived by 20% of the participants to at the very competent level for student competence

Discussion:

The basic profile of the Introduction to APE course consisted of it being assigned 3 credits for a semester, and offered 3 hours per week for lecture in a face-to-face format with 84% of the lecture supported with a practicum experience. Results of this study supported the need for practica experiences either on and/or off campus to be a part of the Introduction to APE course, (Hodge et al., 2002). Practicum experiences can lead to a change in attitude toward teaching students with disabilities and develop an increased perceived level of competence in one's ability to teach students with disabilities (Connolly 1994; Hodge & Jansma, 1999; Hodge, et al., 2002; Hodge, et al., 2003). Results of this study indicated there is some disparity in the purpose of the practicum experience as some students were asked to complete the role of teaching while interacting in a one-on-one, small or large group setting. Closer analysis of practicum experiences, and their relationship to lectures, is suggested for future studies concerned with training teachers to be physical educators and adapted physical educators. While the purpose of the practicum was to get

hands-on experience with individuals with disabilities, specifics related to responsibilities within practicum assignments were not assessed within this study (i.e., development of IEP, lesson plan, unit plan, etc). Detail of practicum experiences should be considered in future studies. How tasks within the practicum setting are linked to course objectives should also be focused on in future studies to address the practicum quality in regards to teacher preparation. Additionally, it appeared the Introduction to APE course was taken by upper level students as over 80% of students enrolled in the course were reported to be juniors. Many PETE students do not have their methods course until their junior year, often resulting in students taking the Introduction to APE course prior to or simultaneously with the elementary or secondary methods courses. This could impact the quality of training students gain from the Introduction to APE course. A similar line of reasoning was made by Hetland and Strand (2010) where they questioned the benefits of curricular topics that are taught as a discrete course and whether students would be less likely to value the topic or if the topic were to be early in the curriculum sequence and receives no further mention would students likely value such content. Additionally, our experience, a combined 35 years in higher education pedagogy, has indicated students who are without a methods course prior to their Introduction to APE course, often do not have a sufficient foundation of teaching to include instructional strategies that can then be built upon to address teaching students with disabilities. It is our belief that the Introduction to APE course should be offered earlier with less emphasis on teaching and more emphasis on an overview of adapted physical education. The results of this study further revealed a variety of faculty expertise in teaching the Introduction to APE course. Only 48% of the total participants had their terminal degree in APE, with the remaining terminal degrees representing the areas of: (a) Pedagogy, (b) Motor development, and (c) Higher education/Administration. Hetland and Strand, (2010) indicated that faculty with various specializations, though not physical education

pedagogists, may have a good understanding of the subject matter, but may lack the ability to apply essential pedagogical concepts to assist PETE majors develop the skills and perceptions of teaching students with disabilities. Therefore, faculty with specialized training in APE may have different perceptions of what are essential content areas that need to be addressed in an effort to prepare PETE majors to teach students with disabilities. This may result in a different content focus within the Introduction to APE course. The results of the current study also indicated the general content of the Introduction to APE course followed essentially a “categorical approach”. Apparently, most programs focused on disability specific content, and minimized the content regarding the legal issues that surround appropriate programming for students with disabilities in physical education. Students in PETE preparation will be faced not only with teaching students with disabilities in the general physical education class but more and more they will be faced with legal procedures (i.e., IEP, assessments, student progress, intake, progress reporting, and review meetings) while working with students with disabilities (Auxter, Pyfer, Zittel, and Roth, 2009). Future physical educators need to be better prepared to address these demands. The understanding of assessment and placement process is critical to appropriate program placement for a student with a disability; the limited amount of time focused on these content areas during the Introduction to APE course will provide little depth nor mastery in areas that are critical to teaching students with disabilities in physical education. Perhaps the most surprising result from this study was the association of the amount of time spent on content cross-referenced to both sets of teaching standards (i.e., NASPE or APENS). Participants addressed five of the six NASPE standards with the primary focus on the planning and implementation. Although, in some cases there may have only been one or two elements within the other 4 standards that were met through the Introduction to APE course. It also appears that approximately 90% of the APENS standards are minimally addressed in the

Introduction to APE course. Again, the emphasis of content suggested a categorical approach (i.e., disabilities) while minimizing content related to: (a) consulting; (b) curriculum development; (c) legislation; and (d) assessment. Despite the primary content emphasis on (a) disabilities, (b) instruction, (c) physical/motor fitness, and (d) modifications, the actual amount of time seems barely enough to adequately address the APENS standards associated with these content areas. These four content areas represented what most (30-60%) of the participants indicated they taught at least 5 or more hours per semester. Still, participants indicated that they addressed 9 of 10 APENS standards in their Introduction to APE course content. When applying the same four content areas (disabilities, modifications, instruction, and physical/motor fitness) to the APENS standards, a range of 30 – 65% of the participants perceived students’ competency to be at the “target” or acceptable level. Recalling that this content was reported to be addressed 5 or more hours per semester it would seem improbable to have competency in the four content areas. Likewise, 50% of participants felt the APENS standards of: (a) measurement and evaluation; (b) assessment; (c) curriculum theory and development; and (d) history/philosophy could reach target level competence from content only addressed 2 hours per semester. Although the course content is addressing a number of different content areas, it appears to be taught in a manner to introduce content rather than address depth and mastery of content. Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE) programs are challenged to prepare qualified professionals with the ability to teach students with and without disabilities in physical education. The NASPE Beginning Physical Education Teacher Standards and the APENS identify qualities or skills that should be acquired to be qualified to teach physical education and adapted physical education (Kelly, 2006). Additionally, the Adapted Physical Activity Council and National Consortium for Physical Education and Recreation for Individuals with Disabilities have endorsed a position statement through the American Association for Physical

Activity and Recreation (AAPAR) of what a highly qualified adapted physical educator is (2007). This statement supports that at a minimum, highly qualified adapted physical education teachers must have the knowledge and skills, as defined by the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE). Moreover, "highly qualified" adapted physical education teachers must possess comprehensive content knowledge in disability studies; assessment methods for service qualification and instructional design; report writing; special education law; development of individualized education programs (IEP); adaptations and modification for physical education; behavior management; individual teaching and learning styles; collaboration and consultation skills; advocacy, inclusion practices; instructional design and planning; community and family resources; professional leadership; and assistive technology for physical education (Kelly, 2006). Although previous research has supported that PETE programs recognize that addressing diversity can have positive effects on perspective physical educators' perceptions of teaching students with disabilities (Hardin, 2005; Hodge, 2003); 69% of the PETE programs participating in this study, offer one only course in APE. Furthermore, the variance among states' interpretation of the term "qualified" appears to impact the profile of university PETE curriculums for training teachers how to teach students with disabilities. In fact, Piletic and Davis (2008) reported that a majority of university PETE programs surveyed within states where certification/endorsement/license in APE existed had more than one course in their curriculums and some included a minor area of study in APE. It would appear although the majority of state education agencies do not require more than one 3 credit course in APE that PETE programs should somehow find a way to include more information in the area of adapted physical education within the PETE curriculum. For example, by implementing an Infusion Model (DePauw & Goc Karp, 1994a, 1994b) or creating more APE courses within the PETE curriculum would allow future physical educators to have more depth and mastery in

teaching students with disabilities in physical education. Further study and research may provide evidence that some programs are successfully implementing an infusion model to address content knowledge for adapted physical education. This evidence of success could be useful to PETE programs as they are challenged to prepare qualified professionals to teach students with and without disabilities in physical education. Still, at this time, the results of the current study supports that offering only one course in adapted physical education does not provide a high level of mastery in content knowledge for future physical educators who will be teaching students with disabilities in physical education

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