The Fall and Rise of Physical Education Blog Series
Part 2: Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE)
By George Graham

If there is a single truth about physical education, from pre through graduate school is that it continues to change. I suspect this is true of all enterprises—business, medicine, education, government and families too. There is constant change—and perhaps the best predictor of the future is the past but that's for philosophers and historians to determine. What I know best is physical education at all levels over the past 45 years. This blog series is focused on one person's view of what has happened over that period and a glimpse, albeit somewhat blurry, into the future of our profession. The series is divided into four categories—K-12 teachers, PETE, professional organizations and the values of society in terms of physical education and physical activity.

I also want to add that I am writing these at the terminus of my career (somehow that sounds better than writing the end of my career.) This is important because I feel entitled to tell it like it is—with no worries that I might offend someone that I might be working with in the future on a project or committee. I also freely admit that this paper is written without relying on the professional literature to support my theories. Both of these factoids—terminus of career combined without having to base my work on the literature is a freeing experience—and as I begin this series of blogs -- one I am looking forward to.

This is the second of four blogs I am writing related to K-12 physical education in the United States. In the first blog, the Fall and Rise of Physical Education (http://www.ssww.com/blog/the-fall-and-rise-of-physical-education/), I suggested that physical educators could be classified into eight related categories—rollers, gamers, fitters, brainers, innovators, at-riskers, activators and teachers. The last category of the eight was teacher. For me this is the most desirable category of physical educator because in my view these individuals are attempting to implement quality programs that lead to the physical literacy of their students as defined in many of the Shape America documents. In my opinion it takes a great deal

of knowledge, expertise and practical experience to become a teacher of physical education as defined in the previous blog. Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE) programs are no doubt the major influence on whether an undergraduate becomes a teacher—or one of the other seven categories of physical educator described in the previous blog.

Typically future K-12 physical educators attend a college or university and major in a program that is designed to prepare them to teach in the schools. These programs often lead to state licensure or certification. Some PETE programs are more effective than others and their graduates begin their careers ready to begin implementing quality programs of physical education—i.e. they are on their way to becoming teachers. Other graduates, however, appear to lack the prerequisite skills, background and understanding necessary to implement quality programs. Or perhaps, equally or more importantly, they lack the commitment and dedication to do the hard work necessary to develop quality programs in less than ideal environments. Why?

Less Effective PETE

In this blog I am suggesting that PETE programs play a critical role in determining the category(ies) of their graduates as defined in my first blog. In this blog I offer my opinion as to why some PETE programs prepare teachers, while others seem to have little or no lasting impact on their graduates. I fully understand that teacher preparation is a complex endeavor influenced by state departments of education, university policies, faculty beliefs, and student recruitment to name a few of the influences. So I am not going to focus on the varying complexities that comprise the teacher preparation enterprise. Instead I am going to focus on one factor that I think is crucial to effective teacher preparation—the link between college and universities and K-12 schools and teachers.

It seems to me that less effective college or university PETE programs are less effective because they are unconnected to K-12 schools. Physical education majors at these schools often scoff at their professors who seem totally "out of touch" with what is going on in schools, often wondering if they have ever taught in a K-12 setting. While the courses may appear the same, from one college to another, the students pretty quickly figure out if their PETE professors can be trusted to guide them to developing the skills and expertise to have a successful teaching career. Do the profs understand what is going on in schools today—or not? While this is an oversimplification it seems to me that this is the biggest reason why some graduates of PETE programs are ready to begin teaching careers as defined by SHAPE America—teaching for learning, promoting physical literacy and a lifetime of physical activity. Others, however start their careers apparently uninformed and content to implement what some have termed "dumbed down" physical education. Some start their careers implementing Hall of Shame activities and inappropriate practices (http://www.pecentral.org/professional/hos/index.html)—and continue to do so throughout their careers. Others fail to develop the quality physical education programs that are believed to make a lasting difference for their students.

More Effective PETE

Clearly more effective PETE programs do a lot of things that impact their graduates and lead them to develop the skills and commitment to implement quality programs of physical education, i.e. to become teachers. For a start they are in, and around, K-12 schools. PETE faculty know the teachers and often the principals at the partner schools that become the laboratories for their students. PETE undergraduates in these programs have a series of practicum experiences leading up to a semester of student teaching—termed an "apprenticeship of observation". The practica may include a variety of experiences, for example—at elementary, middle and high schools; with special education students; in programs that use the latest technologies; in schools that have ideal equipment and facilities and in those that don't; in inner city and rural settings, etc. While this variety of practica would be

ideal, it is probably less than realistic. More effective PETE programs, however, do get their students in the schools before student teaching and in a variety of settings.

But simply providing a variety of practicum experiences hardly seems to be enough. Practica are necessary, but not sufficient. In my experience the most effective programs have developed a clinical faculty of K-12 physical educators. A clinical faculty is created when professors and K-12 teachers spend a lot of time together—at the university and in the schools. The clinical faculty (K-12 teachers) know the PETE program. The teachers and the professors speak the same language—and also share the same commitment to quality physical education!

The language they speak is a shared professional language (SPL) that the undergraduates learn in their PETE program from their PETE faculty and then they see demonstrated when they visit and observe in the schools. This encourages important and critical discussions between and among the triad of undergraduates, K-12 teachers and university faculty. Just as physicians or attorneys have a technical language that is a prerequisite to successful practice, so too is the language of the triad critical to developing an understanding of the practices that lead to effective teaching. Ideally the K-12 clinical faculty also become the student teaching supervisors (cooperating teachers) thus creating a somewhat seamless, progression between the university program and K-12 practica and student teaching.

One of the teacher education laments that I have heard again and again is there are no K-12 programs in the vicinity that have developed quality physical education programs. This is especially true for high school programs. This is a justifiable concern because one of the most powerful influences on future teachers is the ability to see successful programs in action. When quality physical education programs are advocated by PETE faculty, linked for example to national and state standards, but the local K-12 programs are “roll out the ball” or “busy, happy and good” the unspoken message that is communicated to undergrads is that the PETE faculty are at best out of touch, and at worst clueless about the real world.

The creation of a successful clinical faculty, that implements quality physical education programs, takes a long time and lot of work—it is not done quickly or easily. Often, but not always, the clinical faculty are introduced to the SPL in seminars or in-service days. One of the effective ways for a PETE program to create a clinical faculty is to arrange to provide substitute teachers so that the K-12 teachers can spend several days, or more, collaborating with the university faculty to create the clinical teacher model. After the initial series of seminars a plan is put in place for the university and clinical faculty to continue to meet, year after year, to improve both the PETE program and also the school programs. It seems that the clinical faculty model is most effective when it is a genuine collaboration between equal partners.

This may sound easy. My teacher educator colleagues, however, who are reading this paper realize that is anything but easy. It takes time, commitment by the PETE faculty, and schools/teachers that are willing to work in a collaborative experience with future professionals. Why so hard?

One of the main reasons is because some districts/schools/teachers are unwilling to work closely with a university—or place barriers in the way that make it a real challenge to develop a clinical faculty. Universities also can make it difficult, if not virtually impossible. For example, if the college of education, not the physical education department, schedules the student teaching placements it makes little sense to develop a clinical faculty because the student teachers will not be placed in their schools.

Another reason is that the university professors may not agree on the importance of developing a clinical faculty, or on the process of teacher development, or on the courses that undergraduates should be taking, and on and on…. I think I have made my point.

Two Parting Thoughts

As I finish this blog on PETE I want to share two insights related in general to the process of teacher education and specifically to the development of a clinical faculty. One of the realities is that it takes time, a lot of time, to work with and develop a working relationship between the university and K-12 colleagues—a clinical faculty. Some institutions, especially the larger "research" universities and faculties, do not place a high priority on working closely with K-12 colleagues and developing a collaborative relationship. The process of "publishing or perishing" is alive and well at many colleges and universities. This means that professors are expected to publish, and fund, their research. This endeavor also requires a substantial amount of time and effort. The bottom line is that if a faculty member spends time working in K-12 schools, and does not publish often and in top-tier journals, they place their career in jeopardy. For many PETE faculty this is a genuine conflict—they want to develop a clinical faculty and work in the schools, but there is pressure to publish and do research to maintain their position. While some PETE faculty have been able to accomplish both of these missions it seems to be increasingly difficult for younger PETE faculty to do so.

To "pour salt on the wound" the research conducted by the PETE faculty, which is typically related to K-12 schools, teachers or teacher education, is often not shared with K-12 colleagues. Just as more effective PETE programs have their own shared technical language, so too do researchers. Thus even if a K-12 teacher desires to read and understand the research that may be relevant it is often difficult for the teacher to understand the research language. One of the anecdotal proofs of this point is found at any professional conference. If the word research is in the title of the presentation you can expect to find few, in any, K-12 physical educators attending that session-- unfortunate, but true. Perhaps our national association could increase its attempts to "translate" the research of our experts into meaningful summaries and implications. But this idea will be covered in my third blog on professional associations.

My second parting thought relates to the most powerful influence in a PETE program. Who, or what, do you think that is? My experience based on surveys of graduates, as well as informal conversations with graduates, is that it is the cooperating or supervising teacher for the student teaching experience. When the university and the K-12 schools are working closely the cooperating teacher reinforces what the undergrad is learning at the university by modeling it in both the pedagogy and enacted curriculum. The student teachers get the same message in their work at the schools and at the university.

As we know, however, there is not always a close collaboration between K-12 physical educators and PETE programs. In these instances the cooperating teacher has by far the most credibility because they are with the kids and in the schools—they are in the trenches dealing with all the challenges of implementing a K-12 physical education program. They know what works, what doesn't, and hopefully why. They are there to answer the student teacher's questions immediately and with authority.

The absolute worst case scenario is when a student teacher is placed with a cooperating teacher who is unaware of what students are being taught in the PETE program or, worse yet, does not believe in the university program. We have all heard of the cooperating teacher who says to the student teacher, shortly after meeting them: "You know that stuff they teach you at the university? It doesn't work. I'll show you what really works with kids. " All too often what they "show" the student teacher would not be characterized as quality physical education. In fact, their program is all too characterized as developmentally inappropriate featuring Hall of Shame activities (http://www.pecentral.org/professional/hos/index.html).

Conclusion

I am sure my former teacher education colleagues, for whom I have the greatest

respect, have been thinking as they read this blog on PETE is oversimplified. I agree! As I stated at the outset teacher preparation is a complex endeavor. If, however, I were going to suggest one fix that would improve the quality of PETE programs it would be to strengthen the link between K-12 schools and the university. Clearly some PETE programs already have a strong link with K-12 schools that follow the SHAPE America guidelines for quality physical education. Together these K-12 and university programs are taking a giant step towards the preparation of "teachers" as defined in my first blog. They make a huge contribution to our profession by preparing teachers who are ready to implement quality programs of physical education. To them I say congratulations on a difficult job well done--and thanks!