



ADAPTED PHYSICAL EDUCATION

The Syllabus Is a Living Document: An Examination of Introductory Adapted Physical Education Syllabi

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Abstract

Physical education college preparation programs continue to require only one adapted physical education (APE) course. Due to the importance of the one APE course often provided to preservice physical education, this study investigated the status of introductory APE courses across the United States. A content analysis of the course descriptions and objectives was completed on 30 syllabi from introductory APE courses, and descriptive information from the syllabi was collected. The most common topics covered included intellectual disability ($n = 21$), physical disability ($n = 21$), and assessment ($n = 20$). The content analysis revealed four areas of emphasis: (1) disability characteristics, (2) teaching strategies, (3) advocating for individuals with disabilities, and (4) history and legislation. Further research needs to determine faculty's rationale behind the content they choose to cover and the effectiveness of physical education teacher training programs in preparing future physical educators to teach students with disabilities.

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Physical education teacher education (PETE) university programs are challenged to prepare highly qualified physical educators, which includes the ability to effectively instruct students with disabilities (Ayers & Housner, 2008; Kwon, 2018; Piletic & Davis, 2010). Since the passage of Public Law 94-142 in 1975 in the United States, reauthorized as the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act in 2004, more children with disabilities are being educated in public schools today. In fact, over 95% of children with disabilities are estimated to be educated in classes with their same-age peers for at least a portion of the day (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). In spite of this, general physical educators have often reported they are inadequately prepared to teach students with disabilities and need additional training in this area (Block et al., 2016; Hutzler et al., 2019; Lieberman et al., 2002; Samalot-Rivera & Porretta, 2009). For example, Beamer and Yun (2014) surveyed 233 general physical educators about their beliefs and behaviors concerning the inclusion of students with autism spectrum disorder and found that perceptions toward the strength of their undergraduate adapted physical education (APE) preparation program, along with their work experience and graduate coursework, significantly predicted their behavior to include students with autism spectrum disorder. Similarly, Ligg et al. (2017) surveyed 75 in-service physical educators on their experiences with APE preparation within their PETE programs. Approximately half of the teachers surveyed felt underprepared from their APE college course and practicum experiences. Although it has been found that when general physical educators have positive attitudes toward their APE coursework, it benefits their ability to teach students with disabilities (Beamer & Yun, 2014). The results of these studies demonstrate that many do not have this perceived confidence as a result of their APE college courses.

Scholars have strongly suggested that a well-organized APE practicum leads to an array of positive benefits (e.g., increased self-efficacy) for preservice physical educators (Layne & Blasingame, 2018; Ligg et al., 2017; Taliaferro et al., 2015). For example, Woodruff and Sinelnikov (2015) examined the impact of 50 undergraduate PETE students' experience with working with 24 young adults with disabilities in a physical activity setting. These experiences led to positive relationships and increased the likelihood that undergraduates

had improved attitudes and understanding toward people with disabilities. However, many of the undergraduates still felt that they needed additional information and experience with communicating and using best practices with students with disabilities in a physical education setting. Despite the persistent trend toward general physical educators teaching students with disabilities, and preliminary reports of strong undergraduate APE programming significantly influencing their ability to work with students with disabilities (Beamer & Yun, 2014), PETE programs continue to limit the required course in APE to one three-credit course (Kwon, 2018; Piletic & Davis, 2010). Although this is likely due in large part to an already overcrowded PETE curriculum, the fact that so many physical educators consistently voice concerns with teaching students with disabilities warrants the need for additional coursework in this area.

Although there is a lack of literature dedicated to examining the profile of introductory APE courses (Kwon, 2018; McEvoy et al., 2015; Piletic & Davis, 2010), several scholars have examined the demographic information of PETE courses, as well as the qualifications of PETE faculty in the United States, with the majority using questionnaires to collect information about the PETE programs (Ayers & Housner, 2008; Kwon, 2018; McEvoy et al., 2015; Piletic & Davis, 2010). According to McEvoy et al. (2015), the bulk of the literature related to PETE programs has focused on curriculum alignment (Bulger et al., 2008); the curriculum, coursework, and practical experience of the preservice teachers (Ayers & Housner, 2008; Hetland & Strand, 2010); and the incorporation of diversity (Burden et al., 2004). Although Ayers and Housner (2008) indicated that PETE programs often place an emphasis on diversity within their courses, coursework and practicum experiences related to APE were underwhelming.

Over a decade ago, Piletic and Davis (2010) surveyed 136 U.S. PETE faculty who taught the introduction to APE course. Piletic and Davis aimed “to describe the course profile, course content, mechanism of delivery, and the application of teacher standards on content for the Introduction to APE course” (p. 27). The majority (69%) of PETE programs represented in this survey offered only one course in APE. The majority of students required to complete the APE course were PETE majors (95%), which was followed by exercise science

majors (24%). The content areas that were identified as a major emphasis within the courses included disability (72%), instructional and motivational strategies (70%), and modifications (70%). These results indicated that the general content of the introduction to APE course focused primarily on disability-specific content, with less time spent on content related to motor development and legal issues that are pertinent to effective programming for students with disabilities in physical education. The investigators also reported that 84% of the courses had practicum experiences, which included experiences with observing APE classes (51%), assisting with APE activities (72%), and direct teaching of students with disabilities (72%). More recently, Kwon (2018) examined the status of introductory APE courses in PETE programs and how concepts related to disability were infused throughout the PETE curriculum. Kwon gathered data from 75 faculty representing 31 states with an online survey. Fifty-one percent of the participants noted their university offered only one APE course in their PETE program, with just over half (53%) of these introductory APE courses being three credits. Almost all participants (92%) shared that they offered an APE practicum, with 66% reporting the practicum was included in their APE course. In the Kwon study, 74% of participants shared that information about disability was infused in several courses within their PETE program. Methods of infusing information included inviting APE faculty to talk to their classes, class discussion about disability, disability simulations, utilizing adapted equipment, reviewing modifications, and learning various teaching strategies for students with disabilities.

Although these descriptive studies provide a broad overview of the status of APE introductory courses, several limitations should be acknowledged. For instance, the surveys used in these studies only underwent simple face validity measures and offered broad categories from which participants could choose. In addition, these studies offered little context about the content being taught, as well as the professors' values toward the content in introductory APE courses across the United States. If introductory APE courses are designed to prepare future physical educators to teach students with disabilities, additional efforts need to look at the intricacies of the content of these courses. The need for high-quality APE courses is even more accentuated when intertwined with the fact that most preservice

physical educators only receive one course on this topic. Thus, the purpose of this study was to analyze the syllabi of introductory APE courses across the United States. An examination of these syllabi allows for an examination of the current state of introduction to APE courses, which is crucial to the field to understand the objectives, assessments, and topics taught within introduction to APE courses. More specifically, these research questions guided this inquiry:

1. What are the general overview and driving objectives for introductory APE courses across the United States?
2. What assignments and topics are covered within introductory courses across the United States?

Method

Research Approach

A content analysis of syllabi was conducted, which is a commonly applied methodology for understanding training in a variety of subjects (e.g., counselor training, school psychology; Barrett et al., 2015; Vaismoradi et al., 2016) and may be less prone to bias than self-report measures such as surveys, especially when these data are collected retrospectively. This approach advances knowledge through an iterative process of analyzing, coding, and sorting textual data into new formulations that address specific research questions (Vaismoradi et al., 2016).

This study was as part of a larger project (e.g., McNamara et al., 2021). For the purposes of this study, we examined introduction to APE course syllabi APE training physical education undergraduates received as source material to glean a greater comprehension of the training that physical education undergraduates received in APE. Scholars across disciplines have analyzed syllabi to determine patterns in learning outcomes, content, and values emphasized within college courses, as college course syllabi often hold a great deal of information about the structure and content of a course (Barrett et al., 2015; Campbell et al., 2019). A syllabus is a university document that serves as a contract between students and their respective instructors and institution (Parkes & Harris, 2002). Syllabi across the United States often have a common structure that aims to provide a course description that describes the overarching themes of a course. Further, they often contain course objectives, assignments, grading

criteria, and course topics (Campbell et al., 2019; Slattery & Carlson, 2005). Syllabi also document the learning activities and topics covered in the course (Campbell et al., 2019; Slattery & Carlson, 2005), as well as the institution's and instructor's values and beliefs toward a subject (Parkes & Harris, 2002). Therefore, syllabi can be a revealing data source that helps determine the content delivered within introduction to APE courses.

Procedures

We used a list of the 100 most popular PETE and coaching programs from stateuniversity.com to locate PETE programs across the United States. This list was compiled through use of a combination of factors including student retention, faculty salary, and student-to-faculty ratio. We solicited syllabi in the Fall and Spring semesters in 2019 by reviewing the identified PETE program websites and emailing the instructors of courses likely to teach the introduction to APE course or emailing the department chair and asking them to forward the email to their faculty who taught introduction to APE course in their department. To be included within this study, syllabi had to meet the following inclusion criteria: (a) the syllabi was for an undergraduate course, (b) the syllabi was for an introductory courses focused on teaching students with disabilities in a physical education setting, and (c) the syllabi must have been from a course taught within the previous year. Because several terms are often used to classify and define APE (Hutzler & Hellerstein, 2016), we carefully reviewed each syllabi to ensure that the course description, course objectives, and/or course title referred specifically to teaching students with disabilities in a physical education setting. The Institutional Review Board committee at the University of Northern Iowa approved all procedures prior to data collection.

Data Analysis

A content analysis was completed on the collected syllabi. This method allows for an interpretation of text, such as a syllabus, through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes that illustrate the phenomena being examined (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). In accordance with Weber (1990), this content analysis involved four processes: definition of coding unit, definition of categories, coding protocol, and assessing accuracy and reliability

of coding. To begin the analysis, five of the syllabi were randomly selected for an initial analysis of the data. During this initial stage, Scott McNamara and Kylie Wilson independently coded the course descriptions, course objectives, course schedules, assignments, and information pertinent to the practicum experience from the collected syllabi. They began this approach by reading each syllabi several times to grasp the general content and concepts (Vaismoradi et al., 2016; Weber, 1990). Next, the text within the syllabi was divided into meaningful units that reflected similar motifs (e.g., motor development and fitness were placed into a single unit), which were eventually defined and labeled. Each statement was then read individually and coded either into an existing category with similar codes or into new categories. This process occurred continuously throughout the initial stage of data analysis (Vaismoradi et al., 2016; Weber, 1990). Once all descriptions and objectives were categorized, McNamara and Wilson came together to compare codes and categories and discuss discrepancies until reaching a consensus on the definitions of each code and category. The categories were reorganized into larger groups based on similar themes. For example, the categories of “assessment” and “modifications” were grouped together under “teaching strategies” after reexamination because they reflected a similar unifying theme. After reexamining the categories and themes, McNamara and Wilson reviewed each statement again within each category and discussed discrepancies. Statements were moved to other categories and themes or to new categories in a similar fashion until 100% consensus was reached. This allowed McNamara and Wilson to create an interrater framework (MacPhail et al., 2016).

Next, five additional syllabi were randomly selected for analysis. During this stage, McNamara and Wilson independently completed the same steps outlined in the previous stage, using the agreed upon codes and categories. The interrater agreement for the analysis of the syllabi in this second round was calculated at 86.1% (Cohen’s $k = .58$). Once the interrater agreement was determined, McNamara analyzed the course descriptions and objectives for all the syllabi collected, using the agreed upon codes and categories. All of the final themes and frequency counts were reviewed and agreed upon by McNamara, Wilson, and Lauren Lieberman. Four themes

were determined within the content analysis: (1) characteristics of the disability, (2) teaching strategies, (3) advocating for individuals with disabilities, and (4) history and legislation. A frequency count was recorded by McNamara and Wilson, with a 100% interrater agreement, using the agreed upon codes to calculate information regarding (a) topics covered in the course schedule, (b) assignments, and (c) practicum experiences. In addition, descriptive information pertaining to the amount of course credits, name of the courses, and required textbooks were reported.

Results

Overview of Courses

Thirty universities representing all four regions of the United States provided syllabi that met the inclusion criteria. Of the introduction to APE courses represented, all were delivered within either a kinesiology, physical education, and/or health department. Twenty-nine (96.7%) of the syllabi indicated that the course offered was three credits. Of the remaining courses, four credits and one credit were both noted once (3.3%). The syllabi also contained an array of course names. Fifteen used the course name “Introduction to APE” or simply “APE,” and six had the name “Introduction to Adapted Physical Activity” or “Adapted Physical Activity.” Other names that appeared included “Movement for Individuals With Mild Disabilities,” “Special Physical Education,” and “Inclusion in Physical Education.” In addition, the most widely cited primary textbook within the syllabi was *Adapted Physical Education and Sport* (Winnick & Porretta, 2017). Table 1 provides an overview of key characteristics of the syllabi.

The syllabi content analysis showed a variety of topics, assignments, and practicum experiences within the syllabi collected. Twenty-seven (90.0%) of the syllabi contained a course schedule with the topics addressed within the course. Altogether, 39 topic areas were observed. The most common topics included intellectual disability ($n = 21$), physical disability ($n = 21$), assessment ($n = 20$), and autism spectrum disorder ($n = 19$). Seven topics were identified only once through the review. These topics included response to intervention, deaf blindness, transition plans, APE licensure, temporary disabilities, severe and profound disabilities, and related services.

Table 1
Sample Characteristics

Characteristic	<i>n</i>	%
Region		
West	5	16.7
Northeast	7	23.3
Midwest	9	30.0
South	9	30.0
Course names		
APE	15	50.0
Adapted Physical Activity	6	20.0
Inclusion in PE	2	6.7
Other	7	23.3
Primary textbook title		
<i>Adapted Physical Education and Sport</i>	19	63.3
<i>Principles and Methods of Adapted Physical Education & Recreation</i>	3	10.0
<i>Essentials of Teaching Adapted Physical Education: Diversity, Culture, & Inclusion</i>	2	6.7
<i>PE for Children With Moderate to Severe Disabilities</i>	2	6.7
Other	3	10.0
Not Cited	3	10.0

Note. APE = adapted physical education; PE = physical education.

Table 2 provides an overview of the frequency of topic areas covered within the introduction to APE course syllabi.

All of the syllabi included information concerning the assignments provided within the course. Altogether, 15 assignment categories were observed. The most frequently documented assignments included exams ($n = 21$), quizzes ($n = 16$), class presentations ($n = 15$), practicum attendance ($n = 15$), and reflections ($n = 15$). It was indicated that many of the teaching-related assignments (e.g., teaching portfolio, lesson plan), as well as the class presentations and reflections, were directly linked to their practicum experience. Table 3 provides an overview of the types of assignments reported within the syllabi.

Table 2
Overview of Topics

Topic	% (n)
Physical disabilities	70.0 (21)
Intellectual disabilities	70.0 (21)
Assessment	66.7 (20)
Autism spectrum disorder	63.3 (19)
IEP	60.0 (18)
Disability sport	56.7 (17)
Visual impairments	53.3 (16)
Behavior management	53.3 (16)
Law	50.0 (15)
Emotional disturbance	50.0 (15)
Inclusion	50.0 (15)
Teaching strategies	46.7 (14)
Other health impairment	43.3 (13)
Hearing impairment	40.0 (12)
Learning disabilities	40.0 (12)
Traumatic brain injury	39.0 (10)
Motor development	39.0 (11)
Ethics/advocacy	33.3 (10)
LRE	23.3 (7)
UDL	20.0 (6)
History	20.0 (6)
Assistive technology	16.7 (5)
Disability models	13.3 (4)
Sensory integration	13.3 (4)
Paraprofessionals	10.0 (3)
Stroke	6.7 (2)
Speech and language impairment	6.7 (2)
Early childhood	6.7 (2)
Dance	6.7 (2)
Collaboration	6.7 (2)
Aquatics	6.7 (2)

Note. IEP = individual education program; LRE = least restrictive environment; UDL = Universal Design for Learning.

Table 3
Overview of Assignments

Assignment	% (n)
Exam	70.0 (21)
Quiz	53.3 (16)
Practicum attendance	50.0 (15)
Class presentation	50.0 (15)
Reflections	50.0 (15)
IEP	43.3 (13)
Class participation	36.7 (11)
Lesson plans	36.7 (11)
Practicum teaching/portfolio	30.0 (9)
Motor assessment	20.0 (6)
Research paper	16.7 (5)
Accessibility report	10.0 (3)
Disability fact sheet	10.0 (3)
Discussion board	6.7 (2)
Interview	6.7 (2)

Note. IEP = individual education program.

Twenty-seven syllabi contained information concerning the practicum component of the course. The amount of information dedicated to the practicum varied widely. Most syllabi had one or two paragraphs dedicated to an explanation of the practicum program. However, one syllabus contained five pages dedicated to the purpose, structure, communication policies, and behavior and safety procedures for the practicum component of the course. Eleven syllabi indicated the amount of days the students would work with people with disabilities. This ranged between 4 and 16 ($M = 9.55$, $SD = 3.70$). Ten syllabi also indicated the number of hours dedicated to the practicum, which ranged between 6 and 32 ($M = 19.20$, $SD = 9.20$). Three syllabi provided both the amount of days and hours dedicated to the practicum. Nine syllabi cited where the practicum experience would occur, four indicated a public school or a community setting, followed by a public school setting ($n = 2$) and a university or public school setting ($n = 1$).

Course Descriptions and Objectives

Four interrelated themes were determined from the analysis of the course descriptions and objectives of the syllabi. The first theme, “disability characteristics,” reveals the value placed on undergraduates gaining an understanding of the knowledge of the disability, as well as the principles and patterns of motor development across the life span for individuals with disabilities. The second theme, “teaching strategies,” describes a focus on delivering undergraduates information on how to teach individuals with disabilities in a physical education setting. The third theme, “advocating for individuals with disabilities,” portrays the need to expose undergraduates to information and situations to facilitate positive attitude change toward people with disabilities. The fourth and final theme, “history and legislation,” illustrates an emphasis on informing undergraduates about the history of APE, as well as the legislation that guides the profession.

Disability Characteristics

This theme was accentuated with the need for students to comprehend the causes and characteristics of disabilities. For example, one course description read, “Course content includes causes and characteristics of selected disabilities and how these disabilities impact a person’s movement and learning potential.” Although most of the syllabi did not reference specific disabilities, a few explicitly mentioned disabilities such as autism spectrum disorder, intellectual disabilities, and orthopedic disabilities. Throughout the course descriptions and objectives, the syllabi emphasized that undergraduates needed to know the limitations related to disabilities. As well, the syllabi regularly used terms associated with the medical model of interpreting disability (Spencer et al., 2020). For example, one course objective stated, “the student will define the etiology, limitations and movement characteristics of the most commonly occurring impairments.” Another explained that students needed to be able to “identify the signs and symptoms of various disabling conditions.” Although a focus on medical conditions and etiology of disabilities was clear, several syllabi also contained verbiage that suggested a focus on other viewpoints toward disabilities. For example, an objective explained that upon completion of the course, students would be able to “critique perspectives on the definition

and construction of disability (Models of disability, including ICF model, US/International Contexts, language).” Another explained that students would be able to distinguish between social models of disability and personal perceptions toward disability.

Several syllabi also contained course descriptions and objectives that considered the motor development of people with disabilities. One course objective stated that students would be able to “discuss typical and atypical motor development.” Another explained that students will have the knowledge of the principles and patterns of human “and motor development across the lifespan in order to select safe and appropriate activities and effective teaching strategies for individuals with a variety of disabilities.” Various objectives and descriptions also cited the need for students to consider safety concerns when working with individuals with disabilities in a physical activity setting. For example, several noted it was important for students to identify contraindications of exercises for specific disabilities.

Teaching Strategies

Wide ranges of teaching strategies were recounted within the syllabi. Course descriptions in multiple syllabi explained that a predominant focus within the course would be on teaching strategies specific to people with disabilities. For example, an excerpt from one course description read, “Course content includes adapted teaching techniques and equipment for motor development, physical fitness, sport skills, and aquatics.” The focus on teaching strategies was further highlighted throughout the objectives. One explained that by the end of the course, students would be able to “utilize various teaching methods, techniques, and principles to meet the needs of individuals with varying abilities.” Although not common, a few specific teaching strategies, such as story-based interventions and video modeling, were explicitly mentioned. Several specific components of teaching, such as assessment and behavior management, that the course would cover emerged from the course descriptions and objectives. For example, one objective cited that upon completion of the course, students would be able to “apply specific assessment instruments focusing on motor skills and health-related fitness for students with disabilities.” A few objectives also explained that the students would use assessments to formulate learning objectives for students within their practicum experience. The abilities to

differentiate, modify instruction, and apply Universal Design for Learning principles were also mentioned frequently. One course description explained that students “will have to demonstrate and apply modification and adaptations for safe participation in physical education.” Another explained that students would be able to “demonstrate the ability to modify the physical learning environment using the Universal Design for Learning principles for students with all disabilities.”

Advocating for Individuals With Disabilities

One course description that underscores this theme explained, “The purpose of this course is to educate and empower physical education teachers by giving them the information and tools necessary for successful inclusion of children with disabilities in their programs.” The emphasis on empowering students to advocate for people with disabilities was a prominent within a number of syllabi, with one objective stating, “As a result of successfully completing this class, each student should be able to advocate for the need for **all** students to have physical education and be involved in additional physical activity and sport settings.” The need to shift attitudes toward people with disabilities was also noticeable. One course description even suggested that the primary focus of the course was on attitude change related to people with disabilities. Further, a course objective explained that students would be able to “demonstrate empathy and sensitivity towards individuals with special needs.” The descriptions and objectives also suggested that the practicum experience within the class would lead students to better understand and advocate for individuals with disabilities. For instance, one objective noted, “By participating in a field experience, students will recognize the need to enhance awareness for all individuals to be physically active no matter the level of disability.” A number of syllabi also explicitly mentioned the need for undergraduates to be able to provide an inclusive learning environment for students with disabilities. One course description explained that because the philosophy of inclusion was becoming so widespread, there were greater amounts of students with disabilities being educated within general physical education courses and thus a greater need for general physical educators to comprehend how to effectively instruct them. Another course description explained,

Field experiences, group/classroom discussion, and observations will provide the opportunity for students to better understand the principle: “The handicapped student is more similar than dissimilar to the regular/normal student and inclusion is of the utmost importance for development mentally, physical, emotionally, socially, and spiritually.”

One objective also referenced the need for students to use laws to “advocate for inclusion in physical activity, sport, and physical education for all students.”

History and Legislation

The need for students to understand how history impacts APE-related legislation was stressed by the following course objective: “trace the historical impact of major court cases, which led to the enactment of legislation pertinent to meeting the needs of students with special needs.” The emphasis on laws associated with people with disabilities was apparent. One objective explained that students will be able to understand and describe the pertinent federal and state education laws regarding the provisions of physical education to student with disabilities, as well as the special education process. Many syllabi discussed the need for students to understand specific components of the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act, such as the individual education program (IEP) and the least restrictive environment. One course description explained,

This course is designed to provide students with a knowledge of various disabilities and to accurately identify the impact it could have on the participation in a general or a self-contained physical education class. Students will learn about special education laws and how to apply the knowledge to a written IEP.

Further, one objective explained that students will be able to “understand the characteristics of children with disabilities and corresponding placement options.” Another stated, “Students will develop and implement an IEP for their students based on assessments and personal profile.” Other laws such as the Americans With Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act were

also mentioned, however much less frequently compared to the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act.

Discussion

The purpose of this investigation was to examine the status of introduction to APE courses across the United States through analysis of course syllabi. Multiple studies have examined course syllabi to comprehend the content delivered in a course, as well as the institution's and instructor's values toward specific components of a course (Barrett et al., 2015; Campbell et al., 2019). Nonetheless, this is the first investigation to examine introduction to APE course syllabi. PETE programs have the great responsibility of preparing students to teach students with disabilities. Without proper preparation in the area of teaching students with disabilities, preservice physical educators are likely to struggle and fail to provide much needed services. Therefore, gaining a clear understanding of the purpose and content of introduction to APE courses is essential in determining the strengths and gaps in this area for PETE programs across the United States.

The disability characteristics theme, as well as the teaching strategies theme to a lesser extent, indicates that the general content of the introduction to APE course followed essentially a categorical approach. Most courses focused on disability-specific content. A major pattern emerged from an analysis of the course descriptions and objectives with three of the top four most frequently covered topics being specific disabilities. These findings align with Piletic and Davis's (2010) and Kwon's (2018) findings that disability was by and far the most commonly reported area covered in the introduction to APE course. Because this study labels and reports specific disabilities covered in the course schedule, we were able to identify specific types of disabilities covered. Although it appears that disabilities such as autism spectrum disorder, physical disabilities, and intellectual disabilities are covered frequently, other disability categories (e.g., severe and multiple disabilities) were rare. This somewhat conflicts with Ligg et al.'s (2017) study that states the most difficult children to teach for physical educators are those with autism spectrum disorder, multiple and severe disabilities, and visual impairments. How instructors in this study came up with the types of disabilities to focus on is not entirely clear. In alignment with the findings from the

present study, the *Adapted Physical Education and Sport* textbook (Winnick & Porretta, 2017) was the predominant textbook used in these courses, which might suggest that such textbooks may have been a key tool that guided APE instructors development of the introduction to APE course. For example, this text devotes entire chapters to topics well represented in this study such as law, teaching strategies, and specific types of disabilities (e.g., visual impairment, intellectual disabilities, autism spectrum disorder), whereas it does not devote as much time to areas that were not exemplified in this study such as multiple and severe impairments or APE licensure. Further inquiry, such as in-depth interviews with APE course instructors on the rationale to focus on certain APE-related topics, is necessary for further understanding of how introductory APE instructors decide what content to cover.

Although the disability models were only referred to explicitly within 13.3% of the course schedules, many of the syllabi used terminology associated with the medical model when referring to disability. The medical model is a means to view disability as something that needs to be fixed, reducing the disability to something that is undesirable and unfortunate (Haegele & Hodge, 2016; Peers et al., 2014). The medical model insinuates that barriers encountered by individuals with disabilities are not based within wider socio-cultural or political environments (Brittain, 2004; Haegele & Hodge, 2016). This model was expressed throughout the syllabi, with a number of course descriptions and course objectives referring to topics related to disability with terminology such as “handicapped,” “normal children,” “disease,” and “special needs.” In addition, a large number of the topics concentrated on disability categories. This is likely problematic, as scholars have often argued that use of this language can be harmful to people with disabilities, especially when taken out of context of the medical field (Peers et al., 2014; Spencer et al., 2020). Further, the medical model conflicts with the notion that people with disabilities can successfully compete in athletic competition and attain the physical education curriculum (Haegele & Hodge, 2016). Issues with the medical model may ring especially true when preservice educators are introduced to people with disabilities, as the language educators use when referring to and addressing students with disabilities creates a unique environment

that can impact students with disabilities' self-esteem and provides a model for how to interact with people with disabilities (McNamara et al., 2020; West et al., 2015). Boyd et al. (2015) explained that use of terminology based within the medical model can negatively influence people with disabilities, as it reaffirms power imbalances between those with disabilities and those without disabilities, as well as perpetuates negative societal views toward disability. If medical model language is pervasive throughout the syllabi, it is likely that preservice physical educators will adopt that same language that often views disability from a deficit model that perpetuates views of less than (McNamara et al., 2020; West et al., 2015). Although the use of medical model terminology to teach future physical educators may negatively influence their attitudes toward people with disabilities, it is not surprising, as the use of medical model terminology is commonplace within the APE literature (Brittain, 2004; Haegele & Hodge, 2016; Spencer et al., 2020). As the syllabi is often the first impression of a course and field for undergraduates (Barrett et al., 2015; Campbell et al., 2019), it is important for APE faculty to reflect on different models through which to view and interpret disability (e.g., social model, embodiment), and consciously choose language to implement within the syllabi that reflects their understanding of disability. Better yet, APE faculty should consider teaching students these models and allowing them to critically analyze them to identify which model best fits their lens.

The emphasis on promoting positive attitudes toward people with disabilities was a clear pattern in the review of the syllabi. Syllabi often had language about encouraging empathy and an understanding toward people with disabilities, as well as to understand disability communities and history. The theme of advocating for individuals with disabilities demonstrated that practicum experiences often were meant to promote positive attitudes and empathy toward teaching students with disabilities. This aligns with a plethora of research that has shown that working with students with disabilities increases preservice physical educators' attitudes and perceived level of competence in their ability to teach students with disabilities (Hodge et al., 2012; Ligg et al., 2017; Layne & Blasingame, 2018; Taliaferro et al., 2015; Woodruff & Sinelnikov, 2015). Similar to the results of Piletic and Davis's (2010) study, the results of this study indicate that

there may be some disparity in the types of practicum experiences, as a variety of practicum types (e.g., observations, direct teaching) and settings (e.g., public schools, communities) were recorded. In addition, some courses required as little as 6 hours of practical experience. In addition, these results may contrast Kwon's (2018) study that found that more than half of the classes required less than a 20-hour practical experience. Unless these students are also teaching children with disabilities in other field experiences and their student teaching, they may enter the field with little to no confidence with teaching children with disabilities. This limited experience could be attributed to the fact that many PETE programs only have one course dedicated to APE, and thus, instructors may feel that they have to cover a lot of content in a semester and not want to add additional practicum experiences (Kwon, 2018; Piletic & Davis, 2010). In addition, if students lack content knowledge regarding APE, they may have an abundant amount of negative experience in these practicum programs. Future research needs to comprehend whether the amount of APE practicum experiences relates with the quality of the experiences and what background knowledge preservice physical educators need to have a positive experience.

For the theme of effective teaching strategies, the focus was on assessment, behavior management, differentiating and modifying instruction, and applying Universal Design for Learning principles. These strategies are in line with the most current APE textbooks (e.g., Hodge et al., 2012; Winnick & Porretta, 2017). An eye-opening result of this finding was the lack of courses that included assignments on IEPs. A study by Samalot and Lieberman (2017) found that although many teachers were involved in part of the IEP process, they were left out a majority of the time and were not satisfied with their involvement. If PETE programs do not prepare future physical educators to properly navigate the IEP process, this lack of being meaningfully involved and contributing to the IEP process is likely to persist. However, it is promising that many of the syllabi had topics, objectives, and assignments related to their understanding of special education laws. Legislation and ensuring that the intent of the laws is carried out correctly related to physical education has long been an issue for teachers in the field (Samalot & Lieberman, 2017; Wilson et al., 2020). Wilson et al. (2019) found that in-service and preservice

general physical educators often had an incomplete understanding of least restrictive environment. Further, it was explained that although APE courses may cover special education law, this training does not extend to them practicing the implementation of least restrictive environment. The intent of special education laws and the right of the children with disabilities to have access to physical education is an important area that should be thoroughly addressed and applied within APE courses to the maximum extent possible.

Limitations

A number of limitations to this study should be recognized and discussed. A primary limitation to this study is the relatively small sample size. Despite this, the syllabi attained a degree of representativeness of PETE programs from across the United States. Nonetheless, despite the use of objective data, participation bias may have occurred. For example, department chairs and course instructors with expertise in APE may have been more likely to respond. Thus, the results from the syllabi should be generalized cautiously. Finally, a limitation associated with syllabi analysis is the problem of lack of specificity that can occur within syllabi (Barrett et al., 2015). Many syllabi have insufficient details, which interferes with the investigator's ability to discern what is being taught. It is likely that additional topics were taught in these courses; however, the syllabi may not have explicitly acknowledged these topics. Furthermore, the syllabi, course content, or course schedule may change throughout the semester, and the syllabi analyzed in this study may not precisely reflect the content taught (Barrett et al., 2015). Future scholars should employ a more diverse set of data sources, such as surveys and interviews with both the college instructors and their students, to glean a greater understanding of the design of these courses and the content being delivered.

Conclusion

This study was the first of its kind to document the syllabi utilized within introduction to APE courses across the United States. The findings of this study show that more research is needed on the status of preparation for APE in PETE programs. However, this study is an important step, as there is little research in this crucial and pivotal area (Ayers & Housner, 2008; Kwon, 2018; Piletic & Davis, 2010).

This study shows that most courses are still entrenched in the medical model, which has been deemed extremely inappropriate when taken outside of medical contexts (Spencer et al., 2020). In addition, courses are offering an array of topics but may also lack in covering content related to key topics such as transition plans and teaching components of physical education (e.g., dance, aquatics) to students with disabilities. In addition, more practicum hours may need to be added for PETE programs to produce confident and self-determined teachers. The future of the field depends on having physical educators who understand the implications of special education laws, who can advocate for their students, and who know how to teach students with disabilities. At this point, it appears that higher education faculty teaching the introduction to APE course are covering some important topics, but further research needs to examine the rationale behind the areas of emphasis and the effectiveness of PETE programs in preparing future physical educators to teach students with disabilities.

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