

Practicum in a Self-Contained Environment: Pre-Service Teacher Perceptions of Teaching Students with Disabilities

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore pre-service physical education teacher perceptions of teaching students with disabilities and professional preparation in a self-contained environment during a student teaching practicum. Data collection included formal interviews, informal interviews, direct observation with field notes, and critical incident reports; and took place during a seven week student teaching practicum at a school which only serves students with severe and profound disabilities. Qualitative techniques were used to analyze the results. The results indicated a pre-service teacher's perception that a PETE program provided him with adequate preparation for teaching students with disabilities, but also suggested a need of presenting more realistic settings for teaching students with disabilities prior to practicum. In addition, the pre-service teacher, while focused on his own teaching, identified the pedagogical content knowledge for teaching students with disabilities as fundamental in successful teaching.

Adapted physical education is a growing field ripe with information for researchers to examine and teachers to consider. With the emphasis on racial, gender, and sexual orientation equity in the gymnasium over the past two decades (Sparkes, 1997; Squires & Sparkes, 1996; McGuire & Collins, 1998; Griffin, 1984; Griffin, 1985), the focus is now turning towards equity issues for

students with physical and cognitive disabilities. Providing an equal education for these students is not only their right, it is the law (IDEA, 1997). However, it is the opinion of many that teacher education programs have failed to adequately provide curricular courses and field experiences to many of their graduates which would prepare them to successfully teach these students in their classes (Morley, Bailey, Tan, & Cooke, 2005; Hardin, 2005; Hodge & Jansma, 2000).

Teachers construct their knowledge over time and with experience, with the latter being shown as a critical area of teacher development (Rovegno, 2003). The more experience teachers have in the field, the better they are at planning, focusing on student learning, and adapting to the changing contexts in physical education (Graham, Hopple, Manross, & Sitzman, 1993; Phillips & Carlisle, 1983; Silverman, 1991). Understanding teacher perceptions is a way to gain an insight into how their knowledge develops. One part of knowledge construction takes place in the teacher education programs (Rovegno, 1993; Rovegno, 2003).

Pre-service Teacher Perceptions of PETE Programs

Graber (1995) examined the influence of physical education teacher education (PETE) programs on pre-service teacher beliefs of teaching and how pre-service teachers incorporated general pedagogical content knowledge into their

lessons. The findings of the study demonstrated that pre-service teachers had difficulties incorporating pedagogical content knowledge into their lessons. Lack of subject area competence, inability to use subject knowledge with the appropriate teaching applications, and inability to apply the appropriate teaching progressions were primary reasons for difficulties that pre-service teachers experienced during teaching. In addition, pre-service teachers were aware of the need for pedagogical content knowledge in order to teach effectively, and felt that spending extra time planning would help them better teach the content (Graber, 1995).

O'Sullivan and Tsagaridou (1992) found that early field experiences help pre-service teachers to better apply previous knowledge from methods courses in a teaching context. The more real-life applications of teaching that pre-service teachers are exposed to, the more experience they gain, which in turn increases their ability to apply that experience to new contexts (O'Sullivan & Tsagaridou, 1992).

The pre-service physical education teachers identified classroom preparedness as one of several problem areas of PETE programs (Barney & Pleban, 2006). When teachers are not able to adequately plan for the lesson, they spend more time addressing classroom management and focus less on student learning. In addition to planning time, classroom preparedness includes participation in early field experience. Barney and Pleban (2006) theorized that if PETE programs provide pre-service teachers with more early field experiences, then pre-service teachers will be better prepared to plan for their next lessons.

Indeed, field experiences are crucial in preparation of pre-service teachers as "there is simply no substitute for spending time with real children, in real schools, with real teachers" (Graham et al., 1993, p. 212). Field experiences are not limited to student teaching (i.e., practicum) and currently 98% of PETE programs provide pre-student teaching field experiences (Ayers & Housner, 2008). Field experiences are

required to achieve nearly all of the current PETE standards (NASPE, 2003) and practicum still remains the culminating teaching field experience for pre-service physical education teachers (Bahneman, 1996).

Perceptions of Teaching Physical Education to Students with Disabilities

Many PETE programs prepare general physical education teachers to serve students with special needs in one single specific course (Hardin, 2005). Although these adapted physical education courses have been shown to improve physical education majors' attitudes towards teaching students with special needs (Hodge, 1998), many of those courses were unable to provide useful information and teaching strategies for pre-service teachers to effectively teach this population of students (Hodge & Jansma, 2000; Hardin, 2005; Morley et al., 2005).

Hodge and Jansma (2000) examined how different contextual factors affected 704 pre-service teachers' attitudes towards teaching students with disabilities. The results of the study showed that pre-service teachers with relevant experience and females exhibited more positive attitudes towards teaching students with special needs. Hodge and Jansma (2000) recommend that PETE programs provide pre-service teachers with hands-on experience and with instructional information on teaching students in an inclusive environment. This recommendation is supported by earlier research based on 2,943 undergraduate students in which students with hands-on experience displayed more positive attitudes than those without such experience in teaching students with disabilities (Folsom-Meek, Nearing, Groteluschen, & Kampf, 1999).

While educational preparation is seen as a powerful predictor of attitudes toward teaching students with disabilities (Folsom-Meek & Nearing, 1994; Folsom-Meek, Nearing, & Krampf, 1998; Kowalski & Rizzo, 1996), most teachers have no formal teacher training (i.e. courses and workshops) in teaching individuals

with special needs, or at best that their training is very limited (Morley et al., 2005; Meegan & MacPhail, 2006). The physical education teachers perceive teacher training in the form of departmental in-services (i.e. professional development within their school) to be helpful in learning more on how to teach this population of students, but such in-services do not take into consideration the area of physical education. As a result, several authors recommended for PETE programs to include information on teaching in an inclusive environment and provide hands-on experience for pre-service teachers as well (Morley et al., 2005; Meegan & MacPhail, 2006).

Hardin (2005) analyzed perceptions of five practicing physical education teachers of the adapted physical education curriculum in their respective PETE programs and how their preparation programs affected their confidence and competence in teaching students with disabilities. All but one of the teachers had taken a course on adapted physical education in their PETE program. Teachers had received some hands-on experience during this course, but reported that it was their only experience during college course work teaching students with special needs. Teaching experience and learning from other teachers were the main sources of knowledge acquisition for teaching students with disabilities. The more time a physical education teacher spends teaching students with disabilities, the more confident and competent he or she feels when teaching. An interesting finding of the study was that most of the participants felt that their course in adapted physical education sufficiently prepared them for teaching students with disabilities, even though the majority did not get hands-on experience (Hardin, 2005).

The research in adapted physical education has been recently focused on inclusive settings that provide the students with their least restrictive environment as specified in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1997). However, little attention has been dedicated to physical education in more restrictive settings, i.e.

self-contained classes and schools. This is despite the fact that in terms of placement decision, those students with emotional and behavioral disorders who have the most severe deficits academically, behaviorally, and socially, will be placed in self-contained classes or schools (Lane, Wehby, Little, & Cooley, 2005).

Purpose of Study

Given the findings of research on teaching physical education to students with special needs and the gaps that exist in literature on teaching students with disabilities in self-contained schools, the purpose of this study was to explore pre-service physical education teacher perceptions of teaching students with disabilities and professional preparation in a self-contained environment during a student teaching practicum. A pre-service teacher is defined, for this study, as a teacher who has completed all required course work in a university PETE program and is entering his student teaching practicum.

Method

Participant and Setting

The participant in this study was a 21 year old male pre-service teacher named Denis, who attended a university in the southeastern United States. The pre-service teacher had completed the required university course work in the PETE program, which included courses typical in teacher education, including elementary and secondary methods, teaching movement, motor development, elementary and secondary curriculum, and adapted physical education. Denis was entering his secondary school student teaching practicum following his elementary student teaching practicum, which was the second part of the culminating experience for pre-service teachers.

The student teaching practicum lasted seven weeks and took place at Cherry Hill School, which is a self-contained secondary school located in the southeastern United States. The school has been routinely used as a site for field experiences

and student teaching practicum, and had an certified cooperating physical education teacher. The school exclusively serves students with severe and profound cognitive and physical disabilities from grade six through grade twelve. At the time of the study there were 78 students who attended the school. The participant's teaching schedule consisted of five 55 minute periods a day and included teaching all of the grades. The students in the school had daily physical education lessons and the class size varied between eight and eighteen students. During the practicum, the participant observed the cooperating teacher for the first week and taught all of the classes for the remaining six weeks. The subject matter taught during the practicum consisted of aquatics, circuit training, games and activities, and fitness training.

The availability of self-contained classes for students with special needs in which physical education is taught by a certified physical educator qualified to supervise pre-service teachers is limited. Under these circumstances, a case study approach was justified to answer the research question. The study was approved by the University's Institutional Review Board and prior to the study the participant signed a consent form that outlined the purpose of the study, the requirements, and the possible risks and rewards of his participation in this study. Researchers were not part of the University's field experience office or PETE program's personnel responsible for student teaching practicum.

Data Collection

Data for this study were collected using qualitative methods by researchers as non-participant observers (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993) and included formal interviews, informal interviews, direct observation, and critical incident reports.

Formal Interviews

A formal interview was conducted prior to the participant's student teaching practicum, to gain knowledge into his perceptions of teaching

students with disabilities and how well he felt he was prepared to teach. Following the seven week practicum, the participant was interviewed again to ascertain his perceptions of teaching and his professional preparation program. Both interviews lasted 45 minutes, and each interview was taped, recorded, and transcribed verbatim.

Informal Interviews

In addition, informal interviews were conducted daily throughout the practicum. Informal interviews usually occurred following a class that the participant taught. The questions focused on Denis' teaching, how the class went, what went well and what needed improvement, about student participation, and other class events. These informal interviews were used to gain insight into his perceptions of teaching students with various disabilities. The informal interviews were recorded into a Microsoft word document immediately following the event and labeled by time and date.

Critical Incident Reports

The critical incident technique (Flanagan, 1954 cited in O'Sullivan & Tsangaridou, 1992) was used to collect significant daily events that may have contributed to a better understanding of the participant's teaching, management, or knowledge of students with particular disabilities. The researcher administered and collected the critical incident reports that included a twofold question - What was your most meaningful experience in teaching today's physical education class and why? The participant completed the critical incident report at the end of each day, and a total of 35 critical incident reports were collected. This technique has been previously used to gain perceptions of the most meaningful experience during physical education lessons (Hastie & Curtner-Smith, 2006).

Direct Observation

The researchers conducted observations of the participant teaching physical education classes for the entire duration of the practicum, 150 lessons,

and wrote detailed field notes documenting the activities and interactions that were witnessed during the class.

Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

In order to portray a true and accurate depiction of the participant's perceptions, data were gathered from several different sources. The formal interviews, informal interviews, and critical incidents were used to discover how the participant's perceptions were developed from his history, his professional training, and his experience in the student teaching practicum; while the direct observations were meant to depict how the researchers examined his development throughout the practicum. A thematic analysis was used when examining data to identify common themes (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). First the transcripts and field notes were read and reread. Then the meaningful quotes were identified and clustered together to form a category. The next step of the thematic analysis was to identify all data that related to the already classified category. If data did not fit into an already classified category, a new category was created. The next step was to combine and catalogue related categories into subcategories with the entire process remaining flexible (Tesch, 1990).

Once the themes were developed, the researchers triangulated data between the different sources to find which ones had commonalities. In addition, investigator triangulation was used, which Denzin and Lincoln described as "the use of several different researchers or evaluators" (2003, pg. 215) in order to further the reliability of the findings.

In addition, member checks were used to validate that the data collected were a true and accurate depiction of the participant's perceptions. Upon completion of the study, the participant was asked to thoroughly read each interview, critical incident, and field notes, as well as the results of the study, in order to further confirm data accuracy.

Results

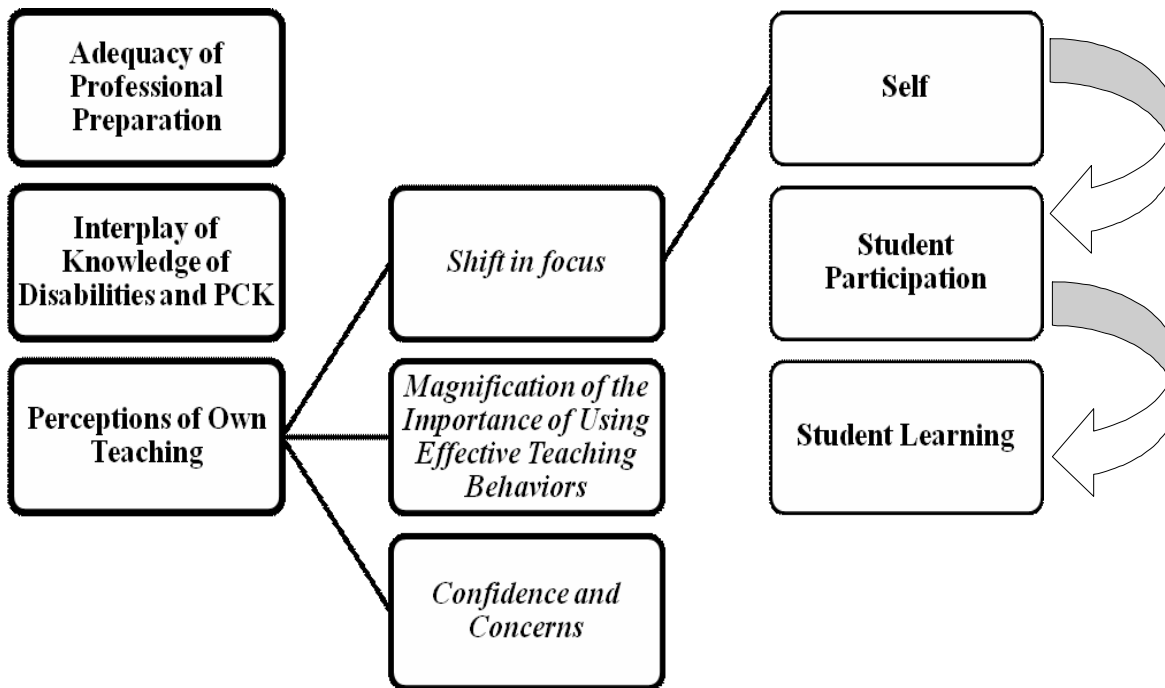
Figure 1 provides a diagrammatical representation of Denis's perceptions of teaching students with disabilities in a self-contained environment. The following themes were generated within the data: adequacy of professional preparation; interplay of knowledge of disabilities and pedagogical content knowledge; and perceptions of own teaching. Within the perceptions of own teaching theme, several sub-themes were identified including the following: perceptual shift from focus on oneself to student participation to student learning; perceptions of confidence level and concerns; and magnification of the importance of using effective teaching behaviors when teaching students with disabilities.

Adequacy of Professional Preparation

Denis stated that the only coursework that prepared him for teaching students with disabilities included a special education class, which was required for all education majors, and an adapted physical education course. The rest of his preparation program focused mainly on teaching able bodied students. Interestingly, Denis felt that he was adequately prepared to teach students with disabilities. During his first interview he stated, "I think I was adequately trained as with the teachings and the readings and the papers and things like that that I had to write. I mean, I think I was trained well."

Following practicum he reiterated the value of the adapted physical education course and how it prepared him "as far as what disabilities are, what some good ideas to go about instructing and adapting physical education for certain students." However, there were some areas that he perceived as lacking in his preparation. Denis said that prior to practicum his "...experiences with the actual students weren't what it should have been." As case in point, during his field experiences he never taught more than one student with disabilities at a time, which is not common for physical education teachers who have much larger classes. In the first interview Denis said, "I wish

Figure 1. Perceptions of teaching students with disabilities in a self-contained environment.



I would have had ... four or five students [with disabilities], you know, because when you go out to schools, it's not going to be just one-on-one. It'll be like one-on-ten, or whatever the case may be." Denis felt that constructing a more realistic scenario during the adapted physical education course, one which more closely resembles what physical education teachers encounter during their teaching, would have perhaps allowed for better preparation for his student teaching experiences. He stated that "to adequately prepare me, really prepare me, I feel that I should have had a couple of students, like five or six students with me, and then teach the lesson. I feel like that would have prepared me a little bit more."

In addition, Denis felt the university and the PETE program should include more classes that dealt with teaching students with disabilities in order to cover more content. He said that "instead of having one class, break it down into

three classes. Maybe have some classes broken down into different disabilities, so you can go more in-depth in your classes to ... help you get a little better prepared."

Interplay of Knowledge of Disabilities and Pedagogical Content Knowledge

Denis entered the student teaching practicum with incomplete knowledge of different disabilities and strategies for successfully educating students with special needs. Denis had experiences with individuals with disabilities in two required college courses and in his elementary student teaching practicum. He never knew the specific disabilities of the students as the university instructors and cooperating teacher "didn't discuss with me what the [student's] disability was." This lack of information left Denis to discover different ways of teaching the students with disabilities on his own. In his

critical incidents, he stated that “I didn’t realize how hands-on I have to be with the lower functioning students,” as well as, “I figured out that it is better to calm down and talk to the student when they do something they are not supposed to do. Yelling just makes it worse.” When asked about his knowledge of the different disabilities following one of his lessons, he stated that “I can figure some of them out, but I am having trouble figuring out the ones with autism.” His lack of knowledge about some of his students’ disabilities was particularly evident when he asked a group of students with severe mental retardation who were illiterate to read the rules that were posted on the wall. Another time, he gave lengthy directions for students whose disability prevented them from comprehending a multiple step task.

Denis acknowledged that the understanding of disabilities and their manifestations was important; however, the pedagogical content knowledge of *how to teach* these students was crucial. In his second formal interview, Denis identified some of the techniques that he learned about how to teach students with specific disabilities:

Kids with autism...in the beginning I was trying to be more hands-on with all of them. So you know, I’ve learned to change some of my teaching points... instead of forcing them...get them in the position to watch me and model it.

In his critical incident report he added that “kids with autism like the structure and they like knowing the order of what they need to do at each station. They do well to a definite beginning and ending signal, like stop when the music stops.”

Perceptions of Own Teaching

Not surprisingly, much of the data that were collected dealt with Denis’s teaching. These data were categorized into the following sub-themes: perceptual shift from focus on oneself to student participation to student learning, perceptions of confidence levels and concerns, and

magnification of the importance of using effective teaching behaviors when teaching students with disabilities.

Perceptual shift from focus on oneself to student participation to student learning. Initially, Denis focused on his instructional obligations, completing the student teaching practicum, and what he had to do to become a better teacher. Most of his initial comments were related to class instruction and management. For example, he stated that when dealing with student behavior, he wanted to be firm but not easy. As evidenced by critical incident reports and informal interviews, Denis focused on teacher behaviors such as movement patterns and feedback in his initial lessons during the study. Comments like “I learned that I need to monitor better and move more while teaching swimming to these students,” “I was more vocal with my feedback,” and “I need to give more precise feedback and better instructions in the pool” are representative of this perceptual focus on himself and his teacher behaviors.

From the introspective view of own instructional and managerial obligations, Denis progressed towards a broader focus on the lesson, and more specifically on student participation and student enjoyment. He considered student participation and enjoyment of the lesson as determinants of the success of the lesson. At that time, the following comments were common: “The students really got into the music,” “Everybody participated today,” “The students participated well during the water polo game,” and “How great the students behaved...They showed great attitudes and enthusiasm which made my lessons much better.”

During his final week of teaching, Denis moved his focus from the student participation and enjoyment to student learning. Particularly, the researchers noted that Denis varied the specificity of performance feedback based on the student cognition level and understanding. In addition, he used what the cooperating teacher considered appropriate refining tasks, and he used a high number of those tasks to keep the students

engaged in learning the activities. In the informal interviews, Denis described his concerted effort on having students learn skill and strategy in a game of water polo noting that it was his focus of the lesson—"to have students learn". He also noticed the outcomes of student learning as students were "faking passes and shots to try to get the defense to flinch." In his critical incidents he noted that the students "did a great job with the refinements about swimming" and how one class was able to "pick up on handball [in the gym] using the same skills as they used in water polo" transferring the basic strategy from one sport to another.

To aid in student learning Denis attempted to provide learning opportunities for all of the students at their individualized skill level. He said,

I do not want to just say something and do something for the whole class. I want to make sure that, if I have a severe student that has a disability; I want to do something that they can be able to do, but I don't want to slow down any other students. I want to challenge them as much as possible...I want to meet each child's ability, so they can do something that is being asked of them to do.

He also noticed how well the ninth grade students learned to use stopwatches when timing their classmates, a new skill for many students.

Perceptions of confidence level and concerns.

Denis demonstrated confidence in his teaching abilities through both his words and actions as evidenced by his formal interviews as well as the researchers' observations. In his first interview Denis stated, "I'm confident in my teaching abilities" and "I feel like I am well prepared to teach." During observations, researchers noted that he used a strong voice and provided high amounts of motivational and performance feedback. In addition, he had prior experience in the subject matter such as swimming, circuit training, and other planned activities. He felt that he could meet the students' individual needs by

evaluating their present level of performance and providing them with learning experiences which were appropriate to their skill level.

However, Denis also had a number of concerns. One of the concerns was the adaptation of activities to student level of ability and not being able to "figure out what their [students'] accommodations are." The main challenge for Denis was to make sure that all of the students were being challenged by an activity regardless of their ability levels.

Another concern for Denis was the management of student behavior. He said he "wanted to be firm; but at the same time, I don't want it to be like a fist fight or a war going on." He did not want to become frustrated and show it to the students. Denis had to face this concern when he caught several students misbehaving in the locker room before and after a swimming lesson. Initially, he decided to punish students by not allowing them to swim the next day. After further consideration and a conference with his cooperating teacher, Denis decided that since students weren't misbehaving during instructional time, they should be allowed to swim. As a result, he decided to alter his management routine at the end of the lesson and send the students into the locker room one at a time to avoid the recurrence of the problem.

An ongoing concern for Denis was how to incorporate students in wheelchairs into certain lessons that required the use of their feet and legs. He said, "If I was teaching a lesson on kicking and punting, you know, how do I get them involved in my lesson? What can I do to include them?" During the second formal interview he re-stated this concern and pointed out that he felt the adapted physical education course should do a better job of providing numerous examples of adaptations for a variety of disabilities. Denis said, "I think we should have gone over some lessons about teaching kids with like severe disabilities, like in wheelchairs, so we could get some ideas on how to include them all in the lessons."

Another concern Denis stated in his interviews was that he was afraid (prior to the practicum) “that [the students] wouldn’t be able to perform as well; or I wouldn’t be able to give as good of instructions, and that they would just kind of look at me saying ‘I don’t know what you want me to do.’” This concern was alleviated by the end of the practicum with Denis saying that the “students exceeded my expectations in terms of how much they can learn and improve their performance.”

Magnification of the importance of using effective teaching behaviors when teaching students with disabilities. As practicum progressed, Denis frequently spoke about the importance of explicit instructions and short, easy to understand learning cues. During the first interview, Denis did not mention this part of teaching; however, this sub-theme was generated from critical incidents, informal interviews, observations, and post-interview.

Denis began his first lessons with very long explanations of rules, routines, and expectations for the students. He later recalled that,

My very first day, I was saying ‘here’s my rules,’ and they were just way, way too long; and I could kind of tell. [The students] were looking at me like ‘we’re lost; I don’t know,’ so I dealt with it by simplifying my instructions...just shorten my instruction time.

In his critical incident reports Denis noted the need to provide precise feedback and better instructions that students could understand. Comments like “in backstroke, I need to say ‘look at the sky’ instead of ‘put your head back’” and “‘hands cupped’ instead of ‘keep your fingers together’” were representative of this trend.

Even at the completion of the practicum, when asked about perceptions of his teaching, Denis identified importance of using cues in order to aid student learning. He said that “using and remembering the little cues to help students learn” was his main accomplishment. He also added, “I feel like I’ve done a good job as far as teaching

them [the students] the cues, and kind of putting it in their head enough where they can always remember it.” The way to address concerns that he had prior to the student teaching practicum, was to find an answer by focusing on his teaching and altering his approach to task presentation:

By just simplifying my instructions ...pinpointing exactly what I want students to do, and really just simplifying. Instead of having long directions or long cues, shorten them to a few words to get it as simple as possible, and really just not try to do too much.

During one of the observations, the researchers noticed that Denis changed the beginning of the lesson to provide the students with a brief overview of the planned activities for the lesson. When asked about the change in the interview, he stated,

I didn’t even realize that I did that. I think I did it to let the students know that they were going to be working on backstroke after freestyle, and this would cut down on the lengthy explanation of the backstroke when it came time to switch activities.

He felt this would decrease management time and increase engaged skill learning time. In addition, providing the order of activities planned in a lesson was beneficial to many students with disabilities, especially those with autism. Therefore, the use of effective teaching behaviors such as having a short planned presentation, providing performance and motivational feedback, increasing students’ time on task, and reducing time spent in management are especially crucial when teaching students with disabilities.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore pre-service physical education teacher perceptions of teaching students with disabilities and professional preparation in a self-contained environment during a student teaching practicum. Similar to previous findings (Hardin, 2005; Morley et al.,

2005), the participant in this study had very little exposure to teaching students with disabilities in his college PETE program. In addition the pre-service teacher in this study felt that the information he learned in his general education special education course did not really pertain to physical education. The general education special education course at the university "...didn't have anything to do with the physical education environment, but basically just supervision and a little like play time in the classroom." Conversely, similar to Hardin's (2005) findings on perceptions of physical education teachers, in this study an adapted physical education course was perceived by the pre-service teacher as providing adequate training to teach students with disabilities. The participant in this study felt that an adapted physical education course supplied considerable content knowledge on the disabilities. However, we also found that the pre-service teacher in this study had difficulties distinguishing what disabilities the students had and how to effectively teach these students, which indicated the gap in his pedagogical content knowledge, the finding that is similar to Graber's (1995) findings.

The limited experiences that the pre-service teacher had in teaching students with disabilities prior to practicum and the lack of the resemblance of these experiences to the realities of teaching was another area of concern identified in this study. This finding corresponds to previous studies (Hardin, 2005; Morley et al., 2005; Hodge & Jansma, 2000; Hynes-Dusel, 1999) where participants felt adequately trained in the classroom, but noted limited hands-on experience of teaching students with disabilities. Altogether, these findings suggest that the adapted component of PETE programs need to make any field experiences as genuine and as true as possible in order to "produce teachers who survive with their zest and intentionality intact" (Locke, 1975, p. 102). It is ultimately the responsibility of the university PETE program to understand the need for more "true to life" field experiences for their

pre-service teachers and to provide them with this type of experience.

The finding of this study in regards to the shift in pre-service teacher perception from the focus on own teaching to the focus on student participation, and ultimately to student learning, may represent a desirable progression, especially given the current focus on student outcomes (NASPE, 2004). Further research is warranted to determine if and to what extent teachers' perceptual shift to focus on student learning is reflected in their actual teaching since some teachers may shift their espoused agenda (for example, focus on student learning) to a different enacted agenda (for example, focus on safety and completing tasks) (James, Griffin, & Dodds, 2008).

Another important element of teaching that Denis recognized and attempted to emulate towards the end of the practicum was a trait of "expert teachers" described in Graham et al.'s (1993) study which consisted of teaching based on the knowledge of students' abilities. Individualized instruction based upon knowledge of student strengths and areas of need is the hallmark of any quality physical education program and is also true for teaching students with disabilities.

Pre-service teachers recognize the importance of planning and acknowledge that with more planning they feel better prepared to teach and to deal with management issues (Graber, 1995; Barney & Pleban, 2006). However, the findings of this study did not reveal the theme of planning common in prior research. One of the reasons for this finding might be the participant's experience and confidence with subject matter being taught. Denis did not consider planning as important for students with disabilities, perhaps, because of his lack of content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge about this demographic of learners. Therefore, it seems advantageous to advocate specific planning based on particular disabilities of students in class in order to improve pre-service teachers' ability to provide inclusive instruction that is sensitive to students needs.

Denis made important personal discoveries

about teaching students with disabilities, which in fact are the characteristics of an effective physical education teacher (Rink, 2002). For example, the importance of giving the students concise and explicit directions and cues to help them improve their learning and increasing the students' time on task are well known. The findings of this study confirmed the need to simplify instructions, present instructions in small informational chunks, and outline the logical sequence of the upcoming events as useful strategies for pre-service teachers when teaching students with disabilities. The results of this study suggest that PETE programs need to strengthen their delivery of pedagogical content knowledge to pre-service teachers, an area of need that can be especially magnified when teaching students with disabilities.

As with most qualitative studies, the findings of this study are applicable to the particular setting where it took place; however, some findings may be applicable in other setting, i.e. inclusive environment. In addition, the findings of the study may be helpful for PETE programs to consider when designing field experiences for pre-service teachers. It is important that teacher preparation programs focus on providing their pre-service teachers with information and effective teaching strategies for students with disabilities. Although the pre-service teacher in this study advocated including more courses dealing with disabilities into PETE programs, it may be difficult to achieve considering the expansive content that PETE programs must cover. Moreover, some may argue that limiting course instruction on students with disabilities to a single adapted physical education course further segregates them to a separate population. A way to resolve this dilemma might be using an infusion approach (Kowalski, 1995) in which knowledge, information, and hands-on teaching experiences are included throughout the courses in the entire curriculum of a PETE program. This approach may provide the pre-service teachers with a well-rounded understanding of how to teach students with disabilities without additional

courses in the curriculum. In any case, PETE programs should make a concentrated commitment towards preparing pre-service teachers for teaching students with disabilities. Otherwise, as Meegan and MacPhail (2006) note, "we are failing to prepare them [physical educators] with the necessary skills and knowledge" (p. 89).

Inclusive classes are becoming more common place in schools throughout the country due to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1997) and No Child Left Behind act (2001), however we must not forget about the teachers and students in the self-contained environment. This article adds to limited research in this area and posits that the experiences that pre-service teachers can gain teaching students with disabilities in the self-contained environment may be beneficial for them as they develop into quality physical educators.

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