2009

Where Have All the Physical Educators Gone? Hint: It is not Higher Education

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Recommended Citation
Bozung, James E.; Lewis, Colleen; and Schutten, Mary, "Where Have All the Physical Educators Gone? Hint: It is not Higher Education" (2009). *Student Summer Scholars*. 35.
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Where Have All the Physical Educators Gone?
Hint: It is not Higher Education

By: James E. Bozung
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**Introduction.** There is a shortage in the number of candidates with certification in physical education to fill vacant faculty positions in higher education physical education teacher preparation programs across the nation. The demand for Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE) faculty outweighs the supply. The purpose of this study is to determine why so few K-12 physical education teachers who are required to take graduate courses for teacher certification do not continue in higher education beyond the mandatory requirements. It may also give more insight into the reasoning of why those who are required and not required to go on to higher education actually do so. Are people who are required to get a master’s in physical education more likely to do so over those who are not required? Physical education is a valuable asset in the K-12 program. Without physical education teacher educators, who will be there to give the information and skills needed to instruct those wanting to be K-12 physical educators? In a study by Boyce and Rikard (2008), it is stated that the shortage of teacher educators may have a negative impact on the amount of public school educators produced in colleges and universities.

With this project, we will be able to understand and evaluate reasons why physical educators are not going on to get their master’s or doctorate degree. We will also identify and evaluate the barriers and opportunities related to higher education physical education and will be able to understand the process of research in higher education. The student scholar’s motive for being involved in this project is because he is considering a master’s program in adapted physical education and wants to identify any barriers of achieving this goal that may be attained in this research. Through completing this project, the scholar will learn and gain experience about the research process that occurs in graduate education. The scholar will also learn about the research a student must perform to choose the right program for their graduate degree. The scholar will learn first-hand the benefits or barriers for going on to higher education. He will find
out if it is in his best interest to go on to higher education immediately after obtaining an undergraduate degree.

**Methods.** In order to get funding for the project “Where Have All the Physical Educators gone? Hint: It’s NOT Higher Education”, a student and two faculty from the Movement Science Department applied for the Student Summer Scholars program for funding. After being accepted for the program, the mentors and student scholar began with the student scholar doing literature review. This was done by reading articles and other research related to the topic. To find articles related to the topic, the student scholar worked with Library Liaison to search the data bases: Sport Discus, Physical Education Index, and Educator’s Research Complete. After collecting articles from these databases and articles the mentors had previously collected, the student scholar executed in-depth literature review. After reading each article, the scholar typed a summary of main ideas with keywords from each.

The student scholar met weekly with his mentor professors to discuss articles and possible survey statements and goals. The student scholar developed categories or themes for the articles and the scholar and mentor professors fine tuned the categories where each article was placed. After they had fine tuned the categories to fit the needs of the project, the student scholar and mentor professors developed survey statements from the categories. In creating the statements, they created the statements to fit a Likert Scale. The student scholar then learned Survey Monkey, an online survey tool, to input the survey. Before the survey could be sent out, the scholar sent it to his peers to have it beta tested and to get feedback on the design. Next content validity was established by expert review. The survey was edited based on this feedback. The mentor professors sought and were granted permission to access listservs of K-12 physical education teachers in Indiana and Michigan for the survey. These states were chosen due to their
differing requirements to keep K-12 certification. Indiana requires a master’s degree [this is changing in 2010] while Michigan requires 18 credits of continuing education. The survey was sent out in the beginning of September because it was within the time frame that teachers return to school. This data from the survey was then compiled. It was used to help those considering a master’s or doctorate degree to learn about the barriers and opportunities that other K-12 educators experienced when they were attaining their PETE degrees.

**Literature Review.** Physical education is a viable aspect in K-12 education. In physical education, we are at a time when there is much known about the physiology, nutrition, psychology, biomechanics, and the human neuromuscular system. What physical education teachers need to do is deliver it to people and to entice them to participate in sport and exercise (Griffey, 1987). Physical education teacher educators need to pass this along to their students so that they, in turn, can entice their students to participate in physical activity for a lifetime. However, with the shortage of faculty at the universities, there could be a negative impact on the number of public school educators produced at colleges and universities (Boyce and Rickard 2008). As stated above, the demand for PETE outweighs the supply. As early as 1987, Griffey found that few institutions within physical education had faculty members that were capable of preparing graduate students. Today, this shortage of graduate students and faculty continues. As the student scholar read through the articles, there were categories that seemed to stand out between each article. These categories are: Decisions Related to Higher Education, Employment Trends, Reasons for Not Seeking a Higher Education Degree, and Faculty Impact.

**Decisions Related to Higher Education.** The decisions related to higher education pose many questions. What students must know is that there is a lot of research, time, and effort that goes into finding the program that is right for them. In an article by Parker et al. (2000) there are
many factors that go into finding a doctoral program for each student. Students must balance studies, assistantships, and jobs. When students move on to higher education, they need to choose a master’s or doctoral program. As the study moves into doctoral studies, choosing the program is like conducting research (Parker et al. 2000). Items to consider while choosing the program are; reputation, resources, ethos, mentoring and sponsorship opportunities, requirements and choices and economics. Students need to choose what they want to specialize in and then decide which university they will attend. Also, when choosing a university to attend, many students search for universities that offer assistantships or scholarships. Therefore, considering the reputation, resources, ethos, mentoring and sponsorship opportunities, requirements and choices, and economics helps many perspective doctorate students choose the program that fits what they are looking for in a graduate program.

When considering the reputation of a graduate school, some students consider the ranking of the school. According to Massengale (1987), rankings can be the driving force for those seeking higher education. In addition, Massengale states that higher ranking schools tend to have a positive effect on the education of its students because they have more distinguished faculties and they attract better students. According to Parker et al. (2000), graduates of the most highly regarded programs in particular specializations are eagerly recruited. Prospective graduate students should consider the reputation of the school when finding the correct program. Prospective graduate students should research what they can about the academic reputation of graduate programs in which they are interested (Parker et al., 2000).

Prospective students must consider the types of resources that the university they are considering to attend has. Students must understand that in the graduate programs, they will be spending considerable amounts of time in the university’s library. The library must somehow
meet the needs of the students at the university. Students must consider the quality, electronics, print resources, connections with other libraries, and research space availability. (Parker et al., 2000).

In choosing the correct graduate program, prospective graduate students must consider the atmosphere of the university. They can talk to current or former graduate students to see how they feel about the program or particular professors (Parker et al., 2000).

The mentoring and sponsorship opportunity aspect is also very important while searching for a graduate program. Prospective students should conduct research on the programs faculty. The prospective students should consider the availability of the programs faculty. The career guidance, advising, and counseling must be apparent in the program’s professors (Parker et al., 2000).

The aspect of requirements and choices in the search for a graduate program is also important in the consideration of the university. Do the students have to follow a set curriculum or is there choice in what they are studying (Parker et al., 2000)? Is there a common core of courses with electives tailored to a student’s interest and skills? The structure of the program is very important (Parker et al., 2000).

Another important item in considering the program is economics. Prospective students must consider their financial situation when they are choosing to pursue higher education (Parker et al., 2000). There are many avenues to take when seeking financial help. Assistantships, fellowships, and loans are all viable ways to get financial help when pursuing higher education beyond the undergraduate degree.

**Employment Trends.** When we think of employment trends, we think of where there are job openings. As mentioned previously, Boyce and Rickard state that with the shortage of faculty
at universities, there could be a negative impact on the number of public school educators produced at colleges and universities. This has already been seen in the past. Griffey (1987) projected that in the year 1990, the number of teachers available to educate our children will be only about 65% of those needed to do so. Universities are most commonly the producers and employers of Ph.D. trained personnel (Wenos, Koslow, Wenos 1996). Wenos et al. stated that the Mellon Foundation of New York projected that 50% of all tenured faculty in higher education, would retire from 1991 – 2000. This projection, budgetary constraints, and lower enrollment rates may not permit 100% replacement of those retirement positions leading to even fewer PETE faculty.

**Reasons for Not Seeking a Higher Education Degree.** There are many reasons that possible candidates do not go on to receive a higher education degree in physical education. Griffey (1987) states the increasing salary of teachers in K-12 education keeps them where they are rather than returning to a university to study. Many candidates have families and they find it hard to find a program that is within their means. In an article by Poole and Graham (1999), reasons stated for not seeking higher education are:

1. The location of the college or university program is too far away for many teachers to enroll as part time students.
2. Few teachers are financially unable to take a year or two off with no pay to work on their degree full time.

Other reasons for not going on to higher education are tenure track and research. K-12 educators do not understand the difference in the tenure process in K-12 education vs. the tenure process in university faculty positions. Also, there is a lot of grant writing and research in PhD
faculty positions. Some K-12 educators do like to have their summers off. If they did attain a doctorate degree, they may be working year round on research and teaching summer classes.

We must also understand that today, the outlook on the future of physical education could be grim. This may help to understand why it is that many do not go on to higher education in physical education. Today we face the budget cuts that are going on in education. The funding per student is being cut as we know it. Schools are looking for ways to keep money in their schools. What it comes down to is cutting programs deemed unnecessary for the school to function. Physical education seems to be one of the first to go. Physical educators know that when the gym is needed, it does not matter if there is a physical education class going on, they must go elsewhere to accommodate the needs of the school first rather than the health of their students and the physical activity they need in the class in order to stay healthy. With all of this going on, why should many with their undergraduate degree in physical education see fit to move on to higher education in physical education when they know that they are probably just going to be the first to be cut anyway.

**Faculty Roles and Impact.** Faculty roles have changed just as much as higher education has changed. In the past, an attractive feature of being a faculty member was freedom to pursue professional interests. Departments have been portrayed as clans of arrogant experts, accountable first to their own agendas, second to their discipline, and third to the institutions that house them. Now there is more interest in what the faculty member does. All faculty are expected to have some balance in their professional lives among the areas of teaching, scholarship, service, and their interactions (Thomas, 2003).

Faculty impact on students can be a deciding factor of whether students will further their education in physical education or move on to a different field. Prospective graduate students
need mentors in the classroom as well as out of the classroom. It is important to facilitate mentoring for students interested in Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance fields and use strategies that may be helpful professionally. According to Schweitzer (1993), it is important to provide a mentoring structure for students in physical education professional programs. He also stated that it is important to facilitate mentoring for students interested in entering the HPERD fields, as well as to define the kind of mentoring assistance and strategies which may be helpful professionally (Hodge, 1997). These mentorship relationships provide opportunities for encouragement, counseling, academic guidance, and facilitation. In an article by Tinning (2000), there is an age gap between professors and contemporary students. For some students, the educational needs are not the same as the professor’s paradigm. This is something that may have a negative impact on these students’ future careers in physical education higher education.
Title Page and Directions

The study is designed to gather Physical Education Teachers' perspectives on Graduate School. Please assist us by completing the survey at the link provided below (please click next). It should require no more than fifteen minutes of your time to complete. This survey is completely anonymous and will remain so. Moreover, since it is voluntary, there are no consequences for non-participation. The informed consent document can be found in the participation request email you received. Please know that once you complete this survey we will not contact you again related to this research, except, and only, to the extent you ask us to provide you a copy of the results of the study. If you would like to receive a summary of the survey results, please send an email to Colleen Lewis at lewiscol@gvsu.edu. Thank you for assisting with this effort!

Key:
SA - Strongly Agree
A - Agree
D - Disagree
SD - Strongly Disagree

If you would like the chance to win an i-tunes card, please fill out the information on the page you are directed to upon completion of the survey.
The following statements refer to choosing a graduate program. Please indicate your level of agreement by checking the appropriate box.

Key:
SA - Strongly Agree
A - Agree
D - Disagree
SD - Strongly Disagree

WHEN CHOOSING A GRADUATE PROGRAM:

1. Driving distance influenced my decision.
   Level of Agreement   SA  A  D  SD

2. Climate and weather influenced my decision.
   Level of Agreement   SA  A  D  SD

3. Funding, such as scholarships and grants, influenced my choice.
   Level of Agreement   SA  A  D  SD

4. Funding support from my employer influenced my choice.
   Level of Agreement   SA  A  D  SD

5. Receiving an assistantship influenced my decision.
   Level of Agreement   SA  A  D  SD

6. The potential for receiving an assistantship influenced my decision.
   Level of Agreement   SA  A  D  SD

7. The reputation of the college/university influenced my choice.
   Level of Agreement   SA  A  D  SD

8. I spoke to other K-12 teachers for advice.
   Level of Agreement   SA  A  D  SD

9. I spoke to my undergraduate professors for advice.
   Level of Agreement   SA  A  D  SD

10. The major I was interested in pursuing, was an important factor.
    Level of Agreement   SA  A  D  SD

11. The location of the university was important.
    Level of Agreement   SA  A  D  SD
12. The curricular schedule was important.
Level of Agreement   SA  A  D  SD

13. The time the courses were offered was important.
Level of Agreement   SA  A  D  SD

14. The qualifications of graduate faculty involved in my chosen program influenced my decision.
Level of Agreement   SA  A  D  SD

15. Finding a faculty mentor influenced my decision.
Level of Agreement   SA  A  D  SD

16. My family was an important factor in my decision.
Level of Agreement   SA  A  D  SD

17. The current national economy has influenced my choice.
Level of Agreement   SA  A  D  SD

18. The ability to pursue graduate school part time and remain at my current job was important.
Level of Agreement   SA  A  D  SD

19. The professional reputation of graduate faculty involved in my chosen major influenced my choice.
Level of Agreement   SA  A  D  SD

20. It was important to develop a new skill set in graduate school.
Level of Agreement   SA  A  D  SD

21. Personal finances were an important factor in my decision.
Level of Agreement   SA  A  D  SD
The following statements refer to important aspects of graduate coursework beyond the bachelor’s degree. Please indicate your level of agreement by checking the appropriate box.

Key:
SA - Strongly Agree
A - Agree
D - Disagree
SD - Strongly Disagree

IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF GRADUATE COURSEWORK BEYOND THE BACHELOR’S DEGREE ARE:

1. To develop writing skills.
   Level of Agreement   SA  A  D  SD

2. To develop a new set of skills.
   Level of Agreement   SA  A  D  SD

3. To develop skills in research and scholarship.
   Level of Agreement   SA  A  D  SD

4. To develop new activities to teach my students.
   Level of Agreement   SA  A  D  SD

5. To develop a program that fits my personal experiences.
   Level of Agreement   SA  A  D  SD

6. To be able to reflect and relate personal experiences to the program.
   Level of Agreement   SA  A  D  SD

7. To develop leadership skills.
   Level of Agreement   SA  A  D  SD

8. To learn from professors that have K-12 teaching experience.
   Level of Agreement   SA  A  D  SD

9. To positively influence my salary.
   Level of Agreement   SA  A  D  SD

10. To learn additional information useful for the duration of my career.
    Level of Agreement   SA  A  D  SD

11. To find a schedule of courses that fits my current lifestyle.
    Level of Agreement   SA  A  D  SD
12. To find options, like online courses, that are part of the program.
Level of Agreement  SA   A   D   SD
The following statements refer to your opinion regarding a doctoral degree. Please indicate your level of agreement by checking the appropriate box.

Key:
SA - Strongly Agree
A - Agree
D - Disagree
SD - Strongly Disagree

MY OPINIONS REGARDING A DOCTORAL DEGREE ARE:

1. I would be interested in studying for a doctoral degree.
Level of Agreement     SA  A  D  SD

2. The doctoral degree is too much work to complete.
Level of Agreement     SA  A  D  SD

3. The doctoral degree is not available in my area.
Level of Agreement     SA  A  D  SD

4. The doctoral degree has little relevance to K-12 teaching.
Level of Agreement     SA  A  D  SD

5. The doctoral degree makes one unemployable in K-12.
Level of Agreement     SA  A  D  SD

6. The doctoral degree is something to which I aspire.
Level of Agreement     SA  A  D  SD

7. The doctoral degree is all about research, not teaching skills.
Level of Agreement     SA  A  D  SD

8. The doctoral degree takes too long to complete.
Level of Agreement     SA  A  D  SD

9. The doctoral degree is not affordable.
Level of Agreement     SA  A  D  SD

10. Achieving a doctoral degree means quitting my job.
Level of Agreement     SA  A  D  SD

11. The doctoral degree is worthwhile.
Level of Agreement     SA  A  D  SD

12. The benefits of achieving a doctoral degree outweighs the barriers.
Level of Agreement  SA  A  D  SD
The following statements refer to your opinions regarding your graduate school experience.
Please indicate your level of agreement by checking the appropriate box.
Key:
SA - Strongly Agree
A - Agree
D - Disagree
SD - Strongly Disagree

YOUR OPINIONS OF GRADUATE SCHOOL:

1. I would have pursued graduate coursework without a state requirement.
   Level of Agreement  SA  A  D  SD

2. I would have pursued graduate school without the increase in pay.
   Level of Agreement  SA  A  D  SD

3. I chose the correct major for my goals in graduate school.
   Level of Agreement  SA  A  D  SD

4. I would have chosen a different major if it would have been available at the school of my choice.
   Level of Agreement  SA  A  D  SD

5. I was able to pursue graduate classes that were of interest to me.
   Level of Agreement  SA  A  D  SD

6. I felt like I had enough information regarding a choice of major in graduate school.
   Level of Agreement  SA  A  D  SD

7. I felt like I contributed to my graduate classes.
   Level of Agreement  SA  A  D  SD

8. I made professional contacts in graduate school that will help me provide better learning experiences in K-12 education.
   Level of Agreement  SA  A  D  SD

9. There was a faculty member in my graduate program that was my faculty mentor.
   Level of Agreement  SA  A  D  SD

10. I actively sought a faculty member in my graduate program to be my mentor.
    Level of Agreement  SA  A  D  SD

11. I felt like I was prepared to take graduate level classes.
    Level of Agreement  SA  A  D  SD
12. My professional experience in teaching K-12 was important in graduate school.
Level of Agreement   SA  A  D  SD

13. Graduate courses challenged me more than undergraduate level classes.
Level of Agreement   SA  A  D  SD

14. The courses I took in graduate school have improved my capability to teach in K-12.
Level of Agreement   SA  A  D  SD

15. I am a better teacher after taking graduate classes.
Level of Agreement   SA  A  D  SD

16. I have the skill set, based on my job experience, to teach college students.
Level of Agreement   SA  A  D  SD

17. I would like to teach in the university setting.
Level of Agreement   SA  A  D  SD

18. Coaching responsibilities interfere with getting a graduate degree.
Level of Agreement   SA  A  D  SD

19. When given the choice, I would prefer to earn a graduate degree rather than coach.
Level of Agreement   SA  A  D  SD

To put your answers in context, we'd like to gather some information regarding your professional affiliation.

1. My physical education teaching employment status.
   Full Time - Tenured
   Full Time - Not Tenured
   Part Time
   Not Currently Employed

2. The grade level I teach (check all that apply).
   Elementary School
   Middle School
   High School
   College/University

3. The environment where I teach physical education.
   Public School
   Private School
   Charter School
4. My undergraduate major was physical education.
   Yes
   No

5. My undergraduate minor was physical education.
   Yes
   No

6. Physical education is one of my teaching endorsements/certifications.
   Yes
   No

7. My physical education teaching experience:
   0 - 3 years
   4 - 7 years
   8 - 11 years
   12 - 15 years
   16 - 19 years
   20 years and longer

8. The range most reflective of my current salary is:
   $0 - $15,000
   $15,000 - $30,000
   $30,000 - $45,000
   $45,000 - $60,000
   $60,000 - $75,000
   $75,000 - $90,000
   $90,000 and above

9. I am required to achieve a masters degree to keep my credential/license.
   Yes
   No

10. I am required to achieve 18 hours in a planned program to keep my credential/license.
    Yes
    No

11. I have taken graduate level course credit.
    Yes
    No

12. I have completed a Masters Degree in physical education.
    Yes
    No
13. I have completed a Masters Degree in another area.
   Yes
   No

14. I have completed 18 hours in a planned program.
   Yes
   No

15. I have taken graduate classes beyond my master's degree (in addition to required CEUs).
   Yes
   No

16. The percentage of my physical education undergraduate professors who had a doctoral degree.
    0 - 25%
    25% - 50%
    50% - 75%
    75% - 100%
    I don't know

17. The percentage of my physical education undergraduate professors who had K – 12 experience.
    0 - 25%
    25% - 50%
    50% - 75%
    75% - 100%
    I don't know

18. The distance, in miles, to the nearest graduate degree granting college or university.
    0 - 10 miles
    10 - 20 miles
    20 - 30 miles
    30 - 40 miles
    40 - 50 miles
    50 - 60 miles
    Further than 60 miles
    I don't know

19. I teach in this state.
    MI
    IN
20. Rank the following statements from 1 to 6 based on the importance to you. Use 1 for the most important and 6 for the least important. Please use each ranking only once.

Location of the graduate program  1 2 3 4 5 6
Benefits enhancing my job (salary/certification)  1 2 3 4 5 6
Additional skill set useful to teach K-12  1 2 3 4 5 6
Encouragement to pursue a graduate degree  1 2 3 4 5 6
Reputation of the graduate program  1 2 3 4 5 6
Financial support to pursue graduate work  1 2 3 4 5 6

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/SXXZDWZ
References


