The Physical Education Profession in Canada

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Abstract
This paper reports on the state of the physical education profession in Canada. Professional physical educators have long been integral staff members in both the public and private education systems as well as in the teacher education programs within the universities. Despite the absence of a national policy to which provinces and territories are accountable, physical educators in Canada are increasingly better prepared due, in part, to strict requirements for enrolment into pre-service teacher education programs and the presence of comprehensive training programs for in-service teachers. The physical education profession in Canada has undergone a remarkable transformation since the mid-1800s; yet, several issues and challenges in the physical education profession remain and could benefit from innovations and future research.

Keywords: Physical education, pre-service, in-service, teacher education, professional qualification, Canada.

Introduction
Certification programs for physical education teachers are designed to empower and equip prospective physical educators with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to effectively meet their professional responsibilities. These educators, their certification and professional development programs, and the regional and national policy-making organizations reflect values or standards for quality teaching that can vary widely across districts, provinces, territories, and nations. The intent of this paper is to report the spectrum and scope of topics relevant to the profession of teaching physical education (PE) in Canada while exemplifying several issues using the province of Ontario.

An Overview of the Physical Education Profession in Canada
Founded in 1867 as primarily a nation of immigrants, Canada now consists of ten provinces and three territories. Ontario is the largest province, is situated in central Canada, and inhabits one-third of the population of Canada. Due to the historical relationships, Western Europe (especially the United Kingdom and France) and the United States had a profound effect on both Canadian education and PE. As early as 1852, physical training was offered in Canadian teacher education schools, yet, the first school in Canada to solely train physical education (PE) teachers was established in Hamilton, Ontario in 1889 [10].

PE (as with education) in Canada is under provincial/territorial rather than national authority so it differs between each province/territory. In other words, the PE curriculum of each province and territory tends to be similar philosophically yet relatively different conceptually and structurally. J. Wright [38] reports that the PE curricula of the three territories generally follow that of two provinces – the Northwest Territory and Nunavut adhere to the Alberta PE curriculum while the Yukon Territory follows that of British Columbia). Meanwhile, except for the provinces of Manitoba, Ontario, and Prince Edward Island, each province and territory has separate curricula for health education and PE [21]. This means that in most of these provinces health and physical education (HPE) are taught in a single curriculum or course. In response to the current health crisis associated with physical inactivity, three provinces (Alberta, British Columbia, and Ontario)
have recently (2005–2008) initiated mandatory 20–30 minutes daily physical activity during instructional or non-instructional time primarily in elementary schools. C. Lu and A. De Lisio [18] report PE scholars’ concerns about replacing PE with DPA or transforming physical education classes into physical activity classes and recommend that daily physical activity should be part of a quality daily PE (QDPE) program taught by specialists in all grades, as promoted by the national organization of physical and health professionals of Canada (PHE Canada) since 1988 [31].

An exploration of the Canadian student experience in school PE reveals that about 20% of Canadian children receive daily PE in school, 41% receive one to two classes/days per week, while 10% receive no PE at all. These numbers decrease as students move through the high school grades [32]. Most provinces require or recommend 150 minutes of PE per week at the elementary level, but many schools average fewer than 60 minutes of PE per week [2]. Many elementary schools may have two PE classes per week while at the secondary levels, many provinces require 110 hours or more of PE—approximately an average of 75 minutes per day of PE for a semester in the case of Ontario [38]. From an enrolment standpoint, a much larger proportion of students are taking PE at the elementary level than at the secondary level. This is partially because PE is usually a required subject at the elementary level whereas there are limited or no PE hours/credits mandated in most secondary schools in Canada. In Ontario, many students do not take any HPE courses any more after taking one required HPE credit/course (no fewer than 110 instructional hours) for graduation at the secondary school level (Grade 9–12) [30]. Recently, Manitoba has become the first province in Canada to have mandatory PE in all grades in publicly funded schools [14].

There seems to be two types of teachers providing PE instruction in Canada. Generalists are normally classroom teachers with limited to no training in PE whereas specialists have more rigorous training in PE either by completing a major (first teachable subject) or minor (second teachable subject) in it as part of their university undergraduate degree. Usually generalists teach many subjects (e.g., arts, language, math, science, social studies) in elementary schools (primary schools) while the subjects in secondary schools (high schools) tend to be taught by specialists [1]. Manitoba, Quebec, and Prince Edward Island are the sole provinces where PE specialists are hired in a majority of the elementary schools [12]. Further, approximately 65% of the publicly funded schools report that their students regularly receive PE instruction from a specialist [1].

Inadequate and inappropriate preparation has been identified as a major barrier for teaching staff, particularly for those non-PE specialists, to develop and implement quality PE programs in schools [19]. Research studies indicate that students taught by staff trained in PE (PE specialists) spend more time being active, have greater improvements in fitness, and have smaller declines in academic performance [1]. It is important to note that PE specialist teachers in many schools within Canada not only teach PE but also teach other subjects. This may be an issue worth exploring as their expertise may not be fully utilized, especially in elementary schools where there is a shortage of PE specialists. Confounding the issue of a lack of trained PE teachers in public education is the current unfavourable employment landscape for prospective teachers. To illustrate, over the last five years it has been increasingly difficult to obtain full-time or part-time teaching employment due to a number of factors such as declining school enrolments and a diminished number of teacher retirements [34]. Consequently, many newly-licensed teachers have to seek out teaching opportunities in rural, remote, or foreign settings.

Teacher Education in Canada

Theoretically, teacher education consists of at least two aspects: pre-service and in-service. Pre-service teacher education refers to the initial education/training provided to teacher candidates (or student teachers, prospective teachers) in the process of obtaining a teaching certificate before teaching independently as an actual teacher in schools. In-service teacher education refers to the continuing education offered to actual teachers who pursue further
professional training or education (e.g., professional development workshops, additional qualification, graduate studies).

To enter the teaching profession in Canada, teacher-candidates usually must have no criminal record, must successfully complete Grade 12 and a four-year post-secondary degree, and are to earn a teaching certificate within a specific division/level over one year that is issued by provincial/territorial regulatory agencies [8]. For example, there are three designated teacher education divisions in the province of Ontario: primary/junior (P/J) division (Grade K–6), junior/intermediate (J/I) division (Grade 4–10), and intermediate/senior (I/S) division (Grade 7–12). The teaching certificate is division-specific, which means that a teacher with a P/J teaching certificate may not be qualified to teach other divisions. The pre-service teacher education programs in Canada are usually offered in about 56 publicly-funded institutions [11]. These licensing institutions are normally approved and regulated by accreditation bodies in the respective provinces/territories [9]. For example, teacher certification in Ontario is regulated by the Ontario College of Teachers [27]; yet, the certificate can be transferred to other provinces pending the corresponding regulating agency’s examinations. Criteria for admitting applicants include having an acceptable academic grades, certain useful working (especially teaching) experiences, evidence of well-written essays or profile statements, and quality references and interviews [6, 11, 28].

There are typically two types of models for the pre-service teacher education programs in Canada: a consecutive or after degree teaching degree program which certifies teacher-candidates after they complete a pre-service teacher education program following their completion of a four-year post-secondary degree and a concurrent (or combined, joint) teaching degree for those who jointly earn their four-year university and one-year teaching degree from the same institution [11]. It has been reported that the admission requirements for teacher-certification programs are generally higher in Canada than its counterparts such as the United States and many European countries [15]. A larger proportion of students take consecutive than concurrent programs in Canada [11]. The pre-service teacher education for consecutive programs in most provinces/territories in Canada runs for three or four semesters except Ontario which is for two semesters [11]. The students in pre-service teacher education programs take a variety of courses and also practice their teaching (e.g., field experience, practica, internship) in schools for the median length of 13–20 weeks. They are mentored primarily by experienced school teachers and/or supervised by university supervisors [11]. In the case of Brock University located in Ontario, teacher candidates are required to have teaching practica for a total of 11 weeks in two (P/J or J/I divisions) or three (I/S division) blocks/periods, in which they may teach HPE at P/J/I divisions, and teach HPE for at least one block in I/S division. Upon the successful completion of these programs, the teacher candidates will earn a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) degree and may be recommended to the corresponding regulatory agencies for teaching certificates.

Pre-service PE Teacher Education Programs

In a pre-service PE teacher education (PETE) program, generalists usually have limited hours to learn how to teach PE. For example, Brock University pre-service teacher education programs offer a 20-hour course of HPE to P/J or J/I teacher candidates (who mostly are generalists); in contrast, there is a 40-hour course of HPE offered to the I/S division teacher candidates (who mostly are HPE majors). Yet, some of the P/J and J/I division and most I/S division teacher candidates have studied in PE or kinesiology programs as their major (e.g., first teachable subject), minor (e.g., second teachable subject), or specialization. The PE courses are usually taught by university full-time (e.g., professors) and/or part-time instructors (e.g., sessional instructors, exemplary teachers who are retired or seconded from schools).

The content or the scope in the pre-service PETE includes: 1) provincial PE or HPE curriculum; 2) PE planning (e.g., yearly/semester plan, unit plan, lesson plan); 3) PE instruction (e.g., task presentation, feedback, teaching styles, teaching strategies); 4) management in PE (e.g., students, equipment, time, safety);
5) assessment and evaluation in PE; and 6) the specific content of school PE. The specific content includes: 1) fitness, especially health-related fitness (e.g., muscular strength and endurance, cardiovascular endurance, flexibility, body composition); 2) three fundamental skills (e.g., locomotion or traveling, stability, manipulation); 3) four movement concepts (e.g., body awareness, space awareness, effort, relationship); and 4) a variety of physical activities in five major categories (e.g., dance, individual physical activities, games, gymnastics, and alternative environment physical activities such as outdoor and aquatics) [5, 19]. All categories of physical activities are equally important and encouraged, but games are probably ranked the most prominent category. Usually games are taught in five categories: simple games, target games, net/wall games, territory/invasion games, and batting/ fielding games. There has been a movement towards using the teaching games for understanding (TGfU) approach in teaching games. In contrast to the traditional approach, the TGfU model stresses the use of tactics (instead of skills) and provides a context for learning skills and strategies in a meaningful way [19].

A number of issues and challenges have been identified in pre-service PETE. For example, there are limited training hours (especially for generalists), limited facilities for PETE courses, and repetitive content in concurrent/combined/ joint programs. In addition, the teaching practicum or field experience should start early and be offered more often in concurrent/combined/joint programs [24]. There is also a tension between theory and practice: full-time instructors tend to value theory and have a profound understanding of and articulate the need for both theory and practice, whereas part-time instructors and university students value practice. University students tend to worry about their survival in schools and many part-time instructors have limited theoretical background, and believe hands-on experiences are the primary or only way to learn to be a teacher. Many pre-service PETE students fail to view PE or their pupils holistically by emphasizing the physical dimension while largely ignoring the emotional, social, or cognitive dimensions. Another concern is the curricular content in the concurrent programs for students majoring in kinesiology as they tend to emphasize courses in the natural sciences at the expense of critical content in the social sciences and humanities [24].

**In-service PE Teacher Education Programs**

There have been increased calls from around the world for greater commitments to providing professional enhancement opportunities for the in-service teachers throughout their careers, particularly in PE [4]. There are a number of avenues to implement such education: 1) professional development opportunities offered by the school and school districts; 2) continuing teacher education offered in accredited institutions; and 3) graduate studies in universities.

Professional development (professional development) is the provision of career professional growth activities designed to enhance the knowledge, skills, and understandings of teachers in order to enhance their thinking and teaching practice [13]. Professional development can be a single or multi-faceted program (e.g., short courses and workshops offered during or after school, weekend, or during the summer break). It may be conducted by self or experts via face-to-face, video, TV, or online to individual or groups within the school or school district/board, or in partnership with other schools, districts/boards, ministries, professional and subject organizations, and institutions [3, 26, 33]. Although professional development has traditionally been accomplished through employer-initiated workshops or association-sponsored conferences, an increasing variety of organizational structures are emerging in professional development such as learning through practice, on-line networks, professional learning communities, mentoring or peer coaching, literature reflection, and research activities [25, 26]. The content of professional development is usually very practical and hands-on addressing updated issues (e.g., equity, inclusiveness, literacy) or learning new knowledge or skills (e.g., new or revised curriculum, TGfU, healthy and safe schools).
Schools and school districts offer regular professional development workshops throughout the school year. Physical and Health Education Canada provides regular conferences (e.g., workshops, presentations) and its multiple leadership roles (e.g., resources, programs, initiatives) in partnership with the provinces. Each province/territory usually has its professional organization offering regular professional development resources (e.g., in paper, electronic, or online forms), workshops (e.g., face-to-face, online), and conferences, usually collaborating with other related provincial agencies (e.g., ministries of education and health promotion, health education agencies).

Continuing teacher education is usually offered through university formal teacher education programs accredited by the provincial organization in charge of the teacher’s certificate of qualification and registration. After being certified, teachers may acquire additional qualifications (e.g., teaching different grade levels or subjects, being qualified for being school principals). Additional qualifications courses and programs provide opportunities to develop greater knowledge and expertise in particular areas of study. The courses are usually offered by senior PE teachers and/or university professors during school breaks (e.g., summer seasons) or throughout the school year. Once a teacher successfully completes the additional qualifications course, the results are submitted to the organization of the teacher’s certificate of qualification and registration [7, 29].

Graduate studies are a more systematic and higher level of in-service PETE consisting of master and doctoral studies having a strong theoretical orientation. The applicants should have a bachelor’s degree when applying for a master’s graduate program and should have a master’s degree for a doctoral program with satisfactory grades while meeting other relevant criteria. Most graduate students who are also teachers complete their graduate degrees on a part-time basis as they enrol in courses that are scheduled after working hours. Some teachers choose instead to request a one-year educational leave to complete their graduate degree as full-time students. A graduate student may choose one of the routes to complete the program, course-based, research projects, and theses. Some universities offer graduate programs that can be mainly completed online in order to accommodate the diverse needs of teachers.

It seems that there is some urgent need to enhance in-service PETE. For example, many PE teachers tend to heavily rely on their tacit knowledge and hands-on experiences to guide their practice. Many of them do not see the relevance of learning theory and undervalue the importance of the development of their theoretical foundation [24]. Also, numerous in-service PE generalists have insufficient knowledge and skills of PE and learn mainly from actually teaching PE in schools [19]. In addition, the lack of knowledge among physical educators is jeopardizing the implementation of quality PE in public schools in Canada [12, 19]. Despite the fact that PE in Canada has moved toward assisting students to develop the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes leading to healthy active lifestyle, many practicing PE teachers still emphasize traditional competitive team sports with a limited variety of physical activities to offer [18, 22].

**Relevant Issues**

The PE teacher profession in Canada has other issues to resolve. For example, there seems to be a lack of diverse cultural representation amongst teacher-candidates, teachers, and PETE instructors in Canada. This can be easily observed across Canadian institutions; yet Canada remains one of the most diverse nations in the world. Another issue is that PE is not necessarily valued (e.g., time allocation, course setup) in schools and teacher education programs [12, 24]. Many schools choose to reduce PE requirements and time allocated in an effort to increase students’ academic performance despite the majority of empirical evidence suggesting that academic performance is improved by engagement in regular physical activity [1]. As one of the responses, physical literacy [23], critical thinking [16], and spirituality [17] have been recently promoted by PE scholars in Canada.

Like many other countries, Canadian PE teachers are usually coaches for interscholastic athletics (e.g., varsity sports), a duty where
remuneration is not typically provided for the service to the school. Many of them experience tremendous pressure and excess workload throughout the school year [20]. On the other hand, some teacher-coaches tend to select elite athletic students for varsity sport teams while allowing these students to dominate PE classes as evident in teacher planning (e.g., selecting seasonal competitive team sports in teachers’ lesson plans), implementation (e.g., frequently inviting elite students to demonstrate in teaching), and assessments of students (e.g., focusing on skills). This is precisely why the traditional approach of PE can cause many children to feel disinterested and to withdraw from PE and physical activity. PE in Canada has already been advocated to shift away from a traditional competitive team sports to focus instead on the development of more individual, lifelong, healthy active lifestyles [18, 22, 37].

Continuing teacher education is mandatory in many parts of Canada. For example, teachers in Ontario public schools are required to submit an annual learning plan (except first year new teachers, because of induction or mentoring programs in place) at the beginning of each school year; yet there remains issues with accountability practices and there is a need of more effective follow-up process to evaluate a teacher’s progress with goals laid out in such plan. Moreover, many teachers cannot have adequate opportunities to access professional development opportunities due to the constraints of finance, time, and human resources in schools or school boards/districts. Many school boards/districts do not have any PE consultants/supervisors who are supposed to be the leaders and key individuals to provide ongoing PE professional development and support, which undoubtedly undermines the quality of the PE profession.

For PETE in higher education, there is a shortage of full-time professors/instructors, especially with doctoral degrees specialized in PETE. There is also a need for PETE to respond to the changes (e.g., global perspective, diversity, variety, obesity issues, nutrition, and wellness) in Canadian society. PETE research is not a priority for many funding agencies [24]. In addition, there are two types of ideologies or orientations in PETE programs in the west, performance discourses (emphasis of subjects such as biomechanics, exercise physiology, sports psychology, tests and measurement, sports medicine, fitness training), and participation discourses (emphasis of inclusion, equity, involvement, enjoyment, social justice, cooperation, and movement) [35, 36]. Performance discourses predominately prevail in Canadian PETE programs, but a balance between these two discourses is definitely preferred [24].

Conclusion

Over the past two centuries, the PE profession in Canada has evolved into an integral component of the public education system and of vibrant teacher education programs in the universities. Despite the lack of prescribed national standards, all provinces and territories have established initial and continuing teacher education programs to ensure and enhance the professional qualifications of PE teachers across Canada. In general, the emergence of competent and capable PE professionals in Canada can be attributed to the ever-present comprehensive requirements within teacher education programs at both the pre-service and in-service levels. Despite this trend, persistent issues and challenges remain such as the lack of consistently valued professional development opportunities for in-service teachers and the need for more rigorous and universal entry and exit qualifications for pre-service physical educators in Canada.
REFERENCES


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