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# Who wants to be a Physical Education Teacher? A Case Study of a Non-Traditional Undergraduate Student in a Physical Education Teacher Education Program

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## Who wants to be a Physical Education Teacher? A Case Study of a Non-Traditional Undergraduate Student in a Physical Education Teacher Education Program

### **Abstract**

Forty percent of undergraduate students are non-traditional students. The purpose of this study was to identify what attracted the participant to physical education, identify what situational/social factors facilitated the career choice, and the beliefs of the participant about what it meant to be a physical educator. The study consisted of one male non-traditional student. Artifacts, observation, and interview methods were employed to gain an understanding of why the participant wanted to become a physical educator and what were the beliefs of the participant about physical education teaching or teachers. Findings indicated the participant was attracted to physical education by his love for physical activity, sport, and the chance to work with youth. His socialization into physical education was influenced by situational and social factors, such as positive experiences with a teacher/coach, positive support of family and friends, and his strong beliefs/values for physical education/teaching.

### **Keywords**

Career Choice, Qualitative Research, Socialization, Case Study

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## **Who wants to be a Physical Education Teacher? A Case Study of a Non-traditional Undergraduate Student in a Physical Education Teacher Education Program**

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*Forty percent of undergraduate students are non-traditional students. The purpose of this study was to identify what attracted the participant to physical education, identify what situational/social factors facilitated the career choice, and the beliefs of the participant about what it meant to be a physical educator. The study consisted of one male non-traditional student. Artifacts, observation, and interview methods were employed to gain an understanding of why the participant wanted to become a physical educator and what were the beliefs of the participant about physical education teaching or teachers. Findings indicated the participant was attracted to physical education by his love for physical activity, sport, and the chance to work with youth. His socialization into physical education was influenced by situational and social factors, such as positive experiences with a teacher/coach, positive support of family and friends, and his strong beliefs/values for physical education/teaching. Key Words: Career Choice, Qualitative Research, Socialization, Case Study.*

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As an adult contemplates a career change, what would attract an individual to a career as a physical education teacher? Is it the opportunity to work with students? Is it a personal love for physical fitness and physical activity? Is it previous involvement and passion for sport? If a non-traditional student decides to become a physical education teacher, what educational program would best prepare the student for this journey? Would specific needs/interests of the individual be met in a program where the majority of learners are traditional students? These are a few of the daunting questions one must ask when deciding to embark on a career path to becoming a physical education teacher. As colleges and universities see an influx in the enrollment of non-traditional students, many unique challenges must be addressed to meet their specific characteristics (Chao & Good, 2004).

Census and other statistical reports show that the number of non-traditional students has increased in all fields of study in higher education (Walsh, Abi-Nader, & Poutiatine, 2005). The number of college students age 25 years and older has grown from fewer than four million in 1980 to more than six million in 2000. Nearly 40% of all undergraduate students are classified as non-traditional students (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001). Despite this rapid growth, few scholars have given non-traditional students much attention. Unfortunately, the limited research provides an unclear picture of non-traditional students (Chao & Good, 2004). Specifically, non-traditional students have not been a major focus of research in physical education teacher education (PETE). In addition, PETE programs have been criticized for inadequate development of content knowledge (Rovegno, 1992); for having too great of a focus on a technical orientation to

teacher education with little emphasis on an inquiry perspective (Kirk, 1986); and for having a lack of commitment to multiculturalism and appreciation for diversity within the recruitment of students into PETE programs (Fernandez-Balboa, 1997). Despite efforts to improve pre-service teacher education, there is little evidence that any of these changes are making teaching education more effective (Metzler & Tjeerdsma, 1998).

Examining an individual's views and perspectives of physical education is vital for a thorough understanding of recruitment into teacher education (Dewar & Lawson, 1984). If PETE programs understand who their recruits are and what their beliefs are about teaching, school, and physical education, steps may be taken to better design, sequence, and present content to ensure a well-rounded program for diverse learners. An increased understanding of prospective teachers' beliefs and perceptions about teaching physical education may assist programs to help students prepare for the role of being a physical education teacher. With limited research available on non-traditional students in PETE programs, further research is warranted to better understand their characteristics. The incorporation of these non-traditional learners presents both challenges and benefits to teacher education programs that differ from those of traditional undergraduate learners (Walsh et al., 2005).

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to: (a) identify what attracted the participant to the field of physical education; (b) identify what situational and/or social factors facilitated the career decision; and (c) describe the beliefs of the participant about what it meant to be a physical education teacher. Two main research questions provided parameters for the study. First, why did the participant want to become a physical education teacher? Second, what were the beliefs of the participant about physical education teaching or teachers? These questions, along with the findings presented, may assist in painting a clearer picture as to why non-traditional students choose the field of physical education and what are their beliefs about teaching physical education and teaching in general. From the findings, PETE programs may gain valuable insight in how to better serve the specific, unique needs of these students. In addition, this study will add to the limited PETE literature addressing non-traditional undergraduate students entering PETE programs. Non-traditional students are a permanent part of the college population. To provide effective classroom instruction and appropriate learning assessment, it is important to understand the motivations, learning styles, and strategies of non-traditional students (Justice & Dornan, 2001).

## **Literature Review**

### **Characteristics of Non-Traditional Students**

In order to understand characteristics of non-traditional students, it is important to identify what a non-traditional student is by definition. In the context of this study, a non-traditional student was defined as a student who was older than 25 years of age, did not live in a campus residence, had started an undergraduate program more than one year removed from high school, and was not influenced by the social environment of the institution (Laing & Robinson, 2003). Non-traditional students entering higher education programs may include career changers, former teachers returning for current or expanded certification, older students seeking degrees and certifications, early retirees from the

military or other fields, and teaching paraprofessionals seeking to upgrade their job classification (Feistritzer, 1996). These specific subgroups are unique interest groups for teacher education programs to understand and provide effective experiences that will guide them in becoming a physical education teacher. The characteristics of non-traditional students have been examined in the education and psychology literature and offer insight for programs interested in these specific qualities. To date, these characteristics have not been a major focus in PETE literature, and the topic warrants further examination.

### **Attitudinal Characteristics**

Research has identified several distinct characteristics of non-traditional students. Attitudinal differences are one of the specific qualities these students exhibit. Non-traditional students have a realistic approach in their expectations about workplace conditions. Their relationship patterns with faculty, teachers, and other students differ from those of traditional students (DeBlois, 1993). Higher levels of self-confidence related to job placement are seen with non-traditional students who have previous professional work experience. They display more self-assurance in their ability to handle class discipline when compared to traditional students, especially those who have parented (Bray, 1995). Non-traditional students often have little interest or time for the college social life, and tend to focus more on academics and need college services that extend past normal office hours (McCormick, 1995). Many of these students are married and have family concerns that demand a large part of their time and energy. Often times they are working jobs that require large amounts of time and energy alongside their academic endeavors. As one may guess, juggling several obligations may cause the non-traditional student to feel a great amount of stress and anxiety. These obligations may influence their attitude toward their educational experiences. Understanding what feelings and emotions these learners bring into the program is important. Teacher education programs should be sensitive to their needs/interests, while keeping consistent with the expectations and vision of the program.

### **Stressors of Non-Traditional Students**

Evidence from research with non-traditional students indicates that higher education is experienced in different ways than by most 18 year old students. In some cases, it may be seen as a struggle for personal, academic, financial, and emotional survival (Macdonald & Stratta, 1998). One problem to be considered is stress of the non-traditional student. Limited research has been conducted concerning the issue of stress in non-traditional students, and the studies that have been conducted report conflicting results. Most studies involve female samples and the outcomes of stress, mainly depression (Dill & Henley, 1998; Home, 1998; Padula, 1994). Future research is warranted to include the experiences of non-traditional male students and their perceptions of stress in higher education, and how stress may impact their learning experiences.

Role strain and satisfaction of non-traditional women students has been a topic of interest in the literature. Women report that time and role demands were two of the major

issues, and women with younger children report the most strain in their student role. The findings suggest women returning to higher education after an absence of at least two years have depression symptom scores twice as high as a normative population (Roehl & Okun, 1984). It has been shown that non-traditional students have more time constraints and role conflicts than traditional students. However, non-traditional students display less academic stress, report greater satisfaction in the school domain, and experience fewer negative health problems than traditional students (Jacobi, 1987). Clearly, more research is warranted in the area to include both genders of students, and students across other disciplines to include physical education.

### **Characteristics of Non-Traditional Students in PETE Programs**

Non-traditional students in PETE programs share commonalities related to the characteristics of other non-traditional students across disciplines (O'Bryant, O'Sullivan, & Raudensky, 2000). Due to the nature of physical education as a discipline, some characteristics are specific to the field. As previously stated, non-traditional students have not been the major focus of research in physical education teacher education. What is known sheds light on the characteristics of non-traditional students entering PETE programs.

Many prospective physical education teachers have stated that positive experiences in sports have served as important factors in shaping their decisions to pursue a career in teaching physical education (Hutchinson, 1993). Non-traditional students have expressed a desire to switch career paths to physical education because they believed strongly that they had the skills, knowledge, and abilities necessary to become successful physical educators (Hutchinson & Buschner, 1996). Hutchinson and Buschner (1996) also reported a desire to work with young people, coaching sports or involvement with athletics, and significant people and experiences as strong influences for non-traditional students who consider a career teaching physical education.

### **Socialization into Teaching Physical Education**

While much of the literature on teacher socialization has focused on traditional students (ages 18-22), it is timely to examine the process with non-traditional students as the demographics of the student population changes. Socialization into physical education research suggests that socio-cultural and psychological factors may contribute to, influence, or facilitate an individual's decision to enter the field (Templin, Woodford, & Mulling, 1982). Socialization is defined as the process whereby an individual becomes attracted to and makes a choice of a particular occupation (Templin et al., 1982). It is argued that socialization of physical education teachers begins early in childhood and continues upon entry into PETE programs (Lawson, 1983). The recruitment phase of socialization into teaching is characterized as the initial entry phase into a PETE program. This phase is characterized by questions such as: Why does one enter physical education? What effects do childhood and/or life experiences plus education have on an individual's decision to enter physical education? These are questions that have been of increasing interest to researchers (Belka, Lawson, & Lipnickey, 1991; Templin & Schempp, 1989).

This study has the potential to address these questions, and others, based from responses of a non-traditional student enrolled in a PETE program.

## **Methodology**

### **Qualitative Tradition**

Qualitative research involves an in-depth understanding of human behavior and the reasons that govern human behavior. Simply stated, it investigates the *why* and *how* of decision making (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Specifically, “Qualitative research is an umbrella concept covering several forms of inquiry that help understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible” (Merriam, 1998, p. 5), a definition widely accepted in qualitative research. Merriam (1998) identifies other terms often used interchangeably to include field study, inductive research, ethnography, and case study. Case study is defined as an exploration of a bounded system or a case over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context (Creswell, 1998). This study paralleled the concepts of an intrinsic qualitative case study. Intrinsic case studies are undertaken for the understanding of the case itself (Stake, 1995). I had an interest in understanding and learning about a particular case (participant), and why he chose a career as a physical education teacher. As an educator in higher education, I was beginning to see an increase of non-traditional students in my classes, and these students expressed specific needs and interests that were different from traditional undergraduate students. To effectively address these characteristics, I wanted to explore the beliefs and perceptions of non-traditional students to further my understanding of all students who entered my classes. With limited research available on non-traditional students, I felt that conducting my own study was warranted and needed.

### **Theoretical Perspective**

Any research finding should be examined in relation to the theoretical perspective from which it derives and to which it may contribute. While findings are never unimportant, they are always subsidiary to theories (Silverman, 2005). In addition, “The theoretical perspective provides a context for the process involved and a basis for its logic and its criteria” (Crotty, 1998, p. 66), and provides the framework for theoretically informed research questions. Socialization, as the theoretical perspective for this study, attempts to understand the process whereby an individual becomes attracted to and makes a choice of a particular occupation (Lawson, 1983). This can directly be applied to the field of physical education and the students who choose this field of study.

Socialization into teaching examines factors that may impact non-traditional students entering a PETE program. For myself, I became a physical education teacher based on my interest in human movement. The goal of this intrinsic qualitative case study was to incorporate the socialization into teaching perspective in examining responses from a non-traditional student in a PETE program. An understanding of why the participant wanted to become a physical education teacher, and what his beliefs were about physical education teaching or teachers provided intrinsic motivation for the study.

With the limited research available on non-traditional students in PETE programs, I wanted to examine why the participant chose the field of physical education and what his beliefs were about teaching physical education and teaching as a whole.

### **Researcher Stance**

My motivation for collaborating with the participant was deeply rooted in my own personal experiences as a physical education teacher for eight years. I was a traditional student who entered a PETE program directly from high school, and continued my pursuit into higher education as a Ph.D. student in a PETE program. As I continued my studies in a PETE program and taught both traditional and non-traditional students, I wanted to gain a thorough understanding of why non-traditional students chose a career as a physical education teacher, and what their beliefs were about physical education teaching or teachers. I attempted to accomplish this by conducting an intrinsic qualitative case study with the study participant, who was a student of mine in the PETE program. The expectation was that the information collected during the study would assist me as a future professor when developing and implementing curriculum and instruction to meet the needs/interests of my students.

### **Participant and Setting**

Scott was a 46-year-old Caucasian male enrolled in a PETE program in the Rocky Mountain Region. He was mid-way through the program and enrolled in the program's elementary methods course, along with other courses. He was projected to complete his student teaching during the fall 2008 semester. Scott displayed an interest in the study and volunteered to be a participant. I invited Scott to participate in the study based on his ability to provide quality responses that would assist me in answering the research questions. His numerous life experiences included being a coach, athletic director, plumber, cook, and food services manager. Scott completed three activities pertaining to the purpose of the study and research questions.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Permission to conduct this study was obtained from the Institutional Review Board at the university. I provided the participant with an informed consent form to participate in research. Once signed by the participant and myself, data collection began. For the first activity, the participant answered written questions on an autobiography form (Appendix A). The responses guided the interview questions for a thorough understanding of the responses in relation to the purpose and research questions of the study. The activity was completed in a comfortable setting for the participant. The second activity completed by the participant was the Rainbow of Life Roles form (Appendix B). The activity provided another method of data collection and guided the interview questions based on responses from the form. The activity was completed in a comfortable setting for the participant. The third method of data collection was a one-on-one interview with the participant. In addition, a semi-structured interview was conducted to allow the participant to talk about his experiences and beliefs of being a non-traditional



student in a PETE program (Kvale, 1996). A digital audio-taped interview was conducted with the participant for 50 minutes in the physical education pedagogy lab. The participant was asked a series of descriptive and open-ended questions relating to the purpose and research questions of the study (Appendix C). The purpose of the interview was to gain a deeper understanding of the responses from the two previous activities, and allow the participant to elaborate on any responses provided. The structure of the questions allowed the participant to elaborate on responses in detail. The design of the interview protocol allowed the participant to feel comfortable discussing his experiences and beliefs, and not feel intimidated to answer the questions openly and honestly. The interview was transcribed verbatim following the completion of the interview. The final method of data collection employed was a direct observation of the participant teaching in an elementary setting. Field notes were taken during the 45 minute teaching experience and compared to responses from the initial three activities to identify common and emerging themes. These methods of data collection were utilized based off recommendations from the literature when conducting case study research (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998; Stake 1995; Super, 1990).

Upon completion of data collection, thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. Thematic analysis is an accepted method for qualitative analysis of transcriptions and the methods of data collection incorporated in this study (Creswell, 1998; Stake, 1995). Specifically, it has been an accepted method of analysis in case study, ethnography, and grounded theory research (Merriam, 1998). A five level approach (Attride-Stirling, 2001) was used to analyze the data. First, data were organized and transcribed when necessary to assist in examining common themes across the data. Second, data were organized into similar themes that directly related to the research questions. These themes were color coded for further analysis. Third, recurring themes were grouped together and analyzed to generate findings. Fourth, theme statements were generated to include in the findings. Fifth, data collected from the participant were placed under the appropriate themes to answer the research questions.

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness in qualitative research has different meanings from validity and reliability in quantitative research. Being able to trust research findings is especially important to professionals in applied fields, such as education, in which practitioners intervene in people's lives (Merriam, 1998). To account for internal validity (credibility), I employed techniques that Merriam (1998) suggests; peer examination, member checks, triangulation, and researcher's stance. First, college professors in sport pedagogy and qualitative research examined the responses to ensure validity in the findings. Second, data collected from the autobiography, rainbow of life roles, and interview were returned to the participant to ensure results were plausible. Third, triangulation occurred in the form of a written autobiography, rainbow of life roles form, interview, transcription of the interview, and an observation of the participant's teaching. Multiple data sources, various data collection methods, and peer debriefing amongst colleagues were used as strategies to enhance the credibility of the findings. Fourth, my professional background as a physical educator for eight years, and three years in a sport pedagogy doctoral program, qualified as what Merriam (1998) terms "researcher's stance" that strengthened

the validity of the study and its findings. To further assure that the data collected were as accurate as possible, a researcher-participant relationship was maintained throughout the study.

### **Findings**

As I began to analyze Scott's responses in the pedagogy lab, I was preparing for some quality work time with the data I had collected. Thinking I had about six hours to myself, Scott knocked on the door with great enthusiasm. He was wearing a Nike track suit and had a confidence about him that filled the lab. He had the look of a physical education teacher. He saw the light on in the room and stopped by to say that he was excited to have the opportunity to share his ideas. He stated, "I think this study you are doing is very cool; it shows your passion for teaching. I want to have the same passion when I teach physical education." After some conversation and small talk that did not pertain to the study, I was again alone with the data to identify common and emerging themes. Scott's visit gave me a sense that what I was about to uncover in the responses would be exciting information. The first research question addressed why the participant wanted to become a physical education teacher.

#### **Why Did the Participant Want To Be a P.E. Teacher?**

Four themes emerged from the responses as to why Scott wanted to be a physical education teacher. Data were gathered from three sources: the autobiographical statements, the rainbow of life roles form, and the interview protocol. In an effort to detail the themes that attracted him to teaching, Scott was asked to reflect on what factors influenced his decision to become a physical education teacher. The following themes were identified and detailed from the responses.

**Strong commitment to teaching.** Scott's strong commitment to teaching was evident throughout his responses. A significant experience in his life made him realize that he wanted to become a physical education teacher. He went to college to play football and baseball; however, numerous injuries forced him to focus his intentions/interests toward other avenues. Scott needed a job to pay the bills so he returned home and began working in a local restaurant. He was reunited with his old high school math teacher/baseball coach, who offered him a job as a baseball coach. Coach LaVotti always told him to get back to school and get his teaching degree. He reminded Scott that it was never too late to go back to school and become a teacher. Scott stated:

When I was able to coach with him and was able to see the players apply what I was teaching, it made the players happy and me proud. I knew from that point on that I wanted to teach for the rest of my life.

Scott's journey to becoming a teacher was not immediate after this experience. Barriers and circumstances in his life forced him to make other important decisions. When Scott found out that his father had become very ill, he moved to the Rocky Mountain area to care for him. While caring for his father, Scott was injured resulting in

two major back surgeries which kept him from working for over 15 months. After healing, a friend hired him to work in a law firm. After several months of working personal injury (ironically) and divorce cases, he realized that he was not the person he wanted to be. He enrolled in a PETE program and has not looked back since. Scott said, "This is where I am supposed to be!" When Scott was asked why he chose physical education, he commented:

I have always loved playing and being active. I love competition as well. I get a high when I walk onto a freshly mowed playing field and smell cut grass and watch children play. I have been a teacher my whole life as an athletic coach, cooking coach, plumbing coach, etc. I have always enjoyed teaching people how to do things and how to do them better. I want to continue teaching and I want to teach the children who will never play competitive sports. Physical education allows me to accomplish this. I have had many careers in my life and became bored with all of them. Teaching children the benefits of a healthy life through activities learned in P.E. is a tough job, but one I know I will love and enjoy the rest of my life because it is what I have a passion for doing.

Scott's excitement for teaching was apparent in his responses and on his facial expressions. As the interview progressed, his excitement for working with kids surfaced in his responses.

**Working with kids** Scott's passion for working with children was evident throughout his responses. Several times he noted the happiness he felt when he saw excitement on kids' faces. His goals of teaching children in P.E. were to instill the value and enjoyment of physical activity so students would be lifelong movers, and to encourage healthy lifestyle choices. Scott believed P.E. should be a fun learning environment for all students. From his past experiences as a student and a coach, he had witnessed several children "left behind" because of their physical abilities. Scott stated:

Students need to be treated with respect regardless of their physical abilities. I believe every student can benefit from physical education with the proper guidance. In today's world, it has become difficult for many students to participate in physical activity with any degree of longevity. Outside influences that appear to be more fun outweigh the influence of physical activity.

Scott's responses on his opportunities to teach children about the importance of healthy eating in physical education were based on his view that many students have developed harmful eating habits. His concern stemmed from observing parents purchasing cost effective groceries that were usually higher in calories, fat, and additives. In addition, Scott was excited to educate students about the risks of bad eating habits and lack of physical activity. Scott believed one of his roles as a P.E. teacher was to emphasize positive behaviors so students are able to make informed choices.

**Significant others as motivators.** Scott described a teacher/coach, family members, a significant partner, and a good friend as motivators while pursuing a career as a physical education teacher. Each of these individuals played a significant role in Scott's life and attributed their support to where he is today both personally and professionally. The impact of these people was evident in the responses and each continues to be a strong motivator in Scott's path toward becoming a physical educator.

Coach LaVotti was Scott's Math and P.E. teacher in high school and his varsity baseball coach. He was instrumental in giving Scott his first coaching opportunity. Coach LaVotti was always around for Scott when he needed someone to talk to and always provided good advice. He encouraged Scott to become a teacher. When Scott returned home, Coach LaVotti would make it a point of emphasis to ask him how school was going. Scott stated, "He made Math and P.E. fun and enjoyable learning experiences for all his students." From these experiences with Coach LaVotti, Scott knew that teaching was where he needed to invest his interests. Family members played a significant role in both Scott's personal and professional life. Scott commented on the influence of his grandfather:

My grandfather was a big influence in my life as I grew up. He would always tell me to follow my heart in making a living. He would remind me to never work at something that will make you miserable or that you feel you have to be there for "the check". It took me awhile because I followed many checks before I got to this point.

Scott's grandfather passed away; however, he still holds his grandfathers' words close to his heart as motivation to become a physical educator. Scott's Mom and Dad were motivators in his journey to become a P.E. teacher. His Dad has passed away, but his words continue to motivate Scott through his education. He commented that his Dad was a strong disciplinarian which stemmed from his experiences in the military. Scott believed this attribute was a major factor in him succeeding in school and juggling all the responsibilities of a non-traditional student. Additionally, Scott's Mom continues to be a positive influence during his education. He stated:

My mother told me it was about time! When I first went back to school and took some classes I don't think she realized my commitment level. Now that I am doing well in school, she understands my commitment and has been very encouraging every time we talk. Furthermore, when I was working my tail off with the law firm, my mother was one of the first people to tell me I had become an asshole. It is nice to hear her encouragement.

Scott's significant partner, Doria, is a strong motivator throughout his endeavors. Scott points to her support as being monumental in terms of his present success in school. She was a radiology student and continues to be very supportive of his educational path. Scott stated, "She understands why I went back to school because she just sensed this is what I am meant to do." He elaborated that Doria is excited and proud of him because she

knows this is what makes him happy and being a physical educator is what he wants to do. Don, a close friend of Scott, continues to motivate him in his quest to becoming a P.E. teacher. Don plays several roles in his relationship with Scott: friend, father figure, golf buddy, and counselor. Scott described the relationship as very positive, and Don was very supportive of him becoming a P.E. teacher. When Scott feels overwhelmed, he turns to Don for support and comfort which only “he can provide.”

**Sporting experiences facilitated entry into teaching.** Scott described a variety of influential sport experiences which facilitated his decision to become a physical educator. He played football, basketball, and baseball in high school and college baseball in 1980. He said, “I have always been active and loved sports ever since I can remember.” His coaches would always tell him that he had the “arm to go places” as long as he didn’t screw up! His ability in baseball opened a door to play football in college, so he took advantage of it. He knew he would never “go anywhere” in football but he wanted to try. Scott suffered several injuries playing football as he was always willing to make physical sacrifices of his body to play and “get the job done”. Coaches advised him to focus on baseball, so he quit playing football to concentrate on baseball. Baseball allowed Scott to travel and live throughout the United States after college. He did not finish college because of an opportunity to sign with the Cincinnati Reds. Scott talked about his days in baseball:

Life was good until the arm injuries started occurring. Four years and four surgeries later I was done, released! I played one last winter season in the Mexican League for a few dollars and decided it was time to hang it up. Even though I screwed up my college education, I would not trade the experiences baseball gave me. In the off-season I lived with my sister for a year and attended and graduated from culinary school. I always thought I would make the big leagues and own my own restaurant.

In several of his responses, Scott would discuss his love for being active and sport experiences as reasons which shaped his decision to become a physical educator. Out of curiosity, I asked him to rate which factor was the most important in facilitating him to become a teacher. He commented that the experiences in his life, the people who motivated him and his love for physical activity and kids were important. He stated, “If I had to choose one factor as the most important, it would be Coach LaVotti.”

### **Beliefs about Teaching**

The second research question addressed Scott’s beliefs about physical education teaching or teachers. Three themes emerged from the responses. Scott viewed the role of a physical educator as dynamic and rewarding. The following themes were identified and detailed from the responses.

**Respect students and their beliefs.** One of Scott's goals as a physical educator is to teach children the value of physical activity through their physical education experience. He believes in treating children equally and not discriminating because of race, ability, sex, or social status. He feels it is important to respect each student and their beliefs/values, even if those views are different from his own as a teacher. He wants students to be able to talk to him about any ideas or concerns that are on their mind; always keeping an open mind when listening to students. He stated, "I want to be able to communicate with my students as a teacher, confidant, and friend."

**Teacher as a role model.** Scott believes all teachers are role models. This is a role he takes seriously and welcomes the opportunity. He said:

Even though my life is crazy and stressful, I love getting up at 8:00 a.m. to go to class and learn about movement. I hear traditional students in class complaining about getting up so early and having too much homework. Dude, I am up and ready every day because I love it. I love the learning, the knowledge I am receiving, and the experience I am getting. Teaching P.E. is something that I don't ever worry about not wanting to get out of bed for. I question their excitement in becoming a physical educator.

Scott commented in his responses that he enjoyed playing and moving around with the students, and wanted to be a model of healthy living for his students. The connections a teacher can make while teaching students is something that excites him about becoming a teacher and role model for learners.

**Teach students to make healthy choices.** Scott is excited to have the opportunity to teach students about the importance of physical activity and healthy eating habits. This information was evident in the interview, rainbow of life roles, and autobiography written by the participant. With the rise in youth obesity, he feels he is in a perfect position to influence the choices his students make through quality physical education. This is a challenge which he gladly accepts as a physical educator. He stated, "Teaching the benefits of a healthy lifestyle through activities in physical education is a tough job, but one I will love and enjoy the rest of my life because it is what I have a passion for doing."

### **Teaching Observation**

Based on responses from the autobiographical statements, the rainbow of life roles, and the interview, I wanted to witness if these responses would transfer in Scott's teaching of elementary students. I observed him teaching in a physical education setting and collected field notes to compare the findings. It was apparent that Scott was a prospective physical educator who practices what he preaches.

Scott was teaching a dribbling with hands lesson to an elementary physical education class. He had developed a lesson plan developmentally appropriate for the students and implemented progressions that challenged students of all abilities. He implemented a variety of equipment choices to meet the needs of individual students and offered variations to tasks according to students' skill levels. I observed him explaining

the objectives of the lesson and why the skills were important. Several times throughout the lesson I observed Scott providing specific skill feedback to individual students, and engaging with all students in the class. When he spoke to students, he would get down to their level, and make them feel comfortable in the learning environment he created. Students were invited to apply the tasks they had practiced and create a game to emphasize skill development. At the conclusion of the lesson, he debriefed with the class on what skills were addressed, the importance of the skills, and how the skills could be implemented outside of class. An assessment was provided to measure student learning which emphasized learning in the cognitive domain. His passion for teaching was evident throughout the lesson, and it was apparent that he enjoyed teaching physical education and was comfortable doing so.

### **Discussion**

The majority of research on teacher socialization in physical education is focused on traditional-aged students (Hutchinson & Buschner, 1996). The participant in this study differed from a traditional prospective physical education student because he was older and had many previous career and educational experiences in arenas other than physical education. The participant was attracted to physical education by his love of physical activity, sport, and the opportunity to work with children. These characteristics were similar to those reported by Hutchinson and Buschner (1996) and Feistritz (1996). His socialization into physical education was influenced by situational and social factors, such as positive experiences with a teacher/coach, positive support of family and friends, and his beliefs/values for physical education and teaching (Dewar & Lawson, 1984).

An interesting finding that emerged from the responses was the factor that influenced Scott's decision to teach—namely his strong commitment to teaching. Early in his life, he was more focused on coaching, not teaching. It was through these coaching experiences which led him to a career as a prospective physical educator. Another finding of interest was his openness to various students' beliefs/values, and his willingness to listen. Understanding one's own beliefs/values, while being sensitive to others beliefs/values, may assist prospective physical educators as they begin careers where the dynamics of the student population in public schools are changing.

Scott's interest in and commitment to teaching were evident throughout his responses. His respect and equity for students was emphasized in the response about his belief of teaching physical education and teaching. These findings fit core values and shifting paradigms linked to diversity and improved quality of teaching in teacher education programs (O'Bryant et al., 2000).

While Scott brought a strong sport background into the program, it should be noted that sports and physical education are two different arenas with different objectives. For example, one of the main objectives in sports is to win games and put the best athletes on the field. In addition, sport teams are typically made up of highly skilled players who choose to be involved on a team. Physical education objectives are much different. The main objective is to develop lifelong movers and classes are comprised of a variety of skill levels. Students do not choose to be there; they are typically required to take physical education class. With these apparent differences, non-traditional students, such as Scott, bring a wide range of life experiences to a PETE program and may not

have a sense of what effective teaching looks like. Therefore, it may be advantageous for PETE programs to recognize that the dynamics of the higher education population are changing, and non-traditional students bring unique life experiences (personal and professional) that influence their professional socialization.

Non-traditional students are a unique interest group for teacher education programs to understand in order to provide effective educational experiences that will guide them in becoming physical education teachers. In Scott's case, he emphasized his concerns in the interview about how various class assignments are organized. He preferred to work on his own and expressed his dissatisfaction of working with traditional students on projects. Due to his work schedule, it was hard for him to meet with group members on campus and he felt as though he did most of the work when he was placed into a group. In addition, Scott enjoyed the opportunities to go into schools and teach. He felt this was more of a realistic challenge versus being in the classroom on campus. This perception may relate directly to the numerous life experiences he had, as well as the numerous job titles he held. In his mind, the traditional approach to teaching was not meeting his specific needs. These specific characteristics have not been a major focus in PETE literature and the topics warrants further examination. Understanding the ideas, experiences, and beliefs these learners bring into a program are important. Teacher education programs should be sensitive to their specific needs/interests, while keeping consistent with the expectations and vision of the program.

As with any research study, limitations will inherently exist. However, these limitations should not discredit the case study design of this study nor its findings. The present study had several limitations that should be noted. First, the case study design is a descriptive method, not an exploratory one. Therefore, behavior and beliefs can only be described and not explained. Second, case study design typically involves only a single individual or just a few and therefore may not be representative of the general group or population. Third, much of the information collected in a case study design is retrospective data, recollections of past events, and is subject to the problems inherent to memory. Fourth, with the large amounts of data that can be collected in a case study design, it is difficult to examine all of the information and answer complex questions related to the case. In the present study, several pieces of data had to be excluded due to the volume of data collected. While still valuable information, the data included in the study were relevant only in answering the research questions.

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## Appendix A

### Autobiography of a Nontraditional Student

\*\*Please answer the following questions in as much detail as you would like to share. You may type your responses under each question.

1. Please tell me about yourself (examples may include age, experiences, education, jobs, beliefs, values, etc.)?
2. Why do you want to become a physical education teacher? Why physical education?
3. What are your beliefs/values about physical education teaching or teachers?
4. Describe the type of support you have been provided from family/friends to enter the field?
5. Describe any major events in your life that guided your choice to want to become a physical education teacher?
6. In your own words, what are the goals of physical education for students?
7. What goals have you set for yourself as a physical education teacher?
8. In your own words, what does it mean to be a physical education teacher?
9. Anything else you would like to share about why you entered physical education and what physical education means to you?

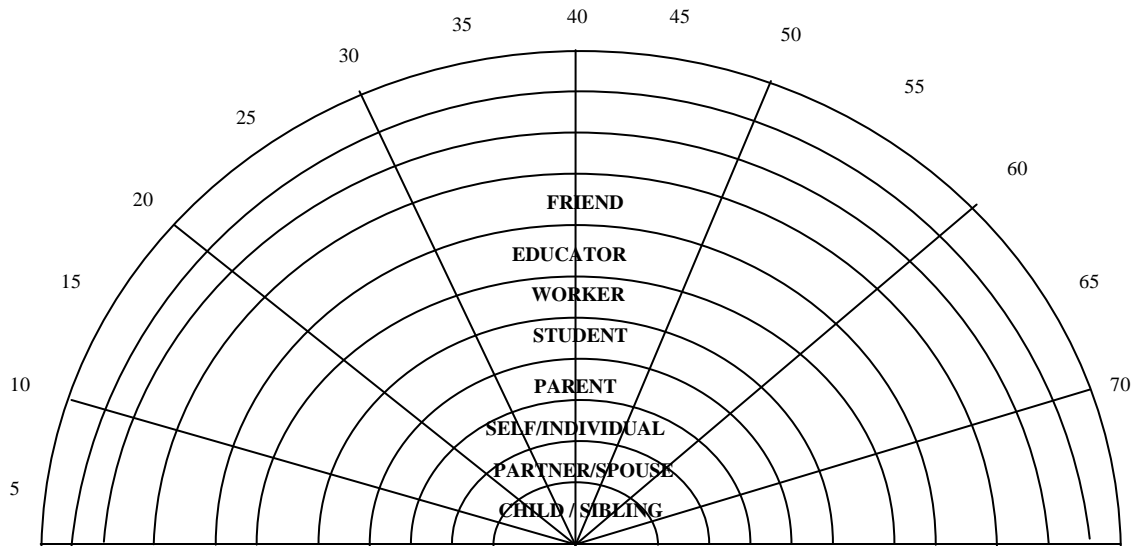
## Appendix B

### Rainbow of Life Roles

**RAINBOW OF LIFE ROLES:** Use a different colored pencil to shade in each section of the rainbow **with varying intensity** – depending on the importance each role played during your life as the years passed. The numbers around the edge indicate your age, so don't shade after your current age! The blank arcs are for you to **add any roles that are important in your life**; these may be within or outside of your teaching career. There are no standards or correct definitions for the roles suggested here. Each person provides their own understanding of what the roles involve and will have an opportunity to explain these. One purpose of this exercise is to underscore the continuous and discontinuous nature of some work or life roles and the way life at any point in time is a function of adjacent and simultaneous role expectations. Another purpose is to help one reflect back on their career and how it intertwines with the rest of their life at various stages, however you define those.

(**ADD OTHER ROLES** that are important to you in the blank arcs: For example, coach, athlete, volunteer, wanderer, spiritual, military, patient....)

[Adapted from Super, 1990]



## Appendix C

### Interview Script

1. Why did you want to become a physical education teacher?
  - \* Strong commitment to teaching.....
  - \* working with kids.....
  - \* Significant others as facilitators....
  - \* Past sport experiences.....
  - \* Academic experiences.....
  - \* Other instructional/educational experiences....
    - Reverse role day
    - ect....
  
2. Describe your family/friend support as you entered into physical education?
  - \* Positive or negative
  - \* Specific support
  
3. If you can, describe the most important factor that attracted you to teaching physical education?
  - Experience
  - Person
  - Event
  
4. What are your beliefs about teaching/teaching physical education?
  - \* Help students appreciate physical activity.....
  - \* Increase student competence, self-esteem, self efficacy, etc.....

- \* Role models of an active and healthy lifestyle.....
- \* Content knowledge.....
- \* Pedagogical knowledge.....

5. In your own words, what is effective teaching in physical education?

6. Anything else you would like to tell me about why you chose physical education teaching as a career????

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### Author Note

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