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PHYSICAL EDUCATION TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF PROFESSIONAL SOCIALIZATION

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine factors affecting positive professional socialization of physical education (PE) teachers. The participants were one elementary and two middle school PE teachers. Data were collected through field notes during passive participant observations, two semi-structured formal interviews and informal interviews, and document analysis of autographical posters. Thematic analysis was employed to examine data. The triangulation of data and member checks were utilized to establish trustworthiness. Results showed that the three PE teachers strengthened their teaching perceptions during professional socialization. The following key themes were identified in the study: impact from physical education teacher education faculty, positive experiences in method courses, positive experiences in early field experiences and student teaching, and close supervision from classroom teachers and university supervisors. The findings of the study suggested that different socializing events played a significant role in shaping positive perspectives during early field experiences, physical education teacher education courses, and student teaching.

INTRODUCTION

Teacher socialization (Curtner-Smith, 2001; Lawson, 1983a, 1983b; Schempp & Graber, 1992; Templin & Schempp, 1989) is a theoretical framework that assists teacher educators and researchers in finding how teachers strengthen and develop their teaching practices. Lawson (1988) described occupational socialization as "all kinds of socialization that initially influence persons to enter the field of physical education (PE) and later are responsible for their perceptions and actions as teacher educators and teachers" (p. 107). There are three phases of teacher socialization: acculturation, professional socialization, and organizational socialization, all of which impact teachers' conceptions of PE and the way they teach it (see Figure 1). First, acculturation explains how PE recruits learn about their career from PE teachers, coaches, and significant others before entering a physical education teacher education program. Second, professional socialization

represents the time in which future PE teachers are enrolled in a physical education teacher education program. Third, organizational socialization refers to how workplace culture affects inservice teachers' teaching in school. Based on the three phases of socialization, the purpose of this study was to analyze and describe factors affecting positive professional socialization of PE teachers. More specifically, the researcher examined the effects of professional socialization from undergraduate physical education teacher education (PETE) preparation.

METHODS

The participants included one elementary and two middle school female PE teachers (aged 29-31 years with 3-6 years of combined teaching experience). Data were collected from field notes during passive participant observations, two semi-structured formal and informal interviews, and document analysis of autographical posters, to gain an understanding of factors that positively influenced PE teachers during their professional socialization. A thematic analysis was utilized when analyzing the data to find common themes (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). The researcher used data triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checks to establish trustworthiness in the study.

RESULTS

Results showed that these three PE teachers strengthened their teaching perceptions positively during professional socialization. While they indicated that they received value from all the support provided to them, four themes emerged: (a) impact from faculty in physical education teacher education, (b) positive experience in method courses, (c) positive experience in early field experiences and student teaching experiences, and (d) close supervision from classroom teachers and university supervisors. One of the participants in the study, Linda, said this about how the physical education teacher education faculty influenced her:

They were amazing. I still talk to them and get a lot of advice and help from them. They always tried to make and help us to be a better professional. Faculty also taught us well and made us ready to become PE teachers. I feel very fortunate.

As explained by the following data excerpt, all three participants had positive experiences in their methods courses. As Laura said about method courses:

I took elementary and secondary method courses while I was in the physical education teacher education program. Both classes were structured well and really helped me to think about how to manage and organize classes. I just remember that I did not understand why

we had to write out detailed lesson plans for each lesson. However, it all began to make sense to me once I started teaching.

Another participant, Sarah, said:

Both early field experiences and student teaching experiences were very helpful for me to learn more about classroom management, teaching strategies, lesson planning, and teaching practices from a classroom teacher and a university supervisor. More importantly, it was a good opportunity to think about cultural diversity.

The participants were supervised closely by classroom teachers and university supervisors during student teaching. As Linda said about her student teaching experiences:

The professor that taught method courses came and observed my lessons periodically. He provided specific feedback and suggestions early so that I could improve shortcomings during student teaching. My classroom teacher supervised me closely and was a good role model. He helped me a lot to grow professionally.

In this regard, different phases of socializing experiences and events had a big impact on conceptualizing the PE teachers' perceptions on teaching during early field experiences, physical education teacher education courses, and student teaching.

CONCLUSION

Researchers use teacher socialization to explain the acculturation, professional socialization, and organizational socialization of PE teachers. Three stages of teacher socialization are closely connected and influenced to strengthening PE teachers' perspectives and practices on PE teaching. In addition, teacher socialization describes factors affecting PE teachers' pedagogical decisions and teaching behaviors on their teaching. In this regard, the most important conclusion concerning the experiences of these three participants was that the pedagogical perspectives and practices learned during professional socialization appeared resistant to Zeichner and Tabachnik's (1981) "wash-out effect." Future research should examine the influences of different conditions encountered during the student teaching experience by preservice teachers who have followed core physical education teacher education programs. Understanding the significance of professional socialization may serve to guide teacher educators to improve the effectiveness of physical education teacher education programs and PE teacher candidates' teaching effectiveness.

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