

An Exploration of the Professional Ethics Cultivation of Pre-Service Physical Education Teachers from the Perspective of Accreditation

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Abstract: Grounded in the core philosophy, standards, and quality logic of teacher education accreditation, this study addresses the central question of what constitutes the professional ethics cultivation of pre-service physical education teachers. It defines such cultivation as an internal process of moral formation oriented toward two fundamental dimensions: “ethical norms of the teaching profession” and “educational commitment.” The study further proposes the internal structural logic of professional ethics cultivation as consisting of “value orientation – paradigm breakthrough – implementation mechanism.” Finally, it briefly outlines the practical direction of ethics cultivation across several dimensions, including value guidance, curriculum design, and educational practice.

Keywords: Teacher Education Accreditation, Professional Ethics, Physical Education, Pre-Service Physical Education Teachers.

1. Introduction

In October 2017, the Ministry of Education issued the Interim Measures for the Accreditation of Teacher-Training Programs in Regular Institutions of Higher Education and the Standards for the Accreditation of Teacher-Training Programs, marking a shift in China’s teacher education quality assurance system from process-based regulation to outcomes-based, competency-oriented evaluation. Under this shift, accreditation no longer treats teacher preparation merely as knowledge transmission or skills training; instead, it places “fostering virtue through education” at the core and affirms that the capacity to embody and enact professional ethics is both the starting point and the baseline of professional competence for pre-service teachers. However, in practice, the cultivation of professional ethics among pre-service physical education teachers continues to face several challenges: weak ethical agency, limited moral identification, shallow emotional engagement, and overly uniform evaluation methods. In this context, the moral mission of fostering virtue through education must be advanced within the framework of teacher education accreditation. This requires developing an internally driven methodological orientation and forward-looking strategies for the professional ethics cultivation of pre-service physical education teachers.

2. The Connotation of Professional Ethics Cultivation in Pre-Service Physical Education Teachers from the Perspective of Accreditation

The concept of “teacher ethics” (shide) emerged gradually alongside the professionalization of teaching in the modern West, and in essence refers to the moral dimension of the teaching profession. Teacher ethics is not a static attribute; rather, it is generated through a continuing process in which teachers affirm their cultural beliefs and professional about “who a teacher is” and “for what purpose a teacher teaches.”

In this process, the teacher’s internal cognition deepens, emotional identification accumulates, and professional will is strengthened over time^[1]. In other words, teacher ethics is not formed by unilaterally “instilling” a fixed code into teachers. It is a generative process in which the individual-under external value guidance-actively absorbs, transforms, and internalizes those values into personal character^[2]. Contemporary scholarship has increasingly shifted its definition of teacher ethics: from an emphasis on external norms and disciplinary constraints toward an emphasis on subjective awareness and internal formation, reflecting a movement from “passively complying with requirements” to “actively establishing the self^[3]”. In this sense, the cultivation of teacher ethics can be understood as a unified process of “internalizing in the heart” and “enacting in practice^[4]”. At its core, it is a form of “learning for oneself^[5]”: that is, the teacher does not develop ethical character merely to satisfy external inspection, but in order to realize a complete and dignified professional self as an educator.

Under the overarching goals of building a high-quality teaching force and improving the quality-assurance system for teacher education, the Ministry of Education issued the Interim Measures for the Accreditation of Teacher-Training Programs in Regular Institutions of Higher Education and the Standards for the Accreditation of Teacher-Training Programs. These documents explicitly require that the ability of pre-service teachers to embody and practice professional ethics be treated as the primary training objective. Within the accreditation framework, this “ability to practice professional ethics” is further specified through two indicators: ethical norms of the teaching profession and educational commitment. The implication is clear: future teachers are expected not only to consciously observe professional norms and uphold an educational calling, but also to express those norms and that commitment in a stable, enduring professional style. In other words, the ability to practice professional ethics is not simply “knowing what teacher ethics is”, but “treating teacher ethics as one’s own code of conduct and consistently acting on it.” This ability is expressed as a full process of unity

between knowing and doing: internalizing professional ethical norms into moral character, externalizing that character into professional action, and allowing repeated practice to sediment into a stable ethical disposition.

Therefore, from the perspective of teacher education accreditation, the professional ethics cultivation of pre-service physical education teachers should be understood as a long-term formative process centered on moral internalization. It is not only an essential component of their professional competence, but also an inherent requirement of the fundamental task of “fostering virtue through education” in the training of future PE teachers in the new era. More concretely, it is a process in which pre-service physical education teachers repeatedly experience, reflect on, and internalize ethical requirements in contexts such as PE instruction, training organization, classroom management, and broader educational practice—ultimately forming a stable professional disposition. In this process, pre-service physical education teachers must correctly handle three key relationships: The relationship between knowing and doing, avoiding a state of “able to talk about ethics but unable to act ethically”; The relationship between external regulation and self-discipline, moving from “I am required to comply” to “I choose to uphold”; The relationship between outward behavioral performance and inward value identification, achieving a unity between “externalizing in action” and “internalizing in conviction.”

3. The Internal Logic of Professional Ethics Cultivation in Pre-Service Physical Education Teachers from the Perspective of Accreditation

The professional ethics of pre-service physical education teachers is neither something that grows naturally on its own nor something that can be simply instilled through moral preaching in the classroom. It is gradually formed within specific value orientations, educational paradigms, and institutional mechanisms. In line with the requirements of teacher education accreditation, its internal generative logic can be summarized as a three-dimensional structure of “value orientation – paradigm breakthrough – implementation mechanism.”

3.1. Value Orientation: The Inner Unity of Theoretical Logic and Embodied Logic

In current school moral education, the dominant approach often emphasizes “scientization” and “knowledge transmission,” relying primarily on the teaching and inculcation of moral knowledge while neglecting students’ lived practice and subjective agency^[6]. This model treats moral education as a form of cognitive training: understanding concepts, memorizing norms, repeated drilling. It privileges outcomes that are observable, measurable, and controllable, which in turn leads to content that is highly conceptualized, activities that are formalistic, and processes that are detached from real contexts. The result is that moral education becomes “disembodied,” and gaps emerge between knowing and doing^[7]. The “embodied view of moral education,” developed in the tradition of Merleau-Ponty, argues that implementing the mission of “fostering virtue through education” helps overcome chronic problems such as the separation of moral education from students’ lived experience, mechanical preaching, and inconsistency

between knowledge and action^[8]. At its core, an embodied approach calls for a shift from “disembodied morality” to “embodied morality”: morality should become something students have actually experienced, not merely something they have been told they ought to do.

Teacher education accreditation’s emphasis on pre-service teachers’ “ability to practice professional ethics” directly reflects this embodied orientation: it is not satisfied with “knowing what teacher ethics is,” but instead stresses “being able to enact teacher ethics in educational practice.” This is consistent with the embodied view of moral education, which highlights the practical, experiential, and situated nature of morality. On this basis, the professional ethics cultivation of pre-service physical education teachers must foreground bodily engagement, active participation, and real context, and avoid drifting into an abstract, lecture-based, disembodied model of moral education. Morality is not only a body of knowledge; it is also judgment and lived experience. Without embodied participation, theoretical instruction alone is unlikely to produce genuine ethical character. Physical education is, by nature, embodied. In training, classroom management, collaboration, and competition scenarios, pre-service physical education teachers interact with their own bodies, with the environment, with peers, and with task goals. Through this process they experience joy, build physical fitness, develop sound character, and cultivate willpower. Their moral level is elevated through the integrated process of “body–situation–action–cognition–emotion.”

At the same time, it must be recognized that pre-service physical education teachers are often relatively less advantaged in cultural accumulation and abstract theoretical reasoning. If we rely solely on a purely theoretical, disciplinary, or regulatory “academic logic,” outcomes are often unsatisfactory and may even leave gaps in their grasp of professional norms and educational ideals. Therefore, the cultivation of professional ethics in pre-service physical education teachers must follow two logics simultaneously. On the one hand, it must be guided by professional norms and value standards, so that they develop a clear understanding of the boundaries of a teacher’s responsibilities and the bottom line of acceptable conduct. On the other hand, it must embed these norms in embodied practice, so that moral judgment, behavioral choice, and emotional investment are connected in real situations.

3.2. The Organic Unity of Moral Heteronomy and Moral Autonomy

Teacher education accreditation is grounded in a “student-centered” philosophy. Accordingly, the cultivation of professional ethics in pre-service physical education teachers must highlight their subjectivity and agency, and awaken their self-awareness as moral agents. In practice, however, there is still a misalignment of subject position in ethics education for pre-service physical education teachers. The deeper reason lies in the long-standing overemphasis on the heteronomous nature of morality—reliance on external rules, codes of conduct, and disciplinary constraints—while neglecting its autonomous dimension. Such an externally enforced model tends to produce superficial compliance rather than genuine internal commitment: students obey moral requirements passively rather than upholding them actively.

In the context of teacher education accreditation, the cultivation of professional ethics in pre-service physical education teachers must move beyond a purely heteronomy-

driven model and achieve an integration of heteronomy and autonomy. Morality, at its core, should be autonomous and self-determined: it should be the individual's active choice, grounded in an internal sense of responsibility, value identification, and professional commitment^[9]. Only under such conditions can moral conduct become stable and broadly effective. At the same time, autonomy does not mean rejecting external regulation. Educational practice shows that what we call "heteronomy" and "autonomy" are not mutually exclusive; they are generated together in concrete educational processes and can transform into one another. External regulation can provide the initial driving force, while autonomy internalizes that force into lasting motivation. Kant likewise argued that the foundation of morality does not lie in external command but in the individual's rational, self-conscious acceptance of duty and responsibility, which includes self-restraint over desire^[10]. Therefore, if ethics education for pre-service physical education teachers is reduced to the transmission of rules, codes, and prohibitions, it risks missing the proper point of departure for moral education—namely, cultivating in future teachers a genuine sense of personal moral agency and educational responsibility.

Essentially, the cultivation of professional ethics is a process of self-discipline, self-reflection, and self-formation on the part of pre-service physical education teachers. It is an integrated system that encompasses ethical cognition, emotion, experience, and behavior. Through ongoing self-observation and reflection, pre-service physical education teachers should gradually develop a pathway of "self-understanding → self-education → self-cultivation," oriented toward their own ideal image of "what a good teacher should be^[4]". In practical teaching contexts, through sports culture, sporting spirit, and concrete physical education activities, they experience fairness, cooperation, resilience, and responsibility in real interactions with others. In doing so, they internalize external moral norms into stable value commitments and externalize those commitments as conscious educational conduct.

3.3. Constructing a Multi-Stakeholder Coordination Mechanism

Teacher education accreditation emphasizes an "outcomes-based" model of talent cultivation. It requires the establishment of (1) a quality monitoring mechanism grounded in quality standards, (2) an attainment evaluation mechanism grounded in course objectives, and (3) a continuous improvement mechanism grounded in evaluation results, so that the cultivation process is continuously optimized. According to the "quality assurance" indicator in the Standards, programs must also incorporate an element of external evaluation, including graduate follow-up and multi-stakeholder social evaluation, in order to assess regularly whether training objectives have been achieved and to feed those results back into curriculum and instructional improvement. This implies that the professional ethics cultivation of pre-service physical education teachers is not a one-off outcome. Rather, it is a process that requires continuous assessment and dynamic adjustment. It must operate within a "evaluation-feedback-improvement" loop, using systematic tracking to drive steady enhancement over time.

At the implementation level, the cultivation of professional ethics in pre-service physical education teachers is not the responsibility of any single unit; it is a systems project that

requires coordination among academic affairs offices, student affairs offices, and training units. It is therefore necessary to establish an ethics cultivation mechanism that spans the entire process, all settings, and all stages of preparation. Professional ethics should be embedded in every link and context of PE teacher education, rather than treated as an add-on moral education module.

From the perspective of how teacher ethics is formed, the academic community generally identifies two approaches: "internal cultivation" and "external cultivation." The internal approach emphasizes activating the individual's subjective agency, enabling pre-service teachers to develop inner moral conviction and self-discipline; the external approach emphasizes providing guarantees through systems, environments, and guided education^[11]. The cultivation of professional ethics in pre-service physical education teachers cannot rely on only one of these approaches. Instead, the two must be integrated, using institutionalized coordination to build a "community-based" model of ethical formation.

More specifically, it is necessary to improve both internal monitoring and external evaluation. Internal monitoring should become a routine element of day-to-day teaching and run through key points such as classroom instruction, practical teaching, teacher-student interaction, and classroom management. External evaluation should consist primarily of graduate follow-up and broader social evaluation, which help assess whether pre-service physical education teachers are in fact "practicing teacher ethics" once they enter real educational positions. Without the support of both mechanisms, teaching, practicum, assessment, and supervision cannot form synergy. As a result, the graduation requirement of "practicing teacher ethics" for pre-service physical education teachers cannot be meaningfully implemented, and their sense of agency cannot be effectively activated.

4. Practical Strategies for the Cultivation of Professional Ethics in Pre-Service Physical Education Teachers from the Perspective of Accreditation

Teacher education accreditation advocates "establishing oneself through virtue, pursuing scholarship through virtue, teaching through virtue, and strengthening education through virtue." Building on the philosophy and requirements of teacher education accreditation, and on a deep understanding of what professional ethics cultivation means for pre-service physical education teachers in the new era, it is necessary to follow the internal logic of how such ethics is formed. This entails upholding the principle of integrating the universal and the specific, and constructing a three-dimensional, whole-process, and all-round system for the cultivation of professional ethics.

4.1. Guiding Value Orientation through Teacher Ethics and Conduct Education in the New Era

On September 10, 2018, at the National Education Conference, General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized that the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education must be integrated into all aspects of moral education, intellectual education, and practical education, and must run

through the entire process of basic education, vocational education, and higher education. He further stated that disciplinary systems, teaching systems, curriculum systems, and governance systems should all be designed around this objective^[12]. On September 9, 2023, he characterized teachers in the new era with terms such as “great teacher”, “builder of dreams”, “guide”, and “one who fastens the first button”, and put forward requirements such as being a “good teacher with four qualities”, a “fourfold guide”, and providing “four kinds of service”, thereby setting the overall mission for teachers to fulfill the task of fostering virtue through education in the new era. These important statements not only provide the theoretical foundation for the cultivation of professional ethics among pre-service physical education teachers, but also clarify its value orientation and developmental direction. In essence, the cultivation of professional ethics in pre-service physical education teachers is a process of understanding, identifying with, and practicing the core socialist values^[13]. In line with this, the Standards for the Accreditation of Teacher-Training Programs break down “the ability to practice teacher ethics” into two indicators: adherence to professional ethical norms and commitment to education. This directly responds to the core expectations for strengthening teacher ethics and professional conduct in the new era.

In practice, the ethical formation of pre-service physical education teachers still faces problems such as weak professional conviction, a diluted sense of educational commitment, and insufficient perseverance, all of which undermine the effectiveness of ethics education^[14]. Therefore, in the new era, the cultivation of professional ethics among pre-service physical education teachers must take General Secretary Xi Jinping’s requirements for strengthening teacher ethics and conduct as its guiding orientation, and strive to shape four identities: practitioners of the core socialist values; guardians of educational ideals and beliefs; adherents to professional codes of teacher ethics; and caring mentors who are genuinely devoted to education and to students’ well-being.

Put simply, the cultivation of professional ethics in pre-service physical education teachers should embody political, theoretical, and emotional identification with Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, thereby planting in students the roots of value and the spirit of conviction.

4.2. Building an Integrated Curriculum System for the Cultivation of Professional Ethics in Pre-Service Physical Education Teachers

Course-based instruction is the primary arena for the cultivation of professional ethics in pre-service physical education teachers. It is the critical medium through which teacher ethics moves from “knowing”, to “identifying with”, and ultimately to “practicing”. Only through systematically designed curricula can moral cognition be deepened, emotional engagement strengthened, and stable ethical conduct formed. In line with the two accreditation indicators of “professional ethical norms” and “educational commitment”, curricula should be optimized and organized as an integrated cluster to foster ethical development collaboratively. On the one hand, ideological and moral elements should be systematically identified and developed within different types of courses, so as to build a set of

mutually reinforcing, value-aligned courses with clear thematic focus on teacher ethics. On the other hand, these courses should not only embody the basic professional ethics expected of teachers, but also correspond to the professional disposition and ethical characteristics of pre-service physical education teachers-so that they may, affectively, come to identify with the role of the PE teacher, and, in terms of values, develop a willingness to commit to that role over the long term.

More specifically, the cultivation of professional ethics in pre-service physical education teachers can be advanced through four coordinated modules:

First, guide pre-service physical education teachers to understand the basic ethical norms of the teaching profession, form appropriate moral character and educational commitment, and establish the vocational ideal of taking teaching and educating students as a lifelong pursuit.

Second, in courses such as pedagogy, psychology, and PE teaching methodology, systematically integrate professional ethical norms and educational commitment into instruction. In this way, while learning how to teach, pre-service physical education teachers also strengthen their sense of professional responsibility and their mission to educate, deepening their internal identification with the role of the “physical education teacher”.

Third, give full play to the disciplinary function of physical education as a means of educating the whole person. In theory courses, technique courses, and specialized training, cultivate willpower and sound character through experiences of competition, cooperation, discipline, and respect for rules; at the same time, nurture qualities such as fair play, teamwork, and respect for norms. In parallel, integrate core socialist values, patriotic spirit, and the Olympic spirit into everyday teaching and competition scenarios, so that pre-service physical education teachers come to understand and enact the moral value of sport in authentic settings .

Fourth, through educational observation, practicum, internship, and community-based practice, create real teaching situations in which pre-service physical education teachers “face students directly and assume the teacher’s role in person”. This allows them to experience firsthand the professional expectations and ethical demands of PE teaching, reinforces their professional identity, and strengthens their conviction to devote themselves to physical education and remain in the profession over the long term.

4.3. Integrating Observation, Practicum, and Research to Foster Professional Self-Identification

The cultivation of professional ethics in pre-service physical education teachers should follow both universality and specificity: it should align with the general principles of ethics education for pre-service teachers, while also reflecting the distinctive character of physical education as a discipline. Because moral development in pre-service physical education teachers is marked by strong bodily engagement, active participation, and contextual immersion, their ethical qualities are formed primarily through lived practice rather than through classroom exhortation alone. Accordingly, educational practice holds a central position in the formation of their professional ethics.

Physical education is fundamentally grounded in embodied practice, which can be summarized by a cycle of “physical activity -physiological experience -psychological experience

-return to physical activity”. Activity and experience together define the essential nature of PE. This means that the professional ethics of pre-service physical education teachers does not arise solely from theoretical cognition; it is continuously formed and reinforced in real contexts such as teaching, classroom management, training organization, and coaching in competitive settings. Practicum-based instruction is therefore not merely a supplement to theoretical coursework. It is a crucial pathway for deepening professional understanding, enhancing instructional competence, shaping professional attitudes, and cultivating ethical conduct as a teacher. The Standards for the Accreditation of Teacher-Training Programs call for the construction of an integrated practice-teaching system that links “educational observation, educational practicum, and educational research”, that is, a “three-practice” model in which each component supports the others and which covers classroom instruction, ethical experience, class management, and engagement in teaching–research activities. This framework underscores that teacher ethics is not merely a matter of moral cognition or rational judgment; it is also a practical competence. However, problems remain in implementation. In many cases, the practicum for pre-service physical education teachers places excessive emphasis on instructional technique training, while devoting insufficient attention to cultivating professional ideals, educational commitment, and value orientation. As a result, the development of professional competence and the cultivation of teacher ethics tend to become relatively disconnected.

The mastery of professional ethical norms can be understood as the “input”, while the formation of educational commitment is the “output”, and the “three-practice” structure is the key bridge between the two. Through authentic situations, role modeling, and affective experience, pre-service physical education teachers gradually internalize externally imposed ethical norms into an active professional conviction, completing the shift from moral heteronomy to moral autonomy. They then externalize this internalized conviction as a stable style of professional conduct. Only by moving continuously through the linked stages of observation, participation, responsibility-taking, and reflection within this integrated “three-practice” pathway can pre-service physical education teachers truly form appropriate values, essential professional character, and core educational competencies.

5. Summary

In the context of teacher education accreditation, the cultivation of professional ethics in pre-service physical education teachers is no longer an “add-on”, but a core indicator of talent-training quality: it directly affects whether programs meet accreditation standards, whether they can pass evaluation, and whether they can serve national education and sport strategies. This is the deeper meaning of “practicing teacher ethics” for pre-service physical education teachers,

and it is the foundation on which high-quality development of physical education teacher education must rest.

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