

## PEDAGOGY

# Concerns of the Novice Physical Education Teacher

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## Abstract

*The purpose of this case study was to examine novice physical education teachers in the first and second year of teaching. Participants included two novice physical education teachers, John in Year 1 and Mark in Year 2. Methodology included observations, semistructured interviews, and documents. Data were analyzed using open coding and constant comparison methods. The two themes that emerged from the analysis included teacher development and concerns with classroom management, procedures, and safety. Using Fuller's (1969) classification of new teacher concerns, the participants exhibited "self-concerns" and "student concerns." Although both the participants in the study displayed similar concerns as other classroom teachers (e.g., classroom management, procedures, and safety), there were differences in how these concerns were implemented.*

For new teachers, the transition from student to teacher and the unknown of their new roles and academic workplace may cause anxiety. Richards, Templin, and Graber (2014) provided evidence that this transition may be more difficult for physical education teachers than for teachers in general education. These factors may cause these new teachers to leave the profession. The study of novice teachers and the transition from student to teacher can be an important tool

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in the retention of these new professionals. Retention has been an area of concern. Ingersoll (2012) stated that first year teacher attrition rates are almost at 33%. Ingersoll (2003) previously noted that 46% of teachers will leave within 5 years, but new data point toward a downward trend with 17% (Gray & Taie, 2015) leaving within 5 years.

Novice teachers may feel overwhelmed, which can be associated to the environment of the school. These school environments may include poor support from administration and parents and difficult teaching assignments, classroom management, and lesson planning. Even though novice teachers have been trained either through a teacher education program or an alternative certification process, concerns about the uncertainties in the new environment arise. Concerns include content knowledge, classroom management, expectations, pedagogical skills, relationships, student learning, planning, and evaluations (Mawer, 2014, p. 12). These concerns can be categorized into task conflict, process conflict, and relationship conflicts (Khan, Yusoff, & Khan, 2014).

The literature addresses the environment new teachers will enter as well as the lack of clearly defined roles of new teachers, classroom management issues, content knowledge, and new teacher support (Kahn et al., 2014). If these issues are not addressed, it could produce feelings such as anxiety and stress and in turn could lead to novice teacher attrition (Aloe, Amo, & Shanahan, 2014).

## **Literature Review**

### **Identities Development and Role Demands**

Fuller (1969) conceptualized a three-phase model of teacher development. The first phase he categorized as a pre-teaching phase, from the initial student interaction up to experience in the classroom. The second phase, the early teaching phase or self-concerns, is characterized by new teachers entering the field and asking questions about support, both emotional and procedural, and job expectations. The third phase, late concerns or student concerns, is focused on the student. Student concerns include learning, knowing students' abilities, and evaluating student performance. Fuller and Brown (1975) reevaluated the three-phase model and revised it to include survival concerns, teaching situation concerns, and pupil

concerns (Marshall, 1998). Survival concerns include controlling student behavior and meeting the approval of not only the students but also other faculty and administration. Teaching concerns include class size and the lack of time and materials (Marshall, 1998). Pupil concerns are focused on the intellectual, emotional, and social needs of the student (Marshall, 1998).

According to Pigge and Marso (1997), as novice teachers continue teaching, concerns of teaching and student concerns increase and self-concerns decrease. These results support Fuller's theory. Conway and Clark (2003) noted the same phenomenon when examining participants completing teaching internships. They noted that not only did teaching concerns transition, but, as Conway and Clark (2003) explained, that a reflective approach to teaching also occurred—a reflective approach that decreased outward attention to organization and procedures and increased inward attention in the desire to become a better teacher.

The uncertainty of expectations may contribute to novice teachers' anxiety. Schempp, Sparks, and Templin (1993) addressed the role demands that novice teachers may encounter. Role demands fell into two categories: explicit and implicit. Explicit role demands include classroom management and procedures, and implicit demands include pedagogy techniques or learning strategies. Schempp et al. pointed out that the explicit demands were not clear until one had differing opinions and ideas, such as a new teacher allowing students to chew gum in class.

### **Classroom Management**

Classroom management and procedures are a big concern (Chesley & Jordan, 2012; Fuller, 1969; Schempp et al., 1993; Tsangaridou & Polemitou, 2015). According to Stough and Montague (2015) content has taken precedence over the emphasis of classroom management. Most teachers agree that classroom management should be the highest priority, especially with explicit role demands (Schempp et al., 1993). Classroom management, or teacher authority, is ingrained into the hierarchical structure of education. Classroom management is essential to gain the respect of veteran teachers. New teachers in this study found that being authoritative “provided little satisfaction” (Schempp et al., 1993, p. 459). Being a good classroom

manager was important to the new teachers because it predestined them as being professional and competent, which in turn had a huge effect on student control. Tsangaridou and Polemitou (2015) reported similar responses to those of Schempp et al. (1993) concerning classroom management. Tsangaridou and Polemitou found that novice teachers had concerns in the areas of classroom management and classroom procedures. Participants stressed that classroom management was vital for effective teaching. Many novice teachers reported that they did not fully comprehend the concepts of classroom management theories and practices during teacher preparation (Chesley & Jordan, 2012). Stough and Montague suggested that the reason may be that classroom management content is difficult to work into the pedagogical course curriculum when the main focus is on content information in specific teaching areas. Stough and Montague also stressed that when classroom management is taught, the programs stress “whole class” (p.448) management and not individual classroom management for individuals, as do some specializations (e.g., special education).

### **Content Knowledge**

Novice teachers believe it is important to be competent in area-specific content knowledge (Schempp et al., 1993). Some novice teachers reported not gaining sufficient knowledge in the content areas that they were teaching (Chesley & Jordan, 2012). In contrast, Tsangaridou and Polemitou (2015) reported that not all novice teachers struggle with content area and the teachers reflect on ways to make the content knowledge more enjoyable for students. Unfortunately, many content areas in tertiary education have increased the focus on the subject matter because of policies such as No Child Left Behind (Stough & Montague, 2015). Students who will become teachers do not receive the same attention to the pedagogical coursework because of the increased emphasis on content areas (Stough & Montague, 2015) and are sometimes ill-equipped to teach what they know.

To combat deficiencies of content knowledge in novice physical education teachers, Sinelnikov, Kim, Ward, Curtner-Smith, and Li (2016) devised a method of intervention by creating professional development workshops. These workshops provided the opportunity for physical education teachers with limited knowledge in badmin-

ton to learn the game. The results indicated that a workshop lasting 4 hr was effective in positively changing the content knowledge of the novice physical education teachers, which had a direct positive effect on student comprehension of badminton skills.

### **Pedagogical and Emotional Support**

Multiple studies have been conducted concerning support of the novice teacher, which can occur in the forms of planning, classroom management, or emotional. Gore and Bowe (2015) examined how the Quality Teaching Rounds (QTR) affected the support for novice teachers in Australia. QTR consists of small groups of teachers varying in career lengths, which allows for discussion, practice, and evaluation. QTR provides pedagogical support in allowing for feedback after observations of classroom teaching, which, as stated by the novice teachers, causes reflection of what they are teaching and how it is being taught. Emotional support using QTR is present in the statements of the participants, who said they see themselves as a “colleague” (p. 83) and are able to have a voice and speak about the daily routines that may be discouraging to a new teacher. Participants stated that they did not feel isolated within this structured environment (p. 83). Gore and Bowe concluded that the project had a positive effect on the retention of novice teachers in the study.

Burke, Aubusson, Schuck, Buchanan, and Prescott (2015) found that perceived support can have an effect on novice teachers’ attrition as well. As reported, 47% of novice teachers had experienced isolated working environments with little collaborative efforts; 26% reported “limited professional conversations about teaching practice” (p. 247); and 14% reported having no professional development, which is required according to Australian standards. Novice teachers expressing intent to leave the field was 24%, with 55% citing wanting to leave because of working environments such as lack of teaching resource sharing, not being afforded to collaborate with experienced teachers, lack of “professional conversations” with other professionals or administration, and not enough access to mentors. Pedagogical and emotional support are vital in the growth and retention of novice teachers.

In a study conducted in Israel, Nasser-Abu Alhija and Fresko (2010) found three domains of support: emotional, ecological, and pedagogical. They found that during the novice teachers’ induction

year that the perceived emotional support these teachers received was rated high and pedagogical support was rated the lowest. They also found that teachers tend to seek their own support in the form of informal mentors even though a formal mentor was assigned. The search for informal mentoring was due to a lack of quality feedback from the formal mentor. They found that the new teachers gave workshop usefulness low to moderate ratings.

Tannehill and Zakrajsek's (1988) study indicated that most of the support received by novice physical education teachers focused more on planning and classroom management and less toward encouragement, reinforcement, and praise. The support structure in the Tannehill and Zakrajsek study was perceived as being of little help with little quality feedback being offered.

## **Method**

### **Purpose and Research Questions**

Novice teachers are faced with many issues and concerns when they are starting a career. These concerns include managerial tasks in the classroom, support from administration and colleagues, content knowledge, and pedagogical concerns. The purpose of this case study was to examine novice physical education teachers in the first and second year of teaching.

The following questions drove the research:

- Question 1: What are the primary concerns of novice physical education teachers?
- Question 2: Are their concerns similar to those of novice teachers in other teaching fields?

It was the intent of this research to explore these areas of concern.

### **Design**

A qualitative case study approach was selected because it provides for a more in-depth process to highlight experiences from the participants who may not otherwise have a voice or whose viewpoints are rarely echoed (Sofaer, 1999). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), case studies are the choice for most naturalistic research because they lend to increasing the researcher's understanding of the proposed questions and display "characteristics that are

especially advantageous to the naturalistic inquirer” (pp. 357–358). Lincoln and Guba also mentioned that the case study alone is not the strongest way to present the information, because it can be “soft” or “sloppy” (p. 360). They suggest using other data such as artifacts, documents, and observations. To strengthen the case study, the researchers incorporated direct observations, field notes, semistructured interviews, and documents. According to Merriam (2009), these multiple methods of data collection also increase the “internal validity” (p. 215) or triangulation.

## **Participants**

Purposive sampling was used to focus on novice physical education teachers. Siegle (2002) defines purposive sampling as the process of selecting a specific group because of certain characteristics that the researcher wants to capture. The participants in the study included two male novice physical education teachers.

John was 35 and was in his first year of teaching middle school physical education. John received his teaching certification through an alternative program. Prior to becoming a teacher, John worked in the private sector.

Mark was 24 and was in his second year of teaching elementary physical education. Mark received his teaching certification through a traditional route (i.e., teacher preparation program and student teaching). Mark was a substitute teacher prior to acquiring full-time employment.

## **Data Collection**

In previous research on the concerns of novice teachers, the Teacher Concerns Questionnaire was used (Bogges, McBride, & Griffey, 1985; George, 1978). Fuller (1969) implied the answers from novice teachers may be limited because of the limited choices in the instrument. In this study, data were collected using observations, field notes, semistructured interviews, and documents. Observations occurred for 3 hr during a regular school day while both participants were teaching physical education, with a total of three physical education classes for each participant observed. Detailed notes were taken during the observations and later transcribed. Items observed were teacher behavior and communication skills dealing with instruction within a classroom setting.

After the conclusion of the observations and during a time that did not take away from educational responsibilities, semistructured interviews occurred. The semistructured interviews allowed for unrestricted answers that might not occur when using surveys and questionnaires. Each novice teacher was interviewed, with the interviews lasting between 45 and 60 min. Interviews were recorded on a handheld recording device and transcribed into a Word document.

Documents were collected from the novice physical education teachers. These documents were received during training at orientation. They consisted of PowerPoint slides, Word documents, and calendars.

### **Data Analysis**

The observations, transcribed interviews, and collected documents were analyzed using open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and the constant comparison method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Two themes emerged after a thorough content analysis using Fuller's (1969) three-stage theoretical model of developmental conceptualization as a guide. As stated earlier, multiple methods of data collection were applied to triangulate. Key words were coded for similarities that fell into self-concerns and student concerns. Table 1 shows this information. The second theme, concerns with classroom management, procedures, and safety, is discussed thereafter.

## **Findings**

During the analysis process, two main themes emerged. The first theme was teacher development, which was divided into the subcategories of self-concerns and student concerns. The second theme was concerns with classroom management, procedures, and safety.

### **Teaching Development: Self-Concerns and Student Concerns**

Both instructors are developing as teachers. John and Mark are demonstrating characteristics of teacher concerns, with one being more concerned with self and the other being more concerned with students. Self-concerns and student concerns were interpreted using codes from the interviews. During the analysis of John and Mark transcribed interviews, key words or phrases fell into either self-concerns or student concerns. John, being in his first year, was in the self-concern developmental phase of teaching. John believed

that he needed more time to adjust to his new environment. He also reported that he did not feel as prepared coming into physical education mainly because of the lack of concentrated subject matter during his alternative certification process. John had more “I” and “me” statements during the interview.

Mark was in the student concern developmental phase of teaching. Mark had more statements that included “we” and that reflected his desire to engage students in the learning process. These key words or phrases are categorized as either self-concerns or student concerns as shown in Table 1. Not all statements are included in this table. The table highlights statements that stood out during the analysis phase.

**Table 1**  
*Key Words or Phrases of Self-Concerns and Student Concerns*

Participant	Teaching concerns	
	Self-concerns	Student concerns
John	I had a bunch of questions.	What needs to happen when these kids come in, you know.
	What do I do, what are my procedures, what do I do if this happens?	There's no foul balls you have people running all the time.
	Do I sit them down, do I tell them to walk, do I do roll call? Tell me where to start because I don't know where to start.	How it made a kid feel.
	Perhaps all first year teachers have anxiety.	
	I was pretty nervous , not quite sure how handling a class of 13 to 14 year old kids is going to go.	
	You are left to your own devices quite a lot.	
	Sometimes I think I talk too much and I am too loud.	

**Table 1 (cont.)**

Participant	Teaching concerns	
	Self-concerns	Student concerns
Mark	I don't think I was completely prepared.  If I was by myself, I don't know if it would be overwhelming, but it would be more of a challenge.	We can't do anything in half a gym.  It's easy to deal with kids having kid problems.  Dealing with kids that can't speak any English.  Then you've got some kids.  We get to talk about what we're doing, plan on doing, what we shouldn't do, maybe what we should do.  There were some awesome kids.

### **Concerns With Classroom Management, Procedures, and Safety**

It was also found that these novice teachers had the same concerns as did classroom teachers. Even though similarities occurred regarding the issues that physical education teachers and other teachers experience, differences were evident within the areas of classroom management, procedures, and safety. Classrooms are different for physical education teachers than for classroom teachers and will be set up differently.

**Classroom management.** John said during his alternative certification program, he learned about classroom management, but it was not focused on physical education. Issues such as classroom set-up and design were stressed, but not in the physical education area. John said this about his preservice training: "They give you ideas on what to do and give you a book and say, 'Here's best practices for some situations.'" John said this about the alternative certification program: "It's good to a certain point, but when it comes down to nuts and bolts, here's what you are going to do minute by minute, you really don't get that." He added,

They did give you a classroom map and say you should set up your desks this way, your computer over here, and your desk should be this way and all this kind of stuff, but minute by minute, you know, organizational skills are sort of left out.

It was observed that John did have classroom management skills. John's students knew how to enter the gym. He had school-required material posted so students could see it. When asked if physical education was addressed in the alternative certification program, John replied, "No, you're to your own devices quite a lot, well always."

Mark is in his second year of teaching physical education. Mark was certified the traditional route through a teacher preparation program. Mark believes that student teaching prepared him for the tasks John was concerned about. Mark's classroom management concerns focused on proper implementation of parent-teacher conferences, student discipline, and maintaining relationships with teachers. Mark stated,

You kind of know what you're doing as far as teaching PE; you got that, but then you've got all these other different situations as far as discipline or parent conversations, stuff like that. Then you've got your relationships with the teachers inside the building.

It was observed that Mark had not only a co-teacher but also a student teacher. Mark appeared to have a good, collegial relationship with his co-teacher and the student teacher.

Classroom management was present in the documents that were collected from John and Mark. John's had an outline for a model classroom. Items addressed in this outline were physical classroom appearance, material location, transition management, grading, and time management techniques. A document obtained from Mark titled "New Teacher Academy Planning Form" addressed classroom management topics, specifically differentiation.

**Procedures.** John voiced his concerns over issues such as taking attendance, dressing out, and warm-up. John's made statements such as the following:

What do I do; what are my procedures; what do I do if this happens? Day one minute one, you know, what needs to happen when these kids come in? Do I sit them down, do I tell them to walk, do I do roll call? Tell me where to start because I don't know where to start. And, you know, warm-up, activities, cooldown, what's the time frame? How? What do you do here?

Mark had procedural dilemmas he encountered that he had to overcome that included standardized testing and picture day. Mark stated,

You've got tons of procedural stuff inside the building. Then you get into STAAR stuff and learning all the things you've got to do and all the set standards as far as when it is STAAR test day and what we're supposed to do and all these different situations.

Both John and Mark voiced procedural concerns, each having a different perspective. Two documents obtained from John contained procedural tasks to assist a novice teacher when working with a mentor. This document titled "Working With Your Mentor" had a list of items to engage and not engage in while working with mentors. These "do" items included asking questions and goal setting. The "don't" items included being unprepared and mentor-driven agendas. The other document was a timeline that detailed meetings and due dates throughout the year for the mentoring he was receiving. Mark's documents were similar. A document obtained from Mark was the titled "New Year Academy Plan" and contained dates for meetings with his continued mentoring program.

**Safety.** Procedural missteps can quickly become safety issues. John joked that he was the "record holder" for broken bones. John recalled the accidents that students had in physical education that he dealt with as a first year teacher. John stated, "This person fell down and burst their head open, here's what you need to do, this person fell down and broke both their arms." John said he had five students who had broken bones during his first year as a physical education teacher.

During times when procedural events took place in the gymnasium, Mark worried about the safety of his student. Mark recalled picture day when his principal said she just needed half of the gymnasium and he could continue using the other half. Mark stated, “We can’t do anything in half a gym while there’s equipment set up on the other side.”

## Discussion

This qualitative case study explores the concerns of novice physical education teachers. The themes that emerged using contextual analysis were training, preparation, and the uncertainties of teaching. The two major findings were interpreted as self-concerns and student concerns, reflecting Fuller’s (1969) three-stage theoretical model of developmental conceptualization, and concerns with classroom management, procedures, and safety.

Fuller categorized these concerns as “self-centered” and “pupil centered.” These self-centered or self-focused concerns include areas such as discipline, how the teacher performs, time management, procedures, and conferences (i.e., parent and teacher). The areas of concern for pupil centered or student focused deal with progression of learning, student success, and proper implementation of content knowledge. Mark and John are at different stages in their careers, with only a year separating them. John’s main focus was on classroom management, and he appeared to be in the self-concerns phase. John, in his first year, was still focused on self-concerns. First year physical education teachers tend to be concerned with self, concentrating on what to teach and how to teach (Napper-Owen & Phillips, 1995; Young, 2012). Mark was in his second year and was transitioning into students concerns. These concerns could be due to the difference in years of teaching or in the difference in the certification process. John was certified alternatively, and Mark was certified on the traditional path.

If teacher preparation programs are focused on the activities that self-focused novice teachers worry about, why do these patterns still exist? Boggess et al. (1985) revealed in their research that self-concerns when “in the presence of a supervisor” (p. 205) waned over time. Novice teachers should foremost be concerned with students during their in-service time. Young (2012) noticed this pattern as well in preservice teachers. How quickly do self-concerns

diminish? Once a preservice teacher is employed and starts the in-service part of his or her career, does this provoke a backsliding into self-concerns? Fuller (1969) suggested that students wanting to become teachers need to teach before enrolling in one education course, to combat the problem of focusing on self and not the student. Teacher preparation programs have included observations prior to acceptance into the program, but is this helping in shortening the self-focused period?

Even though similarities occurred regarding the issues that physical education teachers and classroom teachers experience, there were differences in classroom management, procedures, and safety. Classrooms are different for physical education teachers than for classroom teachers. The “classroom” is a gymnasium, which is larger than a normal classroom, with class sizes being larger in elementary and middle school. Procedurally physical educators will have students dressing out, warming up, and having to move around. Also, safety concerns are different for teachers in a traditional classroom. John labeled himself as the record holder of broken bones; most classroom teachers will not have to deal with bloody noses, fat lips, bruises, contusions, and fractures on a daily basis. Also, there are safety concerns when facilitating activities outside. Safety concerns include weather and allergies.

Schempp et al. (1993) described role demands as those “expectations teachers faced in school” (p. 457). Role demands were divided into two categories: explicit and implicit. Explicit demands included classroom management and procedures, and implicit demands included committees and pedagogy techniques. John’s issues initially were more explicit, whereas Mark’s issues during his second year were transitioning from explicit to implicit.

As stated earlier, novice teachers often feel overwhelmed in their new environments (Banville & Rikard, 2009). They may experience low status or feel unimportant, experience a lack support from other faculty in the school, or face inadequacies in classroom management and lesson planning (Banville & Rikard, 2009; Schempp et al., 1993). Neither one of the novice physical education teachers reported feeling a lack of support. Both John and Mark recognized and appreciated the support they received from their mentors that allowed them to adjust to their new surroundings.

## Implications and Recommendations

One implication from this study points to the practice of creating induction and mentoring programs that are focused on teacher assimilation within a specialized field. Physical education, like many other areas, has different and unique characteristics. For example, Mark stated, “We can’t do anything in half a gym while there’s equipment set up on the other side.” In what other classrooms does this occur? It is unlikely that half of a science or English classroom would be used to take pictures with the expectation that the teacher resume regularly scheduled classroom activities. Research has shown that collaborative efforts between novice teachers and mentors have produced successful outcomes in the areas of assimilation into the new atmosphere, classroom management, content delivery, and support (Stough & Montague, 2015). This could certainly be the case for novice physical education teachers, even more so because of the downplay of the importance of physical education (Blankenship & Coleman, 2009; Elliot, Atencio, Campbell, & Jess, 2013) and isolation (Smyth, 1993).

Another implication addresses the similarities of concerns of these two participants to other novice teachers concerns (i.e., classroom management, procedures, and safety), with the focus of addressing different occurrences within those areas of concerns. The majority of classroom teachers will not have to worry about theft from others from the locker room (classroom management in the area of discipline), broken bones (safety), or dressing out (procedures), but these are a part of the physical education teacher’s concerns and need to be addressed at some point during the first year of teaching. This is why the development of induction and mentoring programs is important and must take into account pairing novice teachers with experienced teachers within the same field.

Recommendations for continued studies include comparing novice teachers who are certified alternatively with those certified by traditional methods to determine if the transition from self-focus to student focused occurs at different time frames. Researchers must also look in depth into induction and mentoring programs that allow out-of-subject mentoring to occur, to see how these relationships enhance or hinder the teacher’s developmental stages. Last,

researchers need to determine if a link exists between attrition rates and teachers who stay in the self-focused stage longer.

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