

A Practical Examination of the Professional Quality of Physical Education Teachers in Primary and Secondary Schools and Their Optimization Pathways

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Abstract: The professional qualities of physical education teachers directly affect the quality of physical education in primary and secondary schools and the achievement of students' core competencies. However, there are still several prominent problems in the current training system, such as the formalism of school-based teaching research, the lack of professional ethics among some teachers, and the weak ability of teaching reflection. In response to these urgent practical issues, this study proposes the following corrective measures: (1) Establish a "teaching and research" community for physical education teachers, and build an endogenous development mechanism where "teaching" and "learning" mutually promote and coexist; (2) Establish a regular mechanism for cultivating professional ethics, enhancing the professional awareness of physical education teachers; (3) Implement the principle of "practice first," transforming theoretical learning into guidance, and effectively improving the professional capabilities of physical education teachers in secondary schools, in response to the requirements of modern education.

Keywords: Primary and secondary schools; Physical education teachers; Professional qualities; Path

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1. Introduction

Building a high-quality and high-level teaching team is one of the important goals of educational reform in the new era, aiming to comprehensively improve the quality of compulsory education. In recent years, relevant national education policies have continuously emphasized the supporting role of teaching research in improving teaching quality, requiring that classroom teaching be the main battlefield, continuously optimizing the implementation effect of the curriculum, and providing guarantees for the development of high-quality physical education courses. Currently, school physical education is in a transitional period from "skill teaching" to "comprehensive education" functions, and at the same time, basic education is also transitioning from a knowledge-based approach to a competency-based approach. As an important

component of school physical education, the professional quality of physical education teachers is closely related to educational quality and teacher quality. Therefore, summarizing the social status and public perception of physical education teachers in primary and secondary schools, sorting out the current practical challenges, exploring the ideal model of physical education teachers, and proposing new path thinking are of great significance for fully exerting the educational role of physical education subjects in the basic education stage.

2. Professional quality of physical education teachers and its cultivation

2.1. The connotation of professional quality of physical education teachers

In recent years, a series of policy documents issued by the state have put forward clear requirements for the construction of the teaching staff. They emphasize the importance of teacher work from a strategic perspective and regard the construction of the teaching staff as a key task for educational development. The definition of the professional quality of teachers has multiple perspectives, and its core at least covers three basic dimensions: student development orientation, teacher professional growth, and the transformation of subject knowledge. In the case of physical education, its professional quality ultimately manifests in three dimensions: students' physical ability, healthy behavior, and sports morality, and is internalized as the teaching skills and professional practical ability of teachers. Cultivate the required qualities of students through these three dimensions, and externalize the professional quality of teachers as professional skills and teaching abilities ^[1]. Physical education teachers, as an important carrier of subject education, should base their professional quality on the physical education discipline, focus on cultivating students' core competencies, and ultimately be reflected in teachers; Physical education teachers should also pay attention to the existence of individuals, and appropriately develop the professional qualities needed by physical education teachers.

2.2. Components of physical education teachers' professional qualities

In light of the connotation of physical education teachers' professional qualities and their development needs, this article will analyze from four dimensions: teacher's sentiment, professional competence, educational artistry, and innovative spirit.

Firstly, educational sentiment is a high-level emotional trait that physical education teachers need to possess to cope with the challenging working environment and maintain enthusiasm for education. It is manifested as positive emotional attitudes and an inclusive mindset. For front-line physical education teachers, since their work locations are mainly outdoors and the working conditions are more challenging, they need to have firmer emotional attitudes and an inclusive mindset to ensure the smooth progress of educational work. Secondly, professional competence is one of the important characteristics of physical education teachers. Besides mastering various sports skills, physical education teachers also need to possess knowledge and skills in teaching design and evaluation, organization and judging of related projects, as well as the ability to prevent and handle emergency sports injuries. Only through continuous learning and practice can physical education teachers acquire the professional qualities of "specialized in one area with multiple skills." Thirdly, educational artistry refers to the methods and means that physical education teachers use in teaching, based on the development laws of the subject and the age characteristics of students, to set

different training loads and intensities, and to respect individual differences of students and conduct scientific teaching. Only through the application of educational artistry can physical education teaching be more targeted and effective. Fourthly, innovative spirit is one of the qualities that physical education teachers must possess. Facing ever-changing social development, physical education teachers need to constantly learn new teaching methods and use new teaching tools, such as school-based research and professional wristbands to monitor training loads. Only with an innovative spirit can they continuously adapt to the needs of educational development and provide better educational services for students.

2.3. The necessity of cultivating the professional quality of physical education teachers

Currently, the country attaches great importance to the work of youth sports and has clearly proposed to strengthen youth sports and promote the coordinated development of mass sports and competitive sports, laying the foundation for the construction of a sports power nation. The construction of a sports power nation cannot be achieved without high-quality physical education teachers. High-quality physical education teachers are the inherent variable of high-quality physical education, the backbone force for cultivating young people's strong bodies, and an important support for building modern school sports education in the Chinese style and a sports power nation. When studying the professional quality of physical education teachers, it is necessary to consider the development of the times and the particularity of the physical education teacher profession. Teachers should not only meet the complex needs of students, but also combine the actual needs of the country and society, enhance their understanding of education, actively improve their knowledge and skills, and become outstanding teachers in line with the development of the times ^[2].

3. Examination of the current situation in the cultivation of professional qualities of physical education teachers

3.1. School-based teaching and research becomes a formality

School-based teaching and research is a product of the development of the teaching and research system in China since the founding of the People's Republic. It has made significant contributions to the improvement of teaching quality and professional levels of teachers in primary and secondary schools. However, nowadays, this activity with a history of 70 years has become a formality. The "teaching" and "research" are separated, becoming a burden for physical education teachers. In the new era of basic education moving towards the development of quality-oriented education, school-based teaching and research activities, which should play an important role, have a serious tendency toward formalization and lack substantive academic discussion content. The root cause lies in the following aspects. On the one hand, some physical education teachers have relatively weak accumulation in humanities and social sciences and have a fear of difficult, in-depth discussions that are written and theoretical. On the other hand, in teaching and research activities, interpersonal concerns are too heavy, and there is a lack of critical dialogue to face problems. Moreover, some teaching and research activities have become tools for conveying administrative affairs and have deviated from the original intention of teaching and research ^[3].

3.2. The deviation of physical education teachers' professional ethics

In primary and secondary school physical education teaching, students are regarded as the flowers of the country, while teachers are likened to diligent gardeners. This metaphor indicates the importance of teachers

in the growth of students. The cultivation of morality is a long-term process. Physical education teachers develop self-discipline and the spirit of enduring hardship through long-term physical training, promoting their continuous improvement of professional qualities. The moral education concepts received by physical education teachers during their university years will accompany them throughout their careers. However, under the materialistic drive of the marketization wave, a few physical education teachers exhibit deviations in their professional behaviors, such as simplifying course content and adopting “laissez-faire” teaching methods, which not only harm the all-round development of students but may also have hidden misleading effects on the formation of students’ values. Additionally, some teachers, due to low professional identity, lack of work enthusiasm, and weak requirements for teacher norms, lead to the phenomenon of emphasizing form over effectiveness.

3.3. The ability of teaching reflection needs to be improved

Teaching reflection is essentially the reflection on past teaching behaviors. It involves summarizing experiences and lessons, optimizing teaching design, and improving teaching quality. For a teacher to become an educational expert, they need to go through several stages such as role transformation, mid-term doubt, and self-improvement. Enhancing the ability of teaching reflection can help overcome professional burnout or development bottlenecks. The factors that lead to the lagging ability of teaching reflection among teachers are multi-dimensional: (1) Externally-oriented deviation in reflection direction — some teachers are accustomed to drawing on others’ successes and failures but neglect the in-depth analysis of their own teaching practice; (2) Inertia of experience dependence — teachers with longer teaching experience are prone to be bound by their inherent experience and have an inertial tendency towards technological innovation ^[4]; (3) Differences in theoretical literacy — teachers with a more solid theoretical reserve often have the ability to multi-dimensionally analyze teaching problems and can conduct systematic reflection from a theoretical perspective; conversely, teachers with low theoretical level have difficulty identifying the deep problems in their own teaching and the frequency and depth of their reflection behavior are significantly insufficient. (4) Implicit influence of organizational atmosphere — harmonious and friendly campus interpersonal relationships help create an open and trusting communication environment, providing psychological safety and emotional support for teachers to carry out teaching reflection; conversely, a tense and depressing organizational atmosphere is likely to trigger teachers’ professional burnout and psychological defense, thereby suppressing their willingness and behavior of reflection ^[5].

4. Analysis of the pathways for cultivating the professional quality of physical education teachers

4.1. Creating a self-generating development path for the physical education teacher teaching community

The physical education teacher teaching community is a collective formed by multiple physical education teachers, whose main purpose is to help teachers solve various teaching problems and receive spiritual comfort from their peers in a collective setting. Self-generating development refers to development without external supervision and relying more on the internal consciousness of the organization ^[6]. The conventional teaching communities often have a path dependence on external administrative instructions. Once external incentives weaken, internal cohesion tends to loosen, and the participation of members decreases. The self-

generating development of the physical education teacher teaching community is conducive to teachers building common goals. Each physical education teacher participating in the teaching community has their own expectations for their professional development. Only when the organization's development aligns with their personal expectations can teachers actively participate in the teaching community due to the organization's incentives and become the force for self-generating development within the community. Secondly, self-generating development is conducive to building an organizational mechanism that promotes the trust relationship among teachers. The physical education teacher teaching community belongs to the same discipline, and teachers within it learn and communicate together in the process of common learning, creating an equal, inclusive, and dialogic environment. This easily builds a trusting relationship among teachers and enables teachers to form a cooperative and positive interaction. Finally, the teaching community is conducive to respecting the individual existence of each physical education teacher, allowing each individual to fully exert their subjective initiative in the teaching process, fully reflecting the inclusive and positive image of the teaching community, and is also an important driving force for the self-generating development of the physical education teacher teaching community.

4.2. Adhere to morality and continuously improve professional qualities

“Establishing virtue and nurturing people, cultivating the essence and shaping the soul” is the fundamental task of education. Physical education teachers are one of the important forces for educating people. Every physical education teacher should undertake their own responsibility for education. In order to better educate, physical education teachers need to constantly improve their professional qualities and moral cultivation, internalize the sense of professional ethics into their own qualities, and externalize the concept of professional ethics in practical classroom teaching. In this way, the concept of professional ethics can be integrated into course learning and teaching, enabling students to establish correct professional values and thinking during the learning process.

In order to cultivate the spirit of dedication and enthusiasm for service, physical education teachers need to adhere to their original teaching intentions and maintain their love and faith in the education cause. In terms of ideological and moral construction and publicity and education, physical education teachers need to possess the professional emotions and educational beliefs required by an excellent physical education teacher, continuously improve moral practice and enhance their own abilities, and correctly recognize the professional responsibilities and tasks of the teaching profession. Only in this way can physical education teachers fully play their role in the process of education and make positive contributions to cultivating teenagers with healthy bodies and good psychological qualities.

4.3. Combining research and teaching with practical application, teaching reflection promotes healthy development

In the current context of school education reform, physical education teachers should base themselves on the actual situation of the school and actively carry out school-based research work to promote curriculum reform and their own professional development. In school-based research activities, the research content should be in line with the implementation of school physical education courses and based on the curriculum standards for thematic project exchanges, so as to apply the research results to the actual teaching process. For example, physical education teachers can understand the connotation of the curriculum standards,

combine the learning situation to formulate unit and class plans, in order to meet the different learning needs of students; implement teaching evaluation research based on learning tasks, in order to understand the learning progress and results of students; assign after-class homework research based on the curriculum standards, in order to improve students' autonomous learning ability and interest. The primary and secondary school stage is a period when students' physical abilities develop rapidly. As the main body of the physical education class, physical education teachers should, through teaching monitoring and teaching experience, dialectically and critically analyze their own teaching experience and teaching behaviors, and continuously improve their teaching level. Regularly conducting teaching reflection in school-based research activities is conducive to objectively evaluating one's teaching level, avoiding potential problems that may occur in future classes, improving the overall physical education classroom teaching level of the teaching research group, and ultimately forming a closed-loop iterative mechanism of "research-driven practice—practice triggering reflection—reflection feeding back optimization." This will help promote school physical education curriculum reform and teacher professional development, and better provide high-quality physical education services for students.

5. Conclusion

The construction of the teaching staff is the cornerstone of the development of education. Their professional qualities directly determine the upper limit of the quality of education. For physical education teachers, their professional qualities are not limited to a single dimension of sports skills; instead, they are an organic unity of educational sentiment, professional competence, educational artistry, and innovative spirit. Therefore, strengthening the professional qualities of physical education teachers has become an urgent need for modern educational reform. This not only requires physical education teachers to continuously deepen and improve their professional skills, but also to comprehensively develop them from multiple dimensions. For example, the teacher's sentiment needs to enable physical education teachers to better understand and convey the connotation of sports culture, allowing students to feel the essence of life in sports; professional competence requires physical education teachers to continuously deepen their own knowledge and practical skills in sports education, and better guide students to explore themselves; educational art requires physical education teachers to better utilize educational tools and educational resources to create a better educational atmosphere and teaching effect; innovative spirit requires physical education teachers to actively participate in educational reforms and teaching practices, and continuously improve their teaching quality and level. Through multi-dimensional development, physical education teachers can better achieve the integration and unification of their profession and society, better play their roles, and contribute to the physical health and lifelong sports concept formation of students.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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