

Physical Education Teacher Education in Canada

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Canada places a high premium on education. Many people assume that Canada's educational system is the same as their American neighbors because a majority of the Canadian population lives in close proximity to the American border. Although there are many similarities between the educational systems of both countries, there are some subtle yet important differences. This article explains elements of the Canadian educational system. It addresses three goals: (1) to provide a global perspective of physical education teacher education (PETE) programs in Canada; (2) to outline the basics of PETE programs in the province of Québec, where our university is situated; and (3) to describe the unique nature of the McGill University teacher education program, including its rich and distinguished history.

A Canadian Synopsis

Approximately 35 Canadian universities offer PETE programs; others, as well as some of these, provide complementary programs such as kinesiology, exercise science, or human kinetics (www.ccupeka.ca). Because education is a provincial responsibility, PETE programs vary across the 10 provinces, and provincial regulations also allow some individualization within the provinces to accommodate philosophies and policies of the various institutions. However, standards across the country are fairly consistent.

Provincial curriculum documents for K-12 education all emphasize healthy active living derived from a combination of physical activity skill development, health-related issues including nutrition, and experiences that promote young people's ability to make appropriate lifestyle choices. PETE programs support these goals as they prepare young adults to teach physical education. Differences between the programs occur in terms of program sequencing (consecutive, concurrent), program length, certification levels, admission requirements, and program curriculum, especially in terms of pedagogy and activity courses and field experiences.

Consecutive PETE programs dominate in most provinces, particularly in Ontario, the largest province of Canada in terms of popu-

lation and number of universities. Consecutive B.Ed. (PE) programs vary in length from 8 to 24 months following completion of a bachelor's degree, which may or may not be related to physical education.

A modification of this pattern occurs when students follow 3 years of general studies with 1 or 2 years of education courses under the same program. In these cases students may receive dual degrees, such as B.Ed./B.Sc. or B.Ed./B.A. Concurrent or integrated degrees, which blend education theory and experiences with other academic pursuits throughout a 4- to 5-year program, are less common. All PETE programs in Québec are concurrent in design and 4 years in length, leading to a B.Ed. (Physical Education and Health).

In all provinces except Québec, graduates of PETE programs are certified to teach at a specified educational level: elementary, middle, secondary, elementary/intermediate, or intermediate/secondary. In Québec, PETE training and certification are for both elementary and secondary levels, K-11. Only 3 of the 10 provinces in Canada have mandated physical education specialists across all grades: Québec, Prince Edward Island, and New Brunswick (francophone division).

In most of Canada, elementary and frequently middle school teachers are generalists rather than physical education specialists, and usually there are no physical education requirements for entry into the elementary teacher certification program. Students applying for entrance to a secondary or middle/secondary PETE program in Canada may need a degree or specific courses in a related discipline for admittance, although many universities do not have this requirement. Some universities also require evidence of additional experiences such as activity/skill courses, coaching experience, or athletic/sport participation.

In provinces where elementary classroom teachers are responsible for physical education, teacher certification programs include little if any required physical education content and practice. In contrast, programs that certify elementary school specialists normally require theoretical and practical preparation courses and field experiences geared to the elementary physical education environment.

Throughout most of Canada, secondary physical education specialists must also be certified to teach a classroom subject, which demands that part of the teacher preparation program be devoted to this content and pedagogy. Graduates of Québec PETE programs are certified only for K-11 physical education, and most programs other than McGill's do not have the flexibility for students to acquire an extensive concentration in an additional academic area.

Of necessity, 1-year consecutive PETE programs may limit physical education pedagogy to a single academic course and minimal practical experience, perhaps with no time allotted to physical education, even at the secondary level.

Concurrent and longer consecutive programs generally provide more opportunities for in-depth perusal of theory, involvement in activity/skills courses, and extensive field experiences. However, even in longer programs, methods courses may reflect general rather than content-specific pedagogy, and activity courses and field experiences may or may not include opportunities for learning to teach physical education. Field experiences occur in blocks of time as short as 1 week and as long as entire semesters, with total in-school experiences during the program ranging from 10 to 24 weeks.

PETE in Québec

Québec's education system is unique in some important ways. First of all, it features a required K-11 elementary and secondary curriculum followed by 2 years of study at the college level for students aspiring to attend university. Second, Québec is the only province that requires students to take physical education across all grades. Most of the other provinces require only one physical education course at the secondary level.

Three universities, including McGill, are mandated to prepare teachers for the English school system of Québec, complementing six French language institutions. Teacher certification in all academic disciplines requires 4 years of university study, and students are required to meet subject-specific teacher education exit profiles.

The PETE degree in Québec is based on 12 professional competencies that prepare graduates to teach physical education and