



The Advocate
Summer 2020

Melissa Bittner, PhD
Associate Professor, California State University, Long Beach

Barry Lavay, PhD
Professor, California State University, Long Beach

Garth Tymeson, PhD
Professor Emeritus, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse

Can APE Practicum Experiences Still be Effective Due to COVID?

APE Practicum

The benefits of adapted physical education (APE) practicum in physical education teacher education (PETE) programs have been well documented. Researchers describe these hands-on service-learning program experiences as important components to introductory APE courses in preparing preservice teachers to work with students with various disabilities (Folsom-Meeks et al., 1999; [Standal & Rugseth, 2014](#); Taliaferro & Bulger, 2020). Between 84 to 89% of undergraduate introductory APE courses have a practicum to supplement the in-class lecture ([Piletic & Davis, 2010](#); Taliaferro et al., 2017). These practicum experiences can lead to changes in attitude and increased perceived level of competence in one's ability to teach students with disabilities (Connolly 1994; Hodge & Jansma, 1999; Hodge, et al., 2002; Hodge, et al., 2003; Taliaferro & Bulger, 2020).

COVID Implications

However, in spring 2020, APE practicum experiences had to be adjusted as a traditional hands-on learning format was no longer possible due to COVID. University instructors quickly found themselves teaching in an online format with great uncertainty for how to modify their APE practicum experiences for preservice teacher candidates. Some programs will need to continue to adjust their



practicum to an online format, with others possibly also making this consideration as many universities are moving to a modified format for the 2020-21 academic year.

Need

Due to COVID in spring 2020, parents found themselves homeschooling with a shelter in place mandate. There were no playgrounds, trails, beaches, parks, or indoor entertainment facilities open for youth to engage in physical activity. Even with PK-12 school physical education programs being delivered virtually, there was still a need for more physical activity. Most parents do not have a background in kinesiology or physical education and were at a loss with what to do. In addition, university instructors had a class of preservice students who wanted to learn how to teach. One option to address these needs was to take the practicum experience online. Over the next academic year there will still be a need for APE practicum experiences to continue, through a total virtual or a hybrid format. Since spring 2020 delivering APE practicums online, what have we learned?

Strengths of an Online Practicum

Although not ideal, benefits still exist to conducting an APE practicum online. First, preservice students get opportunities to continue to develop their instructional planning and delivery skills. They write lesson plans, incorporate concepts such as universal design for learning, and can receive instructor as well as classmate feedback on their teaching. The instructor can watch the preservice students teach and give them feedback and have a debriefing session with a class discussion. Teachers in beginning stages of learning often rely too heavily on equipment; an online format challenges preservice teachers to instruct with limited to no equipment.

Another major benefit of an online APE practicum is familiarization with technology. Preservice teachers while designing their lessons become much more adept at Zoom, iMovie, and PowerPoint. There are many other technology add-ons that can increasingly enhance visuals when teaching (e.g., GIFs, Memojis). Other benefits of incorporating an online APE practicum during COVID include access to a



rich video resource. With lessons being recorded, the university instructor now has access to a large bank of teaching videos that can be used in the future for lecture and analysis. These archived videos can provide models for effective pedagogy and creativity as well as help set the bar high for future cohort groups of APE students, as they have opportunity to visually see examples of good online teaching instruction. Virtual teaching may better prepare preservice teachers for what they may potentially experience in the future. Many current physical education teachers were not prepared to step up to the challenge this year in many school districts when the decision to transition to a virtual platform was made.

A further advantage to continuing an online APE practicum includes grant funding. Many nonprofit organizations are open to funding opportunities for service-learning programs such as APE practicums. By continuing services via online, there is still potential for continued or new grant opportunities. Conducting an online APE practicum is excellent public relations for the university by serving not only the preservice teachers but also the community. For example, California State University, Long Beach (CSULB) President Jane Conoley recognized APE preservice students and instructors' abilities during COVID to adapt the practicum experience to an online setting and sent a congratulatory email recognizing their efforts.

Considerations for an Online Practicum

However, while there are many advantages for conducting an APE practicum online during COVID, there are also many considerations and challenges. A major drawback to online practicum is the lack of hands-on opportunity to teach. How can a preservice teacher learn to teach individuals with disabilities without ever touching and closely interacting with these students? Some lessons may be limited due to equipment or space restrictions. For example, it may be difficult to do a kicking lesson if a child does not have a soccer ball and lives in a small apartment.

In addition, feedback is difficult via Zoom as the preservice teacher can only see four participants at a time if they are screen sharing (i.e., showing a visual). Furthermore, internet connection for



preservice teachers conducting the practicum can be unstable at times (e.g., not enough bandwidth). Many families of participating youth may not have internet and thus cannot access these online practicum opportunities, particularly in low socioeconomic or rural areas. In addition, it can be a challenge involving parents, particularly because individuals with disabilities may need 1-on-1 assistance. This responsibility to assist, which usually falls to the teacher or paraprofessional, is now left to the parent. For example, some parents may lack the expertise to correct their child's movement errors and give them proper feedback.

It is easier to teach certain skills and content in an online setting (e.g., fitness, yoga). When given a choice, most preservice students will gravitate toward teaching these skills. Therefore, unit planning should be considered or the youth participating in the online practicum may constantly participate in the same type of physical activities and not be exposed to a diverse physical education program. In addition, specific types of disabilities should be considered when designing an online practicum. For example, a high functioning student with Down syndrome has different needs compared to a student who uses a wheelchair and has very limited physical functioning. Differentiation, or choices, should be carefully planned in advance so all students can be successful.

Another point of consideration should be the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) (20 U.S.C. § 1232g; 34 CFR Part 99), a Federal law that protects the privacy of student education records. For example, to address this at CSULB, preservice teachers were asked to fill out a photo/video release. If the preservice teacher was not comfortable, Zoom has the option to not show a picture or video on screen and preservice teaching was conducted in this manner. It is also recommended to have a disclaimer statement before engaging in physical activity to consult your physician or other health care professional before starting this or any other fitness program to determine if it is right for your needs. It should be noted, CSULB's online practicum does not show the faces/likeness of any participating youth. Thus, it is difficult to know the quality of views. Each video on



@LongBeachStateAPE ranges between 100 to 200 views, with the top videos getting over 600 views. But who is viewing, for how long, and perhaps most importantly, what is the quality of participation?

Conclusion

Teaching is both an art and a science. The science behind online practicums can clearly be continued. Preservice teachers can still develop lesson plans, practice their teaching, use differentiation, and receive feedback from instructors. However, in an online APE practicum, are we addressing the art of teaching? In some cases, perhaps yes, as the preservice teachers can still brainstorm to design lessons that reflect their creativity and personality. However, if a student has a behavioral issue or is not performing the skill or activity correctly, can preservice teachers adapt? Online practicums may be an option during the COVID crisis of 2020, but there are many variables that need to be addressed for adequate preservice teacher and child learning to take place.



References

- Connolly, M. (1994). Practicum experiences and journal writing in adapted physical education: Implications for teacher education. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly*, *11*, 306–328. doi:10.1123/apaq.11.3.306
- Folsom-Meek, S. L., Nearing, R. J., & Kalakian, L. H. (2000). Effects of an adapted physical education course in changing attitudes. *Clinical Kinesiology*, *54*(3), 52–58.
- Hodge, S. R., Davis, R., Woodard, R., & Sherrill, C. (2002). Comparison of practicum types in changing preservice teachers' attitudes and perceived competence. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly*, *19*(2), 155–171. PubMed ID: 28195772 doi:10.1123/apaq.19.2.155
- Hodge, S. R., & Jansma, P. (1999). Effects of contact time and location of practicum experiences on attitudes of physical education majors. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly*, *16*(1), 48–63. doi:10.1123/apaq.16.1.48
- Hodge, S. R., Tannehill, D., & Kluge, M.A. (2003). Exploring the meaning of practicum experiences for PETE students. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly*, *20*(4), 381–399. doi:10.1123/apaq.20.4.381
- Piletic, C., & Davis, R. (2010). Profile of the introduction to adapted physical education course within undergraduate physical education teacher education programs. *ICHPERSD Journal of Research*, *5*(2), 26–32.
- Standal, O., & Rugseth, G. (2014). Practicum in adapted physical activity: A Deweyinspired action research project. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly*, *31*(3), 219–239. PubMed ID: 25028475 doi:10.1123/apaq.2013-0105
- Taliaferro, A.R., Ayres, S.F., & Housner, L.D. (2017). A descriptive analysis of the application of PETE standards. *The Physical Educator*, *74*(4), 606–626. doi:10.18666/TPE-2017-V74-I4-7499
- Connolly 1994



Taliaferro, A. R. & Bulger, S. M. (2020). A delphi study of effective adapted physical education practicum experience. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly*, (37)1, 20-40.