

Current Issues and Improvement Strategies in the Professional Ethics Education for Government-Funded Physical Education Teacher Candidates: A Case Study of Sichuan Normal University

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Abstract: As a significant source of physical education teachers for rural and remote impoverished areas in China, government-funded physical education teacher candidates must possess high levels of professional teacher quality to meet the “new requirements” set forth for physical education teachers in the “Strong Teacher Plan for Basic Education in the New Era” and “Opinions on Comprehensively Deepening the Reform of Teacher Team Construction in the New Era.” The cultivation of teacher ethics and code of conduct is the foundation of all teacher behaviors, ensuring the teaching words and deeds, morality, and teaching activities of teacher candidates in basic education, and the key to standardizing practical teaching behavior in primary and secondary school physical education. This paper, based on interviews with expert evaluators from Sichuan Normal University, analyzes the current situation and main issues of teacher professional ethics education for government-funded physical education teacher candidates at Sichuan Normal University, dissects the influencing factors, and then proposes improvement strategies.

Keywords: Government-funded Physical Education Teacher Candidates; Teacher Professional Ethics Education; Issues; Improvement Strategies

1. Value Implications of Professional Ethics Education for Government-funded Physical Education Teacher Candidates

1.1 The Teacher Professional Ethics Education as the Paramount Task in the Training of Normal University Students

The report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China emphasizes the need to strengthen and promote comprehensive improvements in all indicators, comprehensive renewal in all sectors, comprehensive advancement in all industries, and comprehensive enhancement of educational quality at all levels. It places education at the forefront of providing talent for social development, highlighting the fundamental task of fully implementing the principle of “cultivating moral integrity and nurturing people.” This is aimed at training national pillars and outstanding talents for the construction of modernization with Chinese characteristics. As a high ground for talent cultivation and a vital center for ideological and cultural innovation, universities have an inescapable duty to uphold professional ethics education. As part of university education, the comprehensive implementation of teacher’s professional ethics education for teacher candidates is not only a basic requirement but also a primary task. From the perspective of mission, the in-depth development of teacher’s professional ethics education is essential for cultivating more outstanding educators for basic education who possess “ideal and belief, moral integrity, solid knowledge, and a benevolent heart,” thereby enhancing the overall quality of the education sector.

1.2 Undertaking Teacher Professional Ethics Education as the Primary Imperative in the Cultivation of University teacher candidates

On August 10, 2018, the Ministry of Education promulgated the “Implementation Measures for the Government-Funded Education of Teacher Candidates Directly under the Ministry of Education,” transitioning from the “tuition-free” policy of 2007 to a “government-funded” model, and reducing the mandatory service period at the grassroots level from 10 years to 6 years [1]. This initiative aims to encourage and support outstanding teacher candidates across the country to continuously teach in remote urban areas and rural villages, thereby providing quality educational and teaching resources to underdeveloped regions. This is intended to alter the current state of educational lag and promote sustainable social, political, cultural, and economic development in these areas. In the cultivation process of government-funded teacher candidates, the “standards of teacher’s ethics” undoubtedly constitute a vital indicator and a significant measure for standardizing and enhancing the overall quality of these students. The content of these standards encompasses professional beliefs, skills, spirit, and ethics of the teaching profession. Therefore, embedding the education of teacher’s ethics standards in the training of government-funded teacher candidates is fundamental to their growth and success.

1.3 Implementing Teacher Ethics Standards as the Intrinsic Necessity for the Development of Physical Education Teachers

In the present era, reports of teachers’ ethical misconduct have become increasingly common, and issues related to teachers’ professional behavior, including ethical standards, professional competence, professional integrity, and professional beliefs, have garnered widespread attention from all sectors of society. On November 14, 2018, the Ministry of Education issued the “Ten Principles of Professional Conduct for Primary and Secondary School Teachers in the New Era,” advocating for resolute and effective measures to comprehensively investigate and rectify teachers’ unethical and code-violating behaviors [2]. However, against the backdrop of policies such as “Incorporating Physical Education into the Middle School Entrance Examination,” “Incorporating Physical Education into the College Entrance Examination,” and “Double Reduction (Reduction of Homework Burden and Reduction of Off-campus Tutoring Burden)”, which have spurred the rapid development of the physical education sector, the ethical standards, teaching abilities, teaching beliefs, ideological character, political identity, theoretical identity, and emotional values of physical education teacher candidates in normal universities are facing severe challenges. The role of professional ethical education and its assessment for physical education teacher candidates in the realm of physical education instruction is particularly prominent, making the optimization of related work increasingly important. The thorough implementation of ethical standards has also become an urgent necessity for the professional development of physical education teachers.

2. Current Issues in Professional Ethics Education for Government-funded Physical Education Teacher Candidates

2.1 Insufficiency in the Targeting and Focus of Teacher Professional Ethics Education Curriculum

At the current stage, the ultimate goal of the Physical Education and Health curriculum, guided by the principle of “Health First,” is to promote the comprehensive development of students’ physical and mental well-being. Guided by the core competencies (motor skills, healthy behaviors, and sportsmanship), the physical education curriculum emphasizes an integrated structural teaching approach of “Learning, Practicing, and Competing.” At Sichuan Normal University, the educational content related to the professional ethics of physical education government-funded teacher candidates is limited, with most of it being part of the general curriculum for all teacher candidates. The arrangement of course hours specifically targeting the professional ethics for this unique group of physical education government-funded teacher candidates is clearly insufficient, with the course content being inadequate, not diverse, and not applicable. Furthermore, within the mainstream curriculum of professional education courses, the actual proportion of teaching that involves knowledge and skills related to professional ethics in sports is not high, and the curriculum includes a limited amount of content related to the education of professional ethics. Moreover, the curriculum for cultivating the professional ethics of physical education government-funded teacher candidates is predominantly theoretical, which does not easily align with the fundamental training objectives of physical education as a discipline. This disjoint leads to a higher likelihood of “deviant” behaviors

among physical education government-funded teacher candidates in the specific context of educational practice.

2.2 Monolithic Implementation of Teacher Professional Ethics Education Curriculum

Through in-depth research on an extensive array of data, it has been discovered that many educators persist in adhering to the traditional lecture-based teaching model, which confines students to acquiring knowledge solely from textbooks and deprives them of opportunities for self-exploration. Moreover, numerous teachers merely attempt to engage students through brief demonstrations, lacking innovative pedagogical strategies. Concurrently, within the limited scope of teacher professional ethics education content, there are issues such as insufficient targeting, superficial case studies, an overemphasis on moralizing, and inadequate integration of theory with practice, which hinder the teacher professional ethics education of government-funded teacher candidates from keeping pace with the rhythm of modern educational advancements. Although this teaching approach may facilitate the conduct of classes for educators, it is inherently detrimental to the professional development of teacher ethics among government-funded physical education teacher candidates and is more suited to the education of general teacher candidates. In the new stage of development, rural primary and secondary school physical education teachers must possess a high level of professional competence and adhere to stringent teacher ethics standards to meet the educational and teaching requirements of “one specialty, multiple abilities” and “one teacher, multiple roles.” Only the implementation of a diverse range of types, modes, and forms of teacher professional ethics education courses can fulfill the demands of professionalization. However, as evidenced by the teacher professional ethics education curriculum for government-funded physical education teacher candidates at Sichuan Normal University, despite achieving some measure of success, there remains a drawback in the monolithic implementation.

2.3 Lack of Continuity in Teacher Ethical Education Curriculum

Upon analyzing the division and allocation of class hours for the teacher ethics curriculum within the training programs, it has been identified that there is an insufficient continuity in the teacher professional ethics education courses and a lack of continuity in the content of professional ethics education throughout the four-year undergraduate period for physical education teacher candidates. The primary manifestations of this issue include a concentration of theoretical courses on teacher ethics in the first two years, with a near absence in the latter two years; an uneven distribution of practical courses (referred to as the “second classroom”) in terms of class hours, without established standards for scheduling or participation formats, and an overlap in the number of participants and subjects, indicating a lack of continuity in the practical application of teacher professional ethics education. While the first two years of teacher professional ethics education are indeed crucial, they cannot substitute for the latter two years of such education. During their junior and senior years, government-funded normal university students are predominantly engaged in off-campus internships or probationary teaching. During this phase, with increased interaction with students and teaching practice, there is a greater need for “enlightening” teacher professional ethics education to regulate their instructional behaviors and for targeted guidance in ethical standards to facilitate their professional development. In summary, the teacher ethics curriculum at Sichuan Normal University lacks continuity and the stages of the program lack specificity in their approach.

3. Influencing Factors on Professional Ethics Education for Government-funded Physical Education Teacher Candidates

3.1 Individuals: Low Self-Expectations, Dim Awareness of Teacher Ethics

For students in the government-funded physical education teacher training program, the fulfillment of the specified training indicators set by the educational objectives, which leads to the satisfaction of graduation requirements, is typically rewarded with a secured job. Consequently, the self-positioning of these students often revolves around how to complete courses to obtain credits. Coupled with the low demands on teacher ethics standards in terms of training objectives, curriculum design, and teaching methods, these students may easily lower their behavioral standards and weaken their self-awareness.

Sports professional cognition refers to the understanding and comprehension that individuals develop regarding their professional role, responsibilities, values, and behavioral patterns while engaging in sports-related work. Firstly, sports professional cognition can facilitate the formation and

reinforcement of awareness regarding teacher ethics standards. When government-funded physical education teacher candidates have a clear understanding of the responsibilities and mission they are to undertake as physical education teachers, they can more distinctly grasp the essence and objectives of teacher ethics standards.

3.2 Educational Institutions: Lack of Curriculum Distinctiveness, Lagging Pedagogical Methods

Through in-depth field investigation and statistical analysis, it has been revealed that the curriculum design for the teacher ethics standard education for students in the public physical education program at Sichuan Normal University is not prominently featured, and the methods employed for teacher ethics standard education lack professional distinctiveness. The current teacher ethics standard education courses predominantly focus on professional ethics, lack specialization, feature outdated teaching materials, and cover relatively limited content. Therefore, in order to keep pace with the times, it is necessary to update some of the content in a timely manner and adopt innovative teaching models to enhance the quality of teacher ethics standard education. Moreover, the intensity of teacher ethics standard education is weak and lacks sustainability. Currently, the teacher ethics standard education for government-funded physical education teacher candidates at Sichuan Normal University is conducted over several semesters, with the majority of semesters offering hardly any teacher ethics standard education courses. Such discontinuity in the curriculum is clearly inappropriate. Simultaneously, the brief exposure to teacher ethics standard courses within a short period of time fails to achieve long-lasting functional effects. The perpetuation of this low-level state of teacher ethics standard education will further diminish the already faint impact of teacher ethics standard education.

3.3 Society: Profound Misunderstandings of Specializations, Restricted Cultivation of Teacher

Currently, Chinese societal values, perspectives on employment, and professional outlooks are still influenced by certain elements of traditional Chinese culture, leading to a significant level of misconceptions regarding sports-related majors. Firstly, the unique nature of physical education necessitates that government-funded physical education teacher candidates, in addition to mastering teaching skills and knowledge, should emphasize individualization and differentiation. These candidates must acquire an understanding of each student or athlete's physical condition, health issues, interests, and hobbies in order to formulate training plans and arrangements that suit their individual characteristics. Consequently, in the education of teacher ethics, government-funded physical education teacher candidates need to learn how to focus on individual differences [3], respect the characteristics and needs of students or athletes, and prioritize the cultivation of moral character and holistic development. In their daily teaching and training, these candidates must establish close interactive relationships with students or athletes. Within the realm of teacher professional ethics education, government-funded physical education teacher candidates need to learn how to build positive interpersonal relationships with students or athletes [4], as well as how to address various problems and conflicts that arise during the teaching process, ensuring the smooth progression of teaching and training activities.

4. Strategies for the Improvement of Teacher Ethics Standards Education for Government-funded Physical Education Teacher Candidates

4.1 Individuals: Clarification of Mission and Responsibility, Enhancement of Teacher Ethics Cultivation

Firstly, government-funded physical education teacher candidates should have a clear understanding of their identity and positioning, and explicitly recognize the mission and responsibilities they bear. Secondly, as candidates in the government-funded physical education program, they need to comprehend the essence, principles, and methods of educational instruction, acquire theoretical knowledge and practical skills in physical education, and master scientific teaching methods. Thirdly, these candidates should approach their studies with a high sense of responsibility and professional dedication, actively engaging in various learning opportunities to continually enhance their professional competence and comprehensive abilities. Fourthly, government-funded physical education teacher candidates should flexibly employ diverse learning strategies, such as reading, listening, practicing, etc., emphasizing the integration of theory with practice, and diligently engaging in reflection and summarization. Fifthly, these candidates need to establish correct professional and life perspectives,

respect students, show concern for their growth, maintain strict self-discipline, and uphold good professional ethics and behavioral standards. Sixthly, government-funded physical education teacher candidates should set ambitious professional goals, define their career direction and development plan, continuously update their knowledge and skills, and strive to become outstanding educators.

4.2 Educational Institutions: Optimization of Training Systems, Strengthening of Teacher Professional Ethics Education

Firstly, it is essential to optimize the training system for government-funded physical education teacher candidates. This involves conducting scientific planning and design based on the actual needs of the majority of public physical education students, establishing both short-term and long-term goals. Secondly, under the premise of achieving an effective integration of incentive measures and management constraints, a variety of forms should be employed to establish a long-term operational supervision and management mechanism to ensure the implementation of teacher ethics standard cultivation.

Subsequently, the training program for government-funded physical education teacher candidates should be refined. Firstly, the curriculum for general teacher ethics standard education should be expanded, with an emphasis on practical teacher ethics standard education courses, thereby enhancing the teacher ethics standards of government-funded physical education teacher candidates in practice. Secondly, in line with the characteristics and needs of these candidates, the assessment of teacher ethics standards during the internship phase should be increased, along with strengthened management and supervision of internship tutors to ensure effective cultivation of teacher ethics standards during the internship process.

Finally, it is necessary to introduce additional teacher ethics standard education courses for government-funded physical education teacher candidates. Firstly, specialized courses in teacher ethics standard education should be established to cultivate the teacher ethics standards of these candidates from multiple aspects. Secondly, interactive communication should be increased to enhance student participation and self-learning abilities. Thirdly, case teaching should be strengthened to guide students in applying teacher ethics standards to specific teaching practices. Fourthly, interdisciplinary curriculum education should be conducted to improve the overall quality of government-funded physical education teacher candidates.

4.3 Nation: Implementation of Educational Mechanisms, Perfection of Teacher Ethics Framework

At the national level, the implementation of the teacher ethics standard education mechanism should be addressed. The approach involves a multifaceted strategy to strengthen the cultivation and establishment of the teacher ethics standard education mechanism, targeting specific issues. During the stage of normal education, the construction of the educational system and curriculum system should be enhanced to create a seamless transition in teacher ethics standard education from the institution of higher education to the employing school, thereby maintaining the continuity of a robust teacher professional ethics education system [5].

Subsequently, a model for teacher ethics standard education should be constructed. Firstly, the cadre of educators in teacher ethics standard education should be expanded to ensure the comprehensive “grounding” of teacher ethics standard education. Secondly, a more efficient and rapid construction of the teacher professional ethics education model should be pursued, with the refinement of the evaluation mechanism for the teacher ethics standards of government-funded physical education teacher candidates. This will promote the improvement of grassroots teacher ethics standard education efforts, and drive the development of teacher ethics standard education courses and the perfection of the curriculum system across various schools [6].

4.4 Society: Cultivation of Correct Values, Creation of Favorable Environment

Societal values are crucial indicators for promoting social development. Firstly, the cultivation of correct values should be emphasized. Through educational and ideological guidance, teacher candidates should be encouraged to clarify their professional responsibilities and missions, thereby establishing correct professional values. Secondly, the spirit of justice should be promoted. Government-funded physical education teacher candidates should adhere to the principles of justice, fairness, and transparency in their interactions with students. Thirdly, a social environment characterized by justice,

fairness, and integrity should be fostered, allowing teacher candidates to develop sound professional ethical standards through environmental influence.

Furthermore, from the perspective of social politics, several measures should be taken. Firstly, the institutional construction should be strengthened across various aspects, including legislation, enforcement, and supervision, to clearly define the responsibilities and rights of all parties and effectively protect the legitimate rights and interests of educators. Secondly, the level of social governance should be enhanced by strengthening the supervision of schools and teacher education institutions, ensuring the equitable distribution of educational resources and the universal access to quality education. Thirdly, a mechanism for public opinion supervision should be established to ensure that administrators adhere to the principles of fairness and justice during law enforcement, guiding government-funded physical education teacher candidates to consciously comply with professional norms.

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