

Out of the Gate: Turn Your PETE Majors into Interview Front-Runners

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After completing four to five years of undergraduate schooling, physical education teacher education (PETE) majors are ready for their first professional teaching job. Even though PETE majors are often well-educated, breaking into the job market may be a stressful, and at times, negative experience. However, with proper training on how to approach and conduct the interview process, the experience can often be positive and meaningful to the job applicant. Such training should include the compilation of a personal portfolio; attendance and involvement in appropriate conferences and seminars; mock interviews conducted by peers, faculty, and local business executives; and participation in real-world settings.

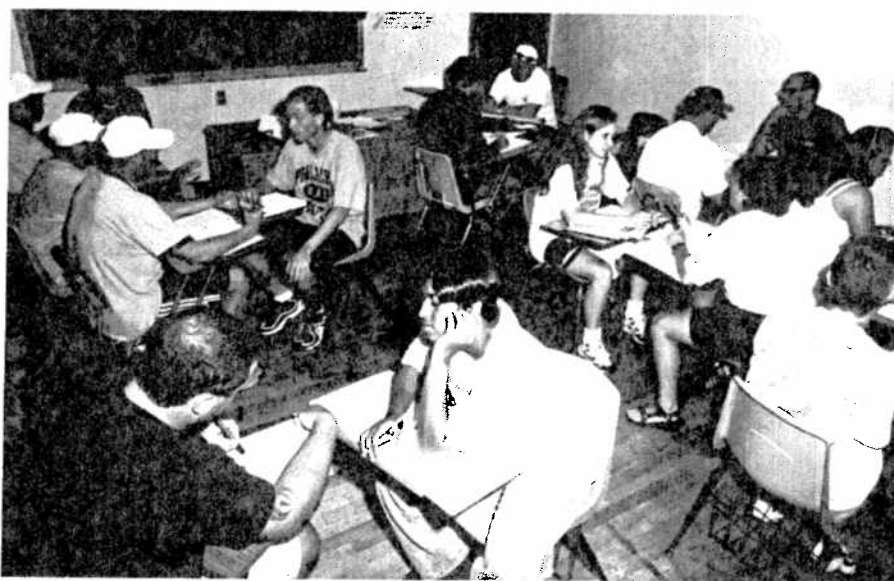
According to Arter and Spandel (1992, p. 36) a portfolio is "a purposeful collection of student work that tells a story of the student's efforts, progress, or achievement in a given area." Hannam (1995) suggests that portfolios can assist with job searching. In a student's senior year the complete portfolio might be useful to potential employers as evidence of the student's abilities. A pilot project conducted at Illinois State University by Waishwell, Morrow, Micke, and Keyser (1996) asked a number of questions relating to the utilization of portfolios. One question asked students to discuss the benefits of developing a portfolio. By far the largest category of responses pointed towards the benefits of a portfolio in job searching and interviewing. The students felt that prospective employers could gain an understand-

ing of their potential and what they are like as a person. These same students also felt that they would be in a more positive position to acquire a job than those who did not have examples of their qualifications.

The importance of attending and participating in state, regional, and national conferences should be self-evident. Attending these conferences enables PETE majors to keep abreast of recent trends in the profession and to network with other professionals. It is important for PETE majors to establish visibility with those who are responsible for the hiring of teachers in their school systems. In addition, taking the initiative to make a presentation either on their own, or as a co-presenter with another student or faculty member, will make an even more favorable impression on those who

make hiring decisions. This participation will also make a nice addition to any resumé. At Appalachian State University, the student majors club places a strong emphasis on this aspect of the job interview process, and the physical education faculty makes it a point to involve as many students as possible in presenting, presiding, and greeting at appropriate conventions. This has had a very positive effect on the marketability of Appalachian State physical education graduates.

Most of the literature concerning interviews deals with the research method of using the interview as a means of collecting data (Lomax, 1996; Patton, 1990; Zidon, 1996). There is little literature available on how to best train and educate PETE majors to be more successful during the professional interview process.



Pairs of students ask one another potential interview questions.

One excellent source is Medley's book *Sweaty Palms* (1993). This text includes interview basics, preparation techniques, and help with making the decision as to whether or not to accept a position if it is offered. Medley also discusses types of interviews, questions and answers, dress, discrimination, confidence, enthusiasm, and honesty. *Sweaty Palms* is the most comprehensive guide to the interview process and is highly recommended for any prospective interviewee.

This article will give PETE faculty members and students, as well as any physical education, recreation or dance teacher in-depth, innovative, and practical interview methods to help them gain employment. Interviewing is a skill, and, like any other skill, the more you practice, the better you become. The following interview practice situations progress from simple to complex in order to prepare the prospective interviewee for the real-world interview process.

Peer Practicum

One of the first and simplest steps to prepare candidates is to have a PETE faculty member list 15 to 20 questions typically asked during job interviews. The questions are typed on small individual pieces of paper and placed in an envelope. After discussing interviewing processes and tips with the students, have them pair-up with one

envelope per pair. One student randomly draws a question out of the envelope and reads it to the partner. Then the partner must respond to the question within a few seconds. After the response, the questioner provides feedback to the respondent on how he or she handled the question, and then they discuss the question. The envelope is rotated to the other partner, and the process is repeated. As questions are answered, remove them from the stack. Ask questions such as: "What will I see when I see the best of you and your performance?" and "Under what circumstances did you last lose your composure?" Also useable are more typical questions, such as: "How will you handle discipline?" or "What is your philosophy of physical education teaching?" See table 1 for additional questions. Prepare enough envelopes to handle half of your largest class size.

Peer Interview

The next interviewing step is to give students a hypothetical job description and the resumés of the final two candidates for the hypothetical job. Inform the students that these two candidates will be in class for the next meeting and that each student must decide which candidate looks best on paper and come to class with three questions to ask each candidate. Both resumés should offer very qualified

candidates, but each candidate's resumé should reveal different professional interests. Determining the "best" candidate on paper should present a difficult choice. The PETE faculty member then secretly selects two students from the class to become the two finalists. These students must learn the resumé material of "their" character and create other material in their backgrounds to fill in the holes in their mock resumés. The PETE faculty member primes these two individuals by giving them hints as to the types of questions and areas of questioning to expect.

At the beginning of the next class, both candidates are introduced and sit on opposite sides in the front of the classroom, facing the class. Their resumé names are written on the board behind them. Before the interview begins, the class votes for its choice for the job, and the results are recorded by the candidates' names. After 20 to 30 minutes of questioning the candidates, the class rethinks its original vote, which was based solely on the paper resumés, and casts a new vote. The new tallies are placed on the board and compared with the first tallies. Discussion ensues on why members did or did not change votes. Discussion items may include, but are not limited to, responses, questions, mannerisms, appearance, fidgeting, eye contact, posture, and grammar. Discussion usually lasts between 15 and 30 minutes. At the end, the two candidates describe how it felt to be interviewed and what difficulties they had in responding to questions.

PETE Faculty Interviews

The next phase in interview preparation is to have PETE faculty members interview PETE students. This process can be completed as an assignment or as an ongoing part of the PETE majors club. The student (candidate) must present his or her own real resumé to the faculty member a week in advance and set up an appointment for the interview. The student will be evaluated on the important interviewing skills that have been pre-

Table 1. Additional Interview Questions

- What do you do to get away from your job?
- What, in your opinion, is the difference between the average coach and a great coach?
- What motivates you?
- Why are you applying for this position?
- What will you add to our program?
- In your last job, what is the one thing you are most proud of having done?
- Why should we hire you?
- What makes you special?
- Why are you changing jobs?
- Where do you see yourself in ten years?
- Who paid for your education?
- How do you keep fit?

viously discussed in class or in club meetings. Items such as, but not limited to, punctuality, appearance, honesty, verbal communication skills, knowledge about the new school, questions asked by the interviewee, attitudes, and manners would be included in the evaluation process. The interview takes place in a secluded place such as a faculty office or conference room, and lasts for about 20 or 30 minutes. At the completion of the interview, the faculty member and student discuss the interview and how they each felt about the student's performance. At the end of the discussion, the resumé is returned with written comments and a brief exchange concerning its positive and negative points ensues between the candidate and the faculty member. Interviews by phone and with multiple interviewers can also be conducted under the foregoing guidelines.

The Use of Meals

The interview process between faculty member and student may take place at a meal function. If a meal function cannot be arranged, interviewing over a snack is also a possibility. There are times when job candidates are invited for breakfast, lunch, or dinner as part of the interview process. Unfortunately, many people have had no formal training in the etiquette of eating. Spending a part of a class or club meeting on basic eating etiquette may just be what is needed for a candidate to positively impress a prospective employer. Conversely, poor eating manners could certainly make a viable candidate lose a job. Points of etiquette might include where the knife should be placed while not in use, where one should place the knife and fork when finished eating, and how to correctly remove that piece of hard stuff in the food that is now chewed up in your mouth.

Videotaping

Videotaping the faculty-student interview can provide excellent feedback on the student's performance. The faculty member and student may view

the tape immediately after the interview discussion, or at a later time that is convenient for both parties. Sometimes it is best for the students to view the video tape several times by themselves before they sit down and review it with the PETE faculty member. This previewing process evokes a better discussion during the review of the video tape with the PETE faculty member. It is a good idea to use a four-head VCR so that slow motion and stop action may be used during the review process. The stop action captures the essence of the moment for specific instances during the interview. After completing the review of the video tape, the faculty member should give the student at least five positive points about his or her interview performance, and then give some points that need improvement. This should be done on a special written form completed jointly by the faculty member and the student. The form should include those items mentioned in the PETE faculty interview section and should be designed by the PETE faculty member before the videotaping. See table 2 for additional items that may be included in the evaluation

form. The joint completion of the form, as opposed to only a faculty report, exerts a stronger influence for improving the PETE student's interview skills.

Local School Officials and Business Leaders

Another phase of pre-job preparation is to invite local school administrators to conduct mock interviews with the PETE students. This can be completed at the local schools, during classes, or during professional major club meetings. Sometimes arrangements can be made to have five or six administrators on hand during the same time period. For example, all administrators come to an hour-long, evening meeting of the majors club. They receive copies of the students' resúmes before the meeting and hold ten-minute interviews, followed by five-minute discussion periods with the students at the meeting. Therefore, each administrator can interview, with discussion, four candidates during the meeting. Multiply this by six administrators, and you have provided interview experiences for 24 students. This process can also work for classes, par-

Table 2. Twelve Tips for a Good Interview

1. Dress in a suit for males, and a dress or suit for females.
2. Arrive on time.
3. Be yourself—don't put on an act.
4. Spend time before the interview to learn about the school, the PE and athletic program, and the school system so that you show you have taken an interest in the job and can ask more specific school-related questions.
5. Do not fidget or use mannerisms like uh's and ok's.
6. On tough questions, think briefly and put your thoughts together in a logical fashion. You do not always have to respond instantaneously.
7. Have a firm, but not a crunching, handshake both at the start and at the end of the interview.
8. If you don't understand a question, paraphrase it or ask to have it repeated in a different form.
9. Use positive body language and good eye contact.
10. Listen carefully.
11. Thank the interviewer and express again how interested you are in the job.
12. Write a thank-you letter as soon as possible.

ticularly those scheduled late in the afternoon and evening.

If there are not enough local public and private school administrators, the PETE faculty member can ask peer PETE faculty, PETE administrators and/or other college faculty and athletic administrators to help with the interview process. Local business leaders may also be used to help with this process. A side benefit of using community members is that it creates good public relations between the PETE department and local professionals. It also allows for local school personnel and business leaders to meet your PETE students and receive an "inside look" at their preparation.

Real-World Setting

The next logical step is to practice in a real-world setting. Many colleges hold job fairs and/or career days in which they invite school officials to campus in order to interview prospective employees from the senior class. Strongly suggest to the students, especially the seniors, that this would be a particularly good time to refine their skills. Also suggest that they should participate in as many job interviews as possible, even if the job is not of interest. During this phase of their interview training, they learn how different each interview experience can be. They will learn that some interviewers do all of the talking and others do little, and that some interviewers are aggressive and others are passive. They will also learn that even though many interviewers will be professional, some will not be. During this "real" interview, PETE students will begin to realize what it takes to be prepared to make a positive impression during the interview process.

Sometime during the training sessions, expose your PETE majors to *Job Choices* (1998), a yearly publication by the National Association of Colleges and Employers. This publication is an excellent source for the job-related knowledge and skills needed for obtaining a professional position. *Job Choices* contains specific information on how to prepare for interviews, what to ex-



Students interview two classmates playing the role of job-seeker.

pect during an interview, how to react to difficult questions, and the importance of first impressions. Also included is information on letter writing, resumé writing, table manners, and what is available in the job market both nationally and internationally. Most college career development centers receive this publication and can provide multiple copies to the PETE faculty member for use with their students. The new copies usually arrive on campus in late August or early September.

The final step in the process is for PETE majors to use their interview knowledge to gain that first job. It is hoped that the tips contained in this article give the PETE reader some guidance for obtaining the knowledge and skills required to perform at an optimal level in the interview process. Remember, interviewing is a skill that improves with practice. Practicing from simple to complex, as indicated in this article, will create a more positive interview experience for all those involved in the process. Our personal experiences with the processes included in this article have been positive, and they have made both the interviewees and interviewers better participants in the interview process.

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