



## PREPARING

# Health and Physical Education Students *for a Job Interview*

By Jane Lynes

**W**hen it comes to preparing our future health and physical educators, physical education teacher education (PETE) program professors do a good job with pedagogy. As a result, our student teachers are well equipped to go into the schools and begin their career. But, before teachers actually start their career, are we as PETE educators neglecting an important skill? Do we prepare these future teachers for an actual job interview? Furthermore, do we teach them how to prepare a teaching resume or a strong cover letter? In today's world of electronics, you would almost think there would be an app for that. So, what can be done to make a teacher candidate stand out from the crowd of other job-seeking candidates?

I would assert that hands-on application, including practice with resume writing and mock interviewing, is something that is needed by our majors. This assumption was confirmed to me through the interview process of a recent PETE graduate from our program. This student was a good, solid teacher; a non-traditional student who had served in the military and had a 4.0 grade point average. Despite having several interviews, he has yet to be hired. A discussion with this student revealed that some of his interview answers were less than appropriate. In another example of the need for job preparation and interviewing skills, a second student made it to the final cut for a job, but his response to one question during the interview disqualified him from the position and another person was hired.

As these two examples seem to validate the need for job and interview preparation, the question becomes, how do we go about this process? My background is in teaching and leadership in secondary schools. Throughout my career, I have made many professional connections and worked with a plethora of teachers, counselors and administrators, as well as many other educational professionals. Not only was I in a position to see

what principals looked for in a candidate, I was actively involved in the interview process. Using this past experience as my guideline, I have created a series of tasks for my students to participate in during the final class that they take before they are placed in the field for student-teaching.

The project begins with the formation of a cover letter, followed by the creation of a guided resume, and culminates with a mock interview. This mock interview is conducted by a retired high school principal, whom I will call HH. She is an experienced and highly-qualified principal, having served as a principal at all three grade levels (elementary, middle and high). HH comes to the university to conduct the mock interviews with each senior. The interviews are conducted in a conference room, lending authenticity to the experience.

Students are given a template to use for the teaching resume, as well as suggestions for the cover letter design and content. Pointers and suggestions are given in class based on my previous experiences with real-life interviews and those of previous classes' "mock" interviews. A lecture, discussion and handouts provide tips for writing the resume and cover letter. After completing these documents, the students submit them for review and both I and their classmates provided feedback. Students then make the recommended changes to their resume and resubmit it. A class period is dedicated to reviewing the final version of the cover letters and resumes and providing peer feedback. The resumes and cover letters are then mailed to the principal (HH) for her to review. This provides her with an opportunity to learn a little about each student prior to the interviews.

The next step in the project is to schedule the principal's visit in the last week or two of classes. Interviews are set in 20- to 30-minute blocks, depending on the time HH has available to conduct the interviews and the number of students in the class. Students are assigned a time schedule for when their interview will be held. They are asked to come to the interview dressed professionally, which was also defined during a class lecture.

HH discusses the details of the "mock job opening" with each individual candidate and then asks a set of prepared questions. The questions are not shared in advance with the students. One of the questions that is asked routinely is, "What sport would you be willing to coach?" HH also allows the students to ask their own set of questions about the "school" and job opening. She then provides students with immediate feedback and suggestions for how they could improve their interview. When all of the interviews have been conducted, HH and I discuss how the students performed during their interviews. Additionally, HH informs students, based on their resume and interview, whether she would or would not hire them for the position and why or why not.

In an effort to determine what characteristics principals seek in a candidate, I have interviewed some principals in the field. The following are comments that they shared about their personal hiring practices.

- "I look at the information they include — specifically professional organizations/opportunities that the applicant engaged in."

- When asked about resume length, the response was, "Yes, length matters. One page is best and the more professional, the better."
- About characteristics, traits and so on the reply was, "They should be sure of themselves but not obnoxious."
- Respondents also stated that the interviewee's handshake is important.
- Finally, when asked what would be most impressive about a candidate, they responded that "How the interviewees answer the questions" is most critical. They stated that answers should be direct and straightforward. "Interviewees should take a moment and really think about the question before answering. This shows the applicant is taking the interview seriously. Also, if an interviewee does not know the answer to a question, they should be honest about not knowing. A follow-up by them showing interest in the issue posed in the unknown question is equally important, as it shows interest in learning." (Anonymous principals, personal communication, October 11, 2018.)

In the last step of the project, students complete a brief survey to share their feelings about the interview process. Most students are impressed by HH and the enthusiasm she exhibits while conducting the interviews, as well as the information and advice that she provides. The majority have reported that the interview was very beneficial to them, as it made them feel more relaxed about the interview process. Many students have also shared that the mock interview and job preparation project helped prepare them for their future interviews by letting them know what to expect. My goal with this project is for it to help students be more knowledgeable and confident in preparing for and participating in their first job interview. S

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## Submissions Welcome!

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