

# EXPLORING PHYSICAL EDUCATION PRESERVICE TEACHERS' ETHICAL DISPOSITIONS DURING SCHOOL PLACEMENT

*EXPLORANDO AS DISPOSIÇÕES ÉTICAS DOS FUTUROS  
PROFESSORES DE EDUCAÇÃO FÍSICA DURANTE O ESTÁGIO  
PEDAGÓGICO* 

*EXPLORANDO LAS DISPOSICIONES ÉTICAS DE LOS FUTUROS  
PROFESORES DE EDUCACIÓN FÍSICA DURANTE EL PRACTICUM* 

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**Abstract:** Codes of ethics are essential components of high-quality education, considering they help uphold shared universal values. The role transition experienced during the school placement carries paradoxical notions between pre-established images of teaching and the reality experienced. The purpose of this study was to explore ethical dispositions of preservice teachers at the end of their school placement. We examined 74 school placement reports, written by preservice teachers enrolled in a master's degree in teaching Physical Education at a Portuguese public university. We followed a qualitative methodology and performed thematic content analysis. Findings showed that the participants' ethical dispositions were primarily reflected in their engagement in professional development, building effective relationships, personal conduct, commitment to pupils' learning, teamwork, commitment to one's own learning, pedagogical content knowledge, initiative and responsibility, embracing innovation, and critical and reflective analysis. Our findings support enhancing ethical training for new teachers throughout their initial teacher education.

**Keywords:** Professional ethics. Initial teacher education. School placement. Physical Education. Ethical disposition.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Ethics is commonly understood as the philosophical interpretation of the principles that guide human action. Codes of ethics, often known as codes of conduct or professional codes, are accepted ethical norms and professional guidelines of conduct that attempt to strengthen someone's commitment and efficiency while also providing self-regulatory ground rules. The absence (or inadequacy) of integrity and ethical conduct in the field of education is incompatible with educational purposes (Nuland; Khandelwal, 2006). This article addresses preservice teachers' reported ethical dispositions at the end of the Physical Education school placement, compulsory during initial teacher education.

The purpose of developing and improving the quality of education generally aims at perceivable outcomes, namely class size, learning time and materials, infrastructure and facilities, and teacher qualifications (Poisson, 2009). Education quality is seldom associated with outcomes such as teachers' commitment, ability to help every student, ethical and professional conduct, and responsible reasoning. These codes are seen as vital elements of high-quality education, considering they ensure that universal values are shared by all. According to Poisson (2009), these are urgently important for the development of quality education for all, including the promotion of global principles such as honesty and integrity. For that reason, numerous scholars (Gluchmanová, 2015; Hendrikx, 2020; Warnick; Silverman, 2011) argue that ethics is an indispensable domain in teachers' work because its values can be modelled for pupils (Costa; McNamee; Lacerda, 2015). Nevertheless, the significance of these codes is contested owing to struggles in understanding them, a lack of ability to implement them, and, most importantly, a lack of education for teachers (Poisson, 2009).

According to data from the International Institute for Educational Planning (2021), 76 nations throughout the world have a code of conduct, a code of ethics, or a professional code for teachers. Some countries, such as Malta and Italy, have a government-established national-level code. Teachers' unions in other countries, such as Denmark and Finland, have formed a national-level code. Other nations, like Australia and the United States of America, have state-specific regional codes. However, unlike in the international context, qualified teachers in Portugal are not required to adopt key principles of a code of ethics since these professionals lack structured, explicit, and objective criteria. However, there is some political interest from national stakeholders in deciding and establishing conditions for teachers. There has been an increase in the legal priority given to professional ethics, starting with the Comprehensive Law on the Education System (Law no. 56/86 of 14 of October) published in 1986 (Portugal, 1986), in which ethical concerns are implied but required ethics in practice are not clearly stated. This law has been amended several times over the years, but without any adjustments regarding teachers' ethical commitments.

The legal establishment of Decree-Law no. 240/2001 of August 30<sup>th</sup> (Portugal, 2001) helped address an ethical gap by approving the General Profile of Teaching Performance. Expectations for different aspects of teachers' professionalism are laid

out in four dimensions in that document: professional, social, and ethical dimensions; development of teaching and learning dimensions; participation in school and relationship with the community dimension; and lifelong professional development dimension. In certain ways, this Decree-Law standardises the teaching profession's know-how and social competences, functioning almost as a code of professional practice (due to the lack of a better one).

Teacher qualification courses in Portugal were restructured in response to the Bologna Process (a higher education reform agreement between European countries to establish harmony of quality and recognition of higher education qualifications). This resulted in the adoption of Decree-Law no. 79/2014 of May 14<sup>th</sup>, which established the need for ethical training during initial teacher education (Portugal, 2014). However, there is no indication of how ethical dispositions should be taught and assessed: whether as a stand-alone course or as a cross-curricular course.

The teaching profession is complex and fraught with doubt and uncertainty, as evidenced during initial teacher education (Alves *et al.*, 2019). As a result, developing theoretical and practical understanding of ethics is critical (Gluchmanová, 2017). There are several philosophical viewpoints in education on the need to teach ethics during initial teacher education and what ethical education should look like (Warnick; Silverman, 2011). Some authors (Aurin; Maurer, 1993; Boon, 2011) suggest that teaching professional ethics is vital, with an emphasis on learning how to apply ethical hypotheses to teaching practice. Some authors argue that an ethical stand-alone course would be beneficial for initial teacher education (Boon, 2011; Warnick; Silverman, 2011) to improve teacher quality. Maxwell *et al.* (2016) studied the impact of preservice teachers being taught ethics as a stand-alone course versus transversally as part of the initial teacher education curriculum. The authors found that most initial teacher education institutions did not provide ethics as a stand-alone subject due to time restrictions on programme schedules and the tradition of having ethics taught as part of an integrated curriculum. Walters, Heilbronn and Daly (2017) concluded that teaching ethics as a stand-alone course is not the way forward owing to a lack of time in the already packed initial teacher education curriculum, student resistance, and the complexities of ethics. The authors also address the fact that these limits are not inconsequential or meaningless.

There is ongoing debate in the scholarly literature regarding the effectiveness of standalone versus integrated curriculum for ethics content and their impact; however, empirical evidence is limited (Boon; Maxwell, 2016; Maxwell; Schwimmer, 2016). Works that explicitly address the issue of the effectiveness of the teaching and learning strategies are significantly lacking in the literature on ethics education in initial teacher education (Maxwell; Schwimmer, 2016).

The ethical implications of education are unmistakable since education contributes to human progress. Individual growth requires well-defined ethical values (Queirós; Silva, 2012). As a result of the unique class interaction, students in Physical Education classes are more likely to develop moral discernment (HIRAMA *et al.*, 2012). Thus, Physical Education has an influential role in fostering respect for sport

(Costa; McNamee; Lacerda, 2015) and developing values such as justice, courage, and honesty, which are orientated towards the individual and collective good (Costa; McNamee; Lacerda, 2016). In their research, Costa, McNamee and Lacerda (2016) conducted interviews with experienced philosophy, sport, and Physical Education scholars to explore the ethical scope of Physical Education. The authors emphasise five ethical potentialities of Physical Education, including the dominant structure of sport, its intrinsic values and spirit, the appropriate practice of sport, its capacity for self-overcoming, and sports as an opportunity to go beyond the requirements of right conduct. As a result, it is understood that Physical Education is a fertile ground for ethical education through sports, and thus ethical dispositions of Physical Education teachers demand a profound awareness of the content to be taught and how that content should be developed; therefore, it requires that from preservice Physical Education teachers too.

The teaching practicum is the initial point of interaction with the teaching reality, and it is characterised by the application of academic knowledge to practical expertise (Cardoso; Batista; Graça, 2016; Tardif; Lessard; Lahaye, 1991). It is pertinent to examine preservice teachers' ethical dispositions throughout this period of transition from student to teacher, as well as the ethical challenges it entails (Maxwell *et al.*, 2016). At the time of writing this manuscript, no public university in Portugal offers ethics as a stand-alone subject in Physical Education teacher education courses. Ethics is taught cross-curricularly, and only a few universities have an assessment framework dedicated to the ethical dispositions that preservice teachers must display throughout their initial teacher education. Ethical disposition is never assumed as a distinct dimension of assessment; rather, it is incorporated into the overall criteria and assessment parameters. As a result, Amado *et al.* (2009) claim that there is no ethical training provided during the initial teacher education in Portugal.

The ethics curriculum at the Portuguese public university studied in this research is taught transversally throughout the initial teacher education curriculum. This transversality is reflected in the school placement syllabus, which states that “professional ethics values are present in all areas [of teaching], with emphasis on cultural levels, reflective capacity, and preservice teachers' attitudes, (...) pedagogical content knowledge, commitment to student learning, and promotion of individual and collective professional development (...)” (Ribeiro-Silva; Fachada; Nobre, 2020). Over time, we began to question which ethical dispositions preservice teachers were developing at our university. We established research on the ethical dispositions of preservice teachers at the conclusion of their school placement, thus, at the end of initial teacher education, immediately before qualifying as Physical Education teachers, to understand which values they emphasise the most. Therefore, the research question that drove this research was: What are the self-reported ethical dispositions that preservice teachers highlight as crucial for teaching Physical Education?

## 2 METHODS

We adopted a qualitative methodology grounded in a social constructivist worldview, which Creswell and Creswell (2018) define as an approach to qualitative research in which “individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences” (p. 46). Based on the participants' reported ethical dispositions, we identified connections among the data. This strategy preserved an individual perspective on the matter (Flick, 2009), allowing for a thorough analysis of the subject. We used documentary evidence in the form of reports to collect data. The textual material was analysed using thematic content analysis without pre-established themes.

### 2.1 SAMPLE

We collected data for two years, resulting in 74 school placement reports. The reports were written by preservice teachers in the final year of the master's degree in teaching Physical Education, which is offered at a sports faculty in a Portuguese public university that teaches ethics cross-curricularly in the initial teacher education curriculum. These reports were written by 29 female and 45 male preservice teachers. Their age ranged from 22 to 46 years old ( $M = 25.8$ ,  $SD = 4.5$ ).

### 2.2 DATA COLLECTION

To obtain Qualified Teacher Status in Portugal, Physical Education teachers must finish a two-year master's degree in teaching Physical Education. The second and final year of the master's programme consists of a year-long supervised school placement designed to facilitate the integration of prior theoretical knowledge via teaching practice in a real-world situation. This is designed to prepare competent Physical Education teachers for professional practice. The preservice teachers are assigned to schools in the third cycle of basic education or secondary education, in placement groups of three to four preservice teachers, and are supervised by a cooperating teacher and a university supervisor. During this year of training, preservice teachers are required to enhance their practice in several areas of teaching, including the ethical dispositions and reflective practices.

Preservice teachers write a structured reflection on the course taken during their school placement and the work produced during the year. This is an individual and original work in which preservice teachers must display critical thinking, in-depth reflection, and scientific research based on their school placement experience. They must describe their learning path, emphasising their strengths and explaining how they overcome their weaknesses.

The school placement report serves as the preservice teachers' master's dissertation; hence, it must adhere to scientific rigour standards. The intent of studying these documents is to observe how preservice teachers perceived and reflected on their school placement and which aspects of their ethical dispositions they valued more. We considered the school placement reports particularly relevant because of their contribution to the preservice teachers' final master's grade and because they

represent a transformation of lived experience into written narrative through mimesis (Flick, 2009). In their literature review, Wang, Odell and Schwille (2008) include three different studies in which preservice teachers' reports were used as data to understand the impact of various components of initial teacher education programmes on preservice teachers. In this study, we focused exclusively on participants' accounts of ethical dispositions.

## 2.3 DATA ANALYSIS

We performed thematic content analysis, a standard procedure for analysing documental material (Bardin, 2011; Flick, 2009). Using this method involves handling themes derived from data (Flick, 2009) through open coding.

We identified the content of the data in the first round of coding, and in the second and third rounds, we focused our coding on the most significant codes. We repeatedly assessed the school placement reports, identifying new themes of ethical dispositions based on what the preservice teachers wrote.

We incorporated strategies to validate and enhance the accuracy of our data (Creswell; Creswell, 2018). We used peer debriefing, which is a procedure that involves input from other researchers who review the study. We selected two peer debriefers, one from our university and one from another public Portuguese university, to provide validity to the data analysis. This allowed an external researcher to interpret our findings.

We kept a log with all the decisions made along the way, as well as memos, to critically analyse the progress achieved. This ensured the trustworthiness of the data and reduced discrepancies in interpretation among researchers. We analysed and reanalysed data until saturation of themes occurred. Extracts from the school placement reports were used to highlight some of the findings.

## 2.4 ETHICS

To maintain anonymity, we assigned pseudonyms to the authors of the school placement reports. All reports are publicly accessible in the university's digital repository for scientific production, which legally exempts us from seeking authorisation to study the documents, as they are intellectual property of the university.

## 3 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The thematic content analysis of the school placement reports yielded ten themes of preservice Physical Education teachers' self-reported ethical dispositions. The following themes were created: a) engaging in professional development; b) building effective relationships; c) personal conduct; d) commitment to pupils' learning; e) teamwork; f) commitment to one's own learning; g) pedagogical content knowledge; h) initiative and responsibility; i) embracing innovation; and j) critical and reflective analysis.

### 3.1 ENGAGING IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The preservice teachers' reports clearly demonstrated the importance of self-training and autonomous research as a continuous learning process. Preservice teachers place a high emphasis on participating in training activities throughout their initial teacher education to develop a deeper understanding of their teaching practice. These findings are consistent with the results of Capel (2016), which discovered that Physical Education preservice teachers place higher value on self-actualisation. These preservice teachers believe that continuous learning throughout their school placement helps them to acquire new knowledge and deepen their understanding on certain subjects as well as understand different teaching contexts.

Throughout the school placement, research was constantly present since the more we know about a given context, the more questions arise. This was a collaborative approach that included our cooperating teacher as well as other teachers from the Physical Education group. We participated in different training actions provided by the university (namely a dance workshop) as well as conferences and workshops organised by another school's placement group. These experiences enabled us to consolidate some ideas, learn about diverse teaching realities, and different perspectives. (Ana)

Professional development, according to the participants, helped address gaps in their knowledge in specific units of work and learning contexts, understand different educational contexts, and enhance their teaching practice via knowledge sharing. Despite their emphasis on this theme, most of the events mentioned by preservice teachers were compulsory, such as seminars and workshops. This may call into question their perception of their own professional development. Amorim and Ribeiro-Silva (2022) showed in their literature review the value of lifelong learning for professional development of Physical Education teachers by allowing teachers to experiment with novel approaches to reflective practice that align with their identities.

### 3.2 BUILDING EFFECTIVE RELATIONSHIPS

The second most often reported theme by the participants was building effective relationships. They demonstrated their ethical disposition by engaging in constructivist interactions with educational stakeholders such as other teachers, staff, pupils, and the community. We saw a difference in detail in this theme between preservice teachers who simply mentioned they built effective relationships within the school and preservice teachers who precisely described how they demonstrated this ethical disposition during their daily practice, as shown in the example below.

Throughout the school placement, we actively engaged and showed enthusiasm in a variety of activities linked to the Physical Education group and other school events. At the end of the first term, we felt compelled to contribute to the school's surrounding community. We invited pupils participating in the school cross-country race to contribute food or clothing to support victims of wildfires and organised a lunch to raise funds for new sports equipment while promoting healthy eating habits. (Eva)

Preservice teachers mentioned that being available for school events, activities, meetings, workshops, and sports teams facilitated interactions with a range

of educational stakeholders, resulting in productive relationships within the school sphere. However, all these activities are already expected of them, as evidenced by the study of Ribeiro-Silva and Amorim (2020), in which the researchers determined that cooperating teachers expected preservice teachers to demonstrate faultless behaviour in the school community and society. This was also the theme in which many preservice teachers merely stated that they built effective relationships without providing any details about how they did it, indicating a limited understanding of their responsibilities.

The results are consistent with the study of Aurin and Maurer (1993), who highlighted a limited understanding in the adoption of duty and commitment to the school. The author argues that by presenting a series of elements to take into consideration that might influence this feature, such as school size, the significance placed on the issue by the headmaster, school traditions and pedagogical orientations. In terms of atmosphere and pedagogical characteristics, these preservice teachers complete their school placement in different schools. Some are placed in urban schools, while others are assigned to semi-rural or rural schools. As a result, effective relationship building varies greatly from school to school. While commitment to school in large urban schools refers to the disciplinary group of Physical Education and the relationships within the group, commitment and relationship-building in semi-rural or rural schools often involve the entire school community. These are specific factors that can contribute to the results obtained, as well as the variation in the detail and importance given to this aspect of ethical disposition by preservice teachers.

### 3.3 PERSONAL CONDUCT

Preservice teachers reported that their ethical disposition and ethics in practice are demonstrated by their personal conduct, which includes appropriate attire and appropriate behaviour towards teachers, pupils, and staff; being diligent and punctual to school commitments; and promoting and reinforcing values among pupils and peers. They also revealed that it was vital for them to be perceived by their pupils as someone with strong values and a professional appearance. Most preservice teachers focused their personal conduct on setting a good example by being punctual and diligent. The participants highlighted how positive interactions among peers, placement groups, and other schoolteachers enabled them to pass on these values to their pupils. As we can see from the example below, feelings of trust and friendship, as well as personal growth, were vital for these preservice teachers during the school placement.

Peers and students developed a trusting and friendly connection. We have always attempted to provide a good example for our pupils by demonstrating positive principles and behaviours, such as punctuality and assiduity, and by consistently encouraging these attitudes in our classroom. We consider that the pedagogical relationship created between us and the pupils was positive, close, and cordial, both in and out of class. Responsibility, punctuality, respect, solidarity, commitment, and persistence are all aspects of our development as preservice teachers during the school year. (Nelson)

The results in this specific theme are not surprising, because it is necessary for preservice teachers to be punctual and regular in attendance in their school placement,

classes, and other school responsibilities to qualify as Physical Education teachers. Nonetheless, preservice teachers mentioned that it is critical for them to instill values in their students, which is in line with the conclusions of Amorim and Ribeiro-Silva (2025a), in which the authors conclude that preservice Physical Education teachers perceive that transmitting values was an essential role of teachers. This was seen particularly during class, by demonstrating the ethical potentiality of Physical Education through developing ethical education via sports (Costa; McNamee; Lacerda, 2016). They view this as intuitive and based on their own personal beliefs. These findings are consistent with the results of a study conducted by Görgüt and Tutkun (2018), who defend that Physical Education teachers convey their values from their families and the environment. In the same study, Physical Education teachers stated that teaching values such as honesty, modesty, respect, equality, and fair play is inherently related to teaching Physical Education. In this line, the research of Amorim and Ribeiro-Silva (2025a) also highlighted that most preservice teachers perceive instilling values as a fundamental role of teachers during Physical Education teacher education, and not transmitting values is one of their fears related to the profession (Amorim; Ribeiro-Silva, 2025b).

### 3.4 COMMITMENT TO PUPILS' LEARNING

A recurring theme throughout the school placement reports was the preservice teachers' commitment to pupils' learning, as seen by their advocacy of differentiated learning, having an inclusive attitude towards all pupils, and promoting the pupils' success. Given the nature of the teaching profession, the importance placed on this theme is not surprising. These findings are in line with the research of Curtner-Smith and Meek (2000) and Capel (2016), who found that Physical Education preservice teachers placed a high value on their students' learning processes. This was also evident in the preservice teachers' reports, such as the one below, in which the participant emphasises the significance of equitable opportunity for all students.

We were committed to promoting physical and social development, equal opportunities, coherence, justice, and responsibility. Our commitment was to captivate pupils by encouraging them to achieve and develop their abilities, thus providing favourable learning conditions for their development and progress. To make this feasible, prior preparation was critical, since the teaching and learning process was developed based on the pupils' challenges to present them with learning situations that correspond to their ability level. We have always attempted to build attractive and challenging learning environments to keep pupils focused on the subject at hand and striving to overcome their own limitations. We have strived to be good teachers and educators, concerned with the development and progress of pupils of all skill levels, while maintaining a correct and fair attitude. As a result, we can state that we leave school with a clear conscience in terms of our obligation to the pupils' learning. (Irene)

In our study, preservice teachers were interested not just in what pupils learnt but also in how they learnt. These preservice teachers showed an emotional connection to students by wanting to make a remarkable difference not just in their pedagogical knowledge but also in their social and ethical attitude. This is consistent with the findings of Wrench and Garrett (2015), who found that the emotional self

was expressed in the preservice teachers' pedagogical practice. The research by Amorim and Ribeiro-Silva (2025b) also showed that preservice Physical Education teachers believe the significance of teachers' work extends beyond teaching Physical Education; it also involves influencing youth development, including both their physical and personal growth. This was evident in the reports of our participants.

### 3.5 TEAMWORK

Teamwork was indicated by a few preservice teachers as a key ethical disposition for their growth as future professionals. Participants reported encouraging peer relationships, mutual respect, and understanding teamwork as a personal and collective responsibility and obligation. One preservice teacher explicitly reported how they showed their ethical disposition throughout their school placement.

Teamwork was always valued within the placement group, so we met whenever possible to clarify questions, reflect on the school placement, and collaborate on projects and educational partnerships as a method to learn and to support one another. (Fred)

Teamwork was appreciated by preservice teachers for its contributions to personal evolution and the ability to build responsibility, communication, collaboration, and respect. Literature emphasises the value of teamwork in this stage of learning, citing it as an ideal opportunity to provide non-pressured informal feedback with someone in the same situation, stage, and status (Lamb; Lane; Aldous, 2012) as their peers. In their research, Amorim and Ribeiro-Silva (2025a) mentioned that preservice teachers highlight that the most meaningful change experienced during their teacher education was an improvement in their social and interpersonal skills, one of them being their capacity for teamwork.

### 3.6 COMMITMENT TO ONE'S OWN LEARNING

It is noteworthy to see that the participants did not give a lot of emphasis to the commitment to one's own learning. This theme was linked to the responsibility of preservice teachers to identify their own strengths and weaknesses, as well as where (and how) they may improve their practice. On the other hand, engaging in professional development was a theme that was often mentioned in the school placement reports, as we previously found. The disparity between commitment to one's own learning and engaging in professional development adds to the already existing uncertainty about the true reason for such high prevalence of engaging in professional development — whether preservice teachers acknowledge this as important for their professional development, or whether this is the result of the university's compulsory training actions. One reason for this result might be related to the preservice teachers' responsibility for identifying their strengths and weaknesses and where (and how) they must improve their practice. Banville (2015) highlights that newly qualified teachers often focus on content and teaching methods before considering student learning, and they learn as they go in their first years of teaching.

### 3.7 PEDAGOGICAL CONTENT KNOWLEDGE

With such low priority given to pedagogical content knowledge, we may agree with Capel (2016) that preservice teachers have high confidence in their own content knowledge, prioritising other aspects and, as a result, ignoring this one. During the school placement, preservice teachers teach in a variety of teaching units (such as gymnastics, track and field, volleyball, and so on), and most of the preservice teachers come from a variety of sporting backgrounds, which helps them to understand different teaching strategies that will be useful to the placement group. There is a strong inclination to replicate lessons or use tasks that have been suggested to them by teachers from other sports backgrounds, particularly in subjects in which they are not very knowledgeable. The low priority given to this theme is in line with the findings of Curtner-Smith and Meek (2000) and Capel (2016) that preservice teachers have other priorities outside teaching Physical Education, which might explain these findings. When preservice teachers are ill-prepared and lack the teaching skills and knowledge necessary for instruction, conflicts with the cooperating teacher may occur (Hudson; Hudson, 2018).

### 3.8 INITIATIVE AND RESPONSIBILITY

The preservice teachers who declared that they demonstrated initiative and responsibility throughout their school placement reported fulfilling the commitments they had undertaken (accomplishing all tasks proposed), meeting the requirements of the school and the school placement, and assuming responsibility for both individual and collaborative work. However, there was no clear indication of actions taken to show how this was achieved or how it was put into practice throughout the school placement. This theme's low priority is not surprising, and these results are in line with the work of Berliner (1988), who suggests that preservice teachers may lack accountability for their actions. The school placement is a year in which preservice teachers undergo significant changes in their identity as teachers and how they act as teachers (Amorim; Ribeiro-Silva, 2025b). As a result, it is understandable that preservice teachers seek advice from their cooperating teachers, which might have an impact on their own capacity for initiative and responsibility. It is also a time when they do not feel entirely like students but also do not feel quite like teachers (Flores, 2020). Having to rely on their cooperating teachers and university tutors for decision-making will, inevitably, impair their initiative and responsibility. Richards, Templin and Graber (2014) highlight that for new teachers, entering the classroom can be a reality shock because of the exponential growth in the number of classes taught, the added responsibility, and the bureaucracy.

### 3.9 EMBRACING INNOVATION

A few preservice teachers highlighted embracing innovation by promoting original pedagogical interventions in their class planning, teaching, and reflection, as well as by showing originality and innovation in document production and project design. It was interesting to note that while they concede they did not become a beacon

of innovation and creativity, they do state that their perspective on Physical Education changed because of the school placement, leading to a more unique and original manner of planning the class. Their previous perspective had been shaped by former Physical Education teachers, who used traditional pedagogical approaches to the units of work. We believe that lack of innovation develops from traditional approaches that stem from pre-established educational notions (Capel, 2016; Wrench; Garrett, 2012). Contributing factors include the many years of schooling that preservice teachers have completed by the time they begin their initial teacher education, as well as their background and experiences in Physical Education (Matanin; Collier, 2003; Wrench; Garrett, 2012), all of which shape their perceptions of Physical Education and the teaching profession (Amorim; Ribeiro-Silva; 2025b).

### 3.10 CRITICAL AND REFLECTIVE ANALYSIS

Critical and reflective analysis was the final theme discovered in the thematic content analysis of the school placement reports. We discovered that preservice teachers autonomously analyse and reflect on their school placement, provide plausible solutions to their problems, and self-evaluate their performance based on internal and external references. The preservice teachers reported that their weekly meetings not only helped them analyse and reflect on their personal pedagogical practices but were also crucial in debating collective work. The ability to think critically, pinpoint areas that need work, and dedicate oneself to establishing these learning opportunities were viewed as strengths for professional development. Chua, Liu and Chia (2018) state that sharing one's reflection process is a crucial step in the development of teachers who have a strong sense of their professional identities because, as they become more aware of who they are as teachers, they take part in more thoughtful planning and reflective inquiry to make sure that their actions align with who they are. Purposeful dialogue among peers is an important exercise (Lamb; Lane; Aldous, 2012). During the school placement, none of the preservice teachers mentioned how critical thinking and reflecting on their teaching practice helped them situate themselves in their practice. There is a disconnect between ethical awareness and practical enactment, as participants do not always connect reflection to action in their teaching practice, even when they reflect on their experiences.

## 4 CONCLUSIONS

Ethics occupies a prominent place in educational research because of its contribution to individual development (Costa; McNamee; Lacerda, 2015; Saarniit; Pevkur, 2019). At the end of the master's degree, it was essential to study the preservice teachers' concept of ethical disposition and how it was developed throughout initial teacher education, particularly during the school placement. This is clearly significant since teachers are expected to demonstrate ethical conduct in both social and individual contexts (Crisol-Moya; Romero, 2014).

Based on these findings, we can conclude that ethical disposition is demonstrated by these preservice teachers through professional development,

effective relationships with educational stakeholders, personal conduct, commitment to pupils' learning, the ability to work as a team, commitment to one's own learning, pedagogical content knowledge, initiative and responsibility, embracing innovation, and critical and reflective analysis. This perspective does not enable us to infer that preservice teachers lack ethical understanding or have flaws in their ethical training, but it may reflect limited reflexivity and critical analysis of their actions. Despite being aware of the critical function of a strong ethical disposition in their initial teacher education, they fail to act on their analysis. Therefore, we believe that insufficient reflection and self-analysis may hinder the conversion of ethical consciousness into practical action, which highlights the difference between understanding ethical dispositions and putting them into practice. To assess their ethical dispositions and ethics in practice, careful observation and analysis of their actual school placement and teaching practice would be required.

The findings provide valuable insights for both research and teacher education curricula. These findings will assist future preservice teachers in understanding the ethical implications of the school placement and how it influences their teaching and the transmission of ethical values to their pupils. These conclusions are also crucial in showing initial teacher education academics the range of ethical dispositions demonstrated by preservice teachers when it comes to learning how to teach and teaching itself. This allows initial teacher education professors to modify the curriculum in the future courses to improve ethical awareness, differentiated learning, and student achievement. Being aware of the preservice teachers' ethical attitudes will contribute to the learning process (Capel, 2016).

Our findings indicate that critical and reflective analysis (with an emphasis on ethical dispositions) must be strengthened during initial teacher education, as the preservice teachers' learning before training may also affect their comprehension of ethical dispositions. As a result, while we agree with the many authors who argue that ethics should be taught across the curriculum (Aurin; Maurer, 1993; Maxwell *et al.*, 2016; Walters; Heilbronn; Daly, 2017), we also feel that a greater emphasis should be placed on this matter for ethics education to be more effective. It is fundamental for universities to assess the ethical dispositions of the preservice teachers they are educating until they are ready to enter the teaching profession (Crisol-Moya; Romero, 2014). As it is compulsory for teachers to perform in an ethically acceptable manner, it is the responsibility of universities to ensure that preservice teachers get a conscious understanding of ethics and how to conduct themselves ethically throughout their teaching career.

Despite the study's limitations, the results are valuable. One limitation is relying on written documents for data. This limitation can be addressed in the future by interviewing participants or doing school placement observations. These results highlight the difficulties that preservice teachers have in reflecting on and analysing their actions as well as narrating their experiences during the school placement. This may generate new questions that were not previously anticipated.

Returning to the university's guidelines for professional ethics stated in the school placement syllabus (Ribeiro-Silva; Fachada; Nobre, 2020), the results show that cultural level is not identified as fundamental in preservice teachers' ethical dispositions. However, we found that embracing innovation, which was not included in those recommendations, is seen as meaningful. The results are consistent with the university's professional ethics recommendations for preservice teachers. According to our results, we cannot conclude as confidently as Amado *et al.* (2009) that there is no ethical training during initial teacher education in Portugal. Nevertheless, we recognise that it is barely visible and that greater attention should be paid to it in the initial teacher education curriculum as well as to the content of the curricular units proposed by the professors.

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**Resumo:** Os códigos de ética são componentes essenciais de uma educação de elevada qualidade, considerando que garantem valores universais mútuos. A transição de papéis vivenciada durante o estágio pedagógico transporta noções paradoxais entre imagens pré-estabelecidas da docência e a realidade vivenciada. O objetivo deste estudo foi explorar as disposições éticas de futuros professores no fim do estágio pedagógico. Foram analisados 74 relatórios de estágio, elaborados por estudantes estagiários de um Mestrado em Ensino de Educação Física de uma universidade pública portuguesa. Seguimos uma metodologia qualitativa e realizámos análise temática de conteúdo. Os resultados revelam que as disposições éticas dos participantes se focaram, sobretudo, no respetivo desenvolvimento profissional, na construção de relações eficazes, na conduta pessoal, no compromisso com a aprendizagem dos alunos, no trabalho em equipa, no compromisso com a própria aprendizagem, no conhecimento do conteúdo pedagógico, na capacidade de iniciativa e responsabilidade, na capacidade de inovação e na análise crítica e reflexiva. Estes resultados sugerem que a formação ética deve ser melhorada ao longo da formação inicial para a docência.

**Palavras-chave:** Ética profissional. Formação inicial docente. Estágio pedagógico. Educação física. Disposição ética.

**Resumen:** Los códigos éticos son componentes esenciales de una educación de alta calidad, ya que garantizan valores universales mutuos. La transición de roles que se experimenta durante el Practicum conlleva nociones paradójicas entre las imágenes preestablecidas de la enseñanza y la realidad vivida. El objetivo de este estudio fue explorar las disposiciones éticas de los futuros profesores al final del Practicum. Analizamos 74 informes de las prácticas, escritos por estudiantes en formación para la docencia, de un máster en enseñanza de educación física de una universidad pública portuguesa. Seguimos una metodología cualitativa y realizamos un análisis de contenido temático. Los resultados revelaron que las disposiciones éticas de los participantes se reflejaron, sobre todo, en su participación en el desarrollo profesional, la construcción de relaciones efectivas, la conducta personal, el compromiso con el aprendizaje del alumnado, el trabajo en equipo, el compromiso con el propio aprendizaje, el conocimiento del contenido pedagógico, la iniciativa y la responsabilidad, la capacidad de innovación y el análisis crítico y reflexivo. Los resultados sugieren que la formación ética deberá ser abordada a lo largo de la formación inicial de los futuros docentes.

**Palabras clave:** Ética profesional. Formación inicial docente. Practicum. Educación Física. Disposición ética.

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## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare that this work involves no conflict of interest.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

**Catarina Amorim:** Data Curation; Formal Analysis; Investigation; Software; Writing – Original Draft; Writing – Review & Editing.

**Elsa Ribeiro-Silva:** Conceptualization; Methodology; Resources; Supervision; Validation; Visualization.

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Research data is only available upon request.

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## EDITORIAL RESPONSIBILITY

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