“I’m a primary non-specialist PE teacher, get me out of here.”

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Introduction

Physical education is only one of five subjects that children between the ages of 5-16 must experience during their school life. In addition the government has set a target of two hours high quality physical education within curriculum time and three hours of sport and physical activity outside the curriculum. From this perspective it might seem that physical education is high on the government agenda and that it is a priority that all children have a positive and stimulating experience. However, afPE (Association for Physical Education) in their manifesto for a world class system of physical education (2008:p2) estimate that “more than 40% of newly qualified primary teachers begin their careers with only six hours or less preparation to teach physical education.” This is not a new phenomenon as Downey (1979:p6) described non-specialist primary teachers as “lacking adequate knowledge and interest in physical education. They adopt low standards, if any, which are reflected in the poor expectations they hold for children doing PE.” The focus of this paper is to examine if the confidence to teach physical education differs significantly between trainee teachers following a subject specialist route in primary physical education compared to those following generalist programmes, and to highlight any specific factors, if any, that might contribute to this.

The recent Ofsted Report “Improving Primary Teachers’ Subject Knowledge Across The Curriculum” (June 2009) stressed the importance of subject knowledge and high quality teaching. It went on to say that “Having a teacher with specific subject knowledge was often a matter of chance, although the effective primary schools knew this and took steps to minimise the risk of its absence.” They stated that teacher’s subject knowledge was “good overall” and that this was to a large degree due to Local Authority training brought about due to the impact of the Physical
Education, School Sport and Club Links (PESSCL) strategy. If trainee teachers are to build upon the subject knowledge gained during their Initial Training then regular, relevant Professional Development (PD) must occur, otherwise schools will continue to employ outside coaches and private companies to deliver physical education at Key Stage 1 and 2. Ofsted commented that, “Although employing coaches brought the advantage of highly specialist subject expertise, it also brought the disadvantage of the coaches’ weaker pedagogical skills.” (Ofsted 2009) It is this ongoing dilemma between physical education and sport that must be at the forefront of teacher education with the understanding that they are not the same thing. As teachers of physical education we are preparing children for Life-Long Physical Activity (LLPA) not to be the next generation of footballers and hockey players, although if this happens then we would support any child who wants to become involved in sport. Hannay (2009) argues that the value of physical education (PE) needs to be better understood by those responsible for developing the curriculum, that PE must be seen as more than an add-on to sport, that it has much to offer in its own right, and that it is important that teachers not coaches teach it.

If teachers and trainee teachers feel confident in teaching physical education then the pupils they teach will have a better experience and so are likely to develop a more positive approach to physical activity in general. Recent work by Garrett and Wrench (2007) and Morgan and Bourke (2008) would support the idea that personal experience is a key feature relating to teachers’ perceptions of their ability to teach physical education. This experience might refer to previous school experience but it also relates to experience gained whilst training or during professional development courses and it is this area that teacher educators must target in order to prepare trainee teachers to deliver physical education effectively to the children they teach.

**Literature Review**

In the literature review we hope to demonstrate that although there are initiatives which point to physical education being a priority of the government and their agencies, this is not reflected in the time provided in Initial Teacher Training for physical education. The literature would seem to show hours on many courses are decreasing. We also aim to show that physical education can contribute much to the
whole development of the child and yet it is still fighting for time and standing in ITT establishments.

The National curriculum (1999) puts forward a powerful rationale for physical education and the value of physical education to all children. It shows the unique contribution PE can make to the holistic development of the child. The fact that PE is the only subject that deals with the education of the body and how it moves makes it vital to physical development as well as playing a significant role in the development of cognitive and social skills (Pickup et al, 2008). The ability of physical education to contribute to a child’s development enables it to meet the personalisation and Every child matters requirements of the National curriculum 2008. It will also enable physical education to play an important role in a new primary curriculum.

The Rose Review 2008 places physical education in the area of learning, Understanding Physical Development, Health and Well Being and whilst most physical educationalists would like to see physical education as one of the areas of learning, it still has a very important role to play in the new primary curriculum. Trainees will still have to be taught how to teach high quality physical education in the new curriculum.

Physical education can also make a large contribution to developing “positive attitudes toward active and healthy lifestyles” (DFEE/QCA, 1999:129). This is an especially important area owing to the increased awareness of the deteriorating health of our children.

The Department of Health (DH) along with the Department for Education and Skills (DFES) and The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) published a service agreement to:

“Halt the year on rise of obesity among children aged under 11 by 2010 in the context of a broader strategy to tackle obesity in the population as a whole” (2004:13)

The Physical Education and School Sport and Community Links Strategy (PESSCL), costing £978 million from 2003/04 to 2007/08 was introduced with a
number of other initiatives: healthy schools programme, the food in schools programme, the school fruit and vegetable scheme, active travel and school travel plans, to help improve the health of primary aged children. The strategy is made up of the following components, sports colleges, school sport partnerships, teacher professional development, step into sport, club links, gifted and talented, swimming, QCA physical education and sport investigation and sporting playgrounds (Pickup and Price, 2007). This initiative helps strengthen the argument for physical education in the primary school, a view that is supported by Almond, (2000) who believes in active living and how physical activities can improve the quality of life.

The PESSCL strategy was superseded by The Physical Education and Sport Strategy for Young People (PESSYP), in January 2008. It aims to encourage children to be involved in 5 hours of Physical education and school sport (PESS) by 2012. This will be done by spending another £755 million over three years to promote 2 hours curriculum physical education and 3 hours sport outside of the curriculum (DCMS and DFES 2008).

Physical education is one of the foundation subjects of the National Curriculum in primary schools making it a compulsory part of the curriculum (DFEE, 1999). It will also be a major part of the area of learning “Understanding physical development, health and well being” in the revised curriculum. This gives PE a status that can be used in arguing for the maximum curriculum time possible. Quality Physical Education and school sport (PESS) should be taught for two hours during curriculum and extracurricular time (DFES, 2003). The PESSYP target is at least 5 hours of high quality PESS during the curriculum and after school by 2012. To achieve high quality physical education there must be an effective use of the curriculum. All pupils must be included and involved whilst time, equipment and space must be used effectively. These measures must work alongside the assessment and monitoring of pupil progress with regular rewards and celebrations of pupil achievement.

Another development in primary schools was the introduction of Planning, Preparation and Assessment (PPA) time for primary teachers in 2006. This means that teachers receive one morning or afternoon to plan, prepare and assess. This opened up a huge opportunity for Head Teachers to bring in coaches to teach
physical education lessons during this time. The problem is ensuring quality control as many of the coaches are qualified in one sport but may be given responsibility for a range of areas in P.E. (Pickup and Price, 2007) have reservations of the use of outside coaches to teach curriculum physical education and call for coaches to meet certain criteria including the teacher being present at the lesson.

The final and for many the most important initiative in education and for children is Every Child Matters which has five main aims for all children to:

- be healthy
- stay safe
- enjoy and achieve
- make a positive contribution
- achieve economic well-being

(Ofsted 2005)

The challenge is for physical education and its supporters to find ways in which the subject can meet the five aims of Every Child Matters. Physical education that includes high quality teaching and learning will allow children to be healthy, safe and enjoy and achieve, it can also help children make a positive contribution. Children with help, if needed, can also achieve economic well being.

Initial Teacher Training (ITT) in England and Initial Teacher Education (ITE) in Scotland have standards trainees must reach to attain Qualified Teacher Status. Standard 14 requires a trainee to

“Have a secure knowledge and understanding of their subjects/curriculum areas and related pedagogy to enable them to teach effectively across the age and ability range for which they are trained” (TDA, 2007:5)

This means that non specialist trainees in primary physical education need to know and understand how to teach all six areas of physical education. Caldecott (2006:45) maintains that these trainees are simply not receiving enough quality PE training to have a “secure knowledge and understanding of their subject”. (Carney and Winkler, 2008) recognise that physical education is not a core subject and as such is
not given as many hours as the core subjects. Indeed Carney and Winkler go on to argue that PE should be given core status which would in theory force ITT institutions to give more hours to physical education training.

Health and safety must be taught well and the trainees given enough time to take in the procedures and policies to enable them to teach challenging but safe lessons. This is difficult to do with so little time on some non specialist courses.

This investigation takes place at a time when Physical Education and School Sport has a high profile in education. This high profile is not matched by any increase in hours for ITT Physical Education. Caldecott et al (2006) argue that the time given to physical education on all non specialist courses is very limited. Birchall,2002 reports that non specialist trainees lack confidence in teaching physical education. Yet this is not a new problem, as far back as the 1970’s the PEA were recommending a minimum of 60 hours of physical education training for non specialist students in ITT (Chedzoy, 2000). Also Downey (1979) described non specialist primary physical education teachers as lacking adequate knowledge and interest in physical education. They adopt low standards, if any, which are reflected in the poor expectations they hold for children doing PE.”

A report by OFSTED (1998) noted the variation in hours allocated to physical education in undergraduate and postgraduate courses was a matter for concern. It was found that undergraduates received between 7.5 hours and 90 hours (mean allocation 32 hours). This would seem to demonstrate an unwillingness or inability by ITT establishments to increase the hours spent on physical education training for primary non specialists. Since this report the trend seems to be towards less hours rather than more with The Chief Executive Officer of The Association for Physical Education, Margaret Talbot describing six hours PE training as "inadequate and at worst a license to kill" (Talbot,2007:6).

The fact that this lack of training has not been addressed for so many years makes the call for more hours a greater challenge. We must meet this challenge as the health and physical capability of our children demand it. The call for an increase in
hours is supported by the statistic that “physical education standards in more than 40% of primary and junior schools were considered to be low” (Caldecott: 2006:48). This is worrying as OFSTED (1998) also reported that concerns existed about trainees’ experience in schools also OFSTED (1996) reported that “the teaching of physical education was good in only two fifths of schools.” This was supported by Clay who stated that ‘many teachers had a limited understanding of planning, performing and evaluating.’ (Cited in Chedzoy, 2000:105) These concerns about the teaching of physical education would seem to suggest that primary trainees are entering teaching under prepared to teach high quality PE sessions. It could be argued that time allocation is a major cause of this lack of understanding and more hours might provide more quality training. This increase in hours would only be of value on courses using the necessary quality assurance strategies to ensure the hours are utilised to the maximum.

**Methods and Methodology**

The confidence of the trainee teachers to teach physical education was gathered via questionnaire, and responses were analysed using a phenomenological approach. Cohen et al (2007:p22 ) describes phenomenology as a “theoretical point of view that advocates the study of direct experience taken at face value; and one which sees behaviour as determined by the phenomena of experience rather than by external, objective and physically described reality.” Through this approach information was gathered based on the trainee teachers own experience, taking into account their personal background and exposure to sport and physical activity, together with the subject specific training they have received during their respective courses. The focus of enquiry is to establish if the trainee primary teacher feels confident to teach physical education and to determine if this confidence is based on the training they have received or their own predisposition to be physically active.

In any discussion of methodology it is useful to distinguish between “Methods” and “Methodology”. If methods refer to techniques and procedures for gathering data such as questionnaires and interviews, then the aim of the methodology is to use this data appropriately. Kaplan (1973) refers to method as the product and methodology as the process. If this is accepted then they must be considered together as
essential independent yet interrelated components of any investigation. This piece of research adopts an ethnographic approach as outlined by Hitchcock and Hughes (1989) and LeCompte and Preissle (1993), in that the results reflect the participants' feelings and attitudes with respect to the experiences they have had throughout their lives, including those gained whilst training to be a primary teacher, with specific reference to physical education and sport.

If any piece of research is to have relevant validity and reliability it must have an appropriate sample. In this case the participants were all primary trainee teachers following different pathways but all culminating in Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) and hoping to teach in a primary setting. Cohen et al (2007) suggests a sample size of thirty to be the minimum number in order to use any meaningful statistical analysis. In this case the numbers were limited due to the availability of trainee teachers following a specific course, and included thirty-one BA Hons (PE), twenty-seven BA Hons and twenty-one PGCE primary trainees. Although the numbers do not all match up to the thirty suggested by Cohen for the purposes of this research they are seen to be representative of these three courses.

Each of the trainee teachers filled in a questionnaire (appendix 1) that was given out by the Course Leader and was completed and returned within a timetabled session. Respondents did not give their name but did indicate what sex and age bracket they were in. They were encouraged to reflect on each question and to give their answer based on current and past experiences. The format of the questions meant that the first six used a Likert scale to indicate the strength of their feelings and the following five encouraged written responses to get a more detailed view of the trainees' experiences. Although the use of questionnaires does not allow the researcher to delve more deeply into a single trainee's experiences with respect to their confidence to teach physical education, it does give a general indication of confidence and as such can suggest possible follow-up research questions.

**Discussion of Results**

The focus of this research was to assess trainee primary teacher's confidence to teach physical education. Three specific groups were targeted each of which will
qualify with QTS having followed three different pathways: 1. BA Honours (primary physical education route). These trainees received 180 hours of physical education over three years. 2. BA Honours (primary generalist route). These trainees received 18 hours of physical education over three years. 3. Post Graduate (Primary). These trainees received 10 hours of physical education over one year. Although the main focus was to distinguish if trainee confidence was influenced by their choice of course it was also useful to see if gender and age had any effect. In a similar manner the questions also aimed to see if either current or past experiences would have an impact on trainee confidence. The following discussion of results represents the initial findings of this research and as such can be seen as a work in progress as more detailed analysis and conclusions will be drawn at a later date.

**Degree Programme**
From the above graphs we can see that with respect to degree programme those following a specialist physical education (PE) route feel better prepared to teach PE than those following a non-specialist degree. Whist this is not surprising both of the non-specialist programmes do not differ significantly and although they might not feel as well prepared they do on the whole feel generally confident with only 18% of the BA non-specialists and 10% of the PGCE trainees feeling ill prepared to teach PE.

The most interesting and potentially significant findings relate to the actual teaching of physical education. Although the majority of trainees have taught PE in school and observed a PE lesson a significant percentage have not been observed teaching. With 29% of BA specialists, 26% BA non-specialists and 19% of PGCE trainees indicating that they have not been observed teaching PE. How can they expect to progress further and develop their teaching of physical education unless they are regularly observed and have relevant targets for their development set.

With respect to gender and age there were no significant findings although it is interesting to note that a majority of trainees from all of the courses enjoyed PE in school. However, more males than females still play sport regularly.
The remainder of the preliminary findings indicates that on the whole trainees feel most confident to teach games and that this is largely due to past experience although some indicated that it was also due to information gained as part of their training. This was also the case where trainees had given other activities such as swimming or athletics as areas they felt most confident to teach.

“Games because I have most experience of this area”. (Trainee 1)
“Gymnastics and games as I have had experience of teaching both.” (Trainee 2)
“Dance as I did dance until I was 19.” (Trainee 10)
“Games, gymnastics and swimming as I have always been involved in sport and so I am comfortable with encouraging and promoting PE.” (Trainee 17)
“Gymnastics as I used to be an elite gymnast.” (Trainee 63)

However, a significant number of trainees also said that they felt least confident to teach games and in most cases gave the reason as a lack of understanding of the rules and laws of the games. This in itself is an interesting finding as it suggests a lack of knowledge of what games teaching should be, as specifically when teaching games to younger children rules are not essential. In fact it could be argued that the pupil should make up their own rules in order to further develop and enhance their overall development.

“Games as I am unsure about the rules of certain team games.” (Trainee 20)
“Games due to a lack of knowledge about rules.” (Trainee 64)

In most instances it was gymnastics and dance that trainees felt least confident with together with a number stating swimming and athletics. In all cases this was due to a lack of experience which in turn resulted in little or no confidence.

“Dance as I have less experience.” (Trainee 12)
“Dance as I am not confident in my own ability and this might rub off on the children.” (Trainee 28)
“Gymnastics and athletics due to a lack of experience and confidence.” (Trainee 33)
“Gymnastics as I feel that I need more experience to develop my confidence.” (Trainee 42)

All of the trainees involved in this research felt that they were safe to teach physical education to a class of children and this should be seen as a positive area of their development. However, it is also one that should be seen as an area for on-going professional development.

“Yes I feel that I have the knowledge and skills to teach PE effectively and safely.” (Trainee 42)
“Yes safety issues have always been given a high priority.” (Trainee 52)

When trainees were asked what further training they would like to receive, there was a general consensus that gymnastics and dance were the two areas that were seen to be of most significance. This is not surprising as in general most trainees tend to have been exposed to more games activities and this is perhaps a reflection of our whole school approach to physical education from 5-16.

“Dance and Gymnastics.” (Trainee 5)
“Gymnastics teaching as I have looked more at my personal performance.” (Trainee 24)

Conclusions

The preliminary indications from this piece of small scale research are that if trainee teachers have more hours devoted to physical education in their training then they will feel much more confident to teach it. However, the most alarming finding is that on the whole the non-specialist trainees who had between 10-18 hours of specialist provision generally felt largely satisfied with their level of knowledge and understanding and indicated that they felt competent to teach physical education. This was based on limited experience and in some cases little or no feedback from lesson observations. This is an area that must be researched further in order to highlight any underlying factors that have not been considered.
Possible recommendations must include ongoing professional development (PD) and this would be in line with the recent findings of Ofsted (2009) and the Association for Physical Education (afPE) who have developed an extensive programme of PD in order to meet the demands of all teachers involved in the delivery of physical education.
References

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Questionnaire for trainees on their confidence/competence to teach PE

Name:

Degree Programme: BA Honours (PE) ☐
BA Honours ☐
PGCE Primary ☐

Year of study ☐

Male ☐ Female ☐

Age: 18-21 ☐ 22-25 ☐ 26-30 ☐ 31-40 ☐ 41+ ☐

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements. Please use the scale 1-4, shown below, to indicate which statement best matches your opinion.

1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = disagree, 4 = strongly disagree

1. I feel well prepared to teach PE on my placement 1 2 3 4
2. I play sport regularly 1 2 3 4
3. I enjoyed PE when I was at school 1 2 3 4
4. I have taught PE in school 1 2 3 4
5. I have been observed teaching PE in school 1 2 3 4
6. I have observed a PE lesson being taught in school 1 2 3 4
7. What do you understand to be the Key principles of Physical Education?
_____________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________

8. What area of PE do you feel most confident to teach? E.g. games, gymnastics, dance, swimming, athletics or OAA
_____________________________________________________
Why?_____________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________

9. What area do you feel least confident to teach?
________________
Why?_____________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________

10. Do you feel you are safe to teach a class of children in Physical Education?
_____________________________________________________
Why?_____________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________
__________________________________________

11. What training would you most like to receive in Physical Education?
_____________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________

Thank you for taking the time to fill in this questionnaire.