

Students as co-creators in facilitating strategies to enhance competence in teaching primary PE

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The Background....



Research has highlighted the significance of how subject-specific training students receive during their degree programme (Freak & Miller, 2017; Morgan & Hansen, 2008), coupled with negative experiences of PE throughout schooling impacts their confidence and competence for teaching PE (Elliot et al., 2011).



Although primary Initial Teacher Training (ITT) courses provide theoretical and practical opportunities for students to learn general and subject-specific aspects of teaching within the university, student experiences vary widely on placement (Randall, 2023).



The shift in provision of PE in school towards the practice of outsourcing to external activity providers (McEvilly, 2021) effectively de-skills generalist primary teachers and can also have a significant effect on PE teaching opportunities for ITT students (Randall, 2023).

The Research...



13 students were recruited as participants of three focus groups. The focus groups were conducted individually with each of the three Year groups and moderated by the PE lecturer from the degree course and another PE lecturer without teaching responsibilities for the course.



Each audio recorded focus group was conducted utilising a hybrid format and had a duration of up to 60 minutes. Open-ended questions explored the participants' PE experiences in childhood, university, on placement, and of additional opportunities working with children. They were also queried for challenges they have faced when engaging with or teaching PE, and their strategies to overcome these.



Using the phases of Occupational Socialisation Theory, the audio recording transcripts were thematically analysed to identify the influences, beliefs and PE-specific knowledge of the student teachers and gain an understanding of the facilitators and barriers to teaching PE. The study employed a critical pedagogies perspective of supporting student voices and ownership to direct the research into ways to do this.

The Findings...



CHILDHOOD: Students shared positive experiences of primary PE, although attitudes towards competitive games affected their enjoyment of secondary PE and participation in sports.



UNIVERSITY: Engagement and attendance at practical PE sessions were low in Y1 and Y2. Significantly higher attendances in Y3 were attributed to a growing realisation of impending employment and opportunities to gain a recognised qualification.



PLACEMENT: Student accounts illustrated diverse opportunities for teaching PE within placement schools, with PE delivery often being outsourced. Students without a strong sport/PE background relied on PE teaching schemes.



BARRIERS: CHILDHOOD: Access to PE and sports affected by family finances, travel, gender of pupils and teacher influenced curriculum offerings, availability of clubs, and school teams dominated by more elite players. Other aspects were social anxieties/pressures, dislike of competitiveness, and PE being used as punishment.



BARRIERS: UNIVERSITY: Timetabling, travel/parking, finances, timing of assignments, devaluation of course due to short duration, social anxieties, fear of judgement, attitudes towards competitiveness, and preferences for different activities.



BARRIERS: PLACEMENT: Time allotted, timetabling, curriculum breadth, negative attitudes towards PE by school/mentor, prioritisation of SATs over PE, outsourcing of PE, PPA time scheduled during PE lessons, and behaviour management concerns.



FACILITATORS: Students and lecturers co-constructed facilitating strategies to reinforce a shared philosophy between the university and placement school of the high priority of PE, underpinned by more PE provision across the degree programme. Course content modifications identified widening appeal by broadening the physical activities and sports curriculum, training towards recognised awards and linking assignment(s) to PE.

Moving Forward...

Include multiple year groups and characteristics - gender, disability, ethnicity, upbringing, experiences of university/placement provision etc

Strengthen relationships with placement providers to ensure university provision is translated and supported in practice

Encourage student voice and ownership

Be aware of ethical implications of double agency

Consider the implications of students' Occupational Socialisation as their differing experiences of PE could impact their attendance and engagement. For example, those individuals who disliked PE or whose placements outsourced PE.

Getting Involved



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