Linking teacher socialisation research with a PETE program: insights from beginning and experienced teachers

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(paper accepted [August 2015] for publication in Journal of Teaching in Physical Education)

Abstract
The purpose of this study is to explore the extent to which beginning and experienced teachers differed in their perceptions of shaping school forces and their being shaped by school forces. The findings allow the authors to examine the link between teacher socialization research and practice in a physical education teacher education (PETE) program and to consider the practical (and institutional) changes that may improve the quality of teacher education. Six beginning physical education teachers (BTs) (in their first year of teaching) and six experienced physical education teachers (ETs) (who had been teaching for six years) took part in interviews and completed prompt sheets throughout the duration of a school year. The paper discusses ways in which one PETE program has attempted to use, and plans for future use of, BTs’ and ETs’ accounts of socialization to inform how best to prepare PSTs for the reality of teaching in schools.

Keywords: teacher socialisation, occupational socialisation, teacher education
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**Linking teacher socialisation research with a PETE program: insights from beginning and experienced teachers**

In reviewing the literature on the socialisation of teachers in physical education, Richards, Templin and Graber (2014) summarise that we have learned about the background characteristics of physical education recruits, the effectiveness of teacher education programs and the influence of induction assistance in aiding new teachers in the transition to the school setting. They believe it is critical that new studies be conducted to both add to the body of teacher socialisation literature and to account for changes in socialisation patterns.

Literature on teacher socialization has highlighted the nature and the strength of the personal and the contextual variables influencing the process of becoming a teacher (Lacey, 1977; Zeichner & Gore, 1990). A significant amount of research has explored the pressures on BTs (Borich, 1995; Bullough, Knowles & Crow, 1992; Huberman, 1989; Kelchtermans, 1993; Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002; Kuzmic, 1994; Schempp & Graber, 1992; Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1985), with a strong focus on the ‘wash out’, ‘reality shock’, ‘burn out’ of the teacher training impact once teachers are confronted with the realities of teaching in a school context (McGaha & Lynn, 2000; Lawson, 1989; Wideen et al., 1998). Praxis shock ‘refers to the teachers’ confrontation with the realities and responsibilities of being a school teacher that puts their beliefs and ideas about teaching to the test, challenges some of them, and confirms others’ (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002, p. 105). The ‘praxis shock’ of beginning teachers not only has to do with issues at the classroom level, but also with teacher socialization in the school as an organization.

Zeichner and Gore (1990) note that the emphasis of teacher socialization research has been on how teachers have been influenced and not on how the structures into which they are being socialized have been shaped and recreated by the teachers. They suggest that one consequence of viewing teacher
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socialization as an interactive process is that teachers influence and shape the structures into which they are being socialised at the same time that they are being shaped by a variety of forces at many levels. It was with an interest in this reciprocal relationship that the authors of the current study set out to explore the extent to which beginning and experienced teachers differed in their perceptions of shaping school forces as well as being shaped by school forces. It was anticipated that the study would lead the authors to consider the link between teacher socialization research and practice in teacher education programs (Zeichner & Gore, 1990) in addition to considering the practical (and institutional) issues that have to be taken into account in order to improve the quality of teacher education (Flores, 2001; Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002). Despite a teacher education program’s endeavour to prepare teachers to teach in a competent manner to their first group of students, such programs are in receipt of recurrent condemnations and are not highly regarded by those who experience them (Bransford, Darling-Hammond & LePage, 2005; Grossman, Smagorinsky & Valencia, 1999). The reasons for this are varied and complex. While it may be impossible for programs to replicate certain school contexts, there is evidence to suggest that teachers are not prepared for the realities of school sites as, during their teacher preparation program, pre-service teachers (PSTs) remember ideal conditions that are more than likely not reproduced when teaching in schools (Eldar, Nabel, Schechter, Talmore & Mazin, 2003; Wright, 2001). Subsequently, some teachers question the worth of their teacher preparation (Grossman et al., 1999).

This study contributes to our understanding of the complex relationships evident in PSTs’ transition from university to the workplace (Siedentop, 1990) and in teacher retention (Cochran-Smith, 2004). The intent is to identify issues that arise within the first year of teaching and appear to embed themselves as practices for ETs, and issues that arise for BTs but are addressed as one becomes more experienced in teaching. In highlighting the predominant working conditions that impact on BTs’
satisfaction and work commitment, and the extent to which the conditions continue or cease to continue as they move to becoming ETs, PETE programs can strive to more competently address such issues.

**Occupational socialization and workplace conditions**

Occupational socialization is defined as, “all kinds of socialization that initially influence persons to enter the field of physical education and that later are responsible for their perceptions and actions as teacher educators and teachers” (Lawson, 1986, p. 107). Lawson (1983a) proposed that three kinds of socialization are possible for teachers; acculturation, professional socialization and organizational socialization. ‘Acculturation’ refers to any experience that influences teachers to pursue their future profession, proposing that acculturation begins at birth and these experiences are more influential at shaping PSTs attitudes toward teaching than teacher education (Lortie, 1975). ‘Professional socialization’ refers to the process where “would be and experienced teachers acquire and maintain the values, sensitivities, skills, and knowledge that are deemed ideal for teaching physical education” (Lawson 1983a, p. 4), and is expected to occur in teacher education programs. ‘Organizational socialization’ refers to “the process by means of which prospective and experienced teachers acquire and maintain custodial ideology and the knowledge and skills that are valued and rewarded by the organization” (Lawson, 1983a, p. 4). Teachers are introduced to a “landscape of teaching” that varies by school (Schempp & Graber, 1992) and often face a dialectical process where their subjective warrant and orientation to teaching, along with knowledge acquired in their PETE program, may be challenged within their school setting (Lawson, 1983b). Schempp and Graber (1992) describe this as “fitting in and fighting back” (p. 341), where teachers with orientations opposed to those of the school will adapt their practices to fit in or continue with their orientations and fight back against the
socialization of the school. It is the organizational socialisation phase that is explored in the study reported in this paper.

In their review of the socialisation literature of physical education teachers, Richards, Templin and Graber (2014) discuss individual physical education teachers, PSTs and the school context as reflecting a continuum of teaching as innovative or custodial. They explain that a custodial orientation reflects an individual or context that is concerned primarily with maintaining the status quo with a reliance on traditional teaching methodologies. An innovative orientation reflects an individual or context that is open to change and encourages new approaches to teaching physical education. The current study reflects a PETE program that strives to instil an innovative orientation through the promotion of innovative teaching methodologies, reflective practice, change agency and action research. A more extensive description of the PETE programme will be provided later in the paper. Examining BTs’ and ETs’ socialisation in teaching physical education provides an opportunity for those delivering the PETE programme to determine the extent to which the innovative orientation survives in the school context. In turn, it allows teacher educators to consider how the programme can be more effective in encouraging PSTs to engage with change, consider new approaches to teaching physical education and challenge ineffective practices in schools.

There is a significant evidence base suggesting initial teacher education programmes do not succeed in producing BTs who challenge and reform existing teaching practices and is primarily attributed to the pressures of occupational socialization on BTs taking on their first teaching position (Cope & Stephen, 2001). While there is evidence to suggest that the induction into a career as a physical education teacher may differ from the induction of classroom teachers (O’Sullivan, 1989), different rationales are provided for why this may be the case including the suggestion that recently qualified physical education teachers experience an eased entry into the profession due to lower pedagogical expectations
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of physical education teachers (Huberman, 1989) or that the isolation experienced by physical
education teachers potentially decrease the amount of pressure and adjustment these BTs have to make
(Sparkes, Templin, & Schempp, 1990; Templin, 1989). Regardless, beginning physical education
teachers continue to report frustration in their struggle to establish the academic integrity of their
subject matter (Curtner-Smith, 2001; Green, 1998; O’Sullivan, 1989).

Workplace conditions are significant variables that affect teaching performance, influencing teachers’
perception of their success and their role as physical education professionals (Stroot & Whipple, 2003).
Workplace conditions can make teaching productive and satisfying or unsuccessful and dispiriting,
playing a key role in keeping teachers in the field (Wynn, Carboni & Patall, 2007). They can enhance
or inhibit a teacher’s ability to be effective and can influence their ability to make choices on becoming
part of the existing system or being empowered to change the system (Stroot & Whipple, 2003). It is
not only the quality or qualifications of individuals who teach, but occupational and workplace factors
that affect teachers’ decisions to enter, stay or leave the profession (Blasé & Kirby, 1992).

It is well established that working conditions that affect the work of physical education teachers are the
low status of physical education subject matter, isolation, relationships with other physical education
and classroom teachers, large class sizes, inappropriate facilities, insufficient equipment, scheduling of
physical education classes, the repetitive nature of physical education work, poor interaction with
school administration and limited influence in decision making (Curtner-Smith, 1997b, 1998, 2001;
Graber, 2001; Macdonald, 1995; Meek & Bethets, 1999; Napper-Owen & Phillips, 1995; O’Sullivan,
1989; Stroot & Whipple, 2003; Stroot et al., 1993). Addressing these variables in teacher preparation
programs is difficult because, without ongoing support from the school setting, quality practices are
likely to wash out (Zeichner & Tabachnik, 1981). In a similar vein to Woods and Lynn (2001), it is
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anticipated that this study will provide insight into what happens to teachers as they attempt to navigate and negotiate the bureaucracy associated with the school environment.

In a similarly designed study to the one reported here, Woods and Lynn (2001) investigated factors that enhanced and constrained six teachers' progress through the career cycle. These teachers graduated from the same university PETE program and were examined during their induction and again later in their career cycles. Data indicated that the physical education teachers and the former physical education teachers were affected by the personal and organizational conditions in both similar and distinct ways. What differentiated those who remained from those who left was the manner in which they negotiated the environmental conditions that occurred throughout their career cycle. This is not dissimilar to what Henniger (2007) reported about the relationship between the extent to which urban physical education teachers allowed work conditions to positively or negatively influence their ability to teach quality physical education.

Expectations of Beginning and Experienced Teachers

Expectations for BTs are the same as, and in some cases even higher than, expectations for more experienced teachers (Fletcher & Barrett, 2004; Feiman-Nemser, 1983). The focus of teacher education should be on providing teachers with a set of high-level beginning competencies rather than preparing fully-formed teachers (Conway, Murphy, Rath & Hall, 2009). It is unrealistic to expect BTs to be ‘finished products’ as BTs have legitimate learning needs that cannot be grasped in advance or outside the contexts of teaching (Feiman-Nemser, 2003). BTs need help in learning about the curriculum, students, and interacting with colleagues in order to be effective in instructional practices (Fletcher & Barrett, 2004). In the vast majority of cases, BTs have assumed full teaching roles from the first day of entering the classroom, learning on a sink or swim basis (Alger, 2009; Little, 1990), resulting in BTs’ experiencing difficulties and expressing concerns.
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Teacher development from BT to ET is the transformation in a teacher’s knowledge as they gain experience and expertise (Sebren, 1995). Professional growth consists of an increase in knowledge about students, development of teaching processes and a shift from self to student learning (Behets & Vergauwen, 2006). As teachers gain experience, they get better at their job (Berliner, 1994), acknowledging that developing ‘competency’ is acquired through experience (Carter, Cushing, Sabers et al, 1988). Because pedagogical skills are gained slowly and through experience, teacher education can only produce teachers primed to learn from experience.

PETE programme

The PETE programme related to this study is in an Irish university and is a four-year full-time undergraduate Honours Bachelor Degree, designed to qualify teachers in physical education and another subject in post-primary schools in Ireland. Entry into the programme is primarily through the Irish Leaving Certificate Examination through the Central Applications Office (CAO). At the time of the study, there were approximately 80 to 90 students accepted into the course per year, with around 10% of students entering the course outside the CAO system as mature students. The high academic calibre of applicants to physical education teaching has been a consistent trend since the early 1970s.

Each of the four years is divided into two 13 week semesters – September to December and February to May with formal examinations at the end of each semester. There are three connected and interrelated components to the PETE programme. The first component in which PSTs spend approximately 50% of their time is the content and pedagogy of physical education which emphasizes the application of teaching the content across post-primary school. The physical education component is framed around three main concepts. Firstly, curriculum models convey the shared philosophy of the PETE faculty and define a clear focus around the content of the PETE program. Exposing PSTs to a variety of curriculum models allows them to experience and understand the different learning
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experiences and opportunities possible through such models, encourages PSTs to consider specific, relevant and challenging outcomes in their teaching, and reflects the curriculum framework for senior cycle physical education in Ireland (for students aged between 14 and 17 years) which is structured around six curriculum models. Secondly, teacher as researcher focuses encourages PSTs to engage in undertaking and accessing research that enhances their understanding of the relevance of pedagogical research for teaching young people in schools. Such research provides insight into how things might be adapted or revised to improve practice. The program helps PSTs learn to read, understand and apply research findings to their teaching settings so that they might better impact and facilitate student learning. Commitment to inquiry and reflection through the teacher as researcher is a dimension of teacher professionalism highlighted by the Teaching Council in Ireland. Thirdly, physical activity for a lifetime emphasizes understanding and interrogating young people’s physical activity and sedentary behaviour as essential to the work of the physical education teacher in modern society. This ensures that graduates of the program possess the knowledge and skills to assess and address the physical literacy needs of learners. The second component of the PETE programme is Education and Professional Studies in which PSTs spend approximately 25% of their time. These studies focus on generic educational issues and include learning, planning and teaching, diversity and equality in education, curriculum, school organisation and the teacher as a professional. The third component of the PETE programme is an elective or specialist option in which PSTs spend approximately 25% of their time. This enables PSTs to gain a qualification in one of the following subjects – Chemistry, English, Geography, Irish or Mathematics for which they are qualified to teach on graduation.

There are three school placements over the four years. The first takes place during second semester of year one where PSTs are placed in a primary school for one week. The second school placement block is in second semester of second year, with PSTs in post-primary schools for six weeks teaching both physical education and their elective subject. The third school placement is a ten-week placement in a
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post-primary school in the first semester of fourth year, teaching both physical education and their
elective. There are also further teaching opportunities within modules, placements which enable PSTs
to see how coaches work, and through participating in inclusive and integrated physical education,
which enables pre-service teachers to adapt classes for people with a physical disability.

Methods

Participants

Six BTs, five female and one male, sourced from the PETE program graduating cohort, agreed to
participate in the research after initial contact with each was made by the first author. All six BTs
undertook the PETE program at the same time as the first author. On graduating from the program, the
second author approached six peers to ascertain if they were interested in being involved in the study.
This particular cohort was chosen as the first author had positive relationships with each and was
confident that they would be prepared to invest in the requirements of the study. Six ETs, five female
and one male, who had been teaching for six years agreed to participate. The six ETs had previously
been interviewed by the second author on completion of their PETE program and again at the end of
their first year of teaching (MacPhail, Tannehill and O'Sullivan, 2006). The intention of inviting the
same cohort of ETs was to allow the collection of data that could not only inform the current study but
also contribute to a longitudinal study, not the focus of this paper, of physical education teachers
teaching and career trajectories. It is important to note that the label of ‘experienced’ refers to the
length of time the teachers had been teaching than to their level of expertise in teaching. Both the BTs
and ETs graduated from the same four-year concurrent PETE program where graduates enter the PETE
program with high level academic standards (O'Sullivan et al. 2009). The influence of significant
others, interest in sport and physical education, wanting to teach, coaching and a desire to change
school practices have all been reported as reasons for the program’s PSTs entering PETE (MacPhail,
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Ethical clearance was granted from the university in which both authors resided at the time.

Data Collection

Interviews. The timeline of interviews for both cohorts is noted in Figure 1. The six BTs were interviewed two months into their first teaching position with respect to their conceptions of the PETE program, valued knowledge and anticipated career trajectories. An interview with a sample of three of the BT cohort half way through their first year of teaching was conducted in order to verify commonalities and differences of teaching experiences that were being reported and to highlight areas that required further investigation during final interviews. The BT cohort was interviewed again at the end of their first year of teaching with respect to the articulation of the relationship between the PETE program and teaching school physical education, and plans for the future. All BT interviews were conducted by the first author in the university setting at the end of the school day. Each BT interview on average lasted between 45 and 60 minutes.

ETs were interviewed, after they had started their seventh year of teaching, with respect to their teaching background, relationship between the PETE program content and teaching school physical education, and plans for the future. The ET cohorts were again interviewed at the end of their seventh year of teaching. All ET interviews were conducted by the first author in the individual school settings of each ET at the end of the school day. Each interview on average lasted between 45 and 60 minutes.

Interview transcripts from the respective cohorts informed the next set of interview questions that were posed. Table 1 provides a sample of questions that were posed at each stage of the study. All interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently typed to produce verbatim text as soon after the interview as possible.
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***Prompt sheets.*** Prompt sheets were used to gain a greater insight into the issues facing BTs and ETs, hoping to encourage teachers to note incidents that happened at various points throughout the school year rather than relying solely on interviews to reflect on teaching experiences. The idea of the prompt sheet was for the teachers to document their working conditions and how they felt these conditions either supported or constrained their work within their particular school context. Prompt sheets are a form of reflective writing which, “*Focus on the writer’s learning itself and attempts to identify the significance and meaning of a given learning experience, primarily for the writer*” (Fink, 2003, pg. 93). Self-reflection skills can be improved and strengthened through the use of specific prompts and cues as they can facilitate the learning process for participants (Kathpalia & Heah, 2008). After careful analysis of the initial interviews with the BTs and ETs, prompt sheets were formulated. Prompt sheet headings were informed by noting what had arisen as pertinent working conditions (noted earlier in the paper) and data from initial interviews, conscious that insights acquired from qualitative interviews may improve the quality of other research designs (Gaskell, 2003). Prompt sheets were headed with the question ‘Over the past two weeks, how have the following working conditions impacted on your teaching?’ and space was then provided for them to respond to (i) appropriate and fair teaching assignments, (ii) working relationships with colleagues, (iii) appropriate curricular resources, (iv) level of accountability and (v) school organisation and leadership. A space was also provided for teachers to note additional working conditions and/or any further comments. It was agreed with the BTs and ETs that a prompt sheet was to be submitted each month. Courtesy of an email, each of the teachers was sent a copy of the prompt sheet a week prior to its submission date. The completed prompt sheets were returned to the first author by email. Throughout the course of the study, five prompt sheets were completed by each of the BTs and four prompt sheets by each of the ETs. Timeline of data collection across both cohorts is noted in Figure 1.
Data Analysis

All the data collected from the interviews and prompt sheets were included in the preliminary data analysis. The block and file approach was the preferred method of reducing data as large pieces of data remain intact (Gubich, 2007). Systematic and rigorous consideration of interviews and prompt sheets was required and coding was the most suitable way to analyse this data. The backwards and forwards method of code analysis (Silverman, 2000) was used and resulted in codes being constantly refined within and across the knowledge bases. The aim of this whole process was a quest for common content themes achieved through labelling and subsequent retrieval of similarly coded segments. As the interpretation developed, the interviews and prompt sheets were referred back to on numerous occasions to ensure nothing of significance was omitted. Themes and concepts that were identified and coded in the interviews were compared and contrasted with the prompt sheets and this cross-reference approach formed the basis of the discussion topics (Mason, 1996).

Efforts to establish trustworthiness included triangulating qualitative data sources (Creswell, 2012), involving identification of similar themes situated in both interviews and prompt sheet transcriptions. Debriefing between the two authors throughout data collection and analysis encouraged discussion on developing interpretations and how best to configure future questions to be posed to the teachers. Noting debriefings by peers as a technique for enhancing credibility of interpretation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), debriefing also allowed the researchers to explore and address any instances where the first author, as a peer of the BT cohort, may have exercised research bias in her interactions with the BT cohort as well as her interpretation of associated data. Member checks were conducted formally by seeking clarification from teachers on the accuracy of their interview transcriptions, with an opportunity to clarify and elaborate on any issues arising in the transcriptions.
Results

There is evidence to suggest that physical educators are not prepared for the realities of educational contexts (Williams & Williamson, 1995) and it is necessary for physical education teachers to address the variables that affect their work (Stroot & Whipple, 2003; Graber, 2001). The themes that arose from the data analysis and that are consistent with the working conditions previously cited in the literature are shared here, (i) appropriate and equitable teaching assignments and (ii) working relationships with colleagues, with a view to explicitly conveying the extent to which what teachers (BTs and ETs) need to consider as practitioners is part of the discursive dialogue in PETE programs.

Data collection points throughout the year provided some perspective on the constant and consistent prevalence of the two themes. This is evidenced in the sections below where BTs and ETs revisit and extend particular narratives throughout the interviews and prompt sheets over the duration of the school year. (...) denotes the change in date from one comment to another within extracts from transcriptions. Pseudonyms replace the names of the teachers.

Appropriate and Equitable Teaching Assignments

Appropriate and equitable teaching assignments are assignments that are manageable and within a teacher’s field of expertise (Johnson & Kardos, 2008). Two issues that surfaced for both BTs and ETs were large class size and the extent of the coaching responsibility placed upon physical education teachers.

Large class size. Large class numbers was recognised as a consistent problem for BTs. Claire admitted she was “overwhelmed (...) under pressure and anxious” with respect to class sizes (BT Claire, Prompt Sheet 1, 6/11/2009; Prompt Sheet 2, 22/12/2009), noting later the significant impact it was having on her ability to teach,
For the senior classes, there were very large numbers involved – 70 or 70 plus pupils and it made it very difficult. I could only teach to a certain extent. You had to keep them in some sort of activity and oftentimes that did involve game-type situations … In a way, it was literally chaos – people everywhere, making noise, not listening. The kids do not get as much benefit from it and I do not get as much of a benefit from it because I cannot teach to the same standard I would like. I could not teach as much as I generally would if I had a smaller number. It made pupil learning more difficult (BT Claire, Interview, 30/03/2010).

Worryingly, excessively large classes continued to have serious repercussions in terms of not only implementing the curriculum and participation levels of students for ETs but also in leading ETs to question their professionalism in dealing with such instances,

For fifth and sixth years, this year we had 60 or 70 timetabled for the gym together and a lot of the time, we had to do cross-court basketball or cross-court hockey. That is not physical education for anyone. There was no teaching done. It was exactly what we were told not to do in the PETE program, which is throw in the ball but what can you do with 60 and with another 20 sitting out? (…)We have spent the last six years trying to reverse this and who is going to be there to pick up the tab again? We are going to have to start from scratch again for the entire year with that particular group (ET Nancy, Interview, 23/11/2009; Interview, 10/06/2010)

Coaching responsibilities. The extent of coaching responsibilities was a consistent theme for BTs, I have become involved with catering for male and female sport in the school. Most sporting events in the school are coordinated through me. I am also involved in [name a number of national initiatives delivered predominantly by physical education teachers] adding to the workload I often feel is overwhelming me at times (BT John, Prompt Sheet 2, 10/12/2009).
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Many teachers summarized the extent of the commitment for physical education teachers to assume coaching roles, with many BTs and ETs suffering ‘role conflict’ indicating that the role of coaching can compromise their role as a physical education teacher,

This month has not got any better regarding fixtures and it came to the stage last week, when I questioned myself if I was a physical education teacher or just a coach. I have been away twice a week since mid term and I am missing time from my [physical education] classes (BT Jean, Prompt Sheet 5, 11/05/2010).

The expected coaching responsibilities of the BTs and ETs lead to the consideration of working relationships with colleagues.

Working relationships with colleagues

BTs and ETs commented on the associated issues of a lack of support from other subject teaching colleagues and collaboration with (or isolation from) physical education colleagues.

Support (or not) from other subject teaching colleagues. BTs surmised that the minimal backing or support they received from teaching colleagues was due to the lack of respect for physical education as a school subject,

I often get the feeling that many other teachers within the school have no respect for the strand of physical education. I hear comments that exam year classes would be better having other classes [other than physical education] instead or that it would be no problem to miss physical education to take an extra class in a different subject. This attitude is annoying as I find it completely disrespectful towards me. It is demeaning the subject I teach. I find it insulting (BT Claire, Prompt Sheet 3, 26/04/2010).

Another example of the lack of respect for physical education was the way physical education was disregarded when it comes to exam-time and /or the staging of school plays,
The hall was used for drama week and then school exams were taking place so it had to be set up for those. The weather was not suitable to go outside so we had to revert to supervising the kids in classrooms for double period. Seemingly it happens every year and we cannot do anything about it. Finally after mid-term we got it back [the hall] only for it to be used again for the aptitude tests … very frustrating (BT Jean, Prompt Sheet 2, 22/12/09; Prompt Sheet 4, 26/03/2010).

The lack of respect teaching colleagues convey for physical education continued to be a significant issue for ETs and such benevolent attitude towards physical education was highlighted in an encounter reported by an ET. The extent to which such an attitude affects the ET’s commitment to teaching physical education is worrying,

One of the teachers passed a comment to both the art teacher and me saying, ‘Sure, what are we saying good luck to them for, all they are doing is kicking a football and drawing a few pictures’. That is the general attitude towards physical education and sport. That is their view … and it is very hard to overcome that (…) I feel as the physical education teacher, physical education is not valued to the degree that I would like and it would impact on my relationship with certain members of staff (ET Kevin, Prompt Sheet 1, 28/01/2010; Interview, 19/11/2010).

It is against this backdrop that the necessity for collaboration across the physical education department was stressed.

Collaboration with (or isolation from) physical education colleagues. BTs felt their teaching improved when they had collaborative relations with their fellow physical education teacher colleagues,

… All the credit for my improvement as a teacher goes to him [the other physical education teacher]. He was really, really good. He has been there twenty / thirty years. Every time we went to teach something new, he has a system. He knows what he is going to do and if I thought I could
add something else we would do it but if not, we would go about it his way. Any time I was going
to do something he would give me advice or if I was ever having problems, he would always step
in and give me a hand. In that sense, he was very good and any difficulties I did come across, he
definitely helped me out. I learned an awful lot from him (BT Sinead, Prompt Sheet 2,
22/12/2009).

Conversely, Mary, as a BT, consistently experienced difficulties with her physical education colleague
both in terms of physical education and in coaching,

I am only there for a year so I have to just put the head down because as it is, I have to row in with
what she wants. I have no other option and that makes me feel under-valued, under-mined even.
She just does not see me as an equal. I am someone she thinks she can just take advantage of
…This is my first year out and she really does look down on me because of my inexperience. I am
full of ideas and enthusiasm but yet she is dampening it by claiming that it will not work. She puts
it down before I have even suggested it or tried it out properly (Prompt Sheet 2, 22/12/2009).

While Mary’s situation has been the most prolonged instance of dissatisfaction with physical education
colleagues, other BTs had remarkably similar experiences.

There were also instances where ETs felt alone in their questions and problems when collaboration
with a physical education colleague was not particularly strong,

We have not discussed content, teaching methods, assessment or other areas that I would have
discussed with teachers in the past (...) I was a bit disillusioned in one sense thinking if this was
always going to be the way … This year, I have had less collaboration with the other teacher. That
lack of collaboration has come from a number of different angles – partly to do with myself but
partly to do with a tiny bit disillusionment with the inconsistency of a new teacher starting all over
again (ET Aine, Prompt Sheet 1, 31/01/2010; Interview, 03/06/2010).
With a lack of collaboration evident for many BTs, it is little wonder that isolation was prevalent. Isolation was heightened for BTs when there was only one physical educator in the school (not an uncommon occurrence in Irish post-primary schools) with little opportunity to pursue professional dialogue,

There is no other physical education teacher in the school so effectively I am the Physical Education Department. I found it difficult to adapt to the level of responsibility being directed towards me. With regard to physical education, I must admit I am alone (…) There is nobody to tell you, ‘This is how you teach’… Once I was gone, that was it. It was a shock being the only physical education teacher. Suddenly I was responsible for all the plans, timetabling, pupils, everything … You have a lot of things being thrown at you. At the start there was a sense of panic. You find yourself fighting your own corner when you are on your own (BT John, Prompt Sheet 1, 6/11/2009; Interview, 03/06/2010).

ETs acknowledged isolation as an obstacle at some stage in their career, affirming that when isolation is prevalent, teachers struggle through the entire year. Again, this is heightened when there is only one physical education teacher in the school,

I am on my own as a physical education teacher. When something does not go great or when something annoys you or when kids are not interested, you really do not have any back-up (…) In terms of just the physical education aspect alone, they would not know anything about it and they would not see your frustration … they would not understand. It does affect me. I would feel very isolation and basically I am working on my own in terms of subject department meetings. Everybody is going off in their fours and fives to talk about their department and I am there and I am on my own (ET Kevin, Interview, 19/11/2009; Prompt Sheet 1, 28/01/2010).
While one would expect a level of experience to be effective in addressing many of the challenges which BTs identified, the issue of working conditions is noteworthy as it identifies aspects that appear to be on-going for BTs and are issues that remain prevalent for ETs. A number of the working conditions noted by BTs and ETs in this study support previously reported conditions affecting the enactment of physical education teaching practices, i.e., large class sizes (Johnson & Kardos, 2008), coaching responsibilities (Fejgin et al., 1995; Stroot & Whipple, 2003) and support (or not) from other physical education and teaching colleagues (Marshall & Hardman, 2000). The establishment of similar working conditions attached to teaching physical education in the Irish school system provides us with evidence to inform how best we consider such issues in an attempt to develop more effective models of PETE. That is, teacher educators can use BTs’ and ETs’ accounts of socialization as part of the curriculum (Zeichner & Gore, 1990) of the PETE programme with a view to best preparing teachers for the reality of teaching in schools.

Some of the variation that exists in socializing experiences among students is a result of differences in the institutional environments of the schools in which they teach (Ziechner & Gore, 1990), with large class sizes being a reported issue for some of the BTs and ETs. In supporting the suggestions of Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002) we have reported previously how the PETE program has utilized a portfolio assignment as well as small-scale action research projects to engage with particular working condition aspects of individual schools. The institutional environment of Irish schools is further interrogated through numerous modules that reside in the ‘education’ component of the PETE program. *The School as an Organisation* is a module that runs parallel to PSTs fourth-year school placement and encourages them to consider the prevailing school culture and ideology in which they reside and how they reconfigure themselves within that. The module provides
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an action-research perspective where PSTs identify and explore an issue that, through reflective practice, would encourage them to consider the enactment of their own practices. *Teachers as Professionals* is a module that provides an opportunity for PSTs to critically reflect on their own developing professional identity as a teacher and their associated teaching philosophy. A strong component of the module is to consider the development of professional agency and how they can best contribute to the critical mass of teachers involved in the wider teaching profession. These opportunities provide meaningful opportunities for PSTs to analyse and reflect upon their own beliefs and implicit theories about teaching and about being a teacher (Flores, 2001). Given that the PSTs enrolled on the PETE programme are studying an additional classroom subject that they are qualified to teach on graduation, they are by default exposed, perhaps more than single-subject PSTs, to contrasting viewpoints in clarifying the complex aspects of teaching in a classroom and a sports hall / gymnasium. One practice that is enforced when PSTs undertake school placements throughout their PETE program is to allow them ‘space’ to try out their own ideas (Hollingsworth, 1989). This is facilitated through encouraging PSTs to identify at least one class a week where they look to enact a new practice, conscious that this is deemed a ‘safe’ space from programme tutors visiting and grading their performance in that particular class.

The more recent tension in the Irish school system between the role of the physical educator and the expectation of being involved in coaching lead to the introduction of a *Youth Sport and Policy* module in the PETE programme. The module provides opportunities for PSTs to examine the ways in which their commitment to, and informed engagement with, local sports and physical activity providers external to a school context might have the potential to bring about positive change for all stakeholders, while interrogating the extension of what it may mean to be a ‘physical educator’. This in turn challenges PSTs to (i) identify effective teaching, coaching and facilitation strategies that
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accommodate diverse populations, e.g. disadvantaged / minority groups, special educational needs, talented performers, (ii) discuss the relationship between teaching, coaching and facilitating youth physical activity, and (iii) identify the existing pillars of youth sport (physical education, extra-curricular sport and sport outside school), the relationship between them and implications for physical education teachers and youth sport providers. As a consequence of this module, it was decided that there was a need to provide students with a reference point for broadening perspectives of physical education in changing contexts and subsequently the first chapter of Building Effective Physical Education Programs (Tannehill, Van der Mars & MacPhail, 2015) discusses the role of the physical educator in and beyond the school.

The issue of BTs and ETs experiencing a lack of support from other physical education teachers and other teacher colleagues has been more difficult to address through the PETE programme, with an awareness that there is a need to provide PSTs with a skill-set that will encourage them to become change agents with respect to enacting and developing practices that will provide them with support structures that may not be evident otherwise (MacPhail & Tannehill, 2012). A current development that the PETE program is considering in an attempt to enhance the support structures between teacher educators, PSTs who are to become BTs, and ETs is the establishment of a formalized shared learning community. It is proposed that we consider how potential similarities and differences in learning trajectories (within and across all three populations) inform how best to plan, structure and support a shared learning community. This in turn has significant implications for teachers, teacher educators and PST’s learning from, and developing with, each other as well as informing each population on how best to share the responsibility of delivering worthwhile student learning in both school and the PETE program. This supports bringing practicing teachers into the higher education contexts with a view to act as a basis for the development of a more effective initial teacher education and for professional
development of both teachers and lecturers working on initial teacher education programs (Cope &
Stephen, 2001), an issue we have addressed through the creation of posts termed ‘Applied Studies
Coordinators’.

The philosophy behind the Applied Studies Coordinator posts was to encourage those with current
experience in teaching physical education in schools to consider a five-year appointment in delivering
applied studies (e.g., adventure, athletics, dance, games) to PSTs on the PETE program. The post is a
five-year contract to allow teachers currently teaching physical education in schools to consider a
career break and to facilitate a turn-over of practicing physical education teachers on the PETE
program. It was anticipated that such posts would optimize the access PSTs have to the craft
knowledge of practitioners. As Lawson (1986) warns, the teacher educator in higher education cannot
afford to divorce themselves or their efforts from practicing teachers. Incorporating the Applied
Studies Coordinators into the staff base of the PETE program allows for the development of a shared
technical culture, i.e., what constitutes the ideal school physical education program and the associated
appropriate teacher behavior in conducting such a program.

**Conclusion**

Ultimately, the potential success, or otherwise, of PETE programs is dependent on the extent to which
teachers, both beginning and experienced, are actively engaged and continue to be actively engaged in
the tasks of teaching school physical education (O’Sullivan, 1989; Stroot & Whipple, 2003). Many of
the BTs conformed to the practices that were already occurring in schools, displaying little ability to
act as ‘transformative agents’ (Fullan, 1993), resulting in feelings of frustration and resignation. As the
years progressed, there is evidence from the ETs that these feelings of frustration and resignation
remained prevalent. As has been stated elsewhere, it is imperative that PETE programs provide PSTs
with the skill-set and disposition to advocate for the physical education subject and have the ability and
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confidence to become change agents (MacPhail & Tannehill, 2012). These teachers have displayed perseverance in the determination to ‘swim against the tide’ but when faced with the same issues year on year, disillusionment has become the over-riding emotion, not dissimilar to Henniger’s (2007) ‘troupers’ (those who complain about work conditions and believe that workplace conditions has negatively influenced their ability to teach quality physical education).

There are mixed accounts of the extent to which a PETE program impacts physical education practices in schools. Minimal impact is attributed to beliefs about the physical education subject being developed during childhood and adolescence not being easily changed (Curtner-Smith, 1999; Green, 1998) while there is evidence that PSTs are influenced more when they perceive faculty to be credible (Graber, 1995) and when faculty have specialist degrees in sport pedagogy and agree a professional ideology (Lawson, 1983b). We appreciate that there is more we can do to encourage PSTs to read and discuss accounts of their peers’ teacher socialization and relate them to their own experiences in learning to teach during school placements, potentially gaining greater insights into and control over their own socialization (Zeichner & Gore, 1990). In turn, the same accounts can challenge our thinking and help us to think more clearly about the consequences of our work for those we seek to educate (Zeichner & Gore, 1990). Complementing the exercise of PSTs engaging with accounts of their peers’ socialization into teaching, there is a need for PSTs to learn how to read research in physical education and apply it to practice. The PETE programme has attempted to address this in a publication that presents a clear, step-by-step guide on how to read and interpret research related to physical education teaching and learning (Tannehill, MacPhail, Halbert & Murphy, 2013).

Agreeing with Lawson (1983b), it is imperative that physical education teacher educators examine their fundamental assumptions about their work. As posed at the beginning of this paper, if indeed the purpose of PETE programs is to produce teachers who will challenge and reform existing teaching
practices, it appears that an obvious starting point is gathering physical education teacher socialization accounts. These then need to be shared with PSTs on the program and an effective way of engaging with such accounts and determining how best PSTs develop a skill-set that not only allows them to deal with such realities but also act as change agents needs to be considered. Extending the role that research on teacher socialization can play, Zeichner and Gore (1990) suggest that such research should be used by teacher educators and policymakers in ways that further the roles of teachers as ‘extended professionals’ who play a significant part in the making of educational policies at the classroom and school levels.

One of the main limitations of this study is that the ETs and BTs were tracked intermittently throughout a school year, perhaps resulting in teachers relying on sharing feelings and practices that were closer to the data collection periods than at other times throughout the teaching year. Future work in this area would benefit from tracking the day-to-day operations of physical education teachers to gain a sense of the consistency and cycle of feelings and experience that contribute to the development of teaching expertise. Nevertheless, the study contributes to the literature by raising an awareness of the knowledge required and structures needed for a more meaningful journey for the development of teaching expertise and associated informed effective practices in school physical education.

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