

WHAT MAKES GREAT PHYSICAL EDUCATION TEACHING?

APPLICATION OF EVIDENCE-BASED RESEARCH TO THE TRAINING EXPERIENCE OF ITE STUDENTS

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INTRODUCTION

What makes great physical education (PE) teaching? If only it were as simple as reading this article! In 2014, The Sutton Trust reviewed over 200 pieces of research to discover what constitutes great teaching. This is just one piece of evidence-informed research that the Secondary PE PGCE and School Direct course at the University of Worcester is informed by.

Coe *et al.* (2014) acknowledge the extreme difficulties in being able to precisely define effective teaching. However, the focus remains on improving pupil achievement and outcomes. The report identified effective practices, as well as practices that were deemed to be less effective; all of which are grounded in evidence and will be discussed within this article.

As a cohort, we reviewed The Sutton Trust report at various intervals throughout the course of the year, both within professional studies and subject sessions. During the outbreak of COVID-19, a distance learning task was set whereby the secondary PE cohort worked in small groups to discuss and reflect how they had applied or could apply the findings of the report to PE. The trainees discussed their opinions of what makes great PE teaching, as well as their experiences throughout their initial teacher education (ITE) year. Following this, three trainees volunteered to edit and collate the work that is produced in this article.

This article aims to provide an overview of the six key factors that were deemed most effective in improving pupils' attainment and outcomes, applying those to a PE specific context and providing workable strategies. The six key factors are:

- (Pedagogical) content knowledge
- Quality of instruction
- Classroom climate

- Classroom management
- Teacher beliefs
- Professional behaviours

As with any suggestion of strategies to improve teaching and learning, the strategies need to be clear, impactful and implementable. The concept that great teachers have high expectations is largely meaningless without an accompanying strategy to support this statement. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to provide teachers, particularly trainee teachers, with a resource to engage with, as well as strategies to better develop themselves as teachers.

(PEDAGOGICAL) CONTENT KNOWLEDGE

Content knowledge can be defined as “the knowledge, understanding, skill and dispositions that are to be learned by school children” (Shulman, 1987, pp.8-9) and has been highlighted as one of the most important factors affecting pupil learning (Coe *et al.*, 2014). The importance of content knowledge is broken down into two complementary concepts: substantive content and syntactic content (Schwab, 1964). Substantive knowledge considers the teacher's understanding of the core PE concepts alongside understanding how pupils think about content to identify and alleviate common misconceptions and ensure pupil progress (Siedentop, 2002; Ward and Li, 2015). Syntactic content underpins the organisation and sequencing of content into effective, scaffolded formats for pupil progress (Schwab, 1964). A teacher may understand the skills involved in a certain sport, but they need to enable pupils to connect the content. For example, you would not deliver a lesson on crossing in football until you have taught the long pass and you would not teach the movement of muscles until you have taught the anatomy of muscles.

Although understanding content knowledge for a diverse range of sports within physical education is challenging, the impact on learning when successful is significant (Coe *et al.*, 2014). Teachers with greater content knowledge, both substantively and syntactically, improve pupil progress as they use their understanding of the content to deliver it in a pedagogically appropriate way (Kleickmann *et al.*, 2013; Iserbyt, Ward and Li, 2017). It is the union of content and pedagogical knowledge that affects engagement, progress and attainment of pupils significantly (Shulman, 1987; Coe *et al.*, 2014). Enhancing content knowledge is possible in a multitude of ways. We recommend engaging with sport-specific courses or literature provided by the university and the national governing bodies of sport. Furthermore, using the knowledge of sports specialists within a PE department can provide opportunities to develop content as well as pedagogical knowledge by observing best practice. Engaging with the sport as either a performer or a spectator can also improve content knowledge. Of importance, however, is the application of this content knowledge. We note that once content knowledge has been enhanced, it needs to be applied pedagogically, either through a lesson plan or delivery. Ultimately (pedagogical) content knowledge is necessary for the development of pupil progress and must be considered within our teaching (Coe *et al.*, 2014).

QUALITY OF INSTRUCTION

Quality of instruction has been identified as one of the key influences to show improvement of outcomes and is at the “heart of all frameworks of teaching effectiveness” (Coe *et al.*, 2014, p.44). In support of this, Fitchett and Heafner (2018) stated for an educator to provide high-quality teaching, they must be using

effective instructional strategies. Quality of instruction encompasses a large range of teaching strategies such as questioning, assessment, modelling, reviewing material and scaffolding (Coe *et al.*, 2014). Within PE, all of these elements are essential to securing pupils' progress. A few simple but effective Rosenshine (2010; 2012) elements that PE can use are:

- Scaffolding for difficult tasks
- Checking for understanding
- Presenting new information/materials in small steps
- Monitoring independent practice (Sherrington, 2019).

As trainee PE teachers, we believe that it is critical to plan and consider how you will communicate instructions; these may differ depending on the group you are teaching. For example, a high-ability group will be able to listen, synthesise and apply a list of instructions quickly. However, a pupil with special educational needs (SEN) may require clearer and more concise instructions to understand what is required of them. Therefore, the teacher must instruct pupils in a way that is suitable for the individuals rather than generic instructions for the group; this will enhance pupils' learning and progress. Questioning can also be used as a powerful tool of formative or summative assessment (Zwozdiak-Myers, 2015) and can support the monitoring of pupil progress (Sherrington, 2019). We believe it is an essential teaching strategy that should be adopted by all.

CLASSROOM CLIMATE

A conducive classroom climate has been identified as a crucial component in teaching and has a positive impact on learning and progress (Coe *et al.*, 2014; Sortkær and Reimer, 2018). Whilst the precise meaning of an effective classroom climate is contested within the literature, Coe *et al.* (2014, p.3) refer to classroom climates as the "quality of interactions between teachers and students". As trainee physical educators, we have found that developing and maintaining effective working relationships with pupils helps to promote a love of learning and capture intellectual curiosity (Coe *et al.*, 2014). Given the dynamic nature of the subject, PE has been proposed as the ideal setting for teachers to develop meaningful relationships with their pupils (Cronin *et al.*, 2018). A pupil-centred approach to your teaching is one method you could look to employ. Trust, warmth, respect, enjoyment and enthusiasm have also been found to lead the development of effective working relationships and contribute to creating positive classroom climates. We have found that enthusiastic

teaching and instilling a sense of trust leads to the development of a positive classroom climate. We believe this to be particularly important, given the unpredictable and diverse nature of the subject. Ultimately, an effective classroom climate is crucial to capture the curiosity of pupils and support learning and progress over time.

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

Improving pupil outcomes with the use of classroom management has been widely researched by many academics (Alstot and Alstot, 2019; Collier-Meek *et al.*, 2019; Grube *et al.*, 2018) and has also been stated by Coe *et al.* (2014) as being key for effective teaching. Many teachers and, more specifically, trainee teachers have worries about their classroom management when working with new groups. We found the following strategies key to supporting our behaviour management within a PE setting. Firstly, we believe relationships with pupils are crucial (Mawer, 2014). Having strong relationships with your pupils may allow them to turn to you in a time of need or concern; this develops a sense of trust that may minimise any disruptions (Gordon, 2016). It is important to learn the names of pupils quickly, helping to build the initial relationship. Secondly, we believe it is important to set high expectations early on (Fletcher and Baker, 2015) and continuously refer to these high expectations in a positive light. Clear lesson objectives with instructions, demonstrations and progressions to challenge the pupils are all important to keep pupils on task and reduce any unwanted behaviour (Arthur and Capel, 2015). Furthermore, routines should also be set and reinforced when required, with the teacher giving consistent but firm responses. Finally, planning and delivering effective transitions between activities saves time and reduces the chance of disruptive behaviour (Tannehill, Van der Mars and MacPhail, 2015).

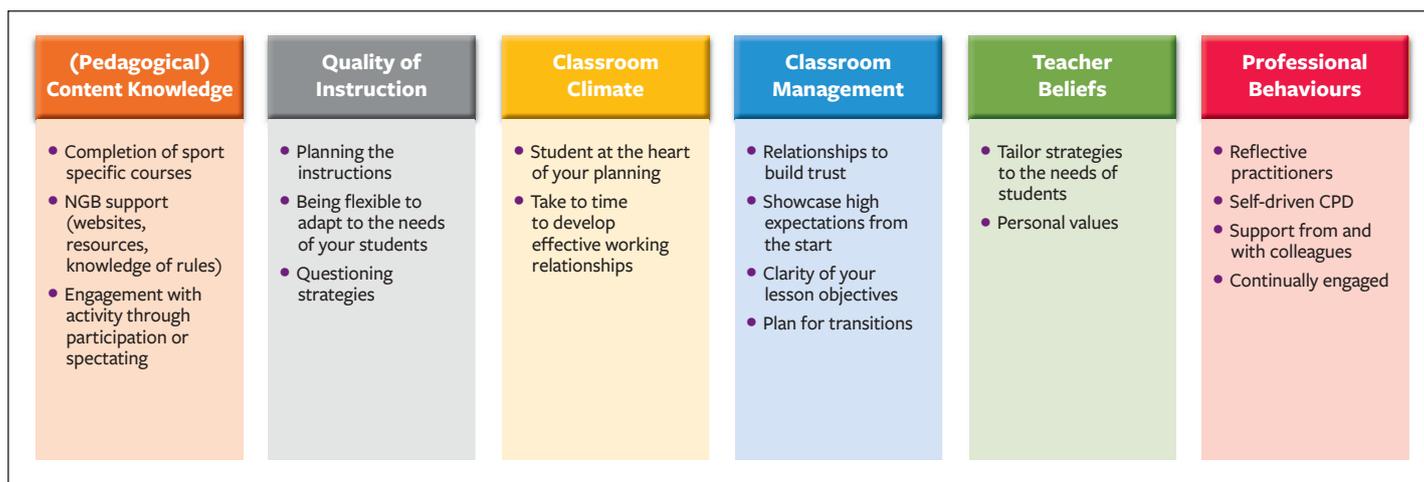
TEACHER BELIEFS

Teacher beliefs concern the approaches and theories they choose to adopt within their practice, as well as their justification for doing so (Coe *et al.*, 2014). Teacher beliefs constitute the diverse and individual nature of the profession, given that every practitioner will have experienced and developed different beliefs over time (Fives and Buehl, 2012). Within PE, teaching practice is relatively open to interpretation. The National Curriculum is not prescriptive so allows individual departments and teachers to choose how they deliver the content outlined in the Physical Education Programmes of Study (Department for Education, 2013). With this in mind, it could be said that teacher beliefs are even

more prevalent, as they will more than likely shape how PE is taught in the 3,448 state-funded secondary schools in England (HM Government, 2020). Ultimately, this may impact on the quality of delivery and the likelihood of sustained learning and progress over time, as well as engagement and lifelong participation. To ensure high-quality delivery, it is important to find strategies and approaches that are tailored to the needs and interests of pupils, as well as those that teachers feel experienced with and comfortable utilising. Throughout our ITE year, we have observed how the beliefs of teachers are imposed on their pupils. One example is teachers who naturally favour competition and focus heavily on teaching and assessing through direct rivalry and a games-based approach. However, this is not necessarily a suitable approach for all pupils and may harm engagement and progress over time. Other observed examples include assessment strategies, disciplinary styles and classroom routines. Teacher beliefs create a sense of individualism within lessons and offer a range of different learning environments. Whilst there may not be a *correct* set of beliefs, it is important to consider that every pupil and class is different. Teachers must be true to themselves and adopt the most appropriate teaching style in various circumstances, with the aim being to support learning and progress over time.

PROFESSIONAL BEHAVIOURS

The Sutton Trust report (Coe *et al.*, 2014) highlights professional behaviours as an important factor of effective teaching that has a positive impact on learning. Coe *et al.* (2014) state that professional behaviours encapsulate "reflecting on and developing professional practice, participation in professional development, supporting colleagues, and liaising and communicating with parents" (p.3). Reflection allows teachers to meet the needs of their context to promote learning (Dillon and Maguire, 2009). Ghaye (2011) suggests that trainee teachers are encouraged to reflect to create more effective practice, a process that should be continued beyond the trainee year. Engaging with a post-lesson reflection – verbally, mentally or through written documentation – is one strategy that enhances professional behaviour. In turn, continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities meet the ongoing needs of teachers in developing practice and are considered highly influential in the development of practitioners (Dadds, 2014; Morgan and Hansen, 2008). We highlight that the opportunity to participate in CPD through university and school has improved both content and pedagogical knowledge which has impacted on our teaching and confidence.



Furthermore, the notion of supporting colleagues within one's own and other schools has been identified as important in professional development as a result of creating social capital (mutual support and trust) and intellectual capital (ideas and practices) amongst teachers (James and McCormick, 2009). Specific to PE, we believe the trainee-mentor relationship is important to the development of both the trainee and the mentor. This relationship encompasses levels of occupational socialisation whereby both the trainee and mentor influence each other's teaching practice due to their expertise and ideas resulting in the sharing of knowledge and professional development. Finally, liaising and communicating with parents allows the creation of partnerships between teachers and parents, which is fundamental to building a community between home and school (Murray, McFarland-Piazza and Harrison, 2015). This partnership creates a cohesive environment where knowledge can be shared between teachers and parents to assist with the development of specific pupils. Overall, professional behaviours should be continually engaged with to create lifelong learning opportunities which improve the effectiveness of teachers and promote pupil learning (Kyndt *et al.*, 2016).

CONCLUSION

In developing this article, it is not our intention to simplify the complex world of PE teaching – many different elements combine to ensure that learning is progressive and meaningful. We hope this article provides suggestions and ideas for further research enabling development in your practice.

If nothing more, reading this article allows you to reflect if your practice is the most effective, as we continually look to improve teaching. As the old saying goes, "If you always do what you've always done, you always get what you've always got". ■

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