

Title 'I didn't want to sound stupid' Are new PE teachers sufficiently prepared to deliver accredited PE and Sport courses?

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“I DIDN’T WANT TO SOUND STUPID.”

ARE NEW PHYSICAL EDUCATION TEACHERS SUFFICIENTLY PREPARED TO DELIVER ACCREDITED COURSES?

Introduction

Professionals and scholars regularly seek legitimacy for physical education (PE) within the education field (Casey & Donovan, 2015; Seymore *et al.*, 2015; Scanlon *et al.*, 2019). Despite having responsibility for affecting fitness, health and wellbeing in young people, the prominence of PE is reduced, and the subject has been marginalised in secondary education (Casey & Donovan, 2015; Maguire *et al.*, 2019). Through the years, PE has sought legitimacy through practical means, providing physical preparation of pupils, such as improvements in fitness, skill development and tactical awareness (Siedentop, 2002; Houlihan & Green, 2006; Capel, 2007; Stiles & Katene, 2013). However, since the development of the EBacc and Progress 8 for comparing schools in league tables, curriculum PE time has been reduced and PE teachers feel less secure in their jobs (Dudley & Burden, 2019).

While the importance of core practical PE has been downgraded, the academic rigour of PE and sport courses has increased. Changes include increased weight of assessment towards the theoretical components and increased depth of sport science content knowledge in GCSE and A-level PE and BTEC sport courses (Spence & MacNamara, 2018; Scanlon, 2019; Thorburn, 2019).

PE and sport courses remain popular, with over 180,000 pupils taking an accredited course at either level 2 or 3 in 2019 (Pearson, 2019; Schoolsweek, 2019). This popularity provides potential enhanced job security, improved levels of legitimacy for the subject and increased pupil contact time (Thorburn, 2019). Initial teacher training (ITT) PE courses must therefore ensure that they are fit for purpose, providing new teachers with the skills and knowledge to secure employment in a competitive field.

GCSE and A-level PE, BTEC sport and Cambridge National or Technical sport qualifications make up the bulk of the 14-19 PE and sport curriculum and have recently undergone a process of academicisation (Spence & MacNamara, 2018). However, PE teachers are mainly prepared to focus on the content knowledge required for the development of physical skills and conditioning or tactical awareness and understanding (Sloan, 2007; Herold & Waring, 2009; Herold & Waring, 2017). Theoretical understanding and sport scientific knowledge have been neglected (Stiles & Katene, 2013; Wee & Chin, 2016; Spence & MacNamara, 2018) and PE teachers are failing to provide adequate successful outcomes for pupils within these courses. This study considered if new PE teachers are qualifying with insufficient subject knowledge to teach sport science material in the specifications of accredited courses.

This research undertook a phenomenological qualitative investigation to evaluate how new PE teachers perceived the development of pedagogical content knowledge (Schulman, 1986 & Schulman, 1987) for delivery of sport scientific material required up to level 3 in accredited PE and sport courses.

Method

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

This study used IPA to understand participant development through PE teacher education (PETE) and the early years of qualified teacher status (QTS). Due to the increased level of detail required for research using IPA, a relatively small number of participants allows a detailed, nuanced analysis of the data (Smith, 2004; Larkin *et al.*, 2006).



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Central to IPA is the understanding that the researcher plays a significant role in interpreting how participants experience their 'lifeworld', whilst bringing with them their own set of ideas and beliefs which form the foundation from which the interpretation is driven (Smith, 2004). The interview process must, therefore, be considered as influenced by the experiences, prejudices and biases of both researcher and participant (Larkin *et al.*, 2006).

Participants

Using a purposive sampling technique, a total of seven neophyte PE teachers, consisting of five males and two females, participated in the semi-structured interviews. Participants were six teachers employed in secondary schools and one lecturer in further education at a tertiary college. Due to the detailed transcript analysis required of IPA, Smith and Osborn (2003) recommend between five and ten participants.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling which complements IPA as it provides a structure for selection of a homogenous group that share characteristics (Etikan, 2016), in this case profession, qualification and experience in post. This technique led to some variety of degree and ITT courses, and methods of gaining QTS in secondary PE. Therefore triangulation (Cresswell, 2011) improved the external validity (Walliman, 2011, pp.104) of the research, allowing the findings to be transferable to a wider population.

Data analysis

Interviews were analysed in line with the step-by-step guide outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), allowing hierarchical themes to develop completely for each data item before the next item was considered.

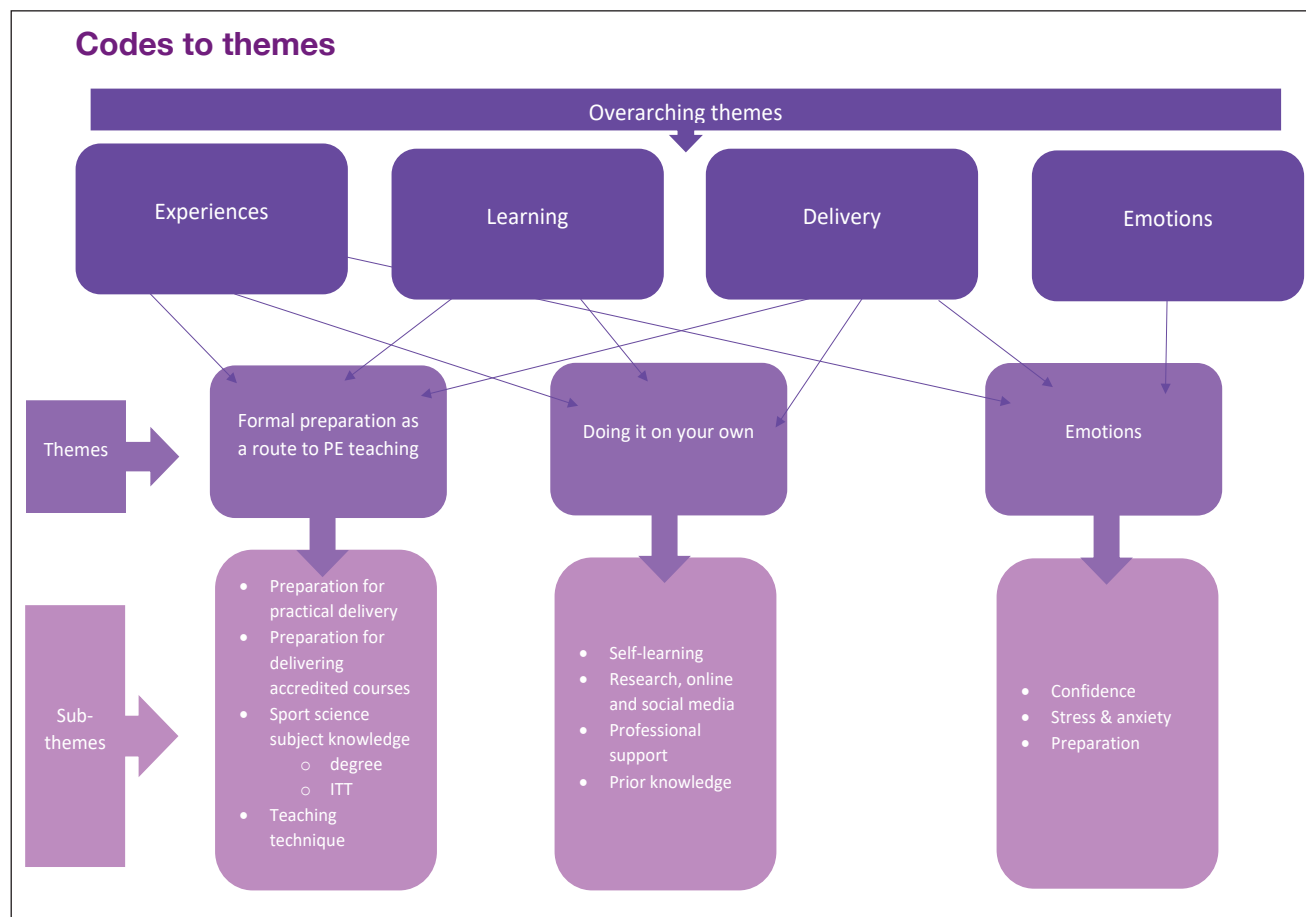
During phase 1, the transcripts were completely coded. Much of the data was given multiple codes, allowing it to be coded in as many ways as "fits the purpose" (Braun & Clarke, 2013, pp.207). Selective coding was used in phase 2 of the analysis. Patterns were identified following coding of all data. This allowed the analysis to focus on broader themes. The relationships between the codes developed into a hierarchical structure of overarching themes, themes and sub-themes.

Results

Four over-arching themes emerged from the collected data: experiences, learning, delivery and emotions. These over-arching themes fed into three main themes that were discussed at length: *formal preparation as a route to PE teaching*; *doing it on your own*; and *emotions* (See Figure 1).

The results suggest that participants perceived the levels of preparation provided during their degree and ITT courses were insufficient to provide content knowledge in sport science or skills and techniques of classroom teaching for pedagogical content knowledge, when they commenced teaching accredited courses. This led to low levels of confidence and increased anxiety in the classroom.

Figure 1: Illustration of themes.





Participants reported that they were well-prepared and more confident to deliver practical content. They reported a significant difference in preparedness for delivering theory content in the classroom compared to practical teaching.

Participants reported that they often gained sport science content knowledge and theory teaching experience without the direct influence of their degree or ITT courses. They sought to improve their sport science content knowledge by gaining additional qualifications, such as personal training, or academic research from journal articles, course textbooks and websites. It was also reported that there is a growing community of practice on social media, particularly on Twitter, where practitioners gain and share resources and experiences in the field.

The levels of preparedness for delivering sport scientific content in accredited PE and sport courses had a large effect on the emotional responses of the participants. The greater the level of sport science content knowledge and the more meaningful experiences provided to the participant, the more confident they felt in their ability and the less anxious they were prior to teaching accredited courses.

Discussion

PE teachers and sport lecturers have a dichotomous role in secondary and further education (Casey & O'Donovan, 2015), delivering the breadth of the National Curriculum for PE (NCPE) and accredited PE and sport courses. Practical content develops skills for sports performance and improving individuals' fitness levels designed to improve the health of the nation. This is an important role and one that PE teachers are trained well to do (Stiles & Katene, 2013). Practical skill

development is the focus for content knowledge acquisition on degree and ITT courses (Ward, 2013; Nyberg & Larsson, 2014; Ensign *et al.*, 2018). Accredited PE and sport courses can increase the status of PE within education by academicising the subject (Thorburn, 2019). However, the method of teaching practical PE is vastly different to that of theoretical sport science teaching, requiring very different knowledge sets and teaching techniques (Wee & Chin, 2016; Spence & MacNamara, 2018). It is not guaranteed that perceptions of security in delivering one ensures security in both (Ward, 2013). This study found that participants perceived higher levels of security in their practical content knowledge.

The development of pedagogical content knowledge is the category of Shulman's (1987) seven teacher competencies most required to separate a knowledgeable person from a teacher of that subject (Capel *et al.*, 2009). Pedagogical content knowledge allows the teacher to blend the selection of appropriate learning material with teaching skills required for pupil-centred learning, such as differentiation, assessment for learning and progression.

The participants reported securing sport science content knowledge from a variety of areas, including work as personal trainers and sport science focused first degrees. Many were recruited on to their ITT courses with little sport science content knowledge, with two participants stating that they had not seen such material since they studied it themselves when they were pupils in secondary education. The perception reported by the participants is that they were inadequately prepared for delivering accredited PE and sport courses following qualification. Their degree and ITT courses provided little time for developing content knowledge of sport science or the pedagogical knowledge required for teaching in the classroom.

There was a sense that accredited courses are an additional element of the PE teacher's role that participants must prepare for independently of their ITT course (Ensign *et al.*, 2018). With only 12 weeks of the 36-week PGCE course based with the ITT provider, it may be that course administrators perceive development of sport science knowledge as the responsibility of the trainee: *"During our placement it was down to us once we found out what we were teaching from the school then was down to us again to look at the content."* (Participant 4). Participant 7, who had completed a sport science degree, perceived himself to be inadequately prepared with pedagogical knowledge for classroom delivery and unable to transfer content knowledge into the pedagogical content knowledge required for successful delivery (Iserby, 2017).

The NCPE is broad and PE teachers often supplement their knowledge in sports or activities through scholarly activity and teacher education courses (Capel *et al.*, 2009). However, PE teachers often enter the profession with transferable skills and knowledge from other sports in which they have participated or coached that enable them to deliver across sports (Gower & Capel, 2004). The participants in this study highlight experiences, such as being a sports coach or completing a sports-related degree, will not guarantee acquisition of content knowledge in sport science (Stiles & Katene, 2013), suggesting that more needs to be done to ensure adequate preparation for delivery of sport science material.

To varying degrees, each of the participants expressed a feeling of having to learn to teach accredited courses using their own initiative. The use of social media, specifically Twitter, and the Times Education Supplement (TES) website

was widely reported and does not appear in any of the literature in the field of PE teacher training. All participants reported conducting research for teaching ideas using material published by the awarding body, such as the specification or student textbook. Though each of these approaches is different, they all share a sense of learning independently from their formal PE teacher training.

Capel and Blair (2007) found that student teachers focused on improvements in teaching practical activities and were reliant on a traditional, games-based curriculum. The participants in this study maintained this cycle of practice, focusing upon practical content teaching and neglecting preparations for teaching sport science material (Ensign *et al.*, 2018). While the focus of PE ITT training courses remains on the practical at the expense of the theory, new PE teachers will continue to feel inadequately prepared and seek improvements of their own accord.

Lack of knowledge has negative effects on teacher efficacy and confidence in specific contexts (Herald & Waring, 2017). This can explain how the new PE teachers in this study can demonstrate such high levels of confidence in their ability to deliver practical content, whilst simultaneously demonstrating lower levels for delivering theory content. Most expressed that they were becoming increasingly confident in their delivery through experience. However, if new teachers are not confident in the delivery of PE and sport courses from the outset of qualification, they may miss out on gaining experiences, as subject administrators will give the role to more experienced and knowledgeable staff (Wee & Chin, 2016) and they may not gain expertise in areas of PE teaching that could allow them to progress their career.



Conclusion

This study found that new PE teachers did not perceive themselves to be adequately prepared for delivering sport scientific material in accredited level 2 and 3 PE and sport courses. New PE teachers had low levels of confidence in the security of their content knowledge of the material of the specifications, and in their ability to teach in the classroom situation compared with practical situations.

PE teachers learned both content knowledge and the pedagogical knowledge required to gain confidence and effectiveness in delivering accredited courses through experience. They developed teaching skills and subject knowledge through self-guided research, experiences and occupational socialisation (Ensign *et al.*, 2018). This perpetuates a cycle of low confidence levels in new PE teachers followed by improving levels of confidence as experiences are gained in post.

Recommendations

Before effective changes can be made to ensure new PE teachers are provided with adequate levels of preparation for teaching accredited courses, PE teacher educators must recognise that training is currently inadequate and that change is required. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made to PE teacher educators.

Degree and ITT course design

To ensure all elements of the role of the PE teacher are covered in training, ITT courses that provide QTS should work closely with undergraduate courses from which ITT courses are likely to recruit. Practical degrees, such as coaching or PE, should be informed of how and where sport science content can be supplemented.

Recruitment

ITT courses should seek to recruit from a diverse range of undergraduate sports degrees. Herold and Waring (2009) found that sport science degrees prepare PE teachers well for teaching accredited courses. A diverse recruitment pool will allow a greater range of experiences to be shared amongst peers and educators (Ensign *et al.*, 2018), reducing the risk of perpetuating cycles of practice (Simmons & MacLean, 2018).

ITT course content

PE ITT courses should develop participants' pedagogical knowledge by including classroom teaching skills sessions and ensuring that experiences to produce and develop these skills are scaffolded into the course (Graber, 1995).

Continuing professional development (CPD)

Sport science institutions and awarding bodies should be encouraged to develop teacher education courses to improve subject knowledge, teaching skills and, ultimately, outcomes for pupils. ■

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