

How Prepared are Primary Pre-Service Teachers when Teaching Physical Education? Do University-based lectures Effectively Develop PPSTs' PE Subject Knowledge and Subject Pedagogy? Part Three

Simon Chapman – Senior Lecturer in Education, University of Northampton

Introduction

This article, the third of five, explores the second research question from a Master's in Education thesis considering Primary Pre-Service Teachers' (PPSTs) preparedness to teach Physical Education (PE) after completing Initial Teacher Education (ITE). The article focuses on developing subject content and pedagogical knowledge. It commences with a literature review focusing on an overview of perceptions concerning PE provision within ITE over time. Following this, a brief overview of the study's methodology is provided before findings and recommendations for practice are made.

Literature Review

ITE is responsible for developing PPSTs' PE subject knowledge and pedagogical skills. However, historically, research labels university-taught aspects of PE within ITE as 'insufficient' not preparing PPSTs to teach the subject (Caldecott *et al.*, 2006; Harris *et al.*, 2012). Following the introduction of Primary League Tables (1996), schools became concerned with rankings and began prioritising the teaching of core curriculum subjects – English, mathematics and science (Duncombe *et al.*, 2018); consequently, ITE followed suit attributing fewer hours to foundation subjects, including PE (Griggs, 2015).

Carney and Armstrong (1996) found 93% of surveyed students were dissatisfied with time allocated to PE during ITE leading to some, including Warburton (2000), suggesting PPSTs only receive an introduction to PE during training; Blair and Capel (2008) outlined 40% of PPSTs received less than six hours of training. Recent studies however highlight a variation between 0-15 lecture hours across institutions (Elliot *et al.*, 2013). Subsequently, PPSTs have entered the profession with limited, and varied, experiences teaching PE (Blair and Capel, 2011).

A House of Lords Select Committee (2021) described PE within ITE as 'inadequate' calling for appropriate time allocated to develop trainees' physical literacy. Ofsted (2022a) supported this noting PPSTs must develop subject and pedagogical knowledge to effectively deliver PE, contradicting Freer (2011) who suggested subject pedagogy should be emphasised because of time restrictions.

Some Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) adopt cross-modular approaches for developing subject and pedagogical knowledge, empowering PPSTs to become proactive 'agents of change' in their learning (Caldwell *et al.*, 2021) meaning trainees develop general pedagogical approaches and theoretical understanding across modules, before applying these to other subject areas.

Reflective & Academic Engagement (RAE)			Developing Practice in Context (DPC)		
7. Investigate an area of practice through active research	6. Facilitate appropriate competition for in and beyond the curriculum	5. Be actively aware of current issues; including changes in policy & curriculum development	5. Give feedback to pupils, parents and to other colleagues on a child's progress in PPE	8. Work with external agencies, community partners & other schools to create further opportunities in PESS	9. Effectively self-evaluate PPE and set targets for improvement
8. Set challenging targets for professional learning linked to pupil outcomes	4. Engage in academic reading and writing around PPE	2. Articulate aims and a rationale for PPE in the curriculum	2. Teach across different physical activity areas, key stages and settings	4. Receive feedback on teaching from subject tutor; class teacher; PPE specialist	7. Lead PPE in school settings, undertaking curricular planning and development
10. Promote PPE within your own context	3. Identify the characteristics of a physical educated child	1. Identify self on a typology for teaching PPE, reflecting upon prior experiences	1. Observe teachers; the wider workforce and children in physical learning contexts	3. Evaluate teaching, learning and other related aspects of professional practice	6. Work with teaching assistants; sports coaches; parents and volunteers to enrich provision
	9. Accredite learning through post-graduate qualifications				
Aspirational			Emerging		
6. Understand and promote health, fitness and well-being in young people	3. Understand the developing child	1. Know the fundamental movement skill themes for skill learning	1. Plan for an individual and a series of lessons	3. Set appropriate challenge within acceptable levels of risk- ensuring safe practice	6. Assess formatively and summatively
8. Know how to use physical education to improve attainment in other areas of the curriculum including literacy and numeracy	4. Understand a range of gymnastics; dance; games; swimming; outdoor adventurous & athletics activities	2. Recognise the stages of development a child moves through when learning a skill	2. Develop effective strategies to promote pupil learning	4. Use a range of teaching strategies to support a complex pedagogy	10. Mentor and support others in developing their own pedagogy; subject knowledge, and advanced approaches to teach PPE
7. Engage with PPE and school sport beyond the curriculum including; healthy schools; competition; school sport; volunteering and leadership		5. Know the statutory frameworks for PPE including the Early Years Foundation Stage and the National Curriculum	5. Adopt inclusive principles for all learners needs	9. Understand and actively support transition of physical literacy across developmental stages	8. Use technology and media to support and advance learning in PPE
Subject Knowledge (SK)			Subject Pedagogy (SP)		

Table 1. Teacher perspectives on their professional practice

However, Morgan *et al.*, (2019) challenged skill transference arguing PE is taught in isolation, for example, other subjects use learning objectives and success criteria, but these are often ignored in PE. Others argued PE on ITE was too theoretical with PPSTs overloaded with information (Feiman-Nemser, 2001), yet the All-Party Parliamentary Group on a Fit and Healthy Childhood (2019) recommended provision is remodelled to provide a more thorough grounding in PE theory.

There is recent positivity in relation to university-based provision in developing subject and pedagogical knowledge. PPSTs are more consistently recognising links between university-taught and school-based ITE elements understanding they are equally as important as one another in putting theory into practice (Randall *et al.*, 2016); specifically, PPSTs expressed positivity about the importance of developing practical teaching experience in university-based lectures to develop their autonomy (Caldwell *et al.*, 2021).

Methodology

This research was conducted as a case study within a HEI with the aim of seeking the truths of participants at a specific moment in time, namely, at the end of their ITE experience.

A mixed methods research approach was utilised. Participants completed initial online questionnaires (n=39) with semi-structured interviews conducted with participants keen to be part of follow up research as identified in the questionnaires (n=6). Questions were based upon the Professional Knowledge Model (PKM) (Randall, 2016) (Figure 1) which provided greater opportunities to understand participants’ truths through the analysis of both quantitative and qualitative methods (Feilzer, 2010). This increased the validity and trustworthiness of the data meaning recommendations for future practice could be developed (Guba, 1981; Denscombe, 2010).

During data analysis, coding identified key themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). For quantitative data, a JISC Survey analysis tool was used to generate statistics and charts whilst with qualitative data, transcriptions were made using Otter.ai; these were then manually coded into primary and secondary themes.

Before researching, the BERA Guidelines (2018) were consulted to ensure the study was ethical and rigorous; ethical approval was provided by the case study institution and participant consent was obtained during the questionnaire and in advance of interviews.

Findings

To investigate this question, the context of lectures at the HEI was explored alongside PPSTs’ perceptions of these. Focusing on the PKM domains as guidance, participants were questioned about aspects of subject knowledge including curriculum knowledge, Fundamental Movement Skills (FMS), child development and health and fitness to ascertain the effectiveness of lectures. Subsequently, they were asked to reflect upon aspects of subject pedagogy including factors in addition to lectures, principles of planning PE, specific strategies to teaching PE and Health and Safety – these areas will be explored in turn.

Lecture Context

Despite recent studies demonstrating PPSTs receive 0–15 hours of PE lectures, this study’s HEI provided 20 hours of lectures; 46.1% (n=18) of participants noted they attended more than fifteen hours of these (Figure 2). Contrastingly, this also highlights 20.5% (n=8) did not attend half the scheduled lectures.

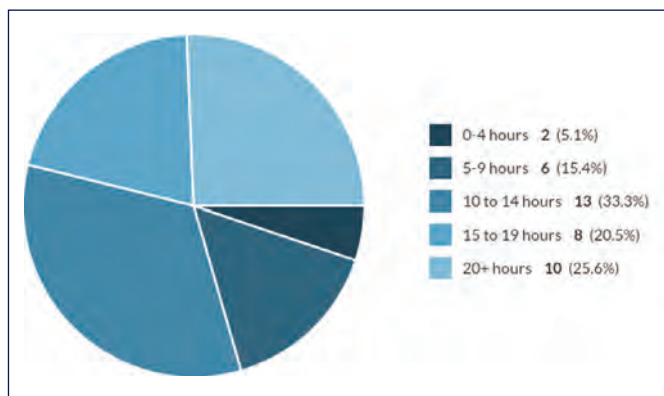


Figure 2: Hours of PE lectures attended

A correlation between lecture attendance and PPSTs’ end of course preparedness exists. 90.3% (n=28) of PPSTs who attended more than ten hours of lectures somewhat agreed or agreed to feeling prepared to deliver PE. However, two PPSTs, who attended 20 hours of lectures ‘somewhat disagreed,’ yet these trainees cited pre-course negative perceptions of anxiety and limited teaching opportunities on placement as key factors. Nevertheless, this underlines the importance of attending lectures as generally, they positively impacted PPSTs’ preparedness.

Subject Knowledge

Knowledge of the National Curriculum

The PE National Curriculum states children should learn to become physically confident, developing their health and fitness through broad ranges of physical activities including gymnastics, dance, games, swimming, athletics and Outdoor and Adventurous Activities (OAA) (Department for Education (DfE), 2013). Lectures at this study’s HEI aligned with these areas with 94.8% (n=37) of participants noting provision developed their understanding of curriculum expectations. As lecture attendance records were not utilised, findings assumed PPSTs attended sessions relevant to specified areas. At least 92.3% (n=36) somewhat agreed or agreed lectures developed their PE subject knowledge in games and dance (Figure 3); interviewees underlined the importance of lectures stating, “lectures were great; there were lots of demonstrations and were really practical” and “my subject knowledge was down to the university side of the course.” The majority of PPSTs were satisfied with university lectures praising their practical nature, drawing upon this when teaching PE having experienced the subject themselves from a pupils’ perspective.

Lecture Area	Somewhat Agree/Agree	Somewhat Disagree/Disagree
Games	94.9% (n=37)	0%
Dance	92.3% (n=36)	2.6% (n=1)
Gymnastics	76.9% (n=30)	7.6% (n=3)
Health and Fitness	69.2% (n=27)	10.2% (n=4)
OAA	66.7% (n=26)	12.8% (n=5)
Athletics	58.9% (n=23)	15.4% (n=6)
Swimming	2.6% (n=1)	76.9% (n=30)

Figure 3: PPSTs’ perceptions of lecture themes

Participants felt putting PE theory into practice within lectures was a highlight; they utilised these experiences when opportunities arose in placements. This implies university-based training impacts preparedness as lectures align with the PE National Curriculum areas PPSTs will teach, developing subject knowledge through self-experiencing lessons. These findings contradict research concerning dissatisfaction with contact hours and the basic overview PE ITE provision provides and conflict research advocating the prioritisation of theory over subject knowledge (Freer, 2011).

However, in some areas, fewer PPSTs somewhat agreed or agreed on the impact of lectures, for example, within gymnastics (76.9%, n=30); health and fitness (69.2%, n=27); OAA (66.7%, n=26); and athletics (58.2%, n=23). Some participants suggested alternative factors, including placements and wider reading, were more significant in impacting their preparedness; this however reinforces the importance of Reflective and Academic Engagement and Developing Practice in Context PKM domains.

PPSTs also outlined areas of limited preparedness; 25% (n=9) cited gymnastics and 11.1% (n=4) athletics as future professional development areas. No PPSTs referenced health and fitness for additional professional development, however, this could be attributed to developing understanding through a cross-modular approach with some participants noting "health and fitness touches on science lectures where you're talking about growth and healthy eating" suggesting PPSTs are consciously aware of cross-modular links (Caldwell, *et al.*, 2021).

An exception to feeling prepared was swimming where 76.9% (n=30) disagreed lectures developed subject knowledge. However, Covid-19 restrictions during the participants' study meant swimming provision was rescheduled and conducted after this research took place with trainees directed to asynchronous resources to develop subject pedagogy and water safety.

Fundamental Movement Skills

Teachers must understand what FMS are and how children develop these in different contexts. Primary-aged children are not mastering basic FMS (Lawson *et al.*, 2021) meaning PPSTs must develop their subject knowledge to ensure they provide quality PE outlining what skills are. Data highlighted only 43.6% (n=17) agreed that lectures developed understanding in this area with interviewees noting they "have heard of FMS but would definitely need to relook at them." This supports research demonstrating teachers' FMS knowledge is limited from EYFS and throughout primary phases (Eddy *et al.*, 2021) as several participants indicated limited or no knowledge of these or how to teach them. Limited understanding could be a semantic issue – PPSTs are taught about FMS yet recognising a specific skill is a fundamental one may not be highlighted explicitly enough meaning trainees unconsciously develop understanding.

Child Development

Teachers require an understating of theory underpinning the developing child and stages children move through to learn new skills. Yet children develop physically at different rates; one factor that affects this is obesity which is impacted by poor diet and limited regular physical activity (Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, 2022).

Data suggested PPSTs placed some emphasis upon lectures developing their understanding of child development with 64.1% (n=25) somewhat agreeing and 28.2% (n=11) agreeing. Participants noted "a strong knowledge [of children's

development] is needed for someone who is prepared to deliver PE." However, another participant outlined they 'knew the basics of child development, but not the specifics like the exact stages of a developing child in PE' implying some PPSTs may have insufficient understanding of PE specific child development.

Participant responses outlined a holistic, cross-modular approach developed child development knowledge noting "there are some areas, especially in Professional Studies, that you could link towards every subject we teach," and "the stages of developing child – I remember being taught that and not just in PE" contradicting views that PE on ITE is taught in isolation (Morgan *et al.*, 2019) supporting the notion PPST agency across modules and subjects (Caldwell *et al.*, 2021).

Health, Fitness and Wellbeing

Teachers must understand and promote health, fitness and wellbeing. Ofsted's Inspection Framework (2022b) holds schools to account for their pastoral support and ability to help children understand and lead healthy lifestyles. Post Covid-19, the UK government issued guidance on supporting these areas through a cross-curricular approach incorporating PE, science, PSHE and RSE (DfE, 2021).

The majority of PPSTs, 94.8% (n=37), believed lectures developed their understanding of health, fitness and wellbeing as they "helped refine how to promote health and fitness." PPSTs were aware these areas were developed across ITE modules including science and Professional Studies and that they used these to develop their PE preparedness.

Subject Pedagogy

The PKM suggests teachers must develop subject pedagogy by planning sequences of lessons using PE strategies to promote learning, understanding risk and safe practice, being inclusive, and assessing accurately. Ofsted (2022a) note pedagogical content knowledge is essential in effective PE delivery. Data implied PPSTs discover subject pedagogy in lectures before developing this on placement.

Not Just Lectures

From thirty-nine PPSTs, at least 70% highlighted they somewhat agreed or agreed lectures supported their development in areas outlined in the subject pedagogy PKM domain (Figure 4). PPSTs did not elaborate further on the importance of lectures; reflecting, this area required greater enquiry during data collection.

Pedagogical Area	Somewhat Agree/Agree	Somewhat Disagree/Disagree
Risk, Health & Safety	100% (n=39)	0% (n=0)
PE Specific Strategies	82% (n=32)	5.6% (n=2)
Being Inclusive	76.9% (n=30)	5.6% (n=2)
Planning	71.7% (n=28)	2.6% (n=1)

Figure 4: PPSTs' perceptions of lectures developing areas of subject pedagogy

Alongside lectures, PPSTs credited placements and cross-modular teaching in developing subject pedagogy because on placement they "stand up in front of children and teach putting elements into practice." This supports research highlighting growing positivity within ITE that trainees recognise university-

taught and school-based aspects are equally important as learning occurs practically in university and in school (Randall *et al.*, 2016).

Planning

Participants explicitly referenced placement opportunities as a method for developing planning as they developed sequences of lessons as medium-term plans as part of directed activities which are compulsory tasks PPSTs must complete during school-based learning. Participants noted they “ended up doing a medium-term plan and following it which went really well. I think that was a turning point for me,” and that they “had ownership of the planning in my third placement.”

Again, within all ITE modules, PPSTs learn to plan effectively, considering key principles including theory, questioning, resources and pedagogical approaches. Yet here, PPSTs did not directly reference a cross-modular approach, perhaps unconsciously aware that planning in other subjects also impacted the process in PE.

PE Specific Strategies

One participant noted they developed different teaching approaches having conducted placements in both Key Stage 1 (KS1) and Key Stage 2 (KS2), however, these strategies were not specifically outlined. From an Emotional Intelligence perspective, different approaches are required for different key stages: in KS1, teachers should respond enthusiastically to children’s emotions whereas practitioners must display self-regulation within KS2 as older children interpret teacher confidence levels (Klemola *et al.*, 2013; Al-Adwan and Al-Khayat, 2016). No participants mentioned widely advocated specific PE pedagogical approaches including the Sports Education Model, Teaching Games for Understanding or STEPs which are explored during PE lectures suggesting although PPSTs planned and delivered PE on placement, they may have utilised more generic planning principles.

Inclusive Practice

PPSTs should also adopt inclusive principles, however, one interviewee noted complexities here as “being inclusive for all learners [in PE] is hard because needs are so varied;” others echoed this as 11.1% (n=4) outlined inclusive practice as a professional development area. More than 80% of teachers noted the number of children with additional physical needs in PE lessons is rising supporting a study conducted by Marron *et al.*, (2021). PPSTs did not reference lectures or placement experience, however, inclusivity and adaptive practice are taught across modules throughout ITE.

Summary

Data suggested university lectures do develop PPSTs’ PE subject and pedagogical knowledge as per aspects of the PKM, but to different degrees. With subject knowledge, PPSTs agreed or somewhat agreed lectures developed their understanding of PE National Curriculum areas including games and dance; an anomaly being swimming yet provision here was disrupted. PPSTs are offered twenty hours of PE lectures during ITE but under half of trainees attended above 15 hours suggesting the impact could be greater. For subject pedagogy, the case differs. Despite most PPSTs agreeing lectures developed understanding, they also acknowledged placements and cross-modular approaches. Moreover, some PPSTs still felt unprepared in their subject and pedagogical knowledge. For example, one interviewee stated: “can I remember the skills, the approaches? What should I be focusing on? What should I be teaching? When should I assess? How do I assess? All these things

worry me.” Improvements can therefore still be made to provision to ensure all PPSTs feel prepared teaching PE.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, several recommendations could be made to develop the effectiveness of lectures and general practice. Firstly, PPSTs’ felt their subject and pedagogical knowledge benefitted from a combination of discrete PE lectures with themes also addressed through cross-modular teaching and school-based training experiences; this is something to be considered in future curriculum planning – certainly in a context of the ITE Market Review. Additionally, subject knowledge concerning FMS needs to be developed and lecturers must highlight these more explicitly to develop learners’ conscious competence. Lastly, data highlighted PPSTs saw merit in wider use of the PKM in their PE training to set targets which can be shared with lecturers and school-based mentors. Additionally, they felt the PKM could develop and track their PE subject and pedagogical knowledge across the duration of their ITT experience.

What’s Next?

The next article, part four, focuses on the study’s final research question exploring whether school-based placements effectively develop PPSTs’ PE subject and pedagogical knowledge. There is also a specific focus on the role of outsourced PE provision and the impact this can have on PPSTs’ experiences and therefore their preparedness to teach PE.

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An Exploration of Modern-day Teaching Practice Through the Understanding of the History and Application of Engestrom's Activity Theory

Francesca Clark – MA Education Student, Birmingham City University

Introduction

Jean Piaget (1964) and Lev Vygotsky (1978) were 20th century pedagogical psychologists, who had opposing theories when considering cognitive development in children. Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory suggests children progress through set cognitive stages of development: maturation, assimilation, and accommodation (Piaget, 1964). Whilst Vygotsky's Socio-cultural Theory (SCT) placed less emphasis

on prescribed stages and highlighted the importance of the environment and language on one's cognitive development with mediated activity, the 'more knowledgeable other' (MKO) and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978). He believed that our social and cultural context has a profound influence on, thinking patterns, our behaviour, ideas, and beliefs. Both theorists inspired and influenced the work of many others that followed (Benson, 2020). Since the 'sociocultural turn' and