

Supporting primary teachers to teach physical education: continuing the journey

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Little attention was paid to professional development of primary teachers in Ireland to support them in teaching physical education (PE) until 2004 when specific support was provided to help them implement the revised Primary Physical Education Curriculum. A significant National In-service Physical Education Programme was undertaken involving the preparation of a cohort of tutors who were to facilitate the programme to all primary teachers. This study focuses on the findings from a study of the effectiveness of the programme from the tutors' and teachers' perspectives beginning with the preparation of the tutors for facilitation of the programme. Elements of good practice emerged that can inform future policy with regard to support of primary teachers teaching PE within the constraints of funding. These include (1) the importance of quality preparation of tutors acknowledging the advantage of technology that may provide a new and cost effective way of supporting them, and (2) retaining the practical exploration of content by both tutors and teachers that prompts reflection on the nature and content of programmes of PE.

Keywords: primary; physical education; professional development

Introduction

This paper focuses on the professional development of teachers in a context of curriculum change in Irish primary schools with particular reference to physical education (PE). The paper is in five parts and begins with an overview of some of the literature relevant to teacher professional development. Key elements of the programme of professional development organised for primary teachers implementing the Physical Education Curriculum (Government of Ireland 1999b) as part of the Revised Curriculum for Primary Schools (Government of Ireland 1999a) are then described before the two questions that guided a research study on the impact of the programme are stated. The third part of the paper provides the details of the study methodology and that is followed by a section where the results of the study are presented. Finally, the lessons to be drawn from this study and their implication for future policy in addressing support for teachers to teach PE are considered.

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Models of professional development

Professional development of teachers is increasingly known as 'continuing professional development' (CPD) rather than 'in-service training'. This generally implies a larger range of possibilities for professional development. However, the support programme related to the implementation of the primary curriculum in Ireland was referred to as a programme of 'in-service' by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) and by the Primary Curriculum Support Programme (PCSP) who had responsibility for mediating the programme to teachers. Earlier definitions of professional development focused on the acquisition of subject or content knowledge and teaching skills. Craft (1996) and Day (1999) proposed a wider interpretation with Craft arguing that 'all types of professional learning undertaken by teachers beyond the initial point of training' (9) are integral components of CPD.

Pointing to the importance of professional development for teachers Darling-Hammond (2000) concluded that well prepared teachers can have a greater impact on student achievement than poverty, language background and minority status. The findings of her study indicate investments in teacher quality need to be considered in the debate on improving student outcomes. Her large-scale study involving qualitative and quantitative analyses suggest that policy investments in the quality of teachers may be related to improvements in student performance. Sandholtz (2002) placed teacher professional development on a par with students' learning in terms of their importance: 'The quality of teacher learning experiences is no less important than the quality of student learning experiences' (827).

While various models of CPD exist (Kennedy 2005 described nine key models) the nature and extent of professional development continues to engender much debate. Traditionally, programmes of professional development in an Irish context were based on providing short courses or workshops, which would equate with the 'training model' described by Kennedy (2005) in addressing the spectrum of CPD models in a comparative manner. She identified the training model as an effective means of introducing new knowledge albeit in a setting that did not take account of the teaching context and fails to impact on how the new knowledge is used in practice. It was this model that was central to the DES in-service facilitated on a national basis which is the focus of the research described in this study. This programme is referred to as the National In-service Physical Education Programme (NIPEP) and is described below. Sandholtz (2002) claimed that '... many traditional in-service models incorporate strategies that oppose research on adult learning and that led teachers to sit "silent as stones" at in-service sessions' (817) and Stein, Schwan Smith, and Silver (1999) argued that it was highly unlikely '... that teachers' practices will be transformed by these experiences' (3). However, it should be noted that a key emphasis in the NIPEP was on 'introducing new knowledge' - the rationale outlined by Kennedy for adopting such a model. Garet et al. (2001) argue that a focus on content knowledge and active learning by teachers (both central features of the NIPEP) represent core features of professional development that have significant, positive effects on change in classroom practice. The DES did follow up this programme with a support programme that was regionalised and support personnel (cuiditheoirí) were able to provide support on a local basis that took the teaching context into account. This support service was more akin to the transformative model described by Kennedy. However, it could be argued that the

NIPEP was a stepping stone towards the deeper kind of learning characteristic of models that promote critical reflection and transformation. A report on the National PE programme in the UK indicated that teachers were critical of the 'one-shot' nature of modules and favoured active professional learning and collective participation in a CPD activity (Armour and Makapoulou 2006) with an emphasis on learning collaboratively. Yet there was an acknowledgement that they had learned by engaging actively with the content of the programme.

The concept of working collaboratively leads to discussion of communities of practice (CoPs). Wenger's (1998) concept of CoPs is based on a social theory of learning where the primary focus is on learning as social participation. It is a concept that has grown in importance as a means of promoting '... through sustaining enough mutual engagement in pursuing an enterprise together to share some significant learning ... communities of practice can be thought of as shared histories of learning' (86). Wenger describes CoPs as involving on-going, social interaction, negotiating new meanings and learning from each other as participants share their competence with new generations of learners. This leads to discussion of teacher learning communities which are based on forming CoPs where teachers are working in collaboration. This concept emerged during the 1980s when Rosenholtz (1989) suggested that teachers who felt supported in their own on-going learning and classroom practice were more committed and effective than those who did not receive this affirmation. She found that the support of teacher networks providing opportunities for cooperation with colleagues increased teacher effectiveness. Likewise, Rosenholtz found that teachers with a high sense of personal efficacy were more likely to adopt new classroom approaches to promote school improvement and to remain in the teaching profession. Day (1999) argued that within learning communities, by starting with dialogue, the culture of reflection in, on and about the action will occur routinely. Making time for sustained reflection and dialogue is a primary challenge in building professional learning cultures.

Situated learning theory is the theoretical framework that informs CoPs. Building on the earlier work of Deglau and O'Sullivan (2006), O'Sullivan (2007) has described the development of CoPs within PE involving teachers '... coming together over time to interrogate their own teaching and work practices as well as the appropriateness of expectations for physical education and physical education teachers' (3). She has described Wenger's (1998) ideas in terms of the five stages of development that are involved in establishing CoPs and related them to a PE context. The result of this exercise is the establishment of a framework for communities of learners for PE. In his work on assessment for learning, Wiliam (2007) concluded that CoPs or professional learning teams were most effective when they were composed of 8-10 people, meeting for two hours per month with an additional two hours spent on collaboration between meetings, and working over a two-year period.

Regardless of the model selected, the challenge for leaders of professional development has been described as leading teachers towards the kind of learning that may require wholesale changes in deeply held beliefs, knowledge, and habits of practice involving '... very deep changes-even a transformation-in teachers' ideas about and understanding of subject matter, teaching, and learning' (Thompson and Zeuli 1999, 350). Thompson and Zeuli described the onus on professional developers to create cognitive dissonance to disturb the equilibrium between teachers' existing beliefs and practices and their experience with subject matter, students' learning and

teaching. There is much literature that supports the idea that ‘... no single model is appropriate for all training needs’ (Hyland and Hanafin 1997, 170).

Professional development in physical education

In the area of PE, the 2nd World Summit on Physical Education identified the need to promote professional development especially for those working in primary schools (ICSSPE 2005). While the importance of effective, career-long professional development is recognised (Bechtel and O’Sullivan 2006; Craft 1996; Deglau and O’Sullivan 2006; Duncombe 2005) little attention was paid to the CPD of primary teachers in Ireland (Duffy 1997; Murphy 2007). Studies conducted by The Review Body on Primary Education (Government of Ireland 1990), McGuinness and Shelly (1995), Deenihan (2005) and the Irish National Teachers’ Organisation (2006) recommended increased emphasis on provision of professional development opportunities for primary teachers.

The need for quality professional development beginning with a quality programme of in-service facilitated by quality tutoring was a central concern of the research described in this study. The publication of the Primary School Curriculum in 1999 (Government of Ireland 1999a) constituted the first revision of the primary school curriculum in Ireland since 1971. PE is one aspect of the primary school curriculum and efforts to enhance implementation of programmes of PE were central to the NIPEP. While the role of PE in providing opportunities to help children lead full, active and healthy lives is espoused within the curriculum, difficulties implementing the curriculum have been noted. For example, primary teachers have responsibility for teaching PE in Ireland although the practice of employing external providers is common (Irish National Teachers Organisation 2006; McGuinness and Shelly 1995). Questions have also been raised about the quality and frequency of PE lessons (Broderick and Shiel 2000; Murphy 2007), although some improvements in provision have been reported such as an increase in the amount of time allocated to teaching of gymnastics, athletics and dance (Woods et al. 2010). In addition, Irish primary teachers have consistently reported a lack of confidence and competence to teach PE (Broderick and Shiel 2000; Deenihan 2005; McGuinness and Shelly 1995) and have highlighted low levels of satisfaction of teachers with their teaching of many of the elements of PE.

The NIPEP

Following on from the publication of the curriculum, the DES established the PCSP to provide and oversee an in-service programme for teachers in implementing the curriculum. The purpose of the programme was to ‘mediate the Primary School Curriculum for teachers towards enabling them to implement it in their schools’ (PCSP 2007, para. 1). The initial phase was designed to provide an overview of the aims, principles and defining features of the revised curriculum while examining the main changes in emphasis. The subject-based in-service programme, which followed in 2000, was introduced on a phased basis. The NIPEP facilitated by 26 tutors was rolled out in the academic years 2004-2006 with the implementation of the Physical Education Curriculum (Government of Ireland 1999b) beginning in primary schools in 2006-2007.

This first phase of the NIPEP (2004-2005) consisted of a day-long seminar facilitated by tutors who had previously undertaken the programme of professional development provided by the PCSP. Tutors were selected from the primary teaching profession by open competition and like most Irish primary teachers, were not subject specialists. The seminars provided an overview of the Physical Education Curriculum (Government of Ireland 1999b) and content related to three of the six strands - aquatics, outdoor and adventure activities and games. The various approaches and methodologies suggested in the curriculum were illustrated as the content was mediated. Each seminar was followed by a day dedicated to planning for implementation of the Physical Education Curriculum (Government of Ireland 1999b), which was undertaken at school level but not facilitated by the tutors. The second seminar day (focusing on the remaining three strands: gymnastics, dance and athletics) and the second day dedicated to planning were scheduled for the following academic year. It should be noted that the in-service programme for teachers represented a significant effort by the DES to support implementation as it was offered to all primary teachers in all primary schools.

The tutor professional development programme (TPDP)

The TPDP was the programme of preparation that the tutors undertook to prepare them to design and facilitate the NIPEP. Its main focus was on the elements of content of the Physical Education Curriculum (Government of Ireland 1999b), the teaching methodologies proposed in the curriculum (outlined in the Physical Education Teacher Guidelines, Government of Ireland 1999c) and the issues directly related to the curriculum such as assessment of PE. The first-named author acted as the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment representative on the Design Team for the programme. The literature on adult learning, teacher change, professional development and programme design as well as the review of experiences of curriculum implementation provided a theoretical basis for the design of the professional development programme for tutors. Tutors spent two years teaching their own classes while they engaged with the programme while face-to-face contact amounted to a total of approximately 130 hours. A further 65 hours approximately were dedicated to preparing the in-service programme for teachers to be facilitated on one seminar day. It was beyond the scope of this study to document preparation for facilitation of the second seminar day.

Research questions and research study

The research described in this paper was undertaken to address two questions: (1) as a result of undertaking the TPDP did tutors feel ready to implement the NIPEP? and (2) what were classroom teachers' perspectives on the NIPEP? A pragmatist theoretical framework (Robson 2002) allied to the context input process product evaluation model (Stufflebeam 2000) using a mixed methods research design (Burke-Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004) were chosen to underpin the study. The reader is referred to Murphy (2007) for an elaboration on the rationale for these choices.

Data collection and sample

Data in relation to the first research question (tutor readiness to implement the NIPEP) were derived from three sources: a questionnaire survey of all tutors (n = 26), interviews with a convenience sample of tutors (n = 6), observation of all tutors as they engaged with the TPDP and observation of the sample as they taught PE in their own schools and facilitated the NIPEP. Response rates to the questionnaires ranged from 88 to 96%. Given the on-going debate about generalist and specialist teachers of primary PE worldwide (Faucette et al. 2002), it is worth noting the teachers coming into the TPDP were fairly typical of Irish primary teachers: all were generalist teachers; almost all indicated that they taught games and athletics frequently but gymnastics, dance and outdoor and adventure activities less frequently and aquatics almost never. Four in five had a background in competitive sport - a likely factor in influencing their choice of preferred strand to teach. Half of them taught PE for longer than the recommended one hour a week.

Data in relation to the second question (teachers' perspectives on the NIPEP) were generated from (1) a questionnaire survey of 85 classroom teachers who were tutored by three of the tutors (drawn from the sample of tutors) at three different venues, one rural and two urban, (2) observation undertaken by the researcher of the NIPEP on three occasions, facilitated by the three different tutors, and (3) interviews with three teachers who had been in one of the groups observed during the programme. There were four phases of data collection: the pre-TPDP phase, two phases of data gathered during the TPDP and the data gathered during the NIPEP. The PCSP granted permission for the study to be undertaken and all participants were informed of the study in writing, and their consent was sought before any data collection was undertaken.

Within this article, it is not possible to present a discussion on how quality assurance issues were addressed in the study or on the modes of data analyses employed. Again, the reader is referred to Murphy (2007) for further details.

Results

Tutor readiness to facilitate the NIPEP

Tutor perspectives on the programme designed to prepare them to implement the NIPEP are presented under three themes: content knowledge and understanding as key to confident facilitation, investment in planning for implementation and confidence deriving from a sense of ownership.

Content knowledge and understanding as key to confident facilitation

From the observation of the final stage of the tutor programme it appeared that this phase of the tutor programme represented an important stage for tutors as it incorporated much consolidation of work previously explored and, appearing much more 'comfortable' with the content in each strand, tutors' discussion of content had a focus on presentation to teachers. In commenting on aspects of their experience of the tutor programme one tutor wrote: 'Felt very knowledgeable on each of the strands' (QST_{5TUT25}). The sense of having a thorough understanding of content issues consolidated in this section of the tutor programme appeared to influence

positively the levels of confidence of tutors. This was particularly evident from observation of the planning sessions prior to facilitation where tutors were able to focus on issues such as selection of particular content without having to question any of the aspects of content that they had little experience of teaching as they embarked on the TPDP. For example, only 54% of tutors had indicated at the outset that they had taught outdoor activities frequently and yet they engaged with a wide range of content options taken from each of the strand units within that strand as they planned for implementation of the in-service programme. Their increased knowledge of content, identified as a key element in the design of the programme of professional development for tutors, represented a particularly significant development given the evidence gleaned before commencement of the programme indicating that poor content knowledge placed constraints on their teaching of a broad programme of PE. Garet et al. (2001) concluded that one of the core features of effective professional development was its focus on content knowledge as a 'central dimension of high-quality professional development' (925).

Tutors identified a significant factor that underpinned their confidence to facilitate an in-service programme to teachers: their experience of teaching PE as they engaged with the tutor programme (a majority of tutors, $n = 23$, continued to teach PE in their own school situation). One tutor elaborated on this: 'It is a very good idea to allow tutors to try out what they have learnt during the school year with their classes. In this way tutors will implement what they know over time' (TUT7). Another tutor commented on the uniqueness of this opportunity:

I have had two years of trying to implement it in the classroom with children, which is most unusual because most of the other trainers in the other subjects did not have that opportunity, so it is a good thing. (GB)

Observation by the researcher identifying the achievements of the tutors as they taught corroborated this tutor's view. Another positive outcome of availing of the chance to teach during engagement with the programme was the opportunity created to '... discuss with [tutor] colleagues their experience of teaching PE lessons' which was considered very valuable (TUT11). Another tutor commented that 'The review of work in schools, in particular, facilitated a good exchange of views, ideas, anxieties' (TUT13).

The engagement with content and teaching methodologies over a prolonged period provided many opportunities for building confidence of tutors prior to implementation. It would seem that it provided tutors with time to engage with the breadth of content that is involved in examining the curriculum and to deepen their understanding of content and issues surrounding the teaching of content. This time devoted to engaging with the programme, allowing them extended opportunities to transfer their learning into practice in the classroom, was especially important for this group of tutors, many of whom had indicated that they had not taught particular strands of the curriculum to any great extent. The sharing of their planning notes and lesson plans is another issue that merits examination. Arguments are put forward at pre-service level against providing resources such as these that are perceived as being overly prescriptive. Nevertheless, these were considered a valuable resource by tutors in this programme. It would seem to vindicate the publication of a comprehensive set of such materials by the Primary School Sports Initiative (2006)

supported by the DES. This resource formed the basis for much of the work in supporting teachers undertaken by the support service (cuiditheoireacht) discussed above.

Investment in planning for implementation

It was very evident that during this section of the programme tutors were engaging with real enthusiasm in planning for the facilitation of the NIPEP. While their understanding of the content issues was discussed above as an element that facilitated ease of planning, there was evidence of firm commitment from the tutors as they grappled with some of the more difficult issues within the planning sessions. One tutor described this process as: 'The [planning] sessions were very intense and tough going but a sense of achievement in the end!' (TUT5). There was prolonged debate and discussion on some of the minor issues as well as the major issues involved in presenting the NIPEP to teachers. When tutors worked in groups on planning for different strands, for example, they reported back to the whole group on the issues that they had grappled with when devising the content to match their particular strand. Observation of these sessions revealed that issues raised ranged from the facilitation of key messages of the curriculum to the issue of providing the balance necessary between theory and practical elements. Field notes recorded during this time contain references to '...groups discussing doable content, grappling with identification of suitable levels of physical activity for teachers throughout the session' and 'engaging in a long debate among the group of seven tutors identifying content that illustrates progression as well as methodologies' (Fieldnotes: 4/9/04).

Confidence deriving from a sense of ownership

A particular outcome of the planning workshops of tutors discussed above was the growing sense of ownership that tutors displayed as they selected the content to be presented, the methodologies to employ and the key messages to be facilitated. At an early stage of the programme, one tutor commented on the fact that active learning '...enables one to gain ownership of and internalise what is presented. This involvement should lead to greater self-knowledge and a deeper understanding and retention of what is presented by the trainers [tutors]' (TUT20). At a later stage field notes, relating to the time that tutors spent planning, contain many references to the intensity of the debate around relevant issues. One tutor described the process of planning for facilitation: 'Learnt a lot from working within a small group on one strand ... Many heads within a group working on one strand was a good idea' (TUT15). Another described these sessions as '...relevant to trainers' needs' (TUT14).

When tutors were interviewed about their 'readiness' to undertake the work in hand, they expressed general satisfaction with their readiness to begin facilitation of the programme and particularly underlined their level of confidence with the content aspects of the programme:

I believed in the content, so that was always something there that helped me along the way. And I think that came across in my days and working with teachers, that I did

believe ... I had done that stuff [sic] with children. And I wasn't speaking from a book, I was speaking from my own experience, you know? (LM)

Another tutor claimed that he was '... very, very comfortable with the content ...' (MM). All tutors expressed their fears about presenting to a group of adults where some members of groups might have little interest in PE. One tutor felt that there was not sufficient guidance sought from tutors from other groups who were familiar with the on-going demands of teachers that were presented to them on a daily basis and thought that an element of 'cross-team' support might be useful (MJ).

During the final interview tutors described their initial anxieties at presenting to teachers as being very short lived. While acknowledging that in the first few weeks of the work they were anxious about teachers' reactions both to them as presenters and to the content, as time went on and evaluations of the work were positive they were then able to focus more clearly on the work in hand. It was then that they began to become aware of the challenge that they had undertaken and they raised the issue of the personal gain that was involved. One tutor described this:

I suppose from a personal point of view, it was a challenge to stand up in front of twenty five adults or thirty adults, you know, and especially when they're your peers. Some of them might be more senior than you and there's ... a certain, I suppose confidence building element to that, when you actually cope with it comfortably. (MM)

Data gathered from the final questionnaire administered to tutors helped to establish how the tutors themselves rated their readiness to facilitate a programme of in-service to teachers. The tutors were asked to describe their levels of confidence as they began to facilitate the NIPEP. Fourteen tutors remained at the final phase of the programme, attrition was caused by factors such as promotion opportunities in their teaching situations. All of the tutors were satisfied that the programme had prepared them well for facilitation. Almost all (13) tutors reported that they were confident to facilitate an introduction about PE and about an aquatics programme, while all tutors reported the same confidence levels to facilitate the games and outdoor and adventure activities programme to teachers (these were the topics that had been identified by the tutors in consultation with the PCSP for the initial phase of the NIPEP). Overall, they were confident about the content they were presenting although some expressed reservations about skills directly related to aspects of facilitation.

Teachers' perspectives on the NIPEP

Four aspects of teachers' perspectives on the NIPEP emerging from the data are presented below. They are: their attitudes towards the NIPEP, changes in their understanding of PE and the Physical Education Curriculum, their willingness to teach new elements of PE content and changes in their attitudes to meeting the individual needs of children in PE.

Attitudes towards the NIPEP

The attitude of teachers and, in particular, their confidence levels are important considerations in providing quality PE. As was noted earlier primary teachers have

reported a lack of confidence and competence to teach PE. Such attention to this element of teaching of PE by primary teachers prompted an examination of the effectiveness of the NIPEP in promoting more positive attitudes and in increasing confidence levels of teachers.

One of the classroom teacher participants commented 'My abiding thing: it was fun for people taking part' (Mary). She went on to say that for people taking part who were reluctant or who do not actually teach a PE class themselves '... they got involved in the games and it didn't put them off the day'. Another related element was highlighted by a teacher (Siobhán) who expressed the opinion that the day was 'non-threatening' especially for people who do not exercise who might be expected to feel some pressure as they were exposed to physical activity. Data gathered from teachers in a questionnaire shed further light on the issue of the active nature of the day. 'I found the active participation in Day 1 great. This should also be a feature of Day 2' (TEA18). 'It was a most enjoyable "hands-on" day. Practical help delivered very well. Active participation is the key to encouraging people to implement this in their classes' (TEA32). One of the teachers interviewed (Michelle) believed that there was a 'nice mix' between theory and practical work and reasoned that for a practical subject '... you need to be doing something but it doesn't have to be a high energy thing'. It seemed to the researcher from observation of the NIPEP at the three venues that the active engagement with content was a key factor in teachers' learning. This finding corroborates the finding of Armour and Makapoulou (2006) who reported that active learning was the key success criterion identified by teachers in England with reference to their national CPD programme.

Understanding of PE and understanding of the Physical Education Curriculum

It could be argued that enhanced understanding of PE and the Physical Education Curriculum (Government of Ireland 1999b) would form a basis for enhancing the confidence levels of teachers to provide quality PE. Indeed one of the main aims identified by teachers prior to their engagement with the in-service programme was that they would gain increased understanding. Only 25% reported that their understanding of PE had been enhanced 'a lot' with a further 51% indicating that it had been 'somewhat' enhanced. One teacher (Siobhán) while suggesting that colleagues' understanding of PE was enhanced by participation in the NIPEP cautioned that it was like the effect of the 'seminar day' on any subject. She felt that the in-service programmes in all subjects were motivating but that the effect lessened over time: teachers are motivated to try new aspects but subsequently '... you fall back into your timetable'. Responses were considerably more positive when asked if their understanding of the Physical Education Curriculum (Government of Ireland 1999b) had been enhanced with 42% indicating that their understanding had increased 'a lot' and a further 48% indicating that it had increased somewhat.

Teaching new elements of content

As well as meeting teachers' expectations for the programme, positive evidence emanated from investigation of key factors related to teachers' teaching of PE such as their declared intention to expand programmes of PE and to reflect more on their teaching and planning for PE. Seventy-four per cent of teachers reported that they

would teach elements of strands that they had not taught previously. This finding was particularly encouraging given that tutors had undertaken to facilitate outdoor and adventure activities, for example, which traditionally teachers would rarely have taught (McGuinness and Shelly 1995; Murphy 2007). Re-affirmation of teachers' competence emerged as an outcome of their engagement with the programme. A teacher in an interview (Michelle) reported that '... all the things that we were introduced to were possible. There was nothing outrageous ... even for people who aren't interested in sport' and indicated that this element was affirming for teachers as they did not feel threatened by having to engage in content that was too demanding for them.

Meeting individual needs of children in PE

While the findings outlined above paint a positive picture of the NIPEP there was one area of general concern to teachers. It was clear that more attention needed to be given to helping teachers differentiate to meet individual needs (only 60% indicated that they had been enabled to differentiate) and to adapt programmes of PE to cater for children with special needs (only 40% reported that they had been enabled to provide for children with special needs).

Conclusion

The literature on CPD emphasises the importance of supporting teachers as they endeavour to enhance their teaching and in turn, children's learning. It was clear from the findings outlined above that the PE tutors were satisfied that the TPDP prepared them for facilitation of the NIPEP, they felt both competent and confident as they embarked on facilitation of the initiative. The teachers who evaluated the first phase of the NIPEP were satisfied that it had provided them with renewed impetus to implement the Physical Education Curriculum.

While no large-scale review of PE Curriculum implementation has taken place a recent study suggests that there has been an increase of 19% in the teaching of gymnastics in schools, while teaching of athletics and dance has increased by 12% over a five year period from 2004 to 2009 (Woods et al. 2010). This provides us with some evidence of implementation of the Physical Education Curriculum in schools.

Recommendations

With regard to future professional development of tutors, two clear messages emerge for providers of CPD for primary teachers teaching PE:

- (1) allowing time to fully engage with the tutor programme including adequate time to plan the programme to be facilitated culminating in tutors 'gaining a sense of ownership' would appear to be significant
- (2) providing participants with ample opportunity to transfer their learning into their teaching situation is a key element to be woven in to their professional development.

With reference to the two considerations outlined above it is important to note that these tutors needed approximately 130 hours of engagement with a TPDP aligned with the experience of transferring their learning to their own teaching context. In the light of the current additional constraints on national resources for funding such initiatives, it is timely to reflect on how tutors might be supported to this level perhaps in different ways so that on-going CPD can be provided for teachers.

First, it is essential that the expertise of this cohort of tutors is retained and developed further. Further contact could focus on (1) supporting them to engage with professional readings perhaps through online debate and discussion, (2) provision of some opportunities to link with other professionals such as those working at third level in PE, (3) maintaining some face-to-face contact involving exploration of content areas of PE (such support was rated as highly significant in their early programme), and (4) providing them with opportunities to discuss quality, innovative practice in Irish primary schools video recorded for that purpose. The use of a blended approach to their learning (as described) has the potential to inspire and motivate them to continue their professional journey in PE.

Second, it appears that a new cohort of teachers is emerging within the Irish primary school system. Many recent graduates of Colleges of Education have undergone study related to the Primary Physical Education Curriculum and are well positioned to undertake support of colleagues within their own schools.

Third, the future shape of support for classroom teachers to teach PE merits serious consideration. Given the positive findings related to teachers working within CoPs (O'Sullivan 2007; Parker et al. 2010), the work of the Irish Primary Physical Education Association (www.ippea.ie) and the Professional Development Service for Teachers supported by the DES could form a very important pillar of any new supports for teachers. One of the aims of the CoPs (or learning communities) that they have established is to form a network of primary teachers in a particular region with an interest in the teaching of PE who might share best practice.

Fourth, a public service pay agreement (the Croke Park Agreement) introduced in 2010 in Ireland has made it compulsory for primary teachers to spend one additional hour per week to facilitate school activities such as planning and continuous professional development (www.per.gov.ie). Some schools have already provided 'space' where the focus is PE. Affirmation for such communities is necessary and consideration by the DES of online support (e.g. engaging in video conference with dedicated personnel, provision of online video materials described earlier as sources for tutor CPD) to enhance the efforts of schools should be explored.

Fifth, following on the NIPEP there was a support system put in place by the DES using 'cuiditheoir' to facilitate the support in schools. McHugh (2008) reported that teachers valued this support in the context of PE highly. Acknowledging the pressures on schools to focus on enhancing numeracy and literacy levels of children it would seem that a regional support service could ensure that links were made between areas so that models of support embracing aspects of numeracy and literacy through PE can be provided.

Finally, in an international context Petrie and Hunter (2011) have argued that it is the '[H]PE profession's responsibility to support primary teachers through coherent PD' (p. 335). This would seem to point to the importance of subject associations, the DES (including the Inspectorate), PE tutors and third level providers of PE collaborating to support primary teachers as they endeavour to teach PE, a subject

that presents 'complex challenges' (Jess 2011). Reflection on the issues raised in the final section of this paper and addressing the implications outlined can ensure that meaningful support can be provided to classroom teachers so that PE earns its place at the forefront of provision to meet the needs of children.

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