

Primary Physical Education Teacher Educators Professional Learning.

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Introduction

Pre-service teachers, teachers and teacher educators, are professionals continuously seeking knowledge to support and guide them in their work. This chapter explores, how initial teacher educators, and specifically Primary Physical Education Teacher Educators (PPETEs) learn as professionals. It will investigate/illustrate how they develop and increase their knowledge and how this informs their understanding, improving their practice and in turn how they share their learning within and beyond their subject community.

The Teacher Educator

The structure and organisation of teacher education differs greatly from country to country. The term ‘teacher educator’ encompasses a variety of teaching professionals. Teacher educators may be professors or lecturers at universities or colleges. They all have experienced different training backgrounds (e.g. they may be researchers and / or former teachers). So, the word ‘teacher educator’ incorporates a mixed and diverse group of professionals delivering a wide variety of practices. Researchers have defined the role of the teacher educator as a person who provides instruction or gives guidance and support to student teachers, ultimately endeavoring to contribute to the development of students into competent teachers.

Teacher educators enter teacher education with a variety of backgrounds and needs. In most instances teacher educators’ roles consist of three major components: teaching/pedagogy, research/scholarship and administrative/service. In some instances, these different components

may support each other. When this is the case some teacher educators express joy for having such a multifaceted job. However, the majority of teacher educators feel that the three components interfere with each other, resulting in work overload and lack of time for participation in professional learning activities. Teacher educator's professional learning, therefore, is not limited to expanding their theoretical knowledge in specific subject matter, but it is more a whole person development with cognitive and affective aspects. This view of professional development is therefore not constrained to time-defended, intentional activities meant to achieve specific goals or standards. Rather it is a way of life or to use modern terminology - #alwayslearning!

Though the vast majority of practising teacher educators has one or more post-graduate degrees in education or a cognate discipline, worldwide those responsible for the education of future teachers have rarely been formally and specifically prepared for their role. In most countries, systematic and sustained efforts for the induction and professional education for teacher educators have been missing. 'Supporting Teacher Educators for Better Learning Outcomes' (European Commission 2013) recognises the links between reform of teacher education programmes, improvements in the quality of schooling. It clearly identifies the centrality of well-prepared, well-supported teacher educators in school improvement, and emphasises the need for systematic, sustained professional learning opportunities to be provided for them.

Physical education literature reflects a relative absence of research on the professional learning of physical education teacher educators. Similar to teacher education in general (Kosnik, Miyata, Cleovoulou, Fletcher, & Menna, 2015), physical education teacher education (PETE), has long been described as a marginalized profession. Primary Physical Education Teacher Educators (PPETE) may feel even more marginalized, even with an increase internationally in their numbers in the past two decades. Exacerbating PPETE marginalization

in higher education is a sense of isolation. There are frequently only one or two primary physical education teacher educators in a single higher education setting when compared to other teaching disciplines. The primary focus of many of their students is on becoming a generalist primary school teacher. Therefore, physical education may not be a priority for the pre-service teachers, especially with many countries prioritizing literacy and numeracy at this level. Lifelong learning needs to be situated for the individual teacher educator's profile and in the particular context within which they teach. It is essential that the PPETE has 'a self-directed commitment to continuous learning related to one's expertise and emergent needs' (Gopinathan, Tan, Yanping, Devi, Ramos, and Chao, 2008, p.34).

What is professional learning?

Professional learning constitutes the learning that is undertaken on a daily basis embedded within the remit of fulfilling the role as a teacher/teacher educator. It is underpinned by research and practice-based evidence and supported by a professional learning community. Engaging in professional development is critical for PPETEs as they move from being first order practitioners in classrooms, to the role of second order practitioners, who formally deliver instruction to teachers about teaching. An increasing number of PPETEs are being employed without classroom or any type of teaching experience. This is a consequence of Universities requiring at least doctorate level qualifications, with many applicants having undertaken their doctorates immediately following their initial degree. This signals strongly that appropriate professional learning is becoming critical to PPETEs development.

The importance of informal learning experiences cannot and should not be underestimated when trying to understand the work teacher educators do in different national locations and the professional support they need. Primary Physical Education teacher educators themselves, as a professional group are increasingly aware of the need to continue to work on

their competences, acknowledging the importance of being or becoming lifelong learners. They have a heightened awareness of the need to keep in touch with the latest developments and insights in their own field.

Types of professional learning

Primary physical education teacher educators' professional development consists of a mix of learning activities, which are valued highly in terms of supporting one's professional development. Professional learning can be divided into two types, the first, *in-service programmes* (i.e. organised programmes for practitioners within the institutions where they work), considered by some to be the primary way in which they receive continuing support. The second, *continuous experiential learning*, accommodates the more informal learning opportunities that contribute to everyday professional practice. This informal learning includes activities such as team meetings, collegial consultation and collaboration with colleagues. Engagement in professional learning activities include formal activities such as training courses, seminars, workshops and conferences. It also includes courses on a wide range of subjects, varying from teaching physical education subject content, to the use of information and communications technologies, pedagogical and general teaching skills. In an increasingly globalised educational world, PPETEs' practices are now also now influenced by international trends and socio-educational policy developments. Currently the discourses surrounding health and wellbeing are impacting the physical education landscape. There are increasingly conflicting views on the nature and purpose of primary physical education in each national jurisdiction and from one country to the next. This means that models of professional learning need not only to pay attention to the context (organisation, institute, school) in which individual PPETE's work. It requires the acknowledgement that they have different professional learning needs depending on national policy, their positions in their careers and their biographical

experiences and aspirations. Novice PPETEs in many instances receive very little support and coaching during their induction phase. They emphasise the need for a formally structured induction with focus on ‘what’, ‘how’ and ‘who’ they are as PPETEs. Active participation in learning communities, regular consultation with colleagues and coaching from experienced teacher educators would be of great value in the professional learning of novice teacher educators. Elements that are regarded as beneficial in subsequent phases of professional learning include in-depth reflection on the PPETE identity, discussion of pedagogical dilemmas and supportive practices within an active research culture. These all continue to be important and are very much part of the professional learning of the PPETE.

Research can contribute significantly to professional development and can be used as a way to keep in touch with the latest developments and to contribute actively to enlarging the body of knowledge. Not only the reading and informing oneself is important but writing research articles is an activity with a high learning value. The fact that articles can be distributed easily among colleagues, can be regarded as a visible token of someone’s expertise, may well also contribute to the positive perceptions attached to writing articles for PPETEs. Research-related activities in particular, such as self-study and inquiry, are often seen as important activities when it comes to professional learning and the innovation of teaching practices.

Individually

Primary physical education teacher educators often function in silos. Such segregation is not good for the individual, the university, or the profession. Although participants regularly engage with colleagues on a departmental or programmatic level, they infrequently engage with colleagues in discourse about research, teaching practice, or student learning, and possibly even less subject specific discourse. In this context, how can PPETEs take responsibility for their own professional learning? Acknowledging that PPETEs may not have the time to read

the volumes of research publications, it is valuable for their learning to attend professional colloquia or conferences that expose them to recent developments within a relatively short period of time. The advances in communications technology allows PPETEs to take part in, or listen to, presentations, podcasts, conferences and workshops online. This has opened a whole new set of conduits for learning for the PPETE community. This is especially true for those who may in the past have felt isolated or deprived in their previous learning opportunities. There is a growing number of academics working in P/PETE who not only publish in peer-reviewed journals but have begun to share their research in more accessible ways with other PETE, PPETE and practicing teachers. These academics have recognised that it can be difficult for PPETE and teachers to access academic journals. Therefore these teacher educators have begun to use the new communications technologies available to share research online, in short accessible segments similar to that done on <http://www.peprn.com>. The online presence of the Irish/Canadian 'Learning About Meaningful Physical Education' (LAMPE) research project <https://meaningfulpe.wordpress.com/> further illustrates the opportunity that teacher educators are using to share their research outputs. This includes readings, results and resources for both PPETE, PETE and teachers. Further research *about*, and *of* practice, is now shared online in many formats such as: podcasts (e.g. 'Playing with Research in Health and Physical Education'). There are blogs (e.g. 'Drowning in the Shallow'); twitter (such as primary PE teacher - [@JoeyFeith](#) and regular tweeter [@ImSporticus](#)); twitter chat ([#pechat](#)) and online physical education websites which have professional learning sections (e.g. www.thephysicaleducator.com and www.pyppewithandy.com). There are other websites designed to provide professional learning for PPETE, PETE and teachers in specific aspects of physical education. The website <https://thepegeek.com/> focuses on integrating technology with physical education. Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs) are becoming popular and allow

individuals participating in the MOOC to connect with other participants and contribute to discussions. Libraries and mentors, are no longer the main sources of knowledge.

Collectively

Research findings point to studying one's practice as an excellent way for PPETEs to reflect on and improve their practices, thus engaging in practice-oriented research. However, teacher educators often need support to conduct research. They want to belong to a research community, and to have protected time for research and access to the necessary financial resources to support their development. For PPETEs, the likelihood of effective professional learning increases when there is interaction between individual professional learning and professional learning in teams. By discussing their own authentic teaching practices with fellow educators, PPETEs are able to connect their research to the development of a knowledge base within the educational community. One proven way of achieving this involves the establishment of professional learning communities within the programme team, where possible, and then becoming part of learning communities outside of this.

There is growing support for the belief that the most powerful learning experiences take place as a result of being part of a community, network or team. It is now considered learning between members is perhaps even more meaningful than individual learning. Learning from more senior PPETEs', their successes and failures - even the great scholars get rejected too – can provide some solace and help a novice or mid-career PPETE become resilient, motivated to teach, research and write.

Many educational theorists have promoted learning as social and situated; often occurring in informal contexts such as communities through interaction, communication, taking part, and gaining access to different contexts (Quennerstedt & Maivorsdotter, 2017). To a large extent, close association with those with similar interests serves to provide a sounding

board, combats isolation and empowers professional growth and development. While many learning communities are with colleagues in the same institution, others function often at a distance and across different time zones. Despite the fact that the geographical separateness has the potential to compound feelings of detachment, proximity does not seem to cause a problem as the community fights any sense of isolation, pushing the individuals to think as a PPETE and researcher.

Not only can PPETE learn from each other's successes and pitfalls, but the need to explain our national systems also gave us a deeper insight into our own systems. It helps to recognise how the educators of teacher educators and the members of the groups they work with, can support each other to meet new nationally specific challenges, supporting the professional development of teacher educators (e.g. to enhance research capability). It is also possible for PPETE to participate in international communities and to gain personal experience of transnational learning, in which the importance of national voices can be both validated and productively utilised, then deeper awareness of their national contexts will result. Given technological advances, it is much easier than it was in the past to reach out and develop collaborative relationships with peers and mentors in other institutions around the world. In times past we used the Postal Service, telephone, and went to meetings. Now, Skype and FaceTime along with Google Drive and Dropbox offer many other avenues for collaboration and supporting each other. For some PPETEs, learning the technologies is an additional area for professional enhancement and in some cases can add to the stress of professional learning in physical education.

Over the past number of years, professional associations have emerged around the world. Many of these associations have been instigated by teacher educators who recognised the value of communities working together for a common purpose and as a vehicle to keep in contact with graduates in order to help support them continue their professional learning after

leaving University. In Europe alone there are over 30 national physical education associations. These national associations affiliate to the European Physical Education Association (EUPEA), with many countries having both a primary and a secondary level association to support all their teachers. There is a PPETE equivalent called the European Primary Physical Education Network (@EuroPrimaryPE) founded in 2017. This body seeks to create a space for PPETEs across Europe to connect, communicate and advocate for school-based primary physical education. The network aims to become a leading voice for primary physical education by highlighting the subject area's educational value and connective potential as the foundation for children's lifelong and life-wide engagement in physical activity. There are similar physical education associations such as the Society of Health and Physical Educators (SHAPE-America), Physical and Health Education Canada (PHE-Canada), Australian Council for Health, Physical Education and Recreation (ACHPER) many of which have PPETE sections. The associations' websites are valuable sites for resources, national and international policy statements, curricula and professional development opportunities.

As well as physical education specific conferences, the international education conferences have physical education special interest groups (SIGs). Examples of these are AERA (American Education Research Association), BERA (British Educational Research Association) and AARE (Australian Association of Research in Education). The international association for all physical education teacher educators from early years, through primary, secondary and third level education is the Association Internationale des Écoles Supérieures d'Éducation Physique (AIESEP - <http://aiesep.org/>) or the International Association for Physical Education in Higher Education. The AIESEP has regular conferences and seminars and is the ideal conference for PPETE to network, present, learn and form research collaborations with like-minded people. In 2014, AIESEP published its position statement on physical education teacher education (accessible on the AIESEP website). This position was

formulated under the guidance of 53 participants from 11 countries. It clearly identifies and focuses on the importance of professional learning for teacher educators at all levels of physical education.

Concluding thoughts

With the ever increasing professional learning opportunities, in a multiplicity of forms, it remains a function of personal motivation and needs that act as the driving forces to enhance professional development. The main obstacles hindering participation in professional learning activities for PPETE are lack of time and work overload. Today we are living in a knowledge rich society. In this context we need also to be able critical consumers of this knowledge, filtering and validating it to ensure quality professional learning. While PPETEs tend to focus on how best to gain support from more experienced colleagues, consideration also needs to be given to how they, in turn, could support their colleagues both locally, nationally and internationally. The extent to which a PPETE's professional learning and modelling the development of learning skills has the potential to affect pre-service teachers' dispositions toward continued professional learning is immense, acknowledging that teacher education programs are a serious beginning point for the ongoing professional learning of both teacher educators and pre-service teachers (Loughran, 2006). A PPETE's investment in their own professional learning, can also add to their employability given that in many countries permanent contracts of employment are becoming fewer and research outputs are key performance indicators for promotion.

In all countries, the consciousness that teacher educators need specific and tailored professional development provision is still not shared by all. Educators, the institutions in which they work, their governments and other stakeholders have divergent opinions. As a result professional development with regard to both research and practice needs more attention by

these groups to drive towards consensus. Teacher educators, and more specifically, primary physical education teachers seek out opportunities for learning and work together to provide these opportunities. There is a need to work at communicating these opportunities and ensure that all PPETEs know that there is a supportive professional learning movement out there which they are welcomed into with open arms. The PPETE community use every method to share their work and whether you are a novice or master PPETE, a beginning primary school generalist teacher or primary physical education specialist make contact and seize these opportunities for further professional learning.

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