

Chapter 8: Learning to teach generalist primary teachers how to prioritise meaningful experiences in physical education

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## Introduction

In this chapter, we discuss our experiences as three teacher educators who used *Learning About Meaningful Physical Education (LAMPE)* as we worked with pre-service generalist primary school teachers (PSTs) in three separate universities in Ireland. Together, we have a wide range of experience delivering primary physical education teacher education (PETE). We are also experienced coaches, having worked with young children right through to elite adults in a variety of sports. Our own sporting experiences include international rugby, county Gaelic football, athletics, golf, hiking and geocaching. In our PETE practices, we draw on a range of curriculum models and approaches, such as game sense and positive coaching, and position ourselves as lifelong learners, continually adapting and updating our approaches.

We were drawn to the ideas of LAMPE partly because they resonated with our personal philosophies and we anticipated these ideas might provide a useful and accessible framework for our PSTs who were learning to teach PE. Maura and Richard had previously participated in the international LAMPE project (e.g. Bowles et al., 2019). While we had come to understand the features of meaningful PE (the '*what*') (Beni et al., 2017) in our first year of introducing LAMPE, we felt we needed to explore how to improve our practices as teacher educators by further utilising the pedagogical principles of LAMPE (the '*how*') (Ní Chróinín et al., 2018). Tony became interested in LAMPE through attendance at various conferences and subsequent engagement with the literature. Following informal discussions at one such conference, the three of us agreed to work together the following academic year, with the intention of learning more about LAMPE, and exploring how we might embed the pedagogical principles of LAMPE in our own contexts.

In this chapter, we describe how we used LAMPE in one semester with three cohorts of PSTs in their 3rd and 4th year of study within a primary teacher education programme. In Ireland generalist primary teachers deliver all curriculum areas. PSTs are therefore required to complete modules in curriculum and pedagogies for eleven different subject areas. One of the three cohorts was a 3rd year group in a required PETE module. The other two cohorts

had already completed core modules and were now participating in an elective or PE specialism module. This suggests these PSTs had a particular interest in PE. Content of the modules included Outdoor and Adventure Activities, Games, and Adapted Physical Education. In their programme to date, PSTs had engaged with concepts including curricular integration, assessment for learning and differentiation. They had also gained insights into other foundation areas such as human development, philosophy and psychology, which informed their understanding of the child-centred focus that is central to the Irish Primary School Curriculum. All students had completed school placements during the first two years of their programme. These experiences positioned the PSTs to critically engage with analysis of, and reflection on, pedagogy in PE.

To illustrate our experiences, we use extracts from regular conversations and written reflections we shared with each other, teaching resources, and student feedback. We share how our collaborative planning, shared experiences and reflective practice helped to shape and support our implementation of LAMPE. We outline how we used resources from the LAMPE website and other literature, and ideas about Meaningful PE more broadly, to scaffold discussion and encourage student engagement with academic literature. We also share how we explored a range of curricular content utilising LAMPE (e.g., outdoor and adventure activities, games, adapted physical education) with PSTs. Finally, we discuss possibilities for teacher educators as they embark on learning about using LAMPE in their teacher education programmes.

### **Collaboration for Learning**

*This is the importance of the reflection, post-reflection and the support -- the internal kind of critical friendship – that gives to each of us as teacher educators to actually be able to talk about these things and to try and tease them out (Richard).*

There has been an increasing trend for PE teacher educators to examine their own practice, with a view to supporting their professional learning. As we began exploring LAMPE it was very beneficial to learn from, and be supported by, colleagues familiar with the approach through being part of an international community of practice. We felt secure that we were undertaking a learning journey where we could share our thoughts, concerns and

uncertainties with others. We built on the work of Goodyear and Casey (2015, p.201) who advocate “for inter-professional collaboration with researcher(s) who cross the boundary of their institutions...to facilitate change and the use of pedagogical models”. We found that this type of collaboration guided and supported our exploration of LAMPE and was a useful framework through which to examine our own learning through reflection and critical friendship.

Our initial objective was to describe how we would introduce the features of meaningful physical education (Beni, et al., 2017) to PSTs in the modules we were teaching and establish how best we could frame learning activities for PSTs within our individual contexts. The next objective was to examine our pedagogies of teacher education in order to develop a fuller understanding of the pedagogical principles of LAMPE to foster student engagement. The sharing of reflections, feedback and dialogue impacted positively on the short-term planning and teaching of subsequent lessons.

### **Developing Pedagogies of Teacher Education**

*Connecting our students’ experiences to “real life” situations is very important in order to stimulate debate and critical thinking. The pedagogical cases [from the LAMPE website] are a good way of doing this. By making PE “meaningful” for our students we may be prompting them to facilitate meaningful experiences for their own pupils (Richard).*

The growing range of literature and online resources focusing on LAMPE (for teacher educators) and the Meaningful PE Approach (for school teachers) had a two-fold effect on our teaching. Firstly, several articles and blog posts helped guide our planning and discussion as we considered the pedagogical principles of LAMPE that support PSTs’ learning. These principles involved explicit prioritisation of meaningful participation; modelling and exploration of pedagogy for meaningful experiences; PSTs engaging as learners, participants and teachers; framing activities using the features of meaningful experiences; and supporting PSTs to reflect on the meaningfulness of PE.

Secondly, the work of Beni et al. (2019), and Ní Chróinín et al. (2019) provided us with academic literature to guide discussion and reflection with PSTs. We used group discussions

in class to prompt PSTs to consider their own understanding and that of their peers in relation to meaningful experiences in PE. For example, Tony's use of an online discussion forum prompted students to ask and answer each other's questions in response to these readings. The experiences of the teachers who implemented preliminary ideas about Meaningful PE in these particular articles were identified by both ourselves and our PSTs as useful and valuable. In particular, the decision-making required by newly qualified generalist teachers (e.g. Beni et al., 2019) resonated strongly with them. As a result, the readings helped frame in-class discussions and the PSTs began to share their own experiences more fully. One of our students said:

I think it was the teacher, Stephanie [in Beni et al., 2019], looking at her reflections, and how she tried to plan for the different [features] of Meaningful PE separately, but then she realized you can't really do that. [It] was helpful to know how she thought or how she planned for it. So, when you go out, you can nearly look at the way she did it and think about how you do it. I just thought it was good to see it from another teacher's perspective.

To support our teacher education practice we also utilised pedagogical cases published on the LAMPE website. These cases acted as a stimulus for our own discussions initially and, subsequently, with PSTs in class. For example, we used the 'cogs of a clock' and 'graphic equaliser' metaphors (Pedagogical Case #4 on the LAMPE website) to help us think about trying not to include all features in a lesson but rather focusing on specific features at appropriate times. Another student considered this approach:

I thought looking at those case studies...showed how Meaningful PE works. There were [features] in each one of them. I remember the running one. Like how you basically made a pretty boring PE activity into one that was meaningful by giving social interaction, challenge, all those elements. Yeah, so I thought looking at those [cases] were really helpful.

In utilising LAMPE for an Outdoor and Adventure Activities module, Maura emphasised the features of *fun* and *social interaction* when undertaking team challenges and, later, *delight* when the tasks were completed successfully. As we used these metaphors to support how we thought about the features, we supported PSTs to develop their understanding that meaningful experiences for pupils could be an outcome of good planning and teaching. PSTs noted how some ideas about meaningful PE were evident in curriculum models we had been including in our teaching. For example, the PSTs undertaking the Outdoor and Adventure module saw an alignment between Meaningful PE and elements of the Adventure Education and Outdoor Education curriculum models. In particular, they noted

how concepts such as *providing challenge* (Tannehill & Dillon, 2007), and *being child-centred* (Williams & Wainright, 2016) resonated with their exploration of Meaningful PE. In addition, discussions on acknowledging *the child's voice* and supporting the development of the learners' *autonomy* provided opportunities to talk about personally relevant learning. The pedagogical approach underpinning this process highlighted the co-construction of knowledge between teachers and children, the potential for experiential learning, and the importance of regular 'reviewing ... to support transfer of learning' (Williams & Wainright, 2016, p.590).

Following a scavenger hunt activity, PSTs completed a chart (Fig.1) whereby PSTs placed a sticker along a continuum to identify how meaningful they found the activity. It is clear from the picture that the PSTs found motor competence to contribute less to the meaningfulness in this activity compared to fun and personally relevant learning.



Figure 1: Meaningful PE Continuum Illustration

Discussions with PSTs at the end of each class allowed us to reflect on meaningfulness as experienced by the PSTs. One PST commented: "I thought that the continuum charts that you did with us, where you use the post it notes to mark it off on each feature, was really good. I thought that was great. I'd definitely use that in the future as well, I think".

This led to further reflection on how they might create similar experiences in their future classrooms. In this way, we were able to blend theory and practice, exploring "concrete examples of what things looks like" (Lawrence, 2018 p.129). We became more effective at including the pedagogical principles of LAMPE into our teaching and continued to reflect and check-in to establish if PSTs not only understood the 'what' but also the 'how' of Meaningful PE. Therefore, while engaging with the pedagogical principles of LAMPE as

teacher educators, we were also engaging with Meaningful PE as an approach for PSTs as future teachers at the same time. The PSTs concluded that, as teachers, the features of Meaningful PE would be much easier to implement in their own classrooms in the future (rather than on school placement), as they would know the children, their backgrounds and the school context better and therefore, they could plan much more effectively.

Our experiences suggest teacher educators should model pedagogies that support meaningful experiences so that PSTs have the opportunity to experience these approaches practically. This may include the teacher educator being intentional and explicit in using strategies that support autonomy (e.g. enabling PSTs to use voice and choice in their learning), and providing experiences that support the development of, for example, motor competence. Moreover, we believe that teacher educators articulating the reasons for their pedagogical decisions regarding LAMPE will encourage the students to critically evaluate such choices in their own future practice. The resulting discussion could involve PSTs unpacking and critiquing the teacher educators' reasons for their practice, thereby creating opportunities for pedagogical inquiry. For example, following a practical class on inclusive strategies for pupils with special needs, PSTs were asked to consider the meaningfulness of their experience. One PST reflected on the level of challenge they had experienced:

*Children's motivation can also be fostered by incorporating an element of challenge into PE as providing children with appropriately challenging tasks resulting in success, will encourage the children to be proud of their performance, leading to more interest and a willingness to take on more challenging activities.*

In our teaching, Meaningful PE was used to support the development of a shared language through creating a coherent platform for teacher educators and PSTs to articulate their professional knowledge by reimagining (why) and recreating (what and how) the practices of Meaningful PE to better address the needs of learners in contemporary schools.

### **Reflections on Content and Pedagogy**

*Why are we so content-focused? I'm improving at facilitating these discussions and giving the students voice but at the loss of content and this is the dilemma. I'm finding the reflection so worthwhile and necessary, and if we want students to do it with children, we should surely model it. But I am battling with losing content! (Maura).*

Although we found it challenging, we suggest teacher educators should aim to position PSTs simultaneously as learners who are learning about prioritising meaningful experiences in PE (i.e. engaging in and experiencing the tasks of PE), and learners who are learning about teaching in ways that prioritise meaningfulness in PE (i.e. developing pedagogical skills). Tasks, activities, and experiences should be designed, selected, and reflected upon based on their potential to support engagement with the features of meaningful PE and underpinned by pedagogies that support meaningful experiences. Therefore, PSTs can be provided with opportunities to reflect on the meaningfulness of their own school and university PE experiences and how these experiences might inform their future practice. Students were quick to appreciate the value of this to “...allow us, as teachers, to reflect on whether a change in our practice must be brought about for the benefit of the pupils and to continue the stream of meaningful PE experience”. They also recognised the impact for their pupils’ learning: “because sometimes the kids don't actually realise what they've learned until they actually think about it themselves”.

In terms of our learning about LAMPE, we first used the features of meaningful physical education developed by Beni et al. (2017) to frame and reflect on our learning. Then, by reflecting on the content at the end of each of our lessons, we examined where features were evident or where they might have been made more explicit in class. We did this by making time for a ‘check-in’ discussion as part of our lesson conclusion. This occurred through looking at how meaningful PSTs’ learning was, and by reflecting on the pedagogical approaches they experienced as learners. Fig 2 shows one PST’s reflection on experiencing motor competence using a visual method.

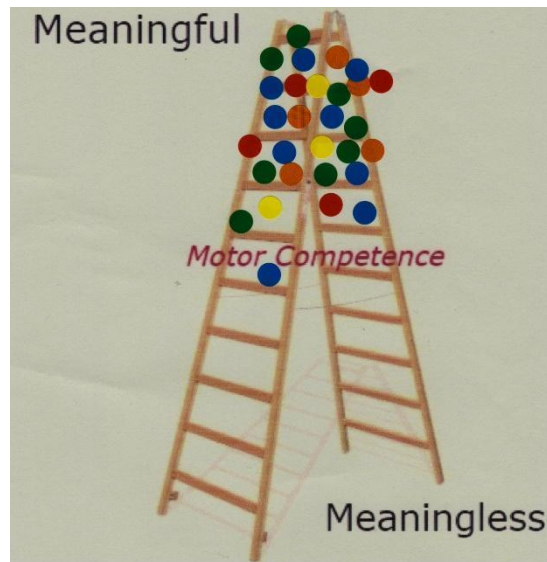


Figure 2: Student end of class response on their Motor Competence experience

Many PSTs commented that this aligned with ‘good teaching’ practices in other curricular areas and the features were accessible and easy to understand. It was interesting, too, that as the PSTs were learning to become generalist teachers, they saw parallels and recognised the value of teaching for meaningful learning across other subjects. As one PST said: *“I think you can apply those meaningful components to most subjects, really”*. LAMPE brought a focus to the value of learning in PE for another PST who stated: *“it is crucial to show the children that what we learn in PE is just as important as what we learn in Maths and the skills acquired can be incorporated and transferred to many other subjects or areas of life”*. As illustrated in Figures 1 and 2, initially we used the terms ‘meaningful’ and ‘meaningless’ as descriptors. Following our discussions and reading of Beni et al. (2018), we now suggest using the term ‘less meaningful’ rather than ‘meaningless’ should be used at one end of the continuum of meaning because it better reflects the responses of our students.

From an administrative perspective, using LAMPE within our modules presented each of us with challenges. For example, we are required to submit our modules outlines to our university programme boards for approval up to 18 months in advance of an academic year. Therefore, when we initiated our exploration of LAMPE we were trying to embed it into previously approved modules. Our discussions highlighted the pressure to deliver approved module content while exploring the features and pedagogical principles of LAMPE. Much of the approach would have been evident in our teaching prior to explicit engagement with LAMPE but we agreed that the practice of ‘checking in’ with PSTs as a



reflective process needed to be prioritised regardless of the potential loss of module content as a result.

When we embarked on using and exploring LAMPE, an important consideration for each of us was how to incorporate authentic discussion into our classes, while at the same time covering a sufficient range of content to enable our PSTs to teach effectively. We were particularly conscious that our time with PSTs was limited and we were concerned that we might be neglecting some areas of curriculum content. As the lack of PE contact time with generalist PSTs is well documented internationally (Tsangaridou & Kyriakides, 2018), we did not wish to further disadvantage our own students. Our experiences using the pedagogical principles of LAMPE, however, have been very positive. We now believe that opportunities for 'checking in' enhanced our teaching and helped our students to develop a deeper understanding of teaching of PE in primary schools. Consequently, we suggest that generalist primary physical education teacher educators exploring LAMPE for the first time engage with the features as a starting point before progressing to the pedagogical principles (Ní Chróinín et al., 2018) due to the role that the features play in several of the pedagogical principles themselves.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

*There is a productive association now from my students that looking at Meaningful PE will support the provision of quality PE teaching and learning ... [leading] towards a consideration of what this will look like in terms of pedagogy and practice (Tony).*

When we started exploring LAMPE we were unsure whether it was a philosophy, a curriculum model, a teaching strategy or a combination of all three. We have come to believe that LAMPE is an overarching approach that can be used in conjunction with curriculum models or as an independent approach for teacher educators. Within our modules, we were exploring a variety of curriculum models, including Teaching Social and Personal Responsibility, Adventure Education, Teaching Games for Understanding, and Co-operative Learning. We found that it was possible to embed teaching for meaningfulness while providing our students with meaningful learning opportunities within each model.

Our experiences illustrate how the pedagogical principles of LAMPE provided a guiding framework that influenced our pedagogical decision-making and actions in our teacher

education practice within individual learning activities as well as within module content, design, and organisation. We found LAMPE to be valuable in supporting PSTs' learning and helped illustrate to PSTs the value of teaching from a coherent set of principles focused on meaningful learning experiences. This process helped to inform PSTs' own decision-making about their actions and children's learning, and they found the language very accessible.

In terms of our process of engaging with LAMPE, the value of a community of practice "emphasizes the contribution of relationship, caring, and mutual support within the group while at the same time focusing on the professional development of individuals within their own discipline" (Brody & Hadar, 2015, p. 247). At the outset, we were concerned that our collaboration might be less productive because of the disparate module content that we were presenting in three different contexts. As we progressed, however, our reflections and discussions showed a consensus that LAMPE was an effective approach for each of us regardless of content and context. During our reflections we interrogated the quality of PSTs' experiences, whereby participation in physical education is viewed as enriching lives (Kretchmar, 2006; O'Connor, 2018). Significantly, it provided us with opportunities to share and discuss ideas that contributed to our own professional learning as teacher educators. Our experiences highlight the importance of building on PSTs' previous experience as they learn to teach using the features of Meaningful PE and pedagogies that support meaningful experiences. We recognised the centrality of teacher educators' and PSTs' reflection as part of this learning process. In turn, we hope this can ultimately underline for PSTs the importance of teacher and pupil reflection within the primary school.

Exploring LAMPE collaboratively provided us with a lens through which to interrogate our practice. Working with other teacher educators reinforced our resolve and sustained us through adapting our practice, providing us with the necessary support and encouragement through sharing experiences, content, resources and outcomes. Trying something new reinvigorated our teaching and made lessons more rewarding for us in return. We each faced challenges as teacher educators when learning about and using LAMPE. We each wanted our own teaching to be meaningful for PSTs, so that their experiences might prompt them to plan and teach for meaningfulness in their classes in the future. We found the provision of the pedagogical case studies and relatable research articles to be useful, and helped our PSTs to engage with ideas about how to make PE meaningful for pupils. What

we have learned in teaching PSTs through using LAMPE is that it is not just a hierarchical teacher educator-PST or teacher-child approach, but rather a more democratic, '*we approach*', in which everyone in the class is involved in ensuring that learning is meaningful, and that, for us, is what matters.

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