

**The Alignment and Coherence Challenge: Developing University-School Partnerships
for the Simultaneous Improvement and Redesign
of School Programs and Teacher Education**

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4905 words

Introduction

Given the changing nature of schools and teacher education within the context of a fast-changing, diverse and global society, it is timely and prudent to critically review Physical Education (PE) and Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE) provision to determine if they are ‘fit for purpose’. There is a strong rationale for reviewing and reconfiguring PE and PETE together as changing PETE and not PE would lead to real-world experiences ‘washing out’ the effects of innovative professional preparation, and changing PE and not PETE would result in beginner teachers requiring additional professional development. This call for a collective review of PE and PETE is not new; in 1998, Goodlad called for simultaneous renewal of university-school relationships to create dynamic, interactive partnerships and, more recently, Lawson (2018) has made a strong case for a critical, collective review of PE and PETE in order to work towards evidence-based policy and research-informed practice, and permit a collective response to current and future challenges to the subject and profession. This is unlikely to be easy or quick but would help interrupt the systematic reproduction of existing PE and PETE for, as the saying goes, nothing changes until something changes.

Challenges exist within PE and PETE in every nation; these drive the development of a common purpose to improve outcomes for teachers and ultimately for pupils across the world. Lawson's (2018) international-comparative analysis of PE and its relationship with PETE makes a case for redesign of both on the basis that current PE programmes do not systematically achieve outcomes claimed by PE teachers, teacher educators or stakeholders such as public health experts and educational policy leaders. Lawson (2018) proffers that gaps between ideal and achieved outcomes, shortfalls and conflicts should be catalysts for agenda-setting or problem-solving, and he prompts theoretically sound, evidence-based redesign which moves the profession towards nuanced, customised forms of PE that better meet the needs of diverse young people. He urges the profession to build new futures for PE based on the claim that: 'Active healthy lifestyles established during childhood are life-enriching and, if they continue, they are life-extending and perhaps life-saving' (Lawson, 2018, p. xii). We share Lawson's strong belief in the potential of PE to enhance pupils' lives and his vision for a bright and better future if the profession is able to think and act differently and collectively. We also, however, acknowledge a number of challenges associated with this such as the renowned resistance to change within the PE profession (Kirk, 2010).

This chapter is written by authors from different countries (England and Belgium) and varying contexts (teaching, teacher education and research) who are experiencing similar, comparable challenges in PE and PETE. The chapter advocates for the bridging of the gap between school-based PE and university-based PETE programmes. Partnerships for simultaneous improvement and renewal are considered a best practice framework given that PE and PETE programmes are mutually constitutive as changing one entails companion

changes in the other. We know from research and development and from partnership experience that alignment (i.e. consistent or compatible structures) and coherence (i.e. shared meanings and common understandings) are associated with the simultaneous renewal of PE and PETE yet these concepts have not previously been prioritised for their influence. In this chapter, we approach this grand challenge or ‘adaptive problem without easy answers’ (Heifetz et al., 2009) by outlining issues mutually influencing PE and PETE, evidencing the lack of alignment and coherence between PE and PETE, and offering a range of viable actions to address this challenge, respecting the limitations of a single, generalisable solution, given the variation and complexity of different contexts.

Issues within and between PE and PETE

Our starting point is a shared understanding of issues within PE and PETE, recognition that issues faced by one adversely affect the other, and a collective desire between us for PE and PETE to work together to address these issues and ultimately improve pupil outcomes. A long-standing issue for PE is that the subject can come across to pupils and their parents as unco-ordinated and piecemeal, especially in its current activity-oriented form and, as a consequence, learning within PE (particularly in domains other than the physical) is not always recognised which does little to enhance the status and value of the subject (Harris, 2018). This is not helped by parents infrequently meeting PE teachers during formal parents’ evenings/consultations, resulting in them having limited understanding of what takes place in PE and why. Our experience is that this lack of understanding is also evident amongst non-PE teaching colleagues, including school principals and senior management who observe few, if any, PE lessons. An associated issue that we are aware of in primary schools in Belgium and the UK is that PE is more often than not, the subject that is cancelled when time is required for other school activities.

Another ongoing but associated issue in PE in the UK is the shift towards it being outsourced to non-qualified teachers such as coaches and instructors, particularly in primary schools (Griggs & Randall, 2018). Whilst this is not the case in Belgium where there are specialist PE teachers in both primary and secondary schools, some of these specialists allow external coaches/instructors to teach curriculum PE, without the close collaboration necessary to ensure high quality PE provision that meets the needs of the pupils. The second author views the trend towards externalisation of the curriculum (i.e. PE being delivered by ‘outsiders’ such as non-profit organisations and private companies) in Belgium as a risk to the subject and profession.

A further issue is a trend towards a reduction in PE time in secondary schools in the UK due to exam pressure, additional curriculum time for other subjects, and staffing cuts (Youth Sport Trust, 2018). The third author reports that many secondary schools in the region in which she teaches have reduced PE time for older pupils (14-16 year olds). This has resulted in secondary school PE teachers being required to teach other subjects and the additional planning and marking associated with this has led to them reducing their involvement in the extra-curricular programme. This author informs that many PE teachers also have pastoral responsibilities which involve reviewing and tracking pupil evidence and liaising closely with colleagues and parents to help ensure that all pupils in their tutor group make good progress in their learning. These increased expectations and demands are resulting in some of these PE teachers struggling to maintain a work-life balance. A further issue for PE in secondary schools is that, as it is not a required subject within the English Baccalaureate, the number of pupils being offered, and opting for, PE examination courses has reduced.

Limited understanding of PE and the learning associated with it has undoubtedly contributed to the confusion between PE, physical activity and sport, and PE's relatively low status and value in comparison with other subjects, which in turn has led to a reduction in PE time in many schools and the subject being partially outsourced to non-qualified teachers. One example of the adverse effect of these issues on PETE in the UK is that pre-service primary generalist teachers teach little or no PE during PETE and their PE subject and pedagogical knowledge are not developed by experienced teachers of PE in placement schools (Griggs & Randall, 2018; Randall et al., 2016).

With reference to issues in PETE, a long-standing problem in England and other countries such as the USA and Ireland (MacPhail et al., 2018; Richards et al., 2018) is the lack of PE specialists in primary schools, and primary school generalist teachers not being adequately trained to teach PE (Harris et al., 2012; Tsangaridou, 2012). This is in stark contrast to countries such as Belgium and Scotland where specialists teach PE in primary schools (Kirk et al., 2018; De Knop et al., 2005). Another PETE issue is how to address and challenge the acculturation effect of socialization which occurs through pre-PETE interactions with influential agents such as parents, teachers and sports coaches (Templin & Richards, 2014). Primarily through what Lortie (1975) termed the 'apprenticeship of observation', individuals develop strong, deeply rooted beliefs, expectations and values associated with PE which Lawson (1983) referred to as individuals' subjective warrants. Our experience of pre-service teachers in the UK and Belgium is that they commence their teacher education with a limited and narrow perception of PE, predominantly based on their own sporting experiences. Exposing and confronting pre-service teachers' subjective warrants remains a challenge for PETE, especially when there is conflict with the beliefs, expectations and values advocated within the PETE programme.

A further and related PETE issue is what to include in the content of PETE, given the various forms PE can take such as the dominant multi-activity curriculum and more recent approaches associated with physical literacy, fundamental movement skills and health-based PE as well as the expanding menu of models-based approaches such as Teaching Games for Understanding, Sport Education, Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility, SPARK (Sports, Play and Active Recreation for Kids) and Cooperative Learning (Green, Cale & Harris, 2018; Lawson, 2018). This seems to be a particular issue in Belgium where the second author reports that many PE teachers continue to adopt direct instruction and a technical approach in their teaching where pupils perform drills to learn basic skills before moving on to tasks which aim to make sense of the activity (Frédéric, Gribomont, & Cloes, 2009). A further impending issue for PETE in Belgium is preparing PE teachers for the curriculum subject of ‘Physical Education’ becoming ‘Physical and Health Education’ which the second author predicts will be somewhat of a revolution for many PE teachers. To add to the problem, this change also coincides with an additional impending change in Belgium requiring all teacher education providers to work together for the first time.

In the same way that issues in PE adversely affect PETE, the reverse equally applies. For example, the inadequacy of primary school generalist teachers’ preparation to teach PE results in them lacking the confidence and competence to teach the subject well which inevitably leads to impoverished experiences of PE for many young learners. This has led to a call by Harris (2018) for PE specialists in primary schools in England, in line with the situation in Scotland (Kirk et al., 2018) and Belgium (De Knop et al., 2005). Although Belgium already has PE specialists in primary and secondary schools, the second author considers that there is a need for increased collaboration between these specialists and their non-PE colleagues to help create an effective whole school approach to promoting healthy,

active lifestyles (Cloes, 2017; De Martelaer et al, 2014). Also, PETE needs to go way beyond exposing pre-service teachers to a series of activities, approaches and models of PE in order to ensure that the design of future PE curricula in schools addresses issues with the inherited multi-activity form of PE (as highlighted by Kirk, 2010) and avoids the danger of replacing this with a similarly disjointed and ad hoc collection of approaches and models-based practice.

The pervasiveness of the alignment and coherence challenge

The alignment and coherence challenge is grand in the sense that it is important and widespread. It is frequently evidenced during PETE when pre-service teachers undertake teaching practice in placement schools where the content of the PE curriculum and the way it is taught contrasts with that advocated within the university component of their teacher training. Indeed, we are only too aware of situations in which pre-service teachers have been told by teachers in their placement schools that they must ignore nearly everything that they have learnt in the ‘ivory tower’ of the university and instead learn what PE is like in the ‘real world’. This clearly demonstrates limited consistency and compatibility between PE and PETE and a lack of shared meanings and common understandings which is unlikely to lead to pre-service teachers adopting innovative orientations which seek to transform PE in schools.

Harris’s (2015) research provides further evidence of the alignment and coherence challenge; in her study, pre-service teachers were asked at the beginning of PETE about their knowledge of how active children should be and their views on the learning that could take place in schools generally, and in PE in particular, to promote active lifestyles. Later in the PETE programme, the same pre-service teachers were asked about their views on the health-related

programmes they had experienced during their teaching placements. Most had experienced health-related PE programmes which they considered ineffective in promoting healthy, active lifestyles amongst young people and which were at variance with their perceptions of the learning associated with this area of work. Harris (2014) concluded that PETE was not adequately preparing future PE teachers to promote active lifestyles and was not addressing previously identified issues in health-related learning such as young people's views of PE and their conceptions about health, fitness and activity. These findings clearly suggest that, rather than working together, PETE and PE can be very much 'at odds' with each other. This prompted Harris and her colleagues to re-think the approach to health-related learning within PETE and continuing professional development (as described in the next section).

The confusion caused by a lack of alignment and coherence experienced during PETE can be further exacerbated when newly qualified teachers take up their first teaching post, especially if they are in school environments that do not encourage them to be creative and experimental but instead expect them to fall in line and deliver what is already on offer. The authors are aware of newly qualified PE teachers receiving negative feedback from established PE colleagues, in response to them challenging ongoing habits and routines. The negative feedback often takes the form of comments such as 'it will not work', 'it is too complicated', or 'it takes too much time', when changes to policies and practices are suggested. Some experienced teachers reject new ideas as they require them shifting outside of their comfort zone plus change often involves additional work. That said, the authors understand that in-service teachers have many demands on their time and recognise that they have insufficient opportunities for meaningful professional development focusing on collaboration, interaction and practice. The consequence of all of this for many beginning teachers is that they become accustomed to custodial teacher orientations and abandon their innovative perspective which

partly explains why the influence of PETE is deemed to be lost or marginalised (Blankenship & Coleman, 2009). A further exacerbating influence on early career PE teachers that we have experienced or witnessed is the effect of whole school pressures (e.g. those relating to time-consuming data and tracking processes), extensive extra-curricular PE expectations, and additional administrative, managerial and/or pastoral roles which can serve to hinder teachers' pedagogical development and their drive, confidence and energy to challenge the status quo.

United we stand, divided we fall

Given that disconnects between PE and PETE are commonplace and problematic, uniting to collectively re-configure PE and PETE makes good sense to help them be 'fit for purpose' and better able to respond to current and future challenges. One possible way of improving the alignment and coherence between PE and PETE is to ensure that partnership schools (which host pre-service teachers on teaching practices) are conversant with, understand and share the research-informed, evidence-based messages, approaches and models communicated and demonstrated during the university-based component of the teacher training programme. One possible way of achieving this is through shared training sessions between university and school staff and/or through joint PETE sessions in which pre-service and experienced partnership school teachers experience, share and discuss research-informed, evidence-based messages, approaches and models. Such sessions have been experienced by the lead author in primary and secondary PETE settings and have resulted in enhanced, authentic experiences for pre-service teachers and much-needed, relevant continuing professional development for experienced teachers. They have also triggered professional, pedagogical dialogue between pre-service teachers, university and school staff about the desire for change and how to achieve this, given the complexity and pragmatics involved.

Another way of improving PE-PETE alignment and coherence is for PETE providers to intentionally seek out and work with schools whose PE staff are conducive to a new vision of PE. This could lead to the creation of 'flagship schools' working closely with the university on research-based practice and practice-based research which would accelerate the process of improvement and re-design of PE and PETE. The expectation that higher education PETE providers in England work in close partnership with schools in the design, delivery and assessment of their programmes (Ofsted, 2018) helps this become a reality, with providers prompted to advance their PETE programmes through, for example, partnership committees and subject advisory groups comprising forward-thinking teachers.

Teachers in these flagship schools can be encouraged and supported to undertake masters and doctoral study and/or to be involved in research projects focusing on transformative, needs-led PE. An example of the latter is the Promoting Active Lifestyles (PAL) research project (Harris et al., 2016) which developed from previous research demonstrating the inadequacy of health-related aspects of PETE. This aligns with Lawson's (2018) view that a field that claims the ability to be a key influence on pupils' lifestyles should feel obliged to deliver on this immense potential. The PAL project involved pre-service and experienced teachers from partnership schools being invited to work collaboratively (as a community of practice) with the aim of increasing pupils' activity levels within the school setting. A flexible approach to achieving this was encouraged to cater for a diverse range of school contexts, populations and budgets. Collectively, the pre-service and experienced teachers who volunteered to be involved created and developed resources around key PAL principles (whole school and PE-specific) and PAL paradoxes, with the support of university teacher educators/researchers. Examples of whole-school PAL principles were: i) review the school's extra-curricular PE

programme and consider how appealing/accessible it is for ALL pupils, and ii) discuss the promotion of active lifestyles, including the ‘one hour a day’ physical activity for health guideline, with all staff, governors, pupils and parents. The PE-specific PAL principles included: i) identify low active pupils and provide them with support/guidance/information and targeted/bespoke activity sessions, and ii) assess learning and progress in PE in active ways (e.g. show, demonstrate, shadow) (Harris et al., 2016). Examples of the PAL paradoxes included: i) PE lessons offer much needed, regular opportunities to be active yet activity levels in PE are generally low, and ii) PE teachers often claim to use fitness testing to promote activity yet many pupils dislike and learn little from fitness testing. Pre-service and experienced teachers’ adoption of freely selected PAL principles ultimately led to positive changes to their philosophies and pedagogies associated with promoting active lifestyles (Harris et al., 2016). Furthermore, some of the teachers have gone on to use the PAL paradox resources to influence the philosophies and pedagogies of colleagues in their own and neighbouring schools, supported by emerging communities of practice. This type of research represents an innovative research and development PE-PETE partnership as it involves pre-service and experienced teachers and researchers collaborating, co-generating knowledge and improving practice and policy in the process, as advocated by Greenhalgh and colleagues (2016).

PE-PETE alignment and coherence can also be improved through university and school staff deliberately addressing the acculturation aspect of occupational socialisation in the form of pre-service teachers’ beliefs, expectations and values associated with PE. We are aware of PETE providers that strategically and explicitly focus on this at various stages of the teacher education process. For example, the first and second authors have experience of working with individuals over an extended period of time (up to 5 years) during which they study for a

masters degree incorporating PETE. This permits regular, ongoing debate of key educational concepts and increases the potential for long-term influence. We also know of university PETE staff undertaking doctoral study on the influences of PETE on pre-service and early career teachers' subjective warrants. This has led to the redesign of PETE in the lead author's institution to increase pre-service teachers' awareness of the beliefs, expectations and values they bring to PETE, where these emanate from, and how they affect their ability to acknowledge, evaluate, teach and create different forms of PE for young people. This ongoing development is showing promise in terms of helping pre-service teachers reflect on their past and how it influences their present and future.

A further opportunity to enhance alignment and coherence between PE and PETE arises through the requirement of ITT providers in England to support teachers during their early years of teaching, particularly the first year (Ofsted, 2018). This is usually provided through numerous forms of professional development such as seminars, workshops, conferences, newsletters, resources and communication via email and social media platforms. These offer opportunities to further develop teachers' skills of, for example, curriculum design based on evidence-based practice. This has the potential to lead to future PE curricula that represent more than a collection of activities, approaches and models and that prioritise and clarify the diverse learning in PE and its contribution to pupils' lives. Post-PETE support for beginning teachers can help them through the challenges of entering and becoming established within the profession whilst retaining their desire to assess and meet the needs of the children they teach. This can help reduce the impact of organisational socialisation, characterized by learning the ropes of the job and conforming to institutional norms in order to feel accepted (Templin & Schempp, 1989), and smooth the often rocky transition for new teachers who may feel marginalised and experience role conflict and reality shock (Curtner-Smith, Hastie

& Kinchin, 2008; Blackenship & Coleman, 2009). The first and second authors have experience of providing professional development on specific topics and issues identified by early career teachers as particular areas of need. This may assist new teachers in redefining the context in which they teach and encourage them to feel empowered to share their ideas, experiences and opinions including, where necessary, challenging institutional norms, drawing on what they have learned from PETE.

Conclusion

Peter Drucker's (2008) question 'If we hadn't inherited it, would we do it this way?' provides much food for thought in terms of PE and PETE. A glib response is that 'we wouldn't start from here' but, given where we are, and to contribute to policy and practice lesson-drawing, we propose the following future research agenda to improve PE-PETE alignment and coherence:

- Exploring and confronting the influence of acculturation during PETE
- PETE working with partnership schools whose PE staff are conducive to a vision of PE that meets the needs of today's learners
- Co-designing PETE and PE with visionary partnership schools and their learners
- Ensuring that partnership schools involved in PETE are willing and able to contribute to a PETE programme which develops PE teachers who can design, teach and assess needs-led PE curricula
- Working with PE staff in partnership schools on research focusing on needs-led PE
- Supporting early career PE teachers through the challenges of organisational socialisation.

We believe that the above research agenda has the potential to impact PE and PETE policy and practice internationally and thus contributes to the call for collective action in the quest for beneficial impact prioritising children's needs. Having said this, we recognise that our proposed viable solutions are framed and thereby limited by the particular national and local contexts within which we live and work. Nevertheless, we recognise that PE's vast potential to enhance children's lives across all nations and contexts relies on teachers' readiness and ability to confront and cope with issues within the field. Beginning teachers clearly need support to address these in order to provide the customised learning experiences their pupils need and deserve. PE teachers and teacher educators are key policy actors in terms of what they prioritise, do and achieve and, rather than ignore or be overwhelmed by this responsibility, we urge that they unite to improve pupil outcomes. We also endorse the prudent and pragmatic advice to think big (or globally) and to act small (or locally) in this regard and to start now as enhancing the quality of children's lives is surely what we are all about.

Epilogue

Constructing this paper proved an interesting challenge. The authors had never worked together previously as a group, and time and work commitments did not permit us meeting to discuss the content of the chapter. As a consequence, two authors have never met each other. In terms of process, the lead author communicated with the other authors by email and telephone to explain the purpose of the chapter and to request their involvement. She then sought their views on issues in PE and in PETE, and the relationship between them, focusing in particular on alignment and coherence. The lead author then drafted the chapter and included within it prompts for comments, ideas and examples from the other authors. The lead author used the responses to the prompts to shape and finalise the chapter. This was an

interesting process as it required weaving in views from a critical practitioner's perspective and those from a leading academic in another country. This was not a particularly easy process with respect to doing justice to the contributions of the different authors and providing a sufficiently robust evidence base for our collective views and ideas, some of which are 'anecdotal' although based on many years' valuable experience of PE teaching and PETE in our respective contexts.

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