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## **The predicament of primary physical education: A consequence of 'insufficient' ITT and 'ineffective' CPD?**

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*Background:* Research on primary physical education (PE) in England and other countries has shown that it is an aspect of the curriculum that has suffered from sparse initial teacher training (ITT). As a consequence of 'insufficient' time spent on PE in ITT (PE-ITT), primary teachers often have low levels of confidence and competence with respect to teaching the subject. Evidence also points to inadequacies in traditional forms of professional development in PE (PE-CPD), leading to calls for more effective ways of developing teachers' competence to deliver high quality PE.

*Purpose:* To explore primary school teachers' experiences of PE during ITT, the PE context in their schools prior to them engaging in a national PE-CPD programme, and teachers' perceptions of the immediate and longer-term effects of this programme.

*Setting and participants:* Primary school teachers in five Local Education Authorities in England.

*Research design and data collection:* A combination of quantitative and qualitative methodological approaches were adopted, including: pre-course audits, course evaluations, focus groups and semi-structured interviews. The pre-course audits captured information about the teachers' experiences of PE-ITT and the PE context in their schools views prior to them engaging in the CPD. The course evaluations

focused on initial impressions of the PE-CPD, and the focus groups and interviews captured the teachers' perceptions of its longer-term effects.

*Findings:* For up to half of the teachers, their PE-ITT was 'insufficient' in terms of the time dedicated to it and the breadth of coverage of the subject. The PE-CPD programme, which was designed in the light of 'insufficient' PE-ITT, did demonstrate some features of effective CPD in that it was considered relevant to classroom practice and partially addressed a few of their many needs (especially in relation to content ideas and inclusive practice). However, its effectiveness was limited due to: its short time span and minimal engagement with teachers; a heavy reliance on resources; and the absence of follow-up support. In addition, it did not adequately address known areas of development for primary PE (such as medium to long-term planning and assessment) and was challenged in meeting the diverse needs of primary teachers of 5-11 year olds. Furthermore, inadequate PE time and reduced opportunities to teach PE in some schools limited implementation of learning from the PE-CPD.

*Conclusions:* In summary, the findings of this study confirmed that PE-ITT continues to be 'insufficient' for many primary teachers and that the PE-CPD in question was not, and could never have been, the panacea for the inherent issues within and predicament of primary PE. In effect, PE-CPD programmes of limited duration and engagement with teachers, a heavy reliance on resources, and no planned follow-up support could not hope to compensate for long-term systemic weaknesses such as inadequate primary PE-ITT. These might be more effectively addressed through professional development programmes which engage teachers and their colleagues in long-term collaborative endeavours that support transformative practice.

**Keywords:** primary; physical education; initial teacher training; professional development

## **Introduction**

Global concerns have been expressed about the initial preparation of, and ongoing support for, primary school teachers to deliver PE (see Hardman and Marshall 2005; Green 2008). To help address this long-standing concern in England (Caldecott, Warburton, and Waring 2006a, 2006b; Clay 1999; Davies 1999; Downey 1979; Kerr and Rodgers 1981; Morgan 1997; Warburton 2001; Williams 1985; Wright 2002), a PE-specific continuing professional development programme (PE-CPD) known as 'TOPs' was devised for primary school teachers by the Youth Sport Trust (YST). This comprised a series of courses, the initial two of which, TOP Play and TOP Sport, were introduced into primary schools in England from 1996 (YST 1997). TOP Play focuses on the acquisition and development of core games skills amongst 4 to 7 year old children, and TOP Sport develops skills amongst 7-11 year olds in a range of sports, building upon the core skills in TOP Play. Additional TOPs programmes such as TOP Dance and TOP Gymnastics were later developed. A second phase of TOPs in 2002 re-aligned the programme to a revised version of the National Curriculum for Physical Education (NCPE) (Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) 1999) and aimed to: raise the status of PE; raise standards of PE and school sport; support and develop inclusive practice; increase teachers' confidence and knowledge; and provide enjoyable physical activity and sport (Haskins 2003).

Teachers accessed the PE-CPD by attending a generic four hour course incorporating TOP Play and TOP Sport, during which they were

provided with a handbook, set of cards and access for their school to a bag of child-friendly PE equipment. Further training was required to access the additional TOP programmes. During the second phase of TOPs, the training was offered through Local Education Authorities (LEAs) to individual teachers, as opposed to schools which had occurred in the first phase. Implementation took place via 'Scheme Managers' who selected 'Scheme Trainers' to deliver TOPs to teachers. A further re-structuring of operations occurred in 2005 when TOPs was integrated into the Professional Development Programme within the Physical Education, School Sport and Club Links (PESSCL) strategy (DfES and Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) 2003).

The effects of TOPs on primary PE have been reported in small-scale, localised studies (Graves 1998; Hunt 1998; Lawrence 2003; Roberts et al. 1998; Spode 1997) which collectively prompted a larger-scale study. This paper presents and discusses selected findings from such a study focusing on primary school teachers' experiences of PE during initial teacher training (ITT), the PE context in their schools prior to them engaging in the PE-CPD, and teachers' perceptions of the immediate and longer-term effects of this programme. Firstly, some of the issues concerning primary PE and PE-CPD that have been identified in the literature are highlighted.

### **Insufficient PE-ITT?**

The literature suggests that there are concerns about the adequacy and quality of primary PE-ITT in a number of countries, including England (see Hardman and Marshall 2005). Indeed, there has been a steady reduction in the time spent on PE in primary ITT in England over a twenty

year period, and there are wide variations in time, with durations recorded as low as five hours in post-graduate programmes (Caldecott et al. 2006a, 2006b; Carney and Armstrong 1996; Physical Education Association (PEA) 1984; Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) 2000; Standing Conference on Physical Education (SCOPE) 1991; Williams 1985). This has triggered a number of proposals in the United Kingdom (UK) about the amount of time that should be devoted to PE during primary ITT, ranging from a minimum of 60 hours (British Council for Physical Education (BCPE) 1980; Central Council for Physical Recreation (CCPR)/National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) 1992; PEA UK 1987), to more recent proposals of 25 (Sport England 2002) and 30 hours (CCPR 2004). However, the quality of the ITT is not just about the volume of contact time, but also about the philosophical approach to and content of the training (Pickup 2006). Indeed, the latter is often restricted to games, gymnastics and dance, which has led to concerns about minimal experience of potentially high-risk activities such as athletics, swimming and outdoor education (Ofsted 2000).

In addition, it has been reported that trainee teachers teach very few PE lessons during their ITT and only a small proportion of school mentors have sufficient subject knowledge to provide informed support in the subject (Caldecott et al. 2006a, 2006b; Ofsted 2000; Rolfe 2001; Rolfe and Chedzoy 1997). Indeed, Pickup (2006) has described trainee teachers' school-based experiences as at best adequate, and at worst non-existent, and he describes a cycle of unenthusiastic class teachers mentoring similarly disposed trainees. Warburton (2000) summarises the PE-ITT situation suggesting that far too many primary teachers have received little more than an introduction to PE,

and Wright (2002) describes it as often amounting to little more than a token gesture. These descriptions were reinforced within a review of the PE-specific needs of newly qualified primary school teachers (NQTs) which confirmed that limited time on PE in ITT left many NQTs feeling ill-equipped to deliver high quality PE and in need of support with respect to subject knowledge, planning, health and safety, and assessment (Woodhouse 2006).

### **Ineffective PE-CPD?**

Ofsted (2005) reported that weaknesses in PE-ITT and a subsequent lack of CPD for teachers created and reinforced problems for primary PE in England. Wide variations in PE-CPD have been reported for NQTs across England, ranging from 'nothing' to 'a five day programme spread over three terms, complemented with resources to support practice' (Woodhouse 2006). In addition, much of the PE-CPD that is experienced by teachers (in terms of 'one off', 'off-site', 'one day' courses) has been described as relatively ineffective (Armour and Yelling 2002), resulting in:

*...fragmented and incoherent teacher learning that lacks intellectual rigour, fails to build on existing knowledge and skills, and does little to support teachers in the day-to day challenges of improving student learning (Sparks 2002, 9.1).*

Thus, it would seem that some forms of teacher professional development do not demonstrate the characteristics associated with effective CPD, these being:

- the content is challenging, up-to-date and relevant to classroom practice;
- the activities are delivered with appropriate expertise;
- schools allow enough time to support effective professional development (to ensure that newly acquired knowledge and skills are consolidated, implemented and shared with other teachers);
- teachers have access to follow-up sustained learning opportunities

(National Foundation for Education Research (NFER) 2001; National Partnership for Excellence and Accountability in Teaching (NPEAT) 1998; Ofsted 2002b; Pritchard and Marshall 2002).

In contrast, Armour and Yelling (2004) have described PE-CPD in England as lacking coherence, relevance and challenge, and consequently urged a re-think of the nature and type of provision of CPD in PE. O'Sullivan and Deglau (2006, p. 446) also consider that PE-CPD needs to be 'situated in classroom practice – not abstract theorizing about ideal environments and goals for PE teaching and teachers'. These views are collectively aligned with a general call for new ways of developing teachers (Guskey 2002; Stein, Smith, and Silver 1999) and greater interrogation of both the purpose and the potential outcomes of CPD structures (Kennedy 2005). In addition, Cordingley and her colleagues (2005) have demonstrated evidence of long-lasting positive benefits of collaborative and sustained forms of CPD.

Armour (2006, p.206) considers that many changes are needed to allow such new forms of PE-CPD to flourish, including 'the traditional practices of CPD providers, and inhospitable school and departmental structures'. Indeed, some schools may need to radically alter their structures,



processes and priorities to enable PE-CPD to happen effectively (Duncombe and Armour 2004). However, it has been suggested that collaborative professional learning may still not be effective in the context of primary PE as most teachers are not knowledgeable enough about the subject to share learning with professional colleagues, even after specialist input (Duncombe and Armour 2005).

### **The Predicament of Primary PE**

Primary school teachers in England and other countries are reported to have limited knowledge of, and low confidence in teaching PE (Hardman and Marshall 2000, 2005) and negative attitudes towards the subject (Portman 1996; Xiang, Lowy, and McBride 2002). In the UK, this may be related to its comparative low status in relation to other subjects (Shaugnessy and Price 1995a, 1995b; Speednet 1999; Warburton 2000), as exemplified in 1998 when the National Curriculum for PE in primary schools in England and Wales was suspended for two years to focus on literacy and numeracy, during which time one third of schools experienced a reduction in time for PE (Speednet 1999). In response, PEA UK (1998) proposed a minimum of two hours (excluding changing time) of quality PE per week for 5-11 year olds. The school timetable, though, is not an accurate reflection of the amount of PE delivered in primary schools due to facilities such as the school hall not being available for PE and/or PE being suspended for other priorities (NAHT 1999; Shaugnessy and Price 1995b; Speednet 1999). Indeed, Ofsted (2004) revealed that well over a third of primary pupils (38%) were receiving less than two hours of PE and sport per week, and that PE time in some schools

was insufficient (Ofsted 2005). Pickup (2006) also revealed that the frequency of PE in primary schools was often below two hours a week due to lessons being cancelled for various reasons. Yet, in the same year, the DfES (2006) reported that 80% of pupils were taking part in at least two hours of high quality PE and sport a week, exceeding the 75% target set for 2006, with the greatest improvement reported to be taking place in primary schools.

Whilst Ofsted reviews of PE in primary schools have revealed improvements in the quality of teaching and of pupil achievement in recent years, they have also continued to highlight planning, expectation and assessment as key areas for development (Ofsted 2002a, 2004, 2005). Pickup (2006) has also reported limited evidence of plans and unclear expectations of pupils in primary PE. From 2005, a further but related issue emerged which impacted upon PE provision in primary schools. All primary teachers in England became entitled to be released for 10% of their timetable for planning, preparation and assessment (Workforce Agreement Monitoring Group 2003). This led to the possibility of external groups (e.g. coaches) supporting the delivery of PE (Sport England 2005). Quality assurance procedures were put in place by some local authorities to ensure that these external groups had appropriate qualifications and checks to permit them to work with children and the professional competence to target pupils' learning (Sport England 2005). Pickup (2006, p. 14), however, expressed concerns about this practice, stating that it '*belittled the subject's worth*'.

## **Method**

Data were obtained from primary school teachers in five LEAs in England all of whom had attended the PE-CPD. The selection criteria ensured inclusion of LEAs of varying size, geographical spread and management structures. The sampling frame within the LEAs comprised all primary teachers attending TOPs courses during the period of the study, the accuracy of which was monitored through regular liaison with the LEA Scheme Managers. The following methodological tools were employed to gather the data: pre-course audits, course evaluations, focus groups and individual semi-structured interviews. The pre-course audit was informed by the literature on primary PE and designed to capture information about the teachers' experiences of PE-ITT and the PE context in their schools prior to engaging in the PE-CPD. The course evaluation focused on initial impressions of the PE-CPD, and the focus groups and interviews captured teachers' perceptions on its longer-term effects.

The pre-course audits were sent to the teachers for completion prior to the course, collected on the day of the course, and returned with the evaluations following the training. In total, 305 pre-course audits and 459 course evaluations were completed across the five LEAs. The focus groups were conducted in primary schools in the five LEAs in which between four and ten of the teachers had attended the PE-CPD. The designated PE Co-ordinator within these schools was directly contacted by the researcher to invite them and their colleagues to participate. The focus groups took the form of carefully planned discussions designed to obtain perceptions of a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment (Kreuger and Casey, 2008). The discussion was facilitated by a schedule of

prompts, informed by the findings from the pre-course audits and course evaluations, and each focus group was approximately forty minutes in duration. Small group or individual semi-structured interviews replaced focus groups in schools in which it proved impossible to bring all the teachers together due to extra-curricular commitments. In total, 17 focus groups and 19 small group or individual interviews were completed across the five LEAs. For the individual teachers involved, a time period of between two to eighteen months had elapsed since attending the training. Informed consent was obtained from teachers prior to their involvement in focus groups and semi-structured interviews, and these were digitally recorded with their permission. Trustworthiness was established through member-checking (i.e. a random sample of teachers verifying the accuracy of the transcript of their individual interview) and cross-checking of data from pre-course audits and course evaluations.

The quantitative data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences to produce descriptive statistics. The data from the open-ended questions, focus groups and interviews were coded and categorised into emerging categories and themes (Ritchie and Lewis 2003) using the constant comparative method (Miles and Huberman 1994) and construct mapping (Thomas 1992). Data analysis was also aided by employing the Theory of Change Logic Model (Kellogg Foundation 2001) which identifies assumptions about how and why strategies work, such as: the teachers will be able to access the PE-CPD; the teachers will be teaching PE and be able to implement their learning; and the teachers will be able to pass their learning on to their colleagues.

## **Findings**

The vast majority of the primary teachers were female (82%), had Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) (89%) and were non-PE specialists (i.e. did not hold a PE/sports science related degree) (82%). There was a range of teaching experience amongst the group: 37% had taught for ten or more years, 44% for one to ten years, and 19% for less than a year. The key themes emerging from the findings are presented in relation to: the primary school teachers' experiences of PE during their ITT, the PE context in their schools prior to them engaging in the PE-CPD, and the teachers' perceptions of the immediate and longer-term effects of the programme. With respect to the latter, the data merely represent the teachers' views and opinions, as opposed to their teaching behaviours and its impact on pupil learning. Unfortunately, it was not possible during the lifetime of this study to substantiate the teachers' views and opinions of the effects of the programme through, for example, analysis of lesson plans and schemes of work, and observation of teaching.

### ***Teachers' experiences of PE during ITT***

Key themes emerging from the teachers' experiences of PE during ITT were: inadequate preparation in terms of insufficient time and limited breadth of coverage of the subject; low levels of confidence in relation to specific areas of activity and pedagogical issues; and an identified need for PE-CPD.

Just less than half of the teachers (43%) considered that their ITT course was 'inadequate' in preparing them to teach PE, 42% considered it to be 'adequate', and 9% described it as 'more than adequate'. A quarter of the teachers (25%) reported having less than 10 hours allocated to PE during their ITT, 27% reported receiving between 10 to 20 hours, 11% 21 to 40 hours, and 13% more than 40 hours. The remaining 24% could not recall how much time had been allocated to PE during their training. The PE areas covered during ITT were reported to be: games (87%), gymnastics (83%), dance (77%), athletics (48%), health and fitness (33%), swimming (25%), and outdoor and adventurous activities (25%). Most of the teachers were very or reasonably confident about teaching games (86%) but approximately a third lacked confidence with respect to teaching gymnastics (37%) and dance (32%). Nearly all were confident about dealing with behaviour and classroom management issues in PE lessons (95% and 96% respectively) but lacked confidence with respect to assessment (39%), child protection (27%), differentiation (26%), continuity and progression (19%), and inclusion (17%). Two thirds of the teachers (66%) considered that they needed further CPD in PE. Over half (55%) described their head teachers as 'very supportive' of PE-CPD, 41% described them as 'reasonably supportive', and 5% stated that they were 'not at all' supportive.

### ***The PE context prior to the PE-CPD programme***

Key themes emerging about the PE context prior to the CPD programme were: variation in PE time and mixed views about the adequacy of this; some consistency in the core areas of the subject for 5-7 years and 7-11

year olds; variance in the proportion of 5-11 year olds reportedly accessing two hours per week of high quality PE and school sport within and beyond the curriculum; and a degree of variation in teaching colleagues' support for PE/sport.

Over sixty per cent of the teachers (61%) considered the time devoted to PE at their school to be 'adequate' for 5-7 year olds, 13% described it as 'more than adequate' and over a quarter (26%) believed it to be 'inadequate'. Nearly all schools provided games (92%), dance (92%) and gymnastics (89%) within the PE curriculum for 5-7 year olds, most included health and fitness (69%), just over half offered swimming (53%) and athletics (52%), and just over a quarter included outdoor and adventurous activities (27%). With respect to PE time for 7-11 year olds, nearly two thirds (64%) of the teachers considered this to be 'adequate', 13% described it as 'more than adequate' and over a fifth (23%) believed it to be 'inadequate'. Nearly all schools provided games (98%), swimming (97%), athletics (95%), dance (91%) and gymnastics (90%) within the PE curriculum for 7-11 year olds, most included health and fitness (84%), and just over three quarters included outdoor and adventurous activities (76%).

Approximately a quarter of the teachers (26%) stated that more than 75% of their pupils received two hours per week of high quality PE and school sport, within and beyond the curriculum. A further quarter estimated the proportion to be between 50-74%, just over a fifth (21%) estimated it to be 25-49%, and 18% reported fewer than a quarter of their pupils to receive two hours per week of high quality PE and school sport, within and beyond the curriculum. The vast majority of the schools (93%) had PE schemes of work

which had been written or revised in the previous five years. Nearly half of the teachers (47%) described their teaching colleagues as 'very supportive' of PE/sport, half (50%) described them as 'reasonably supportive', whilst 3% stated that they were 'not at all' supportive.

### ***Teachers' perceptions of the immediate effects of the PE-CPD programme***

Key themes emerging about the teachers' perceptions of the immediate effects of the PE-CPD programme were: positive views about its relevance, and its potential to improve teacher confidence in and knowledge of the subject, and to impact upon learning beyond the PE context.

The course evaluations revealed that the teachers' initial impressions of the PE-CPD programme were very positive. Almost all perceived that the PE-CPD had increased their confidence to teach PE (99%), developed their subject knowledge (98%) and was relevant to their needs (97%). Furthermore, nearly all (99%) considered that they would be able to effectively use the resources in their schools to support their delivery of PE, particularly with respect to raising standards and supporting inclusive practice. The PE-CPD led to virtually all of the teachers believing that PE had the potential to contribute to pupils' attitudes to learning (98%), their behaviour (92%) and their engagement in healthy lifestyles (97%). Furthermore, the vast majority (85%) considered that it could contribute positively to pupils' attainment in other subjects.



***Teachers' perceptions of the longer-term effects of the PE-CPD programme***

Key themes emerging about the teachers' perceptions of the longer-term effects of the PE-CPD programme included: enhanced attitudes towards and increased knowledge of the subject; and an improved ability to structure lessons involving varied, purposeful and inclusive activities. However, the themes also highlighted the following weaknesses of the programme: minimal attention to known areas of need for primary PE; difficulty in meeting the diverse needs of primary teachers; limited opportunities to implement learning from the programme; and, the absence of follow-up support.

At least fifty per cent of the teachers involved in the focus groups and semi-structured interviews commented that undertaking the PE-CPD had increased their enthusiasm for, and confidence to deliver PE, as well as developed their knowledge of the subject, especially in 'less familiar' activity areas such as dance and gymnastics. One teacher stated:

*I think that just by giving some ideas that are really simple has been really good. I probably should have known them myself, but not being trained in the area of PE, it was really beneficial having people tell you what is the right thing to do*  
(Female Teacher, 2006).

Up to fifty per cent of the teachers also believed that the PE-CPD had helped them to deliver structured PE lessons containing more purposeful and

challenging activities, resulting in their pupils learning a wider variety of new skills, being more actively involved in, and gaining greater enjoyment from PE.

The resource cards associated with the PE-CPD were considered by virtually all teachers to be particularly useful, especially for non-specialist teachers of PE, as they were clearly laid out, user friendly and adaptable. One teacher commented:

*I think especially for people who haven't got a PE degree, the TOPs cards are so important as they are easy to read, and it's there ready for you. You don't get a big folder that you have to read through to find the information. You can just look and it's there. You can look at the picture and you have a general idea within five minutes of what to do (Male Teacher, 2005).*

The vast majority of the teachers perceived the PE-CPD to be particularly helpful in relation to differentiation and inclusion, and most commented on the usefulness of the STEP (Space, Task, Equipment, People) acronym on the resource cards which provided them with a framework for adapting activities to meet the needs of their pupils. A small number who worked in special needs schools, however, commented that more specific information could have been included, with one such teacher stating: *'there are good inclusive aspects in the resources and the training; however, these are very limited'* (Female Teacher, 2006).

Over a third of the teachers though considered that the PE-CPD paid insufficient attention to planning, with one teacher stating:

*The training is very practical and doesn't really go into anything about how you would use the cards in planning a lesson, they don't really talk about that. They just give out the cards with the ideas on them and it's up to you about how you then go away and use them (Male Teacher, 2006).*

A further specific weakness of the PE-CPD identified by over half of the teachers was its limited attention to assessment. Indeed, most teachers were unable to give specific examples of how they had integrated what they had learnt from the PE-CPD into their planning, delivery and assessment of PE.

The use of the PE-CPD resources varied with over half of the teachers using them occasionally for activity ideas, a quarter admitting to relying on them to plan and structure their lessons, and a few individuals utilising them to involve pupils in their own learning. Interestingly, whilst most teachers considered that the PE-CPD had been well delivered and that they had benefited from the practical 'hands on' experience, a minority thought that it had focused too much on 'playing the activities on the resource cards'. Many of the teachers of older children were of the view that the content did not effectively address the needs of the 7-11 year age range.

A few teachers recognised that a one day course was insufficient in terms of effectively raising standards in PE but acknowledged that it was a

good starting point. Some individuals had benefited from sharing experiences with other teachers, particularly colleagues from the same school. They also expressed a willingness to disseminate their learning and a few had already shared information with colleagues. A specific limitation of the PE-CPD identified by over a third of the teachers was the lack of follow-up support. It was suggested that this could involve sharing good practice with other teachers. Another issue related to access to the resource cards, as outlined by one teacher:

*Staff move on so quickly, so very often once a teacher has received the TOPs training, they move onto other roles. It's nice that you get a set of cards that are yours to keep, but it would also be good to have a central lot of cards for the school...(Female Teacher, 2006).*

Another teacher considered that the resource cards should not be accessible only via training as: '*Only interested people go on courses*' (Male Teacher, 2006).

In two of the five LEAs, the teachers had made only minimal use of their learning from the PE-CPD due to the employment of 'specialist' sports coaches to deliver PE in their schools. Over half of these teachers, however, valued the coaches' contribution to the delivery of PE and some individuals stated that it had informed their own PE lessons. One teacher commented:

*In an ideal world, we would all be specialists in every field, but in primary that's not the case. If we can get people in to help with delivery, then I think that is a positive step (Female Teacher, 2006).*

However, not all of the teachers considered the involvement of coaches to be entirely positive. For example, one teacher stated:

*...I only ever teach indoor PE because the coaches come in...personally I feel unhappy because I don't get to teach the subject that I enjoy teaching...although other teachers are breathing a sigh of relief because they don't have the skills and the subject knowledge to be able to teach certain things...(Male Teacher, 2007).*

## **Discussion**

### ***Insufficient PE-ITT?***

The fact that nearly half of the teachers considered their ITT in PE to be inadequate, and that a quarter reported having less than 10 hours allocated to PE during their ITT, suggests that PE-ITT for these teachers was indeed 'insufficient'. Furthermore, three quarters of them had received no training to teach swimming or outdoor and adventurous activities, two thirds had not covered aspects of health and fitness, and over half had received no

training in teaching athletics. Whilst these findings are not new, they are disappointing given that these issues have been raised by a number of national organisations in England over a sustained period of time (BCPE 1980; CCPR 2004; CCPR/NAHT 1992; PEA UK 1987, 2000; Sport England 2002) and by the government's own inspectorate for schools (Ofsted 2000). Furthermore, the situation is not helped by the fact that induction support for NQTs in PE appears to be somewhat of a lottery, given that it can range from 'nothing' to a 'five day programme spread over three terms' (Woodhouse 2006).

### ***Ineffective PE-CPD?***

The effectiveness of the PE-CPD programme can be considered in relation to some of the characteristics associated with 'effective CPD' that have been identified in the literature (NFER 2001; NPEAT 1998; Pritchard and Marshall 2002; Ofsted 2002b).

*The content of the PE-CPD is challenging, up-to-date and relevant to classroom practice, and is delivered with appropriate expertise*

Much of the feedback from the teachers on the PE-CPD was positive which suggests that it was perceived as relevant to classroom practice and addressed at least some of their many needs in relation to primary PE. This was previously recognised by PE advisers, inspectors and teacher educators who generally welcomed TOPs, although they considered it required further support to integrate it into school PE programmes (Hunt 1998; Lawrence 2003; Spode 1997). It would seem that the PE-CPD increased many of the

teachers' enthusiasm for, knowledge of and competence to teach PE, and even led them to consider that attainment in PE had improved, an outcome which has been confirmed by Ofsted (2004, 2005) although clearly this cannot be attributed to the CPD programme in question. The teachers were also of the opinion that it helped them to vary the content of their lessons, as found by Hunt (1998), and it supported inclusion. Furthermore, it led to a belief amongst the teachers that PE had the potential to contribute to whole school improvements such as enhanced attitudes to learning, behaviour management and the promotion of healthy lifestyles, some of which have been noted in earlier small-scale, localised studies (Hunt 1998; Lawrence 2003; Spode 1997).

However, it could be argued that the PE-CPD was not as up-to-date and challenging as it could have been. For example, planning and assessment were identified as weaknesses of the PE-CPD and many of the teachers were unable to articulate precise changes that they had consequently made to the planning and assessment of their PE programmes. Yet planning and assessment had been previously identified as limitations of TOPs (see Hunt 1988; Lawrence 2003) and as areas of development in the subject, with assessment being the weakest aspect of primary PE at the time the second phase of the PE-CPD was developed (Ofsted 2002a). Although it is recognised that teachers' inability to articulate changes may to some extent reflect their limited knowledge of PE making it difficult for them to clearly express changes and associated outcomes (Duncombe and Armour 2005), this clearly represented a missed professional development opportunity.

Given this low baseline, the PE-CPD was generally well received by most of the primary teachers and was considered to be competently delivered. However, it evidently satisfied some teachers more than others. For example, it addressed the needs of teachers of younger children (5-7 year olds), non-specialist teachers of PE and those with less experience, more than the needs of those of older children (7-11 year olds), PE specialists, teachers from special schools, and those with more teaching experience. In addition, whilst the PE-CPD resources were adaptable in that they accommodated a range of needs (exemplified to some extent by the different ways in which they were used by teachers), the diverse nature of the target group was undoubtedly a challenge for the PE-CPD providers. Armour and Makopoulou (2006) have stressed the importance of addressing the professional development needs of CPD providers as central to the success of CPD programmes.

*Schools allow enough time to support effective professional development and teachers have access to follow-up sustained learning opportunities*

Whilst the vast majority of the teachers worked in school environments that were generally supportive of PE-CPD, a small minority did not. The schools that the latter worked in could be described as 'inhospitable' in relation to professional development (Armour 2006, p.206) and in need of radical change to their structures, processes and priorities (Duncombe and Armour 2004). It is promising though that some teachers expressed a willingness to pass their learning on to colleagues; however, this intention may not be fully realised as it is known that most schools fail to allow enough



time to ensure the consolidation and implementation of newly acquired knowledge and understanding and the sharing of this with teacher colleagues (Ofsted 2002b). In addition, as Duncombe and Armour (2005) discovered, this form of collaborative professional development may not prove to be particularly effective in the context of primary PE due to teachers' low knowledge base, even following specific PE-CPD. Furthermore, the PE-CPD programme did not incorporate any follow-up support or sustained learning opportunities, which was a limitation highlighted by the teachers. The request from some of the teachers for such support was nonetheless encouraging and consistent with a call for new ways of developing teachers (Armour and Yelling 2004).

### **Assumptions made within the PE-CPD programme**

The effectiveness the PE-CPD programme can be further considered in relation to selected assumptions highlighted through the Theory of Change Logic Model about how and why strategies work (Kellogg Foundation 2001).

#### ***Teachers will be able to access the PE-CPD***

It was assumed that primary teachers would be able to access the PE-CPD. However, this was not the case for some of the teachers, albeit a minority, who worked in schools that were not especially supportive of PE-CPD. In addition, a number of logistical issues associated with the programme reduced the teachers' access to it. For example, there were frequent postponements to courses partly due to re-structuring of TOPs and

delays associated with its integration into the Professional Development programme within PESSCL (DfES and DCMS 2003). These problems were exacerbated by staff turnover, including YST personnel at a national level, Scheme Managers and Scheme Trainers at regional level, and primary school teachers at a local level.

***Teachers will be teaching PE and able to implement their learning from the PE-CPD***

It was also assumed that the teachers would be teaching PE and therefore able to implement their learning from the PE-CPD. However, opportunities to teach PE were somewhat limited in about a quarter of the schools in which PE curriculum time was described as 'inadequate'. Furthermore, nearly two thirds of the teachers (64%) considered that 75% or more of their pupils did not receive two hours per week of high quality PE and school sport. These findings and those of Pickup (2006) are somewhat at odds with the reported success of the government's strategy in terms of meeting and even exceeding the 75% target set for 2006, with the greatest improvement reported to be in primary schools (DfES 2006). Indeed, they raise questions about the validity of the data supporting the government's target, although this could partly be a consequence of timetabled PE not being a true reflection of the amount of PE taught in primary schools (NAHT 1999; Pickup 2006; Shaugnessy and Price 1995b; Speednet 1999).

In addition, the emergence of outside interest groups such as sports coaches contributing to the delivery of curriculum PE clearly resulted in reduced opportunities for some of the teachers to deliver PE and implement

their learning from the PE-CPD. Whilst many of these teachers recognised the potential positive benefits of involving specialists, others considered that it negatively impacted on their professional development within PE. Managed appropriately, however, such a practice could provide an opportunity for teachers and PE/sport specialists to learn from each other, with teachers developing their subject knowledge and coaches enhancing their understanding of child development and pedagogical issues. It remains to be seen whether concerns expressed about it threatening high quality provision of primary PE (Pickup 2006) are realised, although any potential negative impact may, of course, be reduced by quality assurance interventions (Sport England 2005).

## **Conclusion**

This paper has presented and discussed the findings of a study exploring primary school teachers' experiences of PE during ITT, the PE context in their schools prior to them engaging in a national PE-CPD programme, and their perceptions of the immediate and longer-term effects of this programme. The findings revealed that, for up to half of the teachers in the study, PE-ITT was perceived as 'insufficient' in terms of the time dedicated to it and the breadth of coverage of the subject. The PE-CPD programme which was designed in the light of 'insufficient' PE-ITT did demonstrate some features of effective CPD in that it was viewed as relevant to classroom practice and considered to address a number of the teachers' many needs (especially in relation to content ideas and inclusive practice). However, it was limited in its effectiveness as it did not adequately address

known areas of development for primary PE (such as planning and assessment), and was challenged in meeting the diverse needs of the primary teachers of 5-11 year olds. Further limitations were its short duration, limited engagement with teachers, and absence of follow-up support which was clearly in demand and needed, especially given the problematic nature of teachers passing their learning on to colleagues in this subject. In addition, inadequate PE time and limited opportunities to teach PE in some schools reduced the implementation of learning from the PE-CPD.

In summary, the findings of this study confirmed that PE-ITT continues to be 'insufficient' for many primary teachers and that the PE-CPD in question, whilst 'effective' in some respects, was not, and could never have been, the panacea for the inherent issues within and predicament of primary PE. In effect, PE-CPD programmes of limited duration and engagement with teachers, a heavy reliance on resources, and no planned follow-up support could not hope to compensate for long-term systemic weaknesses such as inadequate primary PE-ITT. These might be more effectively addressed through professional development programmes which engage teachers and their colleagues in long-term collaborative endeavours that support transformative practice.

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### **Professional Abstract**

### **Summary for Practitioners**

This study was designed to explore primary school teachers' experiences of PE during ITT and within their schools, and their perceptions of the effects of a national PE-CPD programme. Teachers in five Local Education Authorities in England provided data for the study via: pre-course audits, course evaluations, focus groups and semi-structured interviews. The findings revealed that, for up to half of the teachers, their PE-ITT was 'insufficient' in terms of duration and breadth of coverage of the subject. The PE-CPD programme demonstrated some features of effective CPD in that it was considered relevant to classroom practice and addressed a number of the teachers' many needs. However, it was limited in its effectiveness due to its short duration, limited engagement with teachers, and the absence of follow-up support. In addition, it did not adequately address known areas of development for primary PE, and inadequate PE time and reduced opportunities to teach PE in some schools limited implementation of learning from the PE-CPD.