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Moen, K. M., Green, K. S. (2013). Physical education teacher education in Norway: the perceptions of student teachers. *Sport, Education and Society*, under utgivelse. doi: 10.1080/13573322.2012.719867

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PHYSICAL EDUCATION TEACHER EDUCATION IN NORWAY: THE PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENT TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

A feature of academic literature on physical education teacher education (PETE) is the expectation that it can and should impact upon student teachers' beliefs and prospective practices in some significant ways. This is despite research over the last 20 years or more alluding to the apparent failure of PETE to 'shake or stir' (Evans, Davies and Penney, 1996) what might be termed the (typically conservative and conventional) pre-dispositions of student and early career PE teachers. In this paper, we examine the perceptions of PE student teachers in Norway in order to ascertain just what it is that makes them so resistant to change and, for that matter, such infertile ground for sowing the seeds of reflexivity. The study involved semi-structured interviews with 41 PE student teachers from the three routes through teacher education available at Nord UC. Among the main themes identified in the data were the PE students' perceptions of: the purposes (and ostensible benefits) of school PE and PETE as well as the nature of PETE itself (including subsidiary themes of sporting and teaching skills, other 'competencies', school placements, mentoring and mentors, PETEs' teaching styles and the students teachers' relationships with the PETEs). The paper concludes that, as far as the students at Nord UC were concerned, the significance of PETE revolved around the programme's efficacy in developing the sporting skills and teaching techniques they viewed as central to their preparation for teaching. The minimal impact of the more theoretical aspects of PETE appeared to be partly attributable to the students' perceptions of PE as synonymous with sport in schools and partly to their particularly pragmatic orientations towards PETE. In this vein, the students viewed experience as the most important, most legitimate 'evidence' on which to base their beliefs and practices and were resistant to the 'theory' of teacher education, rationalizing their tendencies to select the evidence that suited them.

Key words

physical education teacher education, Norway, student teachers

INTRODUCTION

A feature of academic literature on physical education teacher education (PETE) is the expectation that it can and should impact upon student teachers' beliefs and prospective practices in some significant ways. This is despite research over the last 20 years or more alluding to the apparent failure of PETE to 'shake or stir' (Evans, Davies & Penney, 1996) what might be termed the (typically conservative and conventional) pre-dispositions (akin to what Bourdieu [1984] would call habituses) of student teachers and, subsequently, early career PE (physical education) teachers. In other words, prospective PE teachers' intuitive *understandings* of the subject (including their perceptions of the *purposes* of school PE and, for that matter, PE teaching) as well as the teaching *behaviours* (including teaching styles) they appear predisposed to favour, remain pretty durable despite the ostensible aim of teacher education to develop in student teachers a propensity for reflexivity[1].

In this paper, we examine the perceptions of PE student teachers (henceforth referred to simply as student teachers) in Norway in order to ascertain just what it is that makes them so resistant to change and, for that matter, such infertile ground for sowing the seeds of reflexivity. In the process we hope to shed a little more light on PETE in a country, Norway (Møller-Hansen, 2004; Dowling, 2006, 2008, 2011), and a region, Scandinavia (Annerstedt 1991; Larsson, 2009), where only a relatively small amount of research has hitherto been undertaken.

METHODS AND ANALYSIS

Methods

The paper reports the findings from a study of student teachers undertaking PETE at Nord University College (Nord UC) in Norway. Although, strictly speaking, Nord UC cannot be defined as a representative case – insofar as it does not share *all* of the characteristics of other higher education providers of PETE in Norway – because, in organizational terms, it is reasonably representative of the 15 institutions charged with teacher training it can be taken to represent what Bryman (2008) refers to as a *typical* case.

[1] In sociological terms, reflexivity refers to 'being aware of and trying to take into account one's own preconceptions, the fragility of one's conclusions, and the limitations and sources of error that may contaminate all types of evidence' (Roberts, 2012: 115).

At the heart of the study lay five semi-structured group interviews with a total of 41 PE student teachers from the three routes through teacher education at Nord UC[2]. Group interviews were preferred to focus groups on the grounds that we aimed to generate data on a variety of topics (Parker & Tritter, 2006). At the same time, while we were indirectly interested in the group dynamics or interactions between the students, our more immediate concern was the function of the group members in the triangulation of individual views. In this regard, a feature of the study was what turned out to be a high level of consensus[3] within and across the groups during the interviews.

In keeping with methodological recommendations regarding the size of groups for interviewing purposes (see, for example, Bryman, 2008; Morgan, 1998), we aimed to recruit between 6 and 10 students for each group on the grounds that if (as is quite commonplace) some would-be participants dropped out the group would remain viable in group interview terms. By the same token, if all of the students did, in fact, attend the groups would not be so unwieldy as to make them difficult to manage while at the same time allowing everyone to contribute meaningfully to group discussion.

Purposive and probability sampling strategies were employed in the recruitment of students to the groups. Purposive sampling alone was used to establish group membership among the 30 credits Physical Education programme students as well as the Practical and Didactical Education students because both of these groups were quite small (14 and 7 students respectively) and it was feasible (as well as desirable) to conduct whole cohort (programme) interviews. Probability sampling was used to obtain representatives from the remaining three groups (one from each year) on the Bachelor in Physical Education and Sport programmes,

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[2] In the year 2008-2009 when this study was undertaken, there were different ways to become a PE teacher in Norway. One way was to take 30 or 60 credits Physical Education as a part of general teacher education. These routes enabled graduates to teach PE in primary and elementary school (ages 6 to 15), but did not permit them to use the title Subject Teacher in PE. They were generalist teachers with PE as one specialist subject. Another route was to take a Bachelor in PE and Sport, a three-year course studying PE full-time. A graduate with a Bachelor's degree in PE and sports acquired the title Subject Teacher in PE and qualified to teach PE in primary, secondary and upper-secondary school as well as at the "folkehøgskole".The third route to graduate as a PE teacher in Norway, was to take a Bachelor degree in, for example, sports, friluftsliv (outdoor life) or fitness and then complete a one-year (60 credits) Practical and Didactical Education qualification on top. After completing sports, health, friluftsliv or fitness studies together with practical and didactical education, the students were qualified as subject teachers in PE and could teach PE in primary, secondary and upper-secondary schools in Norway (but not in folkehøgskole). All three routes into PE teaching were grounded on national curricula (UFD, 2003a, b, c).

[3] Consensus (and degrees thereof) was established either by interpreting the gestures (for example, the nodding of heads and brief, supportive comments) of students in the group in response to the comments of one of their peers and/or asking follow-up questions aimed at establishing agreement/disagreement.

resulting in groups of 8, 5 and 7 (and an overall mix of 7 males and 13 females). Of the 51 student teachers (27 female and 24 male) invited to participate in the study, 41 actually attended the interviews (25 female and 16 male).

Semi-structured interview schedules were used in order to generate data on our main research questions while at the same time allowing exploration of any other relevant issues that arose during the interviews (Bryman, 2008). Several key themes (and related questions) formed the basis of the semi-structured interviews with the PE students. These were the purposes (and ostensible benefits) of school PE; the purposes of PETE; the nature (or character) of PETE in practice; PETEs' teaching styles and the students teachers' relationships with the PETEs. Each of the five group interviews lasted between 55 and 80 minutes.

Analysis

Analysis of the data generated was based upon the principles of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006). As soon as possible after completion, each interview was transcribed and subjected to what Charmaz (2006) refers to as initial coding: a mix of 'line-by-line' and 'incident-to-incident' coding. After all of the interviews had been subjected to initial coding all codes were written down before being systematically categorized into themes. For example, within the theme eventually labelled 'student teachers' perceptions regarding the purposes of PE' the initial codes included: 'physical activity', 'health', 'joy', 'daily PE', 'cultural activities', 'theoretical skills', and 'social skills'.

Once identified and systematized, the initial codes were rendered into what appeared to be the most fruitful over-arching codes or themes – what in grounded theory is referred to as focused coding: more directed, selective and conceptual codes than initial codes (Charmaz, 2006). The initial codes from the theme 'student teachers' perceptions regarding the purposes of PE' were, for example, refined into two focused codes: 'intrinsic purposes of PE' and 'extrinsic benefits of PE'. Both the initial and focused coding was performed 'by hand'. To reduce the risk of the various steps in the coding process estranging us, as researchers, from the original data (Charmaz, 2006) we used both the initial and focus code documents alongside the interview transcripts and the tapes themselves to maintain 'a watching brief' on the 'big picture', so to speak, while endeavouring not to lose sight of the detail in the data. The final step in the coding process was theoretical coding wherein potential relationships between categories developed in the focused coding were identified (Charmaz, 2006).

FINDINGS

The following section presents the main findings from the study. Each theme is supplemented by illustrative quotations from the interviews with the PE student teachers. The main themes generated by the study were the PE students' perceptions of: the purposes (and ostensible benefits) of school PE; the purposes of PETE; the nature of PETE itself (including subsidiary themes of sporting and teaching skills, other 'competencies', school placements, mentoring and mentors, PETEs' teaching styles and the students teachers' relationships with the PETEs); being a PE student; and, finally, the impact of PETE.

The purposes (and ostensible benefits) of school PE

In each of the focus group interviews a consensus emerged among the student teachers that school PE had both intrinsic (enjoyment) and extrinsic (health, lifelong participation, motor development, and social and cultural development) purposes as well as actual realizable benefits. Nonetheless, while some student teachers referred immediately to an extrinsic justification for PE in the form of health promotion – "*to prevent lifestyle disease, overweight and such*" (female, Bachelor in PE and Sport, second year) – others tended to couple the supposed extrinsic benefits associated with health with the intrinsic benefits, in the form of the fun and enjoyment, assumed to emanate from simply playing sport. Even here, however, the student teachers tended to mention health rather than enjoyment as the initial rationale for and aim of school PE: "*I think [it's] about health and to have fun*" (female, Bachelor in PE and Sport, second year).

The purposes of PETE

The student teachers viewed the primary function of PETE to be the development of their sporting skills and teaching techniques (in the language of the various Norwegian national curricula for teacher education[4], subject and didactical competencies). The students emphasized what they saw as their need, as future teachers, for subject competency first and foremost – which they tended to refer to in terms of "[developing their own skills in] *sports, dances and games*" (female, 30 credits Physical Education). Alongside improving their subject competency, the students highlighted their perceived need to develop didactical competency or, as a female (30 credits Physical Education) student put it, "*the ability to teach them* [sports, dances and games] *to pupils in school*". In ways such as these the PE students

[4] It is worth noting that each of the three routes through PE teacher education in Norway (see footnote 1) has its own National Curriculum.

pointed to the importance of combining sporting skills and teaching techniques in order to become what they, at least, viewed as a 'good PE teacher': "*we feel they fit together* [subject and didactical competency]. *It is important to have both these subjects*" (female, Bachelor in PE and Sport, second year).

While highlighting what they viewed as the necessity as well as desirability of developing their sporting (subject competency) and teaching (didactical competency) skills and techniques during PETE, the student teachers made no mention of the remaining three competences on the national curricula for PETE: namely, social, adaptive and development, and professional ethics competencies.[5]

Although they were only part way through their teacher education programmes when the study took place, the interviews revealed that the students' possessed little or no knowledge about the national curricula for PETE; in other words, the skills or competencies they were meant to develop during PETE and, by extension, expected to be able to deliver as PE teachers. Indeed, none of the students in the five groups appeared at all familiar with the teacher education programmes they were enrolled on. Even when they were shown the national curriculum documents none of them recalled having seen them previously, although a few said things such as "*We have not got it from the teachers, but they have given us the name of it*" (female, Bachelor in PE and Sport, first year) or "*It is on Fronter*[6]*, we can get it there*" (male, Bachelor in PE and Sport, third year). All-in-all, although the students indicated that they been informed about the national curricula in PETE (either by being shown it or told how to access it), it was clear that without exception they had not scrutinized it in any depth. Indeed, many admitted to never having looked at it at all.

The nature of PETE

There were four main features of students' perceptions of PETE *in practice* (as opposed to their views on its ostensible purposes): first, their approval of the ways in which the PETE

[5] Social competency refers, in essence, to teachers' ability to interact and communicate, and to develop youngsters' social skills. Adaptive and development competency refers to what, in academic circles, might be termed 'reflexivity': teachers' dispositions to reflect upon the academic content and teaching methods of their subject as well as "view the development, learning and socialization of children and adolescents in relation to changes in society" (Regjeringen, 2011, p. 3). Professional ethics competency refers to the teachers' ability to recognize the moral dimension of teaching.

[6] "Fronter" is a web tool where the PETEs can communicate with PE students, and the students can communicate with each other etc. All information from the PETEs to the students is allocated on Fronter.

programme at Nord UC, as well as the PETEs themselves, were perceived as prioritizing the development of the student teachers' sporting skills and teaching techniques – in a manner in keeping with the latter's (aforementioned) expectations; second, what they saw as another entirely appropriate tendency among the teacher educators' to eschew the remaining three competencies (social, adaptive and development, and professional ethics competencies); third, their perceptions of the teacher educators' teaching styles as revolving around formal, teacher-centred, command-style approaches, which they saw as lacking variety as well as dynamism and also failing to provide models (for them, as student teachers) of differing approaches to teaching; and, finally, the students' generally positive perceptions of their relationships with the teacher educators. We will say more about each of these in turn.

Sporting skills and teaching techniques (subject and didactic competencies)

In the first instance, the students highlighted, approvingly, the emphasis within PETE at Nord UC on sporting skills and teaching techniques. Several female students from the first year Bachelor in PE and Sport programme spoke for many when they commented "*we have focused on subject competency*" and "*we have obtained quite a bit of didactical competency*". The students returned repeatedly to their teacher educators' tendencies to concentrate upon sports skills, both in their own teaching of the student teachers as well as when commenting upon the students' teaching of practical subjects: "*He focused on techniques and all that*" (female, Bachelor in PE and Sport, third year). This, it seems, created an impression among some of the students that their teacher educators were trying to turn them into coaches as much as teachers: *"so I had a feeling* [that] *the aim was to make me a good football coach and not a PE teacher teaching football*" (female, Bachelor in PE and Sport, third year). Indeed, many of the students suggested that "*some of the practical activities are provided to give us a coaching license*" (male, Bachelor in PE and Sport, third year). It was readily apparent, nevertheless, that many of the students agreed with those of their peers who indicated that they were happy with what they saw as the necessary and desirable emphasis in their PETE programmes on the development and subsequent testing of their sporting skills: "*We have a lot of practical activities, many different sports, and we have skill tests we have to pass. So all-in-all I think this is a good way for us to learn the different sports we are going to teach in school*" (female, Bachelor in PE and Sport, second year). All of the groups seemed to view skill tests as important, even fundamental, to their development of subject competency: "*We have to pass the skill tests … I think it is ok, and it is very important*" (female, Bachelor in PE and Sport, third year).

The social, adaptive and development, and professional ethics competencies

When it came to the issue of the remaining competencies (that is, beyond the subject and didactical competencies), it was clear that while they found it easy to identify and talk about their experiences of the subject and didactical competencies within PE teacher education at Nord UC, none of the student teachers perceived the social, adaptive and development, and professional ethics competencies as equally apparent let alone deliberately implemented within their programmes. The seeming marginalization if not omission of these competencies within the PETE programme did not appear to concern the students, however – partly because they viewed them as of minimal significance for their education and training as teachers but also because they took these competencies to be covered in their school practice placements: "*We have just had school practice and I feel that we have covered professional ethics competency and maybe social competency"* (female, Bachelor in PE and Sport, first year). It was noticeable, nevertheless, that as well as being unfamiliar with the other competencies the student teachers were unable to pinpoint where they actually occurred during the school placement.

The school placement

One particular aspect of PETE that emerged as a prominent theme in the interviews with the PE students was the school placement (often referred to in the academic literature as school *practice*). The school placement at Nord UC was viewed by the majority of the students as the PE students teaching PE classes as well as receiving teaching-related feedback from the mentor teacher and, at times, their peer students: "*I think school practice was good. We discussed with the mentor teacher before and after class. In this way it is possible to know what you have done and what to improve*" (female, Bachelor in PE and Sport, second year). Some, however, felt that in practice observation tended to be the main part of the school placement rather than merely one dimension of the experience:

> *Well, there is a lot of observation, but you don't have much teaching yourself. You are lucky if you have a class or two during a day. The rest of the time all you do is observing. It is not like being a teacher, like the way it is in reality. In a real situation you don't have so much spare time* (male, Bachelor in PE and Sport, third year).

Whatever the reality of the experience, it was clear that all of the student teachers viewed the school placement as lying at the heart of PETE and of far greater relevance to their

development as future PE teachers than the university element of the programme (albeit with the notable exception of those elements of university PETE focused upon sporting skills and teaching techniques): "*I don't feel we have learnt much at university, but when we went to school practice that's when we learnt something. That's when we have developed*" (female, Bachelor in PE and Sport, second year).

Mentoring and the mentors

The students' perceptions of the school practice extended to their views regarding mentoring, both of which they seemed to view as something that happened between the student and the mentor teacher, often without much involvement from the university tutors. The impression that the university tutors played only a very small role during school practice was confirmed by students who had experienced their university 'contact' teachers[7] failing to visit them during the placement: "*We did not have a contact teacher*" (male, Bachelor in PE and Sport, third year) – while others gave the impression that the university contact teacher visited only very occasionally and, even then, briefly *"*[s/he] *came, said 'this is good', and left"* (female, Bachelor in PE and Sport, second year). A female third-year (Bachelor in PE and Sport) student offered the following insight:

> *Not to say anything bad about the contact teacher at Nord UC, but he visited us one day, the last day of the practice period. Then he came one hour and observed, one hour and nothing more. It was very poor support. We are also supposed to get feedback from the* [university] *contact teacher, to get a wider perspective on how we are.*

As well as noting a lack of involvement among the university tutors during school placement, some of the students pointed to what they saw as a lack of involvement among the school mentor tutors also: "*there was a lot of teaching during school practice, and the mentor teacher was not watching. I think we ought to have more supervision in school practice*" (female, Bachelor in PE and Sport, second year).

The PETEs' teaching

When it came to the teacher educators' own teaching, the students viewed them as quite restricted in their approaches. The students perceived their tutors' teaching styles as tending to be based on the teacher educators' own experiences rather than the various styles outlined in

[7] 'Contact teacher' is the name given to the university tutor when they have an ascribed role of the students school practice.

and recommended by the various national curricula for PETE. Consequently, in the students' eyes, what they tended to receive from the teacher educators were what might be called practical 'tips for teaching' rather than a resume or demonstration of the kinds of teaching styles that they, as student teachers – soon to be newly-qualified PE teachers – might be expected to know and deploy: "*we get a lot of tips* [from the teacher educators] *on how to organize the pupils, how to get them to listen to us etcetera"* (male, 30 credits Physical Education). Nevertheless, the student teachers appeared to appreciate these "*Small tips we can use*" (male, 30 credits Physical Education).

In relation to the theoretical aspects of the PETE programme, the overall impression gained from the student teachers was that they perceived the PETEs' teaching to consist largely of conventional oral lectures based upon PowerPoint presentations. In this regard one student (male, Bachelor in PE and Sport, third year) spoke for many when he said: "*almost everyone at the university uses PowerPoint, and stands in the classroom reading the PowerPoint. I think I can read the PowerPoint myself instead of the teacher reading them to me*". The students viewed this approach to teaching on the part of the PETEs as neither dynamic nor inspirational nor, for that matter, providing suitable models of good practice upon which they might model their own teaching behaviours. Thus, they viewed their teacher educators as tending, for the most part, to utilize only one among the many methods of teaching that the *Local Curriculum for Bachelor in PE and Sport* indicates they are supposed to use during PETE. This single method amounted to a teacher-led, direct, didactical approach.

The student teachers' relationships with the PETEs

Despite their explicit and implicit criticisms of various aspects of the teacher educators' approaches to teaching, the majority of the PE students described having a good relationship with the teacher educators: "*The teachers are always open to questions at any time if I have any*" (female, Bachelor in PE and Sport, first year). The students gave the impression, however, that the students' positive views of their relationships with their tutors had more to do with the teacher educators being helpful with relatively minor personal matters or smaller administrative challenges in the students' everyday lives rather than broader issues related to the more academic or practical aspects of becoming and being a PE teacher. For example, the PE students viewed the teacher educators as helpful in adjusting the timetable in PETE to enable them to do other things such as sports, paid work or go home during vacations: "*If we ask to change things, it is never difficult to ask the teachers*" (female, Bachelor in PE and Sport, first year). A female, second year (Bachelor in PE and Sport) student offered a more

specific example: *"To give you an example, when all the students planned to go home on vacation during winter-holiday, even though we do not have winter-holiday at university, but anyway, when the teacher realized everyone was going home, he cancelled the lessons we had in skiing that week."*

Being a PE student

The interviews revealed being a student teacher to have been a multi-faceted role. Many of the students spoke of working in part-time[8] employment while engaged on the ostensibly full-time teacher education programme: "*I work a bit every Friday, Saturday and Sunday*" (female, Bachelor in PE and Sport, second-year). The third year Bachelor in PE and Sport students, in particular, said they worked a lot: "*I feel I am working and earning money more than I go to* [attend] *university*" (male, Bachelor in PE and Sport, third year). Many of the students viewed employment as necessary: "*We have to earn money*" (male, Bachelor in PE and Sport, first year). Indeed, when there was a clash of priorities, many of the student teachers in employment indicated that they prioritized part-time paid work over study.

In addition to placing a premium on employment, many of the students indicated that they prioritized 'leaving campus' and Solum City[1] to go (to their parental) homes – in order to be with friends and/or take part in competitive sports – over their teacher education studies: "*I go home to do sports and meet friends as soon as we have free time*" (female, Bachelor in PE and Sport, first year).

Interestingly, many of the students explained why they undertook paid work or went home – rather than utilize any spare time for further study and/or general preparation for teaching – in terms of a lack of constraint on the part of the teacher educators and the PETE programme. For example, a female third year (Bachelor in PE and Sport) student commented, "*you have too much leisure time if you don't work besides school*". A male third year (Bachelor in PE and Sport) student added "*it is too relaxed, way too relaxed being a PE student*". Many of the students referred, in a similar manner, to what they viewed as a lack of 'pressure' from the teacher educators or the institution on them as students:

> *You can get a Bachelor* [degree] *and have three days off each week, and only be at school five hours a week. It lacks structure. My impression is that we could get a*

[8] While tertiary education is 'free' in Norway, students usually need to take out a loan for subsistence, including purchasing of materials such as text books and so forth.

> *Bachelor after one and a half or two years if you consider the number of lessons we have had at campus. We need schedules that are full, and they have to expect us to have something ready for presentation the next day that is evaluated. Doing such things would push us.* (male, Bachelor in PE and Sport, third year)

Against this backdrop, it was noteworthy that, according to the students at least, the teacher educators and the students held contrasting views on who was responsible for making PETE 'work': the students evidently took the view that it was the responsibility of the teacher educators to make PETE effective.

The impact of PETE

Towards the end of the interviews the student teachers were asked for their impressions regarding if and how PETE had impacted upon them in the present and/or might do so in the future; in other words, what part PETE might play in their development as future PE teachers. Their answers varied. Some said "*not very much. It has been far from what I expected when I started*" (male, Bachelor in PE and Sport, third year), while others, such as this female second year (Bachelor in PE and Sport) student, commented "*we get a lot of knowledge when we have pedagogy and subject didactics and such. This is a kind of knowledge you don't get just by living, you have to read, learn and study*". Another female second year Bachelor in PE and Sport student followed up by saying, "*Yes, knowledge both theoretically and practically, how to make lessons and make plans and such*". Overall, the students' responses created the impression that while many did not feel that PETE had made much of an impact upon them, the ones that felt PETE was valuable seemed to be referring, for the most part, to the practical dimension of PETE – helping them to facilitate the teaching of sport.

Some of the students viewed the actual delivery of the PETE programme as problematic, thereby undermining its efficacy. They cited administrative problems and lack of communication between the teacher educators and the students, in particular, as reasons why PETE had, in their view, failed. A male, third year (Bachelor in PE and Sport) student, for example, expressed his concern like this: "*I did expect the leadership and the school to follow up much more. The follow up has been very poor. We think there are many things that don't work the way it should. Things are being forgotten 'Oh, we forgot that'. Much is not on track and that influences us*."

In the following discussion, we will explore each of the main themes from the findings in turn.

DISCUSSION

While the student teachers at Nord UC displayed a tendency to view PE as having both intrinsic and extrinsic purposes (and, for that matter, tangible benefits) their avowed priorities – health before enjoyment of sport – differ somewhat from previous findings on PE teachers (see, for example, Green[9], 2000). This may reflect a genuine change in priorities within what amount to PE teachers' justificatory ideologies for school PE – from intrinsic to extrinsic justifications – not only in Norway but among physical educationalists at large. Alternatively, it may simply be explainable in terms of a higher level of health consciousness and concern for health promotion through physical activity in Norwegian culture. It may, of course, be both.

In recent years, many countries have begun to adopt behaviouristic approaches to teacher education, manifest in the identification of competencies for teachers – specific teaching skills deemed to constitute effective teaching "performed at a pre-specified level of mastery" (Tinning, 2006: 371). In this vein, since 1976[10] teacher education in Norway has been grounded in various national teacher education curricula. This study was undertaken when PETE in Norway was underpinned by the national curricula of 2003 (UFD, 2003a, b, c), the regulations from which provided *"a mandatory basis for the institutions that provide teacher education, for the employees, students and representatives for practical training"* (Regjeringen, 2011). The national curricula highlight five competencies to be achieved by student teachers through teacher education: subject, didactical, social, adaptive and development and professional ethics competencies. Nevertheless, the student teachers at Nord UC viewed the subject and didactical competencies (put simply, sporting skills and teaching techniques) not only as going hand-in-hand but of far greater importance to them as future PE

[9] In his case-study in England, Green (2000) found that PE teachers tended, almost invariably, to place a premium on sport as the raison d'etre for PE, with health presented almost as a 'back-up' or subsidiary justification if enjoyment of sport were not considered sufficient justification in itself – as, indeed, it tends not to be in educational establishments!

[10] B. Ausland (personal communication, January 3rd, 2011) from the Department of Higher Education/Ministry of Education and Research confirmed that the concept "National curriculum" was first used in Norway in 1994. The National Curriculum for General Teacher Education in 1994 was an adjusted version of a "Study plan for teacher education" from 1992 and the adjustment in 1994 changed the name from "Study plan" to "Curriculum". Teacher education in Norway had been grounded on a "Temporary study plan from 1976" followed by a "Study plan from 1980", before the "Study plan from 1992".

teachers (for pragmatic reasons) than the remaining three competencies (with their emphases on what might be termed personal and social education). The student teachers' acceptance, even approval, of what they saw as the PETEs' inclination to downplay if not eschew the remaining competencies – or, at least, consider them as something that could be left for the school placement – was entirely in keeping with studies elsewhere (see, for example, Behets and Vergauwen, 2006; Larsson, 2009; Tinning, 2006) that have demonstrated that 'school practice' (the '*doing*') is perceived by trainees as significantly more important and influential than theorizing.

The Nord UC students' tendency to view teacher education as primarily about developing their sporting and teaching competencies appeared exacerbated by the centrality to the programme of 'skills tests' (of which they evidently approved). The effect of the tests seemed two-fold: first, it reinforced their predispositions to view sporting skills and teaching techniques as lying at the heart of both school PE and teacher education and, second, it constrained them to focus on preparing for the tests in their spare time. Nonetheless, it was apparent that the students approved of what they viewed as the proclivity of PETE at Nord UC to focus almost exclusively on the delivery of subject and didactical competencies to the virtual exclusion of the remainder (or, at least, plan for the former while assuming the latter would be acquired, seemingly by a process of osmosis, during the school placements). The student teachers' perception that PETE focused on sporting and teaching competencies with a view to them obtaining coaching awards suggested that they saw their teacher educators as conflating the processes of teaching and coaching and, for that matter, the role of being a teacher with that of being a coach – something, once again, that they appeared for the most part to accept.

The *Local Curriculum*[11] *for the Bachelor in PE and Sport* programme at Nord UC states that in areas of teacher education such as 'subject didactics' and 'pedagogy' the teacher educators

[11] The three different routes into becoming a PE teacher offered at Nord UC in 2008/2009 were based on three different national curricula (UFD, 2003a, b, c). The Institution was required to interpret the national curricula (UFD, 2003a, b, c) and develop aims, content, literature, working methods and evaluation for each subject for the local curricula for each route to becoming a PE teacher. The first part of the national curricula (UFD, 2003a,b,c) – entitled 'teacher education' – contained issues such as 'objectives and characteristics', 'being a teacher', 'becoming a teacher', 'social considerations' and 'from National Curriculum regulations to [the Local] Curriculum' and was common to all national curricula (UFD, 2003a,b,c). Under the heading being a teacher, the five competency aims a teacher is required to achieve through teacher education are specified as: subject competency, didactical competency, social competency, adaptive and development competency, and professional ethics competency.

should use a variety of teaching styles and working methods, including field work, group work, studying literature, working seminars and oral presentations, and lectures. The student teachers' perceptions of their teacher educators' reliance on relatively narrow teaching styles in order to deliver what amounted to 'craft knowledge' notwithstanding, it may be that the PETEs at Nord UC were modelling practice that they would be likely to adopt themselves – thereby reinforcing rather than challenging the student teachers' predispositions towards PE.

The main vehicle for enabling students to experience and develop their PE teaching techniques in practice is the school placement and this too is an obligatory aspect of all PETE[12] in Norway. The three national curricula for teacher education (UFD, 2003a, b, c) state that during the school placement student teachers should meet the challenges that teachers might be expected to experience in their everyday teaching lives. In the process, the teacher education institution is required to facilitate 'didactical reflection' through discussions between the students, the teacher educators and the mentor teachers on issues related to the students' experiences on the school placement: including the various approaches towards teaching and learning. Despite this, the student teachers evidently viewed the school placement experience in reality as a practically-oriented process (that is to say, with a focus on the practicalities of actually *teaching* or coaching sports) based on a two-way relationship (between the mentor/school and the student teacher) rather than the three-way relationship (with the addition of the university contact tutor) anticipated by the national curricula. All-in-all, as well as providing one more example of 'slippage' (Curtner-Smith, 1999) between policy and practice, if the student teachers' recollections were accurate then part of the 'contract' between the students and the university – namely, the requirement for the 'contact tutors' to visit the students at least once during school practice (in order to take observe the students teaching and take part in supervision before and after teaching) – appears not to have occurred, thereby further reducing any likelihood of reflexivity beyond that provided by the mentor. In addition, from the students' perspective there appeared to be little by way of what might be termed inter-professional collaboration or sharing between the two main facilitators of PETE: the PETEs and the school mentors. To all intents and purposes, they were viewed as operating in isolation from each other.

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[12] The only study in PETE where the students do not necessarily undertake school practice in PE is the 30 credits as a part of general teacher education route. More precisely, these students have at least 20-22 weeks of school practice during their four year study programme to become general teachers, however the students may go through 20-22 weeks of school practice without teaching PE classes.

Notwithstanding the observation that the Nord UC tutors were seen as occupying a relatively distant and marginal role during school practice, similar to findings from other research (see, for example, Velija, Capel, Katene & Hayes, 2008) this study identified a strong belief in the positive value of the school placement among the PE students; ‘school practice’ was perceived as the one aspect of PETE where the students *really* learned about the most important elements of becoming and being PE teachers. Despite its perceived significance, it is noteworthy that the school placement only occupies a relatively small part of two of the three PETE programmes in Norway. In the Bachelor in PE and Sport the school placement amounts to 10 percent of the three-year programme of study, while in General Teacher Education (30 and 60 credits Physical Education) it adds up to approximately 13 percent of a four-year programme). It is in the one-year Practical and Didactical Education programme that the school placement occupies a relatively substantial portion of the programme, at approximately 33 percent.

All-in-all, the notion of (appropriate) ‘experience’ seemed particularly influential in the student teachers’ perspectives on PETE. In short, they viewed experience as the most important, most legitimate ‘evidence’ on which to base their beliefs and practices and were resistant to the ‘theory’ of teacher education – finding ways to rationalize their tendencies to select the ‘evidence’ that suited them as well as their dispositions towards disparaging much of the theory PETE introduced them to.

With regard to the mentoring process, the findings from this study bear out previous observations that mentors are viewed as guiding student teacher in three main aspects of PE: the content of lessons, the management and delivery of lessons, and more general reflection on their teaching per se. In effect, mentors are seen as having a primarily *practical* role – passing on to student teachers practical advice about the day-to-day demands of teaching PE. Perhaps unsurprisingly – given student teachers’ inevitable concerns with the day-to-day realities of teaching and accumulating school-based practical experience of teaching (Tinning, 2006) – mentors (and, for that matter, their colleagues) appear to have greater impact upon the teaching behaviours and attitudes of student teachers than their training programmes (Behets & Vergauwen, 2006). Certainly, the mentors in this study were seen as playing a more substantial part in the student teachers’ socialization than their university tutors.

When it came to the impact PETE was thought to have had on them as future PE teachers, the responses from many of the students conveyed the impression that any PETE 'effect' was seen as negligible for the most part. At the same time, where PETE was deemed valuable by the students seemed to revolve around the practical dimension – helping them, in particular, to improve their sporting skills and teaching techniques. All of this may be unsurprising given the abundance of evidence suggesting that both male and female student teachers tend to be attracted to careers in teaching PE primarily because it provides them with opportunities to continue their association with sport (Dowling, 2006; Evans & Williams, 1989; Larsson, 2009) – something which appeared equally true at Nord UC.

There were, it must be said, some evident contradictions in the students' perceptions, that some might say reinforces the need for persevering with efforts to encourage greater degrees of reflexivity among student teachers. For instance, while they emphasized health in their justifications for school PE they failed to notice, let alone view as problematic, their preference for developing sporting skills (alongside the teaching techniques related to these) rather than health promoting physical and recreational activities. At the same time, the student teachers tended to be sceptical of the value of the theoretical elements of their teacher education programmes, even though it would be there where they would be likely to acquire the health-related information germane to their stated priorities. In a similar vein, while praising the emphasis within PETE on the sporting skills and teaching techniques the student teachers felt they needed to develop, they were generally quite scathing of the institutional element of PETE by comparison with the 'real-world' experience gained during the school placement. Finally – and as if to illustrate the typically inconsistent, convoluted and messy character of ideologies (as a blend of fact and fiction: what we have good reason to believe coupled with what we want to believe) – the student teachers appeared perfectly capable of possessing generally positive views of their teacher educators at a personal level despite their many criticisms of them at a professional level.

CONCLUSION

There is nothing especially surprising in the findings from this study. In many ways it reaffirms what we have come to know about newly-emerging PE teachers and their engagement with the process of professional socialization. There were, nevertheless, several interesting revelations that, we argue, may add something to our understanding of the process

of PE teacher education not only in Norway but elsewhere (if and where the situation at Nord UC in any way resembles teacher education more generally).

With the exception of 'teaching practice', the negligible impact of professional socialization – in the form of PETE – on the ideologies and preferred practices of prospective PE teachers has been described by Evans *et al* (1996: 169) as leaving their views and practices 'neither shaken nor stirred by training'. If this study is anything to go by, this appears partly attributable to student teachers' continued perceptions of PE as synonymous with sport in schools. In this regard, the student teachers at Nord UC appeared intuitively oriented toward 'reproducing and preserving' (Placek *et al*, 1995: 248) not only PE as they had experienced it but also the sporting cultures they literally and metaphorically embodied; and their experiences during PETE simply tended to reinforce these predispositions[13]. In the case of Nord UC, such tendencies appeared exacerbated by being set in a (Norwegian) cultural context in which sport is a highly valued and a prominent part of people's leisure practices as well as public and official discourses.

The minimal impact of PETE on the student teachers at Nord was also partly attributable to the student teachers' pragmatic orientations. They appeared primarily concerned with doing what they needed to do (in terms of the course requirements) in order to successfully complete their programme, while enhancing their sporting skills and teaching techniques. They were, in effect, inclined to make short-term situational adjustments to the immediate demands of their professional courses in order to achieve their primary goal of qualifying as a teacher.

All told, the findings from this study suggest that there is a tendency to over-emphasize the impact of professional training on prospective teachers. The implicit assumption underpinning PETE rests on a rational model of change; that is to say, that PETE can unfreeze student teachers' beliefs and practices, then bring about movement (even change where needed), before re-freezing around the customs and practices introduced to them during and by PETE. Teacher education at Nord UC, however, appeared to have little impact on the largely established beliefs of would-be PE teachers and only limited – and largely indirect – impact upon their practices (Capel, 2005; Evans *et al*, 1996; Placek *et al*, 1995). Instead, teacher

[13] As far as we were able to ascertain (see Author, 2012), students were rarely, if ever, "introduced", as one of the reviewers put it, "to some of the considerable literature that offers critique of contemporary sport". Our incidental knowledge of the curriculum content of the PETE programmes at Nord UC merely confirms this impression.

education (or, rather, *training*) tended to confirm rather than challenge the student teachers' beliefs about PE (Capel, 2005; Curtner-Smith, 2001). In this regard, Dowling (2011: 201) suggests that PETE programmes in Norway 'seem to do little to disrupt recruits' [student teachers'] "apprenticeship-of-observation"'. This leads Dowling (2011: 201) to question 'whether teacher educators need to reassess their recruitment policies to PETE, as well as to systematically re-analyze their "taken-for-granted" notions of teacher professionalism'.

Based on the findings from the study we find it difficult to escape the conclusion that acculturation alongside the 'on-the-job' *training* element of professional socialization are far more influential in student teachers development as nascent PE teachers than professional socialization in the form of university PETE. The upshot seems to be that if the perceptions of student teachers at Nord were at all indicative of teacher training elsewhere then student teachers seem to offer infertile ground for the sowing of alternative conceptions of the purposes of school PE: in other words, for the development of reflexivity among nascent PE teachers. In short, student teachers' conservative outlooks make it extremely difficult for PETEs (even if they were inclined to do so), and PETE as a process, to encourage students to consider alternative views of PE and adopt alternative practices, let alone those identified in the national curricula.

As indicated above, the fact that the situation in Norway appears to resemble that of other countries where PE teacher education has been researched, may tell us something about the pervasiveness and durability of PE (and sporting) cultures internationally. Put another way, student teachers' inevitable concerns with the day-to-day realities of teaching and accumulating school-based practical experience of teaching (Tinning, 2006) alongside the tensions that many experience in managing their dual roles of teacher and coach (Tsangaridou, 2006) appears to have greater impact upon the teaching behaviours and attitudes of student teachers than their training programmes (Behets & Vergauwen, 2006). In this regard, this study adds weight to the increasingly abundant research demonstrating that teacher education tends to confirm rather than challenge student teachers' beliefs about PE, as well as their anticipated practices (Capel, 2005; Curtner-Smith, 2001).

With regard to Norway, more specifically, Kårhus' (2012: 245) observes that 'a major consequence of the ideological and structural changes in the 2003 "Quality Reform" of HE in Norway' has been an increase in competition between institutions to recruit and retain

students, as regional university colleges (such as Nord UC) are used as vehicles for stimulating growth in the regions. The upshot of the introduction of 'market dynamics' to HE in Norway, according to Kårhus (2012), has been an increase in PE-related programmes offered to students by the university colleges – and, in particular, the so-called '3+1' model whereby an undergraduate degree in a sports-related subject is followed by a one-year teacher education programme (the recently introduced one-year 60 credits Practical and Didactic Education course). Against this backdrop, several comments from the managers featured in Kårhus' study suggest that university colleges in Norway may well have one eye, as it were, on 'building' and maintaining the 'popularity' among current and prospective students of their various PETE programmes. This is likely to exacerbate the tendencies revealed in this study (see also Author, 2012) towards both PE teacher education tutors and, in particular, their students perceiving the customer as 'king'! Nonetheless, while there was some suggestion of tutors acquiescing to student wishes/demands, there was little overall to indicate that the evident shift towards a marketization of education in Norway (and, for that matter, Scandinavia as a whole) alongside contemporary economic imperatives (such as rising levels of unemployment and relative poverty) have, as yet, played out in teacher education in quite the same way that Kårhus proposes that they have in higher education in Norway more generally. Rather, the most likely explanations for our findings seem, for the most part, to remain an amalgam of the preeminence of sport among all those involved in PE (from student teachers, through school mentors to PE teacher educators), the pervasiveness of sport (and particular sports) in Norwegian culture and the relative dearth of practical constraint in the teacher education system.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We are grateful to the anonymous reviewers for their very helpful comments on the original version of the paper.

NOTE

[1] A pseudonym.

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