

Dissertation Proposal:

The perceptions from Primary and PE student teachers at UWTSD on ‘What is Physical Education?’.

Introduction and rationale

This study will aim to investigate the perceptions of what primary and PE student teachers at the University of Wales Trinity St. David [UWTSD] on ‘What is physical education?’. The study will be using the methodology and thesis work of Caulter and Chróinín (2013) whom posed the question “What is physical education?” to Irish pre-service (student) teachers. Their study was quite large, including 544 pre-service educators. However, using their methodology the same principle will be put into place to a smaller sample at UWTSD to find out what student teachers perceive physical education to be here in Wales. Therefore, it must be first understood what the perceived definitions and understandings of what constitutes physical education from a wider perspective.

The Association for Physical Education, otherwise known as AfPE, produced a definition of physical education within their 2015 ‘Health Position Paper’. This paper from AfPE (2015) discusses the role of physical education to public health, also including physical education’s contribution to addressing childhood obesity to a whole school approaches to health. They define physical education as being;

‘The planned, progressive learning that takes place in school curriculum timetabled time and which is delivered to all pupils. This involves both ‘learning to move’ (i.e. becoming more physically competent) and ‘moving to learn’ (e.g. learning through movement, a range of skills and understandings beyond physical activity, such as co-operating with others). The context for the learning is physical activity, with children experiencing a broad range of activities, including sport and dance.’

AfPE (2015).

The association links physical education to being process of students learning how to move and use their body and becoming physically competent, which will in turn lead them to developing a range of skills such as running, throwing, catching and decision making which forms the basis of most sports and physical activities. AfPE (2015) even suggest in this quotation that physical education can help to develop skills such as co-operation (communication) which can be transpired beyond physical education lessons.

This definition agrees with Kirk who has done extensive work in the field of physical education, with books and edited journals consisting of *'Physical Education futures'*, *'Defining physical education'*. *'Physical education, curriculum and culture: critical issues in the contemporary crisis'*. However, in his work *'Defining physical education'* (2010) he defines PE as being;

'a socially constructed activity which is informed by and informs wider physical culture. Individual experiences of physical education as well as messages from wider physical culture, shape understandings of the nature and purpose of physical education, where physical education is defined by what is done in its name'

This definition from Kirk aims to explain how physical education reflects wider society and bends to conform with societal needs. For example, childhood obesity and sedentary lifestyles have become more prominent in the last few decades leading to an emphasis on physical education to 'solve' this problem. This can be seen in AfPE's definition as it calls for physical education to help in the 'contribution to addressing childhood obesity' (2015).

Due to the nature of the proposed methodology by Caulter and Chróinín (2013) they suggest that 'further opportunities to support the recreation of students understandings need to be investigated'. This supports the rationale within the study about investigating more into the understandings of pre-service teachers here in west Wales and whether there are similar or completely different opinions within the two cultures. This study will add to current research about what future teachers perceive physical education to be and whether they value it, as it is imperative that they understand the values if they are going to deliver physical education lessons. The study will be potentially useful for pre-service teachers themselves and perhaps universities who created the modules, to see if the correct teachings and messages are being transcribed 'correctly'.

Aims of the study

There are 3 clear aims of that the study wishes to cover. These include:

- To understand what primary student teachers, perceive PE to be.
- To understand what PE student teachers, perceive PE to be.
- To comprehend the similarities and differences between the Welsh and Irish student teachers.

The first aim wishes to understand what the primary student teachers perceive physical education to be, as they have a much broader curriculum in which they must deliver wider subject areas including maths, English, science and other subjects including physical education. It will be interesting to see what they perceive physical education to be having only spent a small section of their comprehension on it.

The second aim seeks to understand what the PE students perceive physical education to be. Obviously, they undergo the comprehension of physical education in its entirety in comparison to the primary education students. This discrepancy in knowledge might reveal differences in opinions.

Lastly the third aim aspires to uncover whether there are any differences in opinion between this study and the larger study done by Caulter and Chróinín (2013) and whether any themes or trends make themselves apparent.

Data analysis and methodology

This study will use the methodology as found in Caulter and Chróinín (2013).

Participants:

A smaller sample of 20-30 participants will be used, with approximately even amounts of each teaching field in question. They will either belong to the courses Primary Education (QTS/no QTS) and Physical Education ranging between level 4, 5 and 6 students.

Procedure:

The participants will be posed with only one question “What is physical education?” They will be asked to write for 10 minutes maximum on their perceptions on what physical education is. As done by Caulter and Chróinín no direction will be provided to the participants, allowing them to answer the question openly. They will only be prompted to write as much as they can. The participants will be voluntary, after having been asked to stay behind after one of their lectures by their lecturer to complete the writing task. The students will be debriefed on the study and its aims and then asked to complete a 10-minute writing task without conferring amongst them. The only information required from them is their course they are studying. This will, not take up too much of their free time and is efficient and simple to be carried out. After this step in the procedure the writings they create will be transcribed onto a computer using a dictation software, any words or phrases that cannot be made out through the handwriting will be left blank and not edited to suit the researcher. The data will

be handled using the nVivo 8 software, this will allow trends and themes to be seen, as well as the frequency of the words used by the participants. The software will look for words such as sport, physical activity, participation and other key phrases. The nVivo 8 software will allow frequencies to be seen, such as the word ‘exercise’ might appear in all of the 20-30 participants individual writings and the software will be able to display the frequency of the word across all of the individual writing tasks, with the word ‘exercise’ being seen potentially 50+ times collectively across all the intakes of the writings. These frequencies and trends will be discussed in the discussion section and larger sentences will be included which may highlight a certain point.

Caulter and Chróinín (2013) state that their approach to this question was a ‘feasible and efficient method of accessing and analysing a large cohort of students’ understandings of physical education’. They explain that the advantage of this methodology is that ‘a large amount of data can be collected and analysed efficiently and cost effectively.’ However, they do stress the caution that is apparent with a single question methodology stating that ‘responses may be narrow, framed by the focus of a single question’. If participants do not write enough, more participants will be sought after in hopes that they will write more than the past participants. Therefore, to try and avoid a situation such as this a pilot study will be carried out including 3-5 students to see if the problems stated by Caulter and Chróinín appear, and how best to address this problem before a larger sample is requested. In conclusion this type of methodology was chosen to allow students to openly answer the question and to provide an insight into the perceptions as to what they perceive physical education to be. No personal data will be collected aside the participants course, so their confidentiality is not at risk.

Proposed timetable

November	Complete the research proposal and await ethical approval. Then, find out and plan when best to approach individuals/course leaders about the availability of the students on campus.
December	Do a pilot study on 3-5 students to see if the methodology is correct. Then I will begin conducting the writing tasks on the participants, whilst finding relevant literature on hypothesised topics of discussion
January/February	Hopefully all the research will have been conducted at this point, however if for whatever reason there hasn’t been

	enough data collected, this segment of the timetable will be used to collect more
March	Allow there to be dedicated days/times within days to work solely on the dissertation
April	Finalise, check over and submit the dissertation.

During this proposed timetable for the completion of the sections of the dissertation I will be meeting with my supervisor to discuss any potential problems with the research and for tutorials on how to use the nVivo 8 software.

Words: 1,567.

Reference List:

Association for Physical Education (2015) *Health Position Paper*, www.afpe.org.uk: Association for Physical Education.

Coulter, M. and Chróinín, D. (2013) *What is PE? Sport Education and society*. London: Routledge.

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Kirk, D. and Tinning, R. (1990) *Physical Education, curriculum, and culture: Critical issues in the contemporary crisis*. London: Falmer Press.