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# The personal visions of physical education student teachers: putting the education at the heart of physical education

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With neo-liberal policies dominating across the world, the marketisation and outsourcing of physical education is now common. Within this context, we argue the need for a ‘shifting perspectives’ agenda that will firmly establish the educational credentials of physical education in the future. Accordingly, we present the view that the ‘curriculum voice’ of physical education teachers will be central in mounting a challenge to this neo-liberal agenda. In this first study within a longitudinal project, the focus is on final year student teachers studying an undergraduate degree in physical education. Using ecological concepts, we analysed 20 student essays as they seek to describe their personal visions for physical education. Acknowledging the aspirational nature of these visions, findings reveal that each student vision was influenced by different ecological factors and was subsequently personalised. The findings also reveal that while there may be overarching similarities across the visions, the educational subcomponents and theoretical constructs that make up these visions differ across all students. In conclusion, we argue that the findings suggest that, if supported and developed in the future, that these student visions may indeed turn into the ‘curriculum voice’ of a ‘shifting perspectives’ agenda.

**Keywords:** teacher vision; neo-liberalism; physical education; student teachers

## Introduction

In this paper, we present the view that the ‘curriculum voice’ of the physical education profession, particularly the voice of physical education teachers, will be an important catalyst for the global repositioning of physical education as a more central feature of school curricula. While we acknowledge that this curriculum shift will be a long-term process, we argue that supporting physical education student teachers and teachers to articulate, enact and share their educational visions for physical education will be a key feature of the subject’s long-term development. As Quennerstedt (2019, p. 612) proposes, this shift will involve returning to debates about emphasising ‘the E in PE’ (i.e. the education in physical education). Building on our previous calls for a ‘shifting perspectives’ agenda in physical education (e.g. Carse et al, 2017), this

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paper focuses on two related sections. In the first section, we discuss what we mean by an educational vision for physical education and highlight two significant hurdles we believe will need to be addressed in order to propel this ‘shifting perspectives’ agenda forward. In addition, we explore the complex nature of teacher vision within this evolving physical education landscape. Building on this foundation, the second part of the paper discusses findings from the initial phase of a longitudinal study being conducted with final year undergraduate student teachers. Drawing on ecological thinking to frame the study, we report on the analysis of 20 student essays through which they present their personal visions for physical education and consider how they may enact this vision in the future. The paper concludes by considering how these findings may be used to inform future initial teacher education programmes and in-service teachers.

## **Background**

### *The E in PE: historical challenges*

From an educational perspective, physical education’s reputation has long suffered because of the perception that the subject only focuses on the physical or ‘practical’ domain and has limited ‘cognitive content’ (Kirk, 2013, p. 976). A survey of historical developments suggests there may be some credence to support this restricted view of the subject (Kirk, 2001). In the first half of the last century, physical education was delivered through the drill exercises of Swedish and German gymnastics (Kirk, 2001). Following the Second World War, with interest in these regimented approaches waning, a multi-activity curriculum model emerged and gradually dictated a different direction for physical education. This multi-activity curriculum sought to instil character development through participation in different physical activities, particularly traditional team games (Jess & Thorburn, 2015). While this curriculum model remains popular today in many parts of the world (Jess & Thorburn, 2015), by the end of the 20th century, concerns about its educational value were increasingly raised, particularly in relation to the narrow ‘one-size-fits-all’ thinking that informed the approach (Fernandez-Balboa, 1997).

Around the early years of this century, however, as physical education became a more integrated feature of national curricula in many countries (Thorburn & Horrell, 2011), we have witnessed the emergence of a ‘shifting perspectives’ agenda (Carse *et al.*, 2017) as the physical education profession began to introduce curriculum initiatives that were more overtly focussed on broader educational goals (see Ennis, 2017; Griggs & Petrie, 2018). Most of these initiatives extended the scope of physical education towards a holistic mix of physical, cognitive, social and emotional learning (Bailey *et al.*, 2009). Beginning with the developmentally appropriate approaches to elementary/primary physical education in the latter part of the last century (e.g. Gallahue *et al.*, 1975), examples of more holistic approaches have become more evident in the physical education literature. Physical literacy (Whitehead, 2010), socio-ecological approaches (O’Connor *et al.*, 2012) and meaningful physical education (NíChróinín *et al.*, 2019) have emerged as overarching frameworks to address the subject’s holistic

and educationally oriented ambitions. In addition, models-based practice (MBP), originally introduced in the 1980s (Jewett & Bain, 1985), has been reinterpreted to overtly create learning experiences focussed on more holistic educational outcomes (Casey, 2017). This turn towards holistic learning has also benefitted from robust, longitudinal research that has consistently reported the lifelong physical and mental benefits of physical activity (e.g. Reiner *et al.*, 2013). Moving the subject towards this lifelong agenda further highlights the holistic aspirations of physical education as a long-term educational endeavour as it seeks to prepare students to make informed decisions about their engagement in different forms of physical activity across their lives (Penney & Jess, 2004; MacNamara *et al.*, 2011).

### *Securing the E in PE: future hurdles*

While these recent physical education developments may have some positive implications for the ‘shifting perspectives’ agenda noted above, the increasing dominance of neo-liberalism in many countries has seen the emergence of barriers that will need to be negotiated by the physical education profession if this educational shift is to be enacted in practice. Marketisation, performativity and outsourcing have all become mainstream drivers across physical education (Macdonald, 2011) as the design and implementation of national curricula become subject to ‘the normative assumptions and prescriptions of economism’ (Lingard *et al.*, 1998, p. 84). As such, while this neo-liberal agenda presents a myriad of different hurdles for the physical education profession (e.g. Evans & Davies, 2014), we believe that the limiting of teachers’ professional autonomy and the impact of marketisation and outsourcing represent two key hurdles that teachers and the physical education profession will need to negotiate if they are to bring about the shared enactment of an educationally focussed physical education.

Teacher autonomy has become an issue of some concern in the era of neo-liberalism, as governments increasingly view the development and implementation of education policy as a reasonably simple, linear and mechanistic process. Morrison (2003) highlights how politicians are attracted to this ‘allure of certainty’ on the basis of their perceptions that:

*If we know what we are supposed to be doing, what it is for, why we are doing it, how we are doing it, how well we are doing it, and how well it meets expressed purposes and given agenda, then we have a model for accountability which is sufficiently attractive for governments and policy-makers to seize with both hands. (p. 280)*

In this vein, government agencies also tend to take the view that teaching quality improves through a top-down approach to professional development (Day & Smethem, 2009). Teachers have subsequently become familiar with narrowly focussed professional development experiences that are often supported by ‘set’ national curriculum materials (Keay *et al.*, 2019). For many policy makers, teachers have increasingly been viewed as technicians (Zeichner, 2014; Edling & Simmie, 2020) with limited professional autonomy (Ball, 2008). Sachs (2003) considers this limited autonomy to be a form of ‘managerial professionalism’ that seeks to control how teachers ‘think, talk and act’ (Sachs, 2003, p. 122). This de-professionalising of teachers

(Evans, 2011), suggests that work will be required to restore the agency of those in physical education to enable them to articulate, enact and share educational visions for the subject.

In addition, as marketisation and outsourcing have become more common, physical education is now part of an open market in which teachers are no longer the sole or even main, providers of the subject (Enright *et al.*, 2020). In this marketplace, the global issues of obesity and physical inactivity have initiated a broadening of the physical education arena in which the subject is increasingly being ‘positioned as a cure-all for a range of social and private ills’ (Ross & Burrows, 2003, p. 15). Where there is limited expertise in an aspect of secondary physical education (Enright *et al.*, 2020) or a lack of confidence or interest from generalist primary teachers to teach physical education (Morgan & Bourke, 2008), the outsourcing of provision has become an appealing resolution (Griggs, 2010). Profit and non-profit making organisations have benefitted from this broadening of the curriculum and now regularly feature in the delivery of the curriculum, initial teacher education and professional development (Harris *et al.*, 2011). Quennerstedt (2019) has suggested that physical education is subsequently in ‘danger of becoming a mere doing of sport, fitness instruction, physical activity facilitation or obesity prevention’ (p. 614). It is, therefore, conceivable that while physical education may remain part of the school curriculum, its future contribution may revert to a dominant physical agenda and it may again move to the margins of the school curriculum. Consequently, we now turn to teacher vision as a concept we believe offers some hope for the way that teachers may negotiate and influence these two hurdles.

### **Teacher vision**

For almost 30 years, teacher vision has been recognised as an important feature of teacher preparation and professional learning (Hammerness, 2006; Kosnik & Beck, 2011), largely because it forces teachers ‘to take a stand for a preferred future’ (Block, 1987, cited in Fullan, 1993, p. 3). A teacher’s personal vision can help them to develop a picture of the learning they wish to achieve with their classes (Day, 2000), create a guide for negotiating and extending policy aspirations (Darling-Hammond *et al.*, 2005), and become a mechanism for reflecting on experience to inform future professional learning (Shulman & Shulman, 2004). More recently, teacher vision has also been used to help teachers combat the attempts by neo-liberal governments to restrict and control their curriculum voice (McElhone *et al.*, 2009). In this sense, teachers’ personal visions can help them ‘speak back’ (Vaughn & Faircloth, 2013, p. 1) and may even act as an ‘antidote’ (Hara & Sherbine, 2018, p. 686) to the marginalising of their roles as professionals.

While early conceptual accounts of teacher vision presented a view of classroom practice as a moral endeavour (e.g. Fullan, 1993), the initial empirical work tended to take a narrow view of teacher vision by focussing on teachers’ analysis of video clips of classroom events. (e.g. Sherin, 2001). However, the work of Hammerness (2001, 2006) began to widen the scope of teacher vision beyond the classroom. Hammerness set out a ‘complex view’ (2006, p. 2) of teacher vision, which incorporated factors both within and beyond the classroom:

*Vision consists of images of what teachers hope could be or might be in their classrooms, their schools, their community and, in some cases, even society ... vision can provide a sense of 'reach' that inspires and motivates them, and invites them to reflect upon their work. (Hammerness, 2001, pp. 3–4, original emphasis)*

This definition not only recognises the immediate environment, but also considers the wider school, community and societal domains. In addition, Hammerness explains how an interactive mix of the past and present biographies of individuals, their socialisation journeys, together with teacher emotion, are central facets to our understanding of vision from this more complex perspective. Building on Hammerness's work, Shulman and Shulman (2004) locate vision at the heart of how teachers learn and develop (see Figure 1). Thus, at the individual level, beliefs and values play a role in how teachers make decisions about their professional work (Calderhead, 1996; Day *et al.*, 2005), which may further inform and shape the construction of vision over time.

This Figure highlights the complex ecological interplay that takes place over time within and between the following nested levels of the education system:

- At the individual level: Vision, motivation, understanding and practice are in constant interaction through an ongoing reflective process;
- At the school community level: A synergistic exchange is recognised whereby the individual teacher shapes and is shaped by, the shared vision, shared commitment, knowledge base and community of practice to which they belong;
- At the policy/resource level: Curriculum policies and wider issues are taken up and negotiated based upon different forms of capital that are garnered within and between the individual, community and policy levels.

As we discuss later, this idea of teacher vision as an ecological and interactive phenomenon has informed much of our work with student teachers and teachers and informs the study that will be discussed later in the paper.

#### *Teacher vision: the political turn*

While work on teacher vision continues to consider the interplay with wider levels of the education system, vision has increasingly been viewed as pivotal in combating the top-down neo-liberal government directives, particularly in North America (e.g. McElhone *et al.*, 2009; Vaughn & Faircloth, 2013; Hara & Sherbine, 2018). Vaughn and Faircloth (2013), suggest that resistance to controlling government directives may be possible with a clearly articulated vision as one source to inform and empower teachers. This political turn for teacher vision has also percolated into teacher education. Kosnik and Beck (2011) once advised that the absence of vision would confine newly qualified teachers to 'gathering endless strategies, practical tips, and curriculum information' (p. 122). Furthermore, Hara and Sherbine (2018), highlight the contemporary demand for teacher educators to foster vision with student teachers. They explain visioning in teacher education settings as:

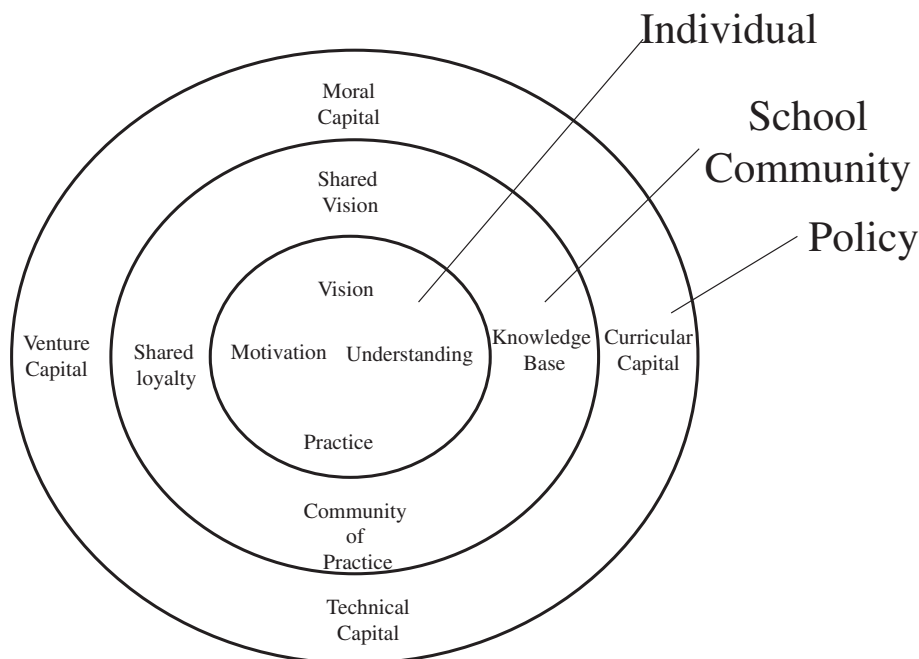


Figure 1. The role of teacher vision within and between the nested levels of education systems (adapted from Shulman & Shulman, 2004)

*...a process of examining beliefs about teaching and learning, to explore how student teachers might conceptualise their roles as agents in reproducing/resisting hegemonic discourses. (Hara & Sherbine, 2018, p. 670)*

In this quotation, the visioning process seems to involve the articulation of beliefs and values about teaching and the adoption of an activist stance where impetus is targeted at the analysis of dominant discourses to foster critical awareness about curriculum directives. As such, Hara and Sherbine (2018) stress that ‘visioning was difficult’ (p. 681). One major difficulty identified was that the students’ visions about practice ‘had not previously been concretized in such a way’ (Hara & Sherbine, 2018, p. 681). The students struggled to capture sophisticated accounts of practice in their visions and found it difficult to make realistic connections to future practice.

Furthermore, McElhone *et al.* (2009) found parallel issues while aiming to foster vision with student teachers. Tracing the visions of participants during the final year of initial teacher education and into the 1st year of teaching, McElhone *et al.* (2009) report as follows: in year 1 of the project (during initial teacher education) the visions were broad and aspirational, while in year 2 (during the 1st year of teaching) the visions were tightly focused on instruction and assessment. Notwithstanding these challenges, the participants reported the following positive outcomes from simply writing about their vision: it was helpful in preparing for job interviews; assisted with the advocacy of their teaching practice to others; sparked a positive ‘trajectory of growth’ (p. 153).

However, in line with Hammerness (2006), we are aware that teacher's personal vision can also have a 'dark side' (p. 3) that may lead them off course. For example, teachers may have ambitious visions that have overly grand aspirations for their classrooms, do not fit with the cultural norms of the context or seek to bring about significant change in their work context. While a vision of this nature may be highly motivating in the early stages, if the teacher's efforts fall short, feelings of disillusionment and a loss of confidence can follow. This may impact negatively on the teacher's motivation and may even result in them leaving teaching altogether (Little, 1996). As such, while personal vision may make some teachers' ambitions rise, vision can also perpetuate stereotypes and suppress alternative possibilities.

It is within this context of physical education developments, neo-liberal influences and teacher vision that the next section of the paper considers our efforts to explore the extent to which physical education students, in the final year of a 4-year initial teacher education programme, have developed a personal vision for physical education that has an educational purpose. Accordingly, we first present the methodological steps taken to capture these student teacher perspectives as they grappled to articulate and track influences on their own personal visions.

## **Methodology**

### *Context for the study and participants*

The first phase of this longitudinal study is set within the context of the Master of Arts (Honours) in Physical Education at the University of Edinburgh. In line with education policy in Scotland this 4-year undergraduate programme seeks to help students to develop the professional knowledge, skills and values to enter the teaching profession with the creative capabilities that will enable them to productively design and enact curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practices in schools. The programme involves the study of physical education curriculum and pedagogy (PECP), sport and exercise science, physical culture, educational studies alongside numerous school-based placements. This research is located within the final year PECP 4 core course.<sup>1</sup> The course builds on the PECP core courses from years 1-3 of the programme and is studied by all physical education students in their final year. The 2019/2020 iteration of this course was taught by the four authors, lasted for 11 weeks during semester one and was allocated 40 hours of contact time spread across lectures, seminars and workshops. The course had the goal of supporting students to investigate and articulate their personal visions for physical education. Similar to Shulman and Shulman (2004), the course adopted an interactive stance in relation to teacher learning and employed an ecological perspective to support students as they considered the different factors that influenced their progress towards 'becoming' a teacher. This ecological framing was broad and open-ended and was guided by individual, task and environmental factors. In addition, we were conscious, as tutors on the course, that our personal visions may influence the students' thinking. Consequently, in all essay-related discussions with the students we acknowledged this possibility and highlighted that it was important that their visions were focussed



on their own experiences and their own thinking. Taken together, these factors provided impetus for the course to provoke students to consider the different people, places, ideas and spaces simultaneously shaping their personal visions.

This study was approved by the ethics committee at the University of Edinburgh. All 84 student teachers in the final year cohort of the programme were invited to take part in the project and 58 students gave written consent that we could analyse their final assignment. In this introductory study, 20 student essays, representing approximately 25% of the student cohort, were purposefully selected for analysis. Three key criteria guided our selection process. First, we looked for a degree of breadth across the different student visions. Rather than random selection or selecting students with the highest grades, we looked across the potential participants and chose essays where the visions represented different possible visions for physical education. Second, the visions in the essays needed to have a strong internal coherence in that different subcomponents within the vision had to interconnect and make sense to a reader. The final criterion was that there was a need for clarity in the essay as the vision was expressed for the reader. Taken together, these criteria enabled us to delineate a range of visions held by the student teachers, while minimising the possibility of misconstruing original interpretations.

#### *Data collection and analysis*

Data were collected from the PECP4 course 3000-word final essay. The course constituted 25% of the students' academic study in the final year of the programme. The essay remit focussed on three related topics: a student's personal vision for physical education; the experiences that had most influenced their vision; and a professional development plan focussed on the enactment of their vision in their early career. While using university students' written assignment responses as research data in education are not a new practice (e.g. see Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009), we were aware of the possible dangers associated with this form of data. We were conscious that the word limit, conventions associated with academic writing and the graded nature of the assignment may constrain the student responses. To address these points, we made regular efforts throughout the course to highlight the importance of students presenting their own ideas and views about physical education. We also took the view that while the essay may be a graded assignment, it would set clearly defined boundaries for the students and would offer a focussed starting point for the longitudinal nature of the study and also enable the students the opportunity to revisit and critique their original visions when they entered the teaching profession. In addition, support mechanisms were put in place to help students focus their thinking about their vision. For example, during week 10 of the course, as a formative task, students worked in small groups to prepare a poster presentation highlighting the key features of their shared visions for physical education. The posters were a combined venture and the students received verbal formative feedback in relation to the content of their posters. Given the collaborative design of the posters, these summarised the broad ideas of multiple group members and did not exactly represent an individual student's vision. Tutors were randomly assigned posters to look at during a 90-minute session

and offered no more than 10 minutes of verbal feedback. As with all summative assessments at University A, the students individually uploaded their essays through an electronic submission system, which were then allotted to tutors in a randomised manner and graded anonymously. Furthermore, the 20 essays analysed as part of the study were also selected anonymously 4 months after the course was finished and the final grades had been processed.

Data from the essays were analysed by the four authors and the following five main steps were employed to analyse the essays. Step one involved each author individually reading the same four scripts and becoming familiar with the main thrust of the data in each one. Step two involved an online meeting to share our individual analysis and to establish commonalities and differences from our experiences. This step also involved considering whether an ecological lens, the central organising feature for the PECP 4 course, could illuminate connections in the data. We decided that the ecological lens provided a helpful 'heuristic device' (Scott & Marshall, 2009, p. 307). According to Scott and Marshall (2009), a heuristic device is simply a '... construct to assist in the exploration of social phenomena' (p. 307). It enabled our analysis to remain open so that the data could inform how we represented a range of interconnected factors—individual, environment, task—that had been experienced differently by each student teacher and, in turn, influenced the development of their thinking about vision and practice over time. Step three involved further preliminary analysis using these individual, environment and task factors. We re-examined one script each and documented how these different factors were employed to code the data. To establish consistency in our collective analysis, we met again to discuss what pieces of data were being assigned to the different individual, environment and task factors. Consistency is important for reliability purposes; it ensured that instances of data were more likely to be assigned to a key factor by different analysts or by the same analyst on a different occasion (Hammersley, 1992). In addition, while we recognised that the ecological analysis helped to tease out those factors that had most influenced the student visions, we also acknowledged it was important to identify the key components that made up these visions. This was particularly important as it would help to ascertain the extent to which the student visions were educational in nature. Aligned with this point, we also agreed it would be valuable to investigate if any theoretical concepts had been used by the students to inform their visions. Step four concerned the allocation of five different scripts to each team member. We individually identified the main components and theoretical concepts related to the vision and used the broad outline of the ecological factors to search for connections and patterns in the data. During this analysis step, team members actively kept memos to track any uncertainties while coding data. A final step involved a discussion to synthesise these individual accounts into a collective analysis. This involved the identification of the similarities and differences between the different student visions and professional development plans and a discussion about the educational subcomponents and theoretical principles underpinning these. Finally, reflections we reflected on the ecological analysis process, sharing memo concerns and offering practical examples from the data that illustrated how the student teachers had developed their visions.

## Findings

Before presenting and discussing the main themes from our analysis, we provide an overview of the visions that were identified by the student participants. The summary in Table 1 indicates that there were four overarching visions for physical education: promoting lifelong physical activity (LLPA) where people remain physically active throughout their lifespan; engaging pupils in holistic learning experiences that link to cognitive, physical, social and emotional domains; providing inclusive opportunities for all pupils to succeed; adaptive practice where curriculum and pedagogy are continually revised to suit the needs and interests of pupils. We now turn to discuss the educational focus of these visions in more detail.

### *Student visions: an educational focus*

Table 1 summarises the students' overarching visions for physical education and the subcomponents that were used to make up these visions. While four overarching visions were presented, the vast majority focussed on the development of a foundation for lifelong engagement in physical activity (12 students) or holistic learning experiences as the main driver (5 students).

Scrutiny of the subcomponents making up these overarching visions, however, reveals two important points: most subcomponents across the four overarching visions had a broad educational focus and no student presented exactly the same subcomponents as another student, even when they had the same overarching vision. The following extracts from students 15 and 19 with an LLPA vision demonstrate the educational and diverse nature that was apparent across the student visions:

*...my vision is lifelong participation in physical activity [and I] justify how inclusion and holistic learning can enhance an individual's PE experience, increasing their likelihood of engaging in PA beyond school.*  
(Student 15)

*...my personal vision is the development of pupils' lifelong participation in physical activity. This vision has been broken down into 3 sub-views—the importance of enjoyment, meaningful experiences ... and developing transferrable skills.*  
(Student 19)

These quotations show how LLPA was envisioned through a wide range of educationally focussed subcomponents that included inclusion, holistic learning, enjoyment, meaningfulness and transferable skills. In addition, these two students illustrated the multiple interpretations of the overarching visions that we found across the student essays.

This diversity across the visions was also witnessed when students interpreted the same subcomponent in slightly different ways. Table 1 indicates that some subcomponents are represented in more than one vision. For instance, meaningfulness is listed as a subcomponent of LLPA, holistic learning and adaptive practice. The series of comments below, taken from the work of students 7, 14 and 17, can be seen as exemplifying subtle differences in their interpretations of meaningfulness. For example, the students each draw on the work of and interpretations of meaningfulness from different authors. Additionally, while there is an undercurrent of personal relevance in each passage, which we should expect with any discussion of meaningfulness,

Table 1. Descriptive summary of participant visions and subcomponents

Vision overview and subcomponents			
LLPA	Holistic learning	Inclusion	Adaptive practice
12 students	5 students	2 students	1 student
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Personalisation</li> <li>● Enjoyment</li> <li>● Meaningfulness</li> <li>● Models-based practice</li> <li>● Salutogenesis</li> <li>● Health</li> <li>● Inclusion</li> <li>● Holistic learning</li> <li>● Talent development</li> <li>● Social development</li> <li>● Primary PE</li> <li>● Critical thinking</li> <li>● Transferrable skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Improvement-aimed</li> <li>● Meaningfulness</li> <li>● Salutogenesis</li> <li>● Personalisation</li> <li>● GIRFEC<sup>2</sup></li> <li>● Self determination theory</li> <li>● Sport education</li> <li>● Positive relationships</li> <li>● Supportive learning environment</li> <li>● Well-being</li> <li>● Engagement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Extra-curricular sport</li> <li>● Challenge hegemonic masculinity</li> <li>● Transferrable skills</li> <li>● Positive relationships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Complexity thinking</li> <li>● Learning process</li> <li>● Meaningfulness</li> </ul>

the students display nuances in how they have privileged certain aspects or the sites where personally relevant learning is consolidated:

*...meaningful learning experiences increase enjoyment therefore ... the chance of engagement in lifelong physical activity beyond PE ... Kretchmar (2006) introduces five features of teaching that when present increase the meaningfulness of the learning. (Student 7—vision: holistic learning)*

*for a situation to have meaning to an individual they must fully understand the connection it has with past experiences, the present and potential significance ... for their future. In agreement with Beni et al. (2016) who discuss ... meaningful experiences as individual to the learner. (Student 14 – vision: adaptive practice)*

*Thorburn (2017) discusses ... meaningful learning as physical activity being a productive experience, a form of exercise in which there is something gained and pupils take knowledge away with them when leaving the department. (Student 17—vision: LLPA)*

These examples are representative of how students adopted and adapted the subcomponents that cut across the different visions for physical education. Taken together, the deployment of different subcomponents *within* each vision and the alternative interpretation of subcomponents *across* each vision demonstrate the diversity that existed in these educationally oriented visions of the students.

#### *Student visions: a theoretical underpinning*

In their essays, students used an extensive range of theoretical constructs to support their visions. In our analysis, we adopted an open stance on theory by viewing it as a flexible set of principles that help to interpret experiences (Carse et al, Under review). In addition, while we acknowledge that the academic demands of the assignment task will have focussed the students' responses, the theoretical constructs employed to provide coherence and a sense of direction for their visions were noticeable. The constructs that dominated across several student visions, included: health as salutogenesis, meaningfulness, physical literacy, self-determination theory, masculinity theory, complexity theory and talent development theory. Our analysis traced how these theoretical constructs were recognised by the students and provided their visions with a sense of direction and coherence. This excerpt from student 7 indicates how meaningfulness, within the current policy context, offered a route ahead, particularly for designing learning experiences to correspond with their holistic learning vision:

*Scottish policy stresses the importance of ... Personalisation and Choice when enacting curriculum ... but for this to happen, PE teachers must understand their learners and their contexts to ensure explicit connections can be identified and explained ... meaningful learning can promote personally relevant learning experiences ... the value a learner attributes to physical education ... influenced by their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Providing learners with meaningful and engaging learning experiences increases enjoyment, therefore, increasing the chances of engagement...*

This passage exemplifies how the students were able to deploy theoretical constructs to their advantage. Meaningfulness is identified as a theoretical lens to (re)interpret the aspirations of policy, thereby, providing coherence and a sense of direction, for personalisation and choice to be contextualised in holistic terms. It could be argued

that the different theoretical constructs featuring in the subcomponents in Table 1, are the students' own efforts to establish a sense of direction and coherence, for their visions during times of uncertainty.

In addition to the quest for coherence and direction, some students recognised a wider agenda for these different theoretical constructs. For example, student 15, acutely aware of the educational precarity of physical education, saw an opportunity to elevate the status of the subject by connecting to current educational policy agendas in Scotland:

*Lifelong learning is one of the contemporary discourses of education, which may be political ... but through connecting my vision with big educational agendas, such as lifelong learning, it can be more easily justified and show ... that everything teachers do in PE has educational value. Therefore, connecting the big agendas can justify the enactment of my vision and place PE as a subject in a stronger position in the educational field as a whole ... teachers have the opportunity to identify talent [through talent development theory]encouraging and assisting individuals to take part in a range of activities, increasing their potential of engaging in LLPA.*

This quote interweaves the potential of physical education with the LLPA aspirations within Scottish policy through the potential of talent development theory. Similar suggestions were presented across the student essays and highlight how theoretical constructs provided the students with tools to underpin their visions for the subject, thereby furnishing it with a clear educational focus.

#### *Student visions: the ecological influences*

Given the range of subcomponents and theoretical constructs underpinning, the student visions, the ecological factors enabled us to uncover the dynamic interaction between individuals, environments and tasks that the students identified as shaping their visions. Beginning with individual factors, the majority of student visions revealed a deep connection to their past, their current experiences and also to the various people who played a part in shaping their personal beliefs about education. The following excerpt from student 1 summarises many of the broad individual factors that appeared in the data:

*...growing up I had always valued health and physical activity, and had always found PE enjoyable. I can remember wanting to be a PE teacher, which has been instilled through my parents, one of whom is a teacher, both raising me with healthy and sporting habits ... teachers during placement confirmed the beliefs that I had obtained during my school years ... this has influenced the kind of teacher I want to be and the impact I want my future practice to have on pupils.*

In this comment, there is a positive recall of past experiences and the active support from significant others. While the majority of individual factors recognised by the students were framed by positive experiences, some recalled negative experiences:

*I did, however, have some negative experiences in PE lessons ... this influenced my overarching theme of lifelong participation. One of the PE teachers ... was very strict and liked perfection in their lessons ... Whilst showing perfection maybe relevant on occasion ... this elitism was enough to spoil the PE experience for some of my classmates. I think this has influenced me considerably and made me keen to help those less able pupils to find an activity which they enjoy participating in and will want to continue outside and after school.* (Student 19)

This quote is representative of the type of negativity within physical education experienced by some students and highlights how these students managed to transform it into a positive influence on their practice.

In terms of environmental factors, the student essays reflected how a nested and complex interplay shaped their visions as they transitioned between different contexts. This is very clearly exemplified in the following related extracts from student 7:

*Recognition of ITE context*

*Not only has my initial teacher education shaped my vision into its current form, I believe it has equipped me with the tools to successfully uphold my vision for PE viewing health as a holistic concept in ... my NQT year.*

*Acknowledgement of national policy context*

*...in [Scottish] educational policies ... there is an educational shift towards teaching the whole child ... I strongly argue that to develop PE holistically and promote wellbeing, learning experiences must be meaningful and relevant to the learner...*

*Demands of school contexts*

*...my placement experience during my second year ... was not very supportive ... my vision for holistic PE was not achievable within that context ... I even felt that the appropriate decision was to leave ITE ... my third placement was with a very supportive department that valued teacher agency in curriculum enactment, made me feel that the gap between my vision and my practice was in fact reasonable...*

These three comments highlight how the complex mix of influences within schools, the theoretical demands of university and the educational traditions and national policy of the Scottish context, all helped this student to make sense of and connect, their experiences across these different contexts. The extracts typify how many of the students made sense of and connections across, their experiences in different contexts.

From our analysis on the students' professional development plans, two important environmental issues were apparent in the data. First, we noted how the unknown terrain of their future school contexts presented some trepidation for the students:

*the school I [will be]entering also presents a challenge when enacting my vision for PE as it [the vision] is likely to require adaptation to fit the views of the school as a whole and the department ... As a result, when I enter a PE department as a qualified teacher my vision for PE may be adapted and broadened to incorporate other aspects....* (Student 12)

In this quote, Student 12 displays an awareness of the 'challenge' of integrating their vision into the future workplace. There is however a desire for vision to be 'adapted and broadened', rather than seeing it being contested or 'washed out' (Levin, 2003). These comments represent a general willingness across most students to be flexible with their vision and to persevere with them in the long-term. A key insight into this flexibility and perseverance in future contexts was revealed in the second point from the students' professional development plans. While the list of professional development suggestions was extensive, communities of practice (CoP) and practitioner inquiry were central. This example from student 8 represents the link that the participants made between the strategic development plan and their visions within future contexts:

*My first action would involve engaging in a CoP ... [this] allows teachers who share a common vision ... to come together to gain a better understanding ... In the case of my vision, a CoP would allow me to learn through social interaction with other people in my department who have a keen interest in making PE more holistic ... After involving myself in a CoP, I aim to use lesson study to gain a better understanding of the impact ... of achieving my vision. Lesson study is a form of collaborative professional learning ... I would use lesson study with the teachers who I have worked with in the CoP mentioned previously. This would allow us to work towards achieving a common goal by following the lesson study cycle together.*

The above quote suggests that the enactment of vision in the future will involve a process of on-going, long-term and collaborative professional development. This is representative of many of the students' professional development plans which both recognised the challenges ahead as they transitioned into the profession but also suggested a commitment to develop vision over time.

Shifting finally to the task factors, our analysis indicated two related task dimensions. The first task factors focussed on *why* their vision was required in the future. For many students, the task they identified for their visions was either about addressing a specific hurdle or about capitalising on an opportunity needing further development. A task to which the vision of student 3 sought to respond was the increasing concern about the nation's health:

*The first element which underpins my vision for PE is health. Health has been a prime concern within society for several years. It has become an increasingly large problem, with 97.5% of the population engaging in at least one health-risk behaviour ... Whilst there is an ongoing issue with physical health, there are other equally important aspects of health which also need to be addressed. Teachers are encouraged to take a salutogenic approach to health within their PE lessons by incorporating social, emotional and mental aspects...*

The second task dimension concentrated on *what* the vision looked like in practice: the curriculum and pedagogical tasks that would be required in schools to bring the vision to life. With a vision relating to the holistic learning of pupils, student 5 exhibits the teaching and learning tasks that connect with this overarching vision:

*A way in which teachers can further develop pupils holistically is through implementing a variety of teaching models in their lessons ... models will provide a range of different experiences within PE, which will hopefully lead to pupils finding enjoyment and meaningfulness within the subject ... throughout my career I will adapt and utilise the models required to suit pupils at different stages of their learning.*

Our interpretation of the task factors—the *why* and *what*—was that there was a synergistic connection between these two dimensions. The student participants showed an awareness of the purpose of their visions and the connections to 'real' world issues while remaining mindful about the pragmatics of enacting the vision in practice.

Therefore, the findings from the analysis of the student visions has highlighted how the student visions were educationally focussed, theoretically informed and futures-looking, while also influenced by a range of nested ecological factors from the past and present. In the next section, we discuss how these findings have helped to create a basis for the next step of this longitudinal project.



## Discussion and conclusion

In this final section of the paper, we highlight a number of important ‘take home’ messages from these findings. While we acknowledge that the students are at the end of their initial teacher education phase, their visions represent a starting point upon which they will be able to reflect as their careers in schools begin and progress. Therefore, while their visions may be aspirational, they portray the student teachers’ thinking in this period as they are about to become teachers and also capture their ability to articulate their visions. In this sense, the findings represent the beginning of our quest, as researchers, to track the long-term influence of teachers’ personal visions on future physical education developments. From our analysis of the data, the wide range of educational subcomponents and theoretical constructs that have been used to inform the students’ visions highlight a number of important points for the future.

First, the students have been able to demonstrate their ability to take ‘a stand for a preferred future’ (Block, 1987, cited in Fullan, 1993, p. 3). While their overall visions may have some degree of similarity, the findings highlight how each student presented a personalised mix of educational and theoretical ideas to inform these visions. As such, the knowledge and understanding that informs these visions seriously questions the neo-liberal notion of ‘teacher as technician’ noted earlier in the paper and suggests that the students have the capability to do their own thinking and talking (Sachs, 2003) about physical education. How this thinking and talking will be turned into action will be for the future. Second, the students have demonstrated that while their visions may be contextualised in the physical domain the focus of their aspirations are concentrated on broader holistic, inclusive and lifelong learning agendas. This thinking aligns with the ‘shifting perspectives’ agenda noted earlier in the paper and with Quennerstedt’s (2019) call to put the education back into physical education. In addition, the theoretical constructs informing the student visions not only highlight this shift towards a preferred educational future for physical education but also connects with many of the contemporary national policy aspirations in Scotland. In the main, however, while the visions indicate a willingness by the students to negotiate some of the ‘bigger picture’ issues from theory and policy, examples of more radical ‘activist’ visions are limited (Hara & Sherbine, 2018). Nevertheless, we suggest that the educational and theoretical nature of the student visions merit support, consolidation an extension as part of their future professional development. Third, the findings highlight how the interactive ecological factors, much in line with Hammerness (2006) and Shulman and Shulman (2004), help to make more sense of the personalised and bespoke nature of the student visions. By sharing their different personal histories and discussing the various nested environmental and task-related factors that have influenced their thinking, it became clearer why different educational and theoretical constructs were more prominent in their personalised visions and future planning. Finally, it is important to acknowledge that most of the students were realistic and pragmatic about the dynamic and changeable nature of their visions. In particular, they were willing to share their trepidation about the challenges they would likely face in the future when they entered the school

system. In this sense, the issues of ‘wash out’ (Levin, 2003) will be an issue for scrutiny as the project moves into the next phase.

In concluding, we note how started this paper by proposing that the ‘curriculum voice’ of physical education teachers will be a key feature of physical education development in the future. In particular, we suggested that this voice will be important in negotiating and possibly challenging, the constraints of the neo-liberal agenda that has marginalised the role of teachers in the curriculum development process. As such, we highlighted a need to support a ‘shifting perspectives’ agenda that, in line with Quennerstedt (2019), firmly establishes the educational credentials of physical education. Accordingly, the paper reports on the early stages of a longitudinal study that seeks to explore the role of teacher’s visions in the future development of physical education. In this introductory paper, we focus on the efforts of 20 final year student teachers as they seek to articulate their personal visions for physical education. Acknowledging the aspirational nature of the visions, the study reveals how each student vision has been influenced by an array of different ecological factors and is subsequently personalised in nature. In addition, while there may be similarities between each of the student visions, the educational subcomponents and theoretical constructs that make up these visions differed across all the students and highlighted the bespoke nature of their visions. As such, these findings raise important questions about the neo-liberal ‘teacher as technician’ narrative and suggest that, if supported and developed in the future, that these student visions may indeed turn into the ‘curriculum voice’ of the ‘shifting perspectives’ agenda in the years to come.

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### **Geo-location**

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### **Data availability statement**

The data for this study are not available.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> For clarity, at the university where this study took place, programmes are the overarching structures of undergraduate and postgraduate degrees while courses are the main components of each programme. In other universities, courses may be called modules.

<sup>2</sup> GIRFEC is the Scottish Government Policy Document ‘Getting it Right for Every Child’.

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