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THE VISIONS AND VOICES OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION TEACHERS.

PART 2: STUDENT TEACHERS

Paul McMillan, Mike Jess, Nicola Carse & Karen Munro

Introduction

In this series of articles, we advocate for the importance of teacher vision in physical education. We view teachers' visions for physical education as a long term and dynamic component of their professional development and as a key feature of the subject's future development. In the first article in this series (*Physical Education Matters, Summer 2021*), we shared how changes to physical education over time have helped to position the subject area as more complex, valued and educationally connected. This favourable shift has attracted the voices of many different stakeholders into the debates about the subject's nature and purpose. Crucially, we highlighted how this development puts increasing demands on physical education teachers to make a significant contribution to these debates about the future direction of the subject area. In this vein, we introduced the concept of teacher vision as a valuable and necessary component to support this discursive feature of a teacher's role.

In the next two articles of the series, we build on this introduction by focussing on student teachers as they have been identified as the most productive but most challenging group to work with on personal vision (Hara & Sherbine, 2018). In this article, we discuss three important issues. Firstly, we explore how, as university tutors, we have grappled to introduce personal vision to the final year physical education student teachers at the University of Edinburgh. Secondly, we describe how we have structured the student experience to specifically focus on the development of their visions for physical education. Finally, we share the key features from the visions of 20 student teachers on completion of the final course, which is immediately prior to their entry to the teaching profession.

Locating Student Teacher Vision

The initial phase of the 'Vision and Voices' longitudinal project was located in the Master of Arts (Honours) in Physical Education at the University of Edinburgh. In line with education policy in Scotland, this four-year undergraduate programme seeks to help student teachers develop the professional knowledge, skills and values to enter the teaching profession with the creative capabilities that will enable them to productively 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. Within this context, the 'Vision and Voices' project was initially housed in the final year PECP 4 core course. This course builds on PECP core courses from years 1-3 of the programme and is studied by all physical education students in their final year. The course lasts for an 11 week semester and is allocated 40 hours of contact time spread across lectures, seminars and workshops.

The Gradual Shift to Personal Vision

For many years, this final PECP course had specifically focussed on the aims and conceptions of physical education. While the course effectively challenged the students' thinking, we had increasingly noted that many students were seeking out the 'right answer' when asked to discuss the aims of physical education, particularly in summative assessments. Consequently, we grappled to shift the focus of PECP4 towards the 'voice' of the students as they investigated and articulated their personal visions for physical education. In line with Shulman and Shulman (2004), we adopted an interactive stance in relation to the students' learning by using an ecological perspective to consider the different factors that influenced their progress towards 'becoming' a teacher. This ecological

frame was purposefully broad and open-ended and, as illustrated in figure 1, was guided by the individual, task and environmental factors that influenced the creation of the students' visions.

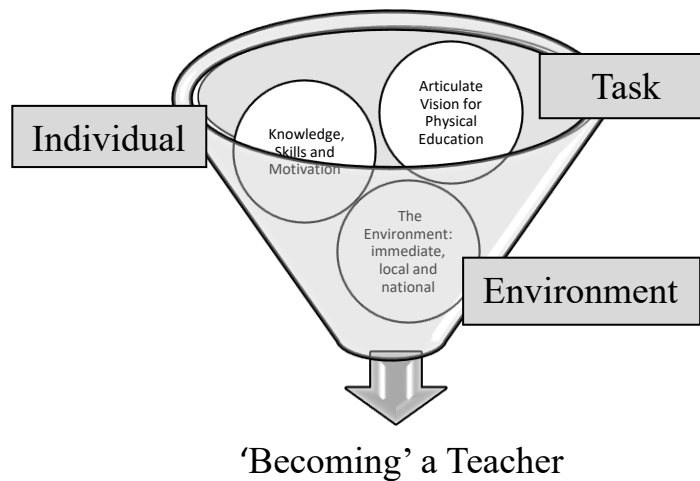


Figure 1: 'Becoming' teacher - an ecological perspective

We were particularly conscious that, as tutors on the course, our personal visions may influence the students' thinking. Consequently, in discussions with the students throughout the course, we acknowledge this possibility and highlight that it was important that their visions are focussed on their own thinking and their own experiences. Taken together, these factors provide impetus for the students to consider the different people, places, ideas and spaces that were simultaneously shaping their personal visions.

Course Challenges and Developments

Designing PECP4 to focus on the student teachers' vision has proved to be a messy, iterative and, ultimately, rewarding process. Because personal vision was only introduced in the final year of the students' programme, supporting their efforts to articulate a vision that spanned their broad aspirations for education was a challenge for the tutor team. While the students may have held a vision for, or view of, physical education, they had never been asked to sketch out this vision or share it with others. Another challenge came from the small number of students whose personal visions had a 'dark side' (Hammerness, 2006, p. 3) i.e. a vision that was particularly negative and concentrated on the problems of physical education as a more traditional and marginalised subject area. Finding ways to support these students, while concurrently trying to signpost the future potential of educationally sound rationales for physical education, was a steep learning curve for staff and students.

Each year, building on suggestions from tutors and students, we have included and adapted a range of topics and activities that focus on the key task, individual and environmental factors most likely to influence the students' visions. These topics have been refined over the years and are now split into three interrelated sections: becoming and vision; negotiating policy, curriculum and pedagogy; and negotiating professional development and learning. In addition, and crucially, the course assessment focusses on three inter-related assignments, which scaffold student progress towards articulating their vision:

1. A physical education debate.
2. A poster presentation focussed on a collaborative vision for physical education.
3. An extended written essay focussed on the students' personal vision.

Consequently, these topics and assessments are all designed to engage the students in learning that integrates their thinking and personal experiences at the end of their undergraduate programme as they are about to enter the teaching profession.

Student Teacher Visions and Voices 2019-2020

As we became more confident that the students’ personal visions for physical education represented their own ‘voices’, we made the decision to create the ‘Vision and Voices’ Project. With agreement from the 2019-20 final year student cohort, we initiated a research study to track the students’ evolving visions as they moved through their careers. In this article, we provide a brief summary of the first phase of this research project in which we collected baseline information about the students’ vision for physical education (see Jess, McMillan, Carse and Munro, 2020 for more detail). The study was approved by the ethics committee at the University of Edinburgh and all 84 students in the final year cohort of the programme were invited to take part. 58 students signed up for the project and, in this initial phase, 20 final student essays, representing approximately 25% of the cohort, were analysed.

From this analysis, it was particularly noticeable that the student visions for physical education were not only varied but included a wide range of different subcomponents. As can be seen in Table 1, four overarching visions for physical education were identified in the student essays. These were promoting lifelong physical activity (LLPA) where people continue to remain physically active throughout their lifespan; engaging pupils in holistic learning experiences from the cognitive, physical, social and emotional domains; providing inclusive opportunities for all pupils to succeed and adaptive practice where curriculum and teaching strategies are continually revised to suit the needs and interests of pupils. Further analysis of the subcomponents within these overarching aims (see Table 1) revealed three key themes that highlighted the complexity of the students’ visions: an educational focus, a theoretical foundation and an awareness of the ecological aspects influencing their visions.

Table 1: Summary of student visions and subcomponents

LLPA	Holistic Learning	Inclusion	Adaptive Practice
12 students	5 students	2 students	1 student
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personalisation • Enjoyment • Meaningfulness • Models Based Practice • Salutogenesis • Health • Inclusion • Holistic learning • Talent development • Social development • Primary PE • Critical Thinking • Transferrable skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvement-aimed • Meaningfulness • Salutogenesis • Personalisation • GIRFEC¹ • Self Determination Theory • Sport Education • Positive Relationships • Supportive learning environment • Wellbeing • Engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extra-Curricular sport • Challenge hegemonic masculinity • Transferrable skills • Positive relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complexity Thinking • Learning process • Meaningfulness

¹ GIRFEC is the Scottish Government Policy Document ‘Getting it Right for Every Child’

An Educational Focus

While the four overarching visions mostly concentrated on the development of lifelong physical activity (12 students) and holistic learning (5 students), more detailed analysis highlighted the broad educational commitment that underpinned the students' visions. This comment from Student 19 represents a clear example of this educational commitment:

...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.

The quote shows how the student's view of LLPA was envisioned through a range of subcomponents that have long held currency in debates about the educational relevance or value of physical education, including enjoyment, meaningfulness and transferable skills.

A Theoretical Foundation

It was also evident that the students used a range of theoretical constructs to support their visions. While we acknowledge the need for academic rigour in the assessment task, the theoretical constructs that were included in the essays supported the overall coherence of the student visions and provided a clear sense of purpose. These constructs included: health-related theories, meaningfulness, physical literacy, self-determination theory, masculinity theories, complexity thinking and talent development theory. This extract from student 7 shows how meaningfulness offered a lens to interpret and (re)imagine an aspect of policy:

Scottish policy stresses the importance of Personalisation and Choice...but for this to happen, PE teachers must understand their learners and their contexts to ensure explicit connections...meaningful learning can promote personally relevant learning experiences...it increases enjoyment, therefore, increasing the chances of engagement...

This passage represents how this student was able to exploit theoretical constructs to their advantage. In other words, meaningfulness is identified as a theoretical lens to interpret the aspirations of Scottish Education policy and to give the student confidence to rationalise personalisation and choice in holistic terms.

An Ecological Awareness

From their essays, the students were conscious that their visions were not 'set in stone' but shaped ecologically over time by different individuals, environments and tasks. All the students had stories about their vision development. While some leaned heavily on one major event, influential individual or challenging situation, most of the students acknowledged how a balance of factors had shaped their visions over time. For them, the vision-making process involved encounters with various individuals (e.g. teachers, coaches, parents, siblings, peers), their engagement with different environments (e.g. schools, coaching settings, university, home), and also with the task requirements that needed to be fulfilled to articulate their vision. In relation to this final point, the students were aware that these task requirements would change at different times and in different situations (e.g. *what* vision is for, *what* it might look like in practice, *why* it is relevant and the role it could play in the future).

This ecological sensitivity left many students with an open mind about their vision in the future and helped them acknowledge that they would need to be flexible with their vision as they transitioned between different contexts throughout their careers. For example, as they looked forward to working in schools, the following two comments demonstrate the students' awareness of the need to learn from

others in a physical education department or community (Student 8) and the need to adapt, but not abandon, their vision so it is better tailored to the school context (Student 12).

My first action would involve engaging in a [physical education] community... [this] allows teachers who share a common vision...to come together to gain a better understanding ... In the case of my vision, [this] would allow me to learn through social interaction with other people in my department who have a keen interest in making PE more holistic. (Student 8)

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)

Therefore, while the personal visions of the students may have a number of similarities, no student had exactly the same vision for physical education and they were aware of the need to adapt and even change their vision when required in a school context.

Closing Comments

The ‘visions and voices’ of the 2019-2020 cohort demonstrate that student teachers have the potential to speak up for physical education in the present and also in the future. With many stakeholders – both inside and outside of schools – seek to navigate the subject in different directions, the student teachers appear to have the capacity to keep education at the heart of the physical education debate. While most of the student visions may be understandably contextualised in the physical domain, the focus of their aspirations are concentrated on broader educational imperatives, such as holistic learning, inclusion, and lifelong learning. This educational bent to these visions, together with a theoretical grounding, shows a willingness to engage in some of the bigger picture issues influencing the future development of physical education. There is certainly a positive outlook, but, at the point of data analysis in the initial phase of this project, the visions of these student teachers remain largely aspirational. As they commence their school careers, we will look forward to reporting on the issues that have emerged as the 2019-20 cohort continue to develop their individual and shared visions for physical education.

In the meantime, however, the next phase of the ‘Vision and Voices’ project with our student teachers is already underway and will be the focus of the next article in this series. The success of the PECP 4 course has acted as the catalyst for personal vision to become the overarching aim of the revalidated physical education programme that is now underway at the University. Vision making is now a core feature that runs through each of the PECP courses in years 1-4 of the programme. In the next article, we share how the progressive development of these personal visions for physical education across the four interlinked PECP courses is becoming a reality.

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