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# **Physical Education Teacher Educators' Views Regarding the Purpose(s) of School Physical Education**

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The aim of this paper was to gain an understanding of the views of a group of physical education teacher educators on the purpose(s) of school physical education and whether, how and why these views have changed over time. Semi-structured individual interviews were carried out with thirteen physical education teacher educators; a fourteenth participant responded to interview questions in writing. Participants were based in seven countries: Belgium, Finland, Germany, Ireland, New Zealand, Switzerland and the USA. A relative consensus on the overarching purpose of physical education was evident, centred on physical education preparing young people for a lifetime of physical activity. The framing of this shared purpose differed somewhat between participants, reflecting a range of perspectives on the value of physical activity. Delineating the boundaries of their subject, participants characterised obesity prevention and maximising in-class physical activity as potential by-products rather than as goals of the subject. The views of many had changed over time, influenced by such factors as findings from research, societal expectations and a perceived need to legitimise physical education within school and university contexts. We note that many of the influences acting on the views of the physical education teacher educators are also known to affect practicing teachers. This suggests a possibility, in the open reflection of physical education teacher educators on the interaction between their views and the institutional and societal contexts within which they work, to provide future teachers with alternative value pathways paved with relatable explanations and shared experiences.

**Keywords:** Physical education teacher educators, physical education, purpose, physical activity, value orientations

The project of which this study forms a part focuses on the professional journeys, views, experiences and practices of an international group of physical education teacher educators. This paper represents a starting point for the sharing of this research, centring on the views these physical education teacher educators hold regarding the purpose(s) of their subject, how these views have changed over time and the influences acting on these views. Discussing values and purpose in teacher education, Hansen (2008, p. 23) argues that without dialogue on purpose people can become passive and resigned to the status quo and that enquiry into purpose functions to keep the conversation 'vibrant, dynamic and consequential', adding that such dialogue is 'indispensable to the very existence of a sense of purpose'. Physical education teacher educators are acknowledged to play key roles in the transformation and reproduction of physical education work practices and knowledge (Lawson, 1991; Kirk & Macdonald, 2001). In this light, the ends towards which the work of these professionals are directed and the circuits of persuasion within which the goals to which they aspire are formed, influenced, or resist influence, become of import for anyone interested in the practice and outcomes of physical education.

### **Purpose(s) of physical education**

According to Kirk (2010, p. 1), 'physical education is defined by what is said, done and written in its name'. Looking at what has been written in the name of physical education, we find in the various historical and philosophical accounts outlining the journey the subject has taken in its modern history (e.g. Kirk, 2010; McNamee, 2005; Morgan, 2006) a conception of physical education as socially constructed with an ever-changing purpose and content. As O'Sullivan (2004, p. 394) reminds us, over time the profession 'has been assigned, accepted, ignored, and rejected various goals for physical education'. These goals have typically centred on achieving educational and health outcomes, although the efficacy of the subject in achieving such goals has been questioned (Bailey et al., 2009; Trost, 2006).

Taking a global look at the goals to which physical education currently aspires, Hardman (2011) lists physical education curricular aims around the world, in order of prevalence, as: (1) development of motor and sport-specific skills, (2) promotion of health-related fitness and active lifestyles, and (3) personal, social and moral development. Focusing on the seven countries in which our study participants are based we see these themes echoed. The formally stated purpose of physical education in Finland is to prepare children and youth for a lifetime of physical activity. In achieving this purpose, equal importance is afforded to the development of psychomotor, cognitive, affective and behavioural skills (Heikinaro-Johansson, Palomäki, & McEvoy, 2014). Similarly, according to the website of Shape America, the largest representative body for physical education in the United States, the overarching goal of the subject is to 'develop physically literate individuals who have the knowledge, skills and confidence to enjoy a lifetime of healthful physical activity' (SHAPE America, 2014), while in Ireland the aim of the subject is 'to support learners' confident, enjoyable and informed participation in physical activity now and in the future' (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2011, p. 9). In New Zealand the combined Health and Physical Education Curriculum has a strong sociocritical orientation with a focus on four areas - personal health and physical development, movement concepts and motor skills, relationships with others, and healthy communities and environments (Culpan & Bruce, 2014; Ministry of Education, 1999, 2007). Motor competencies, safe/healthy lifestyle, and

positive self-esteem and social functioning are the aims of physical education in the Flemish-speaking community of Belgium, while its French-speaking counterpart focuses on health, safety, expression, and sports culture. Although not an officially stated objective, the promotion of lifelong physical activity is also a traditionally accepted goal of physical education in Belgium (De Martelaer et al., 2014). Physical education in Switzerland aims to serve functions categorised as impressive (experiencing wellbeing and feeling healthy), explorative (discovering the body), expressive (creating and presenting movements), productive (exercising and training), comparative (challenging oneself and competing) and co-operative (participating and being part of a team) (Pühse, Gerber, Menginsen, & Repond, 2005). In neighbouring Germany physical education has the double-mission of educating for sports, by introducing young people to ‘the culture of sports and physical activity’, and educating by sports, ‘to promote personality formation’ (Deutscher Olympischer SportBund, 2009, p. 5).

Turning our attention to what is said and done in the name of physical education on a daily basis, we must look to those who enact the subject in schools: young people and their teachers. Research with young people indicates that non-educational goals such as having fun and spending time with friends are valued by this group (Cothran & Ennis, 1998; Flintoff & Scraton, 2001; Garn & Cothran, 2006; Palomäki & Heikinaro-Johansson, 2011; Smith & Parr, 2007). A gender difference is also evident. Lyyra (2013), for example, found that girls prioritise health-related physical education and social and emotional skills, while boys prioritise physical activity and challenge. There is a sense from the literature that, generally speaking, young people value learning *in* the physical while teachers value learning *through* the physical (Smith & Parr, 2007). Cothran (2010) suggests that young people come to class with specific priorities and an in-class negotiation (spoken and unspoken) between these priorities and those aimed for by the teacher determines the outcomes of each lesson. Finnish physical education teachers report being successful in reaching the aim of ensuring students have positive physical activity experiences, while they describe the achievement of aims such as improved fitness and the enactment of regular physical activity as more difficult to achieve in practice (Palomäki & Heikinaro-Johansson, 2011). The studies of Smith and Parr (2007) and Green (2000, 2002) each take a sociological perspective in exploring the views of young people and teachers respectively. These authors stress that the purpose(s) ascribed to physical education by either group can only be fully understood in light of their predispositions towards the subject and the relationships and contexts within which teaching and learning takes place. Echoing the body of research on teachers’ occupational socialisation (Lawson, 1983a; 1983b) and value orientations (Chen & Ennis 1996; Curtner-Smith, 2001; Jewitt, Bain, & Ennis, 1995), Green (2002) maintains that physical education teachers’ ideologies of the subject are grounded in their values and predispositions and in their perceptions of interest and constraint evident in the local and national contexts within which they work.

Physical education teachers are understood to undergo a process of occupational socialisation which affects why and how they teach, with a subsequent impact on their students’ experiences of physical education lessons (Lawson, 1983a, 1983b). It has been further acknowledged that this socialisation process results in physical education teachers embodying one or more dominant value orientations, described by Gillespie as ‘a complex blend of intentions, beliefs and actions in practice [that] provide the lens through which teachers interpret and enact curriculum’ (2011, p. 59). Teachers’ beliefs and value

orientations have been the focus of much research and have been acknowledged as one of the keys to understanding and improving school physical education practice (Chen & Ennis, 1996; Ennis, 1992; Jewitt, Bain, & Ennis, 1995; Tsangaridou, 2006). The occupational socialisation process described by Lawson (1983a, 1983b) sees the value orientations of physical education teachers being influenced by significant people in their lives and by personal experiences of sport/physical activity and school physical education (a socialisation process known as acculturation), as well as by the physical education teacher education (PETE) programmes in which they are educated (professional socialisation) and the professional contexts within which they work (organisational socialisation). The value orientations and socialisation literature provides much information and context for how the views of physical education teachers on their subject matter may be formed and influenced. Less is known, however, about the formation and alteration of views of physical education teacher educators on their subject matter. Certainly this literature also applies to the majority of physical education teacher educators. They also go through the socialisation processes described by Lawson and they too form value orientations which influence their views and practices. However, much literature stops short of following the evolution of the views of physical education professionals past their time as pre-service and in-service teachers into their roles as teacher educators.

While the views of physical education teacher educators have been elicited on their PETE programmes and on the state of PETE in their respective countries (Andriamampianina & Si Moussa, 2005; Melnychuk, Robinson, Lu, Chorney, & Randall, 2011; Parker, Sutherland, Sinclair, & Ward, 2011), their views on the purpose(s) of physical education are more difficult to locate in the literature. Recent self-studies (see Ovens & Fletcher, 2014), although not focused on the purpose of the subject, have added to our understanding of the thinking of this population. Further, Muros Ruiz and Fernández-Balboa (2005) interviewed Spanish physical education teacher educators regarding the definition, principles and purposes of critical pedagogy in physical education, finding, in many cases, their knowledge and understanding to be limited and inconsistent with the literature. Mordal-Moen and Green (2014) discovered a privileging of the practical over the reflective in the discourses of physical education teacher educators in Norway. Participants in their case study saw the purpose of physical education as centred on the learning and acquisition of sport skills. Consistent with the socialisation and value orientations literature among physical education teachers, their views were rooted in their acculturation and occupational socialisation, as well as being strongly influenced by their professional contexts.

Through this paper we aim to supplement this research by exploring the views of an international group of physical education teacher educators on the purpose(s) of their subject and gaining an understanding of whether, how and why these views have changed over time.

## **Methodology**

### *Participant selection*

A combination of convenience and purposive sampling was used in the selection of participants. Convenience sampling is broadly understood as selecting participants who are easily accessible and willing to participate (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). Participants were selected from among the 53 attendees at an international research seminar on PETE. This convenience

sampling frame does admit a degree of bias in that those who chose to register for the seminar could be confidently described as research-active in the field of PETE. This research interest may be more pronounced in this sampling frame than among the general population of physical education teacher educators. The selection of participants was also purposive in that participants were selected from within the sampling frame with a specific purpose in mind (Patton, 2002). There were three selection criteria: (1) contributing to the education of post-primary physical education teachers, (2) holding a senior position in a given faculty (at least senior lecturer or equivalent), and (3) having at least five years of experience as a physical education teacher educator at third level, with at least 10 years of professional experience in the field of physical education. We should clarify that although this paper focuses on the views of participants regarding the purpose(s) of physical education, the selection criteria were framed by the purpose of the overall research project, such that it was desired to have participants with extensive experience in senior positions in order to investigate their career paths and professional views and experiences over time. In prioritising the geographical spread of participants it was decided not to have more than four participants from any one country. Because eight participants from one country met the selection criteria, four of these were selected for participation based on obtaining a range and depth of professional experience to inform the research. Of the 15 physical education teacher educators who met the selection criteria and who were invited to participate, all but one agreed.

### *Participants*

Among the final fourteen participants (seven male and seven female), seven held the job title of professor, the job title of one was assistant professor and six worked under the title of senior lecturer. It is acknowledged that these titles encompass different responsibilities in different countries but the data demonstrated that all participants had a wealth of relevant experience through which to inform the data. Participants were based in seven countries: Belgium, Finland, Germany, Ireland, New Zealand, Switzerland and the USA. At the time of interview, the participants had an average of 20 years of experience as physical education teacher educators, ranging from 6 to 38 years. Given the many ways in which teacher educators are defined (Livingston, 2014), we should clarify that in this paper physical education teacher educators are defined as those educators based in third level institutions who educate, and support the ongoing professional development of, future and practicing teachers of school physical education. It is also important to stress that although this study is international in the sense that its participants are based in various countries, it is not a comparative study and the participants do not claim to represent the totality of views from their respective countries. Rather, our intention is to explore individual perspectives in a variety of contexts. Pseudonyms are used in the presentation of findings. A summary of the participants is presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Research participants

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Years in PETE</b>
Lars	M	Belgium	32
Elina	F	Finland	32
Hanna	F	Finland	15
Jenni	F	Finland	10
Mikko	M	Finland	12
Andreas	M	Germany	14
Karl	M	Germany	38
Cathy	F	Ireland	33
Sara	F	Ireland	11
Jane	F	New Zealand	18
Olivia	F	New Zealand	8
Max	M	Switzerland	27
Ian	M	USA	34
Josh	M	USA	6

### *Interviews*

Individual semi-structured interviews were completed with thirteen physical education teacher educators. One participant chose not to be interviewed but wished to respond to the interview questions in writing. His responses were included in the analysis of data. Five of the interviews were carried out in person at a location convenient to the participant (in an office or a quiet location at a conference). For the other eight participants, interviews took place via Skype. The interviews, which were carried out by the first author, lasted an average of 68 minutes, ranging from 40 to 119 minutes. They began by exploring the participants' pathways into PETE and their experiences of working in the field. The next phase of the interviews, which is the focus of this paper, related to participants' views on the purpose(s) of school physical education, whether/how these views had changed over time and what influenced their views.

### *Data analysis*

All interviews were transcribed, coded and thematically analysed by the first author. Data were analysed inductively (Patton, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) relying on the constant comparative method (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Analyses of the study data consisted of three phases of coding: open, axial and selective (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Open coding involved revisiting the transcripts and segmenting them into categories of information, somewhat dependent on the questions asked in the interviews. Categories included 'socialisation', 'career path', 'experience of being a physical education teacher educator', 'views on purpose', 'professional context', 'research', 'roles/responsibilities', 'challenges' and 'opportunities'. This was followed by axial coding, in which connections were made among categories and related concepts, allowing for a clearer understanding of the depth and

delineation of each category. Strauss and Corbin (1998, p. 124) describe this second stage as one of 'reassembling data that were fractured during open coding'. The final phase was selective coding. For the purpose of this paper, this phase involved the central phenomenon of physical education teacher educators' views on the purpose of school physical education and its codes, such as 'purpose', 'holistic', 'health', 'sport', 'obesity', 'physical activity', 'learning', 'changes in views', 'roots of views' and 'influence on views', being integrated with other categories and codes, such as the codes 'societal context', 'institutional context', 'educational context', 'colleagues' and 'expectations' under the 'professional context' category, and the codes 'influence of' and 'interaction with' under the 'research' category. As all participants were asked the same questions it was possible to interrogate the validity of identified relationships by examining their prevalence across cases. During coding, efforts were made to identify and carefully consider any negative cases (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Other strategies suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) were also employed to improve the trustworthiness of the findings. Each participant received a copy of his/her transcription and was encouraged to clarify or comment on any aspects of the data. While data collection and analysis were carried out by the first author, the second and third authors were available for debriefing, which allowed for the discussion of emerging codes and hypotheses. Additionally, the first author took reflective fieldnotes throughout the research process in which she recorded thoughts, assumptions and possible biases so that these could be confronted during the analysis of data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

In the presentation of findings participants' quotes have been edited to improve readability and to remove any expressions or grammatical nuances which may make a participant identifiable.

## **Findings and discussion**

We now discuss the broad purpose of physical education shared by participants, how this purpose was framed, the boundary negotiations evident in the data, and whether, how and why the views of the participants changed over time. Each finding is discussed in the context of relevant literature.

### *Same picture, different frames*

When the individual views of physical education teacher educators were explored, there was evidence of tentative agreement regarding the overarching purpose of physical education. Broadly speaking, the mentioned purposes of physical education shared the common aspiration of preparing young people for a lifetime of meaningful physical activity participation. As Elina, from Finland, explained simply, the goal of the subject is 'to support the lifelong physical activity of your students'. This is not to say that this was the only response given by each participant. Rather, preparing young people with the skills, knowledge and understanding to be able to participate fully in their respective movement cultures was the common thread weaving through the responses. It is worth noting, however, that a number of participants highlighted as a cause for concern a lack of evidence for the efficacy of physical education in achieving its overarching aim of lifelong physical activity. This is a concern that has also been highlighted in the literature, with recent papers (such as Armour & Harris, 2013) stressing the need to provide physical educators with suitable pedagogies which facilitate the improvement of their practice in this area.



One participant declined at first to give a specific purpose for physical education, contending that physical education does not have one defined purpose. Rather, its purpose is dependent on the context, the teacher and the individual student:

I wouldn't be drawn into saying what the purpose of physical education is because it's very context driven, not only by the school, the students, but also by whoever the teacher is and their disposition and values. (Sara, Ireland)

This reflection aligns with recent calls by scholars for a pluralist incarnation of physical education which serves a variety of purposes (Cothran, 2010; Ennis, 2014; Kirk, 2013; Penney, 2013), embracing what McNamee (2005, p. 17) refers to as the 'inherent openness of the concept of physical education: pluralism in activities; pluralism in values'. Although this participant was the only one to articulate the need to attend to context and individuality in terms of the purpose of physical education, the importance of tailoring physical education to meet the needs of individual students and contexts was touched on by all participants.

In a related finding, the data revealed that below the overarching purpose of preparing young people for continued meaningful involvement in physical activity more than one justificatory argument was made for physical education. In other words, the way that participants framed the main shared purpose of physical education differed somewhat, reflecting a range of perspectives on the value of physical activity. While all rooted the subject in learning, the various contributions such learning was seen to make differed between participants. Some, for example, framed their views within a context of the holistic development of young people: 'I think it's got a huge role in developing the whole person. Having students understand themselves, understand other people, understand the world around them and how all of those things interact and impact on each other' (Olivia, New Zealand). Others framed the purpose in terms of giving students access to a shared culture: 'It's part of our culture . . . sport is something really fascinating for some people and we should give children the chance to be able to participate' (Andreas, Germany). Physical health and avoiding sedentary lifestyles (not obesity prevention per se) was a frame employed by others:

In former times there was a concentration only on skills, that is, how can students learn to swim. But now we also look at how can physical activity lead to an active lifestyle and a healthy lifestyle and how can this aspect of swimming contribute to that. (Max, Switzerland)

Reflecting on this underlying justificatory plurality suggested for the subject, we are prompted to consider that a shared purpose is, perhaps, less important than agreement regarding the boundaries of the subject, 'where a coherent and valued field called physical education may begin and end' (Kirk, 2009, p. 140). We will now discuss where such boundaries were drawn by participants in this study.

### *Defining boundaries*

Tinning (2012) highlights difficulties in attempting to define the boundaries of physical education. According to Penney, however, boundary work is especially important given that 'structural and symbolic boundaries are key to understanding and actively

engaging with stability and change in physical education' (Penney, 2013, p. 6). In addition to agreement regarding a broad aim of physical education being to equip young people for meaningful sustained physical activity participation, the participants in this study voiced aligning opinions concerning what the purpose of physical education was *not*. There was consensus that improving the fitness of young people was not the purview of physical education. Josh (USA), for example, explained: 'I don't think physical education is a place where you get kids fit . . . our place isn't to get kids fit, our place is to teach kids how to become fit and physically active'. Likewise, maximising *in-class* physical activity levels was not seen as a top priority by any, except insofar as this was a by-product of good teaching:

[Physical education teachers] need to teach in a way that allows what we know about effective teaching. If I'm going to learn a skill I have to practice a skill. So I should have a lot of physical activity in my classroom by virtue of the fact that it's effective teaching. It can then play into I'm also physically active. (Cathy, Ireland)

The participants were also in agreement that physical education should not be held responsible for reversing rising obesity levels. In a number of cases, when obesity was mentioned, they voiced a preference to see the role of physical education as tangentially contributing to a reduction in inactivity levels or sedentariness rather than obesity per se. Combating obesity was not seen as a central goal of physical education by any of the participants, although they did feel that the subject could contribute through the achievement of its actual goal of promoting lifelong engagement in meaningful physical activity:

There is this perception in society, or by governments in particular, that education should fix all the evils and the ills of society. And of course for physical education the big thing is around declining physical activity rates and obesity. Now, I don't believe that we can fix that. . . . [Physical education will] contribute towards helping to solve some of those issues. But I don't think that we can actually solve them on our own. (Jane, New Zealand)

We do not focus specifically on obesity, we are focusing more on physical activity . . . we have different lectures and activities focusing on obesity and how to deal with obesity, obese students and so on, of course, but it's not the priority. (Lars, Belgium)

Students will say, if I ask them in a module that I'm involved in 'What is the purpose of physical education?' 'What can you feasibly do in...' you know, and if somebody will say 'Well, we're somewhat responsible for obesity' I can't help but say 'No, you're not, you're a scapegoat for obesity, what's the feasibility of you actually addressing in a class once a week, whatever?' So I don't entertain it, as such, which may be an issue. Maybe I should entertain it and be a bit more critical in relation to 'Okay, well, let's work through this'. (Sara, Ireland)

Given the varied educational and societal contexts within which the participants work, it was somewhat surprising to note the level of consensus regarding what the purpose of physical education is not, especially in light of research and policy discourses which point to

school physical education as a key site for increasing physical activity and combating obesity (Fairclough & Stratton, 2005; McKenzie & Lounsbury, 2009, 2014; Tinning, 2009). Indeed, the participants did demonstrate an acute awareness of both the need to be sensitive to societal expectations and the need to legitimise physical education within school and institutional contexts. Echoing arguments put forward in the literature (e.g. Cale & Harris, 2013; Evans, Rich, & Davies, 2004; Gard & Wright, 2001), however, all contended that, while physical education may contribute to a reduction in obesity levels, such a reduction is not, nor should it be, a central goal of the subject. We will return to the issue of context in the final part of this section but first we will examine whether and how the participants' views of the purpose(s) of physical education have altered over time.

### *Changing views over time*

Green (2002) characterised teachers' philosophies of physical education as processes rather than states, inclined to change over time. A similar tendency towards change was evident in the views of most, although not all, participants in this study. Among those whose views of the purpose(s) of physical education had changed, Josh went from believing physical education should aspire to addressing many goals to believing in a narrower focus for the subject, namely 'to prepare children to be physically active later in life'. Others had broadened their conception of the purpose(s) of physical education over time:

My view was always about ecological integration, about building people's self esteem and self worth through movement and to develop them as people . . . So that's where I started and then it's become really holistic in terms of understanding that movement, sport, physical activity contributes to not just the individual for all of those reasons but also to society. (Jane, New Zealand)

[My view has broadened to include] a need for the development of social interactive competence due to the impact of the Internet, computer games and social networks, an influence which also has decreased the amount of daily free time play and motor activities. (Karl, Germany)

The most commonly mentioned shift was seen among those who had altered their views from a sport/performance orientation to a view of physical education's purpose as being to prepare students for physically active lives. Jenni, from Finland, explained that 'nowadays I think that different sports skills are not as important to me as they were, for example, ten years ago', while Mikko, also from Finland, stated that 'for sure I was more sports oriented [in the past] . . . I'm tempted to say that [I saw the subject's purpose as] to prepare better elite athletes'. Andreas noted a similar change in his view:

When I was beginning to study I thought, well, it's doing sports, and we are doing sports in school and that's done. But that's not enough . . . We have to make clear that our physical education students do more than teaching sports. (Andreas, Germany)

These changes in the views of many participants regarding the purpose(s) of physical education may be significant because they indicate the possibility of a break from the cyclical, self-replicating nature of PETE, whereby the strong influence of acculturation and

occupational socialisation reproduces itself, as evidenced among the teacher educators in the study of Mordal-Mohen and Green (2014). Of course this reproduction is not always a negative one. A minority of participants in this study recorded having always had the same view of the purpose of physical education, that of preparing young people for lifelong physical activity. These views were framed by such terms as being student-centred, creating self-directed learners or promoting holistic health and were clearly rooted in their acculturation and professional socialisation. Elina, for example, shared that the authoritarian style of her physical education teacher made her vow to prioritise being student-centred in her own teaching career, while Cathy's undergraduate programme instilled in her a strong orientation towards self-directed learning which she has maintained throughout her PETE career. We will now examine the influences which served to alter the views of many physical education teacher educators in this study.

### *Influence of research and context*

Overall, sources of influence regarding the altered views of participants on the purpose(s) of physical education included personal reflections, time spent in schools with teachers and students, and discussions with colleagues within and outside the physical education field. Among the most salient themes in this category, however, were findings from research, a responsibility to respond to issues in society and a need to legitimise physical education within school and university contexts. Participants frequently prefaced or followed their responses with references to these latter influences.

The participants' own research findings and those of others were commonly cited as reference points for their views on the purpose(s) of physical education:

I don't think there's anything out there solid that shows that if we force kids to be physically active they're gonna be physically active later on . . . Some people say 'oh, you know, there's plenty out there' but the [study] I want to see, I've never seen it. (Josh, USA)

We know [from research] that we have about eight to fifteen minutes of vigorous physical activity within one lesson, so there is no adaptation possible. So on one hand there are a lot of people coming from other disciplines telling us what we have to do, or telling politicians what they have to do in school. On the other hand it could not work. And this is an argument for [shifting] focus from doing sports to a focus on how and why we are doing sports, while we are doing sports. (Andreas, Germany)

This is a particularly notable finding when we compare the views of participants in this study on the purpose(s) of physical education with those expressed by the physical education teacher educators in the study of Modal-Mohen and Green (2014). In that study the purpose of the subject was framed by sports and performance discourses, a theme rarely mentioned in this study, except in relation to a previously held view. However, the participants in the study by Mordal-Mohen and Green were mentioned as not being research active, while our participants were chosen from among participants at a research seminar and they cited research findings as influential on their views. We wonder to what extent the difference between the views expressed by the participants in the study of Modal-Mohen and Green and

those of our participants could be explained by their understanding of and interaction with research. It would be interesting to investigate further the interaction between research and the views and subsequent practices of physical education teacher educators.

Physical education's location within broader societal contexts was acknowledged in the explanations of many regarding their expressed views. This was an area where the data betrayed a sense of ongoing negotiation:

I find it troublesome that people who are in our business dismiss the public health orientation outright because it automatically neglects potentially other agendas, other purposes of physical education. They always look at it as either or and I don't think that needs to be the case. (Ian, USA)

[The job of the physical education teacher] is changing now and the big challenge for our profession is do we stay back, do we stay where we have been? Because society changes either way and [we should] start to think differently about the teachers' job as being more the expert in supporting wellbeing and supporting lifelong physical activity. (Elina, Finland)

I have the feeling we are not allowed to instrumentalise physical education for issues, for problems in society, but on the other hand we are not allowed, or we shouldn't close our eyes and not look at what happens in society. (Max, Switzerland)

The sentiments above call to mind an argument recently put forward by Penney that 'external inputs and particular external relations are either legitimated or potentially challenged and negated by structures and relations *internal* to physical education' (2013, p. 7, original emphasis).

Educational contexts were found to be particularly influential regarding the views held by participants and how these views translated into practice. Cuts to resources and funding was a challenge faced by many. Jane, for example, expressed her struggles amid increasing student numbers and decreasing funding: 'I fight really hard to maintain the philosophical integrity of what we are doing. And at the moment I'm hanging in there, just'. A number of participants commented on the importance of legitimising the place of physical education within their respective institutions. Further, many participants saw the perceived legitimacy of their views of physical education resting with future teachers and with the degree to which these teachers modelled good practice and represented physical education appropriately in their schools. Some scholars warn that struggles for legitimacy and related reactive behaviours *may* mean that physical education will be appropriated for purpose(s) other than those desired by our participants. Although not advocating this future, Tinning (2012), for example, suggests that the next focus of physical education may centre on obesity prevention, an idea which would oppose the views of participants in this study. The degree to which physical education teacher educators and teachers are influenced by or exert influence over the contexts within which they work, and their understanding of the place of physical education within education and society, appears to speak loudly to the likelihood of the purpose(s) they ascribe to physical education being achieved.

The national curriculum/standards had a bearing on the views of some regarding the purpose of physical education. For example, the holistic orientation of the New Zealand curriculum was echoed in the views shared by Jane and Olivia regarding the broad goals towards which physical education should strive. As Jane described: '[Our curriculum is] really holistic, so that really changes what we do and how we teach and the content that we want students to learn about'. Similarly, for Hanna, lifelong physical activity was termed as 'something which is in our culture in Finland and it's in our curriculum. We always say that. It's the truth for us'. This is not to suggest that the participants were unthinking reproducers of national curricula. In fact, in a number of cases the participants were themselves involved in the construction of the physical education curricula/standards within their regions/countries. Rather, it reminds us that context matters and speaks to the importance of being aware of the interaction between the views of physical education teacher educators and the contexts within which they work. This is reminiscent of the stress placed on the importance of context by Green (2002) and Smith and Parr (2007) in their studies of the purpose(s) ascribed by teachers and young people to the subject.

### **Concluding thoughts**

Similarly to physical education teacher educators in the study by Muros Ruiz and Fernández Balboa (2005), many of our participants commented, after their interviews, on the benefit of taking the time to discuss their views on their subject matter. They found that their participation in the interviews had stimulated their thinking and prompted an intention to reflect further with colleagues on the purpose and aims of their work. These comments highlight the importance of discussions such as those that took place during this research. It stands to reason that the curricular values held by pre-service and practicing physical education teachers cannot be effectively developed or positively influenced by teacher educators unless such teacher educators have adequately interrogated and understood the roots of the curricular values underpinning their own views.

Given that the process of professional socialisation, that which takes place during initial teacher education, has thus far demonstrated little impact on the value orientations of physical education teachers (Curtner-Smith, 1999; Gillespie, 2011; Lawson & Stroot, 1993), we suggest that there is particular merit in the reflections of physical education teacher educators being shared openly with pre-service teachers. The participants in this study entered PETE with various sporting, education and health views and for many, although not all, these views underwent a process of change. The opportunity we suggest for PETE is in physical education teacher educators reflecting openly with their students on the views they themselves ascribe to physical education and explaining the influences that have acted to either alter or strengthen these views throughout their careers.

We note that many of the influences acting on the views of the physical education teacher educators in this study regarding the purpose of physical education are influences also known to affect practicing teachers (Curtner-Smith, 2001; Green, 2000; 2002; Lawson, 1983b). Both physical education teachers and teacher educators are affected by their own acculturation, by national curricula/standards, by day-to-day time and resource constraints, by societal expectations and by the need to represent and advocate for a subject which is not often granted equal status to others within their respective educational contexts. We see in

this commonality an opportunity for PETE. We suggest a possibility, in the open reflection of physical education teacher educators on the interaction between their views and the institutional and societal contexts within which they work, to provide future teachers with alternative value pathways paved with relatable explanations and shared experiences. A consideration of recent self-studies in the field may prove a useful supplement to such discussions (e.g. Ovens & Fletcher, 2014).

This paper relies on data collected with 14 teacher educators from seven countries. It is not intended as a reflection of the general population of physical education teacher educators, either internationally or in a given country. We hope, instead, that by shining a light on the views of this small group we have contributed to knowledge on how different purpose(s) can be ascribed to physical education, and the influences that can act on the views and subsequent practices of these educators. The influence of both context and research on the views of physical education teacher educators was particularly interesting in this study, pointing to areas where further research may be warranted.

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