What does the term 'quality physical education' mean for health and physical education teachers in Australian Capital Territory schools?

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Abstract

This research investigated what the term Quality Physical Education (QPE) meant to Health and Physical Education (HPE) teachers in Australian Capital Territory (ACT) schools. A total of 14 HPE teachers who taught middle school or above, representing government and independent schools, took part in focus group interviews about their understanding of QPE and the factors that influenced their constructs. Figurational sociology and the concepts of interdependence, habitus, and involvement and detachment, were used to inform the research and interpret the findings. It was found that teachers' accounts of QPE were largely informed by their individual and collective experiences and their personal 'philosophies' of physical education. With the exception of a recently introduced national curriculum for HPE, the teachers in this study did not use, or refer to, any evidence-based documents in forming their ideas about QPE. Further, they did not mention any recognised pedagogical approaches that they used in teaching QPE. The findings from this research are important, because 'everyday' or common-sense teacher understandings can negatively impact student learning and threaten the status and credibility of our profession.

Keywords

Quality Physical Education, figurational, sociology, interdependence, habitus, involvement, detachment

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Introduction

The aim of this paper is to apply figurational sociology to understand teacher perceptions and understandings about what the term Quality Physical Education (QPE) means. Unlike other parts of the world, physical education (PE) is taught within the Key Learning Area of Health and Physical Education (HPE) in both Australia and New Zealand. Determining what QPE means is important, because PE in Australia, and globally, is the foremost subject in schools for learning movement competence combined with communication and values-based education (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2014). Further, and in common with teaching across other subject areas, QPE is fundamental to improving student learning (Armour et al., 2017).

As curriculum provides a framework in which QPE can be provided, Australian HPE teachers would benefit from knowledge of what QPE means to effectively implement the Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education (AC: HPE) (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2017). This recently introduced curriculum presents Australian teachers with an opportunity to revisit their existing practices and contemplate modifying their teaching. It is noted that the design of any curriculum and its delivery present both a 'way of knowing' and a description of appropriate or worthwhile knowledge, which together also contain a message about the educational value of the subject (Brown and Penney, 2012). The curriculum, how it is taught, and how it is assessed, are three central messaging systems of QPE (Penney et al., 2009).

Traditionally, PE in Australia and other Westernised countries has been Eurocentric. By this, we mean that it has been predominantly shaped by European influences, especially those from Britain (Fitzpatrick, 2009; Williams, 2018). As well as being Eurocentric, PE both in Australia and globally tends to be reduced to technocratic understandings (Maguire, 2013; Pill, 2016) or 'PE-as-sport-techniques' (Kirk, 2010). Nonetheless, internationally during the past 20 years there has been a push for curricular reform to move from technocratic approaches to more meaningful learning that is student-centred and includes integrated and connected knowledge (Amade-Escot and Amans-Passaga, 2007; Kirk, 2010; Pill, 2012, 2016). In some countries, a perceived lack of quality has created questions of the relevance of PE and subject margin-alisation (Hardman, 2010; Hardman and Marshall, 2005; Kirk, 2010; Pill, 2016). Writing from an Australian context, Penney (2007, 2008) suggested that PE has been perceived as marginal when the content and pedagogy are not connected to the broader curriculum goals of schools. Because PE has existed as a subject area since the beginning of the twentieth century in many parts of the world, and its characteristics have modified to a greater or lesser extent over time, it can be considered a long-term process. Indeed, long-term processes, discussed in the following section about figurational sociology, are important in this study and are central to figurational sociology (Van Krieken, 1998).

The promotion of QPE is important because it has a role to play in bolstering the credibility of PE as a subject area. Further, the provision of QPE can help achieve the reality of a subject purporting to be a platform for physical activity participation and social inclusion 'beyond the school gate' (Amade-Escot and Amans-Passaga, 2007; Drummond and Pill, 2011; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2014). To this end, we concur with Le Masurier and Corbin (2006: 44) who comment that 'in order to achieve "first class" status for their profession, physical education professionals must do a better job of documenting and studying the evidence of the link between quality physical education and present and future physical activity participation'. Given that PE has historically struggled in having comparable status with other

subject areas, there is a need to have more informed understandings about what QPE means within the Australian context and internationally.

QPE

While we argue that defining QPE is important, there is a lack of consensus in the extant literature about what the term means (Marsden and Weston, 2007). Nonetheless, an international definition of QPE exists, which is 'the planned, progressive, inclusive learning experience that forms part of the curriculum in early years, primary and secondary education' (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2014: 9). This definition reflects a trend towards understanding QPE in broader terms beyond the limited technocratic understandings described previously and according to wider educative aims (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2017; Australian Capital Territory Department of Education and Training, 2006; Brown, 2013; Light et al., 2014; Pill, 2011). In fact, broader understandings of QPE advocated by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) also inform the AC: HPE (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2017) through the inclusion of key ideas, as explained below.

Another way QPE can be informed is through theoretical frameworks. These have been used in the Australian context by Light et al. (2014) and Pill (2011, 2016) to show that QPE has meaning that is context specific (Penney et al., 2009). Within Australian Capital Territory (ACT) government schools, the Quality Teaching Model (QTM) (Australian Capital Territory Department of Education and Training, 2006) is used across all Key Learning Areas to help define quality teaching. Some of the teachers in this study would be familiar with the QTM (Australian Capital Territory Department of Education and Training, 2006) because it has been used for more than a decade as a way for teachers to plan and assess quality teaching, similar to the use of the Productive Pedagogies Framework in Queensland and the Quality Teaching Framework in New South Wales. In the context of this research, the AC: HPE (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2017) also provided what can be considered a theoretical framework, as the HPE curriculum is informed by five inter-related key ideas (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2017; Macdonald, 2013). While the term QPE is not specifically mentioned within the AC: HPE (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2017), this curriculum nonetheless demands a broad approach to PE underpinned by the work of Arnold (1979).

Figurational sociology

Figurational sociology was used as a theoretical framework to examine social processes that help to explore teachers' ideas about QPE. The study of processes is of primary importance in figurational sociology. Therefore, it informed the approach that we adopted in this research. Van Krieken (1998) identified several interrelated tenets within Norbert Elias's figurational approach that are relevant to this study. Firstly, it recognised that while people take part in deliberate activity in life, the outcome of such action is often unintended or unplanned. Secondly, people are connected through networks or figurations, by invisible 'chains' of interdependencies, meaning that they are inter-reliant upon each other. Elias (1978: 261) defined the term figuration as 'a structure of mutually oriented and dependent people' which can be used to represent the associations that HPE teachers have in their school faculties, communities and professional associations (Alfrey

et al., 2012). Further, Elias (1998a) argued that social power differentials exist between individuals within figurations. Instead of social power being something that one person possesses, and another does not, Elias (1998a) considered social power to occur between individuals as a shifting balance.

A third principle of figurational sociology noted by Van Krieken (1998), is that people can only be understood within the context of their ever-changing relationships throughout life. Finally, Van Krieken (1998) observed that those relationships are subject to long-term processes that change over time.

Figurational sociology also includes Elias's (1987) theory of involvement and detachment. That is, individuals are emotionally immersed or removed to a greater or lesser extent from social situations that they are part of. Concerning involvement and detachment, no person is ever entirely involved, or in contrast, completely detached (Elias, 1987). Within the PE teaching context, Elias and Dunning (1986) argued that PE professionals often lack detachment by being too passionately involved in their work. In other words, their enthusiasm can be well meaning, but misguided. Furthermore, those authors are critical of PE teachers for not examining their subject within wider social contexts and believe that they tend to favour pragmatic approaches in their work. Similarly, Green (2006) observed high levels of PE teacher involvement and argued that instead of being readily distinguishable, PE is an amalgamation of taken-for-granted, or accepted at 'face value,' beliefs and practices that are safeguarded by the PE profession. Taken-for-granted beliefs are problematic, because they lack critical rigour, are to a greater or lesser extent 'mythical', and are a consequence of a relatively high level of teacher involvement (Elias, 1987).

Habitus

The notion of habitus is a further concept within figurational sociology, meaning a particular form of personality structure (Van Krieken, 1998). While habitus has been widely credited to Bourdieu (1990), Norbert Elias was using the term earlier (Dunning and Mennell, 1996; Paulle et al., 2012) with both sociologists similarly using it to mean personified subjectivity, or what Bourdieu called 'practical knowledge' (Sterne, 2003). Elias refered to two forms of habitus in his work, which are individual habitus (Elias, 1994) and social habitus (Elias, 1991), with the former meaning 'the web of social relations in which the individual lives during his most impressionable phase, during childhood and youth, which imprints itself upon his unfolding personality' (Elias, 1998b: 62). In other words, individual habitus is a person's learned tendency, or disposition to act in a certain way, that remains relatively constant throughout life (Elias, 1994). The use of the word disposition here is taken to mean the inclination for an individual to behave in a given manner that is affected by others who share their figuration.

Social habitus, or 'social personality structure of people' (Elias, 2009: 186) on the other hand refers to behaviour, practices or beliefs that are common to a particular group of people (Elias, 1991). Nonetheless, individual and social habitus are mutually dependent on each other, as the former influences the latter and vice versa (Van Krieken, 1998). HPE teachers as they exist in their teaching-related figurations learn their own particular social habituses. The concept of social habitus is used in this study to understand taken-for-granted beliefs, assumptions and other aspects of broader social processes (Paulle et al., 2012). Further, social habitus has previously been used as a theoretical framework to analyse the practices of teachers within a school setting (see Keay, 2009).

Teacher habitus and beliefs about PE

Similar to Elias and Dunning (1986) above, Green (2002) found in his figurational study of English PE teachers that their everyday practices, instead of being evidence-based, were instead largely their own ideas about what PE should be. The teachers were found to 'possess a distinctive view of PE: one that was quite particular and rather subjective as well as less serious than one might expect' (Green, 2002: 65). They largely associated PE with student enjoyment, sports performance and their own professional status. In analysing why teachers perceived PE in this way, Green (2002) concluded that teacher habitus and the context in which they worked had significant bearing. Both these factors were pivotal in shaping teacher 'philosophies' of PE, meaning teacher beliefs and ideologies, rather than philosophies in the traditional sense.

The notion of 'philosophies' (Alfrey et al., 2012; Green, 2000, 2002; Keay, 2005) was useful in this study to examine teachers' past, current and future perspectives about QPE. Green (2002) also noted that teachers inherit to a greater or lesser extent elements of PE that have 'always' been done a certain way. In holding such beliefs teachers demonstrate a high level of involvement and limited detachment (Elias, 1987) in their subject matter. This imbalance prevents them from being accepting of other possibly more reality adequate or less mythical ways of teaching PE. For example, adopting the use of evidence-based quality frameworks or teaching approaches informed by recognised theories.

It is perhaps possible that teacher beliefs about PE, both within and external to Australia, have been resistant to change partly because of limited teacher professional learning opportunities. Alfrey et al. (2012), regarding PE teachers' engagement with health-related exercise, concluded that professional learning providers have not provided appropriate opportunities for professional knowledge to be developed. A similar criticism could perhaps be directed at those providers in Australia concerning QPE. This might help explain why the PE figuration explained in the previous section has been historically resistant to change.

Figurational sociology was applied in this research for several reasons. Firstly, it stresses the significance of social processes and relationships (Dépelteau, 2013). Indeed, Dunning and Hughes (2013: 50) noted that 'the main distinctive features of figurational sociology are its emphasis on processes and relations. However, it is *radically* processual and *radically* relational in character; that is, it is processual and relational at its *roots* or *core*' (emphasis in original). Secondly, figurational sociology was used because the notion of habitus can be used to interpret teacher dispositions and ways of behaving. Although Bourdieu's (1990) work on habitus and field was appealing to this study, especially through the notion of 'practical knowledge' relating to the research findings, Elias's theory of habitus was preferred. This is because it can be used and interrelated to other aspects of figurational sociology to inform the research and interpret the findings. Finally, Elias's (1987) involvement and detachment theory was important as a way of problematizing and explaining teacher passion and enthusiasm for teaching PE.

Methodology

A qualitative methodology was adopted as it is compatible with figurational sociology (Baur and Ernst, 2011) and because it was deemed as the most useful method to answer the research questions: 'How do you define quality PE?' and, 'What has influenced (any authors, reading, research, professional learning, or experience) your definition of QPE?' The research was conducted at a PE breakfast symposium, held early morning on a week day in term time, which concluded at 8.30 am.

Participants

We acknowledge that holding the symposium early in the morning may have restricted the number of participants, if for example teachers who wished to attend were unable to be released from their schools or were unable to have an alternative teacher take their class. In designing the research, we anticipated that heads of faculty would be less constrained in having to find replacement teachers through them typically having reduced classroom teaching responsibilities. Because heads of faculty, or former heads of faculty mainly participated, it would suggest then that it was easier for those individuals to attend through having fewer constraints, or perhaps because the research was of more interest to them. Collecting data on a weekend or during school holidays was considered, but this approach was deemed as unsuitable. This was because we anticipated that teachers would have school sport or other sport responsibilities, would be on holiday, or would be unavailable due to other commitments.

Following ethics approval at the first author's university, an invitation to participate in the event and research was advertised through the Australian Council for Health, Physical Education and Recreation (ACHPER) website and Facebook page, with ACHPER being the national professional association for HPE teachers in Australia. The symposium was also advertised via direct email to ACT teachers by the ACT Government Education Directorate. Therefore, purposeful sampling was used to select the participants. Anyone who was interested in the symposium was able to attend subject to the kinds of limitations mentioned in the previous paragraph, but only teachers of PE were invited to take part in the research. The interviews were held at two private rooms at an ACT Government Education Directorate teaching and learning centre. A total of 14 teachers, seven men and seven women, participated in the research. There were six existing or former heads of HPE faculties from ACT Government Education Directorate secondary schools and three heads or acting heads of HPE faculties from independent schools. There were five HPE teachers, four from government schools and one from an independent school.

All of the participating teachers taught PE in middle school or above. The teachers who worked for the ACT Government Education Directorate taught at six of the 19 government high schools, while the teachers at non-government schools were employed at three local independent schools. Despite the small sample size, the number of ACT Government Education Directorate heads of HPE faculties was significant because they represent HPE leadership perspectives for nearly a third of the government secondary schools within the ACT jurisdiction. Importantly, as leaders, those individuals hold relative power (Elias, 1998a) within their figurations. Collectively, the teachers had a wide range of PE teaching experience, from one to 39 years of teaching, with five having taught for more than 10 years. Participants were given consent forms and information sheets about the research where it was stated that they could withdraw their involvement in the research at any time without consequence.

Data collection

The research participants were invited to contribute to a focus group discussion, with groups randomly formed at the symposium, by a simple allocation of each teacher to either group one or two. Two focus group interviews occurred simultaneously, lasting 60 minutes each, that were facilitated respectively by the first and second authors. Focus groups were deemed suitable because they allow shared understanding of a given topic or issue (Mills and Gay, 2016). There were six pre-determined questions that related to the two research questions (see Table 1). These questions were asked by both authors at their respective focus group interview.

Table 1. Focus group questions.

Questions asked at the focus group interviews
What three or four words do you associate with quality PE?
How do you define quality PE?
How do you know quality PE when you see it?
How do you know quality PE when you hear it?
What has influenced your ideas of quality PE (and how)?
How has the Australian Curriculum for HPE influenced your ideas of quality PE?

Data analysis

Data analysis was conducted in two stages. Firstly, each interview was transcribed verbatim, with the first author and second author respectively undertaking transcription of the focus group that they led. Transcription in this way enabled a first level of analysis and increased familiarisation with the data (O'Toole and Beckett, 2010). Each author then used thematic analysis to identify initial recurring themes in the data (Bryman, 2012). Thematic analysis was chosen due to its effectiveness as an analytical tool in qualitative research and also because of its compatibility with figurational research (see for example Bloyce et al., 2008). For the second stage of data analysis a single data set was constructed. This single data set was then analysed by the first author and final themes identified and then agreed with the second author. These final themes were then interpreted by the first author using the figurational concepts of interdependence, habitus, and involvement and detachment.

Results and discussion

Data analysis identified the following themes: words associated with QPE were traditional understandings of PE that could be largely interpreted as the teachers' 'philosophies'; there was a lack of a common definition of QPE; research-based frameworks for informing teacher perspectives of QPE had limited mention; the importance of habitus and the influence of significant others in forming teachers' notions of QPE; a high degree of involvement concerning some of the teachers and their subject matter; and the value of communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991) in fostering QPE.

Words that the teachers associated with QPE

The teachers were asked to state 'three or four words' they associated with QPE. They responded with words that represented traditional approaches to PE that can be identified as long-term processes and recurrences within the subject, in addition to words that aligned to broader conceptions of QPE. The words that the teachers cited seemed to be heavily influenced by their 'philosophies', which were grounded in long-established understandings of PE. The word 'active' or its derivative 'activity' was the most commonly cited word, followed by: 'participation'; 'fun' or 'enjoyment'; and 'skill'. Those words along with 'lifelong', 'teamwork', 'fitness', 'improving', 'physical' and 'health' align to narrow and historical understandings of PE (Kirk, 2010; Pill, 2016) and reflect many of the recurring traditional characteristics of PE that ACT teachers in Williams's (2016) study also recounted.

A deeper understanding of QPE relating to quality frameworks, such as the QTM (Australian Capital Territory Department of Education and Training, 2006), the National Standards for Physical Education (National Association for Sport and Physical Education, 2004) and the Quality Physical Education guidelines (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2014) is suggested in the following words used by the teachers: 'student-centred'; 'inclusive or inclusion'; 'critical'; 'making connections'; 'engagement'; 'motivation'; and 'enthusiasm'. Several of these words associate with the three Dimensions (sections) used in the QTM (Australian Capital Territory Department of Education and Training, 2006). For example, 'critical' and 'making connections' relate to Dimension 1: Intellectual quality. 'Engagement' and 'motivation' connect with Dimension 2: Quality learning environment, and 'student-centred' links to Dimension 3: Significance. Nonetheless, when the teachers used these words there was no explicit linkage to the aforementioned framework. This suggests a possible disconnect between theory and practice, or a lack of acknowledgment of the former.

The wide range of words associated with QPE was consistent with Green (2006), in that an amalgam of taken-for-granted beliefs amounted to what constituted PE. In addition to the teachers being asked which three or four words they associated with QPE, 'sport' was frequently mentioned during the interviews within the context of QPE. This connection between QPE and sport is indicative of the central positioning of sport within the teacher biographies, consistent with what Green (2000) also found.

Lack of a common definition of QPE

There was no commonality in how teachers defined QPE. Instead it was explained in broad sweeping terms, again, largely informed by the teachers' 'philosophies' of PE with the privileging of skills, participation, engagement and lifelong learning. For example:

> It's about the kids being actively engaged, to the point of . . . them having lifelong learning in terms of, when they leave school they want to be actively involved in some component of being active. (Colin, 55–59 age range, head of faculty, government school, 34 years of experience)

> . . . yeah, it's very much about teaching life skills, participation and engagement. It gives kids opportunities to, you know, want to maybe adventure out and try something else and hopefully, not only give them life skills but change their lives for a positive impact, as they move through into adulthood. (Peter, 25–29 age range, class teacher, government school, 5 years of experience)

> I pretty much agree with that (Peter) and basically think it's about setting up an active healthy lifestyle and everything that incorporates. (Kylie, 25–29 age range, class teacher, government school, 2 years of experience)

Colin and Peter's remarks had similarities around notions of engagement and lifelong learning, which have been identified as recurring themes in the history of PE in the ACT (see Williams 2016). Therefore, the comments made by both teachers suggest that historical aspects of PE form part of their individual habituses. The lack of mention and valuing of theory in all the teacher definitions of QPE indicates practical knowledge being privileged over theory in common with what is reported in the literature (see, for example, Elias and Dunning, 1986; Green, 2002). The only exception was Emily (25–29 age range, head of faculty, independent school, 8 years of experience), who commented:

I am a big advocate of Margaret Whitehead's work, of physical literacy. So, in terms of developing physical literacy and developing movement skills but also fostering that lifelong motivation to continue that throughout the lifespan as well . . . That is what I think is quality PE.

Although physical literacy is discussed in the UNESCO (2014) quality guidelines, it is surprising that physical literacy was mentioned in the interviews as the term is absent from AC: HPE documentation (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2017), which is the only document that teachers cited in forming their ideas around QPE.

Limited use of research-based frameworks for informing teacher perspectives of QPE

The teachers did not mention the QTM (Australian Capital Territory Department of Education and Training, 2006), which was somewhat surprising given its use in ACT government schools for over a decade. Some of the teachers were aware of the existence of the UNESCO (2014) QPE guidelines. However, these guidelines were not used to inform their practice. One of the teachers attributed the lack of the teachers' knowledge of the UNESCO (2014) guidelines, to them not being mentioned in the AC: HPE (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2017):

I haven't seen it referenced anywhere in the Australian Curriculum documents that I have read, and that has been the main source of curriculum that we have been using for the last however long. (Richard, 35–39 age range, head of faculty, government school, 10 years of experience)

Illustrating this lack of influence of local and global policy on informed practice, in response to whether anything in these UNESCO guidelines resonated or 'stood out' with the teachers, Jarrod (35–39 age range, head of faculty, independent school, 15 years of experience) commented:

Things about policy, how policy is important and how that translates into the curriculum that we write, but then it is obviously what we do in the classroom that matters. That is the key focus that I took out of it – what happens in the classroom.

For Jarrod, what is stated in policy documents, including curricula, was somewhat removed from what occurs 'in practice'. This finding is consistent with what Green (2000) found, that PE practice was largely based on teacher ideas, or 'philosophies' about what PE should be, mainly formed by their personal biographies. Similarly, Amanda (30–34 age range, head of faculty, government school, 9 years of experience) in response to what has influenced teachers' ideas about QPE commented:

Having 'prac' students, university students, being a mentor to them and seeing they either come with nothing and then what you do to help them actually get somewhere and feel positive about teaching.

Again, this statement highlights the habitus of this teacher through university being discounted and the knowledge that 'counts,' being the practical teacher 'philosophies' about *doing* PE.

The AC: HPE (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2017) was the only policy document that teachers specifically mentioned that influenced their ideas about QPE. As an example, Richard (35–39 age range, head of faculty, government school, 10 years of experience) stated:

It has been a big driving document that we use to govern all of the units that we do, and it is definitely a working document that we refer to when reviewing our units. So, it has been very beneficial to us and we are making sure that we are definitely aligning to what the Australian Curriculum is intending to say.

Other teachers spoke about how the AC: HPE (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2017) stimulated conversation and allowed a consistent approach to teaching PE and the sharing of resources and ideas:

I think it provides that consistency, hopefully across the nation in regards to our expectations of what sort of things students are trying to meet in regards to the achievement standards and gives that consistency to them. (Peter, 25–29 age range, class teacher, government school, 5 years of experience)

I think, the three things important to me are, it's the question about what we teach, how we teach, how we assess. The Australian Curriculum I think has given us the parameters to be able to do that. (Colin, 55–59 age range, head of faculty, government school, 34 years of experience)

This comment by Colin reflects QPE as being the inter-relationship of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, a concept that we introduced early in the paper. The way in which teachers use a given curriculum, the teaching approaches they adopt and how they assess, together communicate QPE or a lack thereof (Penney et al., 2009). Concerning curriculum, Williams (2018) found that ACT HPE teachers use their relative power to implement policy including curricula, by 'cherry picking' those directives they will follow and those that they will not. In doing so, preferred long-established practices including 'PE-as-sport-techniques' were safeguarded, upheld and made to 'fit' to new demands.

The importance of habitus and the influence of significant others in forming teachers' notions of QPE

Habitus, both through social habitus within PE faculties and from individual habitus through childhood experiences of PE, had a bearing on the teachers' ideas of QPE and why they became teachers. For example, Peter (25–29 age range, class teacher, government school, 5 years of experience) commented:

The reason I became a PE teacher is because I had a very strong PE teacher at high school . . . I think if you ask most people in the room, you get inspired by those lifelong experiences that we've all mentioned.

Peers, as significant others, also had an important impact on notions of QPE, suggesting strong chains of interdependence (Elias, 1978) between teachers in their respective faculties. In the following quotes, there is also a sense of deep teacher involvement (Elias, 1987) through emotional connections with, and influence of, peers. The frequent use of the word 'really,' indicates a high level of teacher involvement. Further, there is a suggestion of social habitus (Elias, 1991) through the valuing of similar ideas or approaches:

I think it's actually my peers, my colleagues that really influence me to either want to do better, or research things to help them to do better as well. So, it's just working collaboratively with

them . . . which really influences me and inspires me as well. (Amanda, 30–34 age range, head of faculty, government school, 9 years of experience)

. . . your team that delivers physical education and health is crucial. So, if you've got a really good team that's really enthusiastic, that inspires you as a teacher to do better. But I think then that it has a rippling effect on what it does for the students as well, so that teamwork of your physical education staff I think is really crucial (Colin, 55–59 age range, head of faculty, government school, 34 years of experience)

The modelling of other teachers, I think it's really important and there are those staff room conversations that you're having all the time (Isabel, 25–29 age range, class teacher, government school, 3 years of experience)

The above examples illustrate interdependence chains between teachers, where individuals influence the figuration while being influenced by others in the figuration. Such action can have unplanned consequences, for example, reinforcing shared 'philosophies' of PE. In addition, the multiple mention of the word 'really' is indicative of teacher passion and involvement in their subject matter. Involvement is an important lens used in this study and is discussed more in the following section. The word 'research' was stated by Amanda, which was the only time this word was mentioned in the data, in relation to the participants doing research. While researching aspects of PE seems commendable, if poor or unreliable sources of information are used they can be of limited benefit towards QPE, especially if they serve to comply with, or add to existing 'philosophies' of PE.

Teacher involvement with and detachment from their subject matter

In addition to the examples provided above that use the word 'really', there was evidence of teacher involvement through the use of the words: 'passion'; 'passionate'; and 'enthusiastic'. Kylie seemed to use sport synonymously with PE, perhaps indicating a pre-disposition to sport in her individual habitus. Such a pre-disposition is important because it limits broader understandings of QPE:

I think it's about the passion and the passion for the sports that you're teaching as well, and I think that's really important and that definitely shows when you're teaching your kids. If you're passionate about it, they're passionate about it. (Kylie, 25–29 age range, class teacher, government school, 2 years of experience)

I think it is very much about sharing your passion as a PE teacher and if that sort of filters down to the students then I think that engages them more within the PE lessons (David, 40–44 age range, head of faculty, government school, 20 years of experience)

I think it's about creating a really empowering, quite enthusiastic, passionate learning environment for students, which is student-centred, but it also equips students, staff and perhaps the broader community to be physically educated people and I think if we can get to that stage, then the lifelong, the memorable moments come in as well. So, I think it's broader than just 'PE' . . . yeah. (Charlotte, 40–44 age range, head of faculty, independent school, 20 years of experience)

Given the lack of evidence-based influences in teacher accounts of QPE there is some risk that teacher passion and enthusiasm, although well intended, could in fact be misguided. Both David and Charlotte have extensive teaching experience, and consequently their teaching habitus has been formed over a length of time. This understanding of habitus is significant, because without

access to quality professional learning there is a risk with some teachers that their 'philosophies' of PE can become so embedded that they are impermeable to change.

The value of communities of practice as agencies for fostering QPE

It is possible that QPE can be developed and promoted through communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991) where teachers learn new approaches, share ideas and draw upon each other for support (Armour et al., 2017). Further, communities of practice provide education focused settings for meaningful, beneficial, and authentic dialogue between teachers that can develop their pedagogical and content knowledge (Oliver et al., 2017; Parker et al., 2012). Studies have shown that communities of practice enable teachers of PE to reflect upon their own methods, improve student learning, develop their capacity as educators and share good practice (Nash, 2009; O'Sullivan, 2007). Therefore, communities of practice have scope to foster QPE so long as they do not serve to reinforce teachers' 'philosophies' of PE.

Several of the teachers valued communities of practice as ways in which they could construct their ideas around QPE. Examples included sharing learning and ideas or content for teaching within their faculties, sometimes through online networking with providers of PE. For example, Charlotte (40–44 age range, head of faculty, independent school, 20 years of experience) commented:

> . . . just that curiosity to want to know more, whether it's on a local scale, within your own community and how we can better that maybe. It's also interstate, nationally and obviously now globally, with all of our excellent sort of professional learning providers that we have . . . across the country . . . ACHPER being one of them, but also internationally as well . . .

The benefit of collaborative opportunities for discussion and learning about PE was suggested by Michael (60–64 age range, head of faculty, government school, 35 years of experience):

> I think we need to have more conversations like we are having now. Not like moderation days where it is a pain in the backside as we all know. We need more conversations like this, so we are all on the same page. Very open, very relaxed, and where you can say I like that and I'll take it on board.

> Sharing ideas, sharing different things. I don't think we do that enough. I think we are so protective of our own little environment. I think we need to break out and improve. We share it, we improve.

What is evident in the above quote is the significance attached to social habitus and the sharing of ideas and practices that are not necessarily based on rigorous notions of QPE, and instead could be influenced by high teacher involvement and well-intended but misdirected passion. Indeed, most of the teachers who spoke about collaborative learning tended to comment about learning drawn from their peers in their respective faculties. While this kind of learning can be effective, it is nonetheless largely dependent on the social habitus of teachers in their practical setting. This finding is similar to Pill (2014) who found that PE teachers place a high value on discussion with their peers.

Summary

In answering research question 1, 'How do you define quality PE?' this study found in common with the literature (Marsden and Weston, 2007) that there was a lack of agreement about what the term meant. There was limited mention in the teacher responses of empirical

evidence influencing their constructs of QPE. Instead, the teachers perceived QPE in traditional restricted terms that tended to be informed by their habituses, with beliefs, values and dispositions formed and shared over long periods of time. These ideas have endured and been at the mainstay of PE thinking for generations (Kirk, 2010; Pill, 2016; Williams, 2016). The teachers' ideas of QPE, primarily based on their own 'philosophies' of PE, were largely inadequate for addressing the broad scope of the AC: HPE (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2017). Similar to findings by Pill and Stolz (2017), the teachers in this study had largely superficial and naive understandings of key ideas of the AC: HPE (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2017). However, this understanding can perhaps be attributed to some extent to the relatively recent introduction of this curriculum.

In summary, teacher notions of QPE were an amalgam of different perspectives about what they *thought* PE was, based upon their 'philosophies' of PE including their individual and social habituses (Elias, 1991, 1994). There was also some evidence of possible teacher involvement (Elias, 1987) through well-intended but perhaps misdirected teacher passion and enthusiasm in their subject matter. This kind of teacher involvement suggests that some teachers in the study lacked critical reflection about the extent to which their practices could be considered QPE. What was perhaps most concerning about the teacher interview responses was that there was only one reference made to an evidence-based source in defining QPE. Most of the teacher's definitions of QPE had little substance and drew largely from their subjective perspectives and everyday practices, similar to what Green (2002) and Pill and Stolz (2017) found in their research.

Concerning research question 2, 'What has influenced (any authors, reading, research, professional learning, or experience) your definition of QPE?' except for the AC: HPE and some limited examples of professional learning, teachers predominantly spoke about the value of their experience in shaping their ideas about QPE. This finding is consistent with earlier studies where teachers define PE according to their lived experiences or pragmatic approaches (see, for example, Elias and Dunning, 1986; Green, 2006). Some of the participants spoke about the impact of influential teachers in their lives who inspired them to become teachers. This motivation to teach PE from childhood is an example of the effect of individual habitus in shaping personality structure (Elias, 1994) and specifically a desire to become a teacher of PE. Social habitus (Elias, 1991) was also evident through interdependencies with other teachers and how those too have shaped individual understandings of QPE.

Future research needs to be undertaken into how existing quality frameworks such as the QTM (Australian Capital Territory Department of Education and Training, 2006) can be used to develop QPE and to explore how the relevant key ideas in the AC: HPE can be unpacked and contribute to QPE. Importantly, such an endeavour should collectively involve teachers, academics and implementation experts. This kind of collaborative input has the capacity to ensure that future notions of QPE are more evidence-based, instead of being largely informed by the day to day experiences of teachers. Concerning limitations, in addition to the timing constraints that may have restricted the kind of teachers who attended, discussed in the Methodology section, a possible limitation of the research is that attendees were weighted in favour of those who were interested in research perspectives. Indeed, five of the participants held post-graduate qualifications which may be indicative of this interest.

Conclusion

Figurational sociology, and the concepts of interdependency, habitus, and involvement and detachment were useful in analysing the data in this research. This particular branch of sociology was useful, because of how it represents people according to the figurations that they are part of, its emphasis on process and by acknowledging that humans are inextricably linked to their past lives. There are two principal benefits of this study. Firstly, the findings provide understanding about what ACT teachers believe QPE means within the national and international context and secondly, they indicate the extent to which those teachers' perceptions align with the aims and objectives of the AC: HPE (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2017).

Teachers in this study did not portray QPE according to its broad meaning reflected in the AC: HPE (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2017) key ideas underpinned by the work of Arnold (1979). Instead, they demonstrated a high degree of involvement in the subject area, that could be attributed to their individual and social habitus where they portrayed QPE according to their own subjectivities. This high level of involvement is problematic, because it serves to reinforce traditional approaches to teaching PE that are inadequate for meeting the needs of children in contemporary Australia. Consequently, no specific pedagogical theories or theoretically informed approaches were mentioned by the teachers, both of which facilitate depth of teaching and learning in QPE.

The purpose of this paper is not to create a 'stick' with which to 'hit' teachers. As former high school HPE teachers ourselves, we understand the nature of the school PE teaching environment and the time pressures on teachers. That said, our findings suggest further investigation is warranted to determine if any progress has been made since Alexander et al. (1993) claimed that secondary teachers of PE lacked teaching perspectives, with the result being learning deficits. Hickey (1995) also explained a mismatch between the rhetoric of PE and the reality of what is delivered in the name of PE. This mismatch we believe is largely attributable to the strength and enduring nature of the individual and social habitus of teachers, the strong influence of their 'philosophies' of PE and also the relatively high levels of teacher involvement in their subject matter.

In the Introduction, we discussed that internationally during the past 20 years there has been a push for curricular reform in PE, away from fragmented knowledge and skills towards more integrated and connected curriculum. We hypothesise that the reason secondary PE teaching in Australia may not have shifted from 'PE-as-sport-techniques' is that ever since the first attempt at a standardised national curriculum in Australia in the mid-1990s, teachers of PE have been receivers of curriculum reform rather than the drivers of reform (Penney and Fox, 1997). We agree with Fullan (1993: 49) that 'changing formal structures is not the same as changing norms, habits, skills and beliefs'; for the latter to occur we suggest that teachers adopt a greater inclination towards critical reflection on PE. Adopting such a perspective will help facilitate greater teacher detachment, which may also help teachers to have a more reality adequate approach that aligns to evidence-based practice.

Finally, given that PE teacher education (PETE) has been shown to have limited influence on the habitus of pre-service teachers, other methods that connect PETE providers and actual teaching practice need to be explored. An example of such an alternative approach would be academic staff working in partnership with local schools in delivering a PE pedagogy focused undergraduate unit involving pre-service HPE teachers. This aligns with two cornerstones of QPE proposed by Amade-Escot and Amans-Passaga (2007), making connections between PETE and in-service

teachers and involving both parties in future professional learning activities. While examples of these kinds of partnerships already exist, our point is to have evidence-based practice central to those collaborations. Initiatives such as these may also help alter PETE educator habitus, through the formation of new chains of interdependency as well as from fresh insights gained.

The research is important because it has the potential to inform and shape future professional learning offered by government and professional associations. An example of this kind of professional learning could be to promote evidence-based practice, such as models-based instructional approaches to teaching PE (Metzler, 2017). Models-based instructional approaches also align explicitly to the achievement standards that teachers need to address in the AC: HPE (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2017). As ACHPER does not currently have a statement for QPE, this research also provides an opportunity to stimulate conversation both locally and nationally about QPE in Australia. Further, it is the first time that a study has been undertaken that is concerned with what QPE means in the ACT. Therefore, this study provides insights where there were none previously.

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