
Initial Teacher Education Physical Education Graduate Reactions

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Introduction

In recent years there has been increasing attention paid to the nature of teacher effectiveness. One manifestation of this has been a desire to monitor the standard and quality of teaching performance in both initial and in-service training (Mawer, 1995). As is the case with teacher education in general, research in physical education teacher education has tended to follow two distinct lines of enquiry - research on learning to teach and research on teacher induction (Huling-Austin, 1992).

Research on teacher induction has focused on: student and beginner teacher concerns about survival in the teaching environment (cf. Wendt & Bain, 1983, 1989, Schemp, 1986, Behets, 1990); perceptions of what are the attributes of a good physical education teacher (cf. Arrighi & Young, 1987, Mawer, 1993); the “problem of transfer” from pre-service to in-service teaching and the occupational socialization of physical education teachers (cf. Evans, 1988, Locke & Dodds, 1984, Schemp, 1983, Templin, 1989, Lawson, 1989, Woods & Earls, 1995). However, as Locke (1996) points out, few teaching training programmes make any systematic effort to obtain information from their graduates on the effectiveness of their professional training.

This Study

Given this it was considered appropriate to seek feedback from graduates of one form of teacher preparation concerning their perceptions of teacher education effectiveness. This study focuses on a concurrent study model of teacher education currently used in the preparation of physical education teachers.

The professional preparation of secondary school physical education teachers in New Zealand has traditionally been undertaken via two distinct pathways of tertiary study. One pathway provided for graduates of Physical Education, or its allied fields, consists of an “end-on” post-graduate programme. The other pathway provides for students who wish to study for a degree at the same time as they acquire their professional qualification. This pathway is normally delivered via a four-year

programme of concurrent study culminating in the awarding of a degree and teaching diploma and is the subject of the study.

The concurrent programme was originally established in 1976 in association with Massey University. At that stage, students completed a three-year course of full-time study at the Auckland College of Education culminating in the award of a Diploma of Teaching. Students could then complete their Bachelor of Education via a full-time year of study at Massey University or extra-mural study. Between 1976-1983, some 170 physical education teachers were trained in this way (Ovens, 1992). Course modifications in 1988 resulted in the programme being extended to four years with students completing their studies via a combination of full-time study at the Auckland College of Education and concurrent study at Massey University. Between 1992-1995, 56 students have graduated with B.Ed.(Massey)/Dip.Teaching (Auckland College of Education) qualifications

Methods

The subjects consisted of all the students who graduated in 1992, 1993 and 1994, a total of 41 students. A four-part questionnaire which sought information on graduates employment since graduating, their pre-service professional development, the specific programmes taken at the Auckland College of Education and their recommendations on future degree development. The questionnaire consisted of a series of Likert-type statements with response categories of 5 ('high') through 1 ('low') and a series of closed questions and response categories of Yes/No. There was also provision made for graduates to comment on their ratings. Graduates were informed that the information was to be used to develop a new college-based degree. All subjects were asked to complete and return the questionnaire within a month and, in order to maximize the response rate, a reminder note was sent to those who had failed to respond to the first deadline. This procedure resulted in a final return of 34 which represented an 83% return rate. Of the seven graduates who failed to respond, three were known to be overseas, two had not been traced at their last known addresses and two had either failed to receive the questionnaire or had chosen not to complete the questionnaire.

Where content analyses were undertaken of the graduates' responses, the groupings were independently checked by peer review to make sure that they were representative of comments submitted in each question and that they were accurately allocated to the appropriate grouping. The reviewers were two Physical Education lecturers involved

in pre-service teacher education. Where comments contributed were considered pertinent, they were reported verbatim.

Results

Employment history

Most (86%) of the Physical Education B.Ed. students had gained teaching positions upon completion and nearly three-quarters (71%) of them were currently employed as teachers. Of those, a majority (61%) are still employed at the school that had first appointed them. A minority of students (10%) had not taken up teaching upon completion of their pre-service education, and in examining the reasons for this, respondents cited the following: alternative employment (n=2), overseas travel (n=1), sports training (n=1). Approximately a quarter of the graduates (24%) who had taken up a teaching appointment upon completion had since left teaching. The reasons that graduates gave for leaving teaching included: overseas travel (n=5), career change (n=4), and parenthood (n=1). Very few graduates (7%) had undertaken post-graduate study since completing their undergraduate programme.

Graduates' evaluation of their training

Table 1 sets out the responses to five Likert-type statements seeking their evaluations of their pre-service teacher education programme.

Table 1: Ratings of Effectiveness of Pre-service Teacher Education Programme

statements	ratings				
	1 “low”	2	3	4	5 “high”
How effective was your pre-service teacher education preparation for teaching.	0	0	2	18	12
How effectively did your course prepare you for subject knowledge in Physical Education.	0	0	2	16	15
How effective was the education component of your pre-service teacher education	0	1	5	13	13
How effective was the teaching experience component of your teacher education	0	0	6	13	14
How effectively did the programme prepare you to teach a second teaching subject	1	11	11	10	0

The graduates had a high regard for the overall effectiveness of the programme with 92% of the responses scored at either 4 or 5. Their comments identified the following reasons:

- the value of the physical education component of their programme
- the teaching experiences (8 experiences totalling 34 weeks);
- the value of an effective education component of their programme.

However, they were critical of the preparation they received with regard to a second teaching subject, with a majority of graduates (70%) rating this from 3 (neutral) to 1 (low).

Analysis of comments on the effectiveness of the physical education component of their programme, indicated that graduates valued both the practical and theoretical base of the programme. A relatively large number of graduates commented that their knowledge of their subject (n=15) and of the syllabus (n=9) were important factors in their effective pre-service teacher education. Further reference was made indirectly to their subject knowledge with regard to their resource development (n=5). Other areas which received specific positive comment in terms of preparation included: senior school P.E. (n=3), EOTC/ Outdoor Education (n=3) and junior school P.E. (N=2).

The development of a sound physical education pedagogy was commented on favourably. Typical comment in this regard is the following statement:

Excellent pedagogy courses with knowledge about classroom strategies e.g. organization, communication, effective teaching methods etc. with practical and theoretical components.

Some graduates did qualify their comments by adding that nothing could have prepared them for the administrative tasks demanded of them in their employment.

Graduates also commented favourably on the current emphasis on teaching experience, the major thrust of comment directed towards the importance of being able to apply of their knowledge and practice their skills in an applied setting, for example,

I believe it was my teaching sections that developed my confidence and abilities in teaching in a secondary school. the sections are a vital part of the learning process which

distinguishes this teaching course from other P.E. courses. From the 8 teaching experiences I had , I believe, I can offer a great deal to the profession.

The 'hands on' approach is very effective and exposes you to the real world. Learned a great deal from associate teachers and students during teaching practice.

Graduates (n=12) made comment that the success of the experience was very much dependent on the school and the associate teacher, for example,

....very important in terms of putting theory into practice, although it depends on what school you went to as far as guidance, help, and understanding went.

Graduates highlighted the importance of being able to experience a wide variety of schools. The current practice of encouraging students to experience a range of schools which reflect different socio-economic, cultural, and gender settings was reinforced in the comment below:

Two sections a year was excellent - I feel I've a good view of most types of schools. Really important to encourage people to go to different areas and different types of schools.

Several graduates (n=7) commented on what they considered were difficulties associated with teaching experiences. These focused mainly on conflicting demands of time and energy for students who were concurrently undergoing university studies, for example,

Very good but they also meant a lot of pressure with assignments and university study. But they were effective and essential.

Graduates' comments on the role of education in their pre-service education were very positive with the majority (79%) rating it at either 4 or 5. The most frequently reported comments (n=22) focused on the value of the education programme as a means of providing an important background to understanding the nature of learning and teaching. Many graduates recognized the importance of their role as educators and identified their education courses as providing an awareness and understanding of the broader educational issues that impact on their work as teachers, for example,

.... provided an excellent overview of the pedagogical forces at work in our institutions and, the way that the country's dominant ideologies control the education and experiences our youth get.

.... Excellent intellectual discussions and debates in pedagogy and education papers. These papers were particularly important for the development of my own maturity and responsibility as a young teacher.

Many respondents (n=13) felt that the second teaching subject course was not effective. This was expressed in a variety of ways, some were critical of the delivery style and content, but most were concerned about the direction of the courses which concentrated on methodology rather than teaching knowledge. It must be remembered however, that the courses were designed to suit a post-graduate Diploma of Teaching programme where emphasis on methodology may be appropriate. Furthermore, the undergraduate physical education students undertook their second teaching subject course in their fourth and final year and thus had already had extensive teaching experience. The following comment typifies the feelings of those who rated the efficacy of the courses lowly:

The fourth year is a high pressure year including a research project. Didn't have the time to dedicate to a second subject. A lot of repetition occurred when learning with Division C students who had no teaching experience.

Graduates' recommendations for future development

In the final section of the questionnaire, graduates were given the opportunity to comment upon future pre-service teacher education developments in the field of physical education. Graduates were asked if they would like to see a similar programme developed within a college-based degree structure. All respondents (n=34) to this question indicated that they would endorse such a proposal, with half of them justifying their support by stating that such a move would foreground the physical education component which was not readily identified in their qualification. A minority of graduates (N=7) commented that such a move would obviate the need for extra-mural study whilst another group (N=6) presumed that college control of courses would be less problematic in terms assignments and administration.

When asked what the title of such a programme should be, half of the graduates (n=17) suggested the title of Bachelor of Physical Education, whilst nearly three-quarters (76%) felt that the title should contain direct reference to Physical Education.

In response to a question on the duration of the programme, a large majority (84%) of graduates felt that four years was appropriate. Many graduates (68%) justified this length of programme by commenting on the extensive content of the programme. In addition, a majority (56%) commented that it took that amount of time to acquire the necessary skills and experience to become a confident beginner teacher. A small number of graduates (10%) did not support a four-year programme, citing the current cost of tertiary education as the reason.

Conclusions and Implications

On the whole graduates were very positive about the programme they experienced, and it is pertinent that nearly all (86%) secured teaching positions on graduation and nearly three quarters of them are currently teaching. The comments and ratings suggest that graduates believed they were ready to take up teaching. This state of readiness was variously expressed as feelings of confidence, of preparedness, of being well resourced and in terms of possessing the necessary pedagogic skills and knowledge base. The practical component of their physical education study was identified as an important contributor to this knowledge base and its contribution to any future development should be carefully considered to ensure that similar emphasis is maintained.

Not surprisingly, many commented on the significance of teaching experience during the pre-service programme. The comments suggest that for them a number of components of teaching experience were important, notably the number of experiences, the variety of school settings and the progressive nature of the demands made on them. There were some qualifying comments with regard to teaching experience, for example, some commented on the variability in the quality of the associate teachers/school support, the difficulties in meshing teaching experience with concurrent academic study, and, at times, the artificiality of the setting. However, it is clear that teaching experience was of critical importance for these graduates. The College has to continue to monitor the nature of the teaching experience to ensure that it meets these students needs.

Contrary to expectations, the role of education courses in their pre-service education was seen by most graduates as highly valuable in providing important background knowledge to their understanding of learning and teaching. Many commented on the value of education courses in facilitating the development of their philosophy on teaching as well as providing them with an understanding of the broader educational issues that impact on their teaching. Given this positive feedback, it is important that any future development carefully consider the role and nature of education components in a concurrent study programme of pre-service education.

When asked to comment on any future degree development, graduates unanimously indicated support for the development of a programme similar to the one that they had undergone. Most felt that the awarding of a college-based degree would recognize much of the work done in their chosen area of specialism, physical education.

Finally, it is important to note that most graduates felt that a programme of similar duration to the current four-year pattern was appropriate in terms of the acquisition of knowledge and professional development. Against a current background of increasing personal cost of tertiary education and fiscal pressure to shorten pre-service teacher education, it is worth noting that those most heavily affected by these pressures strongly advocate maintenance of current practice.

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