

Wanting to become PE teachers in Spain: connections between previous experiences and particular beliefs about school physical education and the development of professional teacher identities

Gustavo González-Calvo , Göran Gerdin , Rod Philpot & David Hortigüela-Alcalá

To cite this article: Gustavo González-Calvo , Göran Gerdin , Rod Philpot & David Hortigüela-Alcalá (2020): Wanting to become PE teachers in Spain: connections between previous experiences and particular beliefs about school physical education and the development of professional teacher identities, Sport, Education and Society, DOI: [10.1080/13573322.2020.1812563](https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2020.1812563)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2020.1812563>



© 2020 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 28 Aug 2020.



[Submit your article to this journal](#)



Article views: 246




[View related articles](#)



[View Crossmark data](#)

Wanting to become PE teachers in Spain: connections between previous experiences and particular beliefs about school physical education and the development of professional teacher identities

Gustavo González-Calvo ^a, Göran Gerdin ^b, Rod Philpot ^c and David Hortigüela-Alcalá ^d

^aDepartamento de Didáctica de la Expresión Musical, Plástica y Corporal, Universidad de Valladolid, Valladolid, Spain; ^bDepartment of Sport Science, Faculty of Social Sciences, Linnaeus University, Växjö, Sweden; ^cSchool of Curriculum and Pedagogy, Faculty of Education and Social Work, University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand; ^dDepartamento de Didáctica de la Expresión Corporal, Universidad de Burgos, Burgos, Spain

ABSTRACT

Physical Education (PE) teachers have previous experiences that both shape their particular beliefs about the role and purpose of this school subject as well as their pedagogical practice. The present study aims to examine and deepen our knowledge of future Spanish PE teachers' previous experiences of and beliefs about PE that condition their pedagogical practice and intentionality within this school subject. The data reported on in this paper were generated through questionnaires, life-history stories and semi-structured interviews with 24 initial teacher education students in the second year of a degree specialising in PE at a Spanish university. The data was analysed using content and narrative (thematic) analysis. The students, far from being *tabula rasa*, in their responses show how their previous socialisation period, their subjectivities and identities constitute particular beliefs about PE teaching. More specifically, the results reveal four key themes in the student teachers' experiences and beliefs that represent four different factors influencing future PE teacher identities: (1) 'Sport'; (2) 'PE for health'; (3) 'A focus on pedagogy'; and (4) 'A critical orientation'. In conclusion, the study reaffirms the need for further reflection on how previous experiences and beliefs influence the development of professional teacher identities as part of initial teacher education in PE.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 24 March 2020
Accepted 17 August 2020

KEYWORDS

Teacher education; physical education; student teachers; beliefs; professional identity

Introduction

Several studies indicate that their own previous experiences as students influence the attitudes, beliefs and practices of future teachers (e.g. Lortie, 1975; Virta et al., 2019). Thus, it is common for students who enter initial teacher education (ITE) programmes to do so with deep-rooted beliefs about teaching and learning which serve to filter their learning and their interpretation of new knowledge (Richardson, 1996). While learning and knowledge informs beliefs, existing beliefs impact on what is learned and thus what is known, producing a complex paradox. Feiman-Nemser (2001) suggests that for the most part, prospective teachers are often unaware of how their beliefs influence the

CONTACT Göran Gerdin  goran.gerdin@lnu.se  Department of Sport Science, Linnaeus University, Växjö, Sweden

© 2020 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

professional learning. Rather, in teaching, the personal and the pedagogical cannot be separated; what happens in one area profoundly affects the other (González-Calvo & Fernández-Balboa, 2018).

In this paper, we examine how teacher identity development is influenced by one's beliefs about teaching and learning in the school subject physical education (PE). The paper assumes that future (PE) teachers hold deeply ingrained beliefs about teaching and learning developed during their 'apprenticeship of observation' (Lortie, 1975) as (PE) students themselves. These beliefs may, in turn, reflect and constitute different teacher identities, for example, seeing one's self as an 'obesity warrior' (Burrows, 2016) or a 'social justice worrier' (Tinning, 2019). Understanding future teachers' beliefs can also be important for predicting their future PE classroom decisions and practices (Luft & Roehrig, 2007). This is important because PE teachers' long-held beliefs may be in conflict with current PE curriculum objectives.

Within the Spanish context, several studies have analysed the aspects and factors that influence the construction of the professional identity of PE teachers, such as health, corporal subjectivities and consumerism (González-Calvo et al. 2019; Beltrán-Carrillo et al., 2018; Varea et al., 2019). Others have highlighted three dominant discourses in contemporary Spanish PE related to health, education and sport, (García-López & Gutiérrez, 2018) and in particular the ongoing influence of notions of physical health and sport on teaching practice (Gutiérrez-García & Martínez-Álvarez, 2019). These discourses of physical health and sport have also been found to be a determining factor in Spanish ITE students' decision to become PE teachers (González-Calvo & Fernández-Balboa, 2018; González-Calvo et al., 2020). Yet, few studies have examined the experiences and beliefs of ITE PE students that are influential in the development of a future professional teacher identity.

Although, the ITE degree has to follow some common characteristics regarding the contents and outcomes, the pathways into teaching in Spain are characterised by significant variations between universities and, specifically, regarding the different subject specialisations, such as the PE speciality (Gutiérrez-García & Martínez-Álvarez, 2019). Each university decides both on the subjects it wants to integrate and how these subjects are taught. However, the requirement is that primary education degrees last four years and all teachers who teach primary PE in Spain must be specialists in the subject. The PE speciality, at the university where this study was conducted covers contents such as 'Didactics of Physical Education', 'Games and Sports Activities', 'Expression and Body Communication', 'Physical Activity and Health', 'Body Perception and Ability', and 'Physical Education in the Natural Environment'. In this study, we specifically sought to explore how future Spanish primary PE teachers think, speak and write about their experiences and beliefs about the subject and the teaching profession. Therefore, the aim of the study was to examine and deepen our knowledge of future Spanish PE teachers' previous experiences of, and beliefs about, PE that may serve to condition their pedagogical practices within this school subject. The research questions guiding this study thus were: (i) What prior ideas and beliefs about PE do future physical educators bring to initial teacher education? and (ii) How do these prior ideas and beliefs influence the development of future PE teacher identities? Before addressing the methodology used for collecting the data presented in this paper, we introduce and discuss the notion of a 'teacher professional identity' and in relation to PE.

Teacher professional identity and PE

Learning to teach is a social, emotional, intellectual and personal endeavour that begins well before arriving at the university (Karlsson, 2013). In the area of PE, past experiences of schooling, physical activity and sport underpin the knowledge taken up as well as the understandings and assumptions made about selves as future teachers (González-Calvo et al., 2014; Philpot, 2017). In order to approach and understand the previous and transformative experiences of future PE teachers, we will apply the analytic lens of teacher professional identity. This analytical lens affords us to pay attention to the people who learn, including their past experiences and the beliefs that guide them, as well as the

way in which they use them and filter them to give meaning to their learning and with which they justify their present and future actions (Lortie, 1975).

Professional identity is determined by the interaction between personal experiences and the social, cultural, and institutional context (Hagenauer & Volet, 2014). Among all the groups with which primary school teachers must interact, their relations with the students' families become key, since the relationship between both parties will not only determine the success of the pedagogical practice carried out, but also the development of the teacher's professional identity (Keyes, 2002). Even so, it is appropriate to note that the concept of identity is complex, due to the fact that it is multidimensional, including personal, professional, social, and cultural factors.

Identity can be understood as a historical and social construction elaborated by each subject when interacting with the diverse contexts in which they participate (González-Calvo & Fernández-Balboa, 2018). Consideration must be given to values prevalent in individual cultural contexts as what it means to be a professional PE teacher educator is regulated by the culture's limits of what can be said, thought and done at any given time (Dowling, 2011). Among the many other factors that can affect the development of professional identity in schools, one must consider the developmental stage of the teacher (Lortie, 1975). In this sense, the teacher's identity is formed over the years, as one strengthens his or her pedagogical knowledge and establishes his or her capacity to relate to other parts of the school (Frelin, 2013).

Another important factor is related to the teacher's belief system (Schommer-Aikins, 2002). Here it is necessary to emphasise the socio-cultural characteristics that both the teacher and the rest of society associate with education, in general, and, in particular, with the subject to be taught. In the case of PE, a notable contrast is often made between the high value that teachers of PE place on this subject compared with the low status that it is generally given in relation to most other subjects in the curriculum (Pope, 2014). In other words, although all education is already subject to political and social scrutiny, the nature and positioning of PE have led much of the population to perceive it in negative ways that are difficult to change (González-Calvo et al., 2014). In PE, the embodied nature of a teacher professional identity (Tinning, 2010) can also not be ignored, where aspects such as the body of the teacher, their physical skills and beliefs about the body all play an important role in the development of PE teacher identities (González-Calvo et al., 2020).

Seminal research on the construction of the professional identities of PE teachers focussed on how they negotiated the public perceptions of their marginal role in the academic hierarchy of a school (Hendry, 1975). A recent systematic analysis on preservice PE teachers' identities (Keating et al., 2017) revealed that although the research is distributed across many countries, only a small number of researchers are involved with most research focussed on the impact of physical education teacher education (see e.g. Devís-Devís & Sparkes, 1999; Dowling, 2011; Wrench & Garrett, 2012). Studies of the professional identities of PE teachers have revealed some of the challenges for recent attempts to change PE practices. For example, Dowling (2011) suggested that PE teachers hold pedagogical views favouring the development of physical fitness and mastery of sport specific skills over critical and inclusive ideas. A case study of an experienced male PE teacher in Scotland (Thorburn, 2014) concurred that professional identity was closely linked to pedagogical practice. Keating et al. (2017) conclude that this research demonstrates the importance of professional teacher identities on practices, and more specifically the lack of sustained research, hinders the development of high-quality PE teachers.

As Buchanan (2015) states, teachers face professional policies and discourses not as *tabula rasa* but, on the contrary, actively through their own pre-existing identities that allow them to interpret, learn from, assess, and appropriate the new conditions of their work. In several studies it has been shown that beliefs and previous experiences act as a filter with respect to the knowledge taught at university (e.g. Atkinson, 2004; Orland-Barak & Maskit, 2011). However, education in general, and in particular university education, often fail to consider how previous beliefs and lived experiences serve to filter the learning that is taking place. At this point, we consider that the current

focus on PE as physical activity, health and sport (González-Calvo, 2020; Markula & Chikinda, 2016) acts as conditioning factors for the professional identity of teachers.

With this focus on the importance of teacher identity as a backdrop, this paper explores future Spanish PE teachers' previous experiences of and beliefs about PE that condition their pedagogical practice and intentionality within this school subject. We will now account for the methodology used to collect and analyse the data reported on in this paper.

Methodology

Participants

The participants in this study were 23 pre-service PE teachers, of whom nine were male and 14 female, aged between 20- and 39-years-old at the time of data collection. All participants were Spanish by birth and enrolled in the second year of their ITE programme. At the time of data collection, they had just completed a course on 'Didactics of Physical Education' taught by the lead author. This subject is compulsory for all ITE students, regardless of whether or not they decide to continue with the PE speciality in the third year. However, the participants selected for this study had all already chosen PE as their speciality in order to become specialist primary PE teachers. While all students needed to complete questionnaires and the writing of a life-story as an assessment requirement, only the documents of those students who volunteered for the study were analysed. In addition, all the students' grades had already been determined before the study commenced. The students were also reassured that they could withdraw from the study at any point, without the need to provide any explanations.

Data collection

In this study, a narrative, reflective and autobiographical approach was adopted to delve into the personal and pedagogical worlds of the participant (Delle Fave, 2009). This approach places the subject in the foreground, asserting the voice of the participant as a tool for research and interpretation. Thus, participants, through a deep and prolonged process of introspective reflection, can confront their own experiences and actively extract diverse meanings from them.

The data, obtained from all of the 23 participants in the study, were based on three sources: a simple questionnaire of five open questions, a semi-structured individual interview in which the main aspects that led the participants to want to become a teacher of PE were examined in depth, and the writing of a life-history. The five questions that made up the questionnaire were: (1) Explain how you would define PE to someone who does not know what it is; (2) Tell one positive and one negative experience of PE during your time in the educational system; (3) Explain if you consider that PE should be a compulsory subject in the educational system; (4) Propose five changes in the PE course you studied; (5) Explain if and why you would like to teach the PE subject or not.

In the writing of life-histories, the future teachers were asked to write about their memories of physical activity, the ideas that come to light about physical activity and PE, their career choice and their reasons for wanting to become a PE teacher. This tool allowed them to voice their own conscience (Jackson & Mazzei, 2009), thus giving greater strength and credibility to the narrative (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). During the individual interviews the principal researcher invited the participants to tell stories about their past as students, their relationship with PE, their relationships with themselves, their bodies and others. The interviews lasted between 45 and 60 min and were transcribed verbatim.

Data analysis

The three tools used for data collection are considered 'narrative practices' (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2008) which, in themselves, led to 'acts of meaning' (Bruner, 1990) about the teacher's own

professional identity as a narrator of their own experience (Smith & Sparkes, 2008). On the other hand, the participants helped the principal researcher, in his analysis, to establish a triangulation of the three instruments and coherence in the theoretical-practical relations between the different sources of information (Gubrium & Holstein, 2009), which also increased the credibility and transferability of the study (Guba & Lincoln, 2005).

The process of analysis was as follows: the contents of the questionnaires, interviews and autobiographical narratives were subjected to a double categorical content analysis (Riessman, 2008). Each data set was first coded separately, and then compared and contrasted with each other, focusing on the ITE students' initial formation of a professional PE teacher identity. In particular, this form of narrative (thematic) analysis (Riessman, 2008) sought to identify common thematic elements across the research participants' narratives. Ultimately, four themes were identified in the participants' narratives as representing four different factors influencing future PE teacher identities: (1) 'Sport'; (2) 'PE for health'; (3) 'A focus on pedagogy'; and (4) 'A critical orientation'.

Ethical considerations

The study was given ethical approval from the participating Spanish university's research ethics committee. All participants signed consent letters prior to participation and all names used in this paper are pseudonyms.

Results and discussion

The analysis of the data reveals that there are four main factors that influence these future Spanish professional PE teacher identities. These factors can be categorised as: (a) 'Sport'; (b) 'PE for health'; (c) 'A focus on pedagogy'; and (d) 'A critical orientation'. In the findings we explore how these factors influence teacher identity and how these teacher identities may influence their future pedagogical practice.

'Sport' and its influence on the development of a professional PE teacher identity

Not surprisingly, many of the participant future PE teachers in this study have a strong sporting identity. Most of the participants have usually done a lot of physical exercise and enjoyed PE classes when growing up. These future PE teachers with a strong sporting identity were introduced to the world of physical activity and recreational sports at an early age. The people who encouraged them to participate in the different physical and sporting activities usually belonged to their (extended) family, although in several cases they were also influenced by their school PE teachers:

My family has always exercised a lot and that must have influenced me. But the one who has influenced me a lot was a PE teacher I had in primary school and who encouraged me to join the village athletics club. Since then, I have continued to practice this sport. (Sara, Life story)

PE must promote sport and healthy living, something that has to be complemented with the family environment. (Alberto, questionnaire)

In this process of becoming a teacher, contextual variables come into play, as well as their previous experiences as students and active participants in sports. Wrench and Garrett (2012) argue that these learnings that they have accumulated condition their own process of becoming a teacher and, without the necessary reflection, reproduce certain ways of viewing and carrying out teaching. David said:

I remember that my PE classes mostly consisted of sports, and I was one of the 'good guys'. [...]. The PE class was for me one more training session led by the teacher, the main goal of some teachers was to 'get' a good team in a sport every year. Although I don't think that's going to be my goal as a teacher, I do think that sport is going to be the main focus of my classes. (David, Life story)

Sports experiences have meant, for the participants, experiencing situations of both success and failure; however, PE classes, for the participants with a sports background, are primarily associated with success, where they feel more competent than the rest of their peers:

Sometimes I was very frustrated because I wasn't selected to play, or someone else was put in my place because that person was older than me ... However, I never remember those annoyances in PE classes, where I was good and could always give my best. (Diego, interview)

In this sense, beliefs about the body and physical skills play an important part in the development of the professional identity (González-Calvo et al., 2020). On the other hand, during their pre-university educational stage, in which doors to future careers are opened or closed, these students with a strong sporting identity may not have necessarily planned on becoming teachers of PE, rather they were attracted to a career where they could continue with sport:

The truth is, I wasn't good academically, I didn't get very good grades. When the tutor or the counsellor asked me what I was going to do, the options I was presented with were those that had to do with sports. (Sara, interview)

After seeing that focusing exclusively on a sporting career was a risky bet, I decided to go back to school. The option I saw as the easiest was to choose a PE teacher. The truth is that I didn't choose the career because I am too interested in teaching, but because I can relate to the world of sport. (David, Life story)

In the present study, the participants suggest the values and beliefs they have developed through sport constitute a central axis on which everything else turns. They believe these values can serve them both in their studies and in their future professional life. For example, Pablo proposed:

Sport has given me good health, an active life, it has given me a competent personality, a strong character [...] I have learned to win, to lose and to work as a team. All that will help me here in my career and, above all, in my working life. (Pablo, interview)

Being so connected to the world of sports has been a main trigger in these PE teacher students' choices of a teaching career. However, this strong sporting influence can generate a crisis of professional identity for these student teachers if they are confronted with perspectives that suggest that PE is not the same as sport and that not all young people are served by sport in the same positive way they have been (Devis-Devis & Sparkes, 1999).

It is paradoxical to note that some of these future PE teachers are studying PE at university because, in their sporting endeavours they did not reach the heights they had hope for, instead seeking an alternative way to continue to build a career related to the field of sport.

I haven't gotten where I thought, at the time, I could get. At my age, it's already difficult to believe that I'll reach the top of professional sport, so I have to find another way to live my life. What better way than with something that's related to the world of sport, like PE? (Diego, Life story)

The participating students' responses clearly reflect how the sporting experiences of future PE teachers shape their understanding of the subject and their perception and valuing of university studies. The following section represents and discusses their perceptions of their identity as educators for health.

'PE for health' and its influence on the development of a professional PE teacher identity

School PE is considered the most extensive and readily available resource for promoting physical activity among children and adolescents, with PE curricula increasingly directed towards the area of public health. The participants in this study share the belief that PE should serve as an intervention for better health. For example, Lucia stated:

Overweight children do not have the same motor skills, agility, or health ... as a child who is at his or her ideal weight. This must be worked on from the school, promoting this health and these healthy habits from the school, because it is the most important thing that can be taught to children. (Lucia, interview)

The emphasis on physical activity and its relationship with health can be seen as a manifestation of the new public health agenda (Fernández-Balboa, 2017). Going back nearly 20 years, Tinning and Glasby (2002) claimed that the firm, slender body is definitely 'in' with all conceivable healthy lifestyles needing to be constructed around certain body management practices. For several decades, the concept of healthism and individualism have been employed in PE (Kirk & Colquhoun, 1989). This involves assuming the clear social and cultural influences on the concept of health and the bodily implications that this entails. Health is often a central discourse in the shaping of a professional identity for many future teachers in PE. A health discourse is centred on the idea that the body can be turned into a source of health through education in schools, underpinned by the idea that society is at risk of succumbing to the 'disease of obesity' (Evans, 2003). Furthermore, health is used as a means to give prestige to PE, a subject that has always been rather undervalued and thus provides relevance and legitimacy:

The scientific evidence says that obesity is the source of many health problems and we, as physical educators, will have to try to tackle those problems. [...] We cannot go against the dictates of medicine. (Daniel, interview)

Scientific knowledge and 'truths' about obesity have, in this way, been mediated and given meaning in and through PE, allowing teachers to promote a programme that aims to encourage students to make healthy choices about what they eat, what exercise they do and what they look like (from a physical, body image point of view). This ideology is sometimes known as 'healthism' (Johns, 2005) and assumes that students have the ability to make the right choices about healthy lifestyles that will reduce the risk of disease, while also assuming that students alone are responsible for their physical and mental well-being. Healthism foregrounds the acquisition of the ideal body, which leads in many cases to the abandonment of sports practice (González-Calvo & Fernández-Balboa, 2018). For many females, this implies a desire to lose weight or a fear of having a masculinised female body (Bordo, 2003). The fear of having an unwanted body type, the fear of being perceived as unfit, and the fear of rejection among classmates, drives them to be physically active for function purposes (Beltrán-Carrillo et al., 2018). As pointed out by Varea et al. (2019), many PE professionals therefore seek to get closer to the body ideals dictated by the media, which helps them create a sense of professional status and identity, belonging and authority. Christina stated:

Teaching valuable learning to school children, awakening enthusiasm for physical practice as a way of being healthy, preventing disease ... What more valuable learning can there be? (Cristina, questionnaire)

Indeed, many of the future teachers in this study believe that as PE teachers, they play in key role in tackling a medical and social problem such as obesity:

The ideal treatment of obesity is prevention, and school is a suitable place to promote and facilitate the development of physical exercise at different levels of activity. The role of teachers is crucial because of the compulsory nature of education up to the age of 16, due to the amount of time students spend in schools. For this reason, physical education and sports activities must be promoted in the school environment. We, as teachers, are the ideal ones for this purpose (Javier, interview)

This idea assumes that future teachers have the ability to make the right choices about healthy lifestyles that will reduce the risk of disease and are able to teach this to their future students. Thus, it seems that PE is subject to the forces of change as a result of 'official knowledge', which has been originated by political elites who, simultaneously, have been influenced by political and social forces (Johns, 2005).

As a part of their belief about PE as a health intervention, some of the study participants demonstrate a belief that, as PE teachers, they must model physical health. Previous research has demonstrated a taken-for-granted assumption that the PE teacher's body should be an example of fitness and a healthy lifestyle, providing a skilful and bodily role model to their students (Fontana et al., 2017). Gerardo said:

As a PE teacher, I can't be overweight. Being overweight means a negligent attitude towards [one's own] image. [...] I would not like my students to see me being chubby, I imagine this would call my professionalism into question. (Gerardo, interview)

In some cases, however, the future PE teachers' responses show some tension between their need to conform to certain healthy bodily ideals and the acceptance of oneself. Maria, for instance, said:

The first step to modify this type of discourse is the appearance of the PE teacher, since I believe that from the perspective that the PE is working, the importance of non-obesity quickly comes into play, [...] so PE teachers have to show ideal bodies for sport (María, interview)

In this section we have highlighted how the discourses of health, and in particular the threat of obesity to health, are prevalent among future Spanish PE teachers. This legitimises and strengthens certain political and social discourses in their development of the knowledge and pedagogical skills used when teaching PE. The development of this pedagogical identity will be further addressed in the next section.

'A focus on pedagogy' and its influence on the development of a professional PE teacher identity

Among the reasons that appear in the future educators PE teachers' responses as to why they picked this profession are those related to 'wanting to help children learn', 'working with children' and 'being able to do my bit to form responsible citizens'. It is these three reasons that seem to be most attractive to the future teachers in this study. Consistent with Lortie's (1975) apprenticeship of observation, the future teachers in this study want to create the same climate of care and freedom from threats that they experienced in classrooms as students. As Angela explained:

When I did my homework I was often clumsy and didn't succeed. But the atmosphere in the class was always trustworthy, spontaneous, and even when I made mistakes, they were not given much importance. Through effort and willpower, we managed to overcome what the teacher proposed. That is the classroom climate that I want to create as a teacher. (Angela, Life story)

In a focus on pedagogy, the role of the healthy and skilful physical body of the teacher takes second place to their professional identity as skilled teachers. Although participants who claim to have a pedagogical identity acknowledge that the body has some importance as a 'working tool', it is not the most influential aspect of being able to teach effectively. Javier stated:

I don't have the body that you might expect a PE teacher to have. I'm over the ideal weight, I'm not muscular at all [...]. But I think I have many other qualities that make up for those deficiencies: I am very empathetic, I am able to teach motor skills to the student body in an appropriate way, I think I am able to attend to the diversity of bodies and abilities of all school children and not just the motor elites ... (Javier, interview)

This pedagogical orientation helps the teaching body to be considered from a holistic perspective, where all physical bodies can be considered 'normal' for the profession (Virta et al., 2019). However, Tinning and Glasby (2002) indicate that PE remains ineffective in helping young people maintain some measure of analytical and embodied 'distance' from the 'cult of the body'.

The participating student teachers who articulate a focus on pedagogy suggest that bodies that become old, overweight, injured and ill, are still capable bodies for the teaching of PE:

All bodies are suitable for the profession, there are no 'good' and 'bad' bodies. Not for nothing, we are all going to grow old in the profession, we can have an accident or an injury at any time, or be overweight [...]. Therefore, the features of our professionalism cannot be as fickle as the body, our professionalism has to be based on something beyond the body. (Silvia, interview)

Some of the future PE teachers who emphasised this pedagogical focus have chosen the PE specialty because they want to improve the confidence and the atmosphere of the classroom within their lessons and to procure more positive experiences among the students than those they lived through. These participants are motivated by negative experiences in the subject of PE

during their childhood and adolescence, for which they blame their teachers directly. For example, Valerie stated:

Maybe I chose to study PE because of my clumsiness, to compensate for a complex I've been carrying around for a long time. This can help me to empathize with other children, to try to give them good experiences in the EF classes, to avoid that they end up hating the subject as I did. (Valeria, Life story)

As reported earlier in the findings, students who enjoyed success in PE and sport expressed a desire for all students to benefit in the same way as they did. On the other hand, the participants with negative experiences were often diametrically opposed to the notion that PE is a space where caring and development occur. The student teachers that espoused a pedagogical focus reflected on their bad experiences and their desire to create caring PE classrooms (Mordal Moen et al., 2019) that cater to the needs of a diverse student population:

I have always been a chubby child, which always led me to be the centre of ridicule or marginalisation. I was terrified of going to class and exposing my body to the public, and many days I would pretend to have a stomach ache so I wouldn't go, but my pleas to stay home weren't enough. I suffered from bullying and many times physical education classes didn't help me at all, because nobody wanted to get on my bad side and I was self-conscious every time I had to do an exercise in front of everybody. (Ilenia, Life story)

My past, my fight against anorexia and the desire to change my body's ideals are what have brought me here to be able to teach and open the eyes of the children that I can teach one day in the future, to teach them above all to love each other in spite of what the world says, breaking with those dominant beliefs that want to blind us completely, avoiding by all possible means, that those children do not suffer what I once suffered. (Berta, interview)

As we see, past experiences of schooling, physical activity and sport underpin the knowledge taken up as well as the understandings and assumptions made about selves as future teachers (Philpot, 2017). These examples show that one of the objectives sought by future teachers is to cultivate positive relationships between students and with their own bodies. Their own beliefs about the body, physical qualities and physical appearance are central to their ideology, so their beliefs are reflected in their teaching (Wrench & Garrett, 2012). In a salient reminder that identities are complex and subject to negotiation, some of the participants who did not report bad experiences in PE have been motivated to become teachers of PE who can make a positive impact on all students, not just the 'superior' sports people:

I've seen the bad times some of my classmates had in the development of these classes. This has influenced me and will influence my work as a PE teacher. I think that the assessment was the worst organized aspect in the subject and the biggest culprit of these problems and of the bad memories that PE has left in many students. It was a type of assessment that only benefited the motor elites. An assessment that I will not carry out in my classroom, therefore, this is one of the aspects of my personal history that will undoubtedly influence my teaching work. (Angel, interview)

The results above show how the experiences these future PE teachers have had in their own PE have clearly, in different ways, led them to wanting to become teachers of PE and equally importantly, these experiences influence their emerging identity of what kind of teacher they want to be. This critical reflection of their own previous experiences of PE and how this has shaped their beliefs leads us into the fourth and final theme on 'a critical orientation'.

'A critical orientation' and its influence on the development of a professional PE teacher identity

Fostering the moral and upright human being manifested in the student teachers' wishes to make a difference for human beings and, in the long run, to make a difference in society. It is important, from our perspective, that teachers and future PE teachers develop pedagogical practices that put equality, social justice and socio-cultural perspectives first, so that they can better understand the implications

of their teaching. In our study, some of the participants articulated such a vision for their future PE teaching practices. Alberto and Marta said:

I want to be a teacher and it is clear to me that this goes far beyond the fact of teaching, it is also necessary to educate and I would like to be able to encourage a critical spirit in the students, so that they are critical of the messages that are constantly being thrown at us by the media and that they are not easily manipulated by consumerist, elitist messages ... (Alberto, interview)

I see myself as capable of developing critical thinking in students and encouraging the construction of their personality and identity [...], helping each child to be what he or she wants and how he or she wants to be, regardless of the criticisms or opinions or ideals that the consumer society tries to convey to them. (Marta, questionnaire)

Several studies indicate that in school PE there is still a reproduction of traditional models of gender and inequality in the relations between girls and boys (Tinning, 2016). Teachers reproduce hegemonic models of masculinity and femininity and perpetuate male hegemony in the practices of physical activity and sports that they have built up and accumulated from their own school experiences (Gerdin, G. & Pringle, 2017,). This situation of continuity rather than change can only be broken by breaking with preconceived and internalised ideas or, as Brown (2005) indicates, 'forcing the boundaries of what people perceive as gender inconceivable, improbable and acceptable in PE and school sport until the inconceivable becomes the acceptable' (p. 20). In this regard, the future Spanish primary PE teachers indicate the importance of gender inclusion in sport:

From education, we must convey to students that both men and women can do any type of sport and that the fact that a person practices one sport or another is due to his or her own desire and abilities. It is therefore essential to fight for gender equality in sport and that sport itself does not understand gender. (Cristina, interview)

Another recurrent theme around the adopting of a critical orientation in PE is related to these future teachers stressing the important role teachers can play in promoting respect, tolerance and cooperation among students, with PE being an ideal subject to achieve this.

PE also has the task of being a cradle of social criticism [...]. It is not a question of subjecting children to activities with the notion that everyone is capable of carrying them out, of using those who cannot as a bad example and praising those who can; nor is it a question of giving total freedom to each person to do as he or she pleases. It is a matter of acquiring those teaching skills that allow activities to be suitable for students, and not the other way around. That these allow the group to achieve its objectives, encourage it to continue progressing, to fulfil itself and to learn, acquiring values of respect and acceptance by others. (David, questionnaire)

These results draw attention to how some of the PE teacher students have developed beliefs around the valuing of gender inclusion, respect for others and the potential of increased social cohesion (Smith et al., 2020) as fundamental aspects of PE practice.

Conclusions

The purpose of this paper was to identify the experiences and beliefs of future Spanish PE teachers about the role and purpose of this school subject. The paper contributes to the current corpus of literature exploring how pre-service PE teachers construct ideas and beliefs about physical activity, sport, the body and health, during their initial teacher training. The findings indicate that it is important that we, as those responsible for ITE programmes, take into account the prior experiences and beliefs that our students bring, since the new ideas and approaches we introduce have to compete with beliefs and theories developed tacitly and implicitly in their own history as students, throughout their own experience as students in the education system.

Along the lines that we have followed in our work, we understand that those who can offer us the most up-to-date understanding of what PE is (rather than what it can or should be) are the future teachers in charge of teaching it, those who have lived it from within as students and those who will transform and/or reproduce their past experiences of the subject. Our work advocates for placing previous experiences in PE as a starting point, and from there, to make changes and

improvements in the initial training of teachers as a solution to current shortcomings (Casey & Fletcher, 2012). ITE programmes are key to laying the methodological foundations that PE teachers will use in their future practice. Therefore, we advocate for positioning critical reflection on one's own beliefs and daily actions at the heart of ITE (González-Calvo & Fernández-Balboa, 2018; Tinning, 2016), as a strategy for avoiding the reproduction of the hegemonic system of gender, of harassment between equals and/or focused on bodily differences, among others, and to promote change, as proposed by several critical scholars (Evans, 2013; Oliver & Kirk, 2015).

As we have seen in this paper, the emerging identity of teachers developed through their previous experiences and reinforced by and constitutive of their beliefs about teaching and the purposes of PE cannot be separated from their teaching and pedagogical practice (Fernández-Balboa, 2001). Although teachers are expected to develop a professional identity throughout their careers, the construction of this identity should be addressed even before they are immersed in professional life, in other words, it should be addressed in initial teacher training. However, since ITE programmes for primary specialist PE teachers in Spain are characterised by significant variations (Gutiérrez-García & Martínez-Álvarez, 2019), the ITE programme may be a weak intervention for developing a critical professional teacher identity. This study also highlights the considerable diversity of future PE teachers' beliefs about the body, health, pedagogy, critical reflection and the way they embody and incorporate these beliefs into their professional identity. The results suggest a close relationship between previous experiences of PE and the pedagogy they wish to implement in the future, thus corroborating a wealth of previous studies on this topic (see e.g. González-Calvo & Fernández-Balboa, 2018; González-Calvo et al., 2020; Fernández-Balboa, 2001).

In relation to the influence of sport, ITE must stimulate reflection on both the positives and negatives of sport, the similarities and differences between sport and PE and it must develop content knowledge of PE beyond sport to enable teachers to teach beyond sport with some confidence. Sport must be also seen as another tool for generating reflection and experiences in relation to the body (Bernal-García et al., 2018; García-López & Gutiérrez, 2018). With respect to the beliefs about health, it is necessary that future teachers are aware of the global nature of health today and are critical of the social and cultural pressures that are exerted to achieve it (Philpot, 2017; Beltrán-Carrillo & Devís-Devís, 2019). Future teachers must explore the implications of teaching *for* health compared with teaching *about* health. Furthermore, a focus on pedagogy is essential if PE is to advance its position as a relevant subject to enable young people to learn about their body in diverse ways. This requires a multidisciplinary approach to the body at school, which is not always associated with a performance discourse (Tinning, 2010). Finally, a critical orientation is the cornerstone of creating and/or supporting a critical disposition amongst perspective teachers of PE. Reflexively, given that the ITE students are in their third year of study, we cannot be certain if the participants who espoused the importance of inclusion and equity have come to ITE with a critical orientation or whether the PE course they have completed has contributed to this.

Nevertheless, we propose that our study is important because it might further signal the 'emergence' of a new generation of PE teachers whose professional identity is not necessarily subject to corporal and health ideals to the same extent as in the past. Although the findings highlight the continuing influence of sport and physical health on teacher identities, they also suggest that critical thinking and gender equality are emerging in the minds of some of the ITE as a purpose for physical education. This developing critical orientation may be due to an ongoing shift towards a more socially critical ITE PE programme that aims to challenge the development of future professional teacher identities that have previously been built on notions of sport and physical health (Gutiérrez-García & Martínez-Álvarez, 2019). As noted in Virta et al.'s (2019) recent study of Finnish student teachers, perhaps the 'critical orientation' identified in our study suggests the 'emergence of a "new" generation of PE student teachers' (p. 205) also in Spain, whose emerging professional teacher identities advocate for socially critical perspectives and pedagogies for social justice. Although these 'critical identities' have been reported on before (e.g. Wrench & Garrett, 2012; Sirna et al., 2010) we agree with Virta et al. (2019) that there is continued need to provide time

and opportunities during ITE programmes for student teachers to develop knowledge and experiences of socially just teaching practices in PE. To conclude, we call for future studies that explore the connection between personal dimensions of identity – such as gender, socio-cultural and economic context, and physical experiences outside the school – and the development of professional PE teacher identities.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

ORCID

Gustavo González-Calvo  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4637-0168>

Göran Gerdin  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2922-1993>

Rod Philpot  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6556-1413>

David Hortigüela-Alcalá  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-5951-758X>

References

- Atkinson, D. (2004). Theorising how student teachers form their identities in initial teacher education. *British Educational Research Journal*, 30(3), 379–394. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01411920410001689698>
- Beltrán-Carrillo, V., & Devís-Devis, J. (2019). El pensamiento del alumnado inactivo sobre sus experiencias negativas en educación física: los discursos del rendimiento, salutismo y masculinidad hegemónica. *RICYDE. Revista Internacional de Ciencias del Deporte*, 15(55), 20–34. <https://doi.org/10.5232/ricyde2019.05502>
- Beltrán-Carrillo, V. J., Devís-Devis, J., & Pieró-Velert, C. (2018). The influence of body discourses on adolescents' (non)participation in physical activity. *Sport, Education and Society*, 23(3), 257–269. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2016.1178109>
- Bernal-García, A., Grimaldi-Puyana, M., Pérez-Villalba, M., & Fernández-Ponce, J. M. (2018). Professional profile of graduates with a degree in physical activity and sports science in Spain. *Journal of Physical Education and Sport*, 18(3), 1243–1247. <https://doi.org/10.7752/jpes.2018.s3185>
- Bordo, S. (2003). *Unbearable weight: Feminism, western culture, and the body*. University of California Press.
- Brown, D. (2005). An economy of gendered practices? Learning to teach physical education from the perspective of Pierre Bourdieu's embodied sociology. *Sport, Education and Society*, 10(1), 3–23. <https://doi.org/10.1080/135733205298785>
- Bruner, J. (1990). *Acts of meaning: Four lectures on mind and culture (Jerusalem-Harvard Lectures)*. Harvard University Press.
- Buchanan, R. (2015). Teacher identity and agency in an era of accountability. *Teachers and Teaching*, 21(6), 700–719. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2015.1044329>
- Burrows, L. (2016). Ten: "Obesity" warriors in the tertiary classroom. *Counterpoints*, 467, 101–109.
- Casey, A., & Fletcher, M. (2012). Trading places: From physical education teachers to teacher educators. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, 31(4), 362–380. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jtpe.31.4.362>
- De Fina, A., & Georgakopoulou, A. (2008). Analysing narratives as practices. *Qualitative Research*, 8(3), 379–387. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794106093634>
- Delle Fave, A. (2009). Optimal experience and meaning: Which relationship. *Psychological Topics*, 18(2), 285–302.
- Devís-Devis, J., & Sparkes, A. C. (1999). Burning the book: A biographical study of a pedagogically inspired identity crisis in physical education. *European Physical Education Review*, 5(2), 135–152. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1356336X990052005>
- Dowling, F. (2011). 'Are PE teacher identities fit for postmodern schools or are they clinging to modernist notions of professionalism?' A case study of Norwegian PE teacher students' emerging professional identities. *Sport, Education and Society*, 16(2), 201–222. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2011.540425>
- Evans, J. (2003). Physical education and health: A polemic or let them eat cake!. *European Physical Education Review*, 9(1), 87–101. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1356336X03009001182>
- Evans, J. (2013). Physical education as porn!. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, 18(1), 75–89. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17408989.2011.631002>
- Feiman-Nemser, S. (2001). From preparation to practice: Designing a continuum to strengthen and sustain teaching. *Teachers College Record*, 103(6), 1013–1055. <https://doi.org/10.1111/0161-4681.00141>
- Fernández-Balboa, J. M. (2001). Connections, pedagogy and professional learning. *Teaching Education*, 12(1), 103–118. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10476210123847>
- Fernández-Balboa, J. M. (2017). A contrasting analysis of the neo-liberal and socio-critical structural strategies in health and physical education: Reflections on the emancipatory agenda within and beyond the limits of HPE. *Sport, Education and Society*, 22(5), 658–668. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2017.1329142>

- Fontana, F., Furtado, O., Mazzardo, O., Hong, D., & Campos, W. (2017). Anti-fat bias by professors teaching physical education majors. *European Physical Education Review*, 23(1), 127–138. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1356336X16643304>
- Frelin, A. (2013). *Exploring relational professionalism in schools*. Sense Publishers.
- García-López, L. M., & Gutiérrez, D. (2018). Primary physical education in Spain. In G. Griggs & K. Petrie (Eds.), *Handbook of primary physical education* (pp. 285–296). Routledge.
- Gerdin, G., & Pringle, R. (2017). The politics of pleasure: An ethnographic examination exploring the dominance of the multi-activity sport-based physical education model. *Sport, Education and Society*, 22(2), 194–213. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2015.1019448>
- González-Calvo, G., Barbero-González, J. I., Bores-Calle, N., & Martínez-Alvarez, L. (2014). (Re)construction of a teacher's professional identity from his initial training: Autobiographical narration. *The Open Sports Sciences Journal*, 7(Suppl 2, M5), 113–120.
- González-Calvo, G., & Fernández-Balboa, J. M. (2018). A qualitative analysis of the factors determining the quality of relations between a novice physical education teacher and his students' families: Implications for the development of professional identity. *Sport, Education and Society*, 23(5), 491–504. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2016.1208164>
- González-Calvo, G., Hortigüela-Alcalá, D., & Fernández-Balboa, J. M. (2020). Foci and factors that contribute to physical educators' construction of their professional body subjectivities: A qualitative study. *Sport, Education and Society*, 25(3), 292–304. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2019.1578206>
- González-Calvo, G., Varea, V., & Martínez-Álvarez, L. (2019). Health and body tensions and expectations for pre-service physical education teachers in Spain. *Sport, Education and Society*, 24(2), 158–167. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2017.1331426>
- Guba, E., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2005). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluence. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 191–215). Sage.
- Gubrium, J. F., & Holstein, J. A. (2009). *Analyzing narrative reality*. Sage.
- Gutiérrez-García, C., & Martínez-Álvarez, L. (2019). Spain. Physical education teacher education in Spain. In A. MacPhail, D. Tannehill, & Z. Avsar (Eds.), *European physical education teacher education practices* (pp. 360–379). Meyer & Meyer Sport.
- Hagenauer, G., & Volet, S. (2014). 'I don't think I could, you know, just teach without any emotion': Exploring the nature and origin of university teachers' emotions. *Research Papers in Education*, 29(2), 240–262. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02671522.2012.754929>
- Hendry, L. B. (1975). Survival in a marginal role: The professional identity of the physical education teacher. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 26(4), 465–476. <https://doi.org/10.2307/589823>
- Jackson, A., & Mazzei, L. (2009). *Voice in qualitative inquiry: Challenging conventional, interpretive, and critical concepts in qualitative research*. Routledge.
- Johns, D. P. (2005). Recontextualizing and delivering the biomedical model as a physical education curriculum. *Sport, Education and Society*, 10(1), 69–84. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1357332052000298811>
- Karlsson, M. (2013). Emotional identification with teacher identities in student teachers' narrative interaction. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 36(2), 133–146. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2012.686994>
- Keating, X. D., Zhou, K., Liu, J., Shanguan, R., Fan, Y., & Harrison, L. (2017). Research on preservice physical education teachers' and preservice elementary teachers' physical education identities: A systematic review. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, 36(2), 162–172. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jtpe.2016-0128>
- Keyes, C. R. (2002). A way of thinking about parent/teachers partnerships for teachers. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 10(3), 177–191. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966976022000044726>
- Kirk, D., & Colquhoun, D. (1989). Healthism and physical education. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 10(4), 417–434. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0142569890100403>
- Lortie, D. (1975). *Schoolteacher: A sociological study*. University of Chicago Press.
- Luft, J. A., & Roehrig, G. H. (2007). Capturing science teachers' epistemological beliefs: The development of the teacher beliefs interview. *Electronic Journal of Science Education*, 11, 38–63.
- Markula, P., & Chikinda, J. (2016). Group fitness instructors as local level health promoters: A Foucauldian analysis of the politics of health/fitness dynamic. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 8(4), 625–646. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19406940.2016.1220407>
- Mordal Moen, K., Westlie, K., Gerdin, G., Smith, W., Linnér, S., Philpot, R., Schenker, K., & Larsson, L. (2019). Caring teaching and the complexity of building good relationships as pedagogies for social justice in health and physical education. *Sport, Education and Society*, 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2019.1683535>
- Oliver, K. L., & Kirk, D. (2015). *Girls, gender and physical education. An activist approach*. Routledge.
- Orland-Barak, L., & Maskit, D. (2011). Novices 'in story': What first-year teachers' narratives reveal about the shady corners of teaching. *Teachers and Teaching*, 17(4), 435–450. [oi:10.1080/13540602.2011.580520](https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2011.580520)
- Philpot, R. (2017). *Kicking at the habitus: Exploring staff and student 'readings' of a socially critical physical education teacher education (PETE) programme* [Unpublished doctoral thesis]. The University of Auckland.
- Pope, C. (2014). The jagged edge and the changing shape of health and physical education in Aotearoa New Zealand. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, 19(5), 500–511. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17408989.2013.837440>

- Richardson, V. (1996). The role of attitudes and beliefs in learning to teach. In J. Sikula, T. Buttery, & E. Guyton (Eds.), *Handbook of research on teacher education* (2nd ed., pp. 102–119). Macmillan.
- Riessman, C. K. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences*. Sage.
- Schommer-Aikins, M. (2002). An evolving theoretical framework for an epistemological belief system. In B. K. Hofer & P. R. Pintrich (Eds.), *Personal epistemology: The psychology of beliefs about knowledge and knowing* (pp. 103–118). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Sirna, K., Tinning, R., & Rossi, T. (2010). Social processes of health and physical education teachers' identity formation: Reproducing and changing culture. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 31(1), 71–84.
- Smith, W., Philpot, R., Gerdin, G., Schenker, K., Linnér, S., Larsson, L., Mordal Moen, K., & Westlie, K. (2020). School HPE: Its mandate, responsibility and role in educating for social cohesion. *Sport, Education and Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2020.1742103>
- Smith, B., & Sparkes, A. C. (2008). Narrative inquiry in sport and exercise psychology: What can it mean, and why might we do it? *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 10(1), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2008.01.004>
- Thorburn, M. (2014). Values, autonomy and well-being: Implications for learning and teaching in physical education. *Educational Studies*, 40(4), 396–406. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03055698.2014.930338>
- Tinning, R. (2010). *Pedagogy and human movement*. Routledge.
- Tinning, R. (2016). Transformative pedagogies and physical education. In C. Ennis (Ed.), *The Routledge handbook of physical education pedagogies* (pp. 281–294). Routledge.
- Tinning, R. (2019). Troubled thoughts on critical pedagogy for PETE. *Sport, Education and Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2019.1679105>
- Tinning, R., & Glasby, T. (2002). Pedagogical work and the 'cult of the body': Considering the role of HPE in the context of the 'new public health'. *Sport, Education and Society*, 7(2), 109–119. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1357332022000018814>
- Varea, V., González-Calvo, G., & Hortigüela, D. (2019). The influence of consumerism on Spanish physical education teachers. *European Physical Education Review*, 25(4), 949–963. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1356336X18789196>
- Virta, J., Hökkä, P., Eteläpelto, A., & Rasku-Puttonen, H. (2019). Professional identity among student teachers of physical education: The role of physicality. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 42(2), 192–210. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2019.1576628>
- Wrench, A., & Garrett, R. (2012). Identity work: Stories told in learning to teach physical education. *Sport, Education and Society*, 17(1), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2011.607909>