



**The best of both worlds: Exploring the socialisation of
physical education specialism graduates as generalist
teachers with expertise in PE**

By

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Abstract

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There is widespread concern regarding physical education (PE) provision in primary schools by generalist teachers. Since 2012, a cohort of pre-service teachers have graduated annually in Ireland as generalist teachers with subject specific expertise in PE. Four empirical chapters in this thesis examine how socialisation influences PE specialism graduates' (PESGs') confidence, practices, and professional development as PE teachers and leaders.

Guided by self-efficacy theory (Bandura 2012), Study one used a cross-sectional survey to examine PESGs' (n=80) self-efficacy, beliefs and practices in PE. Findings indicated high self-efficacy to teach PE, and the influence of the PE specialism in expanding PESGs' content knowledge. Survey findings also indicated that the teaching environment may present challenges in PESGs provision of PE.

Survey findings informed the next phase of research, semi-structured interviews with PESG's (n=11). Study two explored the impact of teachers' biographies on their view of quality PE (QPE). Although PESGs' prior experiences of PE varied, the specialism supported PESGs to develop more innovative, child-centred views of PE. Study three explored PESGs' integration into the school community – also drawing on interview data (n=11) – examining PESGs' organisational socialisation through a micropolitical literacy lens (Kelchtermans and Ballet 2002a). While teachers appeared eager to contribute to the school community, greater supports may be necessary to scaffold the use of their PE expertise.

A community of practice (CoP) was subsequently developed to support PESGs' (n=5) needs as teachers and leaders of PE. The year-long data collection included group meetings and teacher interviews. Study four revealed that the CoP provided a protected space for PESGs to plan for learning in PE and to collaborate to overcome challenges, empowering them as PE leaders.

Findings suggest PE specialism graduates are confident teachers of PE who value children's learning in PE. PESGs may need further support, however, to apply their skills within schools that place a greater emphasis on sport and physical activity (PA), overcoming the negative influence of organisational socialisation.

Keywords: physical education; physical education teacher education; self-efficacy; occupational socialisation; teacher professional development

Declaration

I hereby declare that:

This thesis is my own work. All quotations from other sources are duly acknowledged and referenced. This document as a whole is not the same as any that I have previously submitted or am currently submitting, whether in published or unpublished form, for a degree, diploma, or similar qualification at any university or third level institution. I am the author of this thesis and the principal author of the four articles which form its core.

Signature: Cillian Brennan

Cillian Brennan

Date: 05/05/2023

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'I am because we are'

The African philosophy of 'Ubuntu' emphasises that we do not exist in isolation. Reflecting on this, I would like to acknowledge and all those who have supported me throughout this PhD journey.

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Finally, to the IPPEA and PDST, thank you for your openness in sharing and supporting me at various stages of the research. I am confident that the future of Irish primary PE is in safe hands.

Míle buíochas

Dedication

*'If I have seen further, it is by standing on the
shoulders of giants'*

Isaac Newton

This thesis is dedicated to:

**All those who have helped me see further, particularly my
family, for their love, support, kindness, and direction.**

I ndíl chuimhne ar mo sheantuismitheoirí



Paddy & Mary Anne Casey

agus

William & Agnes Brennan



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List of Abbreviations

ASF Active School Flag

B. Ed Bachelor of Education

CID Contract of Indefinite Duration

CoP Community of Practice

COVID-19 Coronavirus Disease of 2019

CPD Continuous Professional Development

CSPPA Children's Sport Participation and Physical Activity study

DEIS Delivering Equality of Opportunity In Schools

DES Department of Education and Skills

ECTS European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System

ESRI Economic and Social Research Institute

FMS Fundamental Movement Skills

GAA Gaelic Athletic Association

HEI Higher Education Institutes

ICT Information and Communication Technologies

INTO Irish National Teachers Organisation

ITE Initial Teacher Education

IPPEA Irish Primary Physical Education Association

M Mean

MIREC Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee

NCCA National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

NGB National Governing Body

NQT Newly Qualified Teacher

PA Physical Activity

PAR Participatory Action Research

PDST Professional Development Service for Teachers

PE Physical Education

PESG Physical Education Specialism Graduate

PLC Professional Learning Community

QPE Quality Physical Education

RTA Reflexive Thematic Analysis

SD Standard Deviation

SEN Special Educational Needs

SET Special Education Teacher

SPSS Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

STEM Science, Technology, Engineering, And Mathematics

UK United Kingdom

USA United States of America

UNESCO The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

WHO World Health Organisation

Research Communications

Publications:

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Association for Physical Education in Higher Education Conference. Banff (Online): 7th -10th June 2021 (Oral Presentation)

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Brennan, C., Bowles, R., Murtagh, E., Gonçalves, L.L., & Parker, M., From professional learning community to community of practice: The growth of an online community among primary teachers with a specialism in PE. *International Association for Physical Education in Higher Education Conference*. Queensland (Online): 15th - 18th June 2021 (Oral Presentation)

Brennan, C., Murtagh, E., Bowles, R., Gonçalves, L.L., & Parker, M. 'Sometimes those conversations don't happen in schools': Supporting PE specialism graduates to teach PE through an online learning community. *The International Society for Qualitative Research in Sport and Exercise Student and ECR Online Conference*. Durham: 26th – 27th July 2022 (Poster Presentation)

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This thesis examines the socialisation of graduates of the Bachelor of Education (B. Ed) with a specialism in Physical Education (PE), the process through which teachers' are socialised into their roles, establishing the 'norms, cultures and ideologies deemed important' (Richards and Gaudreault 2017, p.3). The thesis investigates the socialisation of PE specialism graduates (PESGs) at various stages of their development, preceding their entry the B. Ed degree during their acculturation, during their professional socialisation throughout their initial teacher education (ITE), and their organisational socialisation experiences within schools as qualified teachers. This chapter outlines the context and rationale for investigating this cohort of teachers. This includes the challenges that generalist teachers have faced in their provision of quality PE (QPE), and the potential of PESGs to overcome these challenges as subject experts. There are current gaps in the literature to determine if PESGs can positively influence the teaching of PE in primary schools, or if they will need further support to use their skills effectively. This chapter identifies the research aims and objectives for this thesis. An outline of the thesis structure and the areas explored within each chapter is also provided.

1.2 Rationale for thesis

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Charter of Physical Education and Sport (1978) identified PE as a fundamental right, meeting the individual and social needs of children as part of their lifelong education. In many contexts, it appears that children are being denied this right to PE, and it 'seems as though the E in Physical Education, the E in PE, is under attack' (Quennerstedt 2019, p.612). PE has been presented as the 'silver bullet' for many societal problems, and the boundaries of the subject have been blurred by public health and wellbeing discourses (Gray *et al.* 2021; Quennerstedt *et al.* 2021). One of the most significant barriers inhibiting the teaching of QPE, is lack of confidence among generalist teachers (Tsangaridou 2012). This has led to much debate over who is best placed to teach PE in primary schools (Jones and Green 2017; Blair 2018). In the generalist context, low subject status and the blurred subject boundaries have often resulted in teaching being influenced by teachers' prior experiences, reinforcing a perpetual cycle of inadequate PE delivery (Pickup and Randall 2022). PE 'means different things for different people', and it is important to examine teachers'

understanding of PE and how that influences their practices (Capel and Whitehead 2012, p.4).

In the Irish context, ‘there is a gap between the aspirations of the curriculum and reality of teaching and learning experiences’ (Ní Chróinín 2018, p.214). The Children’s Sport Participation and Physical Activity Study (CSPPA) (Woods *et al.* 2018) revealed that 18% of primary school pupils receive less than half of the recommended 60 minutes of curricular PE each week. In addition, findings revealed that PE delivery was dominated by the games strand, with strands such as outdoor and adventure activities, aquatics and gymnastics underrepresented. The challenges faced by generalist teachers in Ireland are similar in other countries such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, United Kingdom (UK) and United States of America (USA) (Fletcher and Mandigo 2012). Teacher related barriers such as poor confidence and competence among teachers, in addition to institutional barriers such as limited facilities and equipment, make the provision of PE more challenging (Houses of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education and Science 2005; Coulter and Woods 2012; Ní Chróinín 2018). As a result, Ireland has followed the international trend of outsourcing PE provision to external providers (Mangione *et al.* 2021), believing that sports coaches are better equipped to meet the needs of children (Ní Chróinín and O’Brien 2019). These services are accepted uncritically, even if it fails to align with the PE curriculum (Bowles and O’Sullivan 2020; Mangione *et al.* 2021). Ní Chróinín (2018, p.214) suggested that:

The importance attributed to sport and physical activity in wider Irish culture and widespread participation seems, to an extent, to compensate for the deficits of primary physical education for some, but not all, children.

There have been calls for the introduction of some form of specialist expertise in the delivery of PE (Ní Chróinín and Murtagh 2009; Fletcher and Mandigo 2012), prompting the introduction of the PE specialism when the B. Ed degree became a four-year course (Waldron *et al.* 2012). The PE specialism offers the opportunity for a small cohort of generalist pre-service teachers to engage in additional PE modules in comparison to their generalist counterparts during initial teacher education (ITE) (Marron *et al.* 2018). This includes further opportunities to reflect on prior experiences of PE, develop content knowledge, engage in practical teaching opportunities and

explore areas such as inclusion in PE (Marron *et al.* 2018). This has also brought anticipation that PESGs may be ‘prepared to develop their capacity as leaders and advocates for the subject without deskilling their colleagues who continue to teach PE’ (Marron *et al.* 2018, p.39). It also brings the potential for a gradual transformation in the delivery of PE in Ireland, with PESGs leading QPE programmes in their schools and supporting other staff (O’Sullivan and Oslin 2012; Ní Chróinín 2018). Although there is limited evidence demonstrating current leadership structures supporting PE provision in Irish primary schools, informal leadership practices such as class swapping have been shown to positively support teachers’ PE provision in schools, using teachers’ expertise effectively (Clohessy *et al.* 2020). While some research has started to investigate this new cohort of teachers (Marron *et al.* 2018), there is a significant research gap in understanding these teachers, their competence and confidence to teach PE, and how they can influence the provision of PE in primary schools. Teacher education also needs to be informed by research, preparing teachers to apply their skills in their continuously changing school environments (Fletcher and Mandigo 2012). This thesis expands the knowledge base informing the preparation and delivery of the PE specialism programme in Irish and international contexts (Lynch and Soukup 2017). While additional teacher education experiences could support PESGs to reach a secure stage of their development, with confidence and competence to teach PE, it remains to be seen if it can help PESGs arrive at the aspirational stage as leaders and advocates of the subject (Randall 2020).

Teacher development can be seen as a lifelong process of socialisation, through which individuals establish professional beliefs and expectations (Richards *et al.* 2019). It considers the dynamic interplay between individuals and socialising agents at different stages of their development. There has been a wide range of research into teacher socialisation in physical education in recent years, as presented by Richards and colleagues (Richards and Gaudreault 2017; Richards *et al.* 2019). Culture and society are continuously changing however, and it is important to continue investigating teachers’ socialisation in a variety of contexts (Richards *et al.* 2014). Although PESGs get the opportunity to expand their PE expertise during the specialism, they enter schools as generalist teachers and will be presented with the same institutional barriers as their generalist counterparts, such as limited equipment, facilities, and a crowded curriculum (Morgan and Hansen 2008a; Ní Chróinín 2018). It

is important to investigate the social processes involved in PESGs' development, how they became PESGs (Curtner-Smith 2016), and how well they are prepared to navigate their school contexts, adapting to their teaching realities as experts in a marginalised subject (Richards *et al.* 2018b). It remains to be seen if PESGs can positively influence the teaching of PE in schools, or if they will be subject to knowledge washout as they struggle to implement their professional learning (Blankenship and Coleman 2009). Further support may be required to build on the foundations of their teacher education, enabling them to cross boundaries and deliver PE built on the needs of children (Jess *et al.* 2022). As PESGs enter the complex landscape of primary PE, negotiating the many influences that shape its provision, it is important to develop an understanding of PESGs' experiences and their learning needs. There have been calls for an increase in research investigating the provision of continuous professional development (CPD) in the Irish context (O'Sullivan and Oslin 2012), while research into professional development models such as learning communities has predominantly focused on secondary PE teachers to this point. Examining generalist teachers' engagement in learning communities provides an important insight into how they negotiate competing demands in their provision of PE (Parker *et al.* 2016).

Finally, it is important to note that this thesis provides an insight into the landscape of primary education during an unprecedented era in global history, the COVID-19 pandemic. In an era of isolation, social distancing and sensitisation, our interactions with the world around us changed drastically. Although this wasn't originally envisaged as part of the thesis, it would have been remiss to overlook its influence on the provision of education, both currently and into the future. During this unpredictable time, educators were forced to adapt to try and maintain the educational foundations of PE (Coulter *et al.* 2021), while it also exacerbated underlying issues that challenged the provision of QPE (Howley 2022). This thesis provides a unique insight into PESGs' journey through these uncertain times.

The research aims and objectives that were developed based on this rationale are presented below. Further justification for the studies in this thesis is provided in the literature review in Chapter 2, and within the context of each relevant study.

1.3 Aim and objectives of thesis

The overall aim of this thesis was to examine the development of PE specialism graduates as teachers and leaders of PE in Irish primary schools. Further details about the purpose of each study are provided in Chapters 4-7, including the rationale for each study and the contribution they make to the field. To develop a greater understanding of PESGs' development, the following objectives were identified:

1. To explore PESGs' self-efficacy to teach PE as generalist teachers with additional expertise.
2. To determine how PESGs' socialisation experiences shaped their understanding of QPE.
3. To examine PESGs' integration into the school context as PE experts and to explore how their expertise is used within schools.
4. To investigate the impact of a learning community on PESGs' progression as PE experts.

1.4 Structure of Thesis

This thesis contains eight chapters as well as supplementary appendices. This introductory chapter provides a brief overview of the rationale for the thesis. Further supporting literature is provided in the literature review in Chapter 2, which presents the context of this thesis in greater detail. Chapter 3 details the research methods applied across the studies in Chapters 4 to 7. Chapters 4 to 7 examine PESGs' development at various stages through a variety of lenses. The purpose of each study is outlined at the beginning of each chapter, in addition to the author's contribution to the study. Chapter conclusions position the study findings within the broader thesis investigation. Supplementary material is available in the appendices. Further details outlining the chapter content is provided below:

Chapter 1:

This chapter provides an introduction to the landscape of primary PE provision and the rationale for undertaking this study. The aims and objectives of the thesis are also included as part of the chapter.

Chapter 2:

This chapter provides a condensed literature review related to primary PE provision in Irish and international contexts, that acts as the foundation for the studies within this thesis. The theoretical framework that guides this thesis is also presented. These areas are then presented in greater detail within the context of each study.

Chapter 3:

This chapter outlines the research methods chosen for this thesis, including the rationale for their selection and a description of how they were applied within the studies.

Chapter 4:

This chapter describes a cross-sectional online survey conducted with PESGs examining their self-efficacy to teach PE, their PE specialism experience, and its influence on their attitudes and beliefs. It also investigated the practices and roles undertaken by PESGs in primary schools. This study has been published in a peer reviewed journal.

Chapter 5:

This chapter investigated PESGs' understandings of QPE, examining the influences that shaped these views, particularly during PESGs' acculturation and professional socialisation. This is the second study in this thesis to have been published in a peer reviewed journal.

Chapter 6:

This chapter examined how PESGs' skills are currently being used in schools, and how PESGs have navigated their micropolitical landscapes as PE experts. It adopted a micropolitical lens to investigate PESGs' organisational socialisation. This study has been prepared for publication.

Chapter 7:

This chapter described the impact of PESGs' long-term engagement with a community of practice (CoP) and how it influenced their organisational socialisation. It also helped to develop a greater understanding of PESGs' needs as PE experts within schools.

Chapter 8:

This chapter presents the findings of the thesis, outlining the contributions this thesis has made to the wider evidence base informing primary PE provision. The policy, practice, and research implications of the thesis findings are also outlined.

Appendices:

This section provides supplementary material that supports the reader's understanding of the thesis studies, including ethical approval, participant information sheets, consent forms, and data generation methods data gathering tools,

Chapter 2

Literature Review

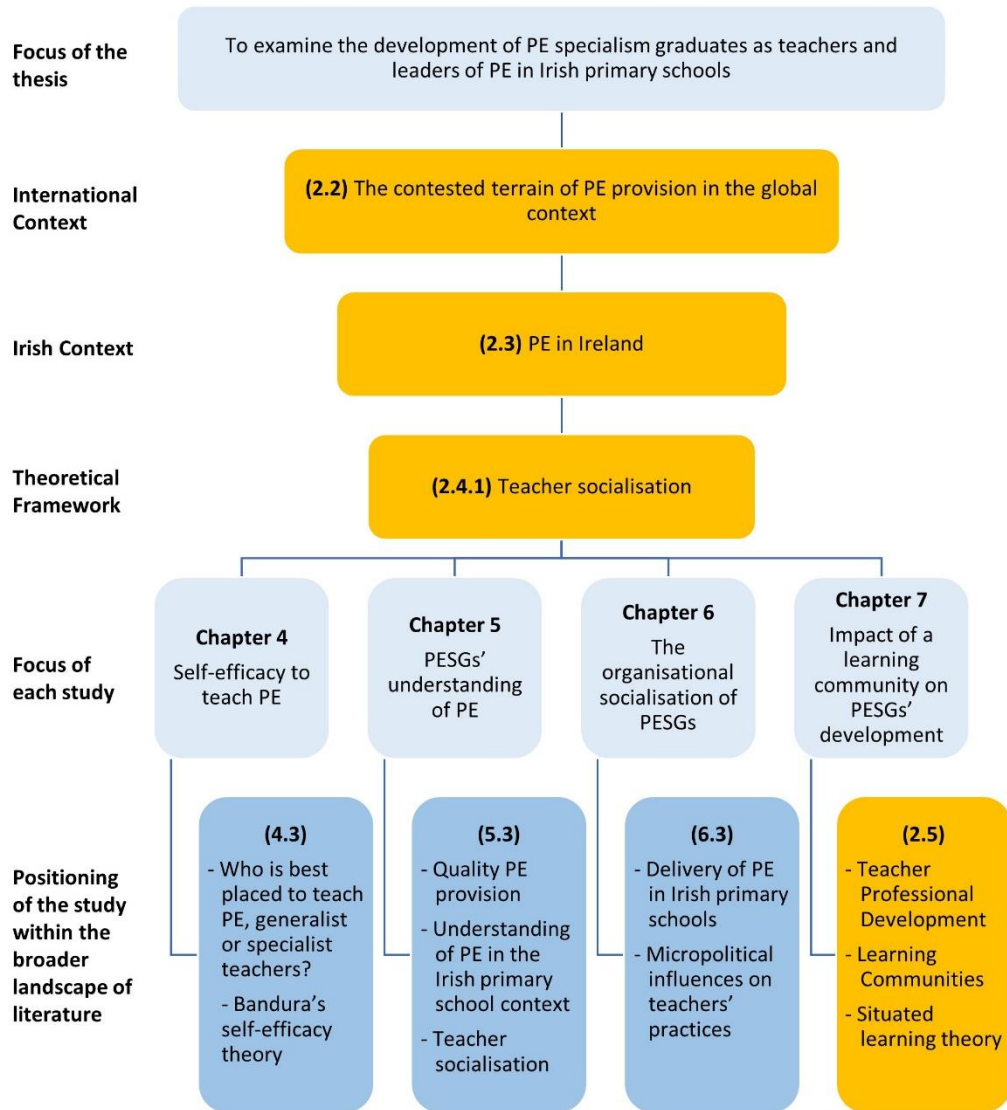
2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a condensed literature review that frames the studies conducted as part of this thesis. The purpose of this literature review is to position this thesis within the existing literature, providing evidence for the need to carry out this investigation (Creswell 2020). As shown in Figure 1, the main focus of the thesis was to examine PESGs' development as teachers and leaders of PE, and this is examined from various standpoints in Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7. This literature review presents the reader with an overview of current research related to teacher development and PE provision in the primary context, helping to 'build a picture or portrait of prior knowledge' that has accumulated around the topic (McGregor 2018, p.3). As highlighted in Figure 1, Section 2.2 and 2.3 help to create this portrait, providing an insight into the contested terrain of primary PE provision both internationally and in Ireland. To examine PESGs' development, it is important to understand teacher education and PE provision in the Irish context, as well as the wider international context and the potential of the novel PE specialism to enhance the provision of PE by generalists. Section 2.4 subsequently examines the theoretical framework that is being used to investigate teachers' development.

The literature examined throughout this chapter was chosen to provide the necessary contextual information to examine the research problem (Wiersma and Jurs 2009). Therefore, the literature review is focused on providing the reader with the necessary tools to examine the studies in Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 in greater detail. As, Chapters 4, 5 and 6 were prepared for publication, a more focused examination of literature was presented within each chapter to provide context for each study. For example, while Section 2.2 provides an initial insight into international debates regarding the provision of PE, Section 4.3 examines the debate regarding who is best placed to teach PE, while Section 5.3 explores competing agendas that influence PE provision. As Chapter 7 is prepared as a traditional chapter, the supporting literature for this study is analysed in Section 2.5. The mapping of the areas of interest as shown in Figure 1, helped to refine the literature review (Creswell 2009), and reduce potential repetition between the literature review and the chapters prepared for publication. While certain studies may fit within the scope of 'teacher development', they were not included in the literature review unless they had a 'discernible bearing on the research

problems’ examined in the subsequent chapters (Shank and Brown 2007, p.32; McGregor 2018).

Figure 1. Overview of literature explored throughout the thesis



2.2 The contested terrain of PE provision in the global context

Before examining teacher development, it is important to acknowledge that primary PE is positioned within a complex, changing landscape, where the value of the subject has to continuously be justified due to its marginalised status (Jess and Carse 2019, p.44). This justification has been provided by UNESCO (1978, p.2), who describe PE as a fundamental right as part of the ‘full development of one’s personality, emphasising that:

The freedom to develop physical, intellectual and moral powers through physical education and sport must be guaranteed both within the educational system and in other aspects of social life.

Although there has been a shifted focus towards children's cognitive, social, emotional and physical learning (Jess and Carse 2019), concerns remain that 'the E in PE, is under attack, and has been so for a while' (Quennerstedt 2019, p.612). While the educational value of PE has been articulated from a variety of academic perspectives (Whitehead 2019; Pickup and Randall 2022), it is positioned within a 'contested terrain' amidst social, political, sport and community influences (Griggs 2018). Within this contested terrain, there is an expectation for PE 'to simultaneously bring about improvements in physical activity (PA) levels, in obesity levels, in rankings in international sporting arenas and in drug-related health and crime statistics' (Penney 2006, p.270). The ideological narratives, however, create aims beyond the scope of PE often overlooking the needs of the child (Quennerstedt *et al.* 2021). For example, while PE is often presented as an avenue to increase long-term sports participation into adulthood, a narrow range of competitive activities can exclude the development of many students, recreating a 'monoculture of looks-like-sport' (Ward and Quennerstedt 2016, p.150; Ward 2018; Walsh 2019), unless teachers are prepared to reconsider their classification of games and sport to broaden children's learning and participation possibilities (Ward 2018; O'Connor *et al.* 2022). Similar principals apply in the relationship between PE and health, where lobbyists in the 'war on obesity' transform the provision of PE to a calorie burning bootcamp or exercise regime (Powell 2018). While PE can make contributions to many of these areas and children's holistic health and participation in sport and PA, these many influences create tensions that make PE a challenging subject for teachers to deliver (Ward and Quennerstedt 2015). Whitehead (2019, p.99) suggests that 'fundamentally physical education is educative in that it develops the embodied potential of the learner. The subject area needs no further justification'. QPE guidelines have been presented to help direct policy makers (McLennan and Thompson 2015), although such approaches often fail to permeate into teachers' attitudes and practices within schools (Williams and Pill 2018). It is clear that within this contested landscape, a common vision is necessary to guide the future of PE and support children to fulfil their potential (Jess *et al.* 2016). In doing so, it is important to identify the main stakeholders responsible for delivering primary PE. Just

as the content within PE is contested, however, so too is the discussion regarding who is best placed to teach PE (Jones and Green 2017). The UNESCO (1978) charter states that PE should be taught by ‘qualified personnel’. While this has been specialist teachers in some cases (Jones and Green 2017), it has predominantly been recognised as generalist teachers in the primary school context, responsible for teaching all curricular areas without having specialised knowledge in PE (Blair 2018). Given that the time allocated towards ITE in PE is often limited (Keay and Randall 2022), these teachers have presented with poor confidence and competence to teach PE (Morgan and Bourke 2008; Tsangaridou 2012). The assemblage of inadequate teacher confidence and competing agendas within PE has facilitated the infiltration of neoliberal ideologies across the globe, with an increasing volume of external coaches given responsibility for the delivery of PE (Sperka and Enright 2018). As shown in Figure 1, further literature related to these challenges will be explored in greater detail in Section 4.3, Section 5.3 and Section 6.3. The following section presents the context of Irish primary PE and how it is positioned within this contested terrain.

2.3 PE in Ireland

UNESCO’s world-wide survey of school PE recommends that PE curricula should be built on children’s needs, providing opportunities for progression, and enhance children’s ‘knowledge, understanding and movement skills in a variety but balanced range of physical activities’ (Hardman *et al.* 2014, p.122). Many of these recommendations are reflected in the Irish curriculum which is ‘positioned within an educational rather than a sport or health discourse’ (Ní Chróinín 2018, p.206). The curriculum outlines that:

Physical education meets the physical needs of the child and the need for movement experiences, challenges and play. It develops a desire for daily physical activity and encourages constructive use of free time and participation in physical activities in adult life. To fulfil these needs, physical education is built on the principles of variety and diversity, not of specialisation. It provides a wide variety of movement activities appropriate to the level of development of the child (Government of Ireland 1999b, p.2)

The principles of the curriculum as described above, are enacted through six strands; athletics, dance (creative and folk), games, gymnastics, outdoor and adventure

activities, and aquatics (Government of Ireland 1999b). It has been acknowledged however, that there are ‘huge variances in the delivery of PE’ (Houses of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education and Science 2005, p.5), with reports suggesting that the ideals of the curriculum fail to transpire effectively in teaching and learning in the classroom (Ní Chróinín 2018). Despite these concerns, the Inspectorate (2022) recently reported the ‘attainment of learning objectives was good or very good in 91% of (PE) lessons observed during announced inspections’. It is unclear however if these ‘announced inspections’ provide a true reflection on practice across the broader landscape. Research related to the frequency, duration and the range of curriculum content delivered presents a contrasting image. It is recommended that Irish children are provided with 60 minutes of curricular PE per week in primary school (Government of Ireland 1999b). In 2014, Hardman *et al.* (2014) reported that Irish primary school students receive an average of 59 minutes of PE each week, however this can range from 30-80 minutes of PE within schools. More recent reports from the CSPPA study however, reveal that ‘almost one in five primary school pupils report receiving 30 minutes or less of PE per week’ (Woods *et al.* 2018, p.54). This study also highlighted that strands such as outdoor and adventure activities, gymnastics and aquatics are often overlooked within schools, while the games strand dominated (Woods *et al.* 2018). Further findings from the Chief Inspector’s Report on behalf of the Department of Education Inspectorate, revealed that ‘insufficient emphasis was placed on the progressive development of skills in the strands of dance and outdoor and adventure activities’ (Inspectorate 2022, p.123). Contextual factors such as facilities, infrastructure and resources available make the implementation of the curriculum more challenging, with 19% of school principals reporting not having access to an ‘on-site indoor space’ (Woods *et al.* 2010), with weather conditions making these shortfalls increasingly challenging (Houses of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education and Science 2005; Ní Chróinín 2018). If schools did have indoor spaces, these were often repurposed during the COVID-19 pandemic ‘as classrooms, staffrooms or storage areas’ (Inspectorate 2022, p.122), magnifying the exiting barriers to PE provision on a greater scale (Howley 2022). Despite the strong educational foundations presented, teachers’ practices reflect a more unsettled picture.

2.3.1 Who teaches PE in Irish primary schools?

In Irish primary schools, the classroom teacher is responsible for teaching all curricular areas, including PE, and ‘the teacher does not need to be a specialist in the teaching of PE’ (Government of Ireland 1999b). Coulter and Ní Chróinín (2022) recently presented the argument for the use of generalist teachers, based on their suitability to meet children’s needs:

‘The more the teacher knows about the child, the better. Generalist teachers have developed knowledge and understandings of the children in their classes over time and have fostered personal relationships with them. These established personal relationships act as a springboard to listen to children’s positions and to guide lesson planning’ (Coulter and Ní Chróinín 2022, p.35)

Despite this understanding of children however, teachers in the Irish context have acknowledged that they ‘lack the knowledge, skills and qualifications to teach PE effectively’ (Fletcher and Mandigo 2012, p.372). It has been acknowledged that ‘many teachers do not feel competent and confident teaching PE’ (Ní Chróinín and Murtagh 2009, p.49; Murphy and O’Leary 2012), and this is reflected in the use of external coaches to deliver PE in primary schools (Mangione *et al.* 2020). The use of these coaches, predominantly from National Governing Bodies (NGB), is a matter of contention, as their pedagogical skills and knowledge of the primary school curriculum varies greatly and ‘no Irish NGB has educated their coaches in the curriculum guidelines’ (Ní Chróinín 2018, p.211). The ultimate responsibility lies with the class teacher, as it is recommended that schools view this coaching as a ‘welcome added extra’ rather than the child’s source of PE (Government of Ireland 1999a; Houses of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education and Science 2005, p.23). This external coaching is dominated by Gaelic games, followed by swimming and dance (Mangione *et al.* 2020). Understandably, aquatics cannot be provided within schools due to the lack of suitable facilities, but the reliance on external coaching across strands has created a system where ‘teachers were not in charge of significant elements of the selection and/or enactment of the PE curriculum’ (Mangione *et al.* 2021, p.15). These services are often accepted uncritically within schools (Bowles and O’Sullivan 2020), with the external coaches recognised by teachers as having greater expertise, better equipped to deliver PE (Ní Chróinín and O’Brien 2019). Improved communication is

needed between stakeholders to ensure children's learning is supported in PE (Ní Chróinín and O'Brien 2019). These findings reflect the policy slippage in the teaching of PE in Irish primary schools. While the Inspectorate acknowledged that the use of external coaches has been shown to contribute to an imbalanced delivery of the curriculum, the 'use of external coaches to support the PE curriculum remained a decision for individual boards of management' (Inspectorate 2022). The delivery of PE lacks leadership, with leadership structures placing a greater emphasis on administrative tasks, rather than the sharing of expertise and skills (Department for Education and Skills 2014). This formalised system makes it 'more challenging for teachers outside of these posts to become autonomous and take on leadership roles' (Clohessy 2017, p.44). While the work of Clohessy *et al* (2019; 2020) has presented the potential impact of informal leadership practices such as class swapping in schools, generalist teachers' positioning as lead teachers and classroom teachers make the development of these practices challenging. Given teachers' desire for support with PE provision, it is important to examine their teacher education experiences.

2.3.1.1 Teacher education in Ireland

The Teaching Council's ITE criteria and guidelines for programme providers includes Numeracy, Literacy, Gaeilge and other pedagogical and sociological subjects as mandatory components of ITE, however PE fails to be mentioned (Teaching Council 2017). Therefore, the PE training during ITE varies greatly among programme routes and institutions. Across the Republic of Ireland, the four-year Bachelor of Education programme contains 30 to 50 hours of PE teacher training, while on the Postgraduate Masters of Education programme, 20 to 30 hours are allocated to the PE teacher training (Ní Chróinín 2018). Although this time allocation is 'generous in comparison to other ITE providers across Europe' (Murphy *et al.* 2021, p.762), there is a limited breadth and depth of knowledge that can be achieved within this time. Pre-service teachers are beginning to reflect on the importance of PE and recognise its educational foundations, but moving their understanding beyond sport and health ideologies remains a challenge during ITE (Ní Chróinín and Coulter 2012; Coulter and Ni Chroinin 2013; Murphy *et al.* 2021). In response to such challenges, there have been recommendations for some sort of specialisation in the delivery of Irish primary (Ní Chróinín and Murtagh 2009; Fletcher and Mandigo 2012). This has resulted in the development of the PE specialism programme, which is outlined below.

2.3.1.2 PE specialism

When the primary education B. Ed degree was increased to a four-year course in 2012, a major PE specialism was introduced in two HEIs in the Republic of Ireland (Marron *et al.* 2018). As part of the PE specialism, approximately 55 generalist pre-service teachers each year get the opportunity to engage in ‘90 to 150 additional hours of PE modules’ in comparison to their non-specialism generalist counterparts (Ní Chróinín 2018, p.211). Table 1 provides an overview of the core and specialism PE modules offered in one HEI in the Republic of Ireland, as outlined by Marron *et al.* (2018). It has created greater opportunities for pre-service teachers to reflect on their prior understandings of PE, develop their PE knowledge and skills, and support them to become leaders of PE within schools (Marron *et al.* 2018). This additional training has afforded further time to engage in practical teaching during ITE, an extremely important aspect of teachers’ development (Marron *et al.* 2018; Murphy *et al.* 2021). As generalist teachers with expertise in PE, it was envisaged that these teachers would become a source of expertise within staff, who could act as ‘leaders and advocates for the subject without deskilling their colleagues who continue to teach PE’ (Marron *et al.* 2018, p.39). Given the recent introduction of the programme, there has been limited research into its delivery, its impact on pre-service teachers and the provision of PE in Irish primary schools. There have been some similar approaches to teacher education in other international contexts. For example, among the variety of pathways for teacher education in Norway (MacPhail *et al.* 2019), the recent introduction of specialised content courses have been shown to positively impact pre-service teachers’ teaching (Olufsen *et al.* 2021). Lynch (2015) described a specialism programme in England that had been recognised for developing partnerships that allowed students to apply theory in ITE within local schools and organisations. In Cyprus, pre-service generalist teachers are required to specialise in two curricular areas in fourth year supporting teachers to develop their self-awareness and enhance their PE teaching (Tsangaridou 2016). In all contexts where generalist teachers are responsible for teaching PE, Tsangaridou (2016) recommends that opportunities for specialisation should be presented, supporting the implementation of effective ITE for PE. While the PE specialism has the potential to support teachers’ development during ITE, CPD is also required to support the improvement of PE provision in schools, as presented in the next section.

Table 1. Core and Specialism PE modules – Institute of Education DCU (Marron *et al.* 2018)

Year 1	Year 2			Year 3		Year 4
	<i>Core</i>	<i>Core</i>	<i>Specialism</i>	<i>Specialism</i>	<i>Specialism</i>	<i>Specialism</i>
Physical Education	Child Development, Health and Wellbeing through PE	Theory, Practice and Fundamental Skill Development	Teaching the PE Curriculum	Curriculum and Inclusion	Outdoor Learning in PE	Subject Leadership in PE
ED1015	ED2019	AP204	AP205	AP301	AP302	AP401
2.5 ECTS	2.5 ECTS	5ECTS	5ECTS	5ECTS	5ECTS	5ECTS

European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), 2.5ECTS = 24 hours contact time

2.3.1.3 CPD in Ireland

It has been acknowledged that many primary school teachers in Ireland have had limited engagement with CPD that supports their PE teaching (Coulter and Woods 2012). Some CPD courses are made available for teachers during the summer holidays with the enticement of ‘three personal days in lieu during the school year’, however, participation is not obligatory and therefore they may not be reaching the teachers who need it most (Ní Chróinín 2018, p.212). There have previously been some examples of effective professional development to support primary school teachers, with the establishment of teacher professional communities by the Irish Primary Physical Education Association (IPPEA) and regional education centres (Parker *et al.* 2012). These communities created networks of teachers who share a common interest in PE, and create opportunities for them to develop their ‘knowledge and skills’ while also making them aware of available resources, supports and developments in the area (Parker *et al.* 2012, p.314). Coulter and Woods (2012) also demonstrated that CPD which focuses on specific curricular areas such as outdoor and adventure activities has also facilitated in-depth learning for teachers, situated in their school context. They also reemphasised however, that ‘professional development opportunities must be foremost in policy-makers’ minds’ (Coulter and Woods 2012, p.341).

There have been a range of initiatives introduced in recent years to promote the delivery of PE, predominantly positioned within health and PA discourses. The Department of Education and Skills (DES) initiative, the Active School Flag (ASF), promotes the quality provision of PE in schools (McMullen *et al.* 2015). Schools are recognised for their efforts to create a ‘physically educated and physically active school community’ (McMullen *et al.* 2015, p.389; Woods *et al.* 2018). Almost one quarter of Irish primary schools had ASF status by 2018, meeting the requirements of a ‘broad and balanced physical education programme; addressing deficits in the provision of physical education; and providing at least 60 minutes of physical education a week’ (Ní Chróinín 2018, p.213; Woods *et al.* 2018). While this has been achieved with limited support, greater access to ‘advice and supports from personnel with expertise and knowledge’ is necessary to build a more sustainable model (McMullen *et al.* 2015, p.389). Further examples of CPD include workshops developed by the IPPEA in collaboration with the Professional Development Service

for Teachers (PDST) (Parker *et al.* 2012). The PDST have also seconded primary teachers, focused on ‘up-skilling their colleagues working in schools on numerous areas and providing associated resources’ (Tannehill *et al.* 2020, p.163). One of these areas is the teaching of fundamental movement skills (FMS) as part of the Move well Move Often programme, enhancing children’s physical literacy (Inspectorate 2022). Although these CPD opportunities can provide useful supports, their position within health and PA discourses could limit the progression of the subject if teachers ‘are not also made aware of the broad spectrum of learning outcomes that are achievable in and through physical education’ (Murphy and McEvoy 2020, p.1333). There is a need for CPD to support teachers’ implementation of a more balanced curriculum (Inspectorate 2022), and ‘without sustained and structured’ support, these problems will continue for generalist teachers (O’Sullivan and Oslin 2012, p.247)

The complex landscape of PE provision in Ireland has been presented, but it is also important to acknowledge that PE is going through a period of change in Ireland. There has been increased emphasis on PE from a policy level, with findings from the Economic and Social Research Institute’s (ESRI) Growing Up in Ireland study (2018) emphasising the need for QPE provision. Furthermore the ‘Get Ireland Active, National Physical Activity Plan for Ireland’ identified that by 2020, there should be a fully implemented PE curriculum ‘for all primary and post-primary pupils to meet Department of Education and Skills guidelines’ (Department of Health 2016, p.19). The focus of this in practice, however, has mainly been at secondary level, with PE introduced as an examinable Leaving Certificate subject (MacPhail and Murphy 2017). While this is a promising development with an increased significance for PE in a student’s life, students often arrive to secondary schools with a very limited experience of PE (Macphail and Halbert 2005). There is hope that the new primary curriculum framework, which is currently in development, will result in an increased time allocation for PE provision (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment 2020). Teachers need support however, to become change agents in the delivery of new curricula, and suitable CPD will need to be provided (Carse 2015). It remains to be seen if the introduction of the curriculum framework and the development of PESGs can support the evolution of PE beyond its current standards.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

It is clear from the preceding sections that there are many factors which influence teachers' development and the provision of PE within schools. A variety of frameworks have been presented to conceptualise this development, examining aspects of teachers' development such as 'becoming a teacher, personal effectiveness, and developing a professional identity' (Veenman 1984, p.159). Models and frameworks examining teacher development have ranged from concerns-based models (Fuller 1969; Fuller and Bown 1975), to social learning theories such as teacher socialisation (Lacey 1977; Lortie 2002) and situated learning theories (Vygotsky 1962; Vygotsky 1978; Lave and Wenger 1991), to the recent introduction of models such as complexity theory (Jess *et al.* 2011; Opfer and Pedder 2011),

The work of Fuller and colleagues (Fuller 1969; Fuller and Bown 1975) presents teacher development across three stages, as teachers' priorities transition from survival (as they establish themselves as a teacher), to mastery (as they try to teach well), before they finally focus on pupil outcomes. Despite this concerns-based model presenting teachers' development as a journey outward, guided by external concerns, it has been argued that this development is achieved in tandem with self-oriented concerns, as teachers examine their own growth as teachers and people (Conway and Clark 2003). The framework presents teacher development as a sequential process, with teachers advancing between stages by addressing the necessary concerns at each stage (Veenman 1984). In contrast, recent conceptualisations of teacher development such as complexity theory, argue that teacher development is a much more dynamic process, and that there 'are many different ways of achieving the same learning effects' (Opfer and Pedder 2011, p.394). Complexity theory suggests that teacher education needs to account for the variety of influences that shape a complex learning system for teachers, moving beyond the linear approach (Mooney Simmie *et al.* 2017). This recursive process of teacher development has been applied in the context of PE (Keay *et al.* 2019), highlighting teachers' self-organising strategies as they negotiate boundaries in their professional lives. To support teachers' capacity to negotiate these boundaries, it is important that the initial conditions of teachers are recognised and appreciated during the learning process (Keay *et al.* 2019). This will help them to

understand the messiness of learning and support their development as teachers throughout their careers (Jess *et al.* 2011).

Much of the recent research into teacher development is built upon contextually oriented frameworks, particularly the understanding that teacher learning takes place in social spaces (Darling-Hammond *et al.* 2017). These models include experiential learning theories such as problem and inquiry-based learning, emerging from the work of philosophers such as Kolb (1984), Dewey (1916), Piaget (1968) and Vygotsky (1962; 1978). Vygotsky's zone of proximal development has been applied to teacher development, presenting it as a 'situated, more transformative approach to teacher development', progressively challenging teachers as reflective practitioners (Warford 2011, p.257). Similarly, Dewey's experiential learning theory sees development as a continuous and ongoing process, facilitated through the process of reflection (Dewey 1916). As teachers negotiate experiences in their daily lives, they are always learning, actively engaging in meaning making (Pekarsky 1990). In applying a Deweyan framework towards teacher development in PE, it is important that 'the core focus of CPD is practice itself', creating opportunities for reflection and continuous learning (Armour *et al.* 2017). These conceptual frameworks see teacher learning as an active process, as teachers engage with experiences and influences throughout their daily lives.

A further theoretical framework that has continued to inform teacher education in generalist and specialist contexts, particularly within PE, is teacher socialisation (Schaefer *et al.* 2017). Built on the work of Lortie (2002) and Lacey (1977), teacher socialisation examines teachers' development from their recruitment, to their pre-service teacher education, to their subsequent development throughout their careers (Templin 1979). While teacher socialisation was originally presented as a linear, top-down form of learning, as teachers were moulded by their socially situated experiences, it is now recognised as a dynamic, agentic process, through which individuals negotiate these influences (Lawson 2016). Although the perpetual cycle of non-teaching practices in PE has often been blamed on the negative influence of teacher socialisation (Curtner-Smith 2009), socialisation can also positively support the advancement of standards beyond existing practices (Kearney 2015), and therefore warrants careful investigation. Given the breadth of PE research positioned within

teacher socialisation (Schaefer *et al.* 2017), it was chosen as the theoretical framework for this thesis, facilitating comparison between this new cohort of PESGs and existing findings. The continuously changing social landscape also means that it is important to continue investigating new generations of teachers, and their experiences of socialisation (Lawson 2016). The next section provides a greater insight into teacher socialisation theory and its significance in PE teacher education.

2.4.1 Teacher socialisation

The study of teacher socialisation stems from the broader occupational socialisation theory which examines how individuals assimilate into professions in a variety of contexts (Richards *et al.* 2019). The investigation of occupational socialisation was subsequently focused on teacher development by researchers such as Lortie (2002) and Lacey (1977), and PE teacher development by researchers such as Lawson (1983a; 1983b) Templin and Schempp (1989); Schempp and Graber (1992) and more recently Curtner-Smith (1997); (2008) and Richards *et al.* (2014); (2019). In the context of PE, Lawson (1986, p.107) described teacher socialisation as ‘all kinds of socialisation that initially influence persons to enter the field of physical education and later are responsible for their perceptions and actions as teacher educators and teachers’. Throughout their lives, teachers have had to negotiate a variety of influencing factors that shape their view of teaching PE. Individuals’ interactions with these socialising influences is predominantly organised into three main phases; *acculturation*, *professional socialisation*, and *occupational socialisation* (Lawson 1983b; Richards *et al.* 2014; Templin *et al.* 2016).

Before examining each phase of the socialisation process, it is important to acknowledge the role of self within socialisation, ‘socialisation is a subjective process’ (Lortie 2002, p.61). Although teacher socialisation was traditionally seen as a passive process through which individuals were socialised into their respective roles (Templin and Richards 2014), it is evident that there is individual agency in the dynamic interplay between teachers and the socialising influences (Schempp and Graber 1992; Templin and Richards 2014). Lawson (1983b, p.4) suggested that within this ‘social tug of war between institutions and people; each has the capacity to shape the other’. It is difficult however, for individuals who ‘do not have the formal power to challenge organisational structures’ (Richards *et al.* 2014, p.114). As a result, it often means that

‘a way of doing things often becomes the way’ (Lawson 1983b, p.4). These restrictions will sometimes require individuals to use covert strategies to resist rather than comply with these constraints (Curtner-Smith 1997). The subsequent sections provide an overview of the phases of teacher socialisation, including the role of the individual and how they interact with socialising agents throughout the process.

2.4.1.1 Acculturation

Acculturation is the pre-training phase of socialisation. This includes all experiences that shapes an individual’s understanding of the profession from birth until entering teacher education (Lawson 1983b). Lortie’s (2002) ‘apprenticeship of observation’ suggests that prospective teachers develop their understanding of the teaching profession through their experiences as students. In addition, as these individuals establish their expectations of the demands associated with teaching, they develop a ‘subjective warrant’ (Lawson 1983b). As they consider if their self-perceptions match these expectations, individuals qualify or disqualify themselves within the job criteria, attracting them to the profession if deemed suitable (Lortie 2002). Prospective teachers’ views are considered to have a lasting influence on teachers’ practices and development (Schempp 1989) but are ‘often distorted because they are exposed to only a limited view of the technical culture of teaching’ (Richards *et al.* 2014, p.115). Interestingly, if teachers do not feel that their school experiences reflected examples of a ‘master teacher’, they will draw on experiences from other areas of interest (Schempp 1989). Interactions with a variety of social, cultural and political factors as well as family members, peers, coaches, and teachers also shape these perceptions, and ultimately influence their decision to enter the teaching profession (Lortie 2002; Richards *et al.* 2014; Curtner-Smith 2016). Therefore, some individuals may develop subjective warrants that do not reflect the realities of the role. This can influence the dialectical engagement with subsequent phases of socialisation, during teacher education or as a qualified teacher.

Through individuals’ apprenticeship of observation and subjective warrants, teaching recruits develop orientations that align their expectations with particular practices (Lawson 1983a; Lawson 1983b). These orientations were originally categorised as coaching orientations and teaching orientations, although more recently teachers’ orientations have been positioned on ‘a continuum from highly teaching

oriented to highly coaching oriented' (Richards *et al.* 2014, p.117). Lawson (1983a; 1983b) outlined that recruits with teaching orientations are more focused on supporting children's learning in PE through teaching activities, while recruits with coaching orientations associate their PE teaching role with sports coaching, with some seeing it as a gateway to a coaching role. Research has suggested that recruits with sporting backgrounds are more likely to have coaching orientations, with a non-teaching perspective guiding their practices (Curtner-Smith *et al.* 2008; Morgan and Hansen 2008b; Ralph and MacPhail 2014). These coaching orientations are also often described as custodial, 'maintaining the status quo and use of traditional teaching methodologies', while innovative teachers are open to the continuous development and adaptation of their practices to meet learners' needs (Richards *et al.* 2014, p.114). Given the close association between sports and PE within cultures, there are concerns that many recruits will enter teaching education with coaching or custodial orientations (Curtner-Smith 2016). Teachers' acculturation is sometimes presented as the strongest phase of teachers' socialisation, filtering the way in which individuals interpret socialising experiences during subsequent phases (Schempp 1989; Curtner-Smith *et al.* 2008; Richards *et al.* 2014). This presents a danger of a perpetual cycle of teacher beliefs and practices (Lortie 2002; Curtner-Smith 2016) creating a 'snowballing effect' (Lawson 1983a, p.10) that is difficult to overcome due to the intergenerational nature of socialisation (Richards *et al.* 2019). Maintaining a balance between teaching and orientations could present the 'sweet spot' for PE teachers as they maintain curricular and extracurricular foci (Curtner-Smith 2016). Professional socialisation could present an opportunity to successfully achieve this as described in the next section.

2.4.1.2 Professional Socialisation

Professional socialisation is teachers' pre-service socialisation experience during teacher education (Lawson 1983b). It is considered 'the primary mechanism for influencing how undergraduate students were socialised into the teaching profession (Graber *et al.* 2016, p.63). It provides an opportunity for teaching recruits to establish the professional ideals outlined by ITE faculty and put it into practice (Lawson 1983b). As previously mentioned however, pre-service teachers will carry predispositions from their acculturation that will influence how they interpret this information (Richards *et al.* 2014). Schempp and Graber (1992, p.330) described this dialectical process

‘involving the confrontation of contending propositions [thesis and antithesis] that ultimately resolve into a synthesis of perspectives and actions of a new and unique design’. A concern for teacher education is that some recruits will comply with ideals to satisfy grading requirements, while ‘their beliefs about teaching remain relatively unchanged’ (Richards *et al.* 2014, p.118). Pre-service teachers appear to be more receptive to knowledge and information presented during their professional socialisation, while those with coaching orientations predominantly have stronger custodial ideals that are difficult to disrupt (Curtner-Smith 2016). It is important that ITE acknowledges teachers’ acculturation and provides opportunities for pre-service teachers to reflect on these prior experiences (Haynes *et al.* 2016). Field experiences have also been established as an important part of ITE (Richards *et al.* 2013; Murphy *et al.* 2021). If practices observed within schools fail to align with faculty ideals however, it may negate the positive influence of ITE (Richards *et al.* 2018b). This adds a further element to ITE, where pre-service teachers must be prepared to negotiate the realities of school life (Richards *et al.* 2013). Establishing a shared technical culture is extremely important in ensuring that pre-service teachers receive consistent messages that align with best practice, both during ITE and in schools (Lortie 2002; Richards *et al.* 2014). Effective teacher education practices can help teachers to establish a teaching identity that they may not have previously understood from their acculturation (Fletcher *et al.* 2013). Just as teachers have to be prepared to withhold the influence of school organisations during ITE, they must also be suitably equipped to do so in their long-term practice as qualified teachers. Teachers’ organisational socialisation is presented in the next section.

2.4.1.3 Organisational Socialisation

Organisational socialisation is the process through which an individual ‘learns the ropes of a particular organisational role’ (Van Maanen and Schein 1977). It includes all experiences throughout a teacher’s career from induction to retirement as they continue the dialectical process between teacher and school culture (Schempp and Graber 1992). Lawson (1983a) explained that as teachers progress from their professional socialisation, the multitude of often conflicting influences can lead to the ideals of teacher education not being enacted. For example, for those who held custodial orientations entering teacher education, there is a danger that the school

environment presents ‘a return to familiar territory’, with teacher education merely marking a brief interruption (Lawson 1983a, p.7). Alternatively, for teachers who held teaching orientations, these school environments may cause ‘reality shock’ if the school context does not reflect their expectations (Veenman 1984). If schools do not value these innovative orientations, teachers may ‘refrain from using the skills and activities learned in pre-service’ training’ contributing to workplace ‘wash-out’ (Blankenship and Coleman 2009, p.98). From the moment a teacher enters a school, they are continuously negotiating a variety of influences, such as the facilities available to them, cultural practices, and the social-professional relationship with other school staff (Kelchtermans and Ballet 2002b). Some teachers may engage in ‘strategic compliance’ where they assimilate with existing practice within the organisation in an effort to survive (Lacey 1977). Another challenge may be the competing demands placed upon teachers in schools who are expected to undertake coaching roles in custodial schools, creating a teacher/coach role conflict due to clashes between school expectations and teachers’ beliefs (Richards and Templin 2012). Many of these influences can result in teachers’ practices becoming reactive to the context in which they are applying them (Green 2002), and if presented with obstacles to teaching QPE as teachers, practices may be guided by teachers’ acculturation (Morgan and Hansen 2008b; Haynes *et al.* 2016; Barber *et al.* 2022). The perceived importance of PE within schools plays a key role in teachers’ identity development, and if their skills are overlooked, it can lead to isolation, marginalisation, reduced job satisfaction and teacher burnout (Gaudreault *et al.* 2018). It is important to note however, that just as the negative influences of organisational socialisation have been presented, the converse is also true. Providing novice teachers with induction support and collegiality, where they feel trusted and competent can help them to manage reality shock and promote positive practices (Lux and McCullick 2011; Ferry and Westerlund 2022).

The studies presented in this thesis examine PESGs’ socialisation from a variety of perspectives and there were a number of supporting theoretical frameworks utilised, as described below.

2.4.2 Supporting theoretical frameworks

A number of social learning theories were used to complement the investigation of teachers' socialisation throughout this thesis. These included Bandura's self-efficacy theory (1977; 1997; 2006; 2012) in Chapter 4, Kelchtermans & Ballet's (2002a) concept of 'micropolitical literacy' in Chapter 6, and Lave and Wenger's (1991) situated learning theory in Chapter 7. These social learning theories facilitated the investigation of various elements of teachers' development at different stages of their socialisation. Further details are provided on each theoretical framework within the context of each study.

The next section examines teachers' professional development and how they can be supported through effective professional development, particularly during the organisational socialisation phase.

2.5 Teacher Professional Development

It is clear from the literature, that the development of teachers' knowledge is a 'complex and on-going process' (Randall 2020, p.143). As outlined by Armour *et al.* (2017, p.806): 'a PE teacher can never be considered as a finished teacher, but instead always in the process of becoming a teacher'. Figure 1 provided an overview of the aspects of teachers' development examined throughout this thesis, and due to the broad scope of this foundational study of PESGs, it was not feasible to examine all aspects of teacher development. The development of teachers' self-efficacy is examined in Chapter 4, the influence of biographical experiences and ITE on teachers' understanding of PE was examined in Chapter 5, while Chapter 6 examined PESGs' professional development within their school contexts. These areas were chosen due to their relevance to prominent debates related to teacher development in PE, particularly teachers' confidence to teach PE (Morgan and Bourke 2008; Tsangaridou 2012; Elliot *et al.* 2013; Dyson *et al.* 2016; Jones and Green 2017), the disconnect between PE and its educational foundations (Lynch and Soukup 2016; Gray *et al.* 2021; Quennerstedt *et al.* 2021), as well as the challenge of applying ITE learnings as qualified teachers (Blankenship and Coleman 2009; Ensign and Mays Woods 2017; Richards *et al.* 2018a). The importance of providing suitable professional development to support teachers navigate their complex teaching realities is also a prominent issue (Patton *et al.* 2015). Literature relevant to teachers' professional development is presented in the

subsequent sections, providing context for the study in Chapter 7, which examines the influence of continued engagement with a CoP on PESGs' development.

2.5.1 Effective Professional Development

This Teaching Council's (2011) Continuum of Teacher Education in Ireland, recognises teachers as lifelong learners from their ITE, through to their induction, and subsequent CPD as qualified teachers throughout their career. The continuum 'describes the formal and informal educational and developmental activities in which teachers engage' (Teaching Council 2011, p.8). In the context of generalist teachers' professional development however, PE is not prioritised within the outline of the continuum, with greater value placed upon the priority areas of literacy, numeracy, ICT and inclusion. Teachers are willing and have the desire to change, however, if adequate supports and structures are put in place to enable the teaching of quality PE (Parker *et al.* 2012, p.323). Before examining professional development practices, it is also important to understand the knowledge that is prioritised as part of teachers' development. This section examines recent research related to teachers' professional knowledge and effective professional development, which was used to support the implementation of a CoP in Chapter 7.

Randall (2020) developed a professional knowledge model as a tool to critically reflect on teachers' development and the supports they require during ITE and through CPD, responding to 'the limited time dedicated to primary Physical Education in ITE/CPD' (Keay and Randall 2022, p.198). An overview of the model is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary of professional knowledge model adapted from (Randall 2020; Keay and Randall 2022)

Stage	Description
The Emerging Stage	This is the foundation of teachers’ development, recognising teachers’ prior understandings of PE and how it contributes to the child’s development. At this stage, teachers understand <i>what</i> to teach. The development of movement skills and knowledge are prioritised to facilitate children’s development.
The Secure Stage	At this stage, the teacher is developing their confidence and competence to teach PE, beginning to place a greater focus on children’s needs in PE. Due to the complex nature of children’s learning contexts, teachers at this stage understand the influences that shape children’s experiences, including ‘an understanding of learning tasks (activity areas), approaches to teaching and learning, safe practice, inclusion, statutory frameworks, beyond the curriculum learning and the wider-workforce’ (2020)
The Aspirational Stage	This stage moves to the ‘peripheral aspects of knowledge’, and is focused on teachers’ own professional development and supporting others to enhance their understanding of PE. This stage is predominantly associated with leadership or advocacy roles in PE. The aspirational knowledge base is considered a central component of PE ‘specialists’.

Helping teachers to develop the se, and evidence suggests that it is sometimes difficult to translate teachers’ CPD to children’s learning in PE (Armour *et al.* 2017). Kennedy (2014a; 2014b) has recommended transformative models of CPD that can enhance professional autonomy, teacher agency, and develop teachers as lifelong learners. The aim of transformative professional learning is to facilitate ‘not only a change in practice but a change in identity’ through collaborative professional inquiry (Boylan *et al.* 2023, p.129). Kennedy’s examination of teacher development, positions CPD models on a spectrum from transmissive to transformative, while malleable models ‘can be used to different ends depending on the intended (or unintended?)

purpose(s)' (Kennedy 2014b, p.692). Transformative professional learning can take many forms and be achieved through various avenues, or through multiple models working in harmony (Kennedy 2014b; Boylan *et al.* 2023). For example, CoPs are positioned within the malleable category, but if they are driven by the needs of teachers and students, facilitating the development of autonomy and independence among teachers, they may be categorised as transformative. If, however, these CoPs merely promote 'contrived collegiality' reinforcing the status quo, they may be categorised as transmissive (Kennedy 2014b). Teacher agency is important in helping teachers to negotiate their teaching contexts, and effective CPD can help teachers to take more responsibility for their own learning (Hargreaves and Fullan 2012; Patton *et al.* 2015; Tannehill *et al.* 2020), empowering them to overcome the challenges they face (Tannehill and MacPhail 2017). The Teaching Council's Continuum of Education (2011, p.20) emphasises that CPD must address the 'plurality of roles played by teachers in the holistic development of students'. These many roles of teachers however, can be overlooked in the traditional, short-term approached to CPD, and there have been recommendations to support teachers in a more relaxed way without prescriptive models, creating CPD 'that is more participative, collaborative, situated and focussed on teachers' learning' (Jess *et al.* 2018, p.114; Fjellner *et al.* 2022). Keay *et al.* (2019) have attempted to build on the work of Kennedy (2014a; 2014b) in the context of PE, recommending that CPD should be a dynamic process through which teachers are 'actively engaged in regular efforts to interpret and negotiate the many task, environment and individual boundaries they consistently encounter in their professional lives' (Keay *et al.* 2019, p.135). There are many elements to effective or transformative professional development, and Patton *et al.* (2015) have identified eight core elements in meeting teachers' needs. They recommend that effective professional development; is based on teachers' needs and interests; acknowledges that learning is a social process; includes collaborative opportunities within learning communities of educators; is ongoing and sustained; treats teachers as active learners; enhances teachers' pedagogical skills and content knowledge; is facilitated with care; and focuses on improving (Patton *et al.* 2015).

Lieberman and Miller (2008) have suggested that learning communities can address many of these features, presenting the opportunity for transformative professional development. It is also suggested that 'learning in communities of practice

seems to offer the potential for the development of teachers as learners who can learn continuously *in and through practice*' (Armour *et al.* 2012, p.75), providing opportunities for long-term situated learning (Jess and McEvilly 2015). The use of learning communities as a tool for professional development is presented in the next section.

2.5.2 Learning Communities

Learning communities have been recommended as a form of professional development that is built on teachers' needs, giving them opportunities to direct their own professional learning (Vangrieken *et al.* 2017). They can provide opportunities for active and sustained learning, which has been shown to have greater impact on student learning than short-term approaches to CPD (Darling-Hammond and Richardson 2009). It is a form of bottom-up professional learning (Hadar and Brody 2010), that supports teachers to implement new ideas and enhance their practice through social interaction and collaboration (Darling-Hammond and Richardson 2009).

Forms of learning communities presented throughout research include professional learning communities (PLCs) and communities of practice (CoPs). Although PLCs and CoPs share many similarities, they are conceptually different, grounded in different learning theories (Blankenship and Ruona 2007; Vangrieken *et al.* 2017). The interchangeable use of PLCs and CoPs within research has contributed to the confusion between both (Vangrieken *et al.* 2017), while the overuse of the terms with little association to their theoretical foundations, has resulted in the loss of their original meaning (Parker *et al.* 2021). PLCs have emerged from learning organisation theory (Senge 1990), while CoPs developed from the work of Lave and Wenger's (1991) situated learning theory. This section provides a breakdown of the characteristics of CoPs and PLCs, and the theoretical foundations that inform our understanding. Greater emphasis is placed on the characteristics of a CoP, as this is the focus of Chapter 6.

2.5.2.1 Communities of Practice

CoPs are recognised as 'groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly' (Wenger and Wenger-Trayner 2015, p.1). They have been proposed as a form of CPD that provide

ongoing support and collaborative opportunities to improve teaching practices (Deglau and O'Sullivan 2006). The concept originated in Lave and Wenger's (1991) investigation of learning through apprenticeship, and the complex set of social relationships through which learning takes place' (Wenger and Wenger-Trayner 2015, p.4). There are three main characteristics that distinguish CoPs from other communities or professional development groups, the *domain*, the *community*, and the *practice* (Wenger *et al.* 2002).

Domain

A community differs from a random gathering of individuals, based on the community's identity, developed from the shared domain of interest among group members (Wenger and Wenger-Trayner 2015). The domain provides meaning to the group, promoting interactions and prompting members of the community to share ideas and recognise the value in each other's contributions (Wenger *et al.* 2002).

Community

Relationships are central to the community and there is a big emphasis placed on connectivity between members, developing social relationships as they pursue a shared interest (Hoadley 2012). The collective learning that occurs through mutual engagement and shared enterprise, distinguishes a CoP from a group of individuals who work in the same field but don't consult or interact with each other (Wenger *et al.* 2002).

Practice

Membership of a CoP should also be a source of knowledge that informs practice (Wenger and Wenger-Trayner 2015). Through sustained interaction with the community, members develop a shared repertoire of resources, as they collectively negotiate meaning (Wenger 1999). This repertoire can include practical tools and resources, but also shared practices and experiences that can be applied when solving problems (Wenger and Wenger-Trayner 2015).

Through continuous mutual engagement and joint enterprise, a shared history can develop establishing the three dimensions of a CoP as described above (Wenger 1999).

Situated learning

Theorists have suggested that learning occurs in social contexts (Dewey 1916; Vygotsky 1978; Brown *et al.* 1989; Lave and Wenger 1991). Constructivist approaches recognise individuals as active agents within their own learning, while social constructivist theory, as outlined by Vygotsky (1978), indicates that learning is socially and culturally situated, as individuals interact with influences in their environment to cocreate knowledge. Building on these theorists' work, CoPs are predominantly traced back to Lave and Wenger's situated learning theory (1991), which recognises 'learning as a social process in social settings', as individuals engage in meaningful interactions as part of a community (Kirk and Macdonald 1998, p.380; Quennerstedt and Maivorsdotter 2016). Within this social learning system 'competence is historically and socially defined', while knowing 'is a matter of displaying competencies defined in social communities' (Wenger 2000, p.226). Learning is therefore bound to the context in which it is developed and applied (Brown *et al.* 1989), and occurs from the dynamic interactions between an individual's experiences and socially defined competence, and this: 'process of alignment and realignment between competence and personal experience, which can go both ways' (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2014, p.14). Interactions within CoPs can facilitate 'the generative process of producing their own future' (Lave and Wenger 1991, pp.57-58). However, this development of knowledge within a CoP takes time, evolving from the shared practices of the group (Hoadley 2012). Through this process, CoPs 'develop their own understandings of their practices and profession' (Parker and Patton 2017, p.449).

The social learning within CoPs is 'situated in the context of problem solving', evolving from group interactions regarding problems within their respective contexts (Hoadley 2012, p.288). Throughout these learning experiences across landscapes of practice, the social world provides a resource for constructing identity (Wenger 2010a). Based on personal experiences, there is 'local knowledge in each practice' that each member brings with them into the community (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2014, p.17). Individuals are active agents in their learning as full participants of communities, constructing identity as they negotiate themselves between socially situated competence and personal experience (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 2010a).

Therefore, ‘identity, knowing and social membership entail one another’ (Lave and Wenger 1991, p.53) and a CoP can mean different things for different people (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2014).

Boundaries of practice

It is also important to note that individuals can be members of many communities, and the social body of knowledge for a professional occupation can be understood as a landscape of practice, ‘a complex system of communities of practice and the boundaries between them’ (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2014, p.13). If knowledge is locally situated within a community, then a community must have boundaries, even if they are unclear and fluid (Wenger 2000). Boundaries are present due to a lack of shared history, for example those that have been part of a CoP and those who have not will have different interpretations of the competence based on shared practice within their communities (Wenger 2000). Boundaries, however, are also present within CoPs, as members arrive to a community from the wider landscape of practice, bringing different histories, competencies and knowledge with them (Wenger-Trayner *et al.* 2014). Take the example of two school leaders in different schools, as two CoPs. A principal in a private school in a large urban area with over 300 pupils, and a teaching principal in a small rural school with less than 60 pupils. Although both teachers are part of the wider landscape of practice, the landscape of school principals, competence and knowledge within their respective school communities may not directly overlap. Asking both school leaders to collaborate within a community will naturally create boundaries, potential areas of misunderstanding due to different ‘regimes of competence, commitments, values, repertoires and perspectives’ (Wenger-Trayner *et al.* 2014). However, it also creates opportunities for new meaning making, as the principals begin to negotiate how competence within each other’s respective school community is relevant to their own (Wenger-Trayner *et al.* 2014). At these boundaries, individuals are introduced to a foreign competence, as competence and experience begin to diverge. This is an important part of the learning process as the boundaries ‘connect communities and they offer learning opportunities in their own right’ (Wenger 2000, p.233). To examine these boundary interactions, Wenger (1999) introduced the idea of brokering and boundary objects which contribute to the meaning making process. Brokering involves

making connections between a community and the outside world, and other communities (Wenger 1999). Individuals are often members of multiple communities, and they have to broker knowledge as they introduce elements from one practice into another (Wenger 2010b). This importing and exporting is a delicate process requiring ‘translation, coordination and alignment between perspectives’, that can sometimes be met with conflict as an external influence (Wenger 1999, p.109). Boundary objects support connections between different practices (Wenger 2000). Artifacts, discourses and processes can provide a meeting point, that allow communities to negotiate meaning across boundaries (Wenger 2000). This could include a shared language that can be understood by both communities, or processes that belong to an organisational structure, providing a lens through which one community can understand the other (Wenger 2000; Wenger-Trayner *et al.* 2017). While boundaries need to be approached carefully due to potential misunderstandings between communities, they also ‘hold potential for unexpected learning [...] rich in new insights’ (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2014, p.17).

Facilitating CoPs

CoPs cannot be created, rather, they develop from a shared history among members (Barab and Duffy 2000; Hoadley 2012). While some CoPs develop organically, others require some external guidance to facilitate the development of this shared history (Parker *et al.* 2012). A facilitator can play an important role in creating opportunities that help a CoP to emerge. Members of a community often come from different communities within a landscape of practice and crossing boundaries between these communities involves ‘respectful conversation, dialogue, and learning one from the other, toward a collective generation of better understanding’ (Greene 2007, p.xii). A facilitator could play a role in ‘brokering relationships between people who need to talk or between people who need help and people who can offer help’ (Wenger 2000, p.232). Reflecting the attributes of effective professional development, it is therefore extremely important that the focus of these communities is built upon the needs of its members, situated within their teaching realities (Whitcomb *et al.* 2009; Patton *et al.* 2015). Developing trust and establishing a shared interest that connects community members’ experiences and competencies is important to ensure these communities are

meaningful and purposeful, ‘relevant to individual members’ (Parker *et al.* 2010; Patton and Parker 2017, p.353).

2.5.2.2 Professional Learning Communities

In comparison to CoPs, the concept of PLCs has a greater affiliation with the educational context (Vangrieken *et al.* 2017). Engaging with a PLC has been shown to inspire and motivate teachers to improve practices and support student learning, as they continuously reflect and discuss their professional practice with peers (Owen 2015). The overuse of the term PLC however, has resulted in the misapplication of the term and its meaning becoming diluted (Watson 2014). PLCs are theoretically grounded in Senge’s (1990) work, which distinguishes learning organisations as:

organisations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning to see the whole together (Senge 1990, p.3)

Applying this construct to the school context, PLCs have been presented as a model for collective development among teachers (DuFour and Eaker 1998), described as an ‘ongoing process in which educators work collaboratively in recurring cycles of collective inquiry and action research in order to achieve better results for the students they serve’ (DuFour and Reason 2015, p.38). While there have been various adaptations of Senge’s model in an educational context, including the work of DuFour and Eaker (1998), the most prominent description of PLCs appears to be from Hord (1997), and subsequently Hord and Sommers (2008), who have continued to refine the characteristics of PLCs through their work. These characteristics of a PLC include:

- Supportive and shared leadership
- Shared values and vision
- Collective learning and application of learning
- Supportive conditions
- Shared practice (Hord 1997; Hord and Sommers 2008)

Importantly, these principles are underpinned by ‘a consistent focus on student learning and collaboration’ (Vangrieken *et al.* 2017, p.49), with knowledge situated in

teachers' daily experiences (Vescio *et al.* 2008). United by a shared vision, centred on student's learning, teachers and school leaders work as equals and adopt shared leadership of the group (Hord and Sommers 2008). Shared individual practice develops from their collective learning experience, as staff engage in reflective dialogue and provide supportive feedback to each other, enhancing their 'knowledge of practice' (Hord 1997; Blankenship and Ruona 2007; Vescio *et al.* 2008). While many of these aspects reflect the principles of a 'community' (individuals working towards a common interest), PLCs have more distinctive organisational aspects than a CoP, including a greater emphasis on external leadership from the school principal (DuFour and Eaker 1998; Hord and Sommers 2008). The focus of PLCs is on creating a culture shift within schools, that supports continuous growth and change (Blankenship and Ruona 2007). Structural and relational factors can facilitate this change by providing opportunities for staff to meet with each other, creating supportive conditions to develop relationships, or providing the necessary resources and equipment to advance practices (Hord and Sommers 2008). By establishing clear expectations, and sometimes gaining financial support, it can ensure that PLCs move beyond what Owen (2014) described as 'contrived collegiality'. If facilitated with care through democratic processes, PLCs have been shown to empower teachers, helping them to 'negotiate the barriers they face' in their teaching environments (Gonçalves *et al.* 2020, p.12). Given the similarities between CoPs and PLCs, they are often mistakenly used interchangeably (Parker *et al.* 2021). Understanding the characteristics of both communities is an important distinction at the beginning of this research study.

2.5.2.3 Sustaining CoPs and PLCs

One of the challenges presented with all learning communities, both CoPs and PLCs, is sustaining them to have a long term impact on teachers and pupils (O'Sullivan 2007; Parker *et al.* 2021). Structural and cultural factors play an important role in the sustainability of a community (Lieberman and Miller 2008). Accessibility to communities through the availability of time and resources influence a community's long-term success (O'Sullivan 2007). It is important that school leaders recognise the benefits of such communities, and afford teachers chances to engage with them (Lave and Wenger 1991; O'Sullivan 2007). Online communities have been suggested as a method for overcoming many of these accessibility barriers, although this creates other

challenges, such as the development of trust and relationships between members (Ferreira *et al.* 2022). Reflecting many of the elements of transformative or effective professional development, developing a sense of ownership among members and empowering them as teachers, also contributes to sustainability (Parker *et al.* 2021). The facilitator plays an important role in creating these trusted spaces, that empowers teachers to apply their socially situated learning within their teaching contexts (Makopoulou and Armour 2014; Gonçalves *et al.* 2020). Creating these opportunities will ultimately influence sustainability, as members establish value from their engagement, through the personal and professional relationships developed, and the influence on student outcomes (Parker *et al.* 2010; Wenger *et al.* 2011).

2.6 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has set the context for the investigation of PESGs throughout this thesis. Globally, PE is positioned within a contested space, with much debate regarding who is best placed to teach PE, and what should be included within PE in schools. These challenges are due to a variety of factors such as lack of teacher confidence, as well as competing narratives related to sports, physical activity and health. The Irish context reflects many of the international trends, with practices varying greatly across schools. The introduction of the PE specialism into ITE programmes, however, brings promise. By examining PESGs through the lens of teacher socialisation, it remains to be seen if their professional socialisation experiences within the PE specialism will transfer into improved practices within Irish primary schools. Teacher development is a complex and ongoing process, and it is important to examine how PESGs can be supported to become active, lifelong learners. The next chapter examines the research methods that were chosen to investigate PESGs' development.

Chapter 3

Methods

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an outline and rationale for the methods used throughout this thesis, presented in Chapter 4, Chapter 5, Chapter 6, and Chapter 7. Four studies were completed to investigate PESGs' development as PE teachers, their integration into the school community and their professional development as qualified teachers. A cross-sectional survey examined teachers' self-efficacy to teach PE, their PE specialism experience and their practices as qualified teachers (Chapter 4). PESG interviews subsequently provided the foundation for two studies, exploring the influence of teacher socialisation on PESGs' understanding of QPE (Chapter 5) and the influence of organisational socialisation on PESGs' integration into the school community (Chapter 6). A longitudinal study investigated the impact of a learning community on PESGs' development as PE teachers and leaders (Chapter 7). The characteristics of the individual studies within the thesis can be found in Table 3.

Table 3. Characteristics of studies conducted as part of the thesis

Study	Chapter	Data Collection Methods	Data Collection Dates	Focus
<i>1</i>	4	Cross-sectional survey	February 2020 – April 2020	PESGs' self-efficacy to teach PE, PE specialism experience, attitudes towards PE and practices as PESGs.
<i>2</i>	5	Interviews	June 2020	PESGs' views of QPE, how PESGs' biographies shaped their experiences of QPE.
<i>3</i>	6			PESGs' experiences as early career teachers in schools and the influence of organisational socialisation.
<i>4</i>	7	Audio recorded group meetings, teacher interviews	February 2021 – January 2022	Supporting PESGs as PE experts through membership of an online CoP.

PESGs: Graduates of the Bachelor of Education with a specialism in PE.

3.2 Participants

Graduates of the four-year Bachelor of Education (B. Ed) with a major specialism in PE were chosen as the target group for this study (Morgan and Bourke 2008; Tsangaridou 2012; Dyson *et al.* 2016; Jones and Green 2017; Bowles and O’Sullivan 2020; Mangione *et al.* 2021). The PE specialism was introduced in two higher education institutes (HEIs) in 2012 (Marron *et al.* 2018; Ní Chróinín 2018). On average, a total of 55 pre-service teachers each year get the opportunity to complete the specialism as part of their B. Ed degree. Its introduction presented an opportunity to address the lack of expertise that existed among generalist teachers (O’Sullivan and Oslin 2012). It was hoped that these teachers could contribute to the delivery of QPE in schools as ‘leaders and advocates of the subject’ (Ní Chróinín and Murtagh 2009; O’Sullivan and Oslin 2012, p.247; Marron *et al.* 2018; Ní Chróinín 2018). The unknown potential of this new cohort of teachers to impact the delivery of PE in Irish primary schools justified the need to investigate this population.

Ethical approval was obtained for this study from the Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee (MIREC) prior to the recruitment of participants, as can be seen in Appendix B. When the first study described in Chapter 4 was conducted, there were four years of graduates from the B. Ed with a specialism in PE (2016-2019), equating to 220 teachers. The cross-sectional study was open to all PE specialism graduates (PESGs), and was promoted through social media platforms, print media, and through informal conversations at a PE conference. The survey was shared with members of the IPPEA and the Irish National Teachers’ Association (INTO). Given the small population of PESGs, targeted recruitment was also employed, using a snowball sample that developed from pre-existing networks of teacher education graduates. A range of initial ‘seed’ contacts were established within each university and each graduating group, based on the investigator’s personal contacts (Waters 2015; Etikan *et al.* 2016). Supported by the combined efforts of the ‘seeds’, as well as ‘continuous, deliberate effort by the researcher’ (Kirchherr and Charles 2018, p.13), a diverse sample was established spanning all groups of graduates and both HEIs (n=80). Participants for studies in Chapters 5, Chapter 6, and Chapter 7 were a volunteer sample that were established from this initial sample of teachers in

Chapter 4. Further participant details are provided in the respective chapters for each study.

3.3 Research paradigms

Qualitative research encapsulates a variety of approaches that each adopt assumptions related to the researchers' beliefs (Braun and Clarke 2021b). These beliefs that shape action are known as the research paradigm, 'ways of looking at the world' that guide research behaviour, influencing what is investigated and how it is investigated (Cohen *et al.* 2017, p.8; Denzin and Lincoln 2017). It is important to be mindful that many paradigms have divergent characteristics that cannot be used simultaneously, and when conducting research outlining the research paradigms helps to 'clarify and organise the thinking about the research' (Cohen *et al.* 2017, p.9). The four terms that comprise a paradigm are considered: 'ethics (axiology), epistemology, ontology, and methodology' (Denzin and Lincoln 2017, p.97). While the ethics and methodologies will be addressed later in this chapter, the focus of this section is on the epistemological and ontological standpoint of this thesis.

It is important to highlight the epistemologies and ontologies adopted in this study, as 'all methods are informed either knowingly or unknowingly by an epistemology and ontology' (Smith and McGannon 2018, p.7). Ontologies identify 'what we can know' through research (Atkinson 2012, p.148), and 'whether or not we assume (aka theorise) a reality that exists separately from our research practice, that we can use our research to know and understand' (Braun and Clarke 2021b, p.167). When making assumptions about social phenomena, researchers must consider if this reality exists beyond the context of this research, or if it is generated from one's consciousness and therefore cannot be assumed to exist beyond this research (Cohen *et al.* 2017). Epistemologies outline 'what we think it's possible to know – and, therefore, how we should go about trying to know it' (Braun and Clarke 2021b, p.175). It positions our understanding of how trustworthy knowledge can be generated, and what can be accepted as real (Whaley and Krane 2011).

A critical realist approach was utilised in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6. Critical realism is 'a diverse assemblage of ideas' and difficult to define among a wide-ranging pool of research (Archer *et al.* 2016; Wiltshire 2018). Much of critical realist research is built upon the work of Roy Bhaskar (Bhaskar 1975; Bhaskar 1979; Bhaskar 1989),

which provided a starting point for future exploration (Danermark *et al.* 2001; Maxwell 2011; Archer *et al.* 2016; Archer and Morgan 2020). Critical realism aligns with ontological realism, recognising that there is a ‘a reality that exists independent of a researcher’s ideas about and descriptions of it’ (Braun and Clarke 2021b, p.169). Bhaskar believes that the ‘real and actual domains can be perceived only fallibly’ (Given 2012, p.168), as our knowledge is a product of the social reality in which we live (Bhaskar 1975). Due to this social construction of knowledge, critical realism is therefore positioned within a constructivist epistemology, as shown in Table 4. This is an epistemological standpoint, because the social reality ‘is what it is, regardless of how we view it, choose to view it or are somehow manipulated into viewing it’ (Archer 2007, p.195; Wiltshire 2018). The inability to find a completely objective reality, however, does not diminish the realist ontological assumption that this reality exists beyond the research (Bhaskar 1989). Bhaskar uses ‘epistemic fallacy’ to warn against the conflation and combination of epistemology and ontology, which sometimes reduces reality to our understandings of reality (Bhaskar 2008). Critical realism disentangles the recommended pairing of epistemological constructivism and ontological relativism (Bhaskar 1989). Instead, critical realism subscribes to epistemological constructivism and ontological realism, as highlighted in Table 4. While there have been some criticisms suggesting the pairing of a constructivist epistemology and realist ontology is contradictory (Smith and McGannon 2018), it has been maintained that critical realism addresses these concerns (Ronkainen and Wiltshire 2021). Critical realism recognises that ‘knowledge is theory-laden, concept-dependent and fallible’ and true interpretations of the social world cannot be guaranteed (Ronkainen and Wiltshire 2021, p.13). Bhaskar (1979) acknowledges that research identifies valid truths that exists beyond research, aligning with ontological realism, although these truths are participants’ perception of truth which is socially constructed, reflecting epistemological constructivism. Therefore, research is providing access to a mediated reflection of reality (Willig 2013; Braun and Clarke 2021b). Critical realism also emphasises the depth of these socially situated realities within its ontology. There are multiple layers to reality, and while some are unobservable, they have ‘the potential to cause observable events’ (Ryba *et al.* 2022, p.156). Furthermore, the causal nature of critical realism is important within this stratified constructed reality, as theory and knowledge may not be uniform across all

people and contexts (Ryba *et al.* 2022). Therefore, explanations need to clearly outline this causality within the actual and real domains (Given 2012). Critical realism was chosen as a suitable paradigm for the initial investigation of PESGs' socialisation, as it allows the researcher to adopt an observer role, focusing 'on explaining the enduring social relations that produce real-world problems' (Wiltshire 2018, p.537). It could be described as teachers providing a window into their reality, presenting their version of truth within their complex teaching realities. The research can identify PESGs attitudes, beliefs, and practices, moulded through socialisation in their respective contexts.

Table 4. Summary of critical realist assumptions adapted from Ryba et al. (2022)

Critical realist assumptions	Description	Example in the context of the organisational socialisation of PESGs (Chapter 6)
Epistemological constructivism	Knowledge is produced, accessing participants' subjective views of their realities, which are connected to the social and cultural contexts through which they were formed.	Our knowledge of the organisational socialisation of PESGs is dependent on how 'organisational socialisation' is defined and measured. The research conducted can help enhance our understanding of the influence of organisational socialisation on PESGs.
Ontological realism	This social reality is accepted as true, with the acknowledgement that it is impossible to access a completely objective reality.	The reference to 'organisational socialisation' refers to an independent reality that people experience outside of this research. The research helps to gain access to this reality among participants, understanding its prevalence and severity.
Stratified ontology	There is a stratified depth to reality. Some reality is observable, while other parts are unobservable.	Elements of organisational socialisation among PESGs may not be measurable or observable, such as historical events or unconscious responses. While these aspects are as real as the observable aspects, our understanding of them is based on inference.
Causal complexity	Causal explanations can be used to explain reality. It is important to be mindful however, that the causal properties of these realities are complex and multifaceted.	Organisational socialisation is a complex matter that can be caused by a variety of factors. This qualitative research may enhance understandings of reasons organisational socialisation influences these teachers.

Having researched PESGs as an observer for the initial phases of research, I adopted a constructivist epistemology and relativist ontology for Chapter 7. Constructivism recognises knowledge as a ‘a product of processes of selection and construction’, and it reflects the influences of those involved in the construction process (Hammersley 2013, p.35). Meanwhile, ontological relativism acknowledges that multiple realities exist, and these are contextually positioned through the construction process (Guba and Lincoln 1994). There are various perspectives and interpretations of constructivism (Young and Collin 2004). This study places an emphasis on the social construction of reality, the knowledge that is developed from social relationships as highlighted by Bruner (1998) and Vygotsky (1978). This research study was focused on supporting PESGs in their teaching and leadership of PE through an online CoP, built on preceding findings related to PESGs’ realities and the challenges they faced. Based on these findings, I decided to reposition myself as a researcher in an attempt to support teachers through effective professional development. By adopting this constructivist approach, I was able to enter participants’ complex worlds, to attempt to understand reality from their perspectives, examining ‘through the multiple lenses of the individuals involved’ (Mertens 2014; Cohen *et al.* 2017, p.23). This allowed me to support teachers’ needs and facilitate situated learning within their complex teaching realities (Lave and Wenger 1991). Rather than adopting an observer role, positioned outside the window analysing teachers’ realities, I stepped into their lives, to access a socially and culturally subjective reality, co-constructing knowledge through my interactions with participants (Howell 2013). It is important to be mindful that this approach to research becomes ‘a product of the values of researchers and cannot be independent of them’ (Mertens 2014, p.17). I adopted a relativist ontological approach, as it was important in meeting participants’ needs to recognise that meaning could be ‘different in different times and contexts’ (Braun and Clarke 2021b, p.176). An important part of this co-creation process was building trust and relationship with the participants, and therefore I was a subjective part of the research making sense of situated meanings (Braun and Clarke 2021b). While objectivity was not possible, reflexivity was important to help establish some detachment, allowing the research to ‘benefit from insider knowledge restrained by degrees of detachment’ (Perry *et al.* 2004, p.146). My positionality as researcher and how I reflexively engaged with this positionality is presented within the next section.

3.3.1 Researcher positionality

Both paradigms described above, acknowledge that we cannot achieve a completely objective view of reality. Therefore, ‘as it ultimately influences the construction of data’, it is important to present my positionality as a researcher, and how I reflected on this positionality throughout the research process (Trainor and Bundon 2021, p.710). Similarly to participants in this study, I graduated from the four-year B. Ed degree with a specialism in PE. Given these experiences, I was able to position myself as an ‘insider’ within many of the studies alongside PESGs, as I ‘understood and shared their concerns, and had a common investment in documenting’ their experiences (Griffin and Bengry-Howell 2017, p.26). Being an ‘insider’ garnered benefits that may have been more challenging for an ‘outsider’ researcher (Berger 2013). Firstly, it enhanced my access to participants for the initial cross-sectional study, utilising the aforementioned ‘seed’ contacts (Section 3.2) who helped to distribute the survey among PESGs. For subsequent studies, my understanding of the PE specialism meant that I was engaging with participants from a position of understanding, and this helped to develop a rapport with participants and build trust. Although presented with these benefits, however, I also had to be wary of conflating their experiences with my own experiences as a PESG, and reflexivity was extremely important to avoid any researcher bias (Berger 2013; Trainor and Bundon 2021). For example, in addition to my experience as a PESG, my sporting experience was a significant part of my identity, particularly my experiences of Gaelic games as a participant and youth coach. I was very aware of these distinct parts of my identity, and I was keen to withhold my sporting identity from my role as a physical educator, aware of the controversial conflation between the two, and the damaging impact sporting narratives can have on PE (Ward 2018). Qualitative researchers have been described as ‘emotionally involved’ with the subject of the study (Perry *et al.* 2004), and a balance needs to be achieved between a researchers’ involvement and detachment within the research study (Elias 1978). Therefore, a number of strategies were implemented to limit opportunities ‘in which the researcher’s feelings may be interfering in the study’s data production’ (Taquette and Borges da Matta Souza 2022, p.11). For example, the survey presented in Chapter 4 is anchored by numerous national and international studies and guidelines for PE provision (Woods *et al.* 2010; Hardman *et al.* 2014; McLennan and Thompson 2015; Woods *et al.* 2018). In Chapter 5 and Chapter 6,

interviewee-aided sociograms were used within the semi-structured interviews, allowing participants to direct the conversation and engage in autobiographical self-thematisation. These are described in greater detail in the subsequent sections (3.6.1 Survey, 3.6.2 Interviews).

When adopting a constructivist approach for the CoP study presented in Chapter 7, my positionality was of greater importance, as the data was rooted in my relationships with participants and the co-construction of knowledge (Charmaz and Henwood 2017). Continuous reflection on this positionality was an important part of the research process (Berger 2013). I was presented with the challenge of being an insider/outsider, as despite being a PESG, I no longer faced the same challenges within schools as the teachers in the CoP, having stepped outside the classroom as a research student. Although I may have felt like an insider, some participants may have viewed me as an outsider, which can create difficulties ‘blending’ into the research space as described by Hill and Dao (2021). This can sometimes lead participants to question the researcher’s expertise in the field, resulting in ‘resistance or lack of responsiveness to some of the questions introduced’ (Råheim *et al.* 2016, p.6). Guidance from my critical friends however, helped me to balance this power dynamic, empowering participants by applying strategies that helped them to share their voice. As a novice facilitator, it was easy to fall into the trap of thinking I knew what the group needed, but continuous engagement with my critical friends ensured I kept attentive to the needs of the group throughout (Gonçalves *et al.* 2020). This critical friendship provided ‘an opportunity for dialogue and the reflexive acknowledgement of multiple truths, perspectives and results in the research process’ (Smith and McGannon 2018, p.31). My critical friends encouraged me to demonstrate my vulnerability as a facilitator, sharing in teachers’ struggles (Gonçalves *et al.* 2020). I acknowledged to group members that I had been out of the classroom while doing my PhD studies, and their experiences were helping me to stay in touch with the daily challenges they faced within schools. Although an outsider status can sometimes disrupt relationships with a community (Hill and Dao 2021), showing this vulnerability helped me to build trust with the members of the CoP (Gonçalves *et al.* 2020). The reflexive process allowed me to use my insider knowledge to develop a greater understanding of PESGs’ experiences, but also achieve a balance of involvement and detachment throughout (Perry *et al.* 2004). Further

examples of my reflexivity will be presented in the data analysis section (3.7), later in this chapter.

Building on the research epistemologies and ontologies presented above, the research methods used throughout this thesis are presented in the subsequent sections of this chapter.

3.4 Research Design

3.4.1 Mixed-methods approach

A mixed-method approach was chosen for the study in Chapter 4 of the thesis. Mixed methods research is an integrative approach of qualitative and quantitative methods to ‘thoroughly investigate a phenomenon of interest’ (Teddlie and Tashakkori 2010, p.8). It allows the researcher to ‘gain new knowledge that is more than the sum of the two parts’ (Creswell and Plano Clark 2017, p.13). As was outlined in the literature review in Chapter 2, there has been limited research of this population of teachers, and the mixed methods approach allowed the researcher to develop a broad perspective of the sample on a large scale (Mertens 2014; Cohen *et al.* 2017). Given the limitations of quantitative methods in examining ‘individual experiences or opinions’ (Hale and Graham 2012, p.97), complementary qualitative methods helped to overcome its shortfalls, enhance accuracy and validity of the research through triangulation (Denscombe 2014; Cohen *et al.* 2017). The collection of quantitative data in Chapter 4 allowed for the investigation of quantifiable measurables related to PESGs’ self-efficacy to teach PE, their experience of the PE specialism, and their teaching experiences, e.g. frequency and duration of PE teaching time, etc. The collection of complementary qualitative data through open ended questions allowed for more nuanced data to be gathered, particularly relating to teachers’ contextual experiences, attitudes and beliefs.

3.4.2 Cross-sectional design

The studies described in Chapter 4, Chapter 5, and Chapter 6 were all cross sectional in design. A cross sectional design was selected as it presents ‘a snapshot of a population at one particular point in time’ (Cohen *et al.* 2017, p.348). While a cross-sectional design results in limited opportunities to determine causal relationships, it allowed for

a wide range of factors to be investigated, as well as the prevalence of outcomes among the whole population (Levin 2006), such as self-efficacy. Given the limited research about this population of teachers, cross-sectional methods were deemed important to engage in this exploratory research. The design had an important role of establishing initial evidence about its cohort, informing subsequent phases of research throughout the project (Levin 2006; Spector 2019). The range of data collected in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6, played an important role in developing CPD that met PESGs' needs in Chapter 7.

3.4.3 Qualitative approach

Qualitative research was used across this thesis, predominantly in Chapter 5, Chapter 6, and Chapter 7. It was chosen for these studies as it supports the understanding of 'the complex, messy and at times unpredictable contributions to and outcomes of social interactions.' (Hastie and Hay 2012, p.79). There are numerous qualitative research genres, but it is widely understood to 'use verbal rather than statistical forms of approach' (Hammersley 2013, p.12). By creating a platform that gives a 'voice to participants', qualitative methods can be used to investigate participants' experiences and meanings (Cohen *et al.* 2017, p.288). As well as observable phenomena, it also facilitates the investigation of complex hidden phenomena, developing an understanding of the sociocultural complexities that inform knowledge and behaviour (Hastie and Hay 2012). This richness of qualitative research meant it was suitable approach for investigating the complexity of the socialisation of PESGs'. As qualitative research is 'value-bound and is influenced by the researcher's values as expressed' (Cohen *et al.* 2017, p.289), the research was guided by various research paradigms to interpret and construct teachers' realities. In Chapter 5 and 6, critical realism allowed the researcher to observe teachers' perceptions of their reality, gaining a somewhat objective perspective of PESGs' reality. This experiential orientation gave a voice to the teachers who provided a window into their complex realities (Braun and Clarke 2021b). In Chapter 7, I engaged with the multiple realities of participants to co-construct knowledge, developing an understanding of the challenges PESGs' face within their realities and how to support them effectively. Rather than observing from outside the window, as researcher, I stepped inside the room to negotiate teachers' realities within their socially and culturally specific contexts. The methods employed

for collecting and analysing the qualitative data within these paradigms will be highlighted later in this chapter.

3.5 Setting

While face to face interviews had originally been planned to take place in Summer 2020, for the studies presented in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in necessary change. Due to recommendations from the Department of Health and World Health Organisation (WHO), we chose to conduct the interviews online for the safety of all parties. Researchers had begun to experiment with digital tools prior to the pandemic (Paulus *et al.* 2017), and while these methods were forced upon researchers by restrictions, it allowed researchers to navigate these challenging circumstances when social distancing was present (Rahman *et al.* 2021). Online interviews were considered an accessible form of data collection, that continued to align with the epistemological standpoint of the research and quality could be maintained (Salmons 2016; Roberts *et al.* 2021). While concerns have sometimes been expressed that an online environment may exclude potential participants, primary school teachers across Ireland were teaching online in 2020, and therefore all potential participants had online access. Although similar to face to face interviews, greater consideration needed to be given to the participants' needs and establishing a relationship with them to make them feel comfortable in the online context (Engward *et al.* 2022).

Due to the continued influence of COVID-19, an online setting was also chosen for the CoP presented in Chapter 7. Further details on the online format and its influence on participants' engagement are presented in that chapter. Online CPD has been acknowledged as an accessible form of learning to enhance teaching (Lander *et al.* 2022; Simpson *et al.* 2022), while the virtual community format has also been identified for addressing professional isolation among teachers of a marginalised subject who face unique challenges (Spicer and Robinson 2021). Participants did not require a subscription to join the Teams group, and they were able to message other participants.

3.6 Data Generation Measures

3.6.1 Survey

A survey was chosen as the data collection method for the study described in Chapter 4. As this thesis was investigating an understudied population, a survey was chosen to collect a broad range of data from a wide sample of the population. The survey was conducted online, helping the sample to overcome the confines of geographical location (Bryman 2016). Participants also had the option of requesting a physical copy of the survey if they desired. Timing of distribution in relation to teacher workload can contribute to satisfactory response rates (Mertens 2014). The distribution of the survey in Spring 2020 supported the development of a satisfactory sample because teachers' movements were restricted due to the enforced school closures and government lockdowns at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, and they had greater discretionary time to complete the survey.

Pilot testing of the survey was conducted in January and February 2020 to identify any survey errors, such as the length of the survey, clarity of the questions, question bias, and necessary structural changes (Brandl-Bredenbeck and Kämpfe 2012). Following the pilot feedback, the survey was revised to make it clearer and more user friendly for participants. A number of survey items were removed due to the duration it took to complete the survey, while a 'Please Explain' question was added to some closed questions, enabling participants to justify their responses. The use of skip logic throughout the online survey also meant participants only answered questions that were relevant to them, i.e. if participants did not have teaching experience, they weren't presented with questions relating to school facilities and equipment.

Surveys can help 'to gain knowledge about attitudes beliefs, opinions or behaviours within a specific population' (Brandl-Bredenbeck and Kämpfe 2012, p.175). While participant answers couldn't be probed fully and there is sometimes the danger of missed data, self-administered online surveys provide a space for participants to provide honest and sensitive information, and can reduce the risk of social desirability bias (Bryman 2016). This survey (Appendix D) gathered data on the PE specialism experience, PE teaching self-efficacy, PE teaching practices and roles undertaken, approach to PE in the school, and PESG's views on PE in the Irish context. Questions were guided by a number of studies, including the CSPPA (Woods

et al. 2010; Woods *et al.* 2018), UNESCO's World-wide Survey of School Physical Education (Hardman *et al.* 2014), UNESCO's Quality Physical Education (QPE): guidelines for policy makers (McLennan and Thompson 2015), as well as wider research on the provision of primary PE in Ireland and in international contexts. The data collected provided an effective starting point to understand this population of teachers, and it informed the other studies carried out throughout the thesis.

A mix of quantitative data, including descriptive, nominal and ordinal data were collected, as well as qualitative data. Descriptive data included participants' teaching experience; school details, e.g. urban/rural, Delivering Equality of Opportunity In Schools (DEIS) school /non-DEIS school status; the whole-school approach to PE teaching; as well as PE teaching practices and roles undertaken. Closed questions were used to collect the majority of this data. Closed questions are not onerous on participants and allow for easy comparison across all participants (Cohen *et al.* 2017). The online format enhanced respondent accuracy by ensuring participants couldn't accidentally select more than one option for responses. The use of partially open questions during the survey also ensured that participants could add their response choice if it was not outlined among the fixed choices (Neuman 2014). Open questions were also used to gather participant feedback on broader issues such as how they feel their skills could be best used as PESGs, and how they feel they could be supported to use their skills effectively. The collection of ordinal data in the survey will be described in greater detail in the next section of this chapter.

3.6.1.1 Likert scale

Likert scale questions present 'a range of responses to a given question or statement' (Cohen *et al.* 2017, p.480). They integrate 'a degree of sensitivity and differentiation' within participant responses, while providing ordinal data that can be easily analysed (Neuman 2014; Cohen *et al.* 2017, p.480). Likert scale questions were used to gather participant feedback on areas such as the specialism experience, their self-efficacy to teach PE, and their confidence to teach participate in each strand. It is recommended that participants are presented with between four and eight evenly balanced response choices, and that each scale point was labelled clearly to avoid misinterpretation (Neuman 2014). Based on feedback from the pilot survey, five response choices were

chosen for participants throughout the survey as can be seen in the final survey Appendix D).

3.6.1.2 Self-efficacy scale

Teacher self-efficacy has continuously been identified as a factor impeding upon the delivery of quality PE by generalist teachers, and therefore it was selected as an important measurement to gather among this cohort. Humphries et al.'s (2012) Physical Education Teaching Efficacy Scale was adapted to gather data related to PESGs' self-efficacy to teach PE. Given it was part of a larger survey investigating other areas, a 15 item survey with a 5-point scale was considered most appropriate to investigate teachers' self-efficacy based on feedback from the pilot phase, adapting the 10-point scale, 35 item survey as outlined by Humphries *et al.* (2012). Statements were guided by Humphries et al.'s (2012) Physical Education Teaching Efficacy Scale and the UNESCO guidelines for high quality PE. Statements were included in relation to the areas of planning, teaching, teaching students with additional needs, assessment and classroom management. As can be seen in Appendix D, the 5-point Likert scale was anchored by (1) 'cannot do/strongly disagree' and (5) 'highly certain I can do/strongly agree', with a midpoint of (3) 'moderately certain I can do/neither agree nor disagree'. It is not possible to have neutral levels of self-efficacy, therefore the inclusion of 'moderately certain I can do' ensured the answers could be rated as a unipolar scale (Bandura 2012).

3.6.2 Interviews

Interviews were chosen as a data collection method in chapters 5, Chapter 6 and Chapter 7, as they allowed participants' attitudes, beliefs and experiences to be investigated in greater detail. Individual interviews were chosen rather than focus group interviews as direct communication between the researcher and participant allowed the discussion to remain focused on the areas of interest (Hastie and Hay 2012). Semi structured interviews were used a flexible approach towards interviewing. The researcher prepared a question guide and broad topic areas to discuss, but the flexible nature of the interviews provided the leeway to explore participant responses in greater detail throughout (Bryman 2016; Brinkman 2017). While semi-structured interviews predominantly follow similar formats, with all participants usually asked all of the

planned questions, it also allows the opportunity for alternative questions to emerge based on the interviewee responses (Hastie and Hay 2012; Mertens 2014). The semi-structured nature of these interviews rather than unstructured interviews, also meant that teachers' experiences could be compared more closely across their respective contexts (Bryman 2016). All interviews during the respective studies were conducted online and were audio recorded. Each interview began with informal strategies to establish a relationship with the participant (Mertens 2014), before delving into more focused questioning which is described in greater detail in the respective chapters. As a fellow PESG, I had the benefit of being an 'insider', helping to develop a relationship with these participants, some of whom were fellow students during my own degree (Berger 2013). The interview guides for the respective studies can be found in the appendices (Chapter 5 & Chapter 6 = Appendix E, Chapter 7 = Appendix F).

3.6.2.1 Interviewee-aided sociograms

Interviewee-aided sociograms were used as a tool during participant interviews for the studies presented in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6. Sociograms are predominantly used to investigate individuals connection to a social network and the influencing factors within this network (Norris *et al.* 2020). In the context of the studies in this thesis, sociograms were used to investigate PESGs' ratings of perceived influence for factors that shaped their view of QPE (Chapter 5) and factors that influence PE provision within their schools (Chapter 6). These ratings represented PESGs' perceptions of how strongly each factor influenced their views, and included both positive and negative influences. Although responses were not analysed using a social network analysis, it provided a support for teachers within the interviews to engage in autobiographical self-thematisation (Kelchtermans and Ballet 2002b). The process of autobiographical self-thematisation stimulates interviewees 'to reflect back on their career (auto-biographical) and narratively share their experiences and the meanings these hold for them (thematisation)' (Kelchtermans and Ballet 2002b). Given my own background as a fellow PESG, strategies such as interviewee-aided sociograms helped to reduce the risk of interviewer bias (Taquette and Borges da Matta Souza 2022). It gave participants the opportunity to direct the conversation, while keeping some structure related to the research objectives, maintaining an appropriate balance of researcher

involvement/detachment (Elias 1978). Further details and sample interviewee-aided sociograms are provided within Chapter 5 (Figure 4) and Chapter 6 (Figure 6).

3.6.3 Meeting recordings

Meeting recordings were used as a data collection method for the study presented in Chapter 7. It allowed data to be collected on the co-construction process between researcher and participants, highlighting the interactions and relationships that developed these socially constructed realities (Howell 2013). CoP meetings recordings provided rich data on the reflexive construction process between all stakeholders. Given the critical perspective, recordings allowed us to ‘look at language itself and the realities it makes’ (Braun and Clarke 2021b, p.164). Due to the online context, greater consideration had to be given towards promoting discussion and building trust at the beginning of the community. Discussion prompts, as shown in Appendix G, were used to help facilitate these connections. As previously highlighted regarding the challenge of blending into the research space (Hill and Dao 2021) during the CoP (Section 3.3.1), my critical friends supported my reflexivity as a researcher, ensuring the meeting content remained focused on PESGs’ needs. I showed vulnerability by acknowledging that the community was helping me to better understand the teaching contexts that I was no longer situated in, empowering members within the group (Gonçalves *et al.* 2020). There were a number of other strategies used within meetings, to ensure the community was built on the needs of members, such as anonymous feedback polls to direct future meeting content, allowing participants to provide feedback on their experiences of the CoP.

3.7 Analysis

3.7.1 Mixed methods analysis

A mixed methods analysis was conducted for the data collected in Chapter 4. Quantitative data were analysed using Microsoft Excel, calculating descriptive statistics and frequency distributions related to areas such as teachers’ self-efficacy to teach PE, their attitudes towards PE and their teaching practices. Meanwhile, qualitative data were analysed using content analysis within the question categories. These findings were subsequently integrated with each other to reveal the wider picture. For example, when asking PESGs if their specialism experience influences

their practices as teachers (Closed question, Yes or No), quantitative analysis supported the large scale analysis of PESGs by categories such as year graduated or HEI, establishing a clear picture on the influence of the specialism among PESGs. However, the content analysis of the associated open questions brought these statistics to life, providing insights that are ‘not possible when only qualitative or quantitative data are collected’ (Harwell 2011, p.8). Further details on the application of a mixed methods analysis are provided in Chapter 4.

3.7.2 Qualitative data analysis

3.7.2.1 Reflexive thematic analysis

Reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) was used to analyse the qualitative data in this thesis in Chapter 5, Chapter 6, and Chapter 7 (Braun and Clarke 2021b). The fluidity of RTA meant it could be applied in different ways, guided by the ontological approaches adopted within different chapters during this thesis (Terry *et al.* 2017). RTA is an active reflexive process that provides guidelines for conducting analysis and generating meaning from data, allowing for reflexive progression and regression between the phases (Braun and Clarke 2021b). It was a suitable form of examining PESGs’ experiences throughout the socialisation process, focusing on interpreting their ‘subjective experiences and sense making’ (Willig 2013; Braun and Clarke 2021a, p.39). A combination of electronic and printed copies of the transcribed interview and meeting data were used to analyse the data, that allowed me as researcher to reflect in different ways as I engaged with the various media types. All coding, however, was input electronically using the NVivo 12 qualitative software package. This section will provide an overview of the RTA process that was used across the studies presented in Chapter 5, Chapter 6, and Chapter 7. Engaging in RTA is not neutral, and therefore it is important to clearly outline how the research was conducted, providing information on areas such as the research paradigms, epistemologies and ontologies; the approach to RTA; and the development of codes and themes including samples (Braun and Clarke 2021c). It allows readers to understand the manner through which knowledge was produced, and how this may be transferred into other contexts.

RTA requires ‘reflexivity, theoretical knowingness and transparency’ (Braun and Clarke 2019, p.590). This section outlines the adventure of RTA and how it was

used to generate meaning, with samples from the thesis. Following the data collection process and the transcription of the audio recorded data during each phase of the research, I began the first phase, the *data familiarisation* process. I immersed myself within the content, listening to the audio recordings of the interviews and reading the transcribed data, noting initial reflections and understandings (Braun and Clarke 2021b). For example, following familiarisation with the PESG interviews for Chapter 5, I noted in relation to PESGs' view of QPE that;

‘Graduates of the specialism felt that PE should be active, enjoyable, and contain learning experiences. A staged model of skill progression was also recommended, creating further opportunities for the development of all children’s abilities. Each individuals’ view of PE was influenced by a variety of factors, however the influence of the PE specialism was ranked highly by all participants.’ (Reflection from the familiarisation process for the study presented in Chapter 5)

Given the critical realist approach to the chapter, initial observations were inductive as I tried to make sense of PESGs’ perception of reality as teachers. Given the research Chapter 5 objectives and critical realist approach, it was important to focus fully on teachers’ attitudes, beliefs, and experiences that shaped their view of QPE (Willig 2013; Terry *et al.* 2017; Braun and Clarke 2021b). Having familiarised myself with the data I began the second phase, *coding* the data systematically. Inductive and deductive analysis was focused on teachers’ view of QPE and the experiences that shaped these views. The coding was a meticulous process of searching the data to identify ‘segments of data that appear potentially interesting, relevant or meaningful’ (Braun and Clarke 2021b, p.35). Code labels were prescribed to these data excerpts that captured the meaning of the data, relevant to the research analysis. Codes were both semantic and latent, capturing the direct meaning of participants’ responses as well as the implicit undertones of the data. Having completed the first phase of coding however, it was evident that codes could be combined and refined, due to ‘over-coding’ (Braun and Clarke 2021b). For example, the initial codes ‘Importance of inclusion in PE.’, ‘Negative impact of exclusive PE experiences’, and ‘Those who find PE challenging are sometimes left behind’ were combined to form ‘Inclusion is important for the long-term impact of PE.’. Table 5 is an example of the code ‘Inclusion is important for the long-term impact of PE’ and a sample of data extracts.

Table 5. Sample of phase one coding

Code	Example data extracts
Inclusion is important for the long-term impact of PE.	<p><i>Bridget:</i> Oak Hills University (pseudonym) had a lot of the good equipment. So for athletics, the hurdles, all of those things, that was great, and even there was an inclusion lesson we did, and we had all the equipment for kids with special needs, and you know, all the balls that like you can shake for kids that are blind and things like that, like that was really beneficial as well. So overall, it was really helpful to see how to give a high-quality PE lesson.</p> <p><i>Grace:</i> I was actually kind of overweight when I was younger, but like the experience of PE in school, it didn't really matter if you were good or bad, like I never felt left out of something or anything like that, like I still went wholeheartedly into everything, and there was no judgment or anything.</p> <p><i>Paul:</i> You have children around 11 or 12 just being so disheartened by not making what essentially was just a school team for a bit of a game [...] seeing the disappointment on children who just as much deserve to be on that team.</p> <p><i>Paul:</i> Separating them I suppose, sport you kind of... PE needs to be more inclusive of everyone. I think sport, as much as it should be inclusive, if you don't have that interest in a particular sport, you're not going to participate in it, but PE you need to grab someone who is not interested in sport anyway.</p>

Having thoroughly coded the data and tidied the labels and data excerpts for each, I moved to the third phase of *generating initial themes*. This process was focused on recognising shared meanings that existed within the data. Codes were compiled if they contained a 'core idea or concept' that was considered relevant in relation to the research objectives (Braun and Clarke 2021b). As highlighted in Table 6, by interpreting codes related to planning for PE, meeting the child's need, and the relaxed approach towards teaching PE, shared meaning was evident. These codes were

assembled as they related to the educational components of PE and the importance of them in the development of the child. It was evident that PESGs' felt that QPE needs be focused on educating children rather than just providing opportunities for PA. This prompted the development of the candidate theme 'Physical education – education needed as well as the physical'.

Table 6. Sample of a candidate theme developed during phase three.

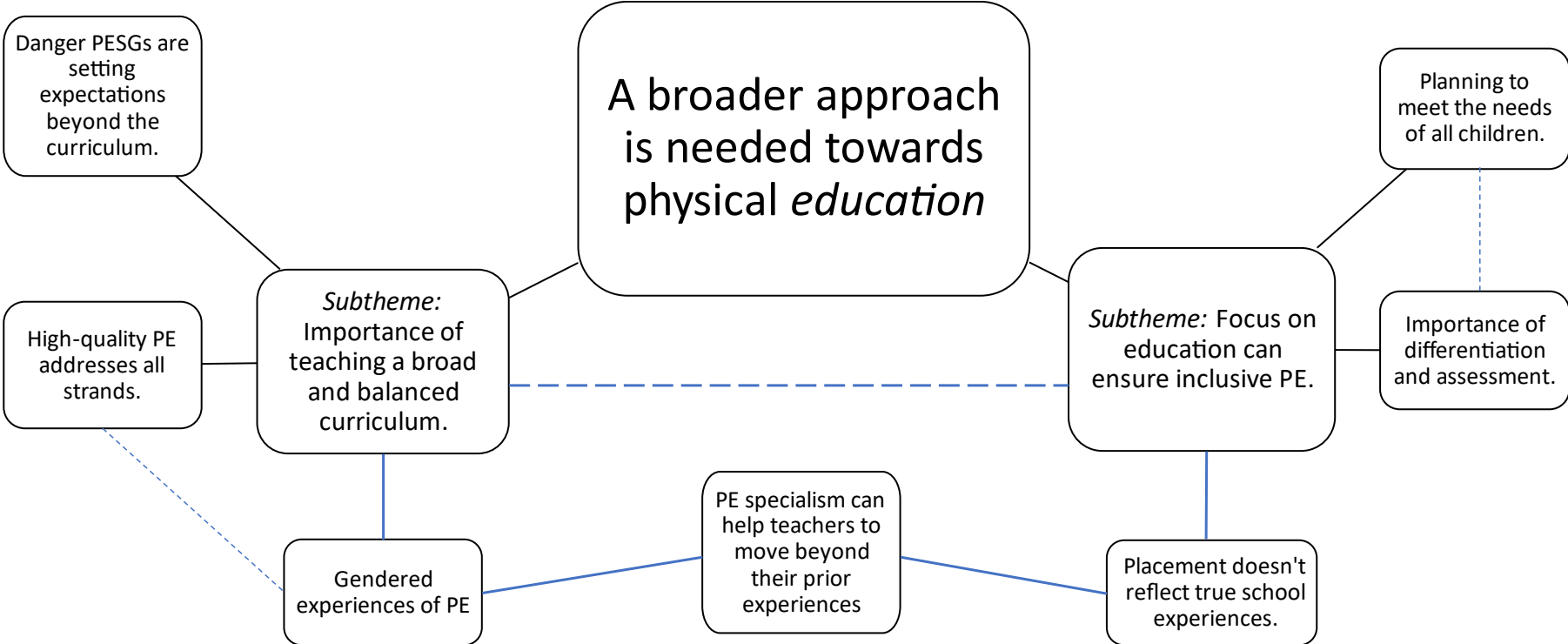
Candidate Theme: Physical education - education needed as well as the physical

- Quality PE needs to plan for learning in the lesson.
- PE needs to meet the needs of all children.
- Inclusion is important for the long-term impact of PE.
- Differentiation and assessment are necessary to create inclusive PE.
- Specialism created opportunities to plan and teach quality PE.
- Role as special education teacher developed greater understanding of children's needs.
- Quality PE should not be focused on competition.
- PE needs to be treated like core subjects.
- Importance of teaching all strands in the curriculum.
- Importance of variety in PE.
- PESGs enjoyed games dominated experiences of PE.
- Attitudes need to change towards PE to move it beyond sport.
- Limited PE experiences due to gender stereotypes of teachers.
- PE should look at the holistic development of the child.
- PESGs setting expectations beyond the curriculum.
- Better links needed between primary and secondary PE.
- Children can be learning without realising they are learning in PE.

Having identified a number of candidate themes that related to the research aim and objectives across the dataset, I moved on to phase four of *developing and reviewing themes*. This phase was focused on determining the fit of the themes in relation to the coded data and full data set (Braun and Clarke 2021b). It was also important to review the themes to ensure there was a central organising concept for

each theme, and they weren't 'summaries of data domains' (Braun and Clarke 2019; Braun and Clarke 2021b). The central organising concept for 'Physical education – education needed as well as the physical' was that QPE should address the educational needs of all children. It was noted that some codes such as 'attitudes need to change towards PE to move it beyond sport' would be better suited to the candidate theme 'sporting biographies need to be managed carefully'. The significance of the themes was also considered in relation to the research objectives and some themes were amended, while others removed. For example, the candidate theme of 'Promoting physical activity and the long-term health and wellbeing of children' was dispersed across the other themes, as it was obvious that PESGs recognised this as an outcome of the QPE which had been outlined in the other themes. It was better placed as subtheme within the overarching themes of greater significance. It also became clear that a common thread across themes was the influence of the PE specialism in expanding teachers understanding of PE beyond their limited experiences as students. Further attention was paid to the acculturation and professional socialisation of PESGs during the review process, framing the themes and subthemes to accurately reflect the semantic and latent influence of socialisation. These modifications continued into phase five which involved *refining, defining and naming themes* (Braun and Clarke 2021b). Thematic maps were helpful in visually representing the themes and subthemes and how they might relate to each other (Braun and Clarke 2021b). Figure 2 provides a sample of a thematic map for the theme of 'A broader approach is needed towards physical *education*'.

Figure 2. Sample of thematic map for 'A broader approach is needed towards physical education' theme



It became obvious that to meet the needs of children, a broader approach was needed towards curriculum delivery. Again, I carefully reviewed the themes and their central organising concepts, and name the themes which continuously evolved through interactions with the data, analysis, relevant literature and writing (Terry et al. 2017). During this phase I also wrote an overview of each theme, as can be seen in Table 7 below.

Table 7. Themes and theme summaries for Chapter 5 analysis.

Themes	Characteristics
PE should contain the <i>fundamentals</i>	PE should equip children with the competence and confidence to lead physically active lifestyles. To achieve this, PE needs to develop the fundamental movement skills that enable them to engage in PA. It is important that PE is fun for children, as these meaningful experiences will influence motivation to engage in PA outside of school. PESGs recognise that a lack of these experiences a children has deprived their classmates of opportunities to engage in physically active lifestyles.
A broader approach is needed towards physical <i>education</i>	A greater focus on the educational needs of the child is needed in PE. This includes; teaching a broad and balanced curriculum that provides a variety of experiences for all children; and implementing planning, differentiation and assessment procedures to create inclusive educative experiences for all children in PE. PE is often treated as a marginalised subject, and the PE specialism helped to develop these teaching orientations among PESGs.
Sporting biographies can help PESGs to hit the target.	PESGs are equipped to negotiate the complex relationship of PE and sport to inspire children to lead physically active lifestyles. Many PESGs have sporting biographies but recognise that PE as sport does not meet all children's needs. PESGs can use their passion for sport and their teaching orientations to motivate children to engage in PA. PESGs sporting biographies can position them as positive role models for students, but it is important that they remain true to their teaching orientations develop through professional socialisation.

The final phase of RTA, *writing up* had initially began alongside the development of initial themes (Braun and Clarke 2021b). As I moved through the different phases however, greater care and detail was taken to tell the story of the data, while preparing the journal article for submission (Braun and Clarke 2021b). While this description provided an overview of the RTA process for Chapter 5, I engaged in a similar approach for Chapter 6 which also employed a critical realist approach. When conducting the RTA for the CoP data in Chapter 7, a similar phased analysis was taken, although it was utilised within a constructivist approach which is described briefly in the next paragraph.

Given the constructivist approach there were slight nuances in my approach as researcher. The data was initially analysed deductively rather than inductively during the data generation process. As I was part of the co-construction process with participants, a number of observations had been made during the research process. I was aware that I had been immersed in the research process as facilitator, researcher and fellow PESG, and some interpretations may have resonated with my own experiences as a teacher. This subjectivity can be a resource ‘that can be tapped to illuminate both the phenomenon under investigation and to situate research design and practices more generally’ (Gough and Madill 2012, p.382). Awareness of this subjectivity is important, but it needs to be monitored and managed appropriately. Regular communication with my supervisors and critical friends helped to maintain reflexivity in my judgement throughout the research, facilitation, and analysis. These deductive insights provided a foundation for analysis, before progressing through the subsequent phases of RTA, interrogating the data in greater detail. By reflecting on my assumptions throughout the process, RTA helped to unite implicit and latent meaning that may not have been as apparent as a participant of the CoP (Braun and Clarke 2021a). Further detail on how RTA was applied from a constructivist approach is provided in Chapter 7.

As a PhD student, new to qualitative research, RTA provided a range of practical guidance for meaning making. This section on RTA provided a transparent outline of how it was applied during my thesis.

3.8 Ethics Approval

Ethical approval was obtained for each of the studies from the Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee (MIREC), see Appendix B. Participants were provided with information sheets for the survey, interviews and CoP (Appendix C). These outlined the project information, the requirements, what will happen the information, how confidentiality will be kept, their right to withdraw, and what will happen to the data after completion of the research. Additional contact details were also provided for the principal researcher, supervisor, and ethics committee if participants had additional queries. Informed consent was attained from participants for each respective study. For the study described in Chapter 4, participants acknowledged their consent to participate by progressing from the information sheet to the first page of the online survey. For the studies described in Chapter 5, 6 and 7, participant consent was obtained verbally due to the online nature of the study, and this confirmation of consent was audio recorded. Participants were read the consent form (Appendix C) and invited to agree/disagree with each statement.

3.9 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter outlined the principles that guided the research conducted in this thesis. The research paradigm, including the epistemologies, ontologies, methodologies and ethics were described as well as a brief rationale for their selection. Cross-sectional and longitudinal research designs were included as part of the thesis, gathering data from and with PESGs at a variety of stages. This mixture of epistemological and ontological viewpoints facilitated both the observation and cocreation of PESGs' attitudes, beliefs and experiences. The subsequent chapters present the research studies in isolation, some of which were prepared for publication in peer-reviewed journals. This starts with Chapter 4, which provides a starting point for understanding PESGs and the influence of the PE specialism on their development as teachers.

Chapter 4

The best of both worlds? The impact of the initial teacher education physical education specialism programme on generalist teachers' self-efficacy, beliefs, and practices

Preamble

The following article reports findings from a cross-sectional online survey examining PESGs' self-efficacy, beliefs, and practices. The study design was guided by the Physical Education Teaching Efficacy Scale developed by Humphries *et al.* (2012) in addition to CSPPA and UNESCO studies examining PE provision (Hardman *et al.* 2014; McLennan and Thompson 2015; Woods *et al.* 2018). This article has been peer reviewed and published in *Education 3-13* online [November 10, 2021].

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Statement of authorship:

I hereby declare that I, Cillian Brennan am the principal author of this article. The following statements outline my contributions to the work:

- Substantial contributions to the conception and design of the work; the acquisition, analysis, and interpretation of data for the work; AND
- Drafting the work and revising it critically for important intellectual content; AND
- Final approval of the version to be published; AND
- Agreement to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.

See Appendix A for signed Statement of Authorship

See Appendix H for copyright permissions.

See Appendix I for differences between this chapter and the published article

4.1 Purpose of Chapter

4.1.1 Rationale

This chapter addresses the objective of the thesis: (1) To understand PESGs' self-efficacy to teach PE as generalist teachers with additional expertise.

Teacher confidence is often presented as the most significant barrier to QPE teaching among generalist teachers (Morgan and Bourke 2008; Tsangaridou 2012). This study provides an insight into the self-efficacy of this novel group of generalist teachers, PESGs. While research is currently undergoing examining this cohort (Marron *et al.* 2018), this study can help to establish a deeper understanding of the profile of PESGs and a base for future research. It also provides an insight into their experience of the PE specialism during ITE, supporting the development of teacher education in Irish and international contexts. Examining PESGs' practices as qualified teachers facilitates comparison with recent measures of the broader population of generalist primary school teachers in Ireland (Woods *et al.* 2018). It also offers an insight into how schools utilise PESGs' expertise. Finally, this study can also help to position PESGs within the international debate regarding who is best place to teach PE (Jones and Green 2017).

4.2 Abstract

This research investigated the self-efficacy, beliefs, and practices of generalist primary school teachers who undertook the Bachelor of Education with a specialism in PE between 2016 and 2019. Data were collected through a cross-sectional survey, and 80 valid responses were received. The findings suggest self-efficacy is high among these teachers, scoring 4.14 (± 0.38 on a 5-point Likert scale). Results also indicated that the specialism positively developed content knowledge and teaching skills among this cohort. However, it was unclear if these teachers were being utilised effectively upon graduation to enhance the provision of PE in Irish primary schools.

Keywords: Physical education teacher education; primary physical education; self-efficacy; subject leadership; generalist teachers

4.3 Introduction

The issue of who is best placed to deliver quality physical education (PE) experiences in primary schools has been the subject of considerable debate, in both Irish and international contexts (Breslin *et al.* 2012; Fletcher and Mandigo 2012; Tsangaridou 2016; Jones and Green 2017; Lynch and Soukup 2017; Blair 2018; Truelove *et al.* 2021). In Irish primary schools, the classroom teacher is responsible for teaching all curricular areas, and the teacher is not required to be a specialist in the teaching of PE (Government of Ireland 1999b). For a number of years, it has been acknowledged that there are ‘huge variances in the delivery of PE’ in Ireland, with almost one in five primary school children only receiving half of the recommended PE curriculum time each week (Houses of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education and Science 2005, p.24; Woods *et al.* 2018).

PE teaching is influenced by a number of factors, which have been categorised as teacher-related factors (confidence, prior experiences, knowledge, and interest) and institutional factors (facilities, resources, curriculum demands, and funding) (Morgan and Hansen 2008a). One reason for the range of quality in Irish primary PE teaching is that many teachers do not feel competent and confident teaching PE (Ní Chróinín and Murtagh 2009; Murphy and O’Leary 2012). This reflects the international discourse, which suggests that generalist primary school teachers lack the confidence to teach PE (Morgan and Bourke 2008; Tsangaridou 2012; Elliot *et al.* 2013; Dyson *et al.* 2016; Jones and Green 2017). Despite efforts to address this during initial teacher education (ITE), the congested nature of generalist teacher education results in limited opportunities to develop content knowledge and gain field experience (Fletcher and Mandigo 2012; Harris *et al.* 2012; Caldwell *et al.* 2021; Randall and Griggs 2021). As a result, when faced with institutional barriers to teaching PE in primary schools, teachers sometimes revert to their PE experiences prior to ITE, placing a greater emphasis on physical activity than the learning experience (Morgan and Hansen 2008b; Keay and Spence 2012; Blair 2018). It has also resulted in a hesitancy to teach PE in Ireland, with many classroom teachers transferring responsibility for PE to external National Governing Body (NGB) sports coaches (Ní Chróinín and O’Brien 2019; Mangione *et al.* 2020). While primary PE in Ireland has not been formally outsourced to external coaches or specialist teachers, it is beginning to reflect the

international pattern of reduced teacher involvement (Dyson *et al.* 2016; Jones and Green 2017; Bowles and O’Sullivan 2020).

The model of generalist teachers delivering primary PE is prevalent throughout the world with teachers predominantly responsible for teaching all class subjects, in Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom (UK), and many European countries, although there has been a growing influence from specialist providers in recent years (Griggs and Petrie 2017; MacPhail *et al.* 2019; Barber *et al.* 2022). Many countries have adopted a neoliberal approach to support the delivery of primary PE, investing in external coaches or specialist PE teachers to deliver the PE curriculum (Williams and Macdonald 2015; Dyson *et al.* 2016; Sperka and Enright 2018; Griggs and Randall 2019). Secondary school PE teachers and sports coaches often fulfil these roles, although uncertainty remains over the suitability of such personnel as specialist teachers (Fletcher and Mandigo 2012; Williams and Macdonald 2015; Griggs and Randall 2019; Sperka 2020). There are concerns that these external providers aren’t equipped to meet the needs of primary school children, and it is feared that their influence may result in the ‘sportification’ of school PE, damaging the already compromised educational status of PE (Powell 2015; Dyson *et al.* 2016; Sperka and Enright 2019). Furthermore, the outsourcing of PE results in reduced teacher involvement, creating a vicious cycle for teachers’ deteriorating competence and confidence (Smith 2015; McVeagh *et al.* 2022). This is in contrast to the United States, where specialist teachers deliver the majority of PE in elementary schools (Griggs and Petrie 2017). These specialist teachers undertake a specific pre-service physical education teacher education programme, and are given responsibility for delivering PE across the school (Parker and Patton 2018). Despite the potential benefits of this model, ‘political and fiscal pressures’ inhibit other countries from implementing it (Fletcher and Mandigo 2012, p.371; Truelove *et al.* 2021).

Alternatively, it is recommended that generalist teachers receive some sort of specialist PE training during ITE to improve teaching quality and pupil outcomes (Fletcher and Mandigo 2012; Tsangaridou 2016; Lynch and Soukup 2017; Olufsen *et al.* 2021). In Ireland, a PE specialism was introduced into two primary level ITE programmes when the Bachelor of Education (B. Ed) degree was extended to a four-year course in 2012 (Ní Chróinín and Murtagh 2009; Marron *et al.* 2018). In contrast

to specialist PE teachers, the PE specialism allows generalist teachers to develop subject-specific PE expertise during ITE. The major PE specialism is offered to 55 new students on average each year, <6% of primary school teaching graduates from the four ITE programmes in the Republic of Ireland (Ní Chróinín 2018). Teachers get the opportunity to engage with 90-150 additional hours of PE modules, equating to 22.5 European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), and 30 ECTS in the respective colleges (Ní Chróinín 2018). It is recommended that ITE should offer pre-service generalist teachers the chance to reflect on prior experiences, develop in depth subject knowledge, and engage in practical field experiences (Fletcher *et al.* 2013; Tsangaridou 2016; Randall and Fleet 2021). The PE specialism creates further opportunities to engage in these practices, supported by ‘peer feedback and teacher educator mentoring’ (Marron *et al.* 2018, p.41). It also allows teachers to develop pedagogical and assessment skills, which may previously have been limited during ITE (Ní Chróinín and O’Sullivan 2016; Marron *et al.* 2018). ITE has already been shown to improve teachers’ appreciation of PE (Ní Chróinín and Coulter 2012), and improved content knowledge can create confident and motivated teachers, who can deliver quality PE experiences (Petrie 2010; Tsangaridou 2016).

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) guidelines recommend that where generalist teachers are responsible for PE, that ‘curriculum co-ordinators with specialist knowledge and expertise’ are considered to support, advise, and guide the delivery of PE among non-specialist teachers (Hardman *et al.* 2014, p.125). PE specialism graduates could play a central role in this model of distributed expertise in primary schools, acting as teacher mentors, supporting generalist teachers to deliver quality PE through informal leadership practices such as class swapping (O’Sullivan and Oslin 2012; Teaching Council 2013; Marron *et al.* 2018; Clohessy *et al.* 2019; Randall and Fleet 2021). Primary PE is at a crossroads in many countries, and specialism graduates may be best placed to connect the key stakeholders, and collectively deliver an integrated model built upon the child’s needs and interests (Tsangaridou 2016; Carse *et al.* 2018; Sperka *et al.* 2018; Ní Chróinín *et al.* 2019; Truelove *et al.* 2021). The PE specialism offers a range of potential possibilities, however, the positive work of ITE can sometimes be challenged when teachers are faced with their teaching realities (Morgan and Bourke

2005). As PE specialism graduates enter the workforce, perceived competence is a key factor in utilising their skills to deliver quality PE (Freak and Miller 2017).

4.3.1 Theoretical framework

Bandura's social cognitive theory (2012) suggests people are active agents in their behaviours; these behaviours are a product of their interactions with, and the interplay between personal, behavioural, and environmental determinants. While each of the interconnected determinants impact behaviour, self-efficacy plays a significant role within these causal interactions (Bandura 2006; Bandura 2012). Self-efficacy refers to individuals' beliefs in their ability to complete tasks, and to attain desired outcomes, ultimately influencing behaviours and actions (Bandura 1997). This study uses Bandura's self-efficacy theory to investigate teachers' self-efficacy to deliver PE.

As individuals assess the potential outcomes of their actions, self-efficacy determines the probability of them undertaking these actions. In the context of primary PE, if teachers are high in self-efficacy, they are likely to adapt and overcome any barriers that may inhibit the teaching of quality PE. High self-efficacy will also result in teachers planning for more positive outcomes, and increase the likelihood of them taking the necessary steps to realise these outcomes (Ashton 1984; Bandura 1993). In contrast, teachers with lower self-efficacy are more likely to be negatively impacted by institutional barriers such as poor facilities, resources, and time constraints. Low self-efficacy also increases the chances of teachers actualising the doubts and faults they envision (Bandura 1993; Tschannen-Moran *et al.* 1998). This may be influenced by negative prior experiences of PE as a participant, with teachers recreating their past PE experiences (Morgan and Bourke 2008). Positive teacher performance requires both the necessary teaching skills, as well as the self-efficacy to use the skills effectively (Bandura 1992; Bandura 1997). Therefore, improving self-efficacy is a key factor in improving teacher behaviours in primary schools.

Self-efficacy can be developed in four ways: *mastery*, (experiences of success, completing tasks competently); *social modelling*, (observing the success of others in similar contexts, and self-comparison to those individuals); *social persuasion*, (social encouragement by others, developing resolve and enthusiasm); and *choice processes*, (individuals' shape their development by their choice of actions and what they engage

with) (Bandura 2012; Zach *et al.* 2012). The reciprocity of confidence and competence plays a key role in shaping behaviour, and the specialism programme has the opportunity to develop both congruently.

While some research is being undertaken to track Irish teachers who completed a specialism in PE (Marron *et al.* 2018), there is limited research of this growing cohort of teachers. Research in other international contexts has investigated the self-efficacy of pre-service teachers to teach PE (Fletcher *et al.* 2013; Barber *et al.* 2022); the confidence of generalist teachers to teach PE (Morgan and Bourke 2008; George *et al.* 2018); and compared the self-efficacy of specialist and generalist teachers (Breslin *et al.* 2012; Truelove *et al.* 2021). This cross-sectional study explores the self-efficacy, teaching practices, and roles undertaken by the first four years of graduates from the PE specialism. It adds to the research supporting ITE for generalist teachers, and the provision of primary PE by generalist teachers in both Irish and international contexts, highlighting the potential impact of this model to develop confident teachers of PE. As the debate continues over who is best placed to teach PE, this model aims to develop generalist teachers with some additional specialist expertise. It could potentially offer the best of both worlds. This study investigates:

- PE specialism graduates' self-efficacy to teach PE.
- The PE specialism experience, and its influence on teacher attitudes and beliefs.
- The practices and roles that are undertaken by PE specialism graduates in primary schools.

4.4 Methods

A cross-sectional design was used to survey B. Ed graduates with a specialism in PE in spring 2020. An online questionnaire was used to collect a mix of quantitative and qualitative data, investigating the PE specialism experience, self-efficacy to teach PE, teaching practices, and roles undertaken.

Skip logic was used to filter the questions asked to participants based on their experiences, for example, graduates were not asked about teaching experience if they had not taught in a school. A range of question types were used within the

questionnaire, including open questions, closed questions, and 5-point Likert scale questions, exploring each of the following aspects:

Specialism graduate profile. Teachers outlined their teaching experience since qualifying, including their teaching role, job status, and CPD undertaken. Participants were also invited to share any relevant experiences of coaching or supervisory roles with school-aged children in sports or physical activity.

Specialism experience. Participants were invited to state their level of agreement with statements on a five-point Likert scale ranging from (1) ‘strongly disagree’, to (5) ‘strongly agree’, with a midpoint of (3) ‘neither agree nor disagree’. The statements related to their PE specialism experience; their motivation for undertaking the PE specialism, the influence of the PE specialism; and their desire to engage with CPD to develop their PE teaching skills. They were also invited to comment on their PE specialism experience.

PE teaching self-efficacy. Participants were invited to state their level of agreement with 15 self-efficacy statements relating to the planning, assessment, instruction, and differentiation of PE, guided by the Physical Education Teaching Efficacy Scale (Humphries *et al.* 2012). The 5-point Likert scale was anchored by (1) ‘cannot do/strongly disagree’ and (5) ‘highly certain I can do/strongly agree’, with a midpoint of (3) ‘moderately certain I can do/neither agree nor disagree’. The inclusion of ‘moderately certain I can do’ ensured the answers could be rated as a unipolar scale, as you cannot have a neutral level of self-efficacy (Bandura 2012). Participants also rated their confidence to both teach and participate in each curricular strand on a 5-point Likert scale, anchored by (1) really not confident, and (5) very confident.

PE teaching practices & roles undertaken. Teachers were asked to indicate how often they taught PE and select the time allocation that best represented their practices. Teachers were invited to add comments on any roles they had undertaken within the school, contributing to the delivery of PE, school sport, or active school initiatives.

4.4.1 Participants

This survey was distributed online in the Republic of Ireland and was open to all teachers who had completed a four-year B. Ed degree with a major specialism in PE in the Republic of Ireland. Participants were invited to complete the questionnaire, which

was promoted through social media platforms, print media, and through informal conversations at a PE conference. The survey was shared with members of the Irish Primary Physical Education Association (IPPEA), and the Irish National Teachers' Association. Targeted recruitment was also used, using pre-existing networks of teacher education graduates in Ireland. Snowball sampling took place with participants encouraged to make other specialism graduates aware of the survey.

The potential sample of the study consisted of all graduates of the specialism in PE from 2016 to 2019 (n = 220). A total of 87 responses were received. There was a satisfactory gender mix that was representative of the gender mix among the population. There was a broad range of participants from all year groups, and a response rate >20% was achieved from each year group. There was a balanced response rate from the two colleges in the Republic of Ireland who deliver the four-year B. Ed with a specialism in PE. 53.8% participants graduated from college 1, while 46.3% participants graduated from college 2.

Of the 87 responses, one response did not meet the participant sample criteria, and six responses contained descriptive data only, and therefore, were excluded from the results. Five responses were partially completed, and the response data was deemed eligible. Four participants did not work in teaching, did not have one year of teaching experience, and therefore, were ineligible to answer questions on their teaching experience.

Table 8. Participant information - year graduated & gender.

Year Graduated	Male		Female		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
-2016	7	(31.8%)	7	(12.1%)	14	(17.5%)
-2017	5	(22.7%)	16	(27.6%)	21	(26.3%)
-2018	5	(22.7%)	20	(34.5%)	25	(31.3%)
-2019	5	(22.7%)	15	(25.9%)	20	(25%)
All	22	(100%)	58	(100%)	80	(100%)

4.4.2 Data analysis

Quantitative data, such as closed questions and Likert scale questions, were analysed using Microsoft Excel. Descriptive statistics were used to identify the range of participants within each relevant group, and how representative the sample was of the wider population. Descriptive statistics and frequency distributions were then used to summarise the quantitative data, including the self-efficacy scale. Scale items were reduced to provide an overall mean confidence score. Mean scores were also calculated for each teaching area. All data were analysed within subgroups, including gender, year graduated, and teaching roles, to determine any disparities that may exist between groups.

Open-ended answers providing clarification of information such as course type, additional qualifications, etc., were analysed using content analysis. These comments were coded and reported as categorised quantitative data. The remaining open-ended questions were initially coded within their question categories. These were subsequently examined, and initial themes were generated from these codes, adopting a semantic approach. Given the structured collection of this data, themes were originally closely associated with the research objectives. These themes were then analysed in greater depth, compared, refined, and recategorized before the final themes were constructed.

4.5 Results

4.5.1 Teacher profile

93.5% (n = 72) of PE specialism graduates are currently working in teaching, with the majority in medium to long-term roles, as seen in Table 9. While the majority of those currently teaching are teaching in Ireland (n = 68, 93.2%), a small minority teach outside of Ireland, in England (n = 2), Australia (n = 1), New Zealand (n = 1) and the United Arab Emirates (n = 1), all in mainstream class teacher roles.

Of the teachers currently teaching in Ireland, 61 are mainstream class teachers (81.3%), and therefore are responsible for teaching their class PE every week (Government of Ireland 1999b). The remaining teachers (n = 7) are in special education teacher roles. As can be seen in Table 9, the contract types varied among all

participants. Nineteen of the teachers that held a permanent position/ contract of indefinite duration (CID) in a school had graduated in either 2016 or 2017.

Table 9. Job status of teachers.

Job status	n	%
Permanent teacher/CID	26	36.1%
Fixed term teacher	25	34.7%
Non-casual substitute teacher	18	25%
Casual substitute teacher	3	4.2%
Total	72	100%

37.5% (n = 30) of PE specialism graduates held a coaching or exercise qualification. While some respondents held qualifications in multiple areas, qualifications from the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA)¹ dominate, being held by 63.3% (n = 19) of those teachers. Teachers also held qualifications in swimming (n = 3, 10%), basketball (n = 3, 10%), generic coaching qualifications (n = 3, 10%), and other disciplines (n = 6, 20%).

Similar patterns were evident among the teachers who were involved in physical activity or sport, in a coaching or supervisory role outside of school. 35% (n = 28) held roles outside of school, with GAA once again being the main sport they are involved in (n = 19, 67.9%), followed by swimming (n = 2, 7.1%), basketball (n = 2, 7.1%), and other sports (n = 5, 17.9%)

4.5.2 PE specialism graduates are confident teachers of PE

Findings from the PE Teaching Self-Efficacy scale can be seen in Table 10. The overall mean self-efficacy for this group was 4.14, (± 0.38 on a 5-point scale) suggesting they are confident in most aspects of their PE teaching. The consistency of

¹ The GAA is the national governing body responsible for the promotion and development of the Gaelic games of hurling, Gaelic football, handball, and rounders. The Gaelic games family also includes the Camogie Association and the Ladies Gaelic Football Association who are responsible for governing Camogie and Ladies Football respectively.

this self-efficacy was evident across groups (gender, year graduated, college, teaching role), with mean confidence >4 for all subgroups. Overall, teachers' self-efficacy was highest in planning PE (4.2 ± 0.5 on a 5-point scale), teaching methods ($4.19, \pm 0.38$), and differentiation ($4.15, \pm 0.41$), while the item they displayed the least self-efficacy in was assessment practices ($3.86, \pm 0.65$).

As Table 10 suggests, teachers displayed high levels of self-efficacy in demonstrating the skills or drills to their students. It also indicates that teachers are confident in creating spaces where children can learn while physically active, working individually and in groups. However, there were areas in which teachers displayed lower levels of self-efficacy, such as monitoring student progress, using assessment to guide their practice, and involving students in this assessment process. These views were not shared by all teachers, with some commenting on their use of assessment, and one teacher remarking; 'I'm confident I am delivering formative feedback and helping the children to learn and improve'. Despite lower results for these items, teachers still displayed confidence in these areas (>3).

Table 10. PE Teaching Self-Efficacy scale.

PE teaching efficacy statements	Mean	SD
Planning	<i>4.2</i>	<i>0.5</i>
I can plan for learning to take place in my PE lessons as well as children being active.	4.32	0.57
I can plan my PE lessons based on the needs of individuals throughout my class.	4.12	0.63
I can plan PE lessons to allow children to work as individuals and in groups.	4.31	0.65
I can integrate PE with other areas of the whole school curriculum.	4.26	0.75
I can link PE to the child's environment/community and promote ways of learning outside the classroom.	4	0.67
Assessment	<i>3.86</i>	<i>0.65</i>
I can assess pupils' progress formatively.	3.84	0.71
I can get pupils to contribute to the assessment process and reflect on their own performance and that of others.	3.88	0.74
Teaching methods	<i>4.19</i>	<i>0.38</i>
I can use questions or activities to get children to think critically or solve problems.	3.82	0.76
I can change a lesson based on how the lesson is working.	4.29	0.51
I can demonstrate and explain a skill/drill so that the class understands what to do.	4.53	0.53
I can get my students to respect and cooperate with each other.	4.08	0.58
I can organise and run active classes safely so that students are not likely to get hurt.*	4.25	0.52

PE teaching efficacy statements	Mean	SD
Differentiation	<i>4.15</i>	<i>0.41</i>
If one of my students was having trouble with a drill, I know ways to change it to make it easier for them.	4.21	0.47
If a drill was too easy for a highly skilled student, I can change it to make it more challenging.	4.22	0.58
If I had a student with SEN in my class, I can find ways for the student to participate with the rest of the class successfully.	4.03	0.65

5-point Likert scale was anchored by (1) ‘cannot do/strongly disagree’ and (5) ‘highly certain I can do/strongly agree’, with a midpoint of (3) ‘moderately certain I can do/neither agree nor disagree’

n=77 ,*n=76

With regards to content areas, teachers were most confident teaching games (4.74, ± 0.5 on a 5-point scale), followed by athletics (4.36, ± 0.63), and outdoor and adventure activities (4.03, ± 0.92). Teachers were less confident teaching gymnastics (3.49, ± 0.95) and dance (3.09, ± 1.11), with aquatics being the strand teachers were least confident to teach (2.82, ± 1.12). Additional comments acknowledged that confidence to teach aquatics was lower as the teaching of this was externalised, and class teachers were not responsible for teaching it. This pattern was reflected in their confidence to participate in each of the strands, with teachers most confident participating in games (4.88, ± 0.36), athletics (4.73, ± 0.55), and outdoor and adventure activities (4.58, ± 0.68). However, confidence to participate in aquatics (4.10, ± 1.02), was ranked above gymnastics (3.64, ± 0.97), and dance (3.49, ± 1.12).

4.5.3 The PE specialism – developing knowledge, skills, and attitudes through social learning

Overall, motivating factors for undertaking the PE specialism varied among students as seen in Table 11. It is clear, however that enjoyment of sports played a significant role in teachers' decisions to undertake the PE specialism. While some may have been influenced by potential job prospects, other participants used the specialism to address inadequacies in their PE teaching, with one teacher commenting; 'I decided to do the PE specialism after my first-year school placement. I wasn't confident teaching PE but it was something I wanted to improve'. Other comments highlighted the success of the specialism in achieving that improvement, as it has 'really enhanced my confidence and ability to teach quality PE'.

Table 11. Motivation for participating in the specialism.

Statement	Mean	SD
I undertook the PE specialism because I enjoyed sports.	4.53	0.62
I undertook the PE specialism to help my job prospects.	3.76	0.9
I undertook the PE specialism because I was already confident teaching PE before starting the specialism.	3.28	0.95
I undertook the PE specialism as I felt it would be less academically challenging than other module options.	2.46	1.18
I undertook the PE specialism because I felt I lacked the confidence to teach PE.	2.6	1.11

5-point Likert scale was anchored by (1) ‘strongly disagree’ and (5) ‘strongly agree’, with a midpoint of (3) ‘neither agree nor disagree’. n=80

Based on the 42 teacher comments, the PE specialism is successful in developing teachers’ understanding of PE, positively influencing their teaching approach, and ultimately the learning experience for children. While many biographical influences may shape their PE teaching practices, perceptions varied on whether they felt they would have been able to teach PE effectively without the specialism, as indicated by a mean score of 2.85 ± 0.79 ($n = 70$) on a 5-point scale for this item. Some participants highlighted the benefit of the specialism in overcoming previous misconceptions, commenting that ‘it has made me develop a positive approach to PE which I didn’t have growing up’. Ultimately, it developed teacher attitudes, skills, and practices, as reflected in one participant comment; ‘PE is a subject I love teaching and often am asked to take other teachers’ PE lessons during the week, or else offer guidance and suggestions to teachers on their own lessons’.

It was evident that the PE specialism is successful in providing teachers with extra content knowledge (4.6 ± 0.66 on a 5-point scale), through what participants described as ‘practical, hands-on, energetic lectures’ and ‘excellent placements’. The opportunity to gain practical experience was valuable, as teachers felt they had the opportunity to trial teaching methods in PE (4.6 ± 0.63) and open comments supported this observation: ‘(I) felt that it equipped me with a greater knowledge of how to teach PE and the different ways to teach PE’. It must be noted, however that many teachers felt

the specialism did not contain enough of these opportunities, as indicated by a score of 1.76 (± 1.08) in response to the statement 'The PE specialism contained sufficient opportunities to practice teaching PE'.

Teachers enjoyed their specialism experience, particularly the opportunity to work together with their classmates, and the community that developed among them, with comments acknowledging the 'great bond as a class and also with our 3 lecturers' as well as the 'multiple opportunities to collaborate with others through group assignments/teaching'. The specialism is successfully developing PE teaching skills among this cohort as well as influencing teacher attitudes, with teachers reflecting that they now 'realise the importance of PE', and 'feel very confident in PE'.

The specialism was a positive influence on the practices of these teachers, both in their planning and teaching, ultimately enhancing student experiences. Comments reflect the efforts these teachers are making to meet the needs of all children in PE, 'making our lessons more accessible to all pupils'. Furthermore, teachers remarked on the content of their lessons, ensuring learning is taking place, by 'includ(ing) a focus on learning and assessment in PE rather than just being active'. It has also influenced the learning environment created for children across all subjects, with teachers acknowledging that they are 'constantly trying to find different ways to incorporate physical activity in lessons'. However, despite these progressive signs, some participants have questioned the practicality of these skills, citing that a 'lack of indoor PE space is a huge factor' in teaching PE, and 'teaching of PE has been limited for the last three years (as) we have a full-time PE teacher who teaches every class'.

Overall, it is clear that teachers want to develop their PE teaching skills further (4.13 ± 0.58 on a 5-point scale), while 90% of teachers agreed/strongly agreed that they would like more opportunities to develop their PE teaching skills (4.11 ± 0.55 on a 5-point scale). Some teachers feel they do not teach enough PE to justify undertaking CPD (2.43 ± 0.98 on a 5-point scale), although many teachers feel the CPD available would advance their skills further (3.98 ± 0.64 on a 5-point scale). Despite teachers' desire to develop their skills, only 12 teachers (16.4%) have engaged in professional development in PE to date, undertaking courses predominantly run by the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) in Ireland, and the IPPEA.

4.5.4 Is confidence enough to change teacher behaviour?

While practices vary among specialism graduates teaching PE in international contexts, these results focus on the practices of teachers in Irish primary schools. 42.6% of mainstream teachers (n = 26) teach PE once a week, 47.5% of mainstream teachers (n = 29) teach PE twice a week, while 6.6% of mainstream teachers (n = 4) teach PE for more than twice a week. Worryingly, 3.3% of mainstream teachers (n = 2) do not get the opportunity to teach PE to their class every week. Interestingly 42.86% (n = 3) of special education teachers are given PE teaching responsibilities, with all of these teachers teaching PE at least twice a week. Of the 62 teachers in Irish primary schools responsible for teaching PE, the majority teach PE for 31-60 mins on average each week (58.1%, n = 36), while 30.6% of teachers teach PE for 61-90 mins per week (n = 19). However, it is concerning that 11.3% of teachers (n = 7) only teach PE for 0-30 mins each week. Children attending rural schools were more likely to receive 61-90 mins of PE each week (46.4% v 17.6%), while male teachers were also more likely to teach PE for 61-90 mins in comparison to female teachers (52.9% v 22.9%). Both cohorts had a similar ratio of teachers who teach 0-30 mins PE.

It is unclear if PE specialism graduates are becoming PE leaders in their schools, as indicated by a score of 2.76 ± 1.19 (n = 71) in response to the statement 'I am regarded as a PE leader in my school'. There is also uncertainty regarding whether teachers feel their additional expertise are being used effectively to improve the quality of PE teaching in their school (3.07 ± 1.07 on a 5-point scale, n = 70), although 40% of teachers agreed/strongly agreed. Many of these teachers contribute to the implementation of active initiatives (n = 20) in their schools, such as the Active School Flag, contributing to school PE provision in that way:

I am a member of the Active School committee and we encourage and support other teachers in their teaching of PE, i.e. for the strand of dance I teamed up with another teacher to enhance the lessons so we could demonstrate together and support one another.

Eleven teachers contribute to planning for PE in the school, while other responsibilities include organising the PE equipment in the school (n = 2). It also varies whether 'other teachers in the school come to me for advice with regards to PE' (2.99 ± 1.08 on a 5-

point scale, n = 70). Some teachers are guiding colleagues in their PE teaching, liaising and advising where possible, with teacher comments highlighting them ‘giving ideas to other teachers who may struggle with various strands’, while another reported that they ‘collaborate with the two other junior infant teachers when discussing planning for some (but not all) strands’.

However, many of the teachers are active in the provision of school sport (n = 51, 72.9%). Fifteen teachers are involved in coaching more than one sport (21.4%). Of the teachers involved in school sport, teachers predominantly coached Gaelic games (n = 38, 74.5%) ahead of soccer (n = 10, 19.6%), athletics (n = 6, 11.8%, basketball (n = 5, 9.8%) and other sports such as rugby and dance.

4.6 Discussion

Self-efficacy has been identified as a key factor influencing the teaching of quality PE by generalist teachers, enabling them to overcome barriers that may challenge their teaching (Bandura 1997; Morgan and Bourke 2008). This study investigated the self-efficacy of PE specialism graduates, examining the potential impact of the specialism to improve teacher efficacy and support improved PE practices in primary schools. Findings suggest that self-efficacy among PE specialism graduates is high, and the PE specialism supports the development of self-efficacy. However, it is unclear if this perceived efficacy is positively influencing the teaching of PE in Irish primary schools. While teacher confidence has been identified as the key inhibiting factor to improved PE teaching practices, greater structural changes may be required to overcome institutional barriers as well as teacher-related barriers (Morgan and Hansen 2008a).

Findings from the self-efficacy scale indicate that PE specialism graduates are confident teachers of PE. Previous research suggests that a mean score >4 indicates that teachers are demonstrating a high level of confidence to teach PE (Ensign *et al.* 2020; Erbaş and Ünlü 2020; Neville *et al.* 2020). Despite there being no comparable self-efficacy data in an Irish context, inferior confidence among generalist teachers has resulted in the delivery of an imbalanced PE curriculum and external coaches being given responsibility for PE delivery (Woods *et al.* 2018; Ní Chróinín and O'Brien 2019; Bowles and O'Sullivan 2020). However, results indicated that self-efficacy to teach PE was high (>4) among all four years of graduates, signalling the stable confidence base among PE specialism graduates. The consistency of self-efficacy

across all items and all groups suggests that PE specialism graduates perceive themselves to be equipped to deliver quality PE.

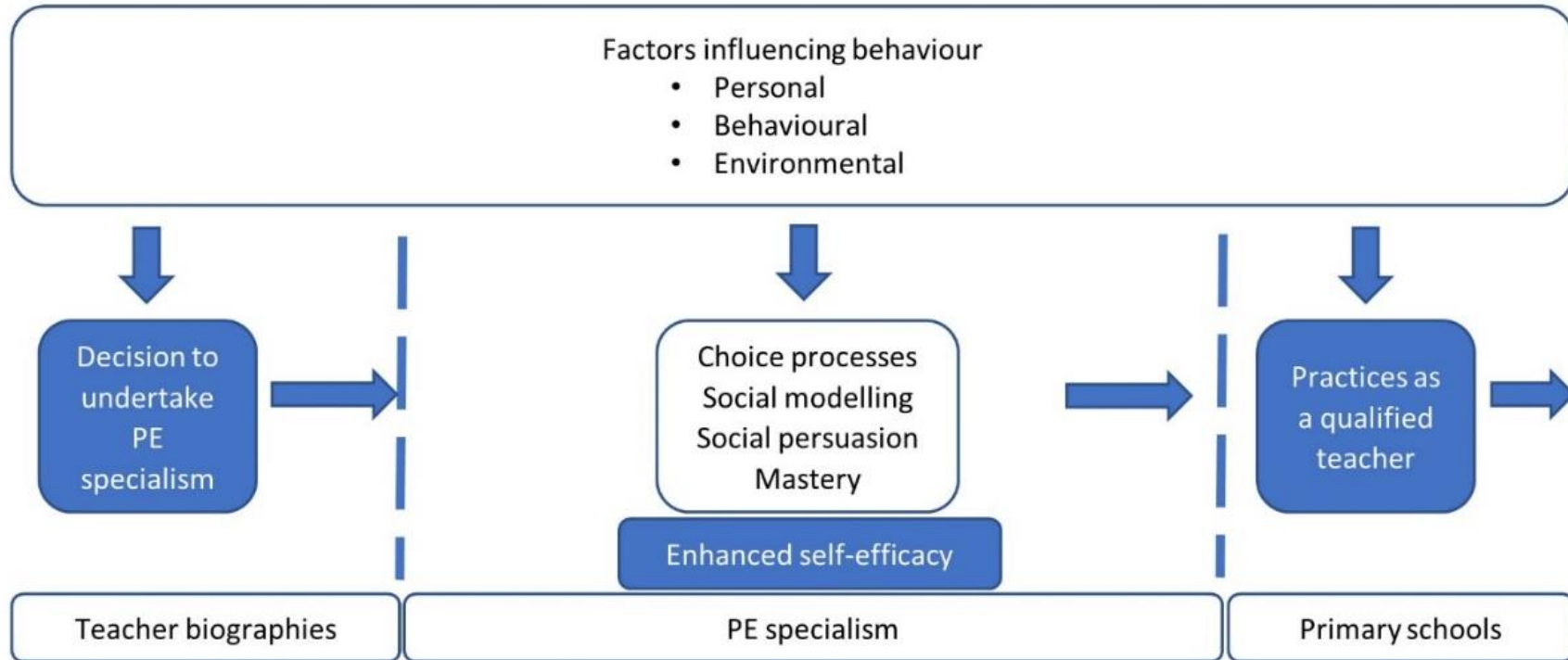
Pre-service teachers are active agents in the development of self-efficacy through choice processes (Bandura 2012). Personal, behavioural, and environmental determinants impacted their decision to undertake the specialism (Bandura 1997). While teachers' motivations varied for undertaking the specialism, it was clear that a love for sports was a key factor in teachers' choices. In addition to this, almost one-third of teachers held an external coaching qualification and were involved in sports coaching outside of the school. Primary PE has recently drifted away from its educational ideals, and given the sporting biographies of PE specialism graduates, there may be concerns that this trend could continue (Jones and Green 2017). In the Irish context, teachers are most confident to teach the games strand, and they teach it more frequently than the other strands, despite external coaches also predominantly delivering the games strand (Woods *et al.* 2018; Ní Chróinín and O'Brien 2019; Mangione *et al.* 2020). Although PE specialism graduates' confidence to teach games was highest, it remained high across five of the six strands. Outdoor and adventure activities have previously been identified as the least taught strand at primary school level (Woods *et al.* 2018), however, findings indicated high self-efficacy to teach the strand. Dance and gymnastics are also underrepresented in generalist teaching (Woods *et al.* 2018). However, specialism graduates are confident to teach them, although there was a greater variance in confidence. Teachers were least confident teaching aquatics, which was unsurprising given the outsourcing of aquatics in Irish primary schools (Mangione *et al.* 2020). Furthermore, biographical influences such as confidence to participate in strands has been shown to impact teacher performance, with teachers demonstrating greater confidence to teach the strands they are confident to participate in (Morgan and Bourke 2008). With the exception of the aquatics strand, teachers' confidence to participate in strands mirrored their confidence to teach each strand. Teachers' biographies can also lead to a misinterpretation of PE, therefore, it is positive to see specialism graduates prepared to teach the full PE curriculum, overcoming any harmful biases.

ITE has the potential to be transformative for generalist teachers, as they advance their knowledge beyond the introductory (Tsangaridou 2016; Freak and Miller

2017). It plays a key role in allowing teachers to reflect on prior experiences, disrupt negative predispositions, and change perceptions (Elliot *et al.* 2013; Haynes *et al.* 2016; Marron *et al.* 2018; Randall and Fleet 2021). Although some teachers felt they would have been able to confidently teach PE without the specialism, it was encouraging to see the PE specialism supports teachers to overcome negative predispositions, while building self-efficacy. Some PE specialism graduates acknowledged the impact of the specialism in developing a positive attitude towards PE, that they previously did not have as a participant. As the educational values of primary PE have become unsettled amidst generalist and external provision (Sperka and Enright 2019), this attitudinal change among specialism graduates is extremely promising. Graduates noted that the specialism gave them a greater understanding of PE, helping to ensure the educative purpose is fulfilled within lessons.

The PE specialism also demonstrates the potential to address the shortcomings of generalist ITE. Assessment, inclusion, and differentiation have previously been highlighted as areas that require further development by generalist teachers (Ní Chróinín and O'Sullivan 2016), while the pedagogical skills of external providers also require improvement (Blair and Capel 2011; Jones and Green 2017). In contrast, it is positive to see that PE specialism graduates are confident in their ability to meet the needs of all children through planning, assessment, and teaching practices. Limited opportunities for practical experiences have also been highlighted as an issue for ITE, due to the demands of generalist ITE and teaching practices (Randall and Fleet 2021). Although specialism graduates would have liked a greater amount of time allocated towards it, they acknowledged the benefit of the opportunities they had to trial teaching methods. This process facilitates Bandura's (2012) mastery experiences, through trial and error. Graduates also commented on the community that developed within the class, as they collaborated with their classmates and lecturers, creating further opportunities for social persuasion and social modelling, developing self-efficacy (Bandura 2012; Martins *et al.* 2015). Teacher comments highlighted their confidence to teach PE, their appreciation for the subject, and their enjoyment teaching it. The PE specialism appears to be addressing some of the weaknesses of both generalist and specialist teaching, developing confident teachers of PE. It would be hoped that this confidence stimulates teachers to engage in self-enabling strategies to create positive learning experiences (Martin *et al.* 2009).

Figure 3. Conceptual representation of teachers' development as PE teachers



Bandura (2012) suggests that peoples' behaviours are a product of their interactions, and it was anticipated that teachers' engagement with the PE specialism would reflect in their teaching practices. It is encouraging to see that teachers feel the PE specialism is positively influencing their practice in schools, both within and outside PE. As well as creating learning opportunities during PE, teachers are trying to integrate physical activity throughout the school day. However, the frequency of PE teaching by PE specialism graduates almost mirrored that of the general teaching population. 18% of primary school children in Ireland were previously shown to receive 0-30 mins PE each week, while the figure was 11.3% among PE specialism graduates (Woods *et al.* 2018). Although this is an improvement, given the expertise of the PE specialism graduates, further investigation will be required to determine the factors that result in the incomplete delivery of the PE curriculum. As highlighted by a small number of teacher comments, institutional factors such as facilities, resources, and external coaches may be limiting their potential influence. Although they have completed the PE specialism, these teachers face many of the same challenges that all generalist teachers face, and they may need to negotiate their position in the delivery of PE (Randall 2019).

It was also hoped that these teachers could support the delivery of quality PE on a whole school level (Ní Chróinín and Murtagh 2009). However, results suggest the use of PE specialism graduates as PE leaders varies greatly, and they may not be getting opportunities to support other school staff as originally hoped. In some cases, there are examples of these PE specialism graduates sharing their expertise by offering guidance, collaborating with other school staff, and supporting them. Although this potential role is evident within some schools, many graduates do not appear to have had this opportunity. Many of the teachers are involved in active initiatives and school sport within their schools. While these are important aspects of the development of the child, it may be reinforcing the alignment of PE towards physical activity and sport (Keay and Spence 2012; Blair 2018). School leaders play a key role in enabling PE specialism graduates to utilise their skills effectively, and it is important that structures are in place to facilitate the sharing of their expertise (McLennan and Thompson 2015; Marron *et al.* 2018; Clohessy *et al.* 2020). While the PE specialism facilitated the development of content knowledge, teaching skills, and self-efficacy through professional socialisation, the school environment appears to offer limited opportunities to use these skills. Further

investigation of the school and national context may be required to determine what is inhibiting the use of these teachers' expertise.

Specialism graduates' self-efficacy may deteriorate if they are not given sufficient opportunities to implement their learnings, acting as self-reactive and self-reflective practitioners (Bandura 2001; McVeagh *et al.* 2022). This cohort of teachers are confident in their initial years of teaching but may require guidance to navigate their context and utilise the skills developed during ITE. Interestingly, while many teachers have highlighted a desire to improve their teaching abilities, only a small minority of teachers have engaged in CPD to date. Further investigation may be required to identify if this is an obstacle to future development, or if the CPD available is at a suitable level to advance their knowledge and skills.

4.7 Limitations

While there was a positive response rate from the population, we do acknowledge that a greater sample size may be necessary to gain a clearer insight. There were several steps taken to overcome any bias, although those that had negative experiences of the PE specialism may be less likely to participate. Participants were invited to participate from a variety of sources, to create a mixed sample group and reduce the chance of bias. Targeted recruitment was used to gain participants from both institutions. This resulted in a mixture of participants from all groups, representing the range of graduates from both colleges across 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019.

4.8 Conclusion

This paper set out to determine the self-efficacy of PE specialism graduates, as well as the impact of the specialism on their attitudes, beliefs, and practices. The findings indicate that self-efficacy is high among these teachers, and they are confident that they can meet the needs of all children through inclusive PE experiences. While many of the teachers that undertake the specialism may have had positive prior experiences of PE and sport, the PE specialism is successful in positively affecting teacher attitudes, developing their understanding and appreciation of PE, while also overcoming negative predispositions. This ITE model presents opportunities to develop content knowledge, engage in practical opportunities, and enhance pedagogical skills. PE specialism graduates have developed a unique set of skills in comparison to generalist and specialist teachers, including confidence that they can deliver quality PE.

It remains unclear if this professional socialisation materialises in their teaching practices. Despite their additional expertise, some teachers are still failing to meet the curriculum time recommendations for PE. Findings also highlight that most PE specialism graduates are undertaking roles supporting physical activity and school sport, rather than the delivery of PE within the school. Existing structures and norms within schools may be reducing the potential impact of PE specialism graduates. An officially designated role may be needed to maximise the influence of PE specialism graduates. The implementation of the upcoming new curriculum may present an opportunity to adopt this role (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment 2020). The findings highlight the potential of the PE specialism in overcoming teacher-related barriers in PE teaching, however, future investigations will need to examine the institutional factors that are inhibiting the full use of their skills. Perhaps specialism graduates need to be given the same time allocated to external coaches, or a liaison role supporting the collective delivery of PE (Ní Chróinín and O'Brien 2019; Randall 2019).

4.9 Chapter Conclusion

The first objective of the thesis was: (1) To understand PESGs' self-efficacy to teach PE as generalist teachers with additional expertise.

Chapter findings revealed that PESGs demonstrated high self-efficacy to teach PE. Descriptive data helped to establish a deeper understanding of PESGs, including their sporting backgrounds, coaching qualifications, and the close links between their love of sport and their decision to undertake the specialism. Further examination of the influence of PESGs' biographies on their understanding of PE is presented in Chapter 5. Findings reflected positively on the impact of the specialism in broadening PESGs' content knowledge, and facilitating practical teaching opportunities. In addition, it was evident that the social learning process facilitated by the specialism, enhanced PESGs' learning experience. This study revealed that PESGs' weekly teaching frequency and duration reflected similarly to generalist teachers across Ireland (Woods *et al.* 2018), but it also provided a greater insight into the barriers that teachers faced in their teaching and leadership of PE. It is unclear if PESGs are fulfilling the leadership roles that were envisioned for them, but evidence suggests that PESGs have the potential to provide a unique balance of generalist and specialist expertise. Further examination of the application of their expertise is required, and this is presented in Chapter 6.

Chapter 5

Turning over a new leaf: PE specialism graduates’ understanding of ‘quality PE’

Preamble

The following article examines PESGs' understandings of QPE. It explores the socialising influences that shaped these views, particularly during PESGs' acculturation and professional socialisation. It provides an insight into the delivery of the PE specialism and how it shapes teachers' beliefs and understandings. This article has been peer reviewed and published in *Irish Educational Studies* online [March 20, 2023].

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Statement of authorship:

I hereby declare that I, Cillian Brennan am the principal author of this article. The following statements outline my contributions to the work:

- Substantial contributions to the conception and design of the work; the acquisition, analysis, and interpretation of data for the work; AND
- Drafting the work and revising it critically for important intellectual content; AND
- Final approval of the version to be published; AND
- Agreement to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.

See Appendix A for signed Statement of Authorship

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5.1 Purpose of Chapter

5.1.1 Rationale

This chapter addresses the objective of the thesis: (2) To determine how PESGs' socialisation experiences shaped their understanding of QPE.

Following the introduction of the PE specialism in HEIs in Ireland, it was hoped that PESGs would be equipped to deliver QPE in schools, while also supporting other teachers to teach QPE (Marron *et al.* 2018). Teachers have varied understandings of PE, informed by the social and cultural contexts that they have interacted with (Capel and Whitehead 2012). In the Irish context, the provision of PE in Ireland continues to be dominated by games (Woods *et al.* 2018), while narratives related to obesity levels, physical activity, physical literacy and sports participation are entangled in the landscape of PE provision (Ní Chróinín 2018). Teachers' prior experiences of PE during their acculturation often shape their understandings of PE (Curtner-Smith 2016), and Chapter 5 revealed PESGs' sporting biographies, closely associating their love of sport with their desire to undertake the PE specialism. It is important to establish PESGs' understanding of QPE and examine the influence of the PE specialism on their views, positioning PESGs on the continuum of teaching and coaching orientations.

5.2 Abstract

Perceptions of quality physical education (QPE) can vary among teachers, due to the many discourses influencing physical education (PE) provision. There are concerns that the educative purposes of PE are not being fulfilled in its current state. This study aims to investigate PE specialism graduates' (PESGs') understanding of QPE, and how these views were shaped. Eleven semi-structured interviews were carried out with PESGs, guided by preceding survey findings and wider research on teacher socialisation. Interviewee-aided sociograms encouraged participants to reflect on prior experiences and direct interview content, engaging in 'autobiographical self-thematisation'. Reflexive thematic analysis was used to analyse of the transcribed interviews. Findings suggest that professional socialisation through the PE specialism shaped teaching-oriented views of QPE among PESGs. Engagement with sport and the PE specialism were identified as significant influences in their view of QPE. Opportunities to reflect on prior experiences during the specialism supported PESGs to overcome coaching orientations and develop teaching-oriented views of PE. PESGs believed that QPE should provide the foundations for children's continued engagement in physical activity. These foundations include the development of fundamental movement skills through a broad and balanced curriculum. By planning enjoyable learning opportunities based on children's needs, PESGs feel the goals of QPE can be achieved.

Keywords: physical education; physical education teacher education; teacher socialisation; teacher biographies; curriculum

5.3 Introduction

There are concerns that a disconnect has emerged between the delivery of physical education (PE) and its educational foundations, with the subject often presented as the panacea for multifaceted socio-political issues such as physical inactivity and health promotion (Quennerstedt *et al.* 2021). The many discourses guiding PE provision have blurred the subject boundaries in several international contexts, contributing to teacher confusion in the delivery of PE (Lynch and Soukup 2016; Gray *et al.* 2021).

Teaching can be seen as a continuous act of making judgements about the why(s), what(s) and how(s) of education. These choices are ideological ... a political choice depending on how we view the purpose of education (Quennerstedt 2019, p.613).

Teachers' understandings and expectations for PE therefore, play a key part in their teaching practices. These understandings develop across a lifetime, and socialisation is the subjective process through which teachers actively negotiate the discourses that guide their understandings and practices (Richards and Gaudreault 2017). This study explores the understanding of Quality PE (QPE) among a new cohort of generalist primary school teachers, who graduated from the Bachelor of Education with a major specialism in PE in the Republic of Ireland. Since its introduction in 2012, the specialism has enabled a small number of pre-service teachers each year (<6% of all primary school teaching graduates) to engage in five additional PE modules during their degree (Marron *et al.* 2018; Brennan *et al.* 2021). The additional expertise developed throughout this programme could facilitate the potential emergence of PE 'experts', equipped to deliver QPE in their respective schools (Marron *et al.* 2018; Brennan *et al.* 2021). It is important to understand how these PE specialism graduates (PESGs) established their view of QPE.

5.3.1 QPE

Achieving a consensus regarding QPE continuously provokes debate (Lynch and Soukup 2016). The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) aimed to provide clarity by developing QPE guidelines for policy makers (McLennan and Thompson 2015):

Quality Physical Education (QPE) is the planned, progressive, inclusive learning experience that forms part of the curriculum in early years, primary and secondary education ... the foundation for a lifelong engagement in physical activity and sport (McLennan and Thompson 2015, p.9).

Elaborating on these tenets, they recommend that QPE is developmentally appropriate, supporting the acquisition of psychomotor, cognitive, social and emotional skills. There is an inclusive, child-centred focus throughout, emphasising the equality of opportunity for all students through ‘personally meaningful and socially and culturally relevant experiences’ (McLennan and Thompson 2015, p.76). They also outline physical literacy as one of the outcomes of QPE, developing children’s ‘motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding’ to participate in physical activity throughout their lives (McLennan and Thompson 2015, p.20; Whitehead *et al.* 2018). Fundamental movement skills (FMS) are recognised as one of the components of physical literacy that can positively impact physical activity behaviours (Barnett *et al.* 2016, p.223). Amidst the discourses that influence PE provision, educators must be wary of ‘dystopian and utopian narratives’ through which PE is presented (Quennerstedt *et al.* 2021, p.858), while the conflation between terminologies such as physical education and physical literacy can create further confusion among teachers (Lynch and Soukup 2016). While some countries provide curriculum frameworks for delivering QPE, teachers’ understandings often remain influenced by prior experiences, rooted in traditional approaches (Williams and Pill 2018).

5.3.2 Irish context

In Ireland, PE is a compulsory subject at primary school, delivered by generalist class teachers (Government of Ireland 1999b). The Department of Education Inspectorate is responsible for assessing ‘the quality of education provision’, and despite acknowledging the need for QPE provision in schools, no guidelines are provided outside of the 1999 curriculum (Inspectorate, Department of Education 2022, p.52). Educational values are prioritised throughout the curriculum, focusing on ‘personal and social development, physical growth, and motor development’, through the strands of athletics, dance, gymnastics, games, outdoor and adventure activities, and aquatics (Government of Ireland 1999b, p.6). While low levels of FMS proficiency have been identified among Irish primary school children (Behan *et al.* 2019), ‘no special mention

or prioritisation is given to FMS over other aims [of the curriculum]' (Ní Chróinín 2018, p.207). The curriculum acknowledges that although PE and sport are linked, PE should place a greater emphasis on individual improvement and holistic development rather than the competitive nature of formalised sport (Government of Ireland 1999b). The exception is Gaelic games², which are given greater importance within the curriculum, due to their status as Ireland's national sports (Government of Ireland 1999b). This, however, has also contributed to an increased outsourcing of PE provision to external coaches, further diluting the educative purpose of the subject (Mangione *et al.* 2021).

As highlighted in international contexts such as Australia (Lynch and Soukup 2016; Williams and Pill 2018), it is difficult to establish if QPE is understood by teachers. Despite an emphasis on learning within the Irish curriculum, teachers who have taught since its introduction still associate PE with physical activity and health discourses (Murphy and McEvoy 2020). While teacher education has been shown to support the development of educational views of PE that aligned with the curriculum, dominant sports and health discourses also remain in teachers' beliefs (Ní Chróinín and Coulter 2012; Coulter and Ni Chroinin 2013). In practice, teachers are struggling to meet curriculum time recommendations, and tend to deliver a games-dominated curriculum (Woods *et al.* 2018). Similar to other countries, however, PE provision is influenced by a range of public health and wellbeing discourses (Gray *et al.* 2021). Programmes such as Move Well, Move Often (PDST 2017) support teachers to develop physical literacy among students, and the Active School Flag initiative creates opportunities for schools to promote physical activity and self-evaluate the planning, implementation and delivery of a broad and balanced PE curriculum (Bowles *et al.* 2017). The influence of health and wellbeing discourses are evident in the draft curriculum framework, presenting PE through language such as 'Wellbeing' and 'Physical and Health Education' (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment 2020). It is clear that PESGs have to navigate a variety of discourses in establishing

² The Gaelic games family includes the Irish sports of hurling, Gaelic football, handball, rounders, camogie, and ladies football.

their view of QPE, and this paper analyses the development of their understandings through the lens of teacher socialisation.

5.3.3 Teacher socialisation

Teachers develop understandings regarding the ‘norms, cultures, and ideologies’ of their profession through the lifelong process of socialisation (Richards and Gaudreault 2017, p.3). Teacher socialisation theory has developed from the broader study of occupational socialisation theory and role theory, and is a dialectical process through which individuals negotiate professional expectations based on personal, social and environmental factors (Templin *et al.* 2016). Building on the general study of teacher socialisation (Lortie 2002), a wide range of physical education teacher socialisation research has been conducted (Lawson 1983a; Lawson 1983b; Curtner-Smith 1997; Morgan and Hansen 2008b; Blankenship and Coleman 2009; Templin *et al.* 2016; Richards and Gaudreault 2017; Richards *et al.* 2019). The dialectical nature of teacher socialisation is extremely important in the context of this study, to determine how this unique cohort of PESGs negotiated personal experiences and sociocultural factors to develop their understanding of QPE. Teacher socialisation is predominantly organised into three main phases; *acculturation*, *professional socialisation* and *occupational socialisation* (Lawson 1983b).

Acculturation includes all experiences from a young age, preceding teachers’ decision to pursue teacher education (Lawson 1983b). They have engaged in an ‘apprenticeship of observation’ through prior school experiences, understanding teaching and learning from the perspective of the student (Lortie 2002). Interactions with family members, peers, coaches and teachers also shape these perceptions, contributing to their decision to enter the teaching profession (Richards *et al.* 2014). Through these past experiences, a ‘subjective warrant’ is developed, as teachers establish their values and ideals for PE, and ultimately their understanding of QPE (Lawson 1983b). Individuals develop orientations towards teaching based on their experiences, positioning them on a continuum from; teaching oriented, with a focus on teaching QPE; to coaching oriented, associating job expectations with sports coaching (Richards and Templin 2012). While females were previously more likely to have entered teacher education with teaching orientations, the evolution of female sports has led to an increase in female recruits with coaching orientations (Curtner-Smith 2016).

Although many of these studies relate to specialist PE teachers, generalist PE teachers were similarly shown to adopt orientations that align with prior experiences (Morgan and Hansen 2008b). There are concerns that PESGs may be more coaching oriented, with previous studies revealing their sporting biographies (Brennan *et al.* 2021).

The next phase, *professional socialisation* begins when an individual decides to pursue a teaching career (Lawson 1983b). Through teacher education, teachers develop knowledge, skills and attitudes guided by the teacher education faculty (Richards *et al.* 2014). Given the dialectical nature of teacher socialisation, there are concerns that teacher education may not be able to offset the deep-rooted beliefs from teachers' acculturation, particularly teachers' coaching orientations (Lawson 1983b). It is important that teacher education provides opportunities to reflect on prior understandings, and challenge orientations that inhibit the teaching of QPE (Randall and Fleet 2021). Practical field experiences are also an essential part of this process, developing the competence and confidence to deliver QPE (Murphy *et al.* 2021). Marron *et al.* (2018) previously presented a detailed overview of the PE specialism, and it is evident that the specialism has afforded greater opportunities for teachers to reflect on prior experiences, develop content knowledge and engage in practical activities (Marron *et al.* 2018; Brennan *et al.* 2021). In addition, a recent emphasis on innovative approaches such as meaningful PE in Ireland may help teachers to focus their PE delivery on children's needs, creating enjoyable, personally relevant learning experiences that challenge children appropriately (Fletcher *et al.* 2020), providing QPE's 'entry point' to lifelong participation.

Organisational socialisation begins when individuals enter the teaching workforce, as they continue to negotiate their understandings of teaching within the school context (Lawson 1983b). Teachers may experience a reality shock when they enter the school, resulting in the washout of the knowledge and skills developed during teacher education (Blankenship and Coleman 2009). The recent introduction of Droichead, the school-based induction model in Ireland, presents opportunities for the mentorship of newly qualified teachers (NQTs) in a supportive school environment (Smyth *et al.* 2016). There is a danger, however, that the combined approach of mentoring and probation could result in the reproduction of existing school practices, limiting the advancement of PE provision.

International studies have interrogated the development of teachers' understandings of PE in a variety of contexts (Mordal-Moen and Green 2014; Lynch and Soukup 2016; Ferry 2018; Jess *et al.* 2021; McEvelly 2021), while previous studies in the Irish context have investigated pre-service teachers' views (Ní Chróinín and Coulter 2012; Coulter and Ni Chroinin 2013), and experienced generalist teachers' understanding of PE (Murphy and McEvoy 2020). Given its recent introduction, there has been limited investigation into the PE specialism and the emergence of this new cohort of potential change agents. The research will inform teacher education programmes in Irish and international contexts that seek to embed a PE specialism route. Those who pursue studies in PE, are more likely to have custodial orientations with an inherent interest in sport guiding their focus towards the games strand (Morgan and Hansen 2008b). This study provides a valuable account of PESGs' understanding of QPE in Irish primary schools. Will PESGs' understandings of PE continue to be based on prior experiences, or have they been equipped to turn over a new leaf for Irish primary PE? This study investigated:

- PESGs' understandings of QPE.
- The experiences throughout their socialisation that shaped their understanding of QPE.

5.4 Materials and Methods

The stance adopted in this study was a form of critical realism. Critical realism adopts a combination of ontological realism and epistemological relativism, acknowledging that an independent reality exists, but research can only access a mediated reflection of this reality (Ryba *et al.* 2022). Researchers are part of the sociocultural context through which this reality is interpreted, and therefore an objective perspective cannot be attained (Braun and Clarke 2021b). Critical realism attempts to look beyond the observable, to examine the causal structures that shape the complex reality (Ryba *et al.* 2022). In this paper we are examining PESGs' understandings of QPE, but also the stratified nature of how these understandings were developed within teachers' social and cultural context.

We chose interviews for data collection to provide 'space for participants to direct the conversation so that they can share what is personally meaningful to them' (Smith and Sparkes 2016, p.108). Ethical approval was obtained from the

university ethics committee and informed consent was gathered from all participating teachers. Eleven semi-structured interviews were carried out in Summer 2020. This followed an unprecedented academic year during which remote teaching was in place from 12th March 2020 to the end of the school year in June, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Gaining an insight into teachers' at this point provides a valuable addition to the continuously evolving landscape of PE provision.

Participants were a volunteer sample of graduates from the two higher education institutes (HEIs) in the Republic of Ireland that offer the Bachelor of Education with a major specialism in PE. They were invited to share their contact details during the preceding phase of the wider research project, an online questionnaire open to all PESGs that graduated from 2016 to 2019 (Brennan *et al.* 2021). Eligibility criteria for the present study required all teachers to have at least one year of teaching experience in a primary school in the Republic of Ireland. By virtue, 2020 graduates or PESGs that only taught outside of Ireland were excluded. As can be seen in Table 12, participants were a mix of graduates from 2016 to 2019 and had a mixture of experience as classroom teachers (who had PE teaching responsibilities as generalist teachers) and special education teachers (SETs). The gender ratio (18% male, n=2; 92% female, n=9) in the present study also reflects that of the primary teaching population in Ireland (Department of Education 2022).

Table 12. Participant Information

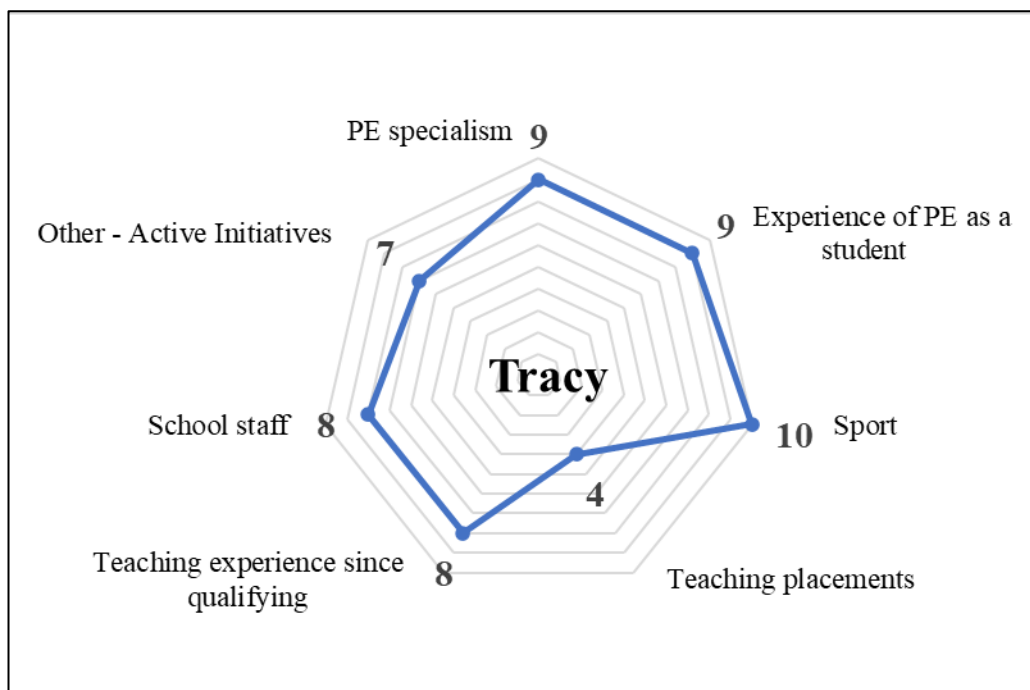
Name (Pseudonym)	Year Graduated	HEI (Pseudonym)	Teaching experience
Mark	2016	Chestnut Grove University	Classroom teacher (3 years), Casual substitute (1 year)
Rachel	2017	Oak Hills University	Classroom teacher (3years)
Denise	2018	Chestnut Grove University	Classroom teacher (2 years)
Fiona	2018	Chestnut Grove University	SET (1 year), Classroom teacher (1 year)
Bridget	2018	Oak Hills University	Classroom teacher (2 years)
Grace	2018	Oak Hills University	Classroom teacher (2 years)
Paul	2018	Chestnut Grove University	SET (1 year), Classroom teacher (1 year)
Tracy	2019	Oak Hills University	Classroom teacher (1year)
Maria	2019	Chestnut Grove University	SET (1 year)
Olivia	2019	Oak Hills University	Classroom teacher (1year)
Chloe	2019	Chestnut Grove University	SET (1 year)

Note. SET = special education teacher

Audio recorded interviews were conducted online and lasted for an average duration of 62 min. This study focuses on parts of the interview relating to teachers' views of QPE, and the experiences that shaped their views. The remainder of the interview conducted a more critical investigation of PESGs' teaching and leadership practices in PE and this will be presented in future works. Interviews were carried out by the principal author, a fellow PESG and former classmate of three participants. Familiarity with the specialism helped establish rapport and generate curiosity-driven questions, however, reflexivity was extremely important to avoid interviewer bias (Smith and Sparkes 2016). While interviews are a social construction and cannot be completely objective, interviewer reflexivity was anchored by the studies' theoretical foundations, research objectives and participant responses throughout. Similar to previous studies investigating teachers' understandings (Coulter and Ni Chroinin 2013), all participants were asked the simple introductory question; 'what is your view of quality PE?', to provide an initial insight into their understanding of QPE. Participants were subsequently invited to complete interviewee-aided sociograms, stimulating them to reflect on their understandings in greater detail, engaging in 'autobiographical self-thematisation' (Kelchtermans and Ballet 2002b). Teachers rated factors that influenced their understanding of QPE within six categories (PE specialism; experience of PE as a student; sport; teaching placements; teaching experience since qualifying; school staff), and had the option of adding an additional 'other' influence. Participants were invited to rate how these factors influenced their view of QPE on a scale of 0-10, awarding higher ratings to influences of greater strength (10 = very strong influence). The focus was on PESGs' perceived influence of each factor on their understanding of QPE, and therefore influences were both positive and negative. As seen in Figure 4, it provided a visual representation of participants' thoughts, allowing participants to direct the interview content, reflecting, connecting and rationalising their experiences (Norris *et al.* 2020). This innovative method limited the risk of interviewer bias, enabling participants to lead the conversation, outlining the reasons for each rating and recalling encounters that shaped these understandings. Although an interview guide provided a broad framework for questioning, curiosity-driven questions were used based on participant responses to explore the stratified layers of their situated realities, for example, 'How do you feel that [experience] influenced your understanding of PE? / Do you feel that has shaped the type of teacher you want to be? How so? / You rated sport highly, how do you see the

relationship between sport and PE? At a later stage of the interviews, participants were also invited to share how they would like PE to be taught in the future, in the context of the upcoming curriculum change.

Figure 4. Sample of interviewee aided sociogram.



During the initial analysis, we calculated a mean score for each category of the interviewee-aided sociograms to gain an overview of what shaped PESGs’ understandings of QPE. This data, however, lacked the nuance and depth of the descriptions that accompanied them and therefore the analysis focused on the experiences presented through the qualitative interview data. Reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) as presented by Braun and Clarke (2019), was chosen to analyse the transcribed interviews and was conducted by the principal author who consulted with the co-authors at various points to maintain reflexivity. RTA was selected as it complemented the critical realist approach, recognising the role of the researcher in the social construction of PESGs’ situated, interpreted realities. The flexibility of RTA also meant that the analysis could be informed by relevant research on teachers’ understandings of PE and teacher socialisation theory (Braun and Clarke 2021b). Following the transcription of participant interviews and analysis of interviewee-aided

sociograms, potential points of interest and analytic ideas were identified through data familiarisation. Being mindful of researcher subjectivities and the influence of the quantitative data collected, inductive coding was initially undertaken with a focus on participants' voice. Having completed the first phase of coding, it was evident that many codes from the analysis could be combined and refined to create a more manageable dataset (Braun and Clarke 2021b). Guided by the research aim and objectives, codes were examined to identify shared meanings before they were clustered into initial themes. It became apparent that the PE specialism was a central factor in shaping PESGs' views of QPE. Despite not receiving QPE as a child, the specialism provided a lens through which their understandings of QPE evolved beyond their prior experiences. Upon review of all the data and initial themes, a more deductive theoretical analysis was adopted, focusing on the latent understandings of QPE present in PESGs' reflections. Three themes were identified, guided by centrally organising concepts before being refined, defined and named. The themes continued to be modified during the writing process, with the use of the PE specialism as a benchmark for understanding QPE ingrained throughout. Teachers' understandings of QPE and the experiences that shaped them cannot be mutually exclusive, and therefore they are interwoven throughout these themes. The first theme does however place a greater emphasis on the PESGs' formative experiences, particularly experiences of sport and the PE specialism. The subsequent themes focus on the manifestation of these experiences in PESGs' understandings of QPE. A theme summary table containing the finalised themes is presented in Table 13.

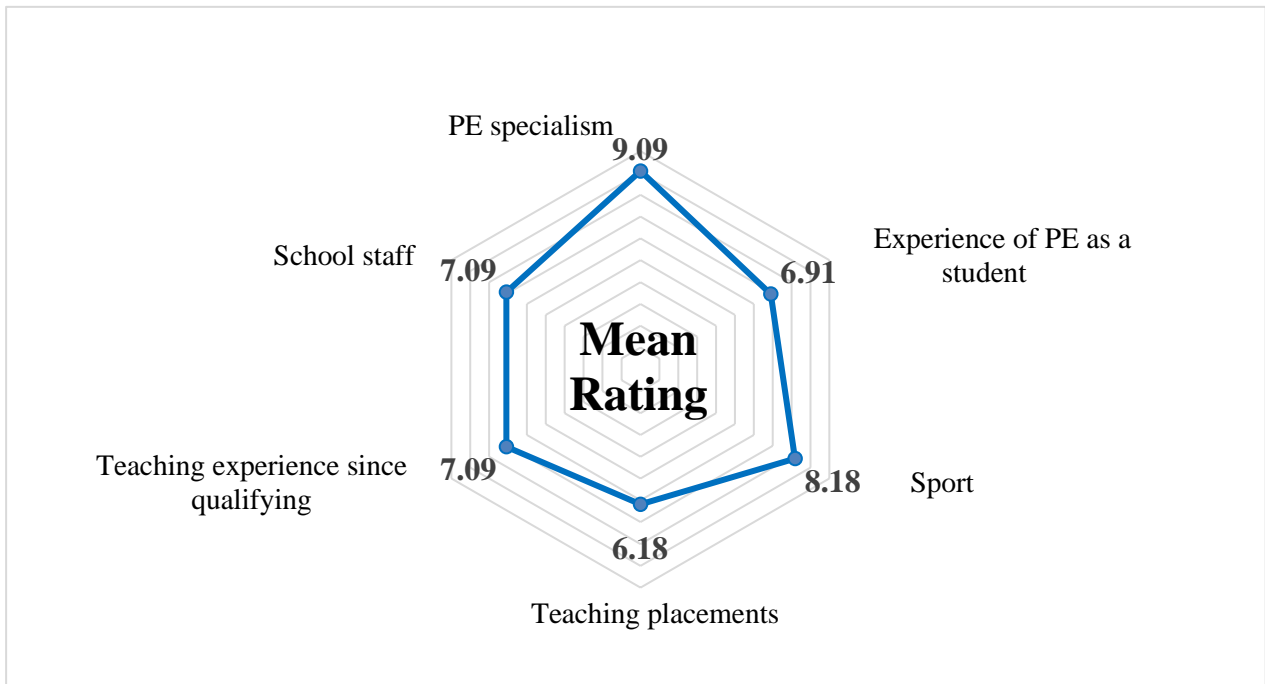
Table 13. Theme Summary Table

Theme	Characteristics
The PE specialism as a catalyst for change	The PE specialism has enabled PESGs to move beyond their coaching orientations and develop more teaching-oriented views of PE. Although currently less active, these coaching orientations need to be managed carefully.
QPE as a broad starting point for children to go the distance	PESGs feel QPE should equip children with the ability to engage in future physical activity by developing FMS and providing a balanced delivery of the curriculum.
<i>Learning to develop a more inclusive approach to PE</i>	Despite negative prior experiences of PE, particularly for females, PESGs feel QPE should meet the needs of all children by providing enjoyable learning experiences for all.

5.5 Findings & Discussion

This study examined the development of PESGs' understanding of QPE. As can be seen in Figure 5 quantitative findings reflected the strong influence of sport and the PE specialism in developing PESGs' understandings of QPE. The qualitative data subsequently revealed that the PE specialism supported the development of teaching orientations, providing an analytical lens through which PESGs could reflect on prior experiences PE and sport. PESGs' understanding of QPE and the experiences that shaped these views will be discussed under three main themes; (1) The PE specialism as a catalyst for change; (2) QPE as a broad starting point for children to go the distance; (3) *Learning to develop a more inclusive approach to PE.*

Figure 5. Interviewee aided sociogram mean rating scores



5.5.1 The PE specialism as a catalyst for change

Findings indicated that PESGs feel the PE specialism can positively impact their understanding of QPE, supporting them to move beyond the games oriented, competitive elements of their coaching orientations, noted for tainting PE provision (Ward 2018). If PESGs continue to be anchored by their teaching orientations, they may be equipped to navigate the complex middle ground between PE and sport, motivating children to lead physically active lifestyles.

Although an interest in sport provided an entry point into the specialism (Brennan *et al.* 2021), the PE specialism supported PESGs to reflect upon their sports-dominated acculturation:

I do primarily remember just a lot of games (in school), like I liked it, I liked the competitive side, like a lot of football, basketball and things like that [...] but I don't think I was really taught how to throw the ball or kick the ball [...] looking back I thought it wasn't quality PE (Bridget)

Recalling their acculturation, these PESGs felt they had not been exposed to QPE, entering the specialism with coaching orientations; ‘before I actually undertook this PE specialism, I probably was very bad that I just associated sport with PE’ (Denise). Their professional socialisation enabled them to critique experiences from their acculturation, which more closely reflected ‘what not to do’ (Paul). PESGs are regretful for the preconceptions they held (Randall and Fleet 2021) and appear to have distanced themselves from coaching orientations on the continuum. They have been supported to distinguish between sport and PE, aware that they ‘are two different things like you know, PE is not meant to be competitive twenty-four seven, and neither is sport, but like there's definitely more of an element of competitiveness in sport’ (Chloe). They now understand that ‘for some children, that competitiveness is what turns them off’ (Fiona), recognising teamwork and cooperation as important aspects of QPE following the PE specialism. In contrast to the exclusive elements of sport, PESGs recognise inclusion as a key part of QPE, ‘if you don't have interest in a particular sport, you're not going to participate in it, but in PE you need to grab someone who is not interested in the sport anyway’ (Paul). PESGs’ responses highlight the positive impact of the PE specialism in moderating coaching orientations, and this is reflected PESGs’ emphasis on learning presented in the subsequent themes.

There continues to be space for a balanced approach to PE and sport, and PESGs’ combination of sporting biographies and teaching orientations could equip them to balance both appropriately, attracting children to ‘the joy and pleasure of physical activity’ (McLennan and Thompson 2015, p.76). While numerous sociocultural factors influence physical activity and sports participation, if PE can play a role ‘in supplementing and/or substituting for sports socialisation in the family then it seems most relevant during the primary school years’(Green 2019, p.27). PESGs have benefited from engaging in sport and want to help children recognise its value:

I want to pass on that love of sport and having an extracurricular hobby. I think is something that's so important. I know sport isn't for everyone, but it can add so much value to your life (Fiona)

Teachers’ sporting biographies provide motivation to enact their teaching visions (Jess *et al.* 2021). It is important, however, that this does not materialise in the continued

delivery of an imbalanced PE curriculum, and PESGs remain true to their teaching orientations. Teachers can help students recognise the importance of what they are learning in PE, supporting them to make connections and engage in lifelong physical activity (Beni *et al.* 2017). Tracy previously played tennis and explained the impact of a small video clip sent to her students as part of a whole school initiative during the COVID lockdown:

I just like bounced a ball up on my tennis racket [...] and then like, next thing on seesaw (school communication app), three of them had sent me pictures of them practising hitting a ball up with a tennis racket (Tracy)

PESGs have a wide range of experience they can share with their students, reporting participation in a wide range of individual and team sports. In addition, a previous study indicated that almost three quarters of PESGs engage in sports coaching in their schools (Brennan *et al.* 2021). It is important that role conflict does not relocate PESGs' orientations more closely to their sporting experiences. Seven PESGs in this study currently are active Gaelic games players at various levels and this has the potential to position them as role models within these community-based sports:

I don't have many behavioural issues ever doing PE, whereas other teachers probably do [...] because they're like 'oh he's... (an intercounty player³)', like a lot of the kids that know would be like, 'oh, he plays whatever, let's listen and let's try and learn (Mark)

This can generate opportunities to deliver culturally relevant learning, including Gaelic games' distinguished position on the PE curriculum (Government of Ireland 1999b; McLennan and Thompson 2015), but it may also present challenges in moving practices beyond coaching orientations in schools. Although PESGs also included teachers that did not participate in sport;

³ Intercounty player – Gaelic games are amateur sports played at a variety of levels. Intercounty players are considered elite, playing at the highest level of competition by representing their counties.

it wasn't just 'oh the PE specialism had to be the ones that are getting gold medals in an Olympics' or anything'. So it was nice to have people who maybe didn't do any sport, but they were still interested in PE (Rachel)

Teachers such as Mark have an identity embroiled in their sporting biographies and these sporting undertones need to be managed carefully. The remaining themes suggest PESGs maintain teaching-oriented views of QPE.

5.5.2 QPE as a broad starting point for children to go the distance

PESGs feel QPE provides a broad starting point for children to lead physically active lifestyles by developing fundamental movement skills through a broad and balanced curriculum.

FMS are recognised as the foundation for future engagement in movement (Barnett *et al.* 2016), and PESGs feel QPE presents an opportunity to develop these skills. Olivia emphasises that 'as much as you teach them to read and write to prepare them for the outside world, you teach them PE skills to prepare them for the outside world'. An emphasis on FMS can sometimes have negative connotations, as children are guided to develop a narrow range of socioculturally defined sports skills (Ward 2018), but PESGs' emphasis on FMS appears to fend off coaching orientations; 'I think they're so important in every sport, but also for a child's physical self, for everyday tasks as well' (Fiona). Despite not mentioning the term directly, PESGs are concerned that by failing to equip children with FMS, they are depriving them of the opportunity to be physically literate (Whitehead *et al.* 2018). The valuable contribution of the PE specialism in developing teaching-oriented views of QPE continued to emerge within the findings. When choosing to pursue the specialism, Bridget initially felt:

This is great, we'll be doing loads of sport and I'll be outside all the time instead of stuck in a lecture and things like that, but what I really learned from the specialism was the importance of the fundamental movement skills and getting the kids to actually learn how to run, jump, skip, all the basic skills through PE. (Bridget)

Teachers' views, however, were also be guided by public discourses about the movement competencies of primary school children in Ireland (Behan *et al.* 2019). In today's society, Mark feels that children's 'fundamental movement is not as good as it

used to be, [...] they spend more time obviously being sedentary'. PESGs recognise a cultural shift from their own acculturation and that QPE plays an important role in developing FMS within this 'movement suppressed culture' (Quennerstedt *et al.* 2021, p.853). With elements of these dystopian perspectives in some PESGs views, it is important to ensure that PE is not refined into skills taught in isolation, with the sole focus being movement competence (Barnett *et al.* 2016).

PESGs' also emphasised the importance of offering a broad range of experiences through QPE, creating opportunities for students to make connections between their learning and the outside world (Whitehead *et al.* 2018). Reflecting upon their acculturation, PESGs recognise the need for a more balanced delivery of the curriculum; 'compared to when I was a child, we only got to go out and play rounders or football, there wasn't a lot of structure to it' (Rachel). Although many PESGs found these PE experiences enjoyable, they noted the impact of the specialism in developing their awareness of all strands, especially strands they had limited experience of. While PE in Ireland still appears to be dominated by the games and athletics strands (Woods *et al.* 2018), PESGs recognise that this does not meet the needs of all students. Some PESGs' motivation to provide this variety was also influenced by negative PE experiences due to gender stereotypes:

We were all girls, the teacher kind of thought that we'd like doing the same thing every week but you kind of have to understand that some boys mightn't even like soccer, or some girls mightn't like the dancing strand. So you do have to just make sure you're giving them a broad view of the curriculum. (Grace)

This resulted in some PESGs receiving a narrow range of curriculum strands, and they are keen to break this prescriptive cycle of PE delivery. Caution is necessary, however, to ensure that this more liberal approach is not infiltrated by public health discourses, extending expectations beyond the means of the subject. Some PESGs feel the curriculum should be framed differently to address areas such as:

Mental issues and like even like eating disorders and everything are so prominent in social media, and because kids are using social media from a younger age, I think it's so important to teach them why they should do exercise, you know, when

you link in SPHE, why eating the good foods is important, and why eating bad foods is not good for you (Chloe)

While knowledge of holistic health is an important component of physical literacy (Whitehead *et al.* 2018) and is reflected in the draft curriculum framework (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment 2020), beatific expectations have to be approached with caution. PESGs recognise QPE as a broad starting point for children's lifelong physical literacy journeys. While teaching-oriented views of QPE emphasise the importance of providing children with the tools to be physically active, the influence of public health discourses may require further examination upon release of the new curriculum.

5.5.3 Learning to develop a more inclusive approach to PE

Findings indicated PESGs place a significant emphasis on the 'E' in PE, acknowledging that QPE should facilitate learning built upon the needs of all children and by virtue create enjoyable learning experiences.

To meet the needs of children, PESGs feel greater consideration needs to be given to planning, differentiation and assessment practices. Bridget explained:

So the quality PE is not, how am I going to fill up this half an hour of PE or an hour of PE? Because like in your Irish lesson or your English lesson you're always thinking, what are they trying to learn? And I think to get quality PE you have to think of what you're actually trying to teach, what's the aim? (Bridget)

While the emphasis on learning is sometimes removed when teachers are faced with their teaching realities (Blankenship and Coleman 2009), PESGs' understandings of QPE appear to remain guided by teaching orientations. Some PESGs' have roles as SETs, and this has contributed to their understanding of children's needs, placing a greater emphasis on making PE accessible. Despite being confident to participate in each curriculum strand (Brennan *et al.* 2021), PESGs can empathise with those that are less proficient by putting themselves 'at the weakest level and seeing it from their eyes' (Mark). Their understanding of QPE emphasises the importance of differentiation and inclusion:

You have to differentiate your PE because like, there's some kids who are more coordinated and have more skills than kids three classes above them, and there's some kids who, you know, just aren't coordinated at all [...] you kind of forget that like, it's a skill that has to be learned. (Chloe)

Grace, a classroom teacher for two years, noted the influence of practical experiences during the PE specialism helping to develop her understanding of children's needs, as 'we got the chance to go out to schools and incorporate what we learned'. This has informed Grace's understanding of planning for learning so that 'weaker kids are getting to progress over the course of the few weeks of teaching a strand'. These developmentally appropriate learning experiences can facilitate experiences of satisfaction, motivating the continued development of these skills (Beni *et al.* 2017). These understandings were also established despite school placement experiences that did not facilitate learning in PE:

If there's an inspector there, you just want to get like the highest mark and you just want to make like, everything as easy as possible and you do not prioritise the children's learning at all. (Tracy).

This importance of practical opportunities to implement QPE as highlighted by Randall and Fleet (2021), was consistent throughout PESG responses. The specialism afforded PESGs the opportunity to plan and implement learning experiences in PE through peer teaching and partnerships with local schools (Marron *et al.* 2018).

Although meeting the needs of children is important to PESGs, there was limited acknowledgement of the need for assessment in their overview of QPE. To attend to children's needs, Olivia acknowledged the need for 'meaningful feedback and assessment procedures, like they would in a normal subject, core subject'. This was based on an opportunity that she had to observe PE in another European context as part of the specialism. Although Olivia raised concerns about formalised assessment requirements; 'they were all about the checklists, all about the tick, tick, tick, tick, tick, to the point where it really took away [from the lesson]'. While assessment can enhance the learning experience, it is open to interpretation. Not all PESGs have had the opportunity to participate in these international collaborations and PESGs may need

greater support to understand suitable forms of assessment and implement them effectively (Ní Chróinín 2018).

PESGs feel that fun is another important aspect of meeting children's needs, making QPE meaningful for all children (Beni *et al.* 2017). Paul remarked that 'the more you enjoy something, the more you're going to keep going with it'. PESGs recognise fun as a gateway for initiating children's learning journey:

a lot of them might be like, well we won't say lazy but, do you know nearly avoiding the movement, and then they see that people are actually having fun, that I think it's important to create that positive space where they are interested in learning and they are interested in partaking, [...] they are willing to join in.
(Maria)

PESGs want to make PE enjoyable so that children want to be physically active, within school and throughout their lives. This perspective, particularly for female PESGs was established during their acculturation, as they vowed not to perpetuate their own negative PE experiences. Denise recalls:

all we did was run around, laps in our pitch in primary school, like it was just laps all the time, and that was just our PE, which obviously is not PE [...], I do think the way it's taught in primary school has a big impact on if a child likes it or dislikes it in [...] for girls especially, a lot of girls that I'd know would have lost interest or wouldn't like PE because of their experience in primary school (Denise)

Maria also remarked on the impact that these negative experiences of PE can have, recalling her classmates in an all-girls secondary school that would 'forget their gear, or you know the typical thing of sitting on the bench for the whole class' (Maria). PESGs emphasised that QPE should provide learning opportunities for all students, facilitating their progression on their physical activity journey. Their understanding of QPE encourages the use of inclusive pedagogies to support all children's learning, reflecting positive teaching orientations.

5.6 Conclusion

This study provides a valuable insight into PESGs' understanding of QPE in the Irish context. Findings highlighted the need to allow time for generalist teachers to reflect on

prior experiences and develop innovative teaching orientations (Randall and Fleet 2021).

PESGs' understanding of QPE is centred upon providing the foundation for children's continued participation in physical activity. Despite not mentioning physical literacy directly, PESGs' view of QPE is centred upon its affective, cognitive and physical components (Whitehead *et al.* 2018). By developing FMS through enjoyable PE experiences, PESGs want to equip children with the competence and confidence to lead physically active lifestyles. In addition, PESGs believe that QPE should offer a broad and balanced delivery of the curriculum, creating opportunities to connect their learning with their daily lives. To achieve these goals, PESGs identify the importance of planning differentiated, enjoyable, learning opportunities that meet the needs of all children. Despite varied experiences of PE throughout their acculturation, PESGs are determined to break the custodial cycle of PE delivery. This was particularly evident among female PESGs who had negative prior experiences due to gender stereotypes.

Despite the positive signs, teaching orientations do not guarantee quality PE delivery (Morgan and Hansen 2008b). It is worth noting that some PESG's roles as SETs and the influence of COVID-19 school closures may have meant that some participants had limited experiences of teaching PE. Some ideological perspectives may still be present, having not been challenged by their teaching realities (Blankenship and Coleman 2009). These could negatively impact teacher confidence and subsequently retract to coaching orientations if unattainable. Given PESGs' sporting biographies, the long-term examination of their understandings will be necessary to determine if professional socialisation has galvanised teaching orientations to withhold the turbulent realities of school life. Further examination of how public health and sports discourses influence teachers' understandings may also be necessary in the context of the upcoming curriculum change in Ireland. Professional socialisation has helped to turn over a new leaf among this cohort of PESGs and time will tell how the story unfolds.

5.7 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter addressed objective 2 of the thesis: To determine how PESGs' socialisation experiences shaped their understanding of QPE.

Chapter findings suggest that PESGs' specialism experience has helped them to move to the secure stage of teacher development with focus on children's learning (Randall 2020). PESGs are determined to provide children with the foundation for their lifelong physical activity journey by providing QPE. They placed a big emphasis on meeting the needs of all children through QPE, adopting a more inclusive approach to PE. As previously presented in Chapter 4, PESGs' sporting biographies were apparent. Evidence from PESGs' understanding of PE however, suggests that the PE specialism has helped them to establish more teaching oriented views of PE. The PE specialism facilitated opportunities for PESGs to reflect on previous experiences of PE and critically analyse their biographies. Through this process, PESGs began to value the 'E' in PE, eager to break the custodial cycle of PE delivery in schools. The specialism also supported PESGs to adopt a more balanced approach to school sport in their respective contexts. It is important to note however, that some ideological understandings of PE were presented by PESGs. These have been influenced by public health narratives, and it is important that it does not extend expectations beyond the scope of the subject, particularly in the context of the upcoming curriculum change. While PESGs' acculturation and professional socialisation were examined in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, Chapter 6 examines PESGs' organisational socialisation in their respective schools.

Chapter 6

Fitting in or standing out? The organisational socialisation of early career physical education specialism graduates through a micropolitical lens

Preamble

The following article investigates PESGs' organisational socialisation experiences in schools. Adopting a micropolitical lens, it examines how PESGs navigate their school contexts and the interests that influence their decisions and behaviours. It also presents an insight into the provision of PE within Irish primary schools. This article is currently undergoing peer review for publication in *European Physical Education Review*.

The full citation for the article is as follows:

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Statement of authorship:

I hereby declare that I, Cillian Brennan am the principal author of this article. The following statements outline my contributions to the work:

- Substantial contributions to the conception and design of the work; the acquisition, analysis, and interpretation of data for the work; AND
- Drafting the work and revising it critically for important intellectual content; AND
- Final approval of the version to be published; AND
- Agreement to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.

See Appendix A for signed Statement of Authorship

6.1 Purpose of Chapter

6.1.1 Rationale

This chapter addresses the objective of the thesis: (3) To examine PESGs' integration into the school context as PE experts and to explore how their expertise is used within schools.

Findings in Chapter 4 provided some positive indications about PESGs' potential to contribute to the whole school delivery of PE. However, it also provided evidence of barriers within schools that may inhibit this process. This chapter explores PESGs' organisational socialisation in greater detail. As early career teachers entering schools, it remains to be seen if PESGs can influence others in the school context, or if the reverse will come true, with PESGs perpetuating existing practices within schools (Keay 2009). One concern would be that PESGs' knowledge and expertise developed through the PE specialism would be washed out by the influence of organisational socialisation (Blankenship and Coleman 2009). This chapter presents the teaching realities faced by PESGs in Irish primary schools, providing an insight into the school culture and how PE is treated within schools. Following the introduction of the PE specialism, there was an expectation that PESGs would become PE leaders (Marron *et al.* 2018). This chapter positions PESGs on this journey, examining how they navigate their teaching contexts and their desire to lead.

6.2 Abstract

The recent emergence of primary school generalist teachers with physical education (PE) expertise has addressed calls for some form of specialisation in primary PE provision in Ireland (Marron *et al.* 2018). It was hoped that these subject experts could advance the quality of PE delivered, through their own teaching and by supporting PE provision across their schools (Ní Chróinín 2018). Despite PE specialism graduates (PESGs) developing teaching orientations and high self-efficacy to teach PE during their professional socialisation, it is unclear how their skills are applied within schools. This study examines the organisational socialisation of PESGs through a micropolitical lens, drawing on the research of Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002a; 2002b). Adopting a critical realist approach enabled us to explore teachers' complex teaching realities. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eleven graduates of the 4-year Bachelor of Education with a major specialism in PE. Reflexive thematic analysis of interview data identified that PESGs had limited opportunities to apply their PE skills due to the conflicting custodial orientations of their schools. Due to PESGs' professional interests, they were more likely to assimilate with the existing school culture as early career teachers, even if it overlooked their PE expertise. The outsourcing of PE provision to external coaches and PESGs' identity as novice teachers also undermined their potential contribution as PE experts. Although some PESGs have positively used their knowledge to direct whole-school PE provision, more structured opportunities may be necessary to support the continued development of PESGs as teachers and leaders of PE.

Keywords: physical education, teacher socialisation, micropolitics, teacher induction, subject leadership

6.3 Introduction

Physical education (PE) is positioned within a continuously changing landscape of social, cultural, and political agendas, presenting a challenging environment for teachers to navigate (Carse *et al.* 2018). There has been much debate regarding who is best placed to teach PE within this complex ecosystem, with the benefits of generalist and specialist teachers argued for in different contexts (Jones and Green 2017). Generalist teachers teach all curricular areas in Irish primary schools, including the recommended

60 minutes of weekly PE (Government of Ireland 1999b). The Irish curriculum suggests that generalist teachers are best placed to deliver a balanced PE programme, integrated with other curricular areas. In practice, however, PE delivery remains ‘largely influenced by the experience and interests of the individual teachers’ (Ní Chróinín 2018, p.208), and the frequency, duration, and content delivered varies greatly (Woods *et al.* 2018). Although teachers are developing more teaching-oriented views of PE, PE continues to reflect ‘the dominant aspects of wider physical culture in Ireland’, such as sport and health (Coulter and Ni Chroinin 2013, p.838). This is reflected in the perpetuating cycle of games-dominated delivery (Woods *et al.* 2018) and the prevalence of programmes like the Active School Flag (ASF), promoting physical activity participation and the self-evaluation of PE curriculum delivery (Bowles *et al.* 2017). Primary PE provision in Ireland has also followed the international trend of outsourcing the delivery of PE to external coaches (Jones and Green 2017; Mangione *et al.* 2020). Schools often recognise external coaching as PE curriculum time, even though it may not align with the curriculum, placing greater emphasis on sports participation and physical activity (Mangione *et al.* 2021). While Gaelic games⁴ ‘should be given particular consideration as part of the games programme’ (Government of Ireland 1999b, p.4), it is often taught throughout the year, with teachers accepting coaches’ services uncritically, satisfied it meets the needs of children (Bowles and O’Sullivan 2020; Mangione *et al.* 2021). Such trends reduce teacher involvement in the delivery of PE, facilitating a lack of accountability for the quality of provision (McVeagh *et al.* 2022).

Following calls for some form of specialisation in the delivery of Irish primary PE, a major specialism in PE has been included in the four-year Bachelor of Education (B. Ed) degree since 2012 (Marron *et al.* 2018). The specialism provides the opportunity for approximately 55 generalist pre-service teachers each year to engage in an additional 90-150 hours of PE modules during their degree (Ní Chróinín 2018). These opportunities for generalist teachers to develop content knowledge and engage in

⁴ The Gaelic games family includes the Irish sports of hurling, Gaelic football, handball, rounders, camogie, and ladies football, governed by the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA), the Camogie Association, and the Ladies Gaelic Football Association.

practical teaching experiences, can support the development of teaching orientations and high self-efficacy to teach PE (Brennan *et al.* 2021; Brennan *et al.* 2023). Given the additional expertise of PE specialism graduates (PESGs), they have been identified as potential leaders and change agents in the delivery of Irish primary PE (Marron *et al.* 2018). As well as directly impacting the quality of PE teaching among this cohort, it was hoped that it may have a ripple effect, improving the standard of PE teaching across schools (Ní Chróinín 2018). The model of in-situ teachers with specialist expertise mentoring colleagues has enhanced the delivery of other curricular areas, such as music (Barrett *et al.* 2019). Informal leadership practices in PE also have the potential to enhance teaching and learning, and PESGs could be suitably equipped to fulfil these roles (Clohessy *et al.* 2020). Considering the novelty of the specialism programme, it is unclear if PESGs' entry into the workforce can be a catalyst for improved PE practices. PESGs constitute a small portion of primary teachers in Ireland, with fewer than 6% of graduates each year completing the PE specialism in the Republic of Ireland. They enter schools among the minority, with expertise in a highly contested subject landscape (Griggs and Randall 2019). It is important understand how PESGs navigate their teaching contexts, as PE experts and potential leaders.

6.3.1 Teacher socialisation

Grounded in occupational socialisation theory, teacher socialisation explains how teachers establish professional expectations and practices through the 'social and political processes that frame their experience' (Richards *et al.* 2019, p.86). During this dialectical process, teachers negotiate influences, predominantly presented within three phases: acculturation, professional socialisation and organisational socialisation (Richards *et al.* 2019). *Acculturation* includes teachers' experiences and interactions before entering the profession, through which they develop a subjective warrant about the 'nature and goals of a physical education teacher's work and the advantages, for them, of carrying out such work.' (Curtner-Smith 2016, p.34). As teachers' beliefs develop, they can be positioned on a continuum from teaching-oriented, placing a value on the educational experience, to coaching-oriented, prioritising competitive sports participation over curricular PE (Richards *et al.* 2014). *Professional socialisation* comprises teachers' experiences from their enrolment in teacher education to graduation. It can play an essential role in helping to move teachers' understandings

beyond their acculturation, preparing them for their teaching realities (Lawson 1983a). However, this is sometimes recognised as the weakest phase within teacher socialisation, as teachers actively accept or reject the values, skills and knowledge presented based on their prior orientations (Richards *et al.* 2014). *Organisational socialisation* includes teachers' experiences while practising as qualified teachers, developing their understanding of teaching within the school context (Lawson 1983a). Evidence suggests that professional socialisation through the PE specialism can expand PESGs' understanding of PE, developing teaching orientations (Brennan *et al.* 2023). It is unclear, however, if this impacts PESGs' subsequent practices in schools. Kelchtermans & Ballet's (2002a) concept of 'micropolitical literacy' provides a theoretical lens to explore teachers' organisational socialisation in greater detail.

6.3.1.1 Micropolitical literacy

When analysing the school network under a micropolitical lens, it reveals the 'formal and informal power' that may inhibit or encourage leadership and knowledge sharing (Blase 1991, p.11). Teachers' 'micropolitical literacy' enables them to understand the micropolitics of their school and establish themselves effectively within this network (Kelchtermans and Ballet 2002a). Micropolitically literate teachers can 'acknowledge, interpret and understand' situations; and effectively apply strategies to 'establish, safeguard or restore desirable working conditions' (Kelchtermans and Ballet 2002a, p.765). Interdependent professional interests shape teachers' behaviours and practices in schools, particularly during their integration into the workplace (Kelchtermans and Ballet 2002b). These professional interests and the potential implications of these interests on teachers' practices are presented in Table 14.

Table 14. Categories of professional interests, adapted from Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002b)

	Description	Potential influence on behaviour
Self-interests	The importance of professional integrity and identity as a teacher.	Visibility and recognition are of high importance to early career teachers. Beginning teachers sometimes take on additional school roles and engage in self-presentation strategies for affirmation and the approval of others.
Material interests	Material supports available to aid teaching, e.g. equipment, facilities, funding, and time for collaborating with colleagues.	Teaching style and content delivered are adapted due to the resources available. Furthermore, if insufficient time is allocated for professional conversations with colleagues, it may strengthen feelings of inadequacy among early career teachers.
Organisational interests	Organisational interests relate to roles and positions within the school.	Early career teachers often prioritise securing and maintaining a job, subsequently influencing self-interests, as they are aware of how others see them. This can result in ‘strategic compliance’ with existing school practices, even if it fails to align with their own ideals (Richards <i>et al.</i> 2013).
Cultural-ideological interests	The school culture, including the formal and informal teaching goals, values and norms.	If cultural-ideological interests conflict with the teachers’ personal teaching philosophy, it may lead to role conflict, and the potential wash-out of knowledge and skills developed during professional socialisation (Blankenship and Coleman 2009; Richards <i>et al.</i> 2013).

Social- professional interests	The importance of social relationships within the school network.	Positive interpersonal relationships are important for a sustainable workplace. Therefore social-professional interests are often prioritised over other interests. Many teachers are prepared to endure unfavourable conditions rather than unsettling interpersonal relationships.
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If PESGs engage in self-presentation strategies to support their job prospects, it could present opportunities to demonstrate their additional PE knowledge and expertise. The opposite, however, is also true. If teachers lack the micropolitical literacy to navigate their contexts, they might abandon their PE skills, assimilating with existing school practices. To fully understand PESGs' navigation of the school context, it is important to investigate the micropolitical landscape, including the factors that facilitate or inhibit teachers' development. The recent introduction of the Droichead induction programme could facilitate a professional learning culture and knowledge sharing between the newly qualified teacher (NQT) and their professional support team (Smyth *et al.* 2016). PESGs are presented with a challenging environment to navigate however, due to the outsourcing of PE provision, limited access to facilities, and varied understandings of PE within schools (Ní Chróinín 2018).

This study explores the organisational socialisation experiences of PESGs through a micropolitical lens. Much research has investigated the socialisation of early career specialist PE teachers (Richards and Templin 2011; Ensign and Mays Woods 2017; Westerlund and Eliasson 2021) and the socialisation of generalist teachers in international contexts (Morgan and Hansen 2008b). However, the socialisation of this unique cohort of teachers presents different challenges. Despite their PE expertise, PESGs have the same responsibilities as their generalist colleagues. Their integration as teachers and leaders of PE is multifaceted, and this study provides valuable insights into the structures, power and relationships that influence PE provision within Irish primary schools. Developing a greater insight into PESGs' teaching realities can support the development of the specialism programme in Irish and international contexts. It can also add to the evidence base informing professional development programmes, ensuring qualified teachers are equipped to use their skills effectively. This study investigates:

- How PESGs' skills are currently being used in schools.
- How PESGs have navigated their micropolitical landscapes as PE experts.

6.4 Methods

This study is part of a broader investigation into the socialisation of PESGs. A volunteer sample of 11 graduates of the 4-year B. Ed with a major specialism in PE participated in this study. We invited PESGs to participate in the study during a

previous survey investigation (Brennan *et al.* 2021), which included graduates from 2016 to 2019. The eligibility criteria for the present study required that all teachers had at least one year of teaching experience in a primary school, in the Republic of Ireland. Table 15 shows the sample of graduates from both higher education institutions that offer the PE specialism. Participants included graduates from 2016 to 2019, including generalist teachers who have PE teaching responsibilities, and special education teachers (SET). All teachers apart from Mark and Bridget completed their induction through the Droichead programme.

Critical realism was the paradigmatic approach employed for this study, recognising that although there is an independent reality, we are accessing a mediated reflection of this reality through interactions with participants (Ryba *et al.* 2022). A critical realist approach also facilitated the investigation of the causal structures and stratified nature of PESGs' behaviours beyond the observable data (Ryba *et al.* 2022). Critical realism complemented our investigation of the multifaceted micropolitical landscapes. It acknowledged that as researchers, we are part of the sociocultural presentation of reality and therefore cannot produce a completely objective presentation (Braun and Clarke 2021b).

We carried out semi-structured online interviews with participants in Summer 2020, and it is important to note the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on teachers' realities at this time. Remote teaching was in place from March 2020 until the end of the school year, and some schools may have emphasised the 'physical' elements more than the 'education' elements in PE (Coulter *et al.* 2021). We chose interviews for this study as they can 'illuminate the ways in which societies and cultures shape personal experience, meaning, decisions, values, motivations' (Smith and Sparkes 2016, p.108). This helped to provide an insight into the micropolitical landscape of primary PE in Ireland and PESGs' teaching realities. The principal author conducted the interviews and was a former classmate of three participants. Researcher reflexivity was imperative to inhibit interviewer bias, remaining anchored by the theoretical foundations, research objectives and participant responses throughout the process.

Table 15. Participant information and school data

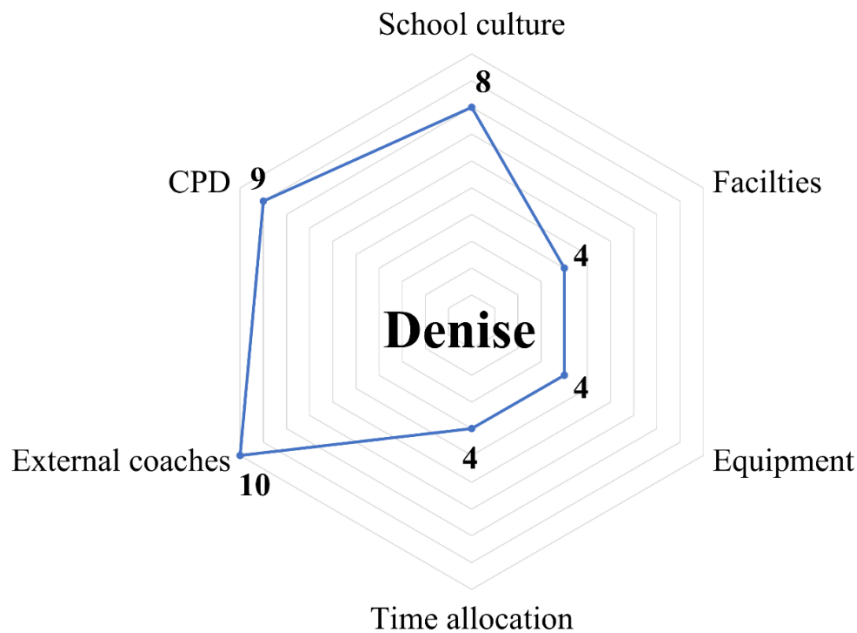
Name (Pseudonym)	Year graduated	HEI (Pseudonym)	Teaching experience	PE leadership in school	ASF programme in school	External coaching in school
Mark	2016	Chestnut Grove University	Classroom teacher (3 years) * Casual substitute (1 year)	Informal PE leader - Mark	-	✓
Rachel	2017	Oak Hills University	Classroom teacher (3 years)	PE team	✓	✓
Denise	2018	Chestnut Grove University	Classroom teacher (2 years)	Informal PE leader - Denise	✓	✓
Fiona	2018	Chestnut Grove University	SET (1 year) Classroom teacher (1 year)	No recognised PE leader	✓	✓
Bridget	2018	Oak Hills University	Classroom teacher (2 years)	Informal PE leader	✓	✓
Grace	2018	Oak Hills University	Classroom teacher (2 years)	PE team	-	✓
Paul	2018	Chestnut Grove University	SET (2 years)	ASF Coordinator	✓	✓
Tracy	2019	Oak Hills University	Classroom teacher (1 year)	No recognised PE leader	✓	✓

Name (Pseudonym)	Year graduated	HEI (Pseudonym)	Teaching experience	PE leadership in school	ASF programme in school	External coaching in school
Maria	2019	Chestnut Grove University	SET (1 year)	Formal PE leader	✓	✓
Olivia	2019	Oak Hills University	Classroom teacher (1 year)	Formal PE leader	✓	✓
Chloe	2019	Chestnut Grove University	SET (1 year)	PE team	✓	✓

Note. SET= special education teacher. *School data provided for Mark's classroom teacher experience

Interviews were audio recorded and lasted for 62 minutes, on average. Parts of these interviews investigated PESGs' understanding of quality PE, and these have been presented in an earlier study (Brennan *et al.* 2023). This paper focuses on PESGs' integration into the school community as PE experts. Therefore, questions explored the existing leadership structures within the school, the school's approach towards PE, how PESGs applied their skills within their school and how PESGs can be supported in their leadership of PE. Questions were guided by Kelchtermans and Ballets' (2002a; 2002b) analysis of the micropolitics of teacher induction and recent survey findings from PESGs (Brennan *et al.* 2021). The interview guide provided a framework for the interviewer while creating opportunities for curiosity-driven questions. Examples of planned questions included; 'Who do you see as leaders in the school environment? How do you feel PE is treated in your school, and how does this compare to your own understanding? Are other teachers in your school aware that you have completed the PE specialism?'. As a further stimulus to examine the whole-school approach to PE, we used interviewee-aided sociograms during interviews, inviting participants to engage in 'autobiographical self-thematisation' (Kelchtermans and Ballet 2002b). Teachers rated factors perceived to influence the delivery of PE within their schools on a scale of 1-10. These factors included: school culture; facilities; equipment; time allocation; external coaches; CPD; an 'other' category enabled PESGs to add another influence. Interviewees awarded ratings to each category based on their perceived influence on PE provision within their school, awarding the most influential factors the highest ratings. These ratings visually portrayed participants' views, (see Figure 6), empowering them to direct the interview content as they reflected on how they navigated these influences within their micropolitical landscape (Norris *et al.* 2020). It also created opportunities for curiosity-driven questions based on participant responses, such as: 'How do you feel about that approach? So you mentioned the value of external coaches and that they are important, how would you like to see them used?'.

Figure 6. Sample of Interviewee-aided sociogram



We chose Braun and Clarke’s (2021) reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) to analyse the interview data, recognising the researcher as part of knowledge formation within the critical realist approach. This reflexive approach allowed the analysis to be guided by relevant research, positioning the socially constructed realities of PESGs within the broader landscape of PE provision. The principal author conducted the analysis and engaged in regular discussions with the co-authors to maintain reflexivity throughout the analysis.

Following audio transcription, data familiarisation supported the identification and critiquing of possible patterns within the data (Braun and Clarke 2021b). The first phase of coding subsequently took place, inductively generating meanings relevant to the research objectives within participant responses. After collating and cleaning these codes, meaningful shared patterns were identified within the dataset to establish initial themes. These initial themes highlighted PESGs’ cautious integration into the school community as they prioritised alignment with existing practices over sharing their PE skills. It became clear that although PESGs were applying micropolitical strategies, they were predominantly guided by the demands placed upon them as vulnerable, early career teachers rather than as PE experts. After reviewing these initial themes, a more deductive analysis took place, examining the impact of the school culture in greater

detail, developing the themes further. Given the varied micropolitical landscapes presented, we reanalysed each transcript to determine how PESGs' practices reflected the school context. Guided by centrally organising concepts, we identified three main themes that were subsequently refined, defined, and named. These themes presented PESGs' micropolitical landscapes in greater detail, illustrating how they navigated these networks and applied their skills within these contexts. While it was evident that school cultures presented challenges to PESGs in applying their PE expertise, contrasting practices were evident within these networks that facilitated or inhibited their development. Throughout the writing process, we modified the themes, and the finalised themes are presented in the summary table.

Table 16. Theme summary table

Theme	Characteristics
Innovative teachers in custodial environments: 'I kind of just go with it'	Schools place greater value on sports and physical activity rather than PESGs' additional PE expertise. Given PESGs' vulnerability as early career teachers, they struggle to advance beyond their recognition as the 'sporty' teacher.
Restricted by responsibility: 'I didn't get to apply my full knowledge'	PESGs' opportunities to teach PE and contribute to the whole-school delivery of PE were limited by their role expectations. External coaches were often given greater power in the whole-school delivery of PE.
The novice expert: 'I think it will take time with me. I'm not someone to go straight into a school and take over.'	PESGs feel their development as leaders will take time, as they develop social-professional relationships and establish themselves within the school. Structured opportunities to share expertise have been shown to support this development.

6.5 Findings & Discussion

Due to PESGs' professional interests and their vulnerability as early career teachers, many PESGs appear to fit into their school cultures, assimilating with existing practices despite limiting their potential contribution as PE experts. While some PESGs had opportunities to assume PE leadership roles and support the whole-school delivery of PE, this was not common practice across schools. The roles undertaken within schools reflected schools' cultural-ideological interests. PESGs integration is presented across three main themes as outlined in Table 16; (1) Innovative teachers in custodial environments: 'I kind of just go with it'; (2) Restricted by responsibility: 'I didn't get to apply my full knowledge', (3) The novice expert: 'I think it will take time with me. I'm not someone to go straight into a school and take over'.

6.5.1 Innovative teachers in custodial environments: 'I kind of just go with it'

It appears that cultural-ideological interests make PESGs' integration into schools more challenging due to schools' custodial orientations that overlook PESGs' expertise, prioritising sport and physical activity over the educational aspects of PE. Guided by their organisational interests and desire for acceptance within schools, PESGs aligned with the existing school practices, restricting their potential influence as PE leaders.

While some schools, such as Chloe's, emphasised PE, 'we have to teach it and we have to teach it well', this valuation of PE was not widespread across schools and was reflected in the material and cultural-ideological interests. For example, despite having access to PE facilities in her school, Tracy's principal sometimes notified teachers 'hall not in use today' due to a bake sale or school photographs without offering alternatives for PE provision. Although PESGs did not agree with such practices, as early career teachers on short-term contracts, they were uncomfortable challenging them; 'I kind of just go with it' (Olivia). PESGs are eager to make a positive impression, and 'you nearly jump at any opportunity to help out and be shown to be involved in the school' (Rachel). As early career teachers, many PESGs have short-term contracts that do not extend beyond the academic year. Self-interests and organisational interests have led to some PESGs undertaking supplementary roles in ICT, music and STEM education (Science, Technology, Engineering, And

Mathematics). While some teachers also have an interest and expertise in these areas, the treatment of PESGs' PE expertise emphasises the marginalised status of PE in schools (Richards *et al.* 2018a). PESGs are entering schools where their skills and expertise are not fully understood or appreciated: 'I had mentioned it in my interview last year [the PE specialism], but it was kind of just, you know, ticked and thrown under the rug' (Grace). This lack of appreciation and marginalisation of PESGs' skills has the potential to accentuate reality shock and result in conformation with existing practices (Blankenship and Coleman 2009; Richards *et al.* 2018a).

As previously shown, school expectations for PE in Ireland appear to be rooted in sports and physical activity (Ní Chróinín *et al.* 2019), which clashes with PESGs' teaching orientations (Brennan *et al.* 2023). Approaches towards PE leadership varied in schools, as seen in Table 15. If PE leaders were established within schools, their responsibilities were more closely associated with organisational tasks rather than supporting learning in PE, reflecting previous findings by Clohessy *et al.* (2020). Although some PE committees supported whole-school planning for PE and knowledge sharing, this was not common practice. The whole-school approach was reflected in the roles undertaken by PESGs. All graduates from 2016 to 2018 were actively involved in school sports coaching, apart from Grace, who was a member of the sports committee and helped to plan a virtual sports day. Although no 2019 graduates had assumed school sports roles, their contributions may have been curtailed due to the enforced COVID-19 school closures during the school year. Sport was a central part of many PESGs' acculturation (Brennan *et al.* 2023), and schools appear to be drawn towards their sporting identity rather than their PE expertise: 'I suppose they would know that I would have been a sporty person, but that mightn't necessarily have meant that they thought I had a PE specialism.' (Fiona). These expectations have the potential to reaffirm beliefs that teachers pursue studies in PE due to a desire to coach, rekindling dormant coaching orientations and creating role conflict (Richards *et al.* 2014; Curtner-Smith 2016). However, this recognition as the 'sporty teacher' did create PE leadership opportunities for teachers such as Denise and Mark, who play Gaelic games at an elite level. Both PESGs used this authority to apply their PE expertise and support whole-school PE provision in various ways. For example, Mark prepared a whole-school plan for PE and engaged in class swapping, teaching PE for other teachers. Interestingly, Denise applied her skills differently, positioned as a knowledge source within the

school, sharing ideas and resources with other staff, particularly for strands they were not as confident to teach. Her role as the ASF and GAA Flag coordinator helped establish this recognition. While both Mark and Denise had the confidence to navigate their contexts, applying their skills to support PE provision, the custodial expectations held by most schools could narrow the potential impact of other PESGs. In addition, not all PESGs will be recognised as the ‘sporty teacher’ as described in Tracy’s experience of being overlooked as a member of the ASF team:

the new NQT boy was sitting beside me, and she [ASF Coordinator] was like to the boy, ‘oh, would you join the active team?’ because I know you play GAA (Tracy)

Tracy subsequently made the ASF coordinator aware of her expertise and also joined the ASF team, given responsibility for organising the school PE equipment. However, it demonstrates how the custodial expectations of school leaders can limit PESGs’ potential to share their skills.

The cultural-ideological interests of the school community also influence the content teachers deliver. Denise described correspondence from parents, encouraging the principal to increase Gaelic games delivery to benefit their sons’ teams, at the expense of the PE curriculum:

dance was for girls only, just for girls, and gymnastics was just for girls as well. So even in my class, the amount of notes I got saying they were withdrawing their child from participating in dance, which I thought was absolutely ridiculous.

As many primary teachers in Ireland believe Gaelic games can fulfil children’s PE needs (Bowles and O’Sullivan 2020), the danger is that other parts of the curriculum suffer at the expense of this approach. Despite being ‘all for the GAA’ herself, Denise was aware of the damaging impact such custodial approaches could have on pupils’ development. Fortunately, the emphasis on PE within the school meant she was confident to use her micropolitical literacy and remain steadfast in her delivery of the curriculum:

We [Denise & the school principal] were saying dance and gymnastics is part of the curriculum, and that it was compulsory for all students, you know, there was no option. Now some parents then backed down from that and said, ‘Okay, we’ll give

the child the opportunity’, but then like the boys then, they wouldn’t hold hands with the girls for dance and, oh it was just... it was messy. (Denise)

However, the conflation between sport and PE is deeply rooted in many school cultures. Grace noted her principal’s recommendation to ‘just bring them out for a run about or a quick game of football’. As seen in Table 15, active initiatives such as the ASF were prevalent across nearly all schools, and some PESGs are concerned that it can lead to a conflation between physical activity and PE. Olivia felt colleagues ‘were thinking, “oh brilliant, we’re doing a running challenge now”, but like is that, is that PE? Not really’ (Olivia). PESGs have moved beyond custodial perceptions through the PE specialism (Brennan *et al.* 2023), but they are often confronted by these orientations again upon graduation, challenging their newly developed views.

PESGs are not prepared to disrupt traditional PE practices on a whole-school level, given their professional interests. As generalist teachers, they are having difficulty sharing their PE expertise without a designated role, as ‘you kind of feel like other things are more important as well’ (Bridget). In addition, the conflicting expectations within schools also present the challenge of ‘how do you pass that [additional knowledge] on to somebody else that isn’t interested in the area of PE?’ (Maria). Custodial orientations of colleagues reinforce the marginalisation of PE, inhibiting PESGs’ potential development of practice (Richards *et al.* 2018a). Establishing a shared educational vision within the school network may be necessary to present a more welcoming micropolitical landscape for PESGs to navigate (Jess *et al.* 2016).

6.5.2 Restricted by responsibility: ‘I didn’t get to apply my full knowledge’

PESGs faced further challenges in applying their PE expertise, as they had limited opportunities to teach PE due to their positions as SETs or the prevalence of external coaches. The power dynamics within these micropolitical landscapes overlooked many PESGs’ subject expertise, presenting external coaches with greater opportunities to contribute to the whole-school PE provision.

Upon graduation, some PESGs were in SET roles and did not have PE teaching responsibilities. While some teachers, such as Chloe, could apply some PE expertise, ‘covering a base of the FMS skills’ with children with additional gross motor needs,

opportunities to teach PE or contribute to the whole-school provision of PE were limited. Another SET, Paul, did get the opportunity to share ideas and assist his class teacher in PE. Paul was given responsibility for teaching half of the class for a teacher who struggled with classroom management issues in PE. Despite recognising a ‘toxic atmosphere during PE’ due to an overemphasis on competition, Paul noted; ‘essentially like, I felt like, you know, I just hadn’t the, it wasn’t my place to say anything’. Although Paul felt the PE lesson failed to meet children’s needs, he needed greater guidance to apply his skills within this micropolitical landscape. Paul’s social-professional interests and the power dynamic with a more experienced staff member resulted in strategic compliance rather than risking damaged relationships. PESGs may require support to apply micropolitical strategies to establish desirable working conditions when presented with such opportunities (Kelchtermans and Ballet 2002a).

PE teaching time was also reduced for many classroom teachers due to the embedded nature of external coaching within Irish primary schools (Mangione *et al.* 2021). Schools often recognise external provision as PE curriculum delivery due to time restrictions, limited facilities or curriculum demands, meaning: ‘I didn’t get to apply my full knowledge if that makes sense’ (Mark). External coaches were present within all schools, providing a range of activities throughout the school year, including Gaelic games, rugby, soccer, aquatics, dance, gymnastics, athletics, badminton, and basketball. While PESGs acknowledge that these coaches can offer some expertise to the delivery of PE, particularly for strands in which they are not as confident to teach (Mangione *et al.* 2020), the caveat is ‘they’re good and they’re bad depending on how they’re implemented’ (Chloe). For example, conversations between Denise and her principal ensured that if coaches entered the school, they had to align with the strands of the curriculum. The recruitment of external coaches, however, is predominantly outside PESGs’ control and was dominated by games-focused activities, while ‘the other things [strands of the curriculum] are neglected a bit’ (Bridget). While PESGs recognised the importance of a broad and balanced PE curriculum from their teacher education (Brennan *et al.* 2023), their teaching contexts immediately confront these perceptions, presenting a challenging environment to navigate.

PESGs can regulate the services of external coaches by working alongside them to ensure children’s needs are met in PE. Positively, nearly all PESGs actively assisted

with the external coaching, assuming co-teaching or assistant roles, noting the additional opportunities it provided to observe students closely in PE. However, some PESGs assimilated with existing school practices, utilising the time for administrative tasks and correcting children's schoolwork. As an NQT, Tracy aligned with the practices of other class teachers in her school, handing over 30 minutes of PE curriculum time to the external coach with no teacher involvement. It exposed the power dynamic between coach and teacher, which can sometimes undermine teachers' expertise and perpetuate a lack of confidence to deliver PE (McVeagh *et al.* 2022). Tracy felt the external coach 'knew my kids like more than me', and given her limited experience of GAA, she viewed the external coach as more knowledgeable; 'I knew she was doing it right'. There is a danger that the safety net provided by external coaches could result in the deskilling of teachers:

if you're in third class for two years, and if the same badminton coach is coming back the second year, I think that's just such a waste [...] the teacher hasn't learned because they feel like they don't have to learn. (Paul)

Collaboration and shared planning is necessary to support all stakeholders, working towards a shared educational agenda (Jess *et al.* 2016; Ní Chróinín and O'Brien 2019). PESGs recognise that within schools, 'there's not enough kind of communication [with external coaches], or maybe the teachers aren't paying attention to what's going on' (Bridget). Although Mark felt his influence as a PE leader was limited by the presence of external coaches, it was positive to see him assert his authority to monitor the quality of coaching in his school. Following consultation with the coaches, they agreed that class teachers should contribute more in supporting the delivery of lessons, while coaches had to make greater efforts to differentiate to meet students' educational needs. When a coach shared his concerns about the quality of GAA skills in the schools, Mark explained, 'you're going to have to just change your drills then really'. Co-delivery could ensure that children's learning needs are met by capitalising on external coaches' content knowledge and teachers' pedagogical and curriculum knowledge. By adopting this approach, PESGs could use their sporting biographies and pedagogical knowledge to act as intermediaries, developing positive connections and uniting the key stakeholders in PE provision (Carse *et al.* 2018).

Many PESGs have had limited opportunities to apply their additional expertise as qualified teachers: ‘I don't feel like there is a lot of room to get involved’ (Rachel). The COVID-19 pandemic further influenced these opportunities; ‘it was kind of a loss last year that I didn't get to use it’ (Maria). Providing opportunities to apply professional knowledge is essential for teachers to reach the ‘secure stage’ of knowledge and skill development (Randall 2020). PESGs are mindful of this transient window: ‘if you leave it go too long, you've lost a lot of your content knowledge if it's not being used’ (Olivia). Suitable professional development may be necessary to ‘get you thinking about PE again’ (Paul), ensuring the ‘lost years’ described by teachers do not become lost skills and expertise.

6.5.3 The novice expert: ‘I think it will take time with me. I'm not someone to go straight into a school and take over.’

While there have been some positive indications of PESGs’ leadership potential, for many PESGs, their development as PE leaders will take time. The interesting juxtaposition of identities as both novice teachers and PE experts creates a complex hybrid. PESGs may require greater organisational support to navigate their micropolitical landscapes and share their expertise effectively.

Despite previously demonstrating high self-efficacy to teach PE, many PESGs’ confidence in sharing their expertise will require further development;

I think it will take time with me. I'm not someone to go straight into a school and take over but, am, I'm going to keep trying each year to do more I guess (Bridget).

As early career teachers, undertaking a PE leadership role was not a priority for many, placing a greater emphasis on establishing themselves within the school community and completing their induction. Balancing the demands of an early career teacher can result in prioritising other aspects at the expense of PE (Blankenship and Coleman 2009; Ensign and Mays Woods 2017). Grace acknowledged, ‘I was happy enough with workload I had haha’, while Maria explained that her school advised her to ‘just focus on the Droichead, so they weren't giving any extra kind of jobs to do with that, thank God’. Numerous structures within PESGs’ micropolitical landscapes facilitated or inhibited their desire to share their PE expertise.

Organisational barriers such as job security and PESGs' status as novice teachers can restrict their potential impact. Despite Fiona expressing a desire to lead the GAA 5 Star Centre initiative within her school –which promotes physical activity and Gaelic games participation (Mangione *et al.* 2020) – she was unable to do so as she did not have a permanent contract. Despite this initiative aligning with the cultural-ideological interests, organisational structures and PESGs' vulnerable job status can suppress their confidence to lead:

The kind of uncertainty of being there year on - year off, you would feel a bit brazen nearly to come out and make a point of 'I want to be the PE leader' when your place isn't even secured in a school. (Fiona)

It was hoped that Droichead could facilitate knowledge exchange between teachers and their support team in both directions (Smyth *et al.* 2016), but it appears that PESGs have a limited contribution within this 'exchange'. PESGs acknowledged positive school atmospheres that welcomed knowledge sharing, but the focus of Droichead was on teachers' learning needs (Smyth *et al.* 2016). Olivia wanted to teach a PE lesson when being observed for Droichead, but; 'they wanted to see my core subjects, which was fine like, I understand that too'. While it also reflects the cultural-ideological interests presented in the first theme, the focus on PESGs' learning needs as novice teachers neglects their development as PE teachers and leaders. If utilised effectively, Droichead could further their development as PE experts. For example, the PE leader in Bridget's school invited her to attend a virtual sports day workshop before working alongside her to implement the sports day; 'I don't know if I would have done it myself if she hadn't kind of spurred me on and helped out' (Bridget). Despite having additional PE expertise, Bridget benefited from these informal mentoring interactions to help her apply her skills (Richards and Templin 2011). While PESGs acknowledged that their development as PE teachers and leaders would take time, organisational structures can facilitate or inhibit this process.

Other obstacles included PESGs' social-professional interests, which influenced their confidence to undertake leadership responsibilities:

maybe next year as I become more familiar with the school and more friendly with the staff and develop those relationships, maybe it might be something I might look into (Fiona).

Social interactions inform teachers' practices, and it is essential that positive, supportive staffroom contexts are developed (Christensen 2013). Some PESGs' feel that; 'maybe in a smaller school, [...] maybe I would have been more confident to put myself out there in a role' (Rachel). Interestingly, Denise had a head start in developing these relationships, previously completing school placement in her current school 'I kind of felt I was in the school already when I first came [as an NQT]'. These relationships and support from her principal aided Denise in initiating her PE leadership role, where she feels her skills are 'being best used the way they are at the minute'. Social-professional relationships, however, continue to influence her actions:

they'd always come to me for ideas, because I feel I don't want to be going to them, because it might look like that they're struggling or something like that (Denise).

This caution of 'bombarding teachers with ideas' (Bridget) and damaging social-professional relationships can compound many PESGs' reluctance to share their expertise in an already marginalised subject.

To facilitate PESGs' growth as PE leaders and overcome the barriers identified, it is necessary to recognise their potential contribution to the whole-school delivery of PE through structured leadership approaches (Marron *et al.* 2018). Chloe stated, 'you have the experience, you might as well share it with everyone'. As mentioned in the first theme, Denise and Mark's 'sporty' identity helped them to acquire leadership positions, but distributed leadership structures within their schools also facilitated these leadership opportunities. Class swapping already took place in Mark's school, and Denise's school actively encouraged knowledge sharing between staff. Informal leadership practices such as class swapping have been shown to develop teachers' leadership of PE within their schools, enhancing pupil learning (Clohessy *et al.* 2019). This approach, however, is not always feasible within schools; 'I didn't feel like it would be acceptable for me to say, 'will you teach my crowd drama, and I'll teach your class PE' (Olivia). Clarity is needed in the leadership of PE within schools (Griggs and Randall 2019), and recognising PESGs as an asset in this role could empower them as future leaders

(Westerlund and Eliasson 2021). With a new curriculum currently in development (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment 2020), PESGs could apply their skills to facilitate positive changes in the delivery of PE (Griggs and Randall 2019).

PESGs are more comfortable sharing their expertise on a smaller scale within schools, usually with other early career teachers or teachers at a similar class level with whom they were working. PESGs had close relationships with these staff who knew they had additional PE expertise. Given the social-professional relationships developed and the recognition of their additional expertise, PESGs felt more comfortable supporting these teachers who ‘maybe weren't perhaps as confident.’ (Olivia). PESGs predominantly recognised leadership as a formal responsibility within the school (Clohessy *et al.* 2020), overlooking their informal contributions. PESGs have demonstrated their potential to enhance PE provision within schools, but greater guidance may be required to help them navigate their micropolitical landscapes as PE leaders (Kelchtermans and Ballet 2002a). Despite being PE experts, PESGs must continue to be supported as novices on their learning journey as PE teachers and leaders, ensuring the impact of the PE specialism is not undone.

6.6 Conclusion

This study provides an important insight into PESGs’ journeys as PE experts within the complex micropolitical landscape of Irish primary schools. Schools appear to reflect the varied understandings and applications of PE within the primary context (Carse *et al.* 2018). While PESGs engage in micropolitical strategies, they are predominantly focused on their self-interests, organisational interests and social-professional interests, eager to make positive impressions as vulnerable teachers. Schools' contrasting cultural-ideological interests have resulted in PESGs suppressing their PE expertise to assimilate with existing school cultures. PESGs are reluctant to disrupt existing practices as early career teachers and are more comfortable fitting in than attempting to stand out as PE leaders. PESGs' expertise have predominantly been narrowed to sports coaching and physical activity promotion within custodial schools, but innovative school cultures have positively supported PESGs’ leadership of PE. More appropriate formal and informal learning opportunities that align with PESGs' specialised expertise may be needed within induction programmes (Richards and Templin 2011; Christensen 2013), supporting PESGs as change agents within these contexts. PESGs’ current status as

novice teachers, and the positioning of external coaches within schools generates a challenging power dynamic to overcome. With the upcoming revision of the Irish primary PE curriculum, the contribution of teachers as the primary deliverers of PE must be emphasised, and a shared vision needs to be established between all stakeholders to meet the needs of children (Jess *et al.* 2016). The unique assemblage of PESGs' sporting biographies and their PE expertise could equip them as effective intermediaries, unifying all stakeholders. However, schools must also demonstrate a willingness to change, with an emphasis on PE leadership (McVeagh *et al.* 2022). While it is ambitious to expect novice PESGs to lead PE within schools immediately, it would be remiss to disregard their expertise and their potential contribution in the evolution of Irish primary PE.

6.7 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter addressed objective 3 of the thesis: To examine PESGs' integration into the school context as PE experts and to explore how their expertise is used within schools.

Chapter findings revealed that PESGs are presented with many institutional barriers in schools that inhibit their development as PE teachers and leaders. They are predominantly entering school contexts with custodial approaches to PE, where their PE expertise are not valued or understood. Some PESGs demonstrated positive examples of PE leadership within schools, supporting other school staff by sharing ideas, class swapping for PE and liaising with external coaches. As early career generalist teachers however, leading PE is not a priority for many PESGs, although they acknowledge that it is something that they would like to develop further. This chapter reframed the expectation that PESGs would naturally develop as PE leaders(Marron *et al.* 2018), highlighting their need for further support. Some school contexts facilitated this development through existing structures that promoted distributed leadership and the sharing of knowledge between staff but there is a danger that in many schools PESGs' development could stagnate, if they do not get sufficient opportunities to apply their skills. Reframing the induction process may provide opportunities to achieve this within schools, while findings can also inform ITE and CPD developments to ensure PESGs are better prepared to navigate these contexts. Chapter 7 examines the influence of a CoP on PESGs' development as teachers and leaders of PE.

Chapter 7

The PE Web: Reframing PE specialism graduates organisational socialisation through participation in an online community of practice

7.1 Introduction

7.2 How does study 4 build on the preceding studies

The studies presented in Chapters 4 to 6 have helped to develop an understanding of PESGs, and the factors throughout their socialisation that have shaped their development. Although there are many positive indications that professional socialisation has helped PESGs to develop teaching-oriented views as confident teachers of PE, it appears that it has limited impact on the provision of PE within Irish primary schools. Few PESGs have reached the aspirational stage of teacher development, where they are confident leading others in the delivery of PE within schools (Randall 2020). There is also a danger that the additional expertise developed during PESGs' professional socialisation could be washed out, if teachers do not get sufficient opportunities to put their additional knowledge into practice (Blankenship and Coleman 2009). As innovative teachers in custodial environments, PESGs are left 'intellectually isolated due to conflicting views of physical education's place in schools.' (Parker *et al.* 2016). The many demands placed upon PESGs as early career teachers could lead to their assimilation with custodial practices within schools.

Despite being presented with institutional barriers however, PESGs have the power over their teaching practices within these contexts (Deglau *et al.* 2006). It is clear that PESGs need further support but results within the previous chapters highlight their limited engagement with CPD to date. This study examines how PESGs can be supported to overcome the barriers they face in their teaching contexts, addressing the objective of the thesis: (4) To investigate the impact of a learning community on PESGs' progression as PE experts. It also addresses the research gap that has been identified within the study of learning communities at primary level, and among generalist teachers, exploring 'how the competing responsibilities of teaching multiple subjects impact their interest and successful participation in LCs' (Parker *et al.* 2021, p.15).

7.3 Research Design

A community of practice (CoP) was chosen as the method of CPD for PESGs, as it is built on teachers' needs, recognising the complexities of each teacher's micro contexts

(Keay *et al.* 2019). PESGs are part of multiple implicit CoPs within the broader landscape of practice across primary PE provision. These communities include their PE specialism classmates, with whom they developed their self-efficacy to teach PE through social learning as described in Chapter 4. Their respective school contexts as described in Chapter 6, are a further community through which knowledge and competence interact. Some teachers are also part of sports communities as youth sports coaches or sportspeople as described in Chapter 5. By creating a CoP built on the needs of this group of PESGs, it was hoped that it could facilitate the brokering of knowledge between communities, helping PESGs to apply their PE expertise within their teaching contexts.

The theoretical framework underpinning this thesis is teacher socialisation, the process through which teachers establish expectations and practices associated with their profession (Richards *et al.* 2014). It builds on the discussion by Parker, Patton and Tannehill (2016), examining the relationship between professional development and organisational socialisation. This chapter examines how participation in a CoP ‘may serve to enhance the positive aspects of organisational socialisation while counteracting the negative forces’ (Richards and Gaudreault 2016, p.6). Teachers’ roles are socially situated within the school community, influencing their beliefs and practices (Richards 2015). CPD however, can also act as a ‘socialising agent for teachers’ (Parker *et al.* 2016). Membership of a CoP involves the ‘dynamic interplay’ between personal experience and the social expectations established by the professional community (Wenger-Trayner *et al.* 2014, p.14). Using Lave and Wenger’s (1991) situated learning theory, this study examines how a CoP among PESGs can influence their development as PE teachers and leaders within their school communities.

This chapter addresses objective 4 of the thesis: To investigate the impact of a learning community on PESGs' progression as PE experts⁵. To examine this objective in greater detail, the following sub objectives were identified:

- To develop a greater understanding of PESGs' needs as PE experts within schools.
- To examine how long-term engagement with a learning community can influence PESGs' organisational socialisation.

A constructivist approach was adopted for this study, acknowledging the locality of practices within the wider landscape (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2014). Situated learning puts 'a very explicit focus on the person, but as person-in-the-world, as member of a sociocultural community' (Lave and Wenger 1991, p.52). Similarly social constructivists believe that knowledge is a social construct developed through social interactions that reflect the culture (Azzarito and Ennis 2003). This longitudinal study presents an insight into PESGs' realities and their learning experiences as members of a CoP called The PE Web. This study was conducted from February 2021 to January 2022, with online CoP meetings taking place at monthly intervals during each academic year. Meetings took place online, and a virtual community was set up between participants, using Microsoft Teams to facilitate group communications between meetings. Online approaches to professional development have become more popular in recent years, and have been shown to develop teachers' content and pedagogical knowledge (Lander *et al.* 2022; Simpson *et al.* 2022).

The CoP began during a time of significant uncertainty for teachers. In February 2021, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Schools had previously been closed during the previous academic year from March to June 2020, and despite returning to onsite teaching in September 2020, school buildings remained closed following the 2020 Christmas holidays. Online remote teaching returned in 2021, and was in place at the beginning of this community. The restrictions imposed as a result of COVID-19

⁵ PESGS are presented as experts within this study, acknowledging their additional PE expertise in comparison to their generalist colleagues that did not complete the PE specialism.

exacerbated existing barriers in the provision of PE (Howley 2022), while teachers were challenged with maintaining learning as part of their PE provision (Coulter *et al.* 2021). These restrictions continued until the phased reopening of primary schools in March 2021. Upon teachers' return to schools however, there were a number of government restrictions and recommendations that continued to transform the teaching and learning process in schools. Class groupings were divided into pods of smaller groups of pupils to facilitate social distancing within school settings. Equipment had to be sanitised after use, or quarantined in some schools, limiting access for teachers. Due to social distancing guidelines and limited spaces in some classrooms, some PE spaces were also repurposed as classrooms upon the return to onsite teaching (Inspectorate 2022).

7.3.1 Participants

Participants of the CoP were a volunteer sample of PESGs from both HEIs that offered the B. Ed with a specialism in PE. Following the interview study presented in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6, participants were invited by email to participate in an online learning community for PESGs, to support them in their teaching and leadership of PE. Although six PESGs initially volunteered to participate, one member left the study after the initial meeting of The PE Web. As facilitator, I made an effort to contact the participant to gain an insight into their decision to leave, to inform the evolution of the group, but no further correspondence was received. This PESG was excluded from the findings. Based on the preceding eligibility criteria for Chapters 5 and 6, the remaining five members of The PE Web had a minimum of one year's teaching experience. These PESGs were teaching in a mix of urban and rural primary schools spread geographically across the Republic of Ireland. Paul and Olivia had both started teaching in new schools since the PESG interviews, while the remaining PESGs had continued in their previous schools. All PESGs participating in the CoP were class teachers, and therefore were responsible for teaching the recommended 60 minutes of curricular PE time each week (Government of Ireland 1999b). Further participant details are provided in Table 17. As facilitator, I was also a member of The PE Web. Given the social construction of knowledge within CoPs, it is also worth noting that I am also a PESG, and was a classmate of two members of the CoP during my own time in ITE. Although the remaining PESGs did not know each other, I had established some level of familiarity with them having conducted the preceding interviews.

As a novice facilitator, I was supported by two critical friends, Pamela and Joanna, trusted people who ask ‘provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens, and offers critique of a person’s work as a friend’ (Costa and Kallick 1993, p.50). Both critical friends had extensive experience facilitating CoPs and provided a me with support to critically reflect on how I was meeting teachers’ needs throughout. We met between each meeting of The PE Web, to ensure the CoP was meeting teachers’ needs effectively.

Table 17. Participant Information

Name (Pseudonym)	Year Graduated	HEI (Pseudonym)	Teaching experience
Rachel	2017	Oak Hills University	Classroom teacher (3years)
Fiona	2018	Chestnut Grove University	SET (1 year), Classroom teacher (1 year)
Bridget	2018	Oak Hills University	Classroom teacher (2 years)
Paul	2018	Chestnut Grove University	SET (1 year), Classroom teacher (1 year)
Olivia	2019	Oak Hills University	Classroom teacher (1year)

Note. SET = special education teacher

7.3.2 Data Generation

A range of individual and group data generation methods were used to provide an insight into the cocreation process. Recognising the initial conditions of each teacher is an important part of the professional learning process (Keay *et al.* 2019). Although interviews had taken place with PESGs during the preceding Summer (Chapters 4 and 5), I conducted short individual interviews with each member of the CoP prior to the first group meeting. This allowed me to reintroduce myself to PESGs following the previous interviews, verbally record PESGs informed consent to participate in the study, and invite PESGs to identify any areas that they would like discussed in the initial meeting.

Meetings of The PE Web CoP took place at monthly intervals for approximately 60 minutes each month. The meetings took place online on Microsoft Teams and were recorded within the Teams app. In error however, I did not record Meeting two of The PE Web. Having noticed that the recording failed to record at the end of the meeting, I immediately recorded my reflections as facilitator, providing a synopsis of the meeting. CoPs are often built organically within organisations where members are familiar with each other (Wenger and Wenger-Trayner 2015). In this context however, members did not know each other, and given the online context, additional measures had to be taken to facilitate PESGs getting to know each other. Appendix G presents a discussion prompt that was used in the first meeting of The PE Web to stimulate conversation about PESGs' teaching contexts, their experiences as teachers, and their prior experiences of PE and the PE specialism. This helped to establish a shared domain of interest among PESGs and sparked future conversations throughout the process. The content and structure of the meetings varied throughout, but it was important that the CoP was built on PESGs' needs, to keep them engaged at the boundaries (Wenger 2010b). Teachers were asked at the end of the meetings what they would like the next meeting to include, although they initially had difficulty collectively deciding on the next steps of the group, they became more comfortable as the CoP progressed in taking ownership for their learning needs. Online tools to submit anonymous feedback were also used to prompt discussion about future directions of the group at different stages. I also conducted 20-minute online interviews at the end of the first academic year to gather PESGs' feedback on the community and how it could meet their needs going forward into the next academic year.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted at the end of the data collection process in January 2022. I invited Pamela as critical friend to conduct these interviews, allowing PESGs to provide honest feedback on their participation within The PE Web. Pamela's awareness of The PE Web and her understanding of the broader landscape of PE provision and CoP development enabled her to interrogate PESGs responses and generate knowledge rich discussion. Further details on the data generation process are presented in Table 18, including the codes used to represent data item in the findings and discussion.

Table 18. Overview of CoP Data Generation

Date	Data generation	Details
February 2021	Consent Form Meeting	I reintroduced myself to PESGs, having previously conducted interviews with them in Summer 2020. PESGs were invited to verbally agree to each statement on the consent form. Each teacher was subsequently invited to highlight any areas they would like help or support with, in the initial meeting.
19th February 2021	The PE Web Meeting 1 (<i>TPEW1</i>)	The focus of the meeting was for PESGs within The PE Web to get to know each other. A discussion prompt, as presented in Appendix G was used to provoke conversations about PESGs' teaching contexts, their experiences as teachers, and their prior experiences of PE and the PE specialism.
16th March 2021	The PE Web Meeting 2 (<i>TPEW 2</i>)	Building on the previous meeting's discussion, PESGs were invited to share their favourite experience of PE. This meeting aimed to help teachers as they adapted to their new teaching realities, returning to onsite teaching for the first time since December 2020. PESGs discussed how their teaching contexts were adapting, how the children in their classes were adapting, and strategies to support smooth transition to onsite teaching.
13th April 2021	The PE Web Meeting 3 (<i>TPEW 3</i>)	Based on PESGs' desire to adopt a more inclusive approach to PE, as well as upcoming school sports days in schools, I shared a 7-minute IPPEA presentation in advance of the meeting. The video explained fun, cooperative games relevant for European School Sports Day. PESGs discussed how they were approaching PE in the context of COVID-19 restrictions. There was an open discussion about what they'd like help with, and PESGs supported each other by sharing ideas. This included a conversation about engaging children that become anxious during PE.

Date	Data generation	Details
11th May 2021	The PE Web Meeting 4 (<i>TPEW 4</i>)	<p>PESGs completed a feedback poll about what they'd like to discuss, prior to the meeting.</p> <p>This meeting was focused on adopting a balanced approach to competition in PE, and PESGs were invited to share resources that they found useful in advance of the meeting.</p> <p>PESGs established that by managing children's expectations in PE and adding conditions to activities, they could support all students' engagement.</p>
8th June 2021	The PE Web Meeting 5 (<i>TPEW 5</i>)	<p>This meeting explored further areas that had been identified for discussion in advance of the May meeting. This included classroom management in PE, organising a mini school sports day, and inclusion in PE.</p> <p>PESGs shared ideas for sports day water games, making gymnastics engaging for disinterested children, balancing competition and cooperation in Gaelic games, and creating a Fairy Trail in a school.</p> <p>The meeting ended with anonymous feedback from members submitted online, identifying how they would like the group to move forward in the new academic year. Next steps were discussed with the full group.</p>
June – July 2021	End of school year interview (SI)	<p>I carried out semi-structured interviews with each PESG at the end of the school year.</p> <p>Questions examined their experiences of The PE Web to date, what has worked best for them, challenges they faced, and future directions they would like for the group.</p> <p>See Appendix F, F.1 for interview guide.</p>
13th September 2021	The PE Web Meeting 6 (<i>TPEW 6</i>)	<p>PESGs discussed the class levels that they had been assigned for the year and how teachers at similar levels might be able to support each other with planning for PE.</p> <p>The discussion also included how PESGs plan to approach PE for the year.</p> <p>A WhatsApp group was created between members to facilitate easier communication between all.</p>

Date	Data generation	Details
4th October 2021	The PE Web Meeting 7 (<i>TPEW 7</i>)	<p>PESGs shared how the games discussed during the previous meeting were working. Members of the group examined how you could adapt teaching activities for the infant classes.</p> <p>PESGs were asked ‘what made you come back to the group?’, and they acknowledged that the group supported them by facilitating planning and sharing, expanding their knowledge and their repertoire of resources to use in PE.</p> <p>Members decided to plan one strand collectively during the meeting, using a shared document to develop a bank of resources for teaching the games strand.</p>
8th November 2021	The PE Web Meeting 8 (<i>TPEW 8</i>)	<p>Teachers facing more challenges in teaching PE during the winter months due to COVID, limited facilities, and limited teaching time due to external coaches.</p> <p>PESGs discussed moving PE activities beyond PA, exploring ideas for teaching PE with limited resources.</p> <p>PESGs also began to create a shared document for teaching the athletics strand.</p>
13th December 2021	The PE Web Meeting 9 (<i>TPEW 9</i>)	<p>As the last meeting of the data generation process, PESGs were invited to share with the other members how they felt about their participation in the group and if it had influenced them.</p> <p>I prompted PESGs to discuss how they would like the group to continue beyond the data collection process.</p>
24th - 27th January 2022	End of CoP interviews (EI)	<p>Pamela conducted semi-structure individual interviews with members of The PE Web.</p> <p>Questions explored PESGs’ motivation for taking part in the group, group interactions and engagement, PESGs’ learning in the group, and the sustainability of the group going forward.</p> <p>See Appendix F, F.2 for interview guide.</p>

7.3.3 Data analysis

It is important to acknowledge that although the group originally started as a PLC, it became apparent through discussions with my critical friends that the characteristics of a CoP had developed during the process. To avoid confusion, I referred to The PE Web as a CoP throughout this study, and future studies will examine the development of a CoP over the course of the year.

As outlined in Chapter 3, I used RTA to analyse the transcribed meetings and interviews. Using a constructionist approach, I examined what reality had been ‘made’ for PESGs through their engagement with The PE Web, as well as its associated implications (Braun and Clarke 2021b). As facilitator and an active part of the social construction of knowledge within the CoP, I was familiar with much of the dataset, although the end of CoP interviews provided an alternative insight into the CoP experience. As facilitator, I was often concerned between meetings, as I considered what PESGs were taking away from meetings, how they were benefitting from it, and if it was meeting their needs as teachers. Following the data familiarisation process however, I recognised that PESGs reflected positively on their experience and felt they had benefitted from it. I subsequently began coding the dataset applying deductive RTA. This allowed me to: ‘recognise and acknowledge the conceptual ideas we (always) come to data a project with, and gives greater analytical priority in our interpretive processes than inductive-oriented analysis’ (Braun and Clarke 2021b, p.210). I curiously examined the data to determine if my tentative perceptions were true, and if the community reflected the characteristics of a CoP. Codes reflected the social learning process among PESGs as well as more latent meanings that highlighted the CoP’s influence and positioned PESGs’ learning within the social and cultural context. Given my closeness to the data, reflexivity was extremely important throughout the analysis, and this was supported through interactions with my supervisors and critical friends. I later began to generate initial themes which included ‘PESGs became comfortable sharing their expertise’. As I developed and reviewed themes however, I recognised that ‘PESGs became comfortable sharing their expertise’ didn’t reflect how PESGs had arrived at this point. Reviewing the initial theme exposed that the opportunities for collegiality and to be heard and valued when sharing PE ideas, empowered PESGs to cross boundaries between their PE expertise and the

school context. Themes were subsequently refined, defined and named before they were written up. Theme summaries can be found in Table 19 below.

7.4 Findings & Discussion

The findings and discussion investigate how membership of the CoP influenced PESGs' organisational socialisation. This is presented across three themes as described in Table 19, which suggest that situated learning through a CoP can support PESGs to negotiate their custodial teaching environments and apply their knowledge and expertise in PE.

Table 19. Theme Summary Table

Theme title	Characteristics
A protected space for reflection: ‘what do I want to do in PE?’	The online CoP created an accessible community for busy early career teachers, where knowledge and competence differed from their custodial teaching environments. PE was valued within The PE Web, encouraging PESGs to adopt innovative practices, and withhold the negative influences of organisational socialisation.
‘It sounds like therapy or something’ PESGs collaborating to overcome challenges	The CoP created a trusted space for PESGs to share the challenges they faced in their teaching and reduce isolation. The collaborative nature of The PE Web helped PESGs to develop a shared repertoire of resources for overcoming challenges within their teaching contexts.
Empowering PESGs to cross boundaries: ‘I won’t be afraid to have those conversations with other people’	Membership of the CoP helped PESGs to develop their identity and voice as PE experts. PESGs were empowered to act as brokers, sharing their PE expertise from The PE Web with their school community.

7.4.1 A protected space for reflection: ‘what do I want to do in PE?’

PESGs' membership of The PE Web facilitated boundary interactions, as they reconsidered their actions within their respective schools based on exchanges with the community of PE experts. Continuous engagement within the shared domain of

interest supported PESGs to withstand the negative impact of organisational socialisation within custodial schools. The accessible nature of the online CoP also contributed to these boundary interactions, that otherwise may not have been feasible for early career teachers.

The continuous reconfiguration of knowledge and competence as part of The PE Web, enabled PESGs to become aware of innovative PE teaching practices that existed beyond their schools. Members of the community ‘all had the same interest [...] we were all working towards the same goal, that we all want to improve as teachers, and as well to help children’ (Rachel, EI). This shared vision focusing on their delivery of PE helped PESGs to apply their skills within their complex teaching realities, ensuring the specialism ‘didn’t just fade away into the background for me, it kept it as a priority in my teaching’ (Olivia, EI). A lack of appreciation for PE within these schools can contribute to knowledge washout among early career teachers (Blankenship and Coleman 2009). As has been discussed in Chapter 6, many PESGs are teaching in custodial contexts in which PE is marginalised. For example, Paul described an interaction with a school colleague who queried what he was teaching in PE in the school yard: ‘I goes, “we were doing athletics, six weeks of that now”, and it’s kind of, “you’re not going by that are you?” Haha’ (Paul, EI). Despite the indifference towards the PE curriculum in his school, Paul felt the CoP helped him to place an emphasis on delivering all strands of the PE curriculum. The boundaries between school practices and the CoP, created multiple opportunities for PESGs shift their focus beyond custodial practices. For example Rachel described:

I remember at the start of the year I was only doing games, and she [Olivia] suggested she was doing dance. So by her suggesting dance, then I went on for the next few weeks and did dance. So it was just like something clicks when you’re having those meetings. Am, and then orienteering was a topic that I would never, like I haven’t actually done orienteering I’d say in the last four years I’ve been teaching, and then just from this group, I really, I suppose gave it a go
(Rachel, EI)

Continued engagement with the CoP, placed value on the provision of PE and prompted members to engage in more thoughtful planning, as they considered: ‘what

do I want to do in PE? And I'd just like bring it up in the group' (Bridget, EI). This opportunity was particularly important during the COVID-19 pandemic when teachers faced challenges in providing PE to meet the needs of all students (Coulter *et al.* 2021; Howley 2022). It also led to the development of a shared repertoire of resources - a shared Google Drive document for teaching different curricular strands - supporting PESGs to deliver a full PE curriculum: 'we planned our targets, we were hitting the strands, and we weren't just like, it was physical education and not just physical activity like' (Paul, EI). It is evident that engagement with the CoP can help PESGs to overcome the marginalisation of PE within their custodial school contexts, encouraging them to take more risks in their preparation and planning as innovative teachers (Deglau *et al.* 2006).

Participation in the CoP has also facilitated PESGs' reflections on their teaching practice, supporting an increased focus on children's learning in PE. As members of multiple communities, PESGs are required to negotiate these complex landscapes of practice, continuously forming knowledge through reflection and collaboration (Wenger 2010a). This continuous cycle of reflection supported teachers to extend their understanding of PE beyond their local understandings: 'it would make you think, you know, do I have to do it this way or is there another way of doing it?' (Olivia, EI). Reflecting on their PE teaching is something that the PESGs had not engaged in as qualified teachers. As Bridget (EI) noted: 'You don't take a minute, because the day is so busy, just to think about how it is going and things like that'. It is important the CPD does not reinforce dominant discourses, and the PE Web helped teachers to interrogate their practices as teachers (Kennedy 2014b). It encouraged them to take ownership for the learning that took place in their PE classes, and it brought an awareness to their needs as teachers (Hunuk *et al.* 2012). PESGs' engagement with the CoP helped them to maintain a critical perspective, seeing 'strange in the familiar', negotiating meaning of how they would like to teach PE (Armour *et al.* 2017, p.805; Westerlund and Eliasson 2021). This process of reflection has also been shown to encourage more student-centred practices (Tsangaridou 2005; Bjørke *et al.* 2022) and a shift beyond 'what to teach' was evident in PESGs' engagement. The community helped PSSGs to shift their focus towards 'children's learning in ever changing contexts', establishing themselves within the secure stage of teacher development

(Randall 2020, p.138). Paul (EI) noted: 'I suppose at the end of the day it's about the kids like', and this focus contributed to knowledge sharing between teachers: 'it benefits the kids in your class, and what's the point keeping it for the 30 kids you teach, you know, there's a lot, there's no harm in sharing it' (Fiona, EI). Once again, it is clear how the 'protected space' provided to PESGs can support more innovative teaching practices.

PESGs recognised the accessibility of these boundary interactions as a valuable part of the learning experience. Due to the many demands placed on early career teachers, PE can often be overlooked:

it's such a busy curriculum, doing everything, so then if you have to go away and plan every PE lesson [...] so then if you've to come to a PE lesson, you could see how a teacher might be like, 'oh, the PE will be grand now', you know. (Paul, EI)

When engaging in professional development, Paul suggests that 'teachers are looking for practicality' (EI). In addition to community members' teaching demands within their schools, some members were also completing postgraduate studies in other curricular areas. While this may create a ripe opportunity for teachers to withdraw into custodial teaching practices, the flexible nature of the online community enabled PESGs to continue to value PE. PESGs described that you 'could come home, have a cup of tea and then log on' (Fiona, EI), and 'you just had to show up with your experiences, your thoughts on things and your ideas' (Olivia, EI). The continuous opportunities to explore these landscapes of practice through a virtual community was valued by members of The PE Web. Technology, however, did bring some challenges with connectivity and sharing practices: 'there's a lot of things that you can do in a room that you can't do over zoom' (Olivia, EI). While PESGs acknowledged that they would have enjoyed the opportunity to meet in person, they also recognised that by 'doing it virtually, that kind of opened us up in a lot of ways, travel wasn't an issue' (Olivia, EI). The accessible nature of an online community facilitated boundary interactions between CoPs across the country, furthering opportunities for meaning making.

It is evident that The PE Web provided valuable boundary interactions for PESGs, reintroducing them to a community where PE was valued. These teacher and student driven interactions were important for early career teachers, by helping them to move their practice beyond the custodial approaches within their schools (Kennedy 2014b). Providing a space to reflect on PE provision allowed PESGs to build on the knowledge and skills developed during the PE specialism.

7.4.2 ‘It sounds like therapy or something’ PESGs collaborating to overcome challenges

Membership of the CoP supported PESGs to navigate their teaching contexts as PE teachers and leaders, creating a trusted support network that allowed teachers to share challenges, provide reassurance to each other, and collaborate to establish innovative solutions.

The CoP created opportunities for collegiality among PESGs, through the development of a trusted support network. CoPs are built on relationships between members and this was an important starting point for PESGs: ‘I’ve gained contacts that I’ll have going forward always, [...] if we have ideas we will continue to share them with each other’ (Rachel, EI). These relationships enhanced trust between members, providing a foundation for professional dialogue (Deglau *et al.* 2006). Bridget (EI) explained: ‘you weren’t thinking you had to impress everyone, you could say kind, this is actually realistic, this is what is happening’. Furthermore, the collegiality provided a window into the wider landscape of practice, putting it into perspective that: ‘everyone has challenges [...] I know that they were in the same boat as me [...] I think I thought I had to be perfect’ (Bridget, EI). Paul noted that PESGs’ willingness to learn as early career teachers may also have supported this vulnerability, honesty and trust. This relatedness between members encouraged them ‘to open up back to them about “oh, don’t worry, that happened to me as well” [...] everyone was trying to help each other’ (Rachel, EI). Similar to research on PE specialists, PESGs had an absence of ‘pedagogically based collegial interaction’ (Templin 1988, p.197), but The PE Web provided opportunities for PESGs to experience relatedness and belonging as generalist teachers with expertise in PE (Washburn *et al.* 2019; Klatt *et al.* 2022).

Membership of The PE Web facilitated a problem-solving process for PESGs during uncertain times. If members faced challenges in their teaching contexts: ‘you wouldn't be afraid to like ask the group’ (Paul, EI). The aforementioned trust and relationships within the community supported collaboration between members (Hargreaves and Fullan 2012), with Bridget explaining: ‘it sounds like therapy or something haha, but any problems you had, you could just kind of like talk about it’ (EI). The PE Web helped PESGs to solve problems, and as Olivia described ‘there was a lot of problems thrown up over the last few years, unexpected ones’ (EI). The supportive working relationships in the community however, encouraged learning by sharing (Darling-Hammond *et al.* 2009; Patton *et al.* 2013). Sometimes teachers drew on the experiences of others to overcome individual challenges, while there were other challenges that ‘we all struggled on together’ (Olivia, EI). Effective CPD addresses contemporary challenges for PE (Armour *et al.* 2017), and the CoP began while PESGs were presented with the unprecedented challenge of remote teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. The community helped PESGs to negotiate these uncertain times:

It was really good support, because no one really knew what they were doing. So, we were really working together at that point as to, especially when the children were at home, how we were going to help with PE at home and make sure children were physically active at home (Fiona, EI)

Concerns have been expressed however, that the social learning process within a CoP can also reinforce malpractice within a community (Wenger 1999). In the initial meeting of The PE Web, PESGs placed a strong value on PA rather than PE. Principals within their schools were emphasising the core curricular subjects, and PESGs like many other teachers found it difficult to plan educational PE experiences (Coulter *et al.* 2021). Having received concerning reports from parents about children’s PA levels, PESGs mentioned that they’d do ‘anything just to get the physical activity up’ (Olivia, TPEW1), including assigning the much maligned Joe Wicks as PE (Lambert *et al.* 2022). Despite the many associated criticisms, Paul questioned ‘like, what’s the alternative at the minute?’ (TPEW1), with PESGs joking that they would not be going in front of the camera to record PE lessons, in addition to their other remote teaching responsibilities. In many contexts, teachers needed to

provide resources that could be easily implemented at home with varied levels of parental involvement and access to suitable spaces (Coulter *et al.* 2021). This emphasis on PA was a widespread international response to these restrictions for many, although some teachers adapted to maintain learning focused PE (Howley 2022). Bridget acknowledged that it may also be time for PESGs to adapt, explaining that many children ‘haven’t left the house, so I think it needs to be addressed at this stage, adding in PE and things into the plans’ (TPEW1). It was positive to see that these concerns for children’s needs prompted a shift back towards learning in PE in subsequent meetings as they returned to onsite teaching. Despite this return however, they continued to be faced with challenges due to COVID-19 restrictions, including sanitisation requirements, student pods and the repurposing of facilities, that meant ‘everything wasn’t a possibility to us’ (Fiona, EI). COVID-19 exacerbated existing challenges that teachers faced within schools (Howley 2022), but The PE Web enabled PESGs to explore solutions based on children’s needs, particularly for those that were less engaged and may be struggling in PE, such as a student in Bridget’s class who was ‘really anxious for PE’ (TPEW3). CoPs have been shown to help teachers navigate challenging contexts (Gonçalves *et al.* 2021), and PESGs’ opportunities to share their challenges and collaborate with each other, helped to establish competence in learner centred PE provision during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Although some challenges faced by PESGs were individual and only relevant to their teaching contexts, the opportunity for boundary interactions were considered important learning experiences. This insight into other teachers’ communities and how they negotiate challenges was important to PESGs: ‘it’s been really helpful, and just sometimes those conversations don’t happen in schools’ (Fiona, SI). This knowledge shared by other practising teachers was accessible to them within their teaching contexts. The importance of this accessibility was evident in the following example. As facilitator I shared teaching resources prepared by primary teachers in the IPPEA for European School Sports day in advance of the April meeting of The PE Web. This was based on my analysis of teachers’ needs with the support of my critical friends. It met their needs by helping them to prepare sports day activities for their class, with a balanced approach to competition. Paul subsequently tried out one of the activities before the May meeting, ‘I used the sheet with the clothes pegs game actually [...]

they responded very well to it you know' (Paul, TPEW5). Although no other members had tried the activities at this point, Paul's efforts prompted other teachers such as Rachel, to try subsequently it. While Rachel explained 'that was my favourite moment of that class, because they absolutely loved it'. It was interesting to note that although the resource was prepared by practising primary school teachers, it was Paul's trialling of the activity that prompted Rachel to put it into practice. It highlighted the importance of teachers sharing their practice with colleagues, as when you 'hear of another teacher who has tried it and it's worked well, at least then you know you can trust it.' (Rachel, EI). PESGs were continuously expanding their repertoire of trusted resources, helping them to navigate their teaching contexts. It demonstrated the transformative potential of the CoP, moving beyond the threat of 'contrived collegiality', with PESGs actively supporting each other to meet children's needs (Kennedy 2014b). Members of the community guided the content of the meeting, identifying their learning needs and taking ownership for their own learning (Armour and Yelling 2007; Parker *et al.* 2010): 'it wasn't necessarily Cillian telling us this is what you should be doing, which can be what those workshops or general professional development can often seem like' (Fiona, EI). Paul explained that even though their experiences 'mightn't have lapped directly over each other [...] there was always I suppose information provided' (Paul, EI). For example, Rachel started the second academic year teaching junior infants for the first time, acknowledging 'it's a big drop from going from fourth [class] where they can do everything, going down to five-year-olds' (EI), but Paul and Olivia were able to share their experiences of previously teaching in the younger classes. Other PESGs experienced challenges such as not having access to indoor PE facilities: 'I can only kind of plan by month because, just with I don't know what, if the weather's bad, I can't, there's no options' (Bridget, EI). These continuous boundary interactions, however, encouraged PESGs to collaborate, developing a repertoire of resources, including shared documents outlining strategies and resources to overcome challenges and teach different content areas:

it can be nice to have a bank of ideas that are of good quality and resources that you can draw on, to sort of share with others, so that you know, what you pull on in your darkest hour (Olivia, EI)

PESGs continued to reflect, share and implement these ideas throughout: ‘I suppose it wasn't our homework but like, it was just like, I suppose, the lesson was well planned, so why wouldn't we use this?’ (Paul, EI). PESGs felt their varied experiences from their school communities enriched the group and these boundary interactions supported them ‘to adapt your teaching to what’s available to you’ (Olivia, EI). The peer coaching provided an opportunity for transformative professional development as PESGs interrogated their practice (Kennedy 2014a). While the reality shock of unexpected challenges can sometimes overwhelm teachers (Blankenship and Coleman 2009), the social learning within The PE Web facilitated socialising experiences ‘more powerful than if the individual faces it alone’ (Lawson 1983a, p.12).

7.4.3 Empowering PESGs to cross boundaries: ‘I won’t be afraid to have those conversations with other people’

PESGs’ participation in the CoP helped them on their learning journey as teachers and leaders of PE. Olivia explained that while the PE specialisms offered in both HEIs ‘really give you such a strong foundation in one particular area’, PESGs were uncertain about how to apply these skills in schools ‘and it was a question that a lot of our lecturers didn't have the answer to’ (Olivia, EI). Through engagement with the CoP, however, it was evident that PESGs began to develop their identity and voice as PE experts, empowering them to share their knowledge and skills within their teaching contexts.

PESGs’ engagement with the CoP helped to develop their identity and perceived mattering as PE experts. For example, the opportunity to receive feedback from other teachers who had acted upon their advice, helped to build PESGs’ confidence:

That bit of feedback is always great, that you know, something you're doing is on the right track [...] because no one's ever sure that what they're doing is the right way to approach it (Fiona, EI)

Despite having additional PE expertise, it is important to remember that PESGs are novice experts, as described in Chapter 6. Support from fellow teachers supported PESGs such as Fiona (EI) to ‘to trust my opinions’, while Rachel (EI) explained that ‘I

feel like I've got more confidence from joining the group myself, to try new things'. These experiences of relatedness are important in furthering teachers' mattering and motivation as professionals (Washburn *et al.* 2019), developing their identity as PE experts. For Wenger (2010a, p.181), 'the social world is a resource for constituting an identity', and PESGs' engagement with the PE Web and their experiences of knowledgeable within the group influenced identity formation. This also extended to PESGs identity within schools:

because I would be talking about the fact that I'm in this group, people were more probably aware of the fact that I did to the PE specialism and that I could be someone to come to in relation to PE. (Fiona, EI)

This development of identity as a PE expert created opportunities for professional interactions within schools, enhancing mattering and providing meaning to PESGs' expertise (Curry and Bickmore 2012). Rachel (EI) explained that her colleagues 'found it very interesting.', while for Olivia (EI) it helped to enhance her relationship with the school principal: 'it's actually sparked a lot of useful conversations between the two of us [...] he was mad to hear what we were doing'. PESGs were continuously building their identity as PE experts, negotiating interactions with the group with their own personal experiences (Wenger 2000; Luguetti *et al.* 2019). This development of identity enhances teachers' resilience, preparing them to negotiate their school contexts and continue to build their identity (Ellison and Woods 2016). Given PESGs' challenges in establishing their identity as teachers with PE expertise as described in Chapter 6, engagement with a CoP demonstrates how PESGs can overcome this.

The convergence of PESGs' enhanced identity and voice also prompted them to share their expertise within schools. Despite previously facing challenges in navigating their micropolitical landscapes (Chapter 6), the CoP supported PESGs to broker knowledge. In Chapter 6, findings suggested that many PESGs were more comfortable sharing their expertise on a smaller scale within schools, with those they had developed social-professional relationships with. Their engagement with the CoP however, supported them to broker knowledge, as they became less apprehensive about sharing their expertise. Olivia described: 'I won't be afraid to have those conversations with other people', confident that colleagues would 'definitely value

hearing my ideas and sharing my practice' (EI). Sometimes that sharing of expertise was as simple as:

I tried out a game recently and I remember saying this is working really well [...] and then I met the, the sixth-class teacher was there and I was like, I must tell her there that that worked really well (Bridget, EI)

On other occasions, the CoP provided boundary objects that supported PESGs to broker knowledge within their teaching contexts. For example, having established problem solving strategies for negotiating COVID restrictions in schools, 'I was able to pass them [ideas and resources] on to staff at school as well, as to how we might combat it which was great' (Fiona, EI). For Rachel, when an idea was shared from the IPPEA conference about creating a Fairy Trail to support the teaching of outdoor and adventure activities, 'it kind of gave me a push, that I said to the group, 'oh I'm going to try it out with my school''. Despite explaining in the first group meeting, that 'it's hard to sort of put your voice out there' (Rachel, TPEW2) in a big urban school, she decided to implement the Fairy Trail and 'wanted it to be like a whole school approach' (EI), coordinating between classroom teachers, school leaders and the school caretaker to ensure the fairy doors were designed by each class and erected around the school. Rachel subsequently had the confidence to share resources she designed for each class level for completing orienteering activities, using the trail. Engaging in this long-term, collaborative professional development, can support teachers as change agents within schools (Carse 2015). Rachel also described the positive feedback received from school staff that 'kind of give me a boost that I had tried something out' (EI), with recognition improving confidence further (Gaudreault *et al.* 2018). Throughout the CoP, it became apparent that PESGs were beginning to shift towards the aspirational stage of teacher development, starting to focus on colleagues' understanding of PE as well as their own professional development (Randall 2020). Engaging in a CoP can help teachers to negotiate their teaching contexts (Tannehill and MacPhail 2017), and findings suggest that it could support PESGs' development as PE leaders.

The opportunities to share, collaborate and engage in professional conversations also empowered PESGs on their learning journey as generalist teachers.

PESGs were scaffolded to use their voice to support professional learning, as highlighted by Bridget below:

Pamela: So did the group meet some of the needs you had about being a teacher of PE in primary school?

Bridget:[...] yeah, it's kind of helped me with both, sort of learning about new games, the content of the curriculum and different things like that, but I would say more so as like, just as a teacher, just having the confidence like, learning about, as you said, sharing my ideas, like am, sharing my ideas, looking for help, am, how to communicate, even, even just talking about PE, it's not something you would do every day. (EI)

Bridget explained that she ‘used to always think “oh, I have to, I have to do this myself”’ (EI), but by partaking in professional conversations, PESGs are now aware that ‘there's so much to be gotten from sharing ideas’ (Paul, EI). Olivia explained: ‘that collaborative process is definitely something I'm going to rely more on, not just in PE but in other subjects’ (EI). PESGs were developing as PE experts but also as learners, nurturing the process of career-long growth as teachers (Armour *et al.* 2017). The development of PESGs’ voice can help them to navigate their micropolitical landscapes, but also extend their learning beyond the PE Web.

7.5 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter addressed objective 4 of the thesis: To investigate the impact of a learning community on PESGs’ progression as PE experts.

Firstly, it is important to acknowledge how the dimensions of a CoP were evident throughout the development of The PE Web.

- Domain – Teachers shared a common interest in PE provision, and a desire to apply the knowledge and skills from their professional socialisation within schools.
- Community – Trusted relationships developed between members, with members expressing their desire to meet in person.
- Practice – The CoP informed PESGs’ practice, placing a greater emphasis on innovative teaching practices, despite being based in custodial teaching contexts.

Although teachers' roles are socially situated within the school community (Richards 2015), The PE Web provided an alternative community that helped to reframe the social expectations within their professional community (Wenger-Trayner *et al.* 2014). The continuous meetings gave PESGs the opportunity to on their PE provision and plan for children's learning, which had sometimes been overlooked among the demands of an early career generalist teacher. Discussions around the shared domain of interest allowed PESGs to see beyond their custodial teaching environments, providing a window into the world of innovative PE provision. This negotiation of competence and experience, helped PESGs to apply the knowledge and skills developed during the specialism, teaching all curriculum strands.

PESGs' participation in a CoP also provided opportunities to engage in professional dialogue, supporting them to overcome challenges they faced within their teaching realities. As described in Chapter 6, PESGs are presented with challenging micropolitical landscapes to navigate, attempting to overcome the negative influence of organisational socialisation. While some PESGs previously felt the 'had to be perfect', the support network within the CoP provide reassurance when faced with reality shock in schools. This collegiality empowered PESGs to negotiate their teaching contexts to apply their skills, particularly during unprecedented times through the COVID-19 pandemic. The shared struggle of navigating enforced restrictions enhanced collegiality. This empowerment and shared ownership of the group supported the sustainability of the CoP to bridge two academic school years (Parker *et al.* 2021). Further research may be required however, to determine if bonds between members would have been as strong in 'normal' times.

Despite this, it was clear that the support network and collegiality can help to reduce the intellectual isolation experienced by PESGs in schools (Parker *et al.* 2016), ensuring that their PE expertise are valued. This perceived mattering was important in helping PESGs to develop their voice and identity as PE experts, building on the knowledge and skills developed during the PE specialism. It was also positive to see a shift in PESGs towards the aspirational stage of teacher development (Randall 2020), beginning to enact some of the leadership capacities envisaged for this cohort (Marron *et al.* 2018). Opportunities for social learning through a CoP can support PESGs on their learning journey as teachers and leaders of PE. The PE Web demonstrated its

potential as transformative professional development, enhancing teacher agency to meet children's needs (Kennedy 2014b). It is important to note that the PESGs that participated in The PE Web had engaged in two previous phases of research, the survey (Chapter 4), and interviews (Chapter 5 & Chapter 6). As a result, these teachers may have been predisposed to continuing their learning journey as PESGs. Despite their additional expertise, all PESGs are on a learning journey, and continued support is required to help them maximise their potential.

Chapter 8

Discussion and Conclusions

8.1 Introduction

The overall aim of the thesis was to examine the development of PESGs as teachers and leaders of PE in Irish primary schools. This chapter discusses the contributions this thesis makes to the existing evidence base, the research and policy implications of these studies, and conclusions from the thesis.

This research was focused on a new cohort of teachers who graduated from the B. Ed with a specialism in PE. The introduction of the PE specialism has been presented as a new dawn in the delivery of Irish primary PE, and this thesis provided a number of novel insights into the attitudes, beliefs and practices of these generalist teachers with expertise in PE. Chapter 4 investigated areas that had not previously been studied among the wider cohort of generalist teachers in Ireland such as self-efficacy to teach PE. Generalist teachers' confidence to teach PE has continuously been identified as a barrier to QPE provision, and thesis findings may provide the foundation for future studies examining the self-efficacy in the Irish context. Furthermore, while generalist teachers' understanding of PE had previously been examined in the Irish context, Chapter 5 presented an insight in PESGs' understanding of QPE and how the PE specialism informed this understanding. Chapter 6 subsequently provided a novel insight into the school context through a micropolitical lens, investigating how PESGs navigate these contexts to apply their skills. Finally, Chapter 7 presented the influence of CPD on PESGs' organisational socialisation experience. Given the lack of research into PESGs since the introduction of the specialism programme in 2012, it provided a longitudinal insight into the needs of PESGs and how to support them to continue their development as PE experts. This thesis also addressed the need for greater research into learning communities in the generalist sector (Parker *et al.* 2021).

Throughout the thesis, the influence of the PE specialism on teachers' development was examined in a variety of ways, contributing to the evidence base of teacher education, teacher socialisation and professional development. It also provided a valuable insight into the barriers teachers face in their everyday teaching realities, and how they could be supported to overcome these barriers. These findings can inform the development of future policy and practice at primary school level. The expectations for PESGs continue to change throughout the research, as a better understanding of this

cohort was established. The findings throughout can make valuable contributions to teacher education in Irish and international contexts.

8.2 Contribution to evidence base

This thesis makes valuable contributions to the evidence base of areas such as teacher education, teacher socialisation, and teacher professional development. Findings within the thesis identify the positive impact of the PE specialism on teachers' development, while also highlighting opportunities to provide further support to PESGs. PESGs are presented with challenging teaching contexts and the expectation for PESGs to lead PE as early career teachers may need to be reframed.

8.2.1 PE specialism can create confident teachers that value the E in PE

The need for some form of specialist expertise in the delivery of Irish primary PE was previously identified (Ní Chróinín and Murtagh 2009; Fletcher and Mandigo 2012), but little is known about PESGs' expertise since the introduction of the PE specialism in Ireland (Marron *et al.* 2018). Thesis findings suggested that professional socialisation through the PE specialism can address many of the perceived weaknesses of generalist teachers.

Generalist teachers' self-efficacy to teach PE is consistently raised as one of the most significant barriers to the teaching of QPE in primary school settings (Jones and Green 2017). In addition, self-efficacy has been identified as an important factor in teachers' ability to overcome barriers in their teaching contexts that may inhibit the teaching of QPE (Morgan and Bourke 2008). Given the range of barriers that primary school teachers face while teaching PE in Ireland, such as limited facilities and equipment (Ní Chróinín 2018), this measure is an important starting point in establishing the expertise of this cohort. As presented in Chapter 4, it was positive to see the consistency in self-efficacy among all cohorts of PESGs.

While generalist teachers often struggle to teach a balanced PE curriculum (Woods *et al.* 2018), evidence suggests that PESGs were prepared to deliver a broad and balanced curriculum. Although teachers were most confident teaching games and athletics, it was extremely positive to see PESGs also displaying confidence to teach outdoor and adventure activities, gymnastics and dance. Despite PESGs revealed that

they were least confident in teaching gymnastics and dance, this was unsurprising given they were also least confident participating in these strands, and within the data presented in Chapter 5, PESGs acknowledged they had limited prior experiences of these strands. Findings highlighted the influence of the specialism in developing teachers' awareness of all curricular areas, particularly the strands that they were less familiar with. However, Chapter 7 demonstrated that PESGs may need continued support to act as innovative teachers implementing these less familiar strands.

One of the most significant challenges of teacher education is developing teachers' understandings of PE, that moves it beyond their acculturation and can withhold the influence of their teaching realities as qualified teachers (Curtner-Smith 2016). It was extremely promising to see PESGs remark on the influence of the PE specialism in establishing more inclusive, teaching oriented views of PE. In Chapter 4, participants commented on how they now 'realise the importance of PE' (Section 4.5.3), and that the PE specialism 'has made me develop a positive approach to PE which I didn't have growing up' (Section 4.5.3). This was built on in Chapter 5 with PESGs recognising the affective, cognitive and physical components of PE. Despite experiencing a limited range of PE experiences, PESGs are eager to break the cycle of custodial delivery in PE, particularly female teachers. While the subject boundaries of PE often become blurred (Quennerstedt *et al.* 2021), PESGs remained centred on facilitating learning experiences for children in PE. It is evident that the PE specialism helps move many PESGs to the secure stage of teacher development, emphasising children's learning in PE, rather than just selecting activities (Randall 2020). Chapter 4 highlighted high self-efficacy among PESGs to meet the needs of children in PE, while Chapter 5 emphasised PESGs' determination to adopt inclusive approaches to PE that will meet the needs of all children. While previous studies in Ireland have also suggested teacher education can develop more teaching-oriented views of PE (Ní Chróinín and Coulter 2012; Coulter and Ni Chroinin 2013; Murphy and McEvoy 2020), there were stronger undertones of sports, PA and health within teachers' understandings.

Sport was a central part of PESGs' biographies, but it appears that PESGs are prepared to adopt a more inclusive approach to sport. Mixed understanding of PE and sport have previously been noted for tainting PE provision (Ward 2018). In Chapter 4,

it was revealed that most PESGs undertook the specialism because of their love of sport, with many teachers holding coaching qualifications in Gaelic games and other disciplines. However, Chapter 5 expanded on this, explaining that the PE specialism helped them to move beyond their understandings where they ‘just associated sport with PE’ (Chapter 5, Section 5.5.1). They appear to be better prepared to navigate the complex middle ground between PE and sport, as demonstrated in Chapter 6, through Mark’s interactions with the external coach about the importance of meeting children’s educational needs in PE. Valuably, PESGs are able to distinguish the importance between PE and sport, emphasising the importance of a balanced approach to competition as demonstrated in Chapters 5 and 7.

This thesis adds to the knowledge base informing the delivery of the PE specialism in Ireland as well as teacher education programmes in international contexts where generalist teachers are responsible for teaching PE. A number of key components were evident in PESGs’ specialism experience. Both Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 emphasised the value in providing pre-service teachers with opportunities to reflect on prior experiences of PE, supporting them to move their understanding of PE beyond their acculturation. A further area of PESGs’ teacher education that was influential, was the practical opportunities to trial teaching methods. Pre-service teachers’ opportunities to teach PE on school placement are often inhibited by the prevalence of external coaches within schools (Randall and Fleet 2021). In addition, some PESGs acknowledged school placement experiences can be performative in nature and do not provide a true reflection on teaching. The PE specialism, however, provided supplementary opportunities to engage in PE teaching, through peer teaching activities or partnerships with local schools, without the pressure of grade attainment. Teacher responses in Chapter 5 also revealed that these practical experiences helped PESGs to better understand children’s needs in the context of PE. This further emphasises the importance of providing practical opportunities to teach PE during teacher education programmes as presented by Murphy *et al.* (2021). Interestingly, PESGs in Chapter 4, did say that they would have liked further opportunities for these practical experiences. PESGs also value opportunities to reflect on prior experiences of PE, as presented in Chapter 5. This is an extremely important part of teachers’ development throughout their teacher education (Randall and Fleet 2021), and it

appears that the PE specialism achieves this successfully. One of the key threads that supported this development throughout was social learning experiences, and PESGs remarked on this in Chapter 4, highlighting the multiple opportunities to collaborate' with others in their class and the 'great bond' that developed. This continued throughout the subsequent chapters, with PESGs recalling the value of their peer teach activities in Chapter 5. Although PESGs are confident, there is also evidence to suggest that there may be further opportunities to advance the PE specialism and strengthen teachers' self-efficacy in areas such as monitoring student progress and implementing assessment methods that guide their practice. In Chapter 5, there was limited acknowledgement of assessment in PESGs' understanding of QPE, and teachers may need further support in implementing sustainable forms of assessment (Ní Chróinín 2018). Overall, the PE specialism supported PESGs' development through social learning experiences that facilitated opportunities to engage in practical teaching and reflect on prior understandings. It also demonstrated the impact that an increased time allocation towards PE during teacher education can have on generalist teachers' development.

There continues to be much debate over who is best placed to teach PE, and this thesis provides a valuable insight into the development of this unique cohort of PESGs. As generalist teachers with a specialism in PE, findings throughout the thesis indicated that the PE specialism can help PESGs to overcome many of the teacher related barriers that inhibit the delivery of QPE among their generalist counterparts. As generalist teachers with high self-efficacy to teach PE, and teaching orientations supporting a desire to meet the needs of children across all curricular strands, it is clear that the PE specialism helps teachers' development beyond the introductory (Freak and Miller 2017). The specialism route has been recommended (Lynch and Soukup 2017), and applied in other international contexts (Tsangaridou 2016; Olufsen *et al.* 2021), and findings within the thesis suggest that this route may provide a suitable medium between subject specialist and generalist education programmes. Greater support may be needed however, to help the generalist teachers with a PE specialism to overcome institutional barriers as presented below.

8.2.2 Negotiating a complex landscape – custodial or innovative?

PESGs have to navigate complex teaching environments as early career teachers, where their PE expertise may be overlooked within custodial teaching contexts. Although the Irish primary school curriculum is positioned within an educational discourse (Government of Ireland 1999b), it appears that many Irish primary schools fail to uphold these ideals (Ní Chróinín 2018). Despite PESGs' additional expertise, it was concerning that the weekly duration of their PE delivery reflected that of the greater population, as described in Chapter 6 (Woods *et al.* 2018).

Previous studies have indicated positive developments in teacher education in Ireland with teachers valuing PE and its educational foundations (Ní Chróinín and Coulter 2012; Coulter and Ni Chroinin 2013). It has yet to reflect fully in practices however, with teachers continuing to deliver an imbalanced, games-dominated curriculum (Woods *et al.* 2018). Findings throughout the thesis suggest that schools place greater value on sport and PA, often overlooking the educational value of PE. This was reflected in PESGs integration into the school context. Chapter 4 indicated that almost three quarters of PESGs contributed to school sports coaching, while others supported the implementation of PA initiatives such as the ASF. Concerns were expressed that PESGs had limited opportunities to apply their PE expertise contributing to the whole school delivery of PE, and Chapter 6 provided greater clarity. It revealed that schools valued PESGs' sporting biographies rather than their PE expertise, leading to PESGs undertaking school sports coaching roles. The emphasis on school sport and PA, continues to reflect the dominant culture in Irish schools that often overshadows PE provision (Ní Chróinín 2018). School leaders play an important role in developing a school environment that facilitates the delivery of QPE (Rainer *et al.* 2012), but the conflation between sport and PE throughout Chapter 6 reflects contrasting understandings between PESGs and their school community.

One of the products of this cultural approach is the prevalence of external coaches positioned as providers of primary PE. School principals and staff determine the suitability of external providers (Ní Chróinín 2018), but there is a perception among teachers that external providers are more suitably equipped to deliver PE (Ní Chróinín and O'Brien 2019). Primary school teachers in Ireland feel external coaches

can meet the needs of children and accept their services uncritically (Bowles and O'Sullivan 2020; Mangione *et al.* 2021). While PESGs acknowledge that these external providers can contribute to the delivery of PE, they note that 'they're good and they're bad depending on how they're implemented' (Chapter 6, Section 6.5.2). The main argument presented for sports coaches within schools, is that they address 'the inherent weaknesses' of generalist teachers (Jones and Green 2017, p.766). Within Chapter 4 and 5, however, my research suggests that PESGs do not possess many of the apparent weaknesses associated with generalist teachers. They are more confident to teach a broad and balanced curriculum, aiming to meet the needs of all children through inclusive PE experiences. It is evident however, that despite these innovative orientations, PESGs' potential contribution to PE continues to be overlooked in the same vein as their generalist counterparts. PESGs explained in Chapter 6 that they felt their contribution to PE within schools was limited due to the positioning of external coaches. PESGs cited the need for improved communication between all parties. While these challenges reflect the broader international perspective (Smith 2015; McVeagh *et al.* 2022), it was positive to see PESGs' desire to work alongside these external providers, coteaching PE. As shown by Mark in Chapter 6, PESGs can also liaise with external coaches if given the responsibility, to help establish shared expectations for the role, and ensure that the external coaching meets the needs of children.

While Chapter 6 did reveal some schools that valued PE and emphasised its importance 'we have to teach it and have to teach it well' (Section 6.5.1), this was not commonplace. While PESGs attempt to negotiate their position in the delivery of PE (Randall 2020), it is the responsibility of school leaders to recognise the potential contributions of PESGs (Marron *et al.* 2018). Unfortunately, PESGs' expertise are often overlooked within the aforementioned custodial teaching contexts. Interestingly, Denise and Mark's recognition as the 'sporty teacher' provided opportunities to take on their leadership roles, within which they applied their innovative teaching orientations. Although the teacher related barriers have been addressed among PESGs, it appears that institutional barriers predominantly limit their potential influence. While PESGs are in the early stages of their careers, there are concerns that PESGs' self-efficacy could deteriorate if given insufficient opportunities to apply their expertise.

8.2.3 PESGs are PE ‘experts’ but are they expert leaders?

UNESCO recommended that teachers with specialist PE knowledge should mentor colleagues in generalist contexts, supporting the delivery of QPE (McLennan and Thompson 2015). With the emergence of PE specialism graduates, it was hoped that PESGs could adopt a leadership role supporting the provision of QPE within their schools, in addition to their generalist responsibilities (Marron *et al.* 2018). It was also suggested that this growing cohort of teachers could engage in informal leadership practices such as class swapping to utilise their expertise effectively (Ní Chróinín 2018). It became clear, however, as the thesis progressed that expectations for PESGs to immediately lead and transform the provision of PE within schools was unrealistic.

Initial indications from Chapter 4 revealed that while some teachers were often ‘asked to take other teachers’ PE lessons during the week, or offer guidance and suggestions to teachers on their own lessons’ (Section 4.5.3), there was less certainty among the wider cohort if their expertise were being used effectively to support the leadership of PE. This contribution to the whole school provision of PE became less apparent in Chapter 6, although there were some positive signs that PESGs could develop as PE leaders. Denise and Mark were both positioned as PE leaders within their schools, demonstrating PESGs’ potential as a knowledge source to support other school staff, as well as the potential to enact informal leadership practices such as class swapping, as presented by Clohessy *et al.* (2019; 2020). Although other PESGs weren’t positioned as subject leaders, there were some further examples of informal leadership, with PESGs supporting other teachers with whom they had developed social-professional relationships with, or other teachers who lacked confidence to teach PE.

Despite some of these positive samples of leadership, the development of PESGs as PE leaders within schools will require further development as described by one PESG ‘I think it will take time with me’ (Chapter 6, Section 6.5.3). Findings in Chapter 6 indicated that leading PE is not a priority for many early career PESGs. There are many demands placed on generalist teachers, and PESGs’ priority is completing their induction, establishing themselves within the school community, and securing a job for the subsequent year. As further demonstrated in Chapter 7, PESGs

require support to navigate their complex teaching contexts and overcome the multiple barriers presented in the teaching of PE. When PESGs enter the aforementioned custodial teaching contexts, they aren't prepared to navigate it as PE leaders. One PESG questioned, 'how do you pass that [additional knowledge] on to somebody else that isn't interested in the area of PE?' (Chapter 6, Section 6.5.1). Without either formal or informal leadership structures within schools, it presents an overwhelming challenge for PESGs to surmount. It was notable that Denise's school already facilitated knowledge sharing between teachers, while Mark's school encouraged class swapping based on teachers' expertise. Due to the complex teaching environments that PESGs have to negotiate, it is apparent that PESGs are on their own learning journey. It is important to consider how PESGs can be supported to continue their development as PE teachers and leaders to ensure their skills do not go to waste.

8.2.4 Supporting PESGs on the Continuum of Teacher Education

Randall (2020) emphasised the importance of professional development at every stage of teachers' career, which reflects the Teaching Council's (2011) Continuum of Teacher Education in Ireland. It is clear that the PE specialism is not the endpoint in PESGs' development and therefore suitable opportunities for CPD must be offered to teachers. In Chapter 4, findings revealed that the many of PESGs would like to develop their PE teaching skills further, but less than one in five graduates had engaged with CPD at that point. Chapter 6, subsequently indicated that PESGs also need support to apply their PE expertise within their micropolitical landscapes.

While there have been previous indications that the inhouse induction programme, Droichead, could facilitate knowledge sharing in both directions between NQTs and experienced staff members (Smyth *et al.* 2016), Chapter 6 suggests that this has failed to transpire. Despite being subject 'experts', PESGs are recognised as novices as part of their induction. In addition, PESGs' PE expertise were not considered as part of their learning needs, limiting potential opportunities for teachers to discuss PE. The convergence of PESGs' identity as the 'novice expert', stagnates their continued development as PE teachers and leaders.

PESGs need support to navigate their teaching contexts, and Chapter 7 examined how PESGs' engagement with a CoP could support their development, overcoming the negative influence of organisational socialisation. The studies presented in Chapters 4 to 6 informed the development of the CoP, which was ultimately directed by PESGs based on their learning needs. Chapter 7 expanded the limited research into generalist teachers' engagement in learning communities to support their PE provision (Parker *et al.* 2016). Competence has to be meaningful in context (Wenger 2010), and PESGs established knowledge that was relevant to their needs within their teaching contexts. It was evident from findings in Chapter 7 that PESGs need the opportunity to continuously discuss the challenges they face and collaborate to establish innovative solutions. The CoP facilitated these collegial opportunities, creating a space where their PE voice was valued, supporting PESGs' perceived mattering. Having established a shared repertoire of resources among fellow PESGs, teachers were empowered to share their PE expertise within their school contexts. The CoP presented a model that can help sustain PESGs' development as PE teachers on their learning journey.

PESGs have to negotiate complex and everchanging teaching realities, and Chapter 7 presented the CoP as a support for teachers navigating the provision of PE during the COVID-19 pandemic, including remote teaching and multiple enforced restrictions, meaning 'everything wasn't a possibility to us' (Section 7.5.2). Although the global pandemic was not envisaged at the start of the thesis, it contributed to valuable insights that can continue to inform teacher professional development. As identified in Chapter 7, it is important that CPD is accessible to teachers and can fit into their busy lives as early career teachers, and the online format facilitated early career teachers' engagement with CPD. It also provided opportunities for teachers to explore the wider landscape of practice and cross boundaries to support the development of knowledge. In the context of the upcoming curriculum change, (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment 2020), CoPs as demonstrated in Chapter 7, could facilitate teachers' navigation of the changing landscape of PE provision. Teacher education cannot prepare teachers for all aspects of teaching, and therefore some learning must take place in the school setting (Ferry and Westerlund 2022). CoPs built on teachers' needs or a slightly reframed Droichead induction

programme facilitate social learning opportunities as presented in Chapter 7, empowering teachers to continue learning in their teaching contexts.

8.3 Policy, Practice and Research Implications

This thesis investigates a new cohort of primary school teachers in the Irish education system. Findings as presented throughout the studies can inform future policy and practice at a variety of levels, including teacher education, PE provision in primary schools, as well as curriculum and teacher guidelines. There is also scope for further research to build on the findings of these studies and develop a greater understanding of the landscape of PE provision in Irish primary school. The recommendations for policy, practice and research are presented in the subsequent sections.

8.3.1 Policy

Recommendations arising from this thesis relating policy include:

- To develop a framework for the continued development of subject experts in Irish primary schools. Building on the Teaching Council's Continuum of Teacher Education, it is important that subject experts are provided with support throughout their professional career to facilitate their continued development. A systematic approach to professional development is needed for early career teachers (Lawson *et al.* 2020). This includes a review of the Droichead induction programme to examine how this in school induction programme can be used to enhance teachers' integration as subject experts into the school environment. Given the importance PESGs placed on integrating with the school community in Chapter 6, it is important to explore how this can be utilised to serve both the NQT and the school community. Through this framework, realistic expectations can be set for these 'novice experts', to support their continued development within schools.
- To establish clear guidelines and a common vision for the goals of primary PE, that are understood and accepted by all relevant stakeholders. In the context of the upcoming curriculum change (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment 2020), it is extremely important that all parties share a common vision for PE (Jess *et al.* 2016; Capel and Blair 2019). A framework or guidelines for QPE to accompany the curriculum, could support its implementation among stakeholders.

- To clearly establish the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders in the provision of primary PE in schools, that recognise the teacher as the main delivery of PE. While this is currently part of the curriculum in Ireland (Government of Ireland 1999b), it is not reflected in practice.

8.3.2 Practice

Recommendations arising from this thesis relating practice include:

- To provide pre-service teachers with sufficient opportunities to develop teaching orientations during ITE. This thesis presented an overview of the PE specialism, highlighting positive aspects that support teachers' development as well as areas for further improvement. While time allocated towards PE during generalist teachers' ITE is often limited (Keay and Randall 2022), some of these elements could support the broader cohort of pre-service teachers to overcome generalists' perceived weaknesses:
 - To facilitate social learning to help develop teachers' self-efficacy to teach PE.
 - To support pre-service teachers to utilise content knowledge developed during ITE to critically reflect on prior experiences of PE.
 - To provide practical teaching opportunities during ITE, extending previous recommendations by Murphy *et al.* (2021).
 - To provide greater opportunities to develop teachers' understanding of assessment practices in PE during ITE.
- To support current and future PESGs in their development as PE leaders. If PESGs are expected to develop into PE leaders in schools (Marron *et al.* 2018), further support is required during ITE to help them navigate their school contexts as PE leaders. It is also important that PESGs are provided with suitable professional development opportunities beyond their teacher education. This CPD should be built on PESGs' needs and empower them to apply their PE expertise within schools.
- To facilitate greater opportunities for knowledge sharing in schools. While the Droichead induction programme was identified as an opportunity for knowledge sharing between novice teachers and experienced members of staff (Smyth *et al.* 2016), greater opportunities need to be provided for PESGs to

share their expertise with their professional support team, demonstrating their potential contribution to the whole school delivery of PE.

- To develop school leaders' knowledge and awareness of QPE, the PE specialism, and PESGs' potential contribution as leaders within their schools. Chapter 6 revealed PESGs' challenges in negotiating school cultures that conflicted with their PE expertise, presenting the risk of knowledge washout. Further supports may be required to help expand school leaders' valuation and understanding of PE, supporting PESGs integration into the school context.
- To facilitate the development of relationships between teachers and external coaches, centred upon children's learning needs. The presence of external coaches seems to be steeped in the Irish education system (Mangione *et al.* 2021), and it is important to utilise these 'supports' effectively. Chapter 6 presented an example of how PESGs can liaise with external coaches, supporting them to meet children's needs.
- To ensure generalist teachers are supported to implement the upcoming curriculum change in Ireland. Chapter 7 reflected the challenges teachers face while negotiating uncertain times. In the context of curriculum change, it has previously been identified that long-term professional development that promotes reflection, continuous learning and collaboration is important in empowering teachers as change agents (Carse 2015). PESGs' engagement with a CoP in this thesis presents a suitable method for professional development in the context of the upcoming curriculum change in Ireland.

8.3.3 Research

Recommendations arising from this thesis relating to research include:

- To examine the development of partnerships between teachers and external coaches and how they can support each other to meet the needs of children in PE, particularly in the context of the new curriculum framework (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment 2020).
- To continue investigating the development of PESGs and their influence on the provision of PE in Irish primary schools. While this thesis presented the potential impact of PESGs as innovative change agents, it also identified the

potential barriers that may inhibit their development. Further longitudinal research is required to examine how PESGs continue to apply their skills in Irish primary PE. As more PESGs enter the workforce, the influence of this cohort on the culture of PE provision warrants continued investigation. It is important to investigate teachers at different career stages within a continuously changing culture and society (Richards *et al.* 2014). If PESGs can positively enhance the teaching of PE in Ireland, it could also promote intergenerational socialisation, improving future teaching recruits' acculturation (Richards *et al.* 2019). Further examination could also be given to the impact of PESGs on children's learning in schools, while the role of PESGs in the delivery of the new primary PE curriculum also warrants inquiry. To examine the understanding of PE among all stakeholders related to primary PE provision in Ireland in greater detail. A need to investigate school principals' and policy makers' understanding of PE has previously been identified (Ní Chróinín *et al.* 2019) and Chapter 6 presented further insights into school leaders' perceptions of PE and the influence of this on teachers' practices within schools. The influence of sport, health and PA discourses may require further investigation, particularly in the context of the interpretation and application of the new PE curriculum.

- To examine the formal and informal leadership of PE in Irish primary schools. It is important that clear guidelines inform the leadership of PE in Irish primary schools. Informal leadership practices have previously been explored by Clohessy *et al.* (2019; 2020), who identified that the leadership of PE in Ireland lacks structure. PESGs could be an inhouse solution to subject leadership offering some specialist expertise as generalist teachers (Griggs and Randall 2019). An updated examination of informal leadership practices utilising PESGs' expertise could make a valuable contribution to the leadership of in Irish primary schools.

8.4 Conclusion

This thesis aimed to investigate the development of PESGs as teachers and leaders of PE in Irish primary schools. The findings presented throughout the thesis suggest that the PE specialism helps teachers to overcome many of the teacher related barriers

associated with generalist teachers. Chapter 4 exhibited PESGs' self-efficacy to teach PE, while Chapter 5 outlined their teaching orientations. This professional socialisation, however, is a starting point within PESGs' development as teachers and leaders of PE. Chapter 6 presented PESGs challenges in applying their skills within the school context, but also the potential contributions they could make as PE leaders. It is important that PESGs receive institutional support to maximise the use of their expertise in school. Chapter 7 presented a professional development model that can empower PESGs to cross boundaries and apply their PE expertise within schools. The results of these studies make significant contributions to the development of teacher education through ITE and CPD. Building on the findings and recommendations presented, future research should continue to examine the development of PESGs and the role they can play in advancing primary PE provision in Ireland.

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Appendices

Appendix A Signed statements of authorship

A.1 Statement of Authorship Chapter 4

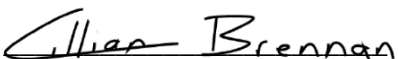
Article Title: 'The best of both worlds? The impact of the initial teacher education physical education specialism programme on generalist teachers' self-efficacy, beliefs, and practices', *Education 3-13*, 1-15, available:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03004279.2021.2001557>.

Statement of authorship:

We hereby declare that Cillian Brennan is the principal author of this article. The following statements outline his contributions to the work:

- Substantial contributions to the conception and design of the work; the acquisition, analysis, and interpretation of data for the work; AND
- Drafting the work and revising it critically for important intellectual content; AND
- Final approval of the version to be published; AND
- Agreement to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.

Signed: 

(PhD Candidate)

Signed: _____

(Supervisor & Co-author)

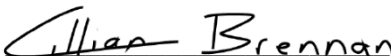
A.2 Statement of Authorship Chapter 5

Article Title: 'Turning over a new leaf: PE specialism graduates' understanding of 'quality PE', *Irish Educational Studies*, 1-18, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03323315.2023.2188240>.

Statement of authorship:

We hereby declare that Cillian Brennan is the principal author of this article. The following statements outline his contributions to the work:

- Substantial contributions to the conception and design of the work; the acquisition, analysis, and interpretation of data for the work; AND
- Drafting the work and revising it critically for important intellectual content; AND
- Final approval of the version to be published; AND
- Agreement to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.

Signed: 

(PhD Candidate)

Signed: _____

(Supervisor & Co-author)


A.3 Statement of Authorship Chapter 6

Article Title: 'Fitting in or standing out? The organisational socialisation of early career physical education specialism graduates through a micropolitical lens' (Under Review) *European Physical Education Review*

Statement of authorship:

We hereby declare that Cillian Brennan is the principal author of this article. The following statements outline his contributions to the work:

- Substantial contributions to the conception and design of the work; the acquisition, analysis, and interpretation of data for the work; AND
- Drafting the work and revising it critically for important intellectual content; AND
- Final approval of the version to be published; AND
- Agreement to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.

Signed: 

(PhD Candidate)

Signed: _____

(Supervisor & Co-author)

Appendix B Ethical approval form for thesis



Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee MIREC-4: MIREC Chair Decision Form

APPLICATION NO. A20-062 Amendment 1

1. PROJECT TITLE

The experiences and impact of teachers with additional expertise in physical education in primary schools

2. APPLICANT

Name:	Cillian Brennan PGR
Department / Centre / Other:	Arts Education & Physical Education
Position:	Postgraduate Researcher

3. DECISION OF MIREC CHAIR

<input type="checkbox"/>	Ethical clearance through MIREC is required.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ethical clearance through MIREC is not required and therefore the researcher need take no further action in this regard.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Ethical clearance is required and granted. Referral to MIREC is not necessary.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ethical clearance is required but the full MIREC process is not. Ethical clearance is therefore granted if required for external funding applications and the researcher need take no further action in this regard.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Insufficient information provided by applicant / Amendments required.

4. REASON(S) FOR DECISION

A20-062 (amendment) – Cillian Brennan - The experiences and impact of teachers with additional expertise in physical education in primary schools

I have reviewed this application and I believe it satisfies MIREC requirements subject to the following being addressed and returned to the MIREC Administrator:

Pp1/24 - Will the co-investigators be operating under MIC guidelines for ethical research? Will the recorded proceedings with the critical friends be owned by MIC?

Pp5/24 - Will the “overview of proceedings” shared with the critical friends be written or oral?

Clarifications:

- The co-investigators will be operating under MIC guidelines and recorded proceedings with the critical friends will be owned by MIC.
- I will share the ‘overview of proceedings’ with the critical friends in both written and oral form. I will send an email to the critical friends to update them on proceedings in advance of our meeting, and then update them orally at the meeting.

Appendix C Participant Information Sheets & Consent Forms

C.1 Survey Information Sheet



Physical Education Specialism Graduates

Welcome to My Survey

This 10-15 minute survey is for teachers who have completed the **four-year** Bachelor of Education degree with a **specialism in PE**.



Information Sheet

Project Title: The experiences and impact of teachers with additional expertise in physical education in primary schools

Invitation to Participate

Cillian Brennan, a Research Master's student in Mary Immaculate College, under the supervision of Dr. Elaine Murtagh and Dr. Richard Bowles, is conducting a study to explore the experiences and impact of teachers with additional expertise in physical education in primary schools. The results of this study can help to inform future policy and practice and improve physical education (PE) provision in schools. It is also hoped that findings can support the future provision of the PE specialism programme in Mary Immaculate College.

What is the project about?

I am interested in exploring the impact of undertaking the specialism in PE as part of the B. Ed primary teaching degree, on teachers' subsequent roles in primary schools and how their expertise can be utilised to create effective Physical Education provision in schools.

What will I have to do?

You are asked to complete an online survey. If you prefer, we can provide a paper copy of the survey.

What happens to the information?

The study will be published as a research paper in a peer-reviewed journal and presented at a research conference.

How will confidentiality be kept?

The completion of the survey is anonymous. You will not be asked for your name. In addition, any potential identifiable information will be omitted from the report.

Right to withdraw

You are free to withdraw from the survey at any time without giving a reason and without consequence.

What will happen to the data after research has been completed?

In accordance with the MIC Record Retention Schedule, anonymised data may be retained indefinitely.

If you have questions about the study or do not understand something, you may contact:

Cillian Brennan
Research Master's student
Mary Immaculate College
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Email: Cillian.Brennan@mic.ul.ie

Dr. Richard Bowles (Supervisor)
Lecturer
Office: G49
Telephone: 061 204912
Email: Richard.Bowles@mic.ul.ie

If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact:

MIREC Administrator,
Mary Immaculate College,
South Circular Road, Limerick.
Tel: 061 204980
Email: mirec@mic.ul.ie

C.2 Interview Information Sheet



PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Project Title:

The experiences and impact of teachers with additional expertise in physical education (PE) in primary schools

Invitation to Participate

Cillian Brennan, a PhD student in Mary Immaculate College, under the supervision of Dr. Elaine Murtagh and Dr. Richard Bowles, is conducting a study to explore the experiences and impact of teachers with additional expertise in PE in primary schools. The results of this study can help to inform future policy and practice and improve PE provision in schools. It is also hoped that findings can support the future provision of the PE specialism programme in Mary Immaculate College.

What is the project about?

I am exploring the impact of undertaking the specialism in PE as part of the B. Ed primary teaching degree. I am interested in teachers' subsequent roles in primary schools and how their expertise can be utilised to create effective PE provision in schools.

What will I have to do?

You are invited to take part in an interview. You will be asked to discuss current practice with regards to PE planning and teaching in primary schools. Following the interview, you will be provided with the interview transcription and invited to make any additional comments if you wish.

What happens to the information?

The interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed. We will use the information to guide the development of a support model for teachers with a specialism in PE. The study will be published as a research paper in a peer-reviewed journal and presented at a research conference.

How will confidentiality be kept?

We will not reveal the names of the people that took part in the interviews. Pseudonyms will be used for any quotes that are included in reports. All personal identification will be omitted so that you will not be identifiable in the written analysis.

Right to withdraw

You are free to withdraw from the interview at any time without giving a reason and without consequence.

What will happen to the data after research has been completed?

In accordance with the MIC Record Retention Schedule, anonymised data may be retained indefinitely.

If you have questions about the study or do not understand something, you may contact:

Cillian Brennan
PhD student
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Tel: [REDACTED]
Email: Cillian.Brennan@mic.ul.ie

Dr. Richard Bowles (Supervisor)
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Telephone: 061 204912
Email: Richard.Bowles@mic.ul.ie

If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact:

MIREC Administrator,
Mary Immaculate College,
South Circular Road, Limerick.
Tel: 061 204980
Email: mirec@mic.ul.ie



PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Project Title:

The experiences and impact of teachers with additional expertise in physical education in primary schools.

Invitation to Participate

Cillian Brennan, a PhD student in Mary Immaculate College, under the supervision of Dr. Richard Bowles and Dr. Elaine Murtagh, is conducting a study to explore the experiences and impact of teachers with additional expertise in physical education in primary schools. The results of this study can help to inform future policy and practice and improve physical education provision in schools. It is also hoped that findings can inform the future provision of the physical education specialism programmes during initial teacher education.

What is the project about?

I am interested in exploring the impact of a professional learning community to support graduates of the B. Ed with a specialism in PE in their teaching and leadership of PE. Graduates will reflect on their experiences of physical education leadership, and collaborate to develop skills as physical education leaders in their schools.

What will I have to do?

You are invited to take part in a professional learning community from February 2021 to October 2021. As part of the community you will be asked to:

1. Participate in group meetings at the beginning and at the end of the intervention. You will be asked to discuss physical education leadership, what you hope to develop as a member of the group, as well as your experience of the professional learning community.
2. You will be invited to submit short reflections throughout, on your experience of PE leadership in your school. These reflections will be submitted as voice notes, or short written reflections.
3. You will be invited to attend online meetings with the other members of the group on a monthly basis at a time agreed upon by the group members. You will be asked to share your experiences and discuss methods for enhancing your teaching and leadership of physical education.

As facilitator of the group, I will guide you throughout the process and will support you in any way possible. I will be in correspondence with critical friends throughout who will offer feedback on my practices as facilitator of the group.

What happens to the information?

The meetings and oral reflections will be audio-recorded and transcribed. The study will be published as a research paper in a peer-reviewed journal and presented at a research conference.

How will confidentiality be kept?

We will not reveal the names of the people that took part in the community. When discussing group proceedings with the critical friends, no identifying data will be revealed. Pseudonyms will be used for any quotes that are included in reports. All personal identification will be omitted so that you will not be identifiable in the written analysis.

Right to withdraw

You are free to withdraw from the professional learning community at any time without giving a reason and without consequence.

What will happen to the data after research has been completed?

In accordance with the MIC Record Retention Schedule, anonymised data may be retained indefinitely.

If you have questions about the study or do not understand something, you may contact:

Cillian Brennan	Dr. Richard Bowles (Supervisor)
PhD student	Lecturer
Mary Immaculate College	Office: G49
Tel: [REDACTED]	Telephone: 061 204912
Email:	Email: Richard.Bowles@mic.ul.ie
Cillian.Brennan@mic.ul.ie	

If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact:

MIREC Administrator,	Tel: 061 204980
Mary Immaculate College,	Email: mirec@mic.ul.ie
South Circular Road, Limerick.	

C.4 Interview Consent Form



PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Study title: The experiences and impact of teachers with additional expertise in physical education in primary schools

Please read the following statements before signing the consent form.

- I have read and understood the participant information sheet.
- I understand the full implications involved in participating, including all risks and benefits associated with the study.
- I understand what the project is about, and what the results will be used for. I know that the research may be published in an academic journal.
- I know that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the project at any stage without giving any reason.
- I am aware that the results will be kept confidential and my identity will be anonymous.
- I consent to taking part in this research study.

Your name (PRINTED): _____

Your signature:

Date: _____



**PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY - PARTICIPANT INFORMED
CONSENT FORM**

Study title: The experiences and impact of teachers with additional expertise in physical education in primary schools

Please read the following statements. You will be invited to agree/disagree with each statement when read by the investigator.

- I have read and understood the participant information sheet.
- I understand the full implications involved in participating, including all risks and benefits associated with the study.
- I understand what the project is about, and what the results will be used for. I know that the research may be published in an academic journal.
- I know that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the project at any stage without giving any reason.
- I am aware that the results will be kept confidential and my identity will be anonymous.
- I consent to taking part in this research study.

Appendix D Specialism Graduate Survey



Physical Education Specialism Graduates

Welcome to My Survey

This 10-15 minute survey is for teachers who have completed the **four-year** Bachelor of Education degree with a **specialism in PE**.



Information Sheet

Project Title: The experiences and impact of teachers with additional expertise in physical education in primary schools

Invitation to Participate

Cillian Brennan, a Research Master's student in Mary Immaculate College, under the supervision of Dr. Elaine Murtagh and Dr. Richard Bowles, is conducting a study to explore the experiences and impact of teachers with additional expertise in physical education in primary schools. The results of this study can help to inform future policy and practice and improve physical education (PE) provision in schools. It is also hoped that findings can support the future provision of the PE specialism programme in Mary Immaculate College.

What is the project about?

I am interested in exploring the impact of undertaking the specialism in PE as part of the B. Ed primary teaching degree, on teachers' subsequent roles in primary schools and how their expertise can be utilised to create effective Physical Education provision in schools.

What will I have to do?

You are asked to complete an online survey. If you prefer, we can provide a paper copy of the survey.

What happens to the information?

The study will be published as a research paper in a peer-reviewed journal and presented at a research conference.

How will confidentiality be kept?

The completion of the survey is anonymous. You will not be asked for your name. In addition, any potential identifiable information will be omitted from the report.

Right to withdraw

You are free to withdraw from the survey at any time without giving a reason and without consequence.

What will happen to the data after research has been completed?

In accordance with the MIC Record Retention Schedule, anonymised data may be retained indefinitely.

If you have questions about the study or do not understand something, you may contact:

Cillian Brennan
Research Master's student
Mary Immaculate College
Tel: 085 8385768
Email: Cillian.Brennan@mic.ul.ie

Dr. Richard Bowles (Supervisor)
Lecturer
Office: G49
Telephone: 061 204912
Email: Richard.Bowles@mic.ul.ie

If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact:

MIREC Administrator,
Mary Immaculate College,
South Circular Road, Limerick.
Tel: 061 204980
Email: mirec@mic.ul.ie



Physical Education Specialism Graduates
About yourself...

1. Are you...

- Male
 Female
 Prefer not to say

2. Year B. Ed Course Completed...

- 2016
 2017
 2018
 2019

3. Where did you complete your degree?

- Mary Immaculate College, Limerick
 Dublin City University, Institute of Education (Formerly St. Patrick's College)
 Other (please specify)

4. Have you a formal coaching/exercise qualification in any sport?

- Yes
 No

If yes, specify details (Awarding body, Qualification, year attended)

5. Are you involved in physical activity/sport for primary school aged children in a coaching/supervisory role outside of school?

- Yes
 No

If yes, specify details (Sport/activity, role, age group)



Physical Education Specialism Graduates
PE Specialism experience

6. Please read the following statements and indicate your level of agreement with the statement by ticking the appropriate response

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
I undertook the PE specialism because I enjoyed sports	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I undertook the PE specialism to help my job prospects	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I undertook the PE specialism because I was already confident teaching PE before starting the specialism	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I undertook the PE specialism as I felt it would be less academically challenging than other module options	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I undertook the PE specialism because I felt I lacked the confidence to teach PE	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

7. Please read the following statements and indicate your level of agreement with the statement by ticking the appropriate response

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
The PE specialism provided me with extra content knowledge	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The PE specialism contained sufficient opportunities to practice teaching PE	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I was unprepared to teach PE in schools following the PE specialism	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The PE specialism was an unnecessary component of my education degree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would have been able to teach PE effectively without my specialism	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

8. Please read the following statements and indicate your level of agreement with the statement by ticking the appropriate response

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
I do not teach enough PE to justify undertaking CPD	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I want to develop my PE teaching skills further	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel the PE CPD available would advance my PE skills further	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would like more opportunities to develop my PE teaching skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

9. Please use the space below to add any further comments in relation to your PE specialism experience.



Physical Education Specialism Graduates
Confidence to teach PE

10. For each of these items, rate how confident you are that you can do them now, or your level of agreement with each statement, on this 1-to-5 scale. Consider your abilities as of.

1 = 'Cannot do' or 'strongly disagree'

3 = 'Moderately certain I can do' or 'neither agree nor disagree'

5 = 'Highly certain I can do' or 'strongly agree'

	Strongly disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neither agree nor disagree 3	Agree 4	Strongly agree 5
I can plan for learning to take place in my PE lessons as well as children being active.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can plan my PE lessons based on the needs of individuals throughout my class.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can plan PE lessons to allow children to work as individuals and in groups.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can integrate PE with other areas of the whole school curriculum.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can link PE to the child's environment/community and promote ways of learning outside the classroom.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can use questions or activities to get children to think critically or solve problems.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can assess pupils' progress formatively.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can get pupils to contribute to the assessment process and reflect on their own performance and that of others.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can change a lesson based on how the lesson is working.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can demonstrate and explain a skill/drill so that the class understands what to do.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If one of my students was having trouble with a drill, I know ways to change it to make it easier for them.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If a drill was too easy for a highly skilled student, I can change it to make it more challenging.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I had a student with SEN in my class, I can find ways for the student to participate with the rest of the class successfully.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can get my students to respect and cooperate with each other.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can organise and run active classes safely so that students are not likely to get hurt.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

11. Please rate how confident you feel to deliver each of the following strands of the PE curriculum

	Really not confident 1	2	3	4	Very confident 5
Athletics	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Dance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Gymnastics	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Games	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Outdoor and adventure activities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Aquatics	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please use the space below to add any other comments in relation to your confidence to deliver the PE curriculum.

12. Please rate how confident you feel to **participate** in each of the following activities/strands

	Really not confident 1	2	3	4	Very confident 5
Athletics	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Dance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Gymnastics	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Games	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Outdoor and adventure activities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Aquatics	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



Physical Education Specialism Graduates
Teaching profile

* 13. Are you currently working in the teaching profession?

Yes

No



Physical Education Specialism Graduates
Teaching profile

* 14. Have you taught for one school year since graduation?

Yes

No

If 'yes', when asked about your 'current school', please apply to the last school you have taught in for these questions.



Physical Education Specialism Graduates
Career profile

* 15. Are you working in the area of PE/sport?

Yes

No

If yes, please explain.



Physical Education Specialism Graduates
Teaching profile

* 16. How would you describe your current job status?

- Permanent teacher/CID
- Fixed term teacher
- Non-casual substitute teacher (teaching in the school for more than 40 days of the school year)
- Casual substitute teacher (teaching in the school for less than 40 days of the school year)



Physical Education Specialism Graduates
Teaching profile

* 17. Have you taught for more than one year since graduation?

- Yes
- No

If 'yes', when asked about your 'current school', please apply to the school you have spent the most time in.



Physical Education Specialism Graduates
Teaching profile

* 18. Have you taught for more than one year since graduation?

- Yes
- No



Physical Education Specialism Graduates
Teaching Profile

* 19. Currently working in...

- Ireland
- Outside of Ireland



**Physical Education Specialism Graduates
Teaching Profile**

20. Enter country here:

21. School...

Urban

Rural

22. Teaching role...

Mainstream class teacher

Special Education Teacher

Other (please specify)

23. Number of years teaching experience

24. Have you completed an in-service in PE since the completion of your teaching qualification? (include summer/evening/weekend/in-service course, certificate diploma, degree)

Yes

No

If yes, please specify (Course, Venue, Year)

* 25. Has the PE specialism influenced your current teaching practice?

Yes

No

Please provide an explanation for your response



**Physical Education Specialism Graduates
Teaching Profile**

26. School...

- DEIS
 Non-DEIS

27. School...

- Urban
 Rural

28. Teaching role...

- Mainstream class teacher
 Special Education Teacher

Other (please specify)

29. Number of years teaching experience

30. Have you completed an in-service in PE since the completion of your teaching qualification? (include summer/evening/weekend/in-service course, certificate diploma, degree)

- Yes
 No

If yes, please specify (Course, Venue, Year)

* 31. Has the PE specialism influenced your current teaching practice?

- Yes
 No

Please provide an explanation for your response



Physical Education Specialism Graduates
PE teaching

* 32. Select the answer that best reflects your current teaching practice

- I don't teach PE
- I teach PE once a week
- I teach PE twice a week
- I teach PE more than twice a week



Physical Education Specialism Graduates
PE teaching

33. During an average school week I teach PE for...

- 0 - 30 mins
- 31 - 60 mins
- 61-90 mins
- 90 mins +



Physical Education Specialism Graduates
PE Resources in your school

34. Please rate the **quality of the PE facilities** available in your school for each strand

Facilities – physical infrastructure, indoor/outdoor areas, e.g. multipurpose indoor hall, basketball court, etc.

	Inadequate	Below average	Adequate	Good	Excellent
Athletics	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Dance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Gymnastics	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Games	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Outdoor and adventure activities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Aquatics	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

35. Please rate the **quality of the PE equipment** available in your school for each strand

Equipment – learning/teaching materials, e.g. gymnastics mats, footballs, hurdles, etc.

	Inadequate	Below average	Adequate	Good	Excellent
Athletics	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Dance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Gymnastics	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Games	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Outdoor and adventure activities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Aquatics	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

36. Please use the space below to add any other comments in relation to the PE facilities and equipment available to you in your school



Physical Education Specialism Graduates
PE teaching in your school

37. Select from the list what teaching models for PE are being used in your school. Select all answers that apply (you can select more than one)

- Each class teacher teaches their own class
- External providers teach PE
- Teachers swap classes for PE
- One teacher teaches PE across a wide range of classes
- Other (please specify)

38. Please list any PE/physical activity initiatives your school partakes in below (Active Schools Flag; Daily Mile; Active Homework, etc.)

39. Does your school have a PE co-ordinator?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

If yes, explain their role.

40. What role do you have in PE provision in the school? (e.g., Whole school planning, Active flag co-ordinator, etc.)

41. Please read the following statements and indicate your level of agreement with the statement by ticking the appropriate response

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
My school actively promotes and supports PE	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The PE specialism was a factor in attaining my current position	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My additional PE expertise are being used effectively to improve the quality of PE teaching in the school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am regarded as a PE leader in my school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The other teachers in the school come to me for advice with regards to PE	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



Physical Education Specialism Graduates
School Sport

42. Are you involved in school sport in your school?

Yes

No

If yes, how so?

43. Rank your school's provision of links to PE/Sport activities outside of the school setting for each strand of the PE curriculum.

e.g. providing pathways for participation in community sport; co-operation with sporting organisations; links with the local sports partnership.

	Insufficient	Limited	Sufficient	Above average	Extensive
Athletics	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Dance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Gymnastics	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Games	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Outdoor and adventure activities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Aquatics	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



Physical Education Specialism Graduates
External coaches

* 44. Does your school bring in external coaches during the school day?

Yes

No



Physical Education Specialism Graduates
External coaches

45. Are the lessons taught by external coaches counted as PE in the school?

- Yes
- No

46. Do the external coaches align with the PE curriculum strands that are being taught each term?

- Yes
- No

Explain

47. What activity does the external coach deliver? (Tick all that apply)

- GAA
- Swimming
- Dance
- Athletics
- Rugby

Other (please specify)

48. Please read the following statements and indicate your level of agreement with the statement by ticking the appropriate response

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
The external coaches have an awareness of the needs of the children in my class.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The external coaches have the ability to support the needs of the children in my class effectively.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The external coaches are more knowledgeable than me and are better suited to teaching the class PE.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Children receive no other PE time in the week other than that provided by external coaches.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
External coaches consult with the class teacher with relation to lesson planning.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
External coaches consult with the class teacher with relation to classroom management.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
External coaches consult with the class teacher with relation to assessment practices.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

49. How do you feel external coaches should be used in primary schools?



Physical Education Specialism Graduates PE in the broader context

50. Please read the following statements and indicate your level of agreement with the statement by ticking the appropriate response

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
60 minutes per week is a sufficient time allocation for primary PE in Ireland	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Primary PE in Ireland provides equal opportunities to both boys and girls	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Primary PE in Ireland provides equal opportunities to children of all abilities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Primary PE in Ireland provides equal opportunities to children of all ethnicities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Primary PE links sufficiently to the child's environment/community and promotes learning outside the classroom.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
There is a manageable ratio of students to teachers in primary PE classes in Ireland.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
There are sufficient guidelines for best practice in primary PE in Ireland.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Assessment is used to guide primary PE practice in Ireland effectively.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The primary PE curriculum in Ireland recognises and responds to the					

changing needs of students as they mature, physically, cognitively and emotionally

The primary PE curriculum in Ireland encourages/helps students to make informed decisions relating to their future needs/aspiration.

51. If you could make any changes to teacher education for primary PE, or the provision of primary PE in Ireland, what would they be and why?

52. How do you feel a school could make best use of a teacher with additional expertise in PE (e.g. a teacher with a specialism in PE)?



Physical Education Specialism Graduates

Further contact

53. If PE content was to be made available to support you in your teaching, through what media would you prefer to receive it. You can select more than one

- Twitter
- Instagram
- Facebook
- Snapchat
- LinkedIn
- Podcasts

Other (please specify)

54. Please tick if you would like to be provided with the results of this survey

- Yes
- No

If yes, provide email (Note this email address will be stored separately to the survey data so that you cannot be identified)

55. Would you be willing to participate in a focus group with a member of the research team?

- Yes
- No

56. If yes, please enter your contact details (Note these details will be stored separately to the survey data so that you cannot be identified.)

Name:

Mobile:

Email:

57. Please feel free to add any further views/comments you may like to add with regards to PE in primary schools and the topics explored in this survey



Physical Education Specialism Graduates

Please click the 'Done' button to submit your responses.

Appendix E Interview Guide for studies in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6

Use micropolitical framework to explore the scenarios in greater detail...

- Knowledge – What happened? Why do you think this was done? How did teachers feel?
- Operational – How did you respond to this? How does your own teaching compare to it?
- Experiential – Is there anything you would do differently? Are you satisfied with the way you responded?

Section	Key questions	Sub questions
Part 1 Descriptive statistics and school context	Invite participant to give a brief synopsis/timeline from graduation onwards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching experience • School type • Class type • Droichead or old form of induction
	How would you describe the school culture? (What is seen as important, how does that manifest itself in school life?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you feel about that? Does it align with your own ideals? • Were you given any additional roles when you entered the school? How did you feel about that? • How would you describe the relationship between staff in the school? • How did you find integration with the other school staff? • Do teachers discuss classroom practice with each other? Do teachers work together in the school?
	Did you feel you were being watched as a new teacher in the school or was it something you were conscious of?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you feel others viewed you upon your entry to the school? • Did you receive feedback from anybody since you started teaching (from students, parents, staff)? • Did you do certain things because you were a new teacher in the school? • Would you have acted in the same way if you had a longer/shorter contract?

Part 2 Leadership	Who do you see as leaders in the school environment?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal/informal leaders • Give examples of how they lead • How do they interact with others? • How do others feel about it? • Are they seen differently?
	Who leads PE in your school?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is this an official/non-official role? • What does their role involve? What do they promote?
	Would you consider yourself a leader?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why is that? • (if no) Would you like to change that? • (if yes) How did that come about, who led it? • How do other teachers feel about it? Are they willing to accept help from others? How was this achieved? • How do you feel it is working, is there anything you'd like to do differently?
Part 3 Views on PE	What is your view of high-quality PE?	
	<p>Rate the influence of the following factors out of 10 on your understanding of high-quality PE</p> <p>(Expand on the ratings, give examples, positive/negative, why?)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PE specialism • Experience of PE as a student in school • Sport • Teaching placements • Teaching experience since qualifying • Other school staff • Other

Part 4 PE in school network	How do you feel PE is treated in your school, is it similar to your own understanding?	Why do you think that it is approached in this way?
	Rate the influence of the following factors out of 10 on the teaching of high-quality PE in your school (Expand on the ratings, positive/negative, why? Examples in own teaching or other's teaching)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School culture • Facilities • Equipment • Time allocation • External coaches • CPD • Other <p>How do you feel you could overcome any of the challenging factors? How were the positive influences facilitated?</p>
	How do you feel about external coaches?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are they given responsibility for teaching PE in your school? How do you feel about this? • Who liaises with the external coach in the school? What requirements/protocols are in place? • How would you like to see external coaches used?

Part 5 Supporting their leadership of PE	Are other teachers in your school aware that you completed the specialism?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have you asked teachers if they'd like help or have you discussed PE teaching with them? • Is it something they show a desire to change? If support was to be made available to them, do you think they would be accepting of it? • If teachers wanted help, in what form do you think they'd like to receive it in?
	Curriculum developments -what would PE look like in an ideal scenario? How do you feel your expertise could be used to improve the quality of PE teaching in schools?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggestions from survey: • advising other staff • demonstrating best practice • observing lessons and offering feedback • co-teaching/class swapping • delivering CPD for school staff • completing whole school planning.
	Do you think there are sufficient opportunities for teachers upon their entry to schools to share their expertise?	
	Would you like to develop your PE teaching skills further?	Do you feel the CPD available is at an appropriate level to allow you to develop these skills?
	If you were to be offered support as a graduate of the PE specialism in your leadership or PE, how do you feel you could be supported effectively.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggestions: • Community of Practice • Membership of an association • CPD • Social media content

Appendix F Interview Guide for Chapter 7

F.1 End of Schoolyear Interview Guide

Intro: This is just a very brief chat to give you a chance to share your experiences of the group so far, to help me to learn about how it has been for you, to get a better understanding of what you need and want, and to help to guide the group going forward, to make sure it is meeting your needs.

1. How has your experience of the group been so far?
 - How has the online format worked for you?
 - Using Teams online
 - Engaging with messages
 - Responding & sharing with others
 - How have you found the time commitment required for being involved in the group?
 - Too much/too little?
 - Frequency of meetings
 - Duration of meetings
 - Tasks between meetings
 - How has being part of the group impacted you so far?
2. What has worked best for you in the group so far?
 - What helped create that experience?
 - How do you think we could create more of those experiences and opportunities moving forward?
3. What challenges have you faced in the group so far?
 - Is there any way the other group members or I, could help you to overcome these challenges?
4. Would you have any recommendations to improve the group (content, meetings, correspondence, etc.) to ensure it fully meet your needs?
5. Is there anything that I haven't asked about that you'd like to add about your experience of the group? If you do think of anything else after the chat, feel free to send me a message.

Prompts to dig a little deeper:

Can you give me an example of that?

Can you tell me a little bit more for me please?

Do you mind explaining to me what you mean by that please?

F.2 End of Learning Community Interview Guide

This is just a brief chat to get a better understanding of your experience of the group, and to allow you to share any feedback that you may have on your experiences, that could guide the implementation of such groups into the future.		✓
Motivation Tell me about the group you were part of.	Why did you decide to take part in the group?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did your experience compare with your expectations?
	How would you describe your experience of the group?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In what ways did this group differ from others that you may have been part of, or other learning experiences?
Group interaction & engagement How was your experience of working with the others in the group?	Did the group have different views/opinions?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What impact did this have? • How did you deal with this?
	The group took place online, did you feel connected to the rest of the group?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did you have roles and responsibilities as part of the group? • Can you give examples of when you felt most engaged with the group? • Do you think others were more/less engaged than you? • How did this impact your experience? • Do you think the online environment had any impact on this?
	What worked best for you in the group?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What helped create that experience?
	What challenges did you face in the group?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What was done to address these challenges? • Is there any way that these challenges could have been addressed differently?

<p>Learning</p> <p>What did you learn from your participation in this group?</p>	<p>How has being part of the group impacted you in your own school life? (If it isn't explained) How did being part of the group influence this?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you think it will impact your future practices? • In five years' time, what learnings will you have taken from your participation in the group this year?
	<p>Did you feel the group met your needs as a primary school teacher teaching PE?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did the group meet your needs? • How could it have addressed them better? • Did you feel the facilitator understood these needs?
	<p>If a new group was being created from the start again, would you have any recommendations to improve the group (content, meetings, correspondence, etc.) to ensure it fully met your needs?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If a new group was being created from the start again, would you do anything differently as a participant?
<p>Sustainability</p> <p>Do you see the group as something that could continue beyond this research? Why/why not?</p>	<p>Do you think other primary school teachers would be interested in participating in such groups? Why/why not?</p>	
<p>Is there anything that I haven't asked about that you'd like to add about your experience of the group? If you do think of anything else after the chat, feel free to send a message/email afterwards.</p>		

Appendix G Discussion Prompt used in Chapter 7

(1) A random number was selected revealing a PESG name.

1
2
3
4
5
6



(2) This PESG chose a colour, revealing a question about their experience of PE.

Rachel
Fiona
Bridget
Paul
Olivia



(3) The PESG answered the chosen question, before selecting the next number, and the cycle continued.

Rachel
Fiona
Bridget
Paul
Olivia



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Appendix I Differences between thesis content and published articles

Chapter 4

Reviewer feedback for the article published in Chapter 5, recommended the use of the term ‘quality PE’ rather than ‘high-quality PE’, as it is used more frequently in research. As a result, ‘high quality PE’ was amended to ‘quality PE’ throughout Chapter 4, to reflect the terminology used across the thesis.