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Teacher education physical education: In search of a hybrid space

Timothy Lynch^{1*}

Abstract: It is argued that a learning environment underpinned by a strengths-based collaborative approach between universities and schools offers extended pre-service teacher learning opportunities and subsequently enhanced preparation. The term “hybrid space” describes the ideal environment of shared partnership where knowledge is jointly created, and consequently, as too is collaborative egalitarianism between stakeholders. This study investigates a possible “hybrid space” course within Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE) in the UK. While much literature discusses the advantages of the “hybrid space” ideal across education disciplines, high-quality research into PETE hybrid spaces is limited, if not non-existent. Hence, the particular course was chosen for data collection as it advocates intricate connections with schools in the local community. Furthermore, the course was awarded “Outstanding” by the national regulatory authority, England and Wales Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), one of the major reasons explicitly stated was for its community connections. A qualitative, interpretive study using a case study methodology was adopted to examine the successful primary PETE course. The findings offer insights into the ideal of hybrid spaces in PETE, which appear to benefit various stakeholders within communities. The study is significant as it assists teacher educators from around the world, challenged to rethink their connections between university courses and school field experiences through illustrating a highly successful example.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Timothy Lynch

Timothy Lynch works for Monash University, Faculty of Education in Melbourne, Australia. He is the current vice-president for the International Council for Health & Physical Education, Recreation, Sport and Dance (ICHPER-SD). He has been involved in primary (and early years), secondary and higher education for 21 years: 15 years teaching experience as a classroom teacher, head teacher, and Health and Physical Education (HPE) specialist. He has worked in various school communities and education systems in Australia and internationally. He is an advocate of quality HPE experiences for all. The research undertaken in the UK Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programme stimulated a wider successful project within Australia (2011–2014), adopting a strengths-based approach to enhance learning and development of pre-service teachers, children and classroom teachers (Best Start—a community collaborative approach to lifelong health and wellness [supplementary material]).

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Benefits of connections between universities and schools in teacher preparation are plentiful. It is argued that the lack of school and university partnerships is an enduring weakness that impedes the quality of pre-service teachers and subsequently the quality of education offered by nations. A shift is occurring in the US and globally with evidence from recent reforms in Finland, Australia and the UK. This study investigates a highly successful course in the UK. A course that advocates intricate connections with schools in the local community which is valued by all stakeholders. The course was awarded “Outstanding” by the national regulatory authority, Ofsted. The data and findings of this study offer insights into successful bridging of university “theory” and school “practice”. This study assists teacher educators from around the world through illustrating a highly successful example of university and school partnerships.

Subjects: Community; Community Health; Community Sport Development; Early Childhood; Education; Personal, Social & Health Education; Physical Education; Primary/Elementary Education; Teacher Education & Training; Teaching Practice - Education

Keywords: strengths-based; community collaboration; pre-service teacher education; health; physical education; hybrid space; primary education

1. Introduction

Literature accentuating the benefits of connections between universities and schools is plentiful. Furthermore, the lack of connection between the learning completed on university campuses and field experience in schools in teacher education is termed the Achilles heel of education (Darling-Hammond, 2009), a perennial problem in traditional university courses (Zeichner, 2010). This suggests that the lack of school and university partnerships is an enduring weakness that impedes the quality of pre-service teachers and subsequently the quality of education in schools.

One of the perennial dilemmas of teacher education is how to integrate theoretically based knowledge that has traditionally been taught in university classrooms with the experience-based knowledge that has traditionally been located in the practice of teachers and the realities of classrooms and schools. (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 9)

Hence, a teacher education learning environment underpinned by a “non hierarchical interplay between academic, practitioner and community expertise” (Zeichner, 2010, p. 89) offers strong possibilities for improvement in preparation of teacher graduates. It is axiomatic that amalgamating skills and expertise amongst various community education contributors will strengthen the learning experience. However, Douglas notes the difficulties in achieving school and university partnerships, emphasising a present need to increase understanding of what is meant by student teacher learning and “how ideas within the concept are applied to learning opportunities” (2014, p. 1). Within the Health and Physical Education learning area, a strengths-based approach is recommended which “supports a critical view of health education with a focus on the learner embedded within a community’s structural facilitators, assets and constraints, and is enacted through resource-oriented and competence-raising approaches to learning” (Macdonald, 2013, p. 100). Zeichner (2010) uses the term “hybrid space” (p. 89) to describe the crossing of boundaries to share expertise on an equal plane and this study investigates a potential “hybrid space” course within primary Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE). In a dynamic environment such as schools and universities, hybrid spaces may be an ideal rather than reality; however, such spaces have the potential to strengthen teacher preparation and subsequently within this context, children’s health. This case study research is significant as there is limited to no research into PETE hybrid spaces. Hence, it offers insights into an internationally successful primary PETE course and builds upon existing hybrid space research within this unique context.

2. Literature review

In exploring hybrid spaces in PE practice, it is necessary to understand the relevance of major themes that underpin the conceptual framework for this review. Key concepts that arise have been organised around the following three Teacher Education elements: (1) Application of theory model; (2) School/university partnerships; and (3) Third space theory and hybrid spaces.

2.1. Application of theory model

The “application of theory” is the traditional model that has dominated university pre-service teacher education. This is where the pre-service teachers learn theories from the theoretical experts in university and then they go and apply in schools (Korthagen & Kessels, 1999). Contrastingly, there is literature that suggests that pre-service teachers learn the teaching and learning essentials in practice (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Hammerness, Darling-Hammond, & Bransford, 2005), which involves direct work in or with schools. Such literature asserts that university and the theoretical experts can be minimised with little detriment to the pre-service teacher quality of preparation (Grossman & Loeb, 2008). Furthermore,

it is not uncommon for supervising teachers during field placements to know little about the course theory and the teacher educators in universities to know little about the practices in the P-12 classrooms (Zeichner, 2010).

Hence, often courses have two separate entities, theory and practice. They consist of a grouping of units/modules that relate to teaching and learning generally, but are unrelated, described as feeble change agents for new teachers (Zeichner & Gore, 1990). While there are studies that evidence how courses have combated this disparity (Howey & Zimpher, 2006; Patterson, Michelli, & Pacheco, 1999), there is limited high-quality research on hybrid spaces in practice and their impact on pre-service teachers (Clift & Brady, 2005).

The application of theory model in the United States (US) originated when teacher education moved from mainstream schools to universities in the 1950s. Teacher education has often been “fairly haphazard, depending on the idiosyncrasies of loosely selected placements with little guidance about what happens in them and little connection to university work” (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 9). Hence, it is argued the fragmentation with this university model is a result of “departmental divides, individualistic norms, and the hiring of part-time adjunct instructors in some institutions that have used teacher education as a ‘cash cow’” (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 7). There have been numerous attempts at connecting campus courses with field practice, which involve partnerships between schools and universities.

2.2. School university partnerships

Research evidences university courses collaboratively overcoming barriers of “Application of theory” fragmentation and disparity. Darling-Hammond (2006) identifies three common elements in successful courses where the theory meets the practice:

(1) Coherence and integration

Coherence and integration challenges the conventional university model. “Course work is carefully sequenced based on a strong theory of learning to teach; courses are designed to intersect with each other, are aggregated into a well-understood landscape of learning, and are tightly interwoven with the advisement process and students’ work in schools” (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 7). In the powerful and highly successful courses, the unit/module teachers “supervise and advise teacher candidates and sometimes even teach children and teachers in placement schools, bringing together these disparate course elements through an integration of roles” (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 7).

(2) Extensive, well-supervised clinical experience linked to course work using pedagogies that link theory and practice

The most powerful courses require students to spend extensive time in the field throughout the entire course, examining and applying the concepts and strategies they are simultaneously learning about in their courses alongside teachers who can show them how to teach in ways that are responsive to learners. (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 8).

Pre-service teachers who participate in practical and real experiences with course work are better able to understand theory, apply the concepts and support student learning (Baumgartner, Koerner, & Rust, 2002; Denton, 1982). Even in modern times with technological developments such as virtual classrooms, there is still no replacement for the real teaching and learning experience. For it is argued that; “no amount of course work can, by itself, counteract the powerful experiential lessons that shape what teachers actually do” (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 9). Darling-Hammond (2006) supplements, “Although it is helpful to experience classrooms and analyse the materials and practices of teaching, it is quite another thing to put ideals into action” (p. 9). Such an environment involves relationships built on trust, where school and university teachers/teacher educators are reciprocally respectful and willing to contribute. It is argued that in order for partnerships/relationships to be sustained in such a learning environment “requires time, understanding, effort and personable attributes on behalf of the leader, but most importantly it requires all stakeholders to believe that the efforts are worthwhile” (Lynch, 2013b, p. 262).

(3) New relationships with schools

Establishing partnerships and relationships between schools and universities is easier planned for than implemented. It is argued that it often involves paradigm shifts for teacher educators and teachers, with all stakeholders genuinely believing that it is worthwhile and meaningful (Zeichner, 2010). This may result in changes in content at schools and universities/teacher training (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Lynch, 2013a).

Relationships involve unique partnership contexts, challenges and tensions (Martin, Snow, & Torrez, 2011). Furthermore, transformation of people's beliefs about their surroundings can be threatening and stressful for the teachers involved (Sparkes, 1991). More so, transformations often result in conflict, loss and struggle, which are fundamental to successful change (Fullan, 1982). Darling-Hammond suggests that "universities must engage ever more closely with schools in a mutual transformation agenda, with all of the struggle and messiness that implies" (2006, p. 3).

The dynamics involved in partnerships have made paradigm shifts difficult in practice. "Research has also demonstrated how difficult these partnerships are to enact" (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 11). Just as curriculum change is complex due to the social dynamics (Fullan, 2001; Sparkes, 1991), developing new practices within a third space is socially complex (Gutiérrez, 2008). There are "difficulties related to planning and coordinating a multilevel social process" (Fullan, 2001, p. 69) as often it requires change to the way things have traditionally been done.

2.3. Third space theory and hybrid spaces

Hybrid space is grounded in third space theory. Third space originates in hybridity theory, which recognises that individuals draw on multiple discourses to make sense of the world (Bhabba, 1990). As addressed, the traditional "Application of theory" model relates to the school being the place of practice where the theory is applied. This perspective is referred to as first place. The second place perspective is where the university is the venue where student and teacher learning occur. The third space involves a crossing of boundaries, "a rejection of binaries such as practitioner and academic knowledge and theory and practice and involve the integration of what are often seen as competing discourses in new ways—an either/or perspective is transformed into a both/also point of view" (Zeichner, 2010, p. 92). Pre-service teachers are better prepared by "creating hybrid spaces in teacher education where academic and practitioner knowledge and knowledge that exists in communities come together in new less hierarchical ways in the service of teacher learning" (Zeichner, 2010, p. 89). The hybrid space also has the advantage of preparing pre-service teachers' collegial skills relating to school improvement (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Research suggests that graduates from such courses "feel more knowledgeable and prepared to teach and are rated by employers, supervisors, and researchers as better prepared than other new teachers" (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 11).

A shift began in the US (Berry et al., 2008; Martin et al., 2011) where clinical experiences and pre-service teaching practice are being rethought and reassessed (Zeichner, 2010). This is evidenced by The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (2010) expert Blue Ribbon Panel's report on clinical preparation and partnerships. This shift is occurring globally with evidence also from recent reforms in Finland, Australia and the UK (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2012; Douglas, 2014). However, research indicates this is a very difficult process, as often the complexity of teacher education is ignored as well as the "settings where learning happens" (Douglas, 2014, p. 6). Furthermore, it requires "a paradigm shift in the epistemology of teacher education programs [courses]" (Zeichner, 2010, p. 89).

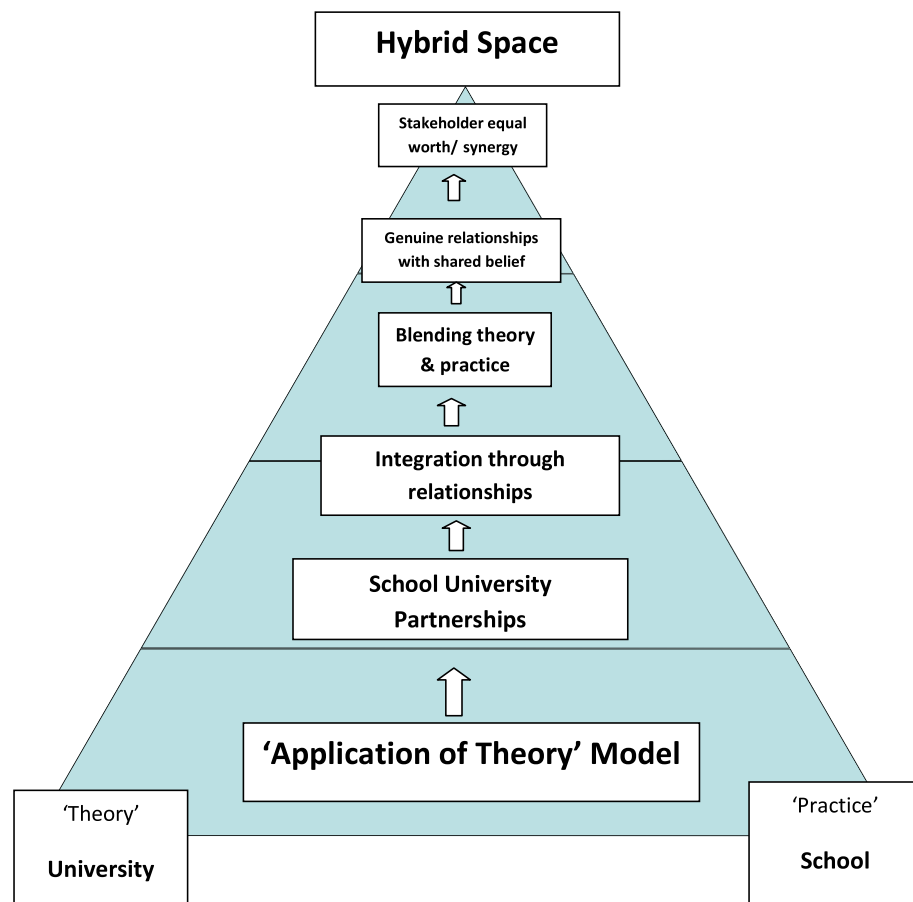
Hence, a deeper reflection accentuates the complexity of a hybrid space; "a space of cultural, social and epistemological change in which the competing knowledge of discourses of different spaces are brought into "conversation" to challenge and re-shape". (Moje et al., 2004, p. 43). In contemplating the complexity, Gorodetsky, Barak, and Hadari (2007) mention edge communities as a third space, which promotes equal collaboration and egalitarianism, in a synergistic interplay of knowledge in support of

student learning. Reference is also made within the literature to a hybrid teacher educator (Martin, et al., 2011; Zeichner, 2010): a university-based teacher educator who builds partnerships with local schools to enhance pre-service teacher education. Some universities have established purposeful positions to assume this partnership role often associated to pre-service teacher education and teacher professional development (Boyle-Baise & McIntyre, 2008). For many teacher educators and/or possible hybrid educators, establishing a hybrid space requires rethinking ways to connect within the community and involves the discovery of possibilities to collaborate. Hence, effective communication and effort are essential for hybrid spaces to be established and maintained (Lynch, 2012).

Specifically within Physical Education, data gathered by Whipp, Hutton, Grove, and Jackson (2011) found that schools benefit as well as universities. Teachers in schools working collaboratively with external providers, such as hybrid educators and university students, are associated with positive perceptions about the value of the physical learning. Furthermore, it is argued that there are three key reasons why Health and Physical Education as a learning area should be prioritised for community collaborations: to promote “health literacy” within communities; to advocate the enjoyment associated with learning in, through and about movement; and the exemplary role HPE enables in promoting equity in education (Lynch, 2013b).

There is a gap in research of model courses, illustrating what a “hybrid space” looks like in practice (Clift & Brady, 2005; Floden, 2005). There are also a growing number of teacher educators not knowing where to begin or how to progress (Zeichner, 2010). Exploring what a successful partnership looks like can assist teacher educators in the way they approach collaborative education and a possible hybrid space. In the context of Britain, “nearly all teacher educators in England enter universities from previous careers in the school or further education sectors” (Murray, 2010), which means that working integrally with schools

Figure 1. Conceptual framework for the literature review.



and teachers is something they are familiar with which arguably increases the likelihood of creating a hybrid space. Hence, a successful Teacher Education course within the UK that advocates partnerships was chosen to be investigated, one that may possibly involve the ideal of a hybrid space. The specific course was awarded “Outstanding” by the England and Wales Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted).

Ofsted is the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills. We report directly to Parliament and we are independent and impartial. We inspect and regulate services which care for children and young people, and those providing education and skills for learners of all ages. Every week, we carry out hundreds of inspections and regulatory visits throughout England, and publish the results on our website. (<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/about-us>)

These major themes underpinning the three teacher education elements shape the conceptual framework that guides the literature review, diagrammatically represented in Figure 1. The overview offers direction to the research purpose as it helps to paint a “big picture” of the relevant literature in identifying a possible hybrid space in PETE.

3. Research purpose

The purpose of this research is to investigate a possible hybrid space in PETE practice. It is envisaged that by exploring such a space, teacher educators will be offered a model to learn from; an illustrative case study within PETE and possible insights into the various dynamics. A successful programme/course with established partnerships in England has been deliberately chosen as a possible example.

The overarching general research question that guided conduct of this research was “How do the PETE course community partnerships’ contribute towards a hybrid space?”

The specific research questions were

- (1) Who are the various partners in this successful course and what are their roles?
- (2) What are the perceived benefits of having partnerships operate within a university course?
- (3) What do primary physical education teacher educators perceive as possible “hybrid space” challenges?

An analytical question arising from the research questions provides a more critical generation of data:

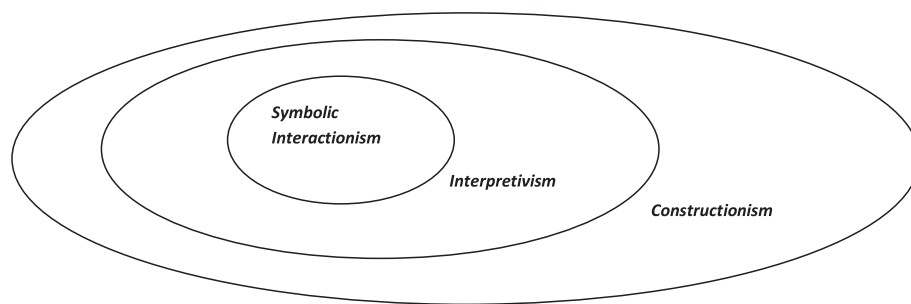
- (4) What hybrid space features does this course evidence?

4. Research design

This qualitative, interpretive study was most appropriate due to the significance of constructed meanings developed from the interpretation of shared experiences and perspectives. “Social realities are constructed by the participants in their social settings” (Glesne, 1999, p. 5). The participants share their experiences and perspectives, which are never wrong. The strengths of using an interpretive research approach include:

- (1) Researching people in natural settings;
- (2) Stressing interpretations and meanings;
- (3) Achieving a deeper understanding of the respondents world;
- (4) Humanising the research process by raising the role of the researched;
- (5) Allowing higher flexibility; and
- (6) Presenting a more realistic view of the world (Sarantakos, 1998, p. 53).

Figure 2. Theoretical framework.



From within an interpretivist theoretical perspective, a symbolic interactionist lens was applied for the purpose of investigating how the primary education pre-service teachers were prepared to teach Physical Education. Symbolic interactionism as a perspective “focuses on the human being and tries to understand human behaviour” (Charon, 1998, p. 12). The key assumptions of symbolic interaction are that “people transmit and receive symbolic communication when they socially interact, people create perceptions of each other and social settings, people largely act on their perceptions, and how people think about themselves and others is based on their interactions” (Neuman, 2000, p. 60). The symbolic interactionist lens was most appropriate due to the dynamics involved in relationships between partners and was applied for the purpose of investigating how the course partnerships contribute towards a hybrid space (Figure 2).

It is acknowledged that symbolic interactionism has shortcomings, as it is dated as a form of social phenomenology and there are multiple versions of this shifting theoretical paradigm. Nonetheless, for the purpose of this study, the interpretive version of symbolic interactionism (the merger of self and social interaction) has strengths in making directly accessible to the reader the worlds of each participant’s lived experience, their voices, emotions and actions (Denzin, 1992). For symbolic “interactionists like to use the ordinary language and interpretive theories that everyday people use” (Denzin, 1992, p. 23), thus symbolic interactionism is connected to constructivism.

4.1. Research methodology

“Case study research in education is conducted so that specific issues and problems of practice can be identified and explained” (Merriam, 1998, p. 38). For this educational study, research case study is the most appropriate means of answering the research questions (Merriam, 1998). Case study is “process-orientated, flexible and adaptable to changes in circumstances and an evolving context” (Anderson, 1990, p. 157), as is the nature of partnerships and third space. This study to a lesser degree will be a storytelling case study, as it will be a “narrative and descriptive account of an educational program which deserves to be told to interested audiences, after careful analysis” (Bassey, 1999, p. 58).

The case study was a primary PETE university course chosen for having strong partnerships with local schools and subsequently was awarded “Outstanding” for an academic year by Ofsted. Hence, it was the purpose of this study to investigate possible “hybrid space” course features. The researcher in “qualitative research is often the primary instrument for data collection and analysis” (Merriam, 1998, p. 7), noting the differences between what was planned and what actually occurred (Anderson, 1990).

4.2. Data generating strategies

The standard data gathering techniques used in qualitative research are participation in the setting, direct observation, in-depth interviewing and document review (Marshall & Rossman, 1994), as data gathering is about asking, watching and reviewing (Wolcott, 1992). The techniques used in this study are interpretive, subjective and flexible, with emphasis on discovery and exploration of meaning

Table 1. Research framework within which the specific methodology has been selected

Epistemology	Constructionism
Theoretical perspective	Interpretivism—Symbolic interactionism
Research methodology	Case study
Data generating methods	Interviews; semi-structured, Reflective journal, Observation, Document analysis

(Sarantakos, 1998). The methods engaged so as to enable precision of details within the chosen theoretical framework were semi-structured interviews, reflective journal, observations and document analysis (Table 1).

4.3. Participants and setting

The course was identified as an appropriate case study during online research when investigating PETE courses that qualified graduates to be generalist primary school teachers with a specialism in physical education. The researcher, who works in an Australian University (in the Faculty of Education) with expertise in Health and Physical Education, was unable to find a similar primary course within Australia. That is, a course specifically focusing on and specialising in primary education PETE did not exist in Australia (Lynch, 2013c). As the researcher had previously taught and been a school leader (Head) in an English curriculum school, it was decided that this previous experience would assist in the interpretive study adopting a symbolic interactionist lens.

The researcher initiated contact with the UK case study to enquire about the possibility of gathering data, which was agreed. The visits occurred over the period of approximately one month, during the beginning of the UK academic year's second term (January 2012), immediately following the Ofsted "Outstanding" 2010/2011 award, and follow-up research was conducted again in January of 2014. The researcher observed: open day for prospective students, which included course specific information from the course manager; interviews for prospective students; worked alongside course teacher educators (two lecturers and one technical assistant) and observed course lessons; consulted the two university lecturers involved in the PETE Primary course and conducted semi-structured interviews. These interviews were audio-taped, later transcribed and checked by the teacher educator participants. Meetings and discussions were held with the Initial Teacher Education (ITE) Course Leader, and the International Coordinator for the Faculty of Education. This involved gaining permission from the Education Course Leader to gather data. Observations also included visiting two local primary partner schools for half a day each and having discussions with teachers.

4.4. Course description

The university physical education teacher educators included the leaders, Simone (pseudonym) and Karen (pseudonym). Assisting the teacher educators with administrative tasks and managing equipment was a full-time physical education technical assistant, Tracey (pseudonym). Simone shared that they also have a sessional dance lecturer. The role of the physical education team was to design and implement teaching and learning opportunities to enable student teachers to develop personal skills, knowledge and expertise in delivering purposeful, relevant and appropriate physical education for children in the primary age range. Karen informed that this includes "a real breadth or range of experience", covering the national curriculum of England and Wales and the six activity areas within physical education: gymnastics, dance, games, athletics, outdoor education and swimming.

Simone summarised the course structure (Table 2) as:

The four years is a journey through various different elements, so as well as the nine specialist subject modules across the four years, there are professional studies modules; classroom management, differentiation, teaching styles and all of that. Then there's the foundation subject modules; History, Music, RE (Religious Education), all the foundation subjects. And core modules; English, Maths, Science and ICT as it stands at the moment.

Table 2. Course details and modules

Stage 1 (first academic year) details	Modules
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop the knowledge, skills and understanding to teach children Study modules for all four strands Undertake a three-week and five-week school placement across the primary age range, both with a fellow student In addition, there is an induction week to help you get to know other students and staff and the Students' Union arranges a number of social, cultural and sporting events All students are allocated a professional tutor to support you through the course 	Core English 1
	Learning and Teaching Mathematics 1
	Core Science 1
	Primary Education in Context
	The Use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in Subject Teach 1
	<i>*Primary Curriculum Subject Introduction 1a</i>
	<i>*Teaching and Learning through School Sport</i>
	<i>*Movement Knowledge Stage 1: Motor Development</i>
	Primary Curriculum Subject Specialist 1 Physical Education
	Home Based and School Based Work
Year 1 Paired School Experience	
Stage 2 (second academic year) details	Modules
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build on the foundations laid in year one in working towards achieving the standards for QTS Study all four strands in greater depth Have a longer school experience, in your preferred age phase, with the opportunity of an overseas placement 	Core English 2
	Learning and Teaching Mathematics 2
	Core Science 2
	Managing Teaching and Learning
	Primary Curriculum Subject Introduction 2a
	<i>*Movement Knowledge Stage 2: Gymnastics</i>
	<i>*Dance as an Art Form</i>
	<i>*The Outdoor Experience</i>
	Year Two School Experience
Stage 3 (third academic year) details	Modules
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue working towards achieving the standards for QTS Extend your expertise in all four strands, particularly in your subject specialism and special educational needs Do a seven-week school experience with increased responsibility outside your preferred age phase, with the opportunity of a London placement 	Core English 3
	Supporting Children's Learning
	The Use of ICT in Subject Teach 2
	Primary Curriculum Subject Introduction 2b
	<i>*Assessment in Physical Education Project</i>
	<i>*Special Education Needs (SEN) and PE</i>
	Year 3 School Experience
Stage 4 (fourth academic year) details	Modules
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Undertake a final assessment of the standards for QTS Gain support in obtaining your first post and preparing a Career Entry and Development Profile Extend your expertise in all four strands, including school management of PE Do an eleven-week school experience, with full responsibility, in your chosen age phase 	Learning and Teaching Mathematics 3
	Core Science 3
	Developing Teacher Professionalism
	Vision and Values in Primary Education
	<i>*Physical Education: Curriculum Leadership and Development</i>
	Year 4 School Experience

*Physical education modules.

4.5. Analysis of data

An interpretivist data analysis strategy was used for the purpose of this research study. An interpretivist is committed to hearing the stories of the participants, their perspectives of the world they experience (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998) and then communicating the context (Merriam, 1998). The researcher attempts to capture the stories by interpreting the culture of the school through reported

experiences, understandings and other collected data, resulting in a learning episode for both reader and researcher (Glesne, 1999). The narrative/descriptive analysis method has been deliberately chosen to illuminate the PETE course.

The analysis process involves using Wellington's six-stage (2000) simplified version of the "Constant Comparative Method for Analysing Qualitative Data" (Figure 3) and was described in a report. The constant comparative method of analysing qualitative data combines inductive category coding, with a simultaneous comparison of all units of meaning obtained (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As each new unit of meaning is selected for analysis, it is compared to all existing units and subsequently categorised and coded with similar units. If there are no similar units of meaning, a new category is formed (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Analysis is iterative (Dey, 1993) and the general stages include immersion, reflection, analysing, synthesising, returning and presenting. Relating to the similarities in context can develop more sophisticated descriptions and more powerful explanations (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

In an attempt to answer the research questions, units of meaning were formed, coded and categorised with other similar units. There was one researcher who conducted all interviews and analysis. The interviewer was an experienced researcher who was guided through the process by regular consultations with other experienced research colleagues. The process of analysis forms an audit trail and is diagrammatically represented in Figure 4 for the PETE hybrid space challenges.

Key themes were generated by employing a coding system during the analysis process. Table 3 illustrates a copy of a coded semi-structured interview transcript. A detailed description of findings from the analysis process is provided in presentation of findings.

Figure 3. General stages in making sense of qualitative data (Wellington, 2000, p. 141).

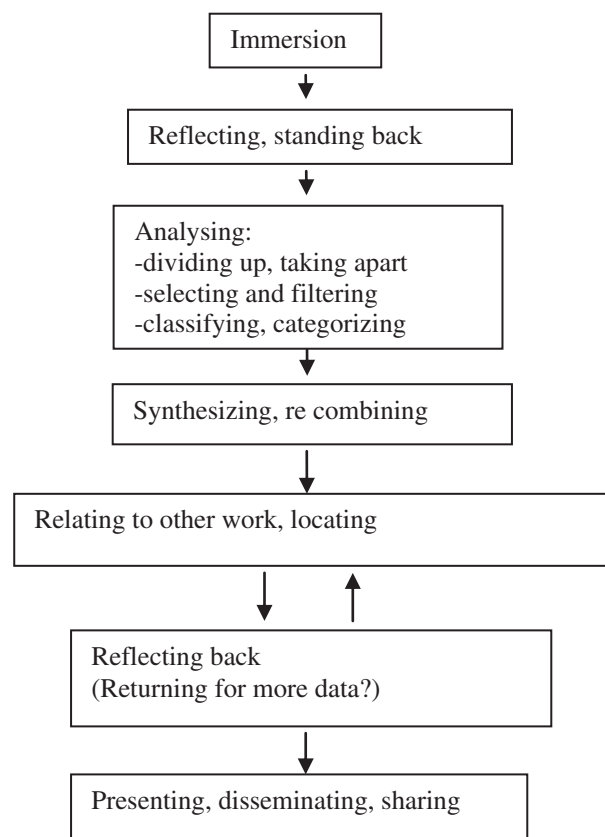


Table 3. Coding of interview transcript

Interview transcript	Coding
I In a nutshell what does the course involve? How would you briefly describe what it's about?	• Course purpose
P You are trained to be a primary school teacher, but you need a passion and interest in physical education. The four years is a journey through various different elements, so as well as the nine specialist subject modules across the four years, there are professional studies modules; class-room management, differentiation, teaching styles and all of that. Then there's the foundation subject modules; History, Music, RE (Religious Education), all the foundation subjects. And core modules; English, Maths, Science and ICT as it stands at the moment. It's like splitting it up into quarters, one quarter is specialist subject modules, one quarter is professional studies, one quarter are other subjects and one quarter is teaching placement. They are on teaching placement for quite a significant amount of time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Course structure • Course modules • Professional Studies • Foundation Subjects and Core modules • Specialist Subject modules • Teaching Placement

Figure 4. Description of data analysis for physical education teacher educators “hybrid space” challenges.

STAGE 1 *Data Generation, display and reflection.*

Participants	Data Generating Strategies
Primary Physical Education teacher educators	Semi-structured Interview Observations of lessons Document Analysis Reflective Journal
Primary Bachelor of Education Students	Observations of lessons Document Analysis Reflective Journal

STAGE 2 *Data coding and distillation.* Themes from data gathered.

- teachers lack of PE understanding	- teacher educator lack of PE understanding
- lack of PE training for primary teachers	- Initial Teacher Education non specialist students' weakness
- Initial Teacher Education negative attitude	- teachers interest in PE
- field experience in schools	- children's physical literacy
- teacher Planning Preparation and Assessment time (PPA)	- where to begin
- children learning in physical context	- de-skilling teachers
- PE coordinators advocating PE in schools	- swimming pool
- hockey field	- netball court
- Head teachers	- employment
- classroom teacher with PE specialism	- teacher qualifications for PE
- Funding	- Grants
- Outdoor Education camps	- UK School Sports Partnerships

STAGE 3 *Generation of key themes.* Data themes from stage 2 categorised.

- limitations of teacher understanding	- limited teacher education	- Initial Teacher Education interest
- teachers interest	- children's experience in schools	- qualified instructors
- university outdoor facilities		- funding

STAGE 4 *Story report and conclusions*

The major challenges for establishing and maintaining ‘hybrid space’ partnerships that teacher educators expressed were; a general lack of generalist teacher understanding about physical education (PE) importance and fundamentals, employment, lack of university outdoor facilities and funding. A lack of PE knowledge and understanding directly related to limited initial teacher education in PE. This often reflected poor attitudes towards PE by teachers, pre-service teachers and a lack of priority for employment by some Head teachers. It was accentuated that as a priority, graduates of the primary education physical education courses needed to advocate and assist in educating colleagues. A lack of university outdoor facilities was overcome through partnerships with schools which assisted with creating a possible hybrid space. Funding has become an issue of concern and a threat to one of the established partnerships; the residential outdoor education camp.

4.6. Verification and ethical issues

An ethical clearance was granted from the Monash University Ethics committee, where the researcher was employed in Australia. Also, permission from the UK university was granted for the recruitment of participants and research to be conducted. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured during the study as pseudonyms were assigned to protect the privacy of the participants.

A conscious effort was made by the researcher to be fair in the generation of data, in the interpretation of data, in the formation of theories and in the presentation of the data. All research is concerned with producing credible and dependable knowledge in an ethical manner. Being able to trust research results is especially important to professionals in applied fields, such as education, “in which practitioners intervene in people’s lives” (Merriam, 1998, p. 198). As the role of researcher was that of both author and instrument (Patton, 1990), bias was consciously avoided and if recognised, minimised. Fairness was achieved through constant peer debriefing, where experienced researchers critically reflected on the process of data generation and analysis during the research.

The process of analysis and audit trail (Figure 4) offers a thick description of “how data were collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made throughout the enquiry” (Merriam, 1998, p. 207), adding trustworthiness and credibility. Member checks involved soliciting informants’ views as to credibility of findings and these were utilised to confirm the plausibility and credibility of interpretations. Themes and conclusions were checked within the other data generating methods, for example, a finding during an observation was further explored during an interview, which as a result, strengthened the quality of the research. This addresses the issue of public disclosure of processes and gives the themes congruence and verisimilitude (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002).

Credibility of the study was achieved by employing triangulation, the process for using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning (Stake, 1994). The multiple perceptions were obtained from observing and interviewing a variety of participants. This was through interviews of both PE teacher educators, observations of classes and various forms of student feedback underpinning document analysis. The corroboration of evidence from a variety of sources increases the chances of accuracy (Creswell, 2002) and consistency, which in addition to being credible, also makes the study dependable. Dependability in qualitative research means that “rather than demanding that outsiders get the same results, a researcher wishes outsiders to concur that, given the data collected, the results make sense, they are consistent and dependable” (Merriam, 1998, p. 206).

The researcher’s prior experiences within the related field, referred to as the investigator’s position (Le Compte & Priessle, 1993), influenced the generation of data and analysis. The researcher had 15 years primary school teaching experience as a generalist classroom teacher, Health and Physical Education specialist and as a school leader in an English curriculum international school. Furthermore, the researcher had been working in university (Faculties of Education in primary HPE) as a lecturer and sessional lecturer for 10 years. Documentation of the researcher’s subjectivity was recorded in a reflective journal.

4.7. Limitations and delimitations of the study

Limitations are research issues that are beyond the researcher’s control, while delimitations are within the researcher’s control. Given that this research project was to investigate a possible hybrid space which includes pre-service teachers interacting with primary school children, it is a significant limitation that the researcher only spent one month in total observing the course and half a day in each of the two local schools. However, under the circumstances, the costs involved, limited funding, and only meeting the teacher educators and course leaders on first arrival in January 2012, without guarantee of teacher educators’ participation and cooperation with the research, this was a successful research project. It also built strong foundations for possible future collaborative work and research. The amount of data gathering that was achieved during the two visits was within the researcher’s control and was optimised. The data gathered during the observations were checked within the other data generating methods, especially the document analysis for credibility. The documents that were available to the researcher included the external examiner’s reports and the Ofsted inspection, which were used in support of data analysis. Also the official course documents were provided.

5. Findings

(1) Who are the various partners in this course and what are their roles?

Within the Bachelor of Education (BEd) primary PETE course, there were a number of partners who contributed to the learning environment: the two teacher educators, Simone (pseudonym) and

Karen (pseudonym); the full-time physical education technical assistant, Tracey (pseudonym); local and international primary schools; and community groups.

Relations developed with nearby partner schools were evidenced through observations by the researcher who spent half of a day in each of the two nearby primary schools. One public school had 362 children and the researcher was welcomed to the school by the head teacher and school community. He attended the weekly school assembly and observed PE lessons from various classes. Karen arranged the visit and lessons, so that the researcher could observe the children's skills and understanding. Karen advised that "we've got three schools within a five minute walking distance" that are often involved, this particular school visit was to one of the three schools.

Simone explains, "We are quite unique I think in that within the faculty we work with children in eight of our nine modules. I know other subjects never work with children at all, so our PE students often say to us "we're really lucky because we get lots of opportunities to work with children". Karen also shared "I think out of all the subject specialism PE has the most access to children, and in virtually every module we run, children are involved in some way".

The teacher educators' roles include implementing the modules in a developmentally appropriate, relevant and meaningful way. They are responsible for establishing and maintaining relations with schools and also to offer support to pre-service teachers. The university has course leaders who are dedicated to providing excellent support assisting pre-service teachers reach their full potential. There was evidence of a personal knowing between teacher educators and pre-service teachers, which was reinforced by Karen who believed that a course strength was that the lecturers "know the students (pre-service teachers), they're not just faces. We get to know our subject groups really well".

The course is structured so that every student is placed into a group with a Professional Tutor (an educational lecturer). Each year level then has a Year Group Coordinator and the student support services are overseen by the Academic and Professional Guidance Tutor, which is a managerial academic role. Simone was the Year One Coordinator and Karen was a Second Year Professional Tutor and a Third Year Professional Tutor. The support structure is explained by Karen:

My main role is lecturing but we have other responsibilities as well. One of these roles being a professional tutor. And they (pre-service teachers) stay with that professional tutor for their four years. So each tutor group is about 15 students and they could be a mixture of specialities (subject specialism). So currently I've got a second year professional tutor group and a third year professional tutor group and I move up with them, so by the time they get to the fourth year I would have been with them for four years. Part of that process is we have two formal meetings a year.

Another role the teacher educators have is to maintain or assist with developing international field experiences. International school experience opportunities available for students include Chile, Finland, Denmark, Czech Republic, The Gambia and Fredonia (New York), USA. These school experiences involve three weeks working in a school and approximately six weeks of travel. The teaching experiences are based in schools and countries where staff and students have been working for many years. The students are supervised by tutors from the university course and also a tutor from the host country who were trained at the university. The School of Education has a strong history in this field and has been successfully managing international teaching practices for over 20 years. This was advocated by Simone who adds, "Even when I was training, Finland was the main focus. It was the PE lecturers at the time actually that developed the link with Finland, so that was really positive for us".

International schools collaborate through their country's partner institution. Karen explains how this occurs in practice:

So for example I run the Denmark placement, so I would take my group of six students out to Denmark at Easter, we do an orientation week with them (pre-service teachers) with me there, so that I know that they can travel on the transport and they know where their schools are, and they've made links with the university. Then I come back and they stay and go into school and do their six weeks placement, and the tutor from the partner institution goes in and observes them, looks at their files, checking they are doing what they are supposed to be doing, giving advice and support. Then the penultimate week I go back out there and go in and observe.

The other partners within the course include as already mentioned, primary schools and community groups. The roles of the schools are to provide field experience where the pre-service teachers spend their block placement time. Field experience for pre-service teachers is discussed by Simone; "they'll go into a class, the school will know they are specialists in PE but how they use the student can vary a great deal. In the past we've tried to look at it and engineer it so that schools who are good at PE get our placements. It's just proved impractical in order for them (pre-service teachers) to get a variety of schools".

The pre-service teachers also provide PE lessons for children in various class groups who visit the PE centre, which is a hall located near the university. Karen explains that "we've got some local schools that will bring children into our lectures, either for Simone and I to teach them and our students to watch, or for the university students to get involved and pair up with the children and run things, or to plan their own schemes of work to implement with the children". Simone explains that "Karen and I will look at what we are teaching each term and we'll plot out which sessions we may want to have children in". Simone gave the example of where the last term they organised to have children in every week, where the teacher educators either "lead the teaching but also we bring the students (pre-service teachers) in. So at times they (children) are working one to one with an adult, they (pre-service teachers) might not be qualified but we oversee everything and check it's all safe and appropriate". Simone shared that the class teacher comes with the class "and often teaching assistants and sometimes parents as well". Tracey organises the times and days with the various schools, which works well. Simone shared that for dancing they had each year level progressively attend; "right through from year 1 to year 6 over the six weeks. So although they're not getting to know all the children, they get to see the progression of dance through the curriculum". In another module, Karen used the same group of Year Two children for gymnastics over five weeks and the "parents of the students (children) are invited in on the last day".

Another role both the university and schools play is sharing facilities. Simone shares the experiences of one particular school:

One of the schools their hall is tiny and they have 30 children, so they have to break it (PE lessons) into three sessions of PE, they bring 10 children in at a time. So when they come up to our hall, which to them is a huge space, their children get a lot from it, using all the apparatus and equipment that we have got as well, so it's a win-win situation really for both of us.

This is reciprocated by the schools. This sharing of facilities and working in partnership was observed by the researcher and given importance by Simone.

Teachers within partner schools assist Simone in conducting practice interviews for fourth-year pre-service teachers. Also, within schools on a larger scale, head teachers have a role in deciding who they employ within the school to coordinate physical education. Karen shares "It is the Head's ultimate responsibility. Anyone going into primary school will have a teaching qualification (classroom teacher) and it is assumed they will take PE, even if they've only had six hours training". As Simone affirms "Yes, and it doesn't always have to be a qualified teacher, so sometimes head teachers will say this person is a gymnastics coach, we're going to get them in. So they might not have qualified teacher status (QTS) but they have qualifications in gymnastics".

The last category of course partnership is organisations within the community. These groups include a residential outdoor education centre, scout and brownie groups, a swimming centre and amateur swimming association. Karen informed the role of the residential outdoor education centre which is 20 minutes drive from the university; “We have some outdoor education module days where the children will come to the outdoor adventure centre and the students (pre-service teachers) run activities for the children”. Karen further explained, “We go in March when it is closed to the public and there’s dormitories and we stay there for the week”. In the past, this week has been totally funded by the university, including the bus for the children to come and participate on the Friday. Simone explains, “They (pre-service teachers) are participants for four of the five days, and then on the fifth day when the children come in they then share what they have learnt and facilitate positive experiences for the children”. The instructors from the camp oversee the activities, as Simone confirms “it wasn’t just our students, the camp staff were over seeing everything and checking everything; helmets and harnesses were on correctly”. Approximately, 50 children from the local primary school usually attend at no cost. Simone confirms “ever since we’ve done it, it’s been free”. Last year it coincided with the half term holidays, Simone adds “so we invited the local scout groups and brownie groups”, where approximately 40 children attended.

The university does not have a swimming pool; Karen shares “we do very little swimming with our PE specialists and we’d like to do a whole module with them”. The teacher educators work collaboratively with the Amateur Swimming Association who teach “a basic one and a half day course”. Karen confirmed that the university hires the swimming pool for this and the pre-service teachers travel using public transport. One of the benefits of partnerships is the sharing of facilities and equipment.

(2) What are the perceived benefits of having partnerships operate within a university course?

After inspection during the 2010/2011 academic year, the course was awarded “Outstanding” by the England and Wales Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted). The Ofsted Initial Teacher Education report states, “There are increasingly innovative opportunities for trainees to gain diverse, high quality teaching experiences in other parts of the United Kingdom or on international placements”. This inspection was thorough and involved investigating school placements, module plans and implementation at university and schools, and interviews with ex-students. Simone explains this process:

We had six weeks’ notice and they came for a week and there were five or six inspectors. They were looking at all of Primary provisions, not just specifically at the BEd (PE) course, but the whole of the BEd course. They spent time interviewing us as tutors and interviewing our students from each of the 4 years, interviewing the post grad students doing the PGCE, and spent time working with our partner schools. They went into some of our cluster schools to get a good representation, they spoke with associate lecturers and teachers there. Also watched students teach in the schools and looked at our grading of them. It was quite intensive.

A national student survey completed by the fourth-year students offers a rating which also evidenced benefits of the course. “Unistats” is an independent website offering a range of statistics on university courses from around the UK. A Key Information Set (KIS) is an official overview of comparable courses for prospective students. A synopsis of the results from the fourth-year students is provided in Table 4:

Simone commented that “We have very positive feedback, we have average size of 22 per year, so that at any one time we have 90–100 students specialising in Physical Education. At the end of each module they fill in a module evaluation, so we as part of our annual review and planning process look at the evaluations of the students. They’re always very positive.”

The course external examiner acknowledged the benefits of having strong professional relationships with local schools and the report stated:

The range of modules and their assessments are pitched at appropriate levels and meet the needs and requirements of students at their respective stages of training. A very positive

Table 4. Student survey for BEd (Hons) Primary (Physical Education) course

Overall, students were satisfied with the quality of the course	94%
Students agreed that staff made the subjects interesting	91%
Students agreed that staff are good at explaining things	99%
Students agreed they got sufficient advice and support	87%
Students in work/study six months after finishing	90%

feature of the modules is the amount of contact that students have with pupils (in both the school and university setting).

Simone commented that the teachers also found the possible hybrid spaces for learning to be beneficial:

They value it as well, they see it as an opportunity to get CPD (Continuing Professional Development). From experience they often say ‘That was brilliant, I never thought of doing that, I’m going to try do that’ and things like this. So it is good and helpful to them too. But also they (the classroom teacher) get to sit and watch and assess their children.

Furthermore, Simone shared that “the children get a lot from it” as they get access to expertise, space and equipment that they may otherwise not have. The teacher educators shared that parents also benefit from the possible hybrid spaces who at times are invited up to observe the lessons.

Document analysis from external examiner reports evidenced that the team was consistently acknowledged for the coherence of the course and the quality of their feedback. Comments from the external examiner’s report included:

The course offers a quite unique and very special experience for the trainee teacher who is specialising in physical education. The commitment of the subject leader and the teaching team is palpable and the time afforded to the subject is in excess of many other “specialist” courses that I am aware of around the country ... Indeed, (in my view) this subject area could and should be showcased as a best-practice example.

The BEd PETE course is also popular amongst prospective students. Simone shares, “We certainly get a huge number of applicants”, and Karen informed, “we get roughly 200 people apply each year and about 80 people being interviewed and roughly 35 places being offered for 20–25 people actually starting the course each year”. Observations by the researcher during interviews for prospective students confirmed the large number of applicants and course interest.

(3) What do primary physical education teacher educators perceive as possible “hybrid space” challenges?

A “lack of understanding” of physical education amongst generalist teachers and fellow teacher educators was identified as a challenge to overcome. Official course documentation explaining the philosophy of the course stated, “The physical education team recognise that some non specialist trainees embarking on a course of initial teacher education have significant weaknesses in, and negative attitudes towards the subject”. Karen asserts:

I think the main barrier is that the vast majority of primary school teachers don’t understand what physical education is. Generally speaking most primary school teachers will have had between 10–20 h of physical education input during their initial teacher training (this course has 290 h). And they may have missed some of those sessions, they may have suffered them in silence and they just don’t understand what it is. They think it is coaching a sports team, and they don’t understand the value for the individual child. The holistic nature of it, they don’t understand that each child is on their own physical literacy journey and they’re supposed to be guiding those children.

Simone supported this belief and specifically referred to field experience: “Some classroom teachers lack confidence and therefore hand it (PE) over to them (pre-service teachers) straight away. So they develop whilst on their feet but not by watching more experienced teachers”. Furthermore, both teacher educators considered this challenge to be reinforced by the Planning Preparation and Assessment time (PPA) in primary schools, introduced approximately 10 years ago. Many schools will use sports coaches to take the class for PE to provide for teachers PPA time, but as Karen stated “it is not sound educational practice” and as Simone shared “is de-skilling the teachers” as they “are not seeing the children in a physical context”. Simone gave the example of her husband: “he is a primary school teacher who has specialised in physical education. He can’t teach it, he wants to teach it but their school has bought into the coaches coming in”. This is why the teacher educators perceived the course as a priority as Karen advocates: “get them [PE specialists] working with their colleagues and having a real effect on the whole school”.

Both teacher educators were experienced school teachers. Simone’s teaching experience included:

Graduated with first class honours and went to teach in primary schools in Exeter. Taught for a number of years, then family came along, when getting back into teaching I decided to look into part-time lecturing.

After graduating, Karen “taught girls PE in a private school for four years, then moved house, and consequently went into the state sector. I did two years teaching girls physical education in secondary, I also did a little English and History too, they were second subjects”. After a change of career into business (financial services), Karen returned as a PE specialist in a private primary school. Here, she taught “two to seven year olds, and I was there for 16–17 years. And that’s where I learnt everything about primary physical education”.

The university official documents proclaim “All of our tutors come from teaching backgrounds bringing years of experience to help guide you into professional practice”. This was evidenced within this course. Simone and Karen’s teaching experience is used to model good teaching practice and to build relations with nearby schools. Simone shares:

one of the reasons we’ve been determined to bring children into our modules is so that we can teach the children and they (pre-service teachers) can at least see us teaching. So it also gives the students of teaching not just in schools but here on campus too.

Another challenge was identified as the lack of facilities on the university campus. As Karen expressed:

Our main problem here is a lack of outdoor space, we don’t have an official outdoor space, so to go outside and play netball or hockey we would have to go to one of the local schools or hire a facility, which has all sorts of implications and we don’t have access to a swimming pool.

Although Simone remarked that the specific PE specialist course is not for all Primary Education students, but rather “you need a passion and interest in physical education”. It was also accentuated during data gathering that the graduates were as Simone stated: “not going to be PE teachers, they are primary school teachers with a specialism in physical education”, giving importance to being a primary classroom teacher, qualified to teach all areas of the curriculum, with a good understanding of the whole child.

Also, value was given to the responsibilities of head teachers within primary schools. Their decisions can also create challenges as they choose who to employ to teach PE and what previous experience and qualifications they have. Simone suggests “We say that to our PE students as well. Don’t assume you’re going to walk straight into the job. There maybe someone already doing the job who doesn’t have a background in physical education”.

Another major challenge identified by the teacher educators was funding. Simone was concerned that funding for the residential outdoor education camp may be terminated and that the pre-service teachers who “are already paying their tuition fees” may be forced to contribute or fund raise. Karen spoke of the UK School Sports Partnership model, which aligned primary schools with secondary to offer support for sport. “So this whole thing is called a partnership, you’ve probably got eight secondary schools and 40 primary schools and it worked really well.” Funding ceased and it has collapsed in most areas. Simone and Karen also expressed the tightening of research grants within universities since the global financial crisis. The final research question is analytical.

(4) What hybrid space features does this course evidence?

Course features that espouse development towards a hybrid space (cf. Figure 1, p. 10) include school/university partnerships, integration through relationships, blended theory and practice, genuine relationships and shared belief, stakeholder equal worth and synergy. The partnerships between the university, schools and community groups were evidenced within the overall planning and course schemes of work and as addressed in question one.

Furthermore, partnerships have been long lasting and are supported by course sustainability. Researcher time in the field was enough to observe the genuine professional relationships and shared belief, equal worth and synergy of stakeholders. This was discussed by the teacher educators during the interviews, where they overcome flaws and difficulties in field experience by deliberately involving children from local primary schools in almost all modules of work. This education opportunity is reciprocated by the schools who contributed to the Ofsted review, allow the university to use sporting facilities and teachers assist Simone in conducting practice interviews for fourth-year pre-service teachers.

The visits to the schools were pertinent in observing the mutually respectful relationship between teacher educators and staff members. Karen contacted both schools the day before to ask if it was possible to visit with the researcher from Australia. The verbal greetings and body language of the school’s staff members were genuine and welcoming. The head teacher in one school, who was busily preparing a few final notes before school assembly, found the time to discuss features of the school and kindly invited both the teacher educator and researcher to assembly. The teachers from different year levels made the effort to teach some PE in the afternoon, so the researcher could observe the level of the children and the various pedagogies they implemented. Furthermore, they were not threatened by the experience. In some instances, the lessons were adopted from PE classes they had observed from pre-service teachers and teacher educator lessons. There was genuine mutual respect for the teacher educators’ knowledge and teachers’ and school staff’s expertise. There was a common goal of enabling the best opportunity for the children and the atmosphere was non-threatening, which subsequently promoted synergy. An outsider could have easily considered Karen to be a member of both schools’ staff.

Another pertinent contributing feature is the hall that formed the site for the PE specialism course, the PE centre. The hall is used by the teacher educators for lectures/tutorials and practicals with an overhead projector and seating, along with a large timber floor space and equipment storage. It is important to note that the hall is not located within the university grounds. Rather, it is situated half way between the university grounds and the schools and acted as a bridge between the university and the schools, a physical and metaphorical meeting place where all stakeholders were welcome, a third space and possibly a hybrid space.

6. Discussion

Data suggests that it is a strong possibility that a hybrid space exists within this course. However, determining a definite answer and the degree to which a hybrid space appears would require longer time and research into the case study. What can be determined is that if the course has not yet developed a hybrid space they certainly appear to be in the process of creating one (Figure 1). Nonetheless, the BEd primary PETE course is evidenced as being high quality according to students, unique by lecturers, coherent and best-practice by external examiners, popular amongst prospective students and awarded “Outstanding” by the England and Wales Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted).

One recurring enabler of hybrid space features was previous teaching experience of teacher educators. This is supported by Murray who states that English teacher education primary courses consist of teacher educators from teaching backgrounds (2010). Karen and Simone perceived themselves as teachers and the pre-service teachers as teachers (with a specialism in PE). What this enables is an environment where the majority of stakeholders are on an equal status, as teachers. This was observed by the natural and comfortable disposition teacher educators had around the school and reciprocally, teachers and staff had with them. There was also a personal knowing between the teacher educators and the pre-service teachers, accentuated by the inclusive and encouraging pastoral care structure (professional tutor). Hence, within this case study previous teaching experience does seem significant in integrating various teacher educator roles and establishing and sustaining partnerships.

Darling-Hammond (2006) identifies three common elements in successful courses where the theory meets the practice; data in this case study evidence all three.

(1) Coherence and integration

The course work “is carefully sequenced based on a strong theory of learning to teach; courses are designed to intersect with each other, are aggregated into a well-understood landscape of learning, and are tightly interwoven with the advisement process and students’ work in schools” (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 7). The teacher educators deliberately adopted responsibility in providing the pre-service teachers with practical and theoretical preparation, which was specifically tailored to the individual module for that semester and the context for the partnering school/s. Furthermore, the teacher educators “supervise and advise teacher candidates and sometimes even teach children and teachers in placement schools, bringing together these disparate course elements through an integration of roles” (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 7).

(2) Extensive, well-supervised clinical experience linked to course work using pedagogies that link theory and practice

The pre-service teachers participate in practical and real experiences with course work and are therefore better able to understand theory, apply the concepts and support student learning (Baumgartner, Koerner, & Rust, 2002; Denton, 1982). As argued by Darling-Hammond, “no amount of course work can, by itself, counteract the powerful experiential lessons that shape what teachers actually do” (2006, p. 9). The teacher educators were experienced teachers, which resulted in confidence and competence. They were in a familiar environment in schools and enjoyed their time amongst other educators.

(3) New relationships with schools

Relationships involve unique partnership contexts, challenges and tensions (Martin et al., 2011). Darling-Hammond suggests that “universities must engage ever more closely with schools in a mutual transformation agenda, with all of the struggle and messiness that implies”. (2006, p. 3). The messiness did seem to be limited by the teacher educators and their ability to perceive themselves as teachers, which immediately enabled egalitarianism. The hall being situated away from the university also assisted in a third space, place of meeting. Finally, Tracey’s role was to liaise amongst the schools which assisted with administration. This enabled Karen and Simone to focus on teaching and enabled the partnerships to be manageable. Therefore, it could be argued that a “non hierarchical interplay between academic, practitioner and community expertise” (Zeichner, 2010, p. 89), that is a “hybrid space” was created by the teacher educators Simone and Karen, with the assistance of Tracey.

Challenges for hybrid spaces identified by the teacher educators included a general lack of understanding amongst educationalists (generalist teachers) of the importance of PE. However, while this was a challenge, it was also a “strength” in the partnerships enabling the teachers and children to perceive the learning opportunities as meaningful and worthwhile. Hence, the collaborations promoted “health literacy” within communities; advocated enjoyment associated with learning in, through and about

movement; and enabled equity in education (Lynch, 2013b). Finally, the course had been generously funded in the past which Zeichner (2010) contends, most good examples of hybrid spaces are supported with external funding in some way.

6.1. Insights into dynamics

The purpose of this study was to give insights into various dynamics of this award winning programme. Careful analysis of data and further reflection suggest that the community connections do offer strong possibilities for course quality improvement, and therefore a strengths-based approach in Health and Physical Education is conceivable (Macdonald, 2013). There are at times difficulties in this process (Douglas, 2014); however, complexities appear to be minimised when the relationships are developed over a sustained period of time, where trust is built between stakeholders and not forced. Strength of partnerships is increased when the university lecturers are experienced, successful teachers and school leaders with the ability to act as hybrid teacher educators. If higher education is genuine in attempts at course improvement, then intake numbers of pre-service teachers needs to be taken into consideration with regards to the quality of pastoral care.

Within this context, the course was developmentally appropriate for teaching children PE in the primary school, and therefore perceived as very relevant by all stakeholders. It also appeared to supplement and extend the various schools' PE learning opportunities and not saturate or compete with existing curriculum. Head teachers had an important role in leading and determining the PE implementation within their school, deciding how this would be enacted and by whom. Finally, funding was made available for this course and was a necessary ingredient for initiating and maintaining partnerships.

7. Conclusion

This study investigated a possible example of a hybrid space in a teacher education course, identified as having strong partnerships with local schools and subsequently was awarded "Outstanding" for an academic year by Ofsted. Hence, it was the purpose of this study to investigate possible "hybrid space" course features (cf. Figure 1, p. 10).

Such partnerships may involve a change in beliefs for some teacher educators, often those who are perceived as theoretical experts. Furthermore, a hybrid space may be a foreign teaching and learning process for some, only familiar with the "application of theory" model. It is commonly acknowledged that partnerships are also socially complex. However, education departments globally are advocating the change in efforts to strengthen teacher education. This shift has appeared to be problematic for many teacher educators as they are not familiar with the process and there is limited research into PETE. Hence, this research is significant as it explores a successful BEd primary PETE course in the UK and "takes into account the settings where teacher education learning happens" (Douglas, 2014, p. 6). Through sharing the data gathered: regarding course partners and roles, the perceived university benefits, university challenges and identification of hybrid space features, this study contributes to the knowledge within this field.

The findings did suggest within this context that there were connections between having teacher educators with teaching experience in primary schools and the partnerships established. The teacher educators were also confident and competent with the children aged 5–11 years and felt comfortable working in, with and amongst primary school educators and communities. The various stakeholders perceived themselves as "teachers" working together in the best interest of the children.

Funding supported the innovative possible hybrid space and there was also a full-time administrative position within the department, Tracey, who played a substantial role in partnership establishment and administrative tasks that can be cumbersome. Finally, this study is significant as it assists teacher educators from around the world, challenged to rethink their connections between university courses and school field experiences, through illustrating a highly successful example.

Supplementary material

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