



2014 AIESEP Position Statement on Physical Education Teacher Education

Background

There has been inadequate attention to the questions of what constitutes quality in physical education and in physical education teacher education (PETE). Such questions include what we know about those charged with educating physical education teachers, what challenges are faced by the PETE community and how such challenges might be addressed. The purpose of the 2013 AIESEP Specialist Seminar was to bring together experts in physical education teacher education and related disciplines with a view to creating a space for reflection and discussion on quality physical education and quality PETE. Discussions centred on how to adapt to changing educational and societal demands while ensuring quality physical education at each level of schooling. In various recent political statements, declarations and reports the importance of quality PETE has been emphasized. However, it is important that the views of the PETE community, those charged with ensuring quality in physical education and PETE, are also documented and available to inform policy.

The 2013 AIESEP Specialist Seminar took place at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland, on September 12th-14th, 2013. The theme of the seminar was *The Role of Physical Education Teacher Education in Ensuring Quality Physical Education in the Classroom*. A total of 53 participants from 11 countries (Belgium, Cyprus, Finland, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Luxemburg, New Zealand, Switzerland, the UK and the USA) took part in the seminar. Participants included professors, school teachers, university lecturers and PhD students, all specialising in physical education teaching and teacher education.

Those attending were divided into six working groups, which met for discussion at five scheduled times during the seminar. Each group was given a focus according to the expertise of those who constituted the group. The groups' foci were

- the preparation of those who facilitate physical activity, physical education and purposeful play in early years settings;
- the preparation of classroom teachers to teach quality physical education;
- the overlapping learning outcomes between health education and physical education; and
- the preparation of physical education specialists for the secondary school setting.

Preparatory readings and guiding questions were circulated in advance of the seminar in order to facilitate discussion. The guiding questions were as follows:

- What is quality physical education and what dispositions, skills and supports do teachers need in order to ensure the quality of their teaching?
- What currently informs the core curriculum, aims and content of physical education studies in the education of physical education specialist teachers, classroom teachers and kindergarten teachers?
- How do we ensure physical education teacher education remains current and informed by the realities faced by teachers in schools?
- How should the recent increased emphasis on the promotion of physical activity and health within and beyond the school impact the structure and content of physical education teacher education?
- What do we know about the preparation of teacher educators and what should we know about the preparation and professional development of teacher educators?
- What do seminar participants see as the main challenges facing PETE across the various levels (early childhood, primary, secondary) and how might these be addressed?

Groups were encouraged to use their discretion regarding which guiding questions (if any) they chose to explore. Each group leader was then asked to formulate a group statement. These group statements formed the basis of the AIESEP Position Statement which now follows.

Position Statement

AIESSEP defines **quality physical education**, at any level, as that which concerns the physical, affective, social and cognitive development of young people, exposing them to positive individual and collective learning experiences where they develop knowledge, skills and dispositions that allow them to be informed and responsible decision makers relative to engagement in physical activity and sport in their lives.

AIESSEP believes that **quality physical education teacher education** programmes are those where graduate teachers are lifelong learners who possess a deep knowledge of the subject area and a set of reflective, pedagogical and didactic skills and professional dispositions that allow them to design and deliver quality physical education programmes for all students. Graduates should be ethical, caring, critical, innovative, reflective, collaborative and communicative professionals who advocate for students and quality physical education.

Regarding the **early years** of children's lives, AIESSEP acknowledges that settings in which very young children are educated represent unique environments for which practitioners/teachers must be carefully prepared. Ensuring the provision of quality learning experiences for this age group involves an extra level of complexity given the range of developmental stages encountered among children in the setting and the variety of settings involved (houses, crèches, schools, etc.). There is a need for an accepted, all-encompassing definition for purposeful play/physical education/physical activity for this age group, and standardisation in qualifications required for practice in early years settings.

AIESSEP contends that physical education modules should be mandatory for all **pre-service classroom teachers**. These courses should allow them opportunities to understand the important role and contribution of motivated and enthusiastic teachers of primary physical education. Further engagement in physical education related content should be undertaken by all pre-service classroom teachers through integrated modules where physical education is linked with other subjects and consideration is given to the holistic development of the child. Allocation of time for treatment of content and pedagogy needs careful attention to ensure that pre-service classroom teachers can engage meaningfully with physical education. It is important that time for physical education, and for the practice of teaching physical education, is allocated in each year of a programme.

AIESEP acknowledges the overlapping learning outcomes between physical education and health education and the increasing pressure on physical education to respond to concerns regarding the physical activity levels of young people. AIESEP proposes that, in addition to its other learning outcomes, physical education can, and should, contribute to **health goals** but the focus of physical education in the promotion of physically active lifestyles should be about meaningful, pleasurable, and culturally relevant engagement of young people in physical activity and sport that contributes to their emotional, social and physical wellbeing.

AIESEP believes that physical education teacher educators have the required expertise to contribute to the facilitation of solutions to existing **challenges** such as the following:

- How to network effectively within and across the teacher education community to increase the status and value attributed to physical education within colleges and universities, relative to other subjects, and to become more competitive for research funding.
- How to assess the ability of programmes to graduate students who have an appropriate level of content knowledge and the ability to understand pedagogical content knowledge in context.
- How to respond appropriately to changing societal trends and government priorities while maintaining the quality and focus of physical education teacher education programmes.
- How to ensure physical education teacher educators are themselves lifelong learners, research active and critically engaged with changes in contemporary society, the needs and interests of young people and the realities of work in schools.
- How to ensure teacher educators are open to revising their programmes so that graduates possess skills which are relevant to contemporary society and adequate resilience to be change agents in their professional practice.

AIESEP maintains that it is incumbent upon physical education teacher educators to remain connected to teachers and schools. Effective physical education teacher education requires the creation of a series of systematic and sustainable collaborations that support the development of the subject of physical education and the work of physical education teachers in schools. The various school realities and contexts should

be to the forefront in the programme planning undertaken by teacher educators. A central aspect of this work is to conduct research with teachers and students in schools.

AIESEP questions the evidence base of aspects of physical education teacher education programmes and challenges the physical education teacher education community to engage in relevant, quality research which will inform programmes in the field. AIESEP suggests the following **research agenda**:

- Identify effective or impactful physical education teacher education practices that support students of physical education in their professional learning.
- Explore the values and understandings of physical education teacher education students, how these change over time, and in what ways PETE is positively impacting the values and dispositions of our students.
- Examine the pedagogies of physical education teacher education and what students are learning as a result of our pedagogies.
- Explore the skills, knowledge and dispositions of physical education teacher educators, as well as the nature of their work and their workplaces (e.g. Who are they? What is their knowledge base? How are they selected? How are they mentored? What are their dispositions/value orientations and how do these manifest themselves in programme content/delivery? Are they reflective professionals? What are their career trajectories? What are the realities of being a teacher educator?).

In conclusion, AIESEP stresses the need for the PETE community to work collaboratively with the broader community of teacher education scholars towards the achievement of quality in their programmes. AIESEP encourages the PETE community to continually look inward at what physical education teacher educators and their programmes are influenced by, and what they should be influenced by, and to continually look outward at the influential role physical education teacher education does and should play in broader society.