

# Rethinking teacher education curriculum in Japan: the perception of physical education teachers

Kakazu Kengo (Okinawa University, Japan)

Iwata Shotaro (Hiroshima University, Japan)

## INTRODUCTION

### Background : Context for Teacher Education Curriculum in Japan

- Japan enacted a new teacher training curriculum in 2019 (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2019). This training curriculum requires student teachers (STs) to acquire educational content that meets the needs of communities and school and demonstrates the autonomy and originality of the university.

### Literature Review

- International scholars have found that practicum is a highly valued element of teacher training and education, especially because it serves as a bridge between theory and practice (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Zhao & Zhang, 2017). In this connection, researchers have substantially studied the integration of theory and practice in teacher education programmes (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Grubbs, 2017). It has also been identified that quality teachers depend on the quality of teacher education and that it is related to teachers' knowledge and skills.
- On the contrary, numerous researchers highlight the difficulties inherent in bridging theory and practice (Allsopp et al., 2006; Zeichner, 2006). Some critics posit that most teacher education programmes fail to address how STs can connect the knowledge they gain from practicum to the theory they are taught (McDevitt & Kurihara, 2017).
- Physical education teacher education (PETE) is no exception, and research is being conducted from the same viewpoint. Considering that STs are the future professionals who will provide quality physical education (PE) to all students, improving the quality of the PETE programme will lead to the training of professionals who can practise quality PE. Most importantly, the opinions of in-service teachers in any sort of teacher education curriculum reform must also be considered.

### Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the concepts of learning to teach presented by Feiman-Nemser (2008).

- Learning to think like a teacher  
This applies critical thinking to one's own beliefs, pedagogical thinking, reflecting on experience and adjusting practice.
- Learning to know like a teacher  
This includes various kinds of knowledge related to teaching practice, such as curriculum, subject matter and students.
- Learning to feel like a teacher  
This is related to the formation of various educational emotions and identity as a teacher.
- Learning to act like a teacher  
The teacher constantly absorbs new information and uses it to decide their next moves, especially when faced with unpredictable classroom situations.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study aims to elucidate the perception of PE teachers on the necessities for PE teaching and the minimum knowledge that needs to be acquired in PETE programmes.

- What do PE teachers consider important in the practice of PE?
- What do PE teachers consider an important knowledge to acquire at PETE programmes in order to teach PE effectively?

## METHOD

### Participants

- The participants of the study included 165 Japanese secondary-level PE teachers. The analysis was conducted on 151 respondents, excluding the six who had incomplete responses.

### Data Collection and Analysis

- The questionnaire comprises 35 closed items. This includes 'understanding of the national curriculum' and 'understanding and teaching method of the content of track and field'.
- The questions were developed considering previous research and the new syllabus (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2019) and were internally validated by several teacher educators before the approval of the final version.
- PE teachers were asked to rate various factors related to PE teaching, particularly, the practical aspects of PE, using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Not At All Important*) to 5 (*Very Important*).
- Because we were interested in the perception of minimum knowledge that needs to be acquired by the PE teacher in PETE programmes, simple tabulation was used in order to focus on the main trend of the findings.
- The analysis was conducted in three phases under the assumption that 1 and 2 represented 'not important', 4 and 5 represented 'important' and 3 represented 'neither'.

## RESULTS

### What do PE teachers consider important in the practice of PE?

The results revealed that PE teachers believed 'lesson planning', 'creating a good classroom atmosphere', 'utilizing assessment methods', 'motivating students', 'asking questions' and 'providing instructions' to be necessities in PE classes. → PE teachers believe that knowledge of the 'goal-content-method-assessment' of PE is important, such as curriculum, subjects and students.

On the contrary, PE teachers considered an 'understanding of swimming', 'an understanding of the basic structure of a lesson plan', 'understanding of trends in teacher research', 'creating a lesson plan that assumed a PE practice' and 'lesson planning based on trends in teacher research' inconsequential to teaching PE.

**TABLE 1** Top five items with the highest number of responses in each phase

	Item	Respondents	%
Important	Lesson planning	147	97.4
	Asking questions	145	96.0
	Creating a good classroom atmosphere	145	96.0
	Utilizing assessment methods	143	94.7
	Motivating students	143	94.7
Neither	Providing instructions	143	94.7
	Lesson planning based on trends in teacher research	32	21.2
	Understanding of physical education theory	26	17.2
	Understanding of dance	23	15.2
	Understanding of cross-curriculum	23	15.2
Not important	Enhancement of language activities	23	15.2
	Understanding of swimming	7	4.6
	Understanding of the basic structure of a lesson plan	7	4.6
	Understanding of the trends in teacher research	6	4.0
	Creating a lesson plan that assumed a PE practice	5	3.3
	Lesson planning based on trends in teacher research	5	3.3

### What do PE teachers consider an important knowledge to acquire at PETE programmes in order to teach PE effectively?

PE teachers considered 'understanding of the national curriculum', 'providing instructions', 'creating a good classroom atmosphere', 'motivating students' and 'lesson planning' the minimum knowledge that needs to be acquired in PE teacher education programmes. This result corresponds to what they consider important in the practice of PE.

**TABLE 2** Top five 'most important' responses

Item	Respondents	%
Understanding of the national curriculum	57	43.5
Providing instructions	52	39.7
Creating a good classroom atmosphere	51	38.9
Motivating students	43	32.8
Lesson planning	37	28.2

## CONCLUSION

Although practical experience tends to draw the most attention in teacher education reform, we believe that our study has demonstrated that theory can play such a role. Moreover, the findings of this study can result in improvements in the PETE programmes and subsequently provide students with more quality PE classes.

## REFERENCES

- Allsopp, D. H., DeMarie, D., Alvarez-McHatten, P., & Doone, E. (2006). "Bridging the Gap Between Theory and Practice: Connecting Courses with Field Experiences." *Teacher Education Quarterly* 33 (1): 19–35.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2006). "Constructing 21st-century Teacher Education." *Journal of Teacher Education* 57 (3): 300–314.
- Feiman-Nemser, S. (2008). "Teacher Learning: How Do Teachers Learn to Teach?" In *Handbook of Research on Teacher Education: Enduring Questions in Changing Contexts*, edited by Marilyn Cochran-Smith, Sharon Feiman-Nemser, D. John McIntyre and Kelly E. Demers, 697–705. New York: Routledge.
- Grubbs, S. J. (2017). "Perceptions of Teaching Practicums from Thai Students in 4-year and 5-year Teacher Education Programs." *Teacher Education & Practice* 30 (1): 177–193.
- McDevitt, S. E., & Kurihara, M. (2017). "Bridging Funds of Knowledge in Learning to Teach: The Story of a Japanese Pre-service Teacher's Authentic Teaching Practicum Experience." *Journal of Thought* 51 (3–4): 38–51.
- Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan. (2019). Heisei Sanju-ichi Nendo Kara Atarashi Kyoshokukatei ga Hajjimarimasu [New Teacher Education Programs Starts in 2019]. Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan.
- Zeichner, K. (2006). "Reflections of a University-based Teacher Educator on the Future of College- and University-based Teacher Education." *Journal of Teacher Education* 57 (3): 326–340.
- Zhao, H., & Zhang, X. (2017). "The Influence of Field Teaching Practice on Pre-service Teachers' Professional Identity: A Mixed Methods Study." *Frontiers in Psychology* 8: 1–11.