



Title of research: An exploration of the impact of a community of practice (CoP) on physical education teachers' professional development designed to empower them to address issues posed by their challenging work situations

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Date: 2008 to 2010

Brief outline of research idea:

Between 2004 and 2008 a number of physical education teachers who worked in schools with poor or no facilities and with students who displayed challenging behaviour in school reported tremendous difficulty in implementing the revised Junior Cycle Physical Education (JCPE) syllabus. After years working in difficult circumstances these teachers reported feelings of:

- disempowerment and alienation from the mainstream education system
- a lack of connection between in-service workshops and life as they knew it; resulting in a reluctance to engage with these sessions or with any discussion on planning for implementation
- disengagement with the establishment; though not with their students
- a need to engage with colleagues working in similar situations.

In September 2008 the JCPESS initiated a project to support this group of physical education teachers in urban schools in the Dublin area, with professional development to empower them to address issues posed by their challenging work situations (e.g., poor facilities, low economic conditions, students with challenging behaviour). This initiative became known as the Urban Schools Initiative (USI).

This research project proposed to promote scholarly discussion by critically examining and challenging how a community of learning framework allows for sustainable, cost effective, and contextually based continuing professional development for physical educators teaching in challenging environments. The research undertaken in conjunction with faculty in the Physical Education and Sport Sciences Department at the University of Limerick sought to describe and understand how:

- to improve the physical education experience of students by facilitating development of innovative curriculum programmes, based on the JCPE syllabus learning outcomes, suitable to the context of challenging learning environments,

- to develop a model of good practice which can be used by teachers in similar circumstances,
- to explore innovative ways in which the community is developed to allow new ideas about teaching and learning to be integrated into the teaching workplace,
- teachers' ideas are supported, affirmed and challenged as appropriate within a community of practice.

Findings from this research would subsequently provide insight into frameworks that support teaching, educational reform, and new ideas in teaching and learning in physical education in challenging contexts.

Summary of research aims

An exploration of the impact of a community of practice (CoP) on physical education teachers' professional development designed to empower them to address issues posed by their challenging work situations. The following research questions were posed:

- How does development of a community of practice with teachers in the USI provide support to them in setting and achieving group goals?
- How does the USI community of practice facilitate these physical education teachers' experiences of planning and teaching students in the context of the teachers' learning environments?
- What can we learn from this USI to inform the development of models of good practice for teachers working in challenging environments across Ireland?
- What are the implications of this USI that might inform the development of professional development structures in physical education and indeed the wider educational community?

Timeframe including details of when the research was carried out

The Urban School Initiative (USI), in which the research was carried out (2008 – 2010) comprised distinct stages with a specific emphasis within each: i) Creating a community of practice; ii) Trialling ideas, strategies, and documenting experiences; iii) Sharing experiences, capacity building, and planning future work; and iv) Sustaining the community of practice and implications for the USI. Within each stage were CoP in-service seminars sponsored by the Junior Cycle Physical Education Support Service (JCPESS) and evening workshops organised and hosted by community members. At the conclusion of each USI in-service/workshop, the teachers completed evaluation forms and engaged in discussion to determine if the workshop had met their needs, if they intended to implement ideas, and to identify further professional needs.

Stage 1 (Sept. – Dec. 2008)

Creating a Community of Practice.

Stage 1 began with an initial meeting of a group of 14 teachers from DEIS 13 schools with little or no physical education facilities. Also present were members of the USI working group and Grace Goc Karp a visiting lecturer from the University of Idaho. Mary O'Flaherty, National Coordinator of the JCPESS welcomed those in attendance and outlined the genesis and nature of the project.

This stage comprised two in-service seminars and one workshop (in-service seminars were facilitated by both this researcher, a Regional Development Officer with the JCPESS and Deborah Tannehill, Senior Lecturer in the Department of Physical Education and Sport Sciences co-director of the PE PAYS Research Centre at the University of Limerick).

In-service Seminar One (8th-9th September 2008) focused on:

- Building working relationships between all parties involved
- Undertaking an audit of where teachers were, in respect to their own capacities, interests, and concerns in teaching physical education
- Capacity building among the group of teachers by:
 - encouraging and facilitating teachers to talk about their own teaching practices and ideas and engage in critical discussion about these ideas with peers
 - ensuring that the teachers' knowledge of the subject matter, of teaching and learning, and of their students was shared and valued
 - encouraging teachers to identify their needs and seek avenues to provide for those needs
 - familiarising teachers with contemporary curriculum ideas;
- Identifying a programme of work with which they would experiment in their own schools and agreeing a mechanism for sharing the results of this experimentation.

Outcomes of In-service One included:

- Overwhelming support for the work of the initiative by the participating teachers who all reported finding the in-service helpful. Comments included:
 - 'Great to get the ball rolling- we needed to get together to start it so hopefully we're on our way. Everyone very amenable and helpful'.
 - 'Lets see if all we tried to discuss and organise we can do – if we do, it should be helpful'
- A timetable of work for the year was set out and agreed
- Two schools (2x2 teachers) agreed to run workshops for the group on the evening /night of 5th November.
- Communication was developed through a mailing list for the group and a wiki created to facilitate the sharing of ideas and resources

Workshop One (5th November) focused on:

Two sessions led by teachers from two of the participating schools.

- Two teachers from the host school presented a workshop on warm-up games
- A further two teachers conducted a session on skipping.

Outcomes of workshop:

- Sessions were considered to be helpful by participants.
- Comments reflected an appreciation of the relevance of the content to the context in which they work and included:
 - “I will definitely use all the ideas given to us last night. The handouts are great. I will soon have a good bank of ideas which will be very helpful for future”
 - “Excellent workshop. Materials very well presented. Thanks to all involved. Setting a very high standard for the rest of us!”

In-service Two (11th December)

The second in-service seminar focused on:

- Building relationships with service providers
 The meeting was addressed by Coilín O’Reilly from Dublin City Council (DCC), 11 of the 13 schools being located in this area. This was a very positive and productive session with a commitment by the DCC representative to work toward the provision of orienteering facilities in support of an orienteering project to be undertaken by the group.
- Managing Challenging Behaviour
 A meeting of the JCPESS and NBSS was held on 13th October to identify how these teachers might be supported in dealing with students displaying challenging behaviour in the PE context. Following this meeting each participating school had completed a questionnaire on the behaviour patterns of 10 of their students who display challenging behaviour. An initial analysis of the data was carried out and results were intended to inform a two-hour workshop on behaviour management delivered by two members of the NBSS on the morning of 11th December. While the presentation was considered to be somewhat helpful, the teachers expressed the opinion that there was a complete lack of appreciation of the physical education context. There followed a very productive session where the teachers shared examples of strategies that they had found to be effective in dealing with challenging behaviour in physical education.
- Frisbee Games. Deborah Tannehill conducted a session on how Frisbee games could be used to meet the learning outcomes of a number of areas of work within the JCPE. This session was reported as being very helpful by teachers.
- Future work and direction resulted in the decision that:
 - Time to be set aside at the next meeting for development of schemes of work in all areas of work at junior cycle with the exception of aquatics – in recognition of the particular difficulties associated with the provision of this area
 - Teachers trial a new activity or teaching strategy and report on their experiences at the next meeting
 - There should be further discussion with the NBSS with a view to finding support mechanisms appropriate to the physical education context.

Stage 2 (January – March 2009)

Trialling ideas, strategies and documenting experiences

This stage comprised one regional in-service, one workshop, and experimentation by teachers in their own schools.

Participation in regional in-service seminars:

The USI teachers identified dance and orienteering as two areas of work where they required further in-service support. The JCPESS facilitated this request by giving priority to applications from USI teachers to participate in two in-service seminars run as part of the JCPESS regional in-service programme. Thus a number of members of the Community of Practice attended a Dance in-service held in one of the participating schools. Ten of the teachers also attended a regional Orienteering in-service (presented by a USI member) held in Baltinglass, OE Centre. At a gathering over lunch in Baltinglass the teachers decided to:

- Use the expertise from among the group to run a follow up ICT workshop in order to generate maps and orienteering resources for their work
- Teach a block of orienteering
- Bring their students together for a culminating event in Santry demesne on 20th May and to seek the support of the Orienteering Association in organising and running such an event.

Workshop 2 (March 10th)

This evening workshop, presented by two of the teachers and an Associate Presenter with JCPESS, was held in an inner-city school. The purpose of workshop was to support the teachers' decision to teach a block of orienteering culminating in participation in an orienteering event by familiarising members with the:

- preparation and distribution of orienteering resources
- use of the internet to download images to generate school map
- use of internet to locate and download resources

Outcomes of workshop:

- All participants left with a map of their school; a set of laminated resources for use in teaching thumbing and setting; symbol recognition; distance estimation; and a number of video clips for use in dance and other areas of work
- It was very difficult to cover everything in a 3 hour workshop – however the vast majority of participants recorded that they found the workshop to be very helpful 'Always a great help' 'great to have work ready – very practical, very useful'
- It was decided that a 'mini' orienteering workshop would take place on 24th March for those teachers unable to attend the in-service in Baltinglass.

Stage 3 (March – May 09)

Sharing experiences, capacity building and planning future work

This stage comprised one USI seminar (24th March with a brief meeting on the evening of 23rd) and one workshop:

In-service seminar 3 focused on:

- Behaviour Management
 - The indications from the initial analysis of the behaviour questionnaires were presented and discussed. The possible role of the NBSS in supporting teachers in managing challenging behaviour was also discussed. In response to what the NBSS considered as fair criticism of their workshop of the 11th December, two direct questions were posed by the National Coordinator of the NBSS for consideration by the teachers; firstly, 'What did the USI group of teachers want from the NBSS' and secondly, 'What did they not want from the NBSS'. A response was formulated and emphasised the need for the NBSS to gain an appreciation of the physical education context.
 - The group decided to pursue the development of PE postcards (similar to those in use in the JCSP programme) to acknowledge positive aspects of student behaviour.

- Curriculum Planning
 - Having identified activities that worked well in their context and the JCPE syllabus learning outcomes addressed by same, the teachers used the Rich Task Planning templates to develop schemes of work. These were collected for typing, then returned to the authors for any amendments and shared through email with colleagues.
 - While work began on the development of three-year plans, the teachers considered that efforts to broaden their programme would be greatly enhanced by the sharing and trialling of these schemes of work.

- Future planning

The group was anxious that the Community of Practice continue its work:

 - Teachers indicated areas in which they were willing to conduct a workshop for other members. Eight such workshops were identified; the first of which was scheduled for 28th April.
 - Teachers were encouraged to participate in the upcoming PEPAYS forum and PEAI conference. Attendance to be supported by the payment of registration fee and travel or subsistence from available research funds
 - Teachers expressed a keen interest in attending a workshop by Don Hellison, who works in the area of Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility through Physical Activity, either as part of the PEAI conference or one scheduled for Dublin around the same time.
 - Teachers were encouraged to consider undertaking the new UL MSc in teaching physical education

Methodology Used

Before commencing with the research project, ethical approval was applied for and received from the Faculty of Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee. All directives that resulted from this approval were complied with throughout the research.

Four methods of enquiry were used to answer the research questions:

USI In-service and Workshop evaluations – at the conclusion of each USI in-service/workshop, the USI teachers to determine if the workshop had met their needs, if they intended to implement ideas, and identify further professional needs completed an evaluation form.

Focus group discussions – All USI teachers formed themselves into three groups and discussed issues related to their perceptions of the benefits of USI, how it has become their own initiative, and how to move forward. Discussions were recorded and transcribed for analysis.

Focus group interviews – Two small groups of USI teachers were interviewed to gain their perspectives on the impact of the community of practice: its development, their interactions, personal and group development, and implications for maintenance of the community. Interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis.

Individual interviews – The two USI facilitators were individually interviewed to gain their perspectives on development of the community and their observation of USI teacher reactions and responses. Interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis.

Data Analysis

The USI in-service and workshop evaluations were analysed and reported through frequencies and percentages to document USI teachers' perspectives. Interview data were analysed inductively (Patton, 1990) using the constant comparative method (Rubin & Rubin, 1995) with common themes and patterns identified. Triangulation was employed to cross check responses from the USI teachers and facilitators and across in-service and workshop evaluations. Cross checking with USI teachers and facilitators allowed evidence to be confirmed or disconfirmed and interpreted.

Results and Discussion

Results obtained from each data source are briefly provided and then used to answer the research questions that guided this work; tentative conclusions and recommendations are provided.

USI In-service and Workshop evaluations.

USI In-service evaluations

In-service meetings were scheduled for 1-2 days with teachers released from school to attend and develop their skills and knowledge. At the conclusion of each in-service meeting, teachers made the decision on the focus for the next session and topics for USI evening workshops. Table 1 reports the teacher responses on the in-service evaluation forms. Data indicates that 100% of the USI teachers found all in-service meetings helpful or very helpful. The only topic that seemed to be problematic was the session focused on behaviour. While teachers still found the idea of examining behaviour important as noted in the written comments, these teachers' suggested that the problematic nature of the session was due to the fact that the group conducting the workshop did not adapt their comments or the tasks

to the settings in which these teachers work. This issue did spur the teachers on to share their own ideas on behaviour management and to delve further into the topic through a separate evening workshop.

Written comments from teachers reflected their excitement with what they had achieved, highlighted insights gained, and suggested how the Community of Practice might develop further. Early USI in-service sessions drew responses related to starting a Community of Practice that focused on teachers in similar situations with common concerns. One teacher noted, "Great to get the ball rolling; we needed to get together to start so hopefully we're on our way" while another suggested, "very useful meeting with people from similar circumstances; looking forward to more". As time moved on comments became more emphatic about the benefits gained from the USI which was reflected by one teacher when he said, "Great as usual; I would hate it this were to fizzle out as energy from the group is a great motivator". When the USI moved into its final year, teachers began to share their concerns for the future and how their efforts might be sustained, "USI must continue in some shape or form; it is too good to discontinue".

Table 1: USI in-service evaluations	Very helpful		Helpful		Not Helpful		Not very helpful		No response	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Year 2008-09										
In-service #1- September 2008										
Helpfulness of in-service	1	100								
• Team challenge session	4	64	3	21					2	1
• Needs assessment / action plan	9	29	2	14			1	7	7	4
	4									.5
In-service #2 – December 2008										
Helpfulness of in-service	9	60	5	33					1	7
• DCC Sport & Recreation	1	80	1	7					2	1
• Behaviour management	2	7	1	80					2	3
• Frisbee games	1	93	2	7						1
• Planning	1	40	1	20					6	3
	4		3							
	6									4
										0
In-service #3 – March 2009										
Helpfulness of in-service	1	93	1	7						
• Behaviour management	4	33	9	60					1	7
• Meeting learning outcomes	5	67	4	27					1	7
• Programme planning	1	73	2	13					2	1
• Future planning CofP	0	87	2	13						3
	1									
	1									

	1									
	3									
Year 2009-10										
In-service #4 – December 2009										
Helpfulness of in-service	1	100								
• Sport Education - acrosport	4	93	1	7						
• Impact of Community of Practice work	1	86	2	14						
• Planning	3	93	1	7						
	1									
	2									
	1									
	3									
In-service #5 – March 2010										
Helpfulness of in-service	1	100								
• Dance	3	85	2	14						
• Athletics	1	92	1	7						
• Writing time	1	92	1	7						
	1									
	2									
	1									
	2									

USI Workshop Evaluations

In addition to the in-service meetings, teachers designed and delivered evening workshops to their Community of Practice colleagues. At the close of each workshop, teachers completed an evaluation form and determined the focus of the next evening session.

	Very helpful		Helpful		Not Helpful		Not very helpful		No response	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Year 2008-09										
November 2008										
Helpfulness of in-service	6	86	1	14						
• Warm-ups	6	86	1	14						
• Minor games	6	86	1	14						
• Skipping	6	86	1	14						
	Yes		No							
	#	%	#	%						
Intend to try minor games	7	1071								
Intend to try skipping	5		2	9						
	Very helpful		Helpful		Not Helpful		Not very		No respons	

							helpful		e	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
March 2009										
Helpfulness of in-service	6	75	2	25						
• Map making	3	38	2	25					1	13
• ICT	5	83	2	25					2	25
• Resource making	5	83	2	25					1	38
• Presentation	3	38	2	25					3	25
	Yes		No							
	#	%	#	%						
Intend to use map making	8	100								
I intend to use ICT										
Intend to try skipping	8	100								
	Very helpful		Helpful		Not Helpful		Not very helpful		No response	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
April 2009										
Helpfulness of in-service	10	83	2	17						
• Multisport / endball	11	92	1	8						
	Yes		No							
	#	%	#	%						
Intend to try multisport / endball	11	92	1	8						
Year 2009-10										
February 2009										
• First Aid										
	Very helpful		Helpful		Not Helpful		Not very helpful		No response	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
October 2010										
• PEAI Conference – Don Hellison										
• Don Hellison workshop										
April 2010										
Helpfulness of in-service										
• Behaviour										

Interesting to note that the USI teachers commented on the value they placed on one another's ideas on 'what works' and how to adapt physical education content to their settings and the young people with whom they work. One teacher suggested that, "what we are gaining from each other is concrete, practical, and it works" while another indicated that she, "continues to get ideas from each other that work in our settings".

Focus group discussions

At the conclusion of our March 2010 USI in-service meeting the USI teachers formed themselves into three groups of five and discussed issues related to their perceptions on benefits of USI, how it has become their own initiative, and how to move forward. They were asked to discuss three issues 1) what they had gained from USI for themselves, their teaching, and their work with young people; 2) whether they felt the USI was 'their' project focused on their needs and goals; and 3) where they want to go with the USI and what they are willing to commit to its maintenance.

Responses to what the teachers had gained from the USI fell into themes that included, teachers' needs, improved morale, support, and innovative practice. These themes were supported by teachers' comments such as the group that suggested the USI focused on, "our needs in our situations with our students" or those who talked of, "sharing our best practices, and had them accepted without being judged...they fit what we all faced every day". Each group was able to point out an area in which they felt invigorated about teaching physical education again as their morale improved as a result of their Community of Practice interactions.

When discussing their thoughts, ownership of the USI the teachers repeatedly spoke of their needs being addressed and their voices considered. One group talked about how holding USI workshops in their own schools with limited facilities allowed them to feel it was really intended for them, *"you know we weren't in schools with lovely big playing fields and sports halls; we were in places similar to what we have so it made it more real and we could relate"*. Another noted that, *"the facilitators had our needs in mind. I think we were always asked, what did we want and the lists of what we put down were carried out. Like, we got to do everything that we asked to do"*. Again, all groups of teachers discussed aspects of the USI that reflected their needs, desires, and wishes and one group even commented that the one session that wasn't as useful was, *"our idea, but so"*. Having everyone valued and share in the planning and delivery of the USI was highlighted by another group who stated that, *"Everybody's voice is always heard, and everybody got a say in it, you know, nobody was left out and everybody said as they felt and everybody was listened to and everybody had new ideas"*.

These teachers all agreed that they were not ready to have the USI disbanded, as there was more they could gain from interacting. One group noted that, *"we would hate to see the group, this group disintegrate and we would be willing to give workshops in the future"*. This group even figured out how many workshops each person would be responsible for in a year and how that might fall across the school terms. Another group talked about how, *"if people are willing to commit to evenings we might link a meeting in with the PEAI conference and take time for our session that would show others what we are able to do"*. An interesting area that surfaced in one group related to the preparation of pre-service teachers and how they might play a role in that process. They asked whether, *"should we volunteer as mentors to some young teachers that are going out into situations like ours? Even if we are there for a phone call or inviting them to join our group it might help them to feel like they are doing ok and can make it work"*. As the discussion progressed, these teachers suggested that UL

consider offering a full module in the teacher education course that would focus on difficult settings, young people who may be struggling, and with content that is not the traditional physical education activities.

Focus group interviews.

The facilitators sought USI teachers who were willing to take part in focus group interviews to explore their perspectives on the impact of the community of practice; its development, their interactions, personal and group development, and implications for maintenance of the community. Focus group interviews were scheduled at a convenient evening time for the six participating teachers with the interviews conducted by an experienced pedagogy colleague. Comments shared by the USI teachers following the year of working together to create a community of practice note that, *“This group has been very useful; it focused on our needs, in our situations, and with our students”* while another suggested that, *“We developed a feeling of togetherness, you know, we weren’t on our own...We have a network now where we can talk to each other about similar problems and maybe share resources.”*

As community developed, these teachers found themselves working together toward the common goal of gaining confidence in designing and delivering a positive and effective physical education programme for young people in challenging settings with limited resources. Support among the group was critical to these teachers as one reported that, *“Coming together as a group, sharing ideas that work...it was reassuring, exciting, it gave us a sense of, you know, enthusiasm, it rejuvenates you as well, to do things differently.”* Feelings of ownership and committing to something that belonged to them was pivotal in these teachers’ experiences within the community as one teacher noted, *“Maybe the best thing was that USP [Urban Schools Project] was ours; it was very encouraging to have each other...but that is it, it was our ideas and what we wanted to do that led us.”*

Now, with two years committed to one another this community continues to thrive, initiating innovative curricular workshops and sharing tips on practices that are effective in their settings. These teachers are actively consulting one another on issues related to their teaching and student learning and beginning to consider how they might share their new knowledge with others in similar situations.

Individual facilitator interviews.

The two facilitators, one representing the JCPE SS (JCPE-F) and the second a physical education teacher educator (PETE-F) shared insights they gained on how the community developed, what they perceived it meant to the teachers and how they saw it developing and progressing. These facilitator perceptions support many of those shared by the USI teachers themselves.

When examining how the community developed initially, the facilitators both noted reluctance, or perhaps a questioning about whether ‘this initiative’ would be any different than others in which they had become disenchanted. As the PETE-F noted; *“I think at first they questioned was this really going to be something that was worth their while, why are we here and what is going to be different?”*. A second observation related to what the

facilitators viewed an insecurity of the teachers; “They didn’t feel they were ... they questioned themselves as teachers. They questioned themselves in terms of what they were achieving and it wasn’t until they began to talk to each other that they began to recognise that they were achieving something. It was different to what other teachers were achieving but they were achieving” (PETE-F). JCPE-F also noted that being part of this community “makes daily life as a teacher easier, better, more meaningful”.

As teachers became comfortable with each other, and us, the community progressed; they began to take ownership of it and identify goals they wanted to achieve. JCPE-F highlighted that the community took on, “an identity of their own and a structure to support that identity; run by teachers for teachers”. The facilitators noted that, “the teachers were committed to one another and in that commitment comes strength and they have begun to recognise the things that they are doing well and they are building on those”. The teachers repeatedly spoke of sharing ideas with one another about what is working in their classes with their pupils. In some ways they are not trying to teach the same physical education as other teachers in better equipped schools with young people who want to learn, PETE-F shared how, “The difference for me is that I will look at some physical education teachers that have kids doing stuff just to keep them active where there is no learning intent. These teachers might do exactly the same activity but they are not doing it just to keep kids active; they are trying to do it to get kids to recognise their own strengths and work together. You can hear it when they talk about it”.

These teachers appeared to enjoy the interactions with their colleagues and working in the community itself. JCPE-F noted that the community tends to be, “more solution focused than problem focused; their needs are similar in that they want to offer a curriculum that suits their context, and then ask, what is your solution?”. PETE-F was conscious of how the teachers viewed their work with one another when she indicated, “they would start talking about the Urban Schools Initiative and they would talk about it as theirs. ‘It’s our work. It’s our project’. So I think they are proud of what they developed”.

When examining how this community might move forward, these teachers gave facilitators the impression that they wanted to continue as it is worthwhile. JCPE-F shared her perception that these teachers would strive to keep the community, “moving forward; they will keep going due to personalities. Found such strength in one another – have something to offer group and group has something to offer them”. The teachers discussed attempting to move their community into the PEAI structure, become involved with mentoring student teachers through the university, examining the impact of the community on their work with students, and student learning, and sharing their work with other teachers. PETE-F observed that, “when you talk to the teachers about sharing what they’ve done with other teachers that is when they are a little bit apprehensive; will we be judged?”.

Overview of research findings and recommendations

Discussion of Research Questions

In this report, a brief summary statement is made relative to the findings in support of each question.

- How does development of a community of practice with teachers in the USI provide support to them in setting and achieving group goals?

USI teacher discussions, focus group interviews and facilitator interviews all consistently confirm that these teachers both appreciated and recognized the support they provided one another. Their comments reflect the value they place on one another's ideas, teaching practice, and camaraderie.

- How does the USI community of practice facilitate these physical education teachers' experiences of planning and teaching students in the context of the teachers' learning environments?

At this point, evidence relates to the support these teachers are providing one another, and the motivation being a member of the community has given them to continue to persevere in teaching physical education in difficult settings. This question will continue to be explored as the teachers continue to take part in and progress through the community of practice. Many of their comments on how to progress relate to their teaching practices, work with learners and impacting young people in physical education.

- What can we learn from this USI to inform the development of models of good practice for teachers working in challenging environments across Ireland?

Data provides evidence that there are benefits of working in a community of practice with a group of teachers who share common challenging teaching settings that includes poor facilities, low economic conditions, and students with challenging behaviour. These teachers prepared to share what they have learned from this community experience in the hope of impacting the work of others in similar situations. They are also eager to become involved with mentoring young professionals who may find themselves entering challenging teaching settings.

- What are the implications of this USI that might inform the development of professional development structures in physical education and indeed the wider educational community?

Findings from this research are providing support for much research that has previously been conducted within physical education communities of practice including teachers forming their own interpretations of educational issues, teachers taking ownership, situating professional development in teaching practice and within the actual teaching and learning context of schools, and working to meet teachers' needs (Duncombe & Armour, 2005; O'Sullivan & Deglau, 2009).

Findings from this research have been published in a peer-reviewed scholarly journal see attached paper (Tannehill, D., & MacPhail, A. (2017). Teacher empowerment through

community of practice: the urban school initiative. *Professional Development in Education*. 43(3): 334-352.)

Summary of background reading

The problems and frustration documented in the in-service reports across four cohorts of teachers (2003-2007) outline above, were not unique and echoed the findings of researchers working with teachers in similar circumstances in both the UK and US (Armour & Yelling 2007; Bechtel & O'Sullivan, 2007; Ward & O'Sullivan, 2006;). In 1998, Black and Wiliam (1998) premised that,

'Teachers will not take up ideas that sound attractive no matter how extensive the research base, if the ideas are presented as general principles that leave the task of translating them into everyday practice entirely up to the teachers. Their classroom lives are too busy and too fragile for all but an outstanding few to undertake such work. What teachers need is a variety of living examples of implementation, as practiced by teachers with whom they can identify and from whom they can derive confidence that they can do better. They need to see examples of what doing better means in practice'

Black, P. and Wiliam, D. (1998)

After careful examination of the issue, the JCPSS concluded that the support offered through the in-service programme did not help these teachers in facing the frustrations and challenges posed by their working environment. The JCPSS recognised that while these teachers felt alienated from the system they were committed to providing the best education they could for their students. This was evident from the teachers desire to share ideas with their colleagues and their continual attitude of caring they displayed. The JCPSS wished to create a vehicle whereby this sharing, collegial interactions and dialogue could happen and considered that the teachers themselves hold many of answers to their own problems.

After facilitating a 4-year, long-term professional development initiative with physical education teachers in an urban setting in mid-western USA, O'Sullivan and Deglau (2006) proposed a set of principles for the design and delivery of quality professional development that reflect the results of their work. They proposed that:

- Teachers are treated as "active learners"
- Teachers should be empowered and treated as professionals and leaders

- Professional development situated in classroom practice
- Focus on content knowledge
- Follow-up is on site and sustained over time
- Attention to teacher and student teaching-learning contexts
- Programme driven by teacher needs - balanced by programme vision

Design of the current project was cognisant of research findings regarding the centrality of capacity building and teacher networking to effective professional development (Armour & Yelling 2004; O'Sullivan & Deglau, 2006).

This research was further guided by the insights into the professional lives of experienced physical education teachers; current best practice in teaching and what constitutes and promotes effective Continuing Professional Development by the following background readings:

Coolahan, J. (2002) OECD Education Working Paper No.2, Teacher Education and the Teaching Career in an Era of Lifelong Learning. In Edwards, A.,

Gilroy, P. & Hartley, D. (2002) Rethinking Teacher Education: Collaborative responses to uncertainty. Routledge Falmer: London.

Darling-Hammond, L & Bransford, J. (2005). Preparing Teachers for a Changing World: What Teachers Should Learn and Be Able to Do. New York:

Jossey-Bass. Day, C. (2000) Teachers in the 21st century: Time to renew the vision, *Teachers and Teaching: Theory into Practice*, 6 (1), 101-115.

Finley, S.J., Marble, S.T., Copeland, G., & Ferguson, C. (2000) Professional development and teachers' construction of coherent instructional practices: A synthesis of experiences in five sites, Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA, April 24-28, 2000.

Kirk, D. & O'Flaherty (2004). Learning Theory and Authentic Assessment in Physical Education. Paper presented to the PE and Sport Pedagogy SIG at Annual BERA conference, September 10-13

Lave, J. & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.

Lieberman, A. (1992). The meaning of scholarly activity and the building of community, *Educational Researcher*, 21(6), 5-12.

NCCA (2007). *Assessment in the Junior Cycle Physical Education Project*. Dublin: NCCA

O'Sullivan, M., & Deglau, D. (2006). Principles of professional development, Monograph Issue, *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, 2006.

O'Sullivan, M. (2003). What Do We Know About the Professional Preparation of Teachers. In S. Silverman and C. Ennis (Eds.). *Enhancing student learning in physical education: A research approach to effective teaching* (2nd ed.). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics

O'Sullivan, M. (2006). Professional lives of Irish physical education teachers: Stories of resilience, respect, and resignation, *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, 11(3), 265-284. (2007 Manuscript of the Year Award for Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy).

OECD (2005) *Teachers Matter. Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers*.

Pedder, D., James, M., & MacBeath, J. (2005) How teachers value and practice professional learning, *Research Papers in Education*, 20 (3), 209-243.

How the research contributed to your profession learning

I am very conscious that my involvement in directing this project enabled me to continue my own research and professional development. As a member of the JCPESS, this project provided a means to meet the needs of teachers who are not served by our support practices at the time. This project has informed the development of models of good practice for teachers working in challenging environments. It also served as an opportunity to inform the development of professional development structures in physical education and indeed the wider educational community.

From a personal point of view I was extremely fortunate to have the opportunity to work with and learn from fellow professionals in UL (O'Sullivan, Tannehill, and Parker) who hold such expertise and international renown in the area of professional development and have vast experience in facilitating communities of practice – particularly with teachers working in challenging urban environments. This connection with UL continues to provide me and my fellow Community of Practice members with access to many other renowned physical educators. Deborah Tannehill and Missy Parker remain active members of our group. My involvement with this project informed my practice and provided me with a community of colleagues who supported me in my return to teaching, in a school with a similar profile to those who were the subject of this research.

This Community of Practice or Professional Learning Community continues to sustain and enhance my professional practice to date.

How this research will benefit the teaching profession and the wider education community

From the perspective of the teaching profession, the research made a significant contribution to the:

- development of teacher knowledge to enhance teaching and learning of JCPE syllabus;
- improvement in the relevance, challenge, and quality of physical education experiences for students in these challenging educational sites;
- stimulate resilience and a sense of professionalism for these physical education teachers and facilitate its growth and maintenance. A number of these teachers who initially reported a feeling of isolation and disempowerment have since presented at

conferences PEAI, PE Pays and Féilte; one member has successfully completed her doctoral thesis on The Impact of a Community of Practice on Teachers and their Students

- develop a community of professional physical education teacher leaders to develop innovation and impact change in the Dublin schools;
- develop a model of good practice which can be used by teachers in similar circumstances

Much of the success of the USI Community of Practice may be attributed to the design of the project that followed the guidelines and principles for the design and delivery of quality professional development as proposed by O'Sullivan and Deglau (2006). The second 'key' feature of this work was the teachers themselves and the commitment they made to the community and to improving the physical education they delivered to young people in these challenging settings.

Through sharing experiences and participating in workshops and seminars, increasingly delivered by group members themselves, the teachers immersed themselves in the continuous process of developing innovative curriculum programs, based on the JCPE syllabus learning outcomes, and suitable to the context of their learning environments. The teachers themselves have identified the need to engage students in reflecting on their experiences in physical education and to date there is only anecdotal evidence of increased student motivation in physical education class.

In relation to the development of a model of good practice, the success of this initiative in engaging heretofore alienated teachers is overwhelming supportive of the Community of Practice model as central to the provision of effective Continuous Professional Development (CPD). This is recognised by the teachers and is evidenced from their determination and commitment to share their experiences, not only with teachers in similar situations, but with Newly Qualified Teachers and as a possible part of PETE programmes. Members of this Community of Practice presented at both the PEAI national conference in October and the PEPAYS forum in June 2010. Also noteworthy is that a small group of USI CoP members also published two papers in an international teaching journal documenting some of their work as a means to provide guidance to other physical education teachers. These are noted here: Clonan, M., Cullen, E., Kiely, K., O'Malley, B., & **Tannehill, D.** (summer, 2014). Part 1. USG meets SSLFS: Engaging Targeted Groups of Young People. *PE Matters*, pp. 19-24.

Clonan, M., Cullen, E., Kiely, K., O'Malley, B., & **Tannehill, D.** (autumn, 2014). Part 2. USG meets SSLFS: Engaging Targeted Groups of Young People. *PE Matters*, pp. 18-21.

There is commitment among the members of this community of practice to continue beyond the dissolution of the JCPESS and to continue its development in accordance with the needs and interests of its members. The Community of Practice has developed from Stage One of the initiative involving the creation of a Community of Practice, to Stage Four where its members explore how to sustain the Community of Practice and where they and CDP providers examine the implications of the USI that might inform the development of

professional development structures in physical education and indeed the wider educational community.

These stages coincided with the Three Phase involvement of the JCPESS with the USI. Phase One corresponded with year one of the initiative where the Community of Practice was totally supported by the Support Service. Phase Two involved a continued support of the Community of Practice by the JCPESS in conjunction with support from the Teacher Professional Network (TPN) established by the PEAI. **Phase Three 2009 to date:** involves the Community of Practice operating as a self-sustaining unit, but with no further involvement by the JCPESS. A number of scholars have commented that the USI is the longest running CoP (in all subject areas) in Ireland (personal communication with D. Tannehill), a fact for which we are proud and feel some responsibility relative to sharing with other teachers.

The next meeting of the Urban Schools Group is scheduled for 10th April 2019.

Viewed from the wider education community, this research contributed to the scholarly debate, at both national and international level, on the nature and impact of continued professional development and:

- stimulated a wider education interest and commitment to the continued professional development (CPD) for practising teachers;
- generated and continues to generate opportunities for further research on the impact of a community of practice on physical education teachers' professional development
- facilitated integration of the revised JCPE syllabus into school programmes
- developed greater expertise around teaching and learning for post primary physical education; and enhanced and improved delivery of a physical education programme that is relevant and important to students in meeting their social and personal needs.
- cultivated an understanding of the issues teachers face when working in challenging environments and thereby inform the work of a range of agencies including the National Behaviour Support Service and the Junior Certificate Schools Programme and Special Education Needs Support Service

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