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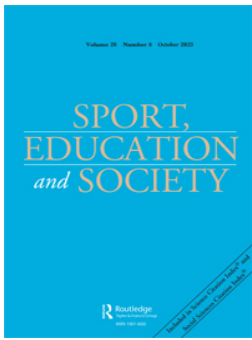
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'To a certain extent it is a business decision': exploring external providers' perspectives of delivering outsourced primary school physical education

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ABSTRACT


The use of external providers to deliver primary school physical education (PE) shows no signs of slowing in England. Longstanding concerns into outsourcing primary school PE have highlighted the extent to which external providers often lack appropriate teaching qualifications and pedagogical knowledge. That said, when compared to primary school generalist teachers, external providers have been argued to be the 'best fit' to deliver primary school PE due to their greater knowledge base and experience of delivering curriculum activities, such as competitive team games. There is a paucity of research however surrounding external providers' perspectives on their delivery of primary school PE, with their important insights and experiences underrepresented in the literature. This study, therefore, seeks to explore external providers' perspectives and reflections on curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practices as delivered by them in outsourced primary school PE lessons. Semi-structured interviews were conducted over the telephone and Skype (video call) with 10 external providers, from four different outsourcing companies in the North of England. Penney et al.'s (2009, Curriculum, pedagogy and assessment: Three message systems of schooling and dimensions of quality physical education. *Sport, Education and Society*, 14(4), 421–442) three message systems of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment were used as a theoretical lens that aided the analysis of the data. The findings demonstrate that external providers: (1) developed and followed their own curriculum frameworks formed by their outsourcing companies to deliver in schools; (2) utilised various student-centred pedagogical approaches to deliver curriculum content that was driven by their formal and informal educational experiences to engage young people and (3) unlike some of the literature suggests, they provided assessment practices that were integrated into their curriculum frameworks. It was concluded that careful consideration must be taken by schools when contemplating whether to employ (or not) external providers to provide their curriculum content, deliver their primary school PE lessons, and to assess their pupils.

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Introduction

Since the turn of the twenty-first century, primary school physical education (PE) has received significant international attention from academic, political and professional arenas (Carse et al., 2018). This has seen an influx of stakeholders invested in this highly contested and crowded subject area, with politicians, national organisations (public and private), policy makers, external providers and the media all interested in primary school PE (Evans & Davies, 2014). More crucially, governments internationally have taken a more neoliberal view on primary education, with performativity, marketisation and outsourcing deemed as key influences (Evans, 2013; Macdonald, 2011). Internationally, it is thought that these neoliberal ideologies have opened school provision to new services and products from external providers seeking a global market (Ball, 2009; Macdonald et al., 2020). For instance, the current proliferation of external providers offering educational services and products is a prime example of neoliberalism in education (Macdonald et al., 2020).

In England, one such example of this neoliberal practice is the primary 'PE and sport premium' (PESP) governmental funding commitment. Announced by the Department for Education (DfE) initially in March 2013, and then doubled in September 2017, the PESP provides all primary schools in England with an annual payment of around £16,000 (based on schools with 17 or more pupils, plus £10 supplement per pupil thereafter), per annum (DfE, 2022). In June 2022, it was confirmed that the PESP funding would continue at £320 million for the 2022/2023 academic year (DfE, 2022). Unlike previous PE and school sport strategies, the PESP funding has been ring-fenced (Griggs, 2018), meaning that primary schools can only spend PESP funding on PE and school sport provision (see DfE, 2022). This has subsequently allowed primary school headteachers to invest in activities that increase pupils' opportunities to engage in competitive sport and physical activity initiatives (Cope et al., 2015). In addition, it has afforded classroom teachers the opportunity to engage in enhanced professional development with external providers, such as informal observation of external provider's practices (Parnell et al., 2017). Importantly, neoliberal education and outsourcing predate the creation of PESP with the PE School Sport and Club Link (PESSCL) strategy, and PE and Sport Strategy for Young People (PESSYP) being, to some extent examples, of outsourcing. That said, PESP can be seen as part of the acceleration of neoliberalism and allows us to explore the conditions under which it emerged and how it has shaped curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practices in primary PE.

Outsourcing in PE

Outsourcing is defined as the process of obtaining products or services from external providers, such as private companies, sporting associations and organisations (Mol, 2007). Wilkinson and Penney (2016) have argued that outsourcing has led to primary school PE being 'auctioned off' to external providers. To support this view, in England, a DfE (2019) report for the 2017/2018 academic year found that 88% of primary schools employed external providers for extra-curricular sport, whilst 76% of primary schools used outsourced coaches for curricular lessons. Importantly, the outsourcing of primary school PE to external providers is often considered contentious (Griggs, 2018). Longstanding concerns into outsourcing primary school PE have been highlighted in relation to the extent to which external providers lack the appropriate teaching qualifications and pedagogical knowledge, and a tendency to prioritise competitive sporting activities over educational goals (Blair & Capel, 2008, 2011; Griggs, 2007, 2010). In other words, external providers are thought to lack the appropriate curriculum knowledge and experiences, age-appropriate pedagogical understanding, and apparent confusion in assessment practices (Penney et al., 2009; Stirrup, 2020), to deliver inclusive primary school PE experiences (All-Party Parliamentary Group, 2016; Griggs, 2010). This results in traditional, didactic practice, which may be problematic for some pupils and could negatively impact their primary school PE experiences (Smith, 2015; Sperka & Enright, 2019). For educators, issues relating

to outsourcing can result in shifting the responsibility of delivering primary school PE to an external provider, with teachers becoming increasingly de-skilled – building on what may potentially be low levels of competence and confidence – to deliver primary school PE curricula (Blair & Capel, 2011, 2013; Keay & Spence, 2012).

Contrary to the above there are others who have argued that external providers may be considered as ‘best fit’ to deliver primary school PE when compared to primary school generalist teachers (Parnell et al., 2017). This is because external providers are thought to have a greater knowledge base and more comprehensive experience of delivering primary school curriculum sports, such as competitive team games (Talbot, 2008). It has also been suggested that since external providers compete against one another for business, through outsourcing, the standards of primary school PE are thought to improve (Evans & Davies, 2015). Moreover, the practice of external providers and generalist primary educators working collaboratively has become more prevalent, normalised and accepted (Green, 2008). It has been argued that by providing generalist primary school educators with opportunities to observe external providers, it can be beneficial for their professional development (Harris et al., 2012; Parnell et al., 2016). Other benefits of educators observing external providers include learning subject-specific knowledge, acquiring lesson ideas and sporting activity examples (Mangione et al., 2020; Ni Chroinin & O’Brien, 2019). It is, therefore, assumed that when facilitated through a collaborative approach – between teacher and external provider – shortfalls in pedagogical knowledge can be supplemented by classroom teachers, which in turn should be beneficial for all involved, including pupil learning (Duncombe et al., 2018; Parnell et al., 2017).

Previous research into external providers’ involvement in the outsourcing of primary school PE has noted how it (outsourcing) is often exclusive, not sustainable, delivered by individuals without pedagogical knowledge, and not used to support staff professional development (Blair & Capel, 2008, 2011; Griggs, 2010, 2018). This research has also frequently lacked the voices of external providers themselves, resulting in limited evidence for the assumed benefits of this process (Ni Chroinin et al., 2020). To address this gap, this novel paper specifically focuses on these underrepresented voices, providing an insight into external providers’ motivations and potential influence on the outsourcing of primary school PE (Ni Chroinin et al., 2020). Moreover, this paper offers a significant contribution to understanding how primary school PE curriculum content, pedagogical and assessment practices are shaped by external providers’ knowledge, agendas, and interests.

For instance, in relation to curriculum content, there is a significant gap in understanding how external providers interpret national curricula, and little is known about how this might translate into certain services, products, and practices from external providers (Sperka et al., 2018). There is also limited evidence on what pedagogical practices external providers engage and enact in primary school PE (Stirrup, 2020). In terms of assessment, there is relative silence surrounding assessment practices in external provider’s outsourced provision (Sperka & Enright, 2018) and it is rare that external providers provide examples of assessment practices in their products and services (Sperka & Enright, 2019). As such, this study specifically aims to explore external providers’ perspectives, reflections and rationale for the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practices they deliver in outsourced primary school PE lessons in England.

Theoretical lens: ‘quality’ PE – curriculum, pedagogy and assessment

Powell (2015, p. 86) has argued that increased outsourcing can impact people’s views of ‘the purpose of PE [and] what quality PE looks like’. This is important since the PESP funding is ultimately provided with the intention of improving the overall ‘quality’ of primary school PE. For instance, it is available to drive and improve the ‘quality’ of what is delivered in primary school PE, whether that is through the employment of external providers or upskilling of generalist teachers in schools, and yet, very little is currently known about this from the perspectives of the external providers themselves. Therefore, by focusing on the perspectives of adult stakeholders and considering ‘quality’ PE from the viewpoint of Penney et al. (2009) – who drew on the three dimensions of curriculum, pedagogy

and assessment – this paper is able to offer novel insights that extend our understanding of outsourcing in primary PE.

For instance, Penney et al. (2009, p. 423) identify ‘quality’ as ‘a concept to be problematised and always contextualised in relation to PE’. In their paper, Penney et al. (2009) promoted a discourse around quality that moved beyond standard discourses and prompted critical thinking about developments of quality PE. In so doing, they borrowed from Bernstein’s (1977) three message systems of schooling – specifically curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, and argued that these three dimensions presented a framework for thinking about quality PE (Penney et al., 2009).

Briefly, in relation to the former – curriculum – Penney et al. (2009) propose that the scope and sequencing of content should be such that young people are able to achieve progressively demanding outcomes. In addition, the content should align with learning that is distinct to PE but also include more generic learning that aligns with broader school curricula that can be advanced through PE (Penney et al., 2009). With regard to pedagogy, Penney et al. (2009) suggest that – amongst other things – the choice of pedagogic approach should support the pursuit of learning outcomes and reflect learning needs, that learning, teaching and assessment are integrated, and that tasks are authentic from a learner perspective and inclusive of individual learning needs. Finally, instead of traditional assessment focusing on components of fitness, or the assessment of isolated skills, quality assessment in PE should draw on authentic assessments. These should be ‘contextually meaningful, replicating the manner in which the knowledge and processes being assessed are utilised in real life contexts’ (Penney et al., 2009, p. 435).

Hence, Penney et al. (2009) suggest that quality PE can be viewed through the lens of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. However, it remains important to note that there are a range of contextual factors that may influence decisions in each of these dimensions including teachers’ own beliefs and values, professional learning opportunities, school organisation and local and national cultures (Penney et al., 2009). When outsourcing is considered, contextual factors and notions of ‘quality’ PE become even more apparent (Sperka & Enright, 2018). Like Penney et al. (2009) suggested with teachers, multiple contextual factors must be considered when outsourcing occurs. These include external providers’ own beliefs and values of PE, previous professional learning opportunities, and their outsourcing company’s principles and cultures.

Methodology

Participants and outsourcing companies

The participants selected for this study were external providers from four different outsourcing companies, located in the North of England. Overall, 10 participants took part. Participants were recruited using both the key informant ($n = 4$) and snowball ($n = 6$) sampling techniques (Gratton & Jones, 2010). Initially, using the key informant sampling method, either the owners or coaches of the outsourcing companies were contacted via email. Following this, further participants were recruited from contacts known by the original participants. Table 1 provides biographic details of each participant (including age, gender, ethnicity, job role and duration at the outsourcing company) and summarises their coaching philosophies and qualifications. The four outsourcing companies are detailed in Table 2, with information about each outsourcing company and their aims and values. Please note, names of participants and companies identified in the tables below are pseudonyms to help protect their identity.

Methods

Due to this study taking place in 2020 during the Coronavirus pandemic, remote data collection methods were required. Prior to the commencement of data collection, full ethical clearance from the authors’ institution was gained. Semi-structured interviews facilitated over the telephone and

**Table 1.** Participant table.

Participant	Age/Gender/ Ethnicity	Outsourcing Company	Role	Duration	Qualifications (prior to/during working at company)	Coaching Philosophy
Alex	25; Male; White British	Direct PE	Sports Coach (SC)/ Tournaments Organiser	7 years	Prior: FA L2 Football During: Sports Leaders L2, Handball L1, and Dodgeball L2	Pupil enjoyment and development
Ben	22; Male; White British	Direct PE	Sports Coach	3 years	Prior: BTEC L2 in sport During: Various coaching badges including Dodgeball	Student-centred approach. 95% pupils doing and 5% coach talking
Callum	23; Male; White British	Direct PE	Sports Coach	2 years	PE degree, Sports Leaders L3, Football L1 and Athletics L1	Pupil engagement and enjoyment (safe environment)
David	37; Male; White British	Redmere Sports Trust	Head of Community Engagement (HofCE)	10 years	PE degree, other qualifications	Not specified
Ellie	23; Female; White British	Direct PE	Sports Coach	< 1 year	Sports Coaching degree, Rugby Union, Basketball, Gymnastics, Tennis, Lifesaving, and more qualifications	Pupil development and excellence. Also, pupil enjoyment
Faiz	23; Male; South Asian British Pakistani	Summerdale Sports	Sports Coach and Activities Co- ordinator	< 1 year	PE degree, no coaching qualifications	Encourage pupils to be active (extrinsically/ intrinsically). Role model for pupils
Harry	21; Male; White British	Summerdale Sports	Sports Coach and Well- being Leader	3 years	Rugby L2, L1s in Football, Dodgeball, Tchoukball, Spikeball and Handball	Pupil enjoyment, inclusivity, and development
Michael	32; Male; White British	Elite Sports	Franchisee	9 years	Prior: Sports Development degree, football L2, and Multi-skills L2 During: Qualification opportunities increased '5-6-7-8 fold', now qualified to teach 20 + sports (L1 qualifications)	Pupil engagement and active pupils. Provide pupils with a range of different sporting opportunities (not just traditional sports)
Sam	24; Male; White British	Direct PE	Sports Coach	18 months	PE degree, PGCE primary student	Pupil development and excellence. Also, pupil enjoyment
Sian	20; Male; Female	Direct PE	Sports Coach	1 year	Sports-related degree, netball L2 and more qualifications	Pupil excellence. Preparing for elite performance

Table 2. Outsourcing company table.

Outsourcing Company	Founded	About	Aim/Values
Direct PE (DPE)	2008	Previously known as ACE Sports Coaching (<i>pseudonym</i>). Name change in 2017, due to wanting to be known as more than a coaching company because of educational services offered (e.g. own PE curriculum and PE-CPD events).	To enhance/develop physical activity opportunities provided to children and young people.
Elite Sports (ES)	1999	Large outsourcing franchise in UK. Approximately 100 franchisees across UK. Franchisee in this study had worked with 70–80 primary schools. Now, works with 30 primary schools.	Tagline: 'To inspire and teach future generations'. Values and visions: Improvement of children's health and wellbeing.
Redmere Sports Trust (RST)	2005	Outsourcing professional sports foundation. Founded when other sports clubs began to create foundations and charities.	Tagline: 'To enhance young people's life experiences through physical activity'.
Summerdale Sports (SS)	2011	Company focuses on providing primary school PE provision and competitions.	Champions children's mental health. Attempts to improve children's knowledge of mental health, through their 'five ways of happiness'.

Skype (computer-mediated) were therefore chosen to explore external providers' perspectives on their delivery of outsourced primary school PE. In recent years, telephone and computer-mediated interviewing have become an increasingly popular method for qualitative data collection (Smith & Sparkes, 2016). In this study, eight out of the ten interviews were conducted over the telephone, each lasting between 40 and 70 min. In comparison to traditional face-to-face interviews, telephone interviewing is particularly advantageous when it comes to scheduling interviews and re-arranging last-minute interviews (Hanna, 2012). They are also cost-effective and time-efficient (Sparkes & Smith, 2014).

In contrast, computer-mediated interviews – or online interviewing and e-interviews – are a form of data collection method facilitated through the medium of the internet (Salmons, 2014). In this study, two out of the 10 interviews were conducted over Skype, lasting between 30 and 80 min. Computer-mediated interviewing is thought to have numerous advantages. For instance, like telephone interviews, they have a geographical advantage, as participants located far away from the researcher can take part in the research (Smith & Sparkes, 2016). In addition, computer-mediated interviews are thought to have a generational appeal to younger participants through using technology (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). However, both telephone and computer-mediated interviews are considered to have various disadvantages, including the loss of contextual information typically associated with face-to-face interviews (such as participant language and cues) and not knowing if others are present (Holt, 2010). That being said, both interviewing techniques were necessary given the implications of a national lockdown and the need to find alternative methods of gathering data.

Data analysis

All telephone and computer-mediated interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed using inductive and deductive procedures (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). Following multiple, independent readings of participants' transcripts by the lead author, the data were initially coded. Codes were then collated into potential core themes before a thematic matrix table was generated (Cohen et al., 2011). After this point, the resultant themes were refined (Cohen et al., 2011). For instance, initially, eight predominant themes aligned to the data themselves were identified. Then, Penney et al.'s (2009) notions of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment were used to guide the codes in a deductive manner. For example, codes related to the external providers' use of curriculum

frameworks were aligned closely to ‘curriculum’. Negative cases that contradicted emergent patterns were sought to adapt, expand, or restrict the original construct to assist in helping to tell the overall story (Cohen et al., 2011). Member checks with participants were used to check for representation of their meanings and interpretations (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). Following the interview, participants were provided a verbatim transcript of their conversation via email (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). From this, one participant added other coaching qualifications and experiences that they had undertaken. Two participants did not respond to the member check email, so their responses were assumed to be agreed by them. All other participants responded and were happy with how they were represented.

Findings and discussion

In using Penney et al.’s (2009) three message systems, three common themes were identified from the analysis. The first theme (*curriculum frameworks*) explores how external providers are increasingly developing their own curriculum frameworks to deliver in their partner primary schools. The second theme (*student-centred pedagogical approaches*) is concerned with how external providers utilised various student-centred pedagogical approaches to deliver curriculum framework content. The final theme (*assessment practices*) explores external providers’ assessment practices which were found to be integrated into their curriculum frameworks.

Curriculum frameworks

According to participants, half of the outsourcing companies (DPE and ES) in this study designed and utilised their own curriculum frameworks to shape their curriculum content in their partner primary schools. These frameworks referred to external providers developing their own primary PE curriculum and were communicated, reproduced and delivered in schools.

REACT PE was given to all the coaches that currently do work in schools (Alex, DPE SC).

REACT PE curriculum that we deliver ... they [the company] give us the content to deliver and then we go into the school and then deliver it (Sam, DPE SC).

Many of the external participants went on to provide an insight into what their outsourcing company’s curriculum frameworks looked like.

The curriculum [framework] that we had to follow, which was a scheme of work, which like focused on a sport every 6 weeks and then changed up (Alex, DPE SC).

We have an online portal whereby our members of staff drop all the [lesson] plans on there ... schools have a secure login, where they can see what has been going on (Michael, ES Franchisee).

In line with these findings, recent evidence has suggested that external providers often develop their own curricula frameworks to deliver in their curriculum lessons (Sperka & Enright, 2018). In fact, curriculum construction is currently argued to be a free-for-all and a space that is now open-to-all, including external providers (Pope, 2014; Rossi & Kirk, 2020). External providers are expanding their involvement in schools, by producing curriculum resources that are being integrated into school curriculum as a whole programme or curriculum resource, such as the outsourcing company’s curriculum frameworks in this study (Kirk, 2020; Sperka, 2020). The curriculum frameworks were noted by several of the participants to have a strong alignment to the English primary school national curriculum.

I would say there’s a strong link to it [the national curriculum] ... they’ve really delved into the [national] curriculum and incorporated it into all of the session plans in a really good way (Callum, DPE SC).

The company have obviously devised this [curriculum framework] ... and they have provided these lessons that coincide with the [national] curriculum ... it covered like obviously the things that we needed to be

covering in primary school PE, which is like your fundamental movement skills, your object control, etc, and you do get that through like a variety of sport, which was aligned up with the national curriculum for PE (Ellie, DPE SC).

In contrast to the findings of this study, it has been argued previously in the Australian context that some externally provided curriculum frameworks have provided limited links to national curricula (Petrie et al., 2014). However, Sperka et al. (2018) research into Tennis Australia's secondary school (TSS) programme highlighted the importance external providers placed on their alignment of their curriculum frameworks to the overlying national curriculum. On the surface, this suggests that external providers seem to be making a 'conscious effort' to meet national primary PE curricula requirements when developing their curriculum frameworks (Sperka et al., 2018). Using Penney et al.'s (2009) perspectives on 'quality' curriculum, it could be argued that external providers' curriculum frameworks alignment to national curricula may not necessarily guarantee a curriculum which could be deemed as 'quality'. While external providers may be making a 'conscious effort' (Sperka et al., 2018) to align their curriculum frameworks, according to Penney et al. (2009) a 'quality curriculum' must demonstrate alignment to the overlying educational goals of the whole curriculum and aim to deliver a range of learning outcomes. Moreover, while the external providers may have proposed that their curriculum aligned to the national curriculum, it is important to note that there are questions over their knowledge and engagement with the national curriculum (Griggs, 2010). That being said, the same concerns could be raised over qualified primary generalist teachers engagement with the primary PE curriculum. However, the external providers' claims of their curriculum frameworks alignment to the national primary PE curriculum need to be taken with caution. In the English context, this may be problematic due to the current primary school national curriculum for PE (NCPE) (see DfE, 2013) which places great emphasis on competition and traditional team games, rather than the development of a range of learning goals. That said, traditional team games are not a statutory requirement in the NCPE and there is a possibility for teacher (or in this instance external provider) autonomy (DfE, 2013).

Many of the external providers also went on to provide an insight into how their curriculum frameworks were sequenced and mapped out their curriculum content.

REACT PE just basically breaks it down for them [coaches] ... and goes right this is game one, this is what you do ... game two ... game three (Alex, DPE SC).

More than anything like I say it's just breaking it down [curriculum content] ... to be honest a lot of it was pretty much done for us ... [the curriculum framework] was broken down and it was kind of just you designing a session around it (Sian, DPE SC).

Participants then went on to suggest that their curriculum frameworks were mapped out from nursery to year six, consisting of lesson-by-lesson session plans.

[The curriculum framework has] 39 lessons from nursery to year six ... and every week there is a different lesson focusing on a different core skill (Ben, DPE SC).

The way [the curriculum framework] works is it's got lesson plans each week of the school year ... [and has] got lesson plans for every class (Callum, DPE SC).

Like Sperka and Enright's (2018) research noted earlier, this study found curriculum frameworks breaking down and mapping out curriculum content explicitly to the national curriculum. For instance, participants noted that they delivered core skills specifically stated in the primary NCPE, which were mapped out in their curriculum frameworks. Positively, this sequencing of content should mean that pupils achieve progressively demanding outcomes (Penney et al., 2009). Tensions have, however, arisen around the one-size-fits-all, pre-packaged and pre-planned nature of these curriculum frameworks (Powell, 2015). The scripted and 'locked-down' nature of these pre-planned curriculum frameworks have resulted in the external providers having little or no input into the curriculum content that they deliver (Enright et al., 2020). More concerning is

that these curriculum frameworks may not account for pupils' wide range of individual needs and interests, therefore undermining their sense of connection to their learning and schooling (Macdonald et al., 2020; Powell, 2015). Ultimately, as Petrie et al. (2014) cautioned, if these externally provided curriculum frameworks continue to prevail, there will be a regression to the traditional notions of PE being sport, without any consideration of the needs or interests of pupils. More broadly, this highlights the current neoliberal ideologies present in outsourced primary PE, with curriculum frameworks being an educational product and service offered by external providers (Macdonald et al., 2020). In England, this will reinforce a focus on competition, competence and excellence (Ward & Griggs, 2018), which may alienate a host of children and young people.

Student-centred pedagogical approaches

It has been suggested that external providers have limited pedagogical knowledge (Blair & Capel, 2008, 2011; Griggs, 2010, 2018), however, the participants in this study demonstrated broad pedagogical knowledge and indicated that they used various instructional models. For instance, Teaching Games for Understanding (TGfU) was noted as a popular pedagogical model used by external providers.

Naturally my sessions are all around [and] are based around TGfU ... I like to incorporate games and I like to take the skills into a game and practice them ... for me [that] is the best way to learn the skills is to learn and practice in a game situation, and [to] be fun ... for me personally they [instructional models] are worth it due to the results that I want, that they create a good experience, they create a good session, they have all been designed for a purpose, and the purpose has been really useful for me (Harry, SS SC).

TGfU was used ... and it was valued ... actually teaching them the rules of the game (Ellie, DPE SC).

Another popular instructional model that was employed and engaged with by the external providers was Sport Education, which was often used in their practice when focusing on leadership.

I mean with Year 6 we do a lot of leadership stuff ... they can help lead their own little groups and we give them a little task to do (David, RST HofCE).

In terms of Sport Education, I do use that ... mainly when it comes under the leadership lessons, obviously giving pupils the opportunity to, different you know having different roles ... you see a lot of the pupils that are not so good at PE do come out of their shell a bit more and get involved a bit more when you give them a new role (Callum, DPE SC).

In contrast to these findings, two participants indicated that they were unsure about whether they used or chose not to use instructional models.

I am not familiar with those ones [instructional models] to be honest ... I am just not familiar with the lingo I suppose (Michael, ES Franchisee).

Not really ... no ... we have kind of dabbled with them all [instructional models] ... TGfU was one at a point and then everyone was raving about that ... it seems to chop and change every year (David, HofCE).

Moreover, participants' previous educational experiences may influence their engagement with instructional models. For example, Michael does have a university degree; however, it is not a PE degree. It is, therefore, likely that he may not have had prior experience of pedagogical models. Thus, providing a possible explanation into why he seems to be unaware of and does not use these models. By using Penney et al.'s (2009) notions of what constitutes 'quality' pedagogy, pedagogical innovations (such as TGfU and Sport Education) contribute to quality learning and teaching in PE. Positively, the presence of these models in most of the external providers' practice highlighted that they may have moved away from traditional pedagogical approaches, such as command and didactic styles (Gordon et al., 2016). That said, it is widely argued that employing instructional models requires significant pedagogical expertise and vast PE-specific knowledge (Casey, 2014),

which some of the participants here lacked due to participant demographics (such as age) and their educational experiences.

According to participants, their knowledge and experience of using instructional models were developed via research and national governing bodies (NGB) training courses, such as university degree programmes and level 1 or 2 NGB coaching qualifications. For instance, seven out of the ten participants had a university degree. As noted above, in the case of Michael, it was suggested that some university degree courses may not explore pedagogical models. That said, some of the other external providers highlighted that their previous university background provided them with knowledge of different pedagogical practices and theories.

Again ... coming back to the PE degree that I did ... I feel like I was well equipped with the knowledge, but also with the different kinds of pedagogical frameworks or even theories that I would use (Faiz, SS SC).

I knew about TGfU from my sport coaching degree, so that's where I kind of had the knowledge for that (Ellie, DPE SC).

From an NGB support side, six out of 10 participants proposed that they developed their pedagogical knowledge through their outsourcing companies providing them with opportunities to complete various NGB coaching qualifications.

My team have done quite a lot of PE-CPD ... we partner with a couple of organisations (David, RST HofCE).

We normally get a lot of PE-CPD events on a lot of teaching methods ... we generally get taught to use a lot of different methods ... like how to teach PE lessons (Alex, DPE SC).

For participants, attaining a level 2 NGB qualification was thought to enable them to deliver curriculum lessons by their outsourcing companies.

I had done my level one and level two, so he [company owner] was really keen to get me on board because I could run [curriculum] sessions (Sian, DPE SC).

Me being a level two coach meant that I was able to go [and deliver curriculum lessons] straight away (Sam, DPE SC).

Like Parnell et al. (2017) indicated, the minimum statutory requirement to deliver within primary schools in England is currently a level 2 qualification. Whilst the external providers in this study highlighted that these coaching qualifications provided them with vast pedagogical practice ideas and activities. It has been cautioned that these opportunities often do not cover the appropriate pedagogical knowledge and only support the adoption of didactic approaches, rather than advocating for more holistic pedagogical practices (Steiner-Khamsi, 2018). Moreover, it is argued that there is a great emphasis on improving coaches' knowledge (Cushion et al., 2003; Nelson & Cushion, 2006). This ultimately results in external providers developing a great understanding of 'what' to deliver, but not necessarily 'how' to deliver this content (Parnell et al., 2017).

Assessment practices

According to participants, as noted earlier, half of the outsourcing companies in this study utilised their own curriculum frameworks. Within their curriculum frameworks, participants suggested that there were assessment practices intertwined.

We do all of our assessments through REACT PE [curriculum framework] (Alex, DPE SC).

It is all part of the same system [the curriculum framework] as the session plans ... for each session plan there is a corresponding assessment (Michael, ES Franchisee).

However, some of the external providers believed that their curriculum framework assessments were time-consuming, tedious and confusing.

[The curriculum framework assessments] was tedious, it was so long the assessment ... every kid ... you had 19 things to score them on ... and remembering that child and remembering if they can do it (Ben, DPE SC).

[Curriculum framework assessments] Assess children against the key proficiencies within the lesson ... so balance, control, kind of the motor skills (Michael, ES Franchisee).

Recent evidence has suggested that this range of assessment categories in external provider's practice may lead to confusion for pupils in terms of what they are being assessed on (Sperka & Enright, 2019). In other words, confusion in external providers' assessment practices can mean that pupils may be assessed on what they cannot do and the skills that they may not have (Sperka & Enright, 2018). This confusion may ultimately compromise student learning and understanding of what is valued in PE (Sperka & Enright, 2019). Moreover, in England, the primary school NCPE does not have any clear assessment guidance to assess pupils' learning against (see DfE, 2013). Using Penney et al.'s (2009) notions of what constitutes a 'quality' assessment, this confusion may affect the reliability and validity of their assessment judgements. Thus, understandings of what 'quality' is in PE needs to be acknowledged as dependent on various external factors, such as the personal values and beliefs of external providers (Hay & Macdonald, 2010). It is, therefore, argued that the inclusion of external providers may add complexity to assessment practices in primary school PE (Sperka & Enright, 2019). Thus, this inclusion may ultimately compromise student learning and understanding in what is valued within PE (Sperka & Enright, 2019).

According to the participants, the inclusion of assessment practices was due to their outsourcing company's motives and values. While this might 'look good' it did not reflect a genuine attempt to support teachers, pupils and schools and emphasises the neoliberal principles of business and markets. For instance:

I think it's just that the company wanted it [assessment practices] ... it looks good doesn't it (Ben, DPE SC).

Generally it's the company, I think they've got the most value on it [assessment practices] ... [outsourced coaches] are coming in and they're doing everything regarding PE, they're teaching, they're doing all the assessments (Callum, DPE SC).

Several of the participants noted some of the motivations behind their outsourcing company's inclusion of assessment practices, which were proposed to be a 'business decision'. While this is not necessarily new, it does highlight the enduring ways in which outsourcing and marketisation are evident in primary PE and schools more broadly.

To a certain extent it is a business decision [to include assessment practices] (Michael, ES Franchisee).

I think assessment is incredibly important, but the way that DPE went about their assessment was more for a business opportunity ... [the assessment] boosted sales of DPE going into schools ... it looks good (Sam, DPE SC).

In line with these findings, recent evidence has suggested that schools are not just witnessing an influx of private enterprises through outsourcing, but rather the marketisation of education in relation to its governance, organisation, purpose and delivery (Evans & Davies, 2015). In effect, education, in itself, is being opened up to a plethora of private companies and local enterprises for profit-making purposes (Macpherson et al., 2014). One of the participants then went on to suggest that the inclusion of assessment practices within their products and services assisted in the maintenance and sustainability of their relationship with the schools.

When I come round to do the contract renewals in the summer term ... if I can sit down in front of the head-teacher and throw them [assessment] statistics ... you've got 25 per cent of children who have moved from expected to exceeding ... it is then very hard for a headteacher to turn around and say well thank you, but we don't want you next year (Michael, ES Franchisee).

Similar to these findings, Sperka (2020) found that the decision by external providers to include assessment practices in their products and services to schools was arguably implemented to help

maintain and sustain their contracts with their partner schools. Outsourcing has thus stealthily and progressively opened up the provision of the education system to the private sector (O'Neill, 2011; Powell, 2015). Outsourcing of the education system has been previously thought to be limited to curriculum content and pedagogic delivery (Sperka & Enright, 2018). Like these findings suggest, assessment is now argued to be 'ripe' for outsourcing, as schools seek expertise on assessment practices from external providers (McCuaig et al., 2016). That said, as noted earlier, in the current English primary school NCPE there are no levels or support for assessment in primary school PE (see DfE, 2013). In support of this view, it has been argued that outsourcing companies are strategic in terms of how they package their product to schools (Steiner-Khamsi, 2018). The inclusion of assessment practices could be argued to be a 'business-like' tactic used by outsourcing companies to improve and sell their products and services (Macdonald et al., 2020).

Conclusion

This study sought to explore external providers' perspectives, reflections and rationale for the decisions they make when they deliver primary school PE lessons in England. Importantly, by considering 'quality' PE from the perspective of Penney et al. (2009), and in using their three dimensions of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, this paper has extended our understanding of outsourcing in primary PE. More specifically, in relation to curriculum, external providers developed and implemented their own curriculum frameworks to shape content in their partner primary schools. While they were found to be making a 'conscious effort' to align and map their curriculum frameworks to the primary PE curricula, this did not necessarily result in a curriculum which could be deemed as 'quality'. This is because curriculum content should align with learning that is distinct to PE, but also include more generic learning outcomes that are associated with learning that can be advanced through PE (Penney et al., 2009), something which the external providers' curriculum frameworks did not seem to achieve. In relation to pedagogy – and in contrast to existing literature surrounding external providers' lack of pedagogical knowledge – most external providers in this study knew of, and used, some student-centred pedagogical approaches (namely, TGfU and Sport Education) to implement their curriculum content. Penney et al. (2009) would argue that using such pedagogical innovations would constitute a step towards 'quality' learning and teaching in primary PE. As such, the presence of these student-centred pedagogical approaches demonstrates external providers' knowledge and willingness to seek pedagogical advances in PE (Penney et al., 2009).

In relation to assessment, this study found that external providers are increasingly providing assessment services and practices in their outsourcing provision. The assessment practices reported in this study seemed to be greatly influenced by the sports-based curriculum frameworks that the external providers meticulously adhered to and were influenced by various external factors, including their own personal values and beliefs. The inclusion of such assessment practices was due to their outsourcing company's motives and values. However, the inclusion of assessment practices further emphasised neoliberal principles of business and markets, with little genuine attempt to support schools, teachers and pupils – instead the provision of assessment practices were seen to 'look good' and were to some extent purely a 'business decision'. Importantly, such practices highlight the enduring ways in which outsourcing and marketisation are evident in primary PE and schools more broadly. Therefore, given the neoliberal ideologies and concerns regarding the 'quality' in external providers outsourcing provision, careful consideration must be taken by schools when contemplating whether to employ (or not to employ) external providers to deliver their curriculum framework content, school PE lessons, and to assess their pupils.

While this paper has provided an initial insight into external providers' perspectives, reflections and motives regarding their curriculum content, pedagogical approaches and assessment practices, further research is required. Research in this area could use a global competitiveness or neoliberal

theoretical lens to explore their motives and intentions. Using such approaches would extend our understanding of neoliberal ideologies used by external providers in their outsourcing provision. Consideration should also be given to the voices of pupils on outsourcing in their primary school PE lessons, as they have ‘important perspectives that deserve to be heard’ (Sperka, 2020, p. 10) and are frequently overlooked in this context.

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