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Trainee and recently qualified physical education teachers’ perspectives on including children with special educational needs

Philip Vickerman and Janine Kim Coates

Faculty of Education, Community and Leisure, Liverpool John Moores University, I M Marsh Campus, Barkhill Road, Liverpool, L17 6BD, UK

Background: In recent years within the UK the inclusion of children with special educational needs (SEN) in mainstream physical education (PE) has escalated up the statutory and political agenda. Despite this increased focus in schools, empirical research demonstrates that inequalities still exist in relation to the readiness of government, teacher training providers, schools and PE teachers to deliver this agenda. Furthermore, there is little empirical research regarding the experiences of trainee and recently qualified PE teachers related to the development of their knowledge, understanding and application of strategies to include children with SEN.

Aims: The present study aimed to examine the views and opinions of trainee and recently qualified PE teachers to gain an insight into their views and experiences of both their initial teacher training, and confidence once in schools to include children with SEN.

Methods: Five PE teacher training providers in England were identified as the sample group in which the views and opinions of 202 trainee and 19 recently qualified teachers (up to 2 years’ post qualifying experience) were examined. A mixed methodological research design was constructed in order to examine ‘the extent to which trainee and recently qualified PE teachers’ perceived readiness to include children with SEN was evident’. Data were collected via two questionnaires comprising a series of open and closed responses (one to trainee teachers, and one to recently qualified PE teachers). Questions focused upon respondents’ present experiences and perceived confidence in teaching children with SEN; reflections on the effectiveness of their training; professional development and training; links with schools and mentors; interpretations of inclusive PE and general values and attitudes. Data were analysed via the Statistical Package for Social Scientists. The open-ended responses were analysed using protocol analysis in order to code key themes and provide a rich insight into the general and specific issues related to trainee and recently qualified PE teachers’ perceived readiness to include children with SEN.

Results: The study found training experiences gained by students and recently qualified teachers to be rather mixed, with many indicating a lack of perceived readiness to include children with SEN satisfactorily. Eighty-four percent of recently qualified PE teachers, and 43% of trainees identified their initial teacher training had not prepared them sufficiently to work with children with SEN in schools.

Conclusion: In the future, trainee PE teachers need more opportunities to work, and be assessed on SEN as part of their school-based experiences, alongside gaining practical PE experience. Moreover, it is evident trainee teachers need opportunities to experience the full continuum of learning needs if they are to respond effectively to the individual needs of all pupils. A key factor in addressing this in the future will necessitate schools, training providers and government listening to the voices of trainee and qualified PE teachers.

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teachers and children with SEN in order to address the high levels of dissatisfaction that are currently present.

**Keywords:** inclusion; physical education; special educational needs; training; teachers

**The context for including children with special educational needs**

According to Morley et al. (2005, 85) the UK government has made ‘explicit its commitment to developing an inclusive education system’. Special educational needs (SEN) has risen up the British political agenda, evidenced by legislation such as the National Curriculum (NC) Inclusion Statement (Department for Education and Skills (DfES)/Qualification Curriculum Authority (QCA) 1999), SEN and Disability Rights Act (Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) 2000) and the Revised Code of Practice (DFES 2001a). Furthermore, the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA) (2007) standards for the award of Qualified Teacher Status and the OFSTED (2002) Inspection Framework have additionally increased the focus of scrutiny, competence and implementation of the teacher training element of SEN.

Statistical evidence from the DfES (2004) shows year-on-year rises in the number of children with SEN, as defined in the SEN Code of Practice (DfES 2001a), being included within mainstream education (1993: 48%; 1997: 57%; 2001: 61%; 2004: 76%). As a result, this raises many questions related to the readiness of trainee and recently qualified PE teachers to deliver this increasing agenda within schools. This is particularly pertinent as Slee (2001, 119) suggests, due to ‘concerns about teachers being unprepared for the challenges of inclusive schooling’, while Brent (2005) and Hodge et al. (2004) suggest the key to preparing PE teachers for inclusion rests with initial teacher training (ITT) providers creating an effective curriculum that is based upon encouraging teachers to adopt flexible and creative approaches to learning, teaching and assessment. Moreover, there is an increasing emphasis on the need for continued professional development (CPD) for both newly qualified and experienced teachers, to ensure that all teaching professionals are adequately prepared for teaching the increasing numbers of children with SEN attending mainstream PE lessons (Armour and Yelling 2004; Smith and Green 2004). As a result, the need for both teacher training providers and schools to address SEN issues and prepare teachers effectively is essential to the outcome and quality of education that is received by a child with SEN.

DePauw and Doll-Tepper (2000), Lambe and Bones (2006), and Morley et al. (2005) support the need for agencies such as teacher training providers, schools, and trainee, newly qualified and experienced teachers to review their current systems and establish a clear context as to what inclusive PE for children with SEN means in practice. Consequently, what trainee and newly qualified PE teachers need is sound pedagogical guidance and practices which are embedded across the whole training curriculum, rather than seen as a bolt-on addition to the teacher training curriculum. Currently, mandatory SEN training in ITT is limited to in-school practice to satisfy the requirement for trainee teachers to demonstrate effectively how they would make ‘effective personalised provision’ for children with SEN (TDA 2007, 10). This should be extended to reflect the increasing numbers, and diversity of children with SEN in mainstream schools, through extensive practical and applied theoretical SEN guidance throughout ITT. This requirement is reflected in the perceptions of PE teachers who state that inadequate SEN training places substantial constraint on their teaching practice (Smith and Green 2004). Furthermore, Lambe and Bones (2006, 525) argue: ‘those responsible for ITT at the strategic and operational level
will need to be more proactive in winning the hearts and minds of their students towards an approach to teaching in a setting that is different from the accepted norms’. Thus PE teachers of the future must be both convinced of the arguments for inclusive education, while at the same time being provided with the necessary knowledge, skills, understanding and confidence to provide high-quality PE experiences for children with SEN.

The present study reports upon the final phase of a three-part investigation focusing on the views and opinions of trainee and recently qualified PE teachers in relation to their perceived readiness to include children with SEN within their classes. The previous phases focused upon, firstly, an examination of ‘official line agencies’ such as government and statutory and professional teacher/PE agencies perspectives on SEN; and secondly, on the views and opinions of teacher training providers in relation to their preparation of PE teachers to include children.

It has been argued that trainee and recently qualified teachers’ views and opinions are the ultimate measure of government SEN and inclusive policy alongside the professional opinion and practices provided by teacher training providers (Farrell 2001; Slee 2001); particularly as the educational experiences received by children with SEN in PE relate directly to the ability of teachers to adopt flexible, responsive and worthwhile educational experiences (Hutzler et al. 2002; Fitzgerald 2005). As such, the first phase of the investigation, which considered the views and opinions of professional (PE associations) and statutory agencies (i.e. TDA, OFSTED, DfES) in relation to how policy definition, interpretation and guidance at a national level impact upon delivery by teacher training providers and schools, found there was inconsistency of definition and interpretation of inclusion and how it should be implemented. This raised questions on the ability of teacher training providers to produce a coherent and systematic approach to delivery if there is confusion at national policy and strategic level (Vickerman 2002).

The second phase examined how PE ITT providers implemented professional and statutory guidance through their pedagogical practices and delivery with students. Westwood (1997), DePauw and Doll-Tepper (2000), Smith (2004), and Smith and Green (2004) view this issue as central to any move towards an inclusive agenda advocating that the teacher training curriculum can be considered as the conduit and key agent for change and development in SEN policy and practices. What was evident, however, was that there is presently inconsistency in the amount of hours and the nature of activities and experiences that trainee PE teachers receive in relation to including children with SEN (Vickerman 2007).

The shift to inclusive education for children with SEN in PE

Evidence suggests ‘increasingly students with disabilities are being educated in general physical education classes’ (Ammah and Hodge 2005, 40). Furthermore, the PE NC (DfES/QCA 1999) emphasises the need for inclusive teaching in PE through targets which focus on ensuring teachers set suitable learning challenges; respond to pupils diverse needs; and adapt their assessment strategies to accommodate all children’s needs. However, Dyson (1999, 2) notes some concern with the concept of disability now being ‘at the heart of a new and privileged society’, particularly as inclusion statements often seek to remove difference that focuses upon predicted equality and are, therefore, not necessarily outcomes-based. Adopting a social model of inclusive education implemented through policy and regulation therefore runs the risk of overlooking the child’s true needs. Farrell (2004, 83) therefore argues that SEN has become a policy power-struggle, instead of a ‘rational response to any real need’. As such, the implementation of policies by the government may appear to be socially and morally desirable, but the danger is that
impacts are measured through statements written into policies, rather than success being judged in terms of the quality of learning experience for the child with SEN (Armstrong 2005; Smith and Thomas 2006).

The NC Inclusion Statement (DfES/QCA 1999) in relation to PE, alongside recent legislative changes in SEN, such as the Code of Practice (DfES 2001a), necessitates ITT providers to review their current practices to ensure teachers of the future are able to support entitlement and accessibility to the curriculum. Furthermore, the NC establishes an expectation that the PE curriculum will be based on ‘equality of opportunity’, which is ‘one of a broad set of common values and purposes which underpin the school curriculum and the work of schools’ (DfES/QCA 1999, 4). Moreover, in order to include children with SEN effectively in PE their teachers must be aware of a range of key principles including flexibility, creativity and responsiveness; equality policies; learning and teaching strategies; and creation of pupil-centred learning and development in schools.

**From policy to practice in inclusive PE**

Armstrong (2005, 135) suggests ‘special education is seen as a contentious area of public policy’ in which the common threads of inclusive education policy need to be drawn together. He goes on to suggest that the successful implementation of inclusive PE rests upon acceptance by teachers of the basic values of citizenship, principles of equal access, and provision for all children. Additionally, teachers and schools must have a positive attitude and supportive policy statements, and plan effectively for inclusion, while focusing on positive outcomes for children with SEN. If, as the PE NC 2000 suggests, ‘teachers must take action and ensure that their pupils are enabled to participate’, (DfES/QCA 1999, 33) there is a need to develop methods for increasing teachers’ knowledge, understanding and skills on both the philosophy of inclusion as well as the practice of adapting the curriculum (Avramidis and Norwich 2002).

As a result, the DfES ‘Schools achieving success’ (2001b) document states that they will help schools to meet the needs of children with SEN through a commitment to inclusion and a recognition of the responsibility placed upon teachers to enable such practice to occur. More specifically, the PE NC (DfES/QCA 1999) addresses some of these issues by considering assessment in alternative activities, and flexibility of teaching and learning practices. This rests the responsibility of implementation and delivery with teacher training providers and PE teachers to ensure that they are adequately prepared to deliver such practices in order to meet the requirements of the curriculum.

The Teacher Training Agency (TTA) (1999) published the *National SEN specialist standards*, emphasising ‘the key to unlocking the full potential of pupils in our schools lies in the expertise of teachers and headteachers. Research and inspection evidence demonstrate the close correlation between the quality of teaching and the achievement of pupils’ (TTA 1999, 1). They recognised the central role teachers and schools play, and for the first time, began to identify aspects of SEN provision that are required in order to create access to education. The key issue according to Rose (1998), however, remains the extent to which ITT providers are helping teachers with the practical skills to deliver policy objectives that strongly advocate inclusion. Armstrong (2005) further argues that there is a great deal of evidence of rhetoric and policy on inclusion, but questions what has changed in relation to the practice and experience of inclusive education for the child with SEN. This is reflected in the perceptions of experienced teachers who argue that while inclusive education is a favourable outcome, it is not necessarily a realistic target (Morley et al. 2005). For these teachers, inclusion was seen as a journey towards an ultimate target, but
at the present time, was not considered to be fully obtainable due to a lack of working knowledge about lesson adaptation. This highlights apparent implications for ITT and CPD (Morley et al. 2005) in providing comprehensive SEN training.

In addressing the training needs of future teachers, the TTA (1999) SEN specialist standards advocate that teacher training standards will be the vehicle for measuring competence. It claims that as increasing numbers of children with SEN enter mainstream, ‘more teachers in mainstream schools will require the knowledge, understanding and skills to work effectively with pupils’ (TTA 1999, 3, point 9). The document then goes on to suggest ‘all teachers, whether in mainstream schools or in special schools, will need to continue to develop their teaching, pedagogy based on the known features of effective practice in meeting all pupils learning needs’ (TTA 1999, 3, point 10). This suggests that all teachers will become specialists in SEN; however, this is somewhat contradictory given that many trainee teachers experience only a limited amount of specific SEN training (Morley et al. 2005; Smith and Green 2004).

Nevertheless, as Hodkinson (2006, 15) argues: ‘If inclusion is to become the core principle of the English educational system, its future success may rest with the next generation of teachers’. He continues by suggesting that inclusion is a complex and multi-faceted issue, however, to-date its understanding and implementation among trainee teachers has been rather shallow. As a result, the present study sets out to examine this assertion specifically in relation to gaining the views and opinions of trainee and recently qualified PE teachers in relation to their readiness to include children with SEN in PE.

**Method**

The purpose of the study was to examine the perspectives of trainee and recently qualified PE teachers in relation to their perceived readiness to include children with SEN. The subjects were identified from five PE teacher training providers who deliver undergraduate and/or postgraduate secondary PE courses in England. The criteria for selection of trainees were based upon training providers’ regional diversity; range of Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) grades; and range of either large, small and/or undergraduate and postgraduate provision (see Table 1).

The decision to examine both the views and opinions of trainee teachers and recently qualified PE teachers was two-fold. Firstly, it gave an opportunity to reflect on trainee perceptions of readiness to deliver inclusive PE while in training, and then on into schools. Secondly, it enabled the opportunity to gain an insight into the professional development of PE teachers at an early stage in their career development. In order to

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Teacher training provider</th>
<th>Trainee teacher numbers</th>
<th>Context</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>75 undergraduate trainees</td>
<td>Large undergraduate and postgraduate course in the north of England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>55 undergraduate trainees</td>
<td>Large undergraduate four year course in the south of England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>70 postgraduate trainees</td>
<td>Large 1-year postgraduate course in the Midlands</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>30 undergraduate trainees</td>
<td>Small undergraduate 4-year course in the south of England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>15 postgraduate trainees</td>
<td>Small 1-year postgraduate course in the Midlands</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
ascertain the similarities and differences of perception among trainee and recently qualified PE teachers, the decision was made to divide the data collection into two stages, resulting in a questionnaire for trainee teachers and, a questionnaire for recently qualified teachers. Ethical approval was granted by the university’s standard submission procedures while informed consent was gained from respondents through the signing of a separate form returned with the questionnaire (McNamee and Bridges 2002).

Stage one (trainee PE teachers)

In relation to trainee teachers on a Postgraduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) course, there were no issues to consider regarding selection, as they undertake a 1-year course. However, in relation to trainees on 3- or 4-year undergraduate programmes, final-year students were identified as being in the best position to evaluate their training, as they would of had the opportunity to undertake extensive school-based training experiences, and engage in lectures on aspects of SEN and inclusive provision.

Respondents from both Stages one and two were predominantly white European, and all were under 30 years of age. This is important in understanding the ways in which individual actors perceive specific situations (Armour and Jones 1998), and as such the similarities in age and cultural status present a preliminary ground for interpreting and analysing the views of this particular group.

Several options were therefore considered when determining how to ascertain the views and opinions of trainee teachers. Trainee teachers could have been observed while on school-based practice, or in tutorials and lectures while at university, although this would have proven problematic to standardise (Bridges and Smith 2007). Face-to-face interviews would have proven problematic in relation to the amount of time taken, as well as being subject to small sample sizes (Peugh and Enders 2004). The decision was therefore taken to distribute a questionnaire containing open and closed questions to all final-year trainee teachers from the five selected PE ITT providers, which gave the opportunity for a large sample of data to be collected. Furthermore, following previous research (Vickerman 2002, 2007), key themes and issues were identified which it would be pertinent to consider addressing with trainee and recently qualified PE teachers. Therefore, pilot questionnaires were undertaken with 10 final-year trainee teachers and 10 recently qualified PE teachers to ensure the questions were clear and relevant to the subject under investigation.

When attempting to make judgements on individuals’ views, opinions, and experiences of inclusion, Farrell (2000) suggests there are concerns related to this type of methodological research in that: ‘evaluating the effectiveness of inclusion is virtually impossible’ (Farrell 2000, 156). This is due to the range of SEN, inclusive experiences and contexts being so great, and the variety of available provision and delivery within schools being so diverse. Therefore, as a result it is difficult to judge whether trainee and/or recently qualified PE teachers are experiencing similar or entirely different forms of inclusive PE provision for children with SEN in addition to differences in personal experiences and opinions regarding PE (Armour and Jones 1998) and inclusion. In contrast, Goodwin and Watkinson (2000) suggest that the alternative of not comparing or discussing inclusive provision discounts the rich sources of data that can be gleaned from the subjects themselves, who are fundamentally at the heart of the provision that is being delivered. Therefore, bearing in mind the concerns indicated by Farrell (2000), the questionnaire sought to gain data related to the trainee PE teachers’ views and experiences of inclusive education, professional development, and training to date and their perceived readiness to implement inclusive activity.
The questionnaire at Stage one was administered face-to-face with trainee PE teachers at their training provider location in order to increase return rates. The questionnaire comprised 32 questions under 6 headings: About you; Your professional development and training to date; Your links with schools and mentors; Interpreting inclusive PE; Values and attitudes; and Other views and opinions. Therefore, questions addressed, for example, issues concerning the amount of time spent considering SEN issues; balance between practical and theoretical PE delivery; definitions and interpretations of inclusion; perceived effectiveness of training for inclusion; and the extent to which SEN issues are delivered in isolation or are integral to other aspects of training.

**Stage two (recently qualified PE teachers)**

Similar considerations were taken into account for recently qualified teachers. However, there were further complications with regard to ease of access to qualified teachers who had now left the ITT provider and could be employed anywhere in the country. As a result, contact was made with recently qualified teachers, who had up to 2 years’ post-qualifying experience. This had two advantages, firstly ITT providers keep data on first destination statistics and many teachers may still be in their initial teaching posts. Secondly it offers the opportunity to ask teachers to reflect upon both their recent ITT and subsequent abilities to deliver inclusive PE to children with SEN. Consequently, a selected number of qualified PE teachers’ views on their training and current inclusive PE practice with children with SEN were obtained via questionnaire. The decision was taken to contact three male, and three female teachers from each of the five selected PE ITT providers used at Stage one. Again, respondents were predominantly white European, and under the age of 30.

A questionnaire comprising of a series of open and closed responses was distributed to all recently qualified teachers from the five selected ITT PE providers asking similar questions to those in the Stage one questionnaire, but with two additional themes focusing first upon their present experiences and perceived confidence in teaching children with SEN; and second their reflections on the effectiveness of their training.

**Data collection and analysis**

Data from Stage one and two questionnaires were collated and represented in graph format following analysis via the Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) (Version 14.0). The open-ended responses were analysed using protocol analysis (Robson 2002; Marshall and Rossman 2006) in order to provide a rich insight into the general and specific issues related to trainee and recently qualified PE teachers’ perceived readiness to include children with SEN. The responses were coded according to four factors to demonstrate credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformity of the results as a means of validating the findings (Robson 2002). In relation to credibility, the objective measures of data collection were gained via the closed questions, while in contrast, the subjective open-ended data were coded through protocol analysis (Marshall and Rossman 2006) to identify key themes and issues arising from the data. Transferability was achieved by comparing the data with previous studies at early phases (Vickerman 2002, 2007) in order to identify areas of commonality that arose from the data, which also contributed to the dependability of the data set as it could be triangulated with data from previous ‘official lines’ and teacher training provider findings. Finally, this process contributed towards the conformity of data to key themes and issues which were identified from different levels of interpretation. The identified themes,
and therefore questionnaire items, were constructed on the basis of an analysis of current literature, which highlighted the issues discussed within this paper.

Each questionnaire sent from the respective PE ITT provider was analysed separately at both stages, then combined with the others to provide a global overview of the data set for final-year and recently qualified teachers. Moore (2000) suggests that in order to satisfactorily gauge opinion, sufficient quota samples must be undertaken in order to make more generalised assumptions regarding the wider subject group. Consequently, in administering and collecting the questionnaires directly from 5 of the 24 available PE ITT providers to England’s final-year trainees, this represented 21% of the total available population group. In addition, by administering the questionnaires on a face-to-face basis with the trainees, the high response rates have, to a large extent, discounted the probabilities of difference due to low return rates (Bridges and Smith 2007).

Stage two questionnaires were posted to a random selection of recently qualified PE teachers from the five selected PE ITT providers. The questionnaires were sent out by the ITT provider with an accompanying letter explaining the context of the research, and confirming that they were consenting to the study. A total of 30 questionnaires were posted with monthly follow-up reminders up to a maximum of three contacts. The data were analysed on the basis of 19 responses, representing a return rate of 63%. The gender split was 8 males (42%) and 11 females (58%). In contrast, the total number of questionnaires returned at Stage one totalled 202 responses from a potential 245, representing a return rate of 82%. The distribution of male returns was 85 (42%) and 117 females (58%) which was representative of the overall gender split from the five training providers.

Results

Results of the data analyses are presented in Tables 2 and 3.

Discussion

Trainee PE teachers’ perceptions of professional development and training

The issue of whether SEN should be addressed as discrete blocks or embedded across all elements of training is an issue of considerable debate (Robertson, Childs, and Marsden 2000; DePauw and Doll-Tepper 2000; Hodge et al. 2004; Armstrong 2005). Forty-five

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher training provider</th>
<th>Trainee teacher numbers</th>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Mean total hours spent on SEN preparation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>75 undergraduate trainees</td>
<td>Large undergraduate and postgraduate course in the north of England</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>55 undergraduate trainees</td>
<td>Large undergraduate 4-year course in the south of England</td>
<td>70</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>70 postgraduate trainees</td>
<td>Large 1-year postgraduate course in the Midlands</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>30 undergraduate trainees</td>
<td>Small undergraduate 4-year course in the south of England</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>15 postgraduate trainees</td>
<td>Small 1-year postgraduate course in the Midlands</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3. Percentage responses to questions on training to include children with special educational needs (SEN) (rounded to nearest whole figure).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Teacher training provider A (%)</th>
<th>Teacher training provider B (%)</th>
<th>Teacher training provider C (%)</th>
<th>Teacher training provider D (%)</th>
<th>Teacher training provider E (%)</th>
<th>Mean overall (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My ITT has not prepared me well for including children with SEN in PE (recently qualified teachers)</td>
<td>SA 60</td>
<td>SA 80</td>
<td>SA 40</td>
<td>SA 50</td>
<td>SA 70</td>
<td>SA 60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A 30</td>
<td>A 10</td>
<td>A 20</td>
<td>A 36</td>
<td>A 24</td>
<td>A 24</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N 0</td>
<td>N 5</td>
<td>N 10</td>
<td>N 10</td>
<td>N 0</td>
<td>N 5</td>
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<td></td>
<td>D 5</td>
<td>D 5</td>
<td>D 20</td>
<td>D 4</td>
<td>D 0</td>
<td>D 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD 5</td>
<td>SD 0</td>
<td>SD 10</td>
<td>SD 0</td>
<td>SD 6</td>
<td>SD 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My ITT did not prepare me well for including children with SEN in PE (trainee teacher response)</td>
<td>SA 10</td>
<td>SA 40</td>
<td>SA 10</td>
<td>SA 20</td>
<td>SA 20</td>
<td>SA 20</td>
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<td></td>
<td>A 20</td>
<td>A 30</td>
<td>A 15</td>
<td>A 30</td>
<td>A 20</td>
<td>A 23</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>D 40</td>
<td>D 20</td>
<td>D 5</td>
<td>D 30</td>
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<td>D 27</td>
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<td></td>
<td>SD 10</td>
<td>SD 0</td>
<td>SD 60</td>
<td>SD 20</td>
<td>SD 10</td>
<td>SD 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have spent time on specific SEN training modules (trainee teacher response)</td>
<td>SA 40</td>
<td>SA 10</td>
<td>SA 20</td>
<td>SA 20</td>
<td>SA 10</td>
<td>SA 20</td>
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<td></td>
<td>A 10</td>
<td>A 15</td>
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<td>N 0</td>
<td>N 30</td>
<td>N 10</td>
<td>N 0</td>
<td>N 30</td>
<td>N 14</td>
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<td></td>
<td>D 10</td>
<td>D 40</td>
<td>D 5</td>
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<td>D 25</td>
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<td>SD 5</td>
<td>SD 60</td>
<td>SD 20</td>
<td>SD 40</td>
<td>SD 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have undertaken assessment tasks specifically on SEN (trainee teacher response)</td>
<td>SA 20</td>
<td>SA 10</td>
<td>SA 10</td>
<td>SA 20</td>
<td>SA 40</td>
<td>SA 20</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>A 7</td>
<td>A 0</td>
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<td>N 10</td>
<td>N 12</td>
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<td>D 26</td>
<td>D 16</td>
<td>D 33</td>
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<td>SD 40</td>
<td>SD 30</td>
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<td>SD 38</td>
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<td>Trainee teachers should visit SEN schools as part of the ITT</td>
<td>SA 60</td>
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<td>SA 60</td>
<td>SA 50</td>
<td>SA 60</td>
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</table>

(Continued.)
Table 3. (Continued.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Teacher training provider A (%)</th>
<th>Teacher training provider B (%)</th>
<th>Teacher training provider C (%)</th>
<th>Teacher training provider D (%)</th>
<th>Teacher training provider E (%)</th>
<th>Mean overall (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children with SEN should be included in mainstream PE (trainee teacher response)</td>
<td>SA 50 A 10 N 10 D 10 SD 10</td>
<td>SA 40 A 10 N 0 D 40 SD 0</td>
<td>SA 40 A 10 N 10 D 30 SD 10</td>
<td>SA 30 A 20 N 30 D 20 SD 0</td>
<td>SA 46 A 10 N 8 D 24 SD 6</td>
<td></td>
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<td>My ITT in SEN was all theory-based (recently qualified teachers)</td>
<td>SA 30 A 10 N 0 D 40 SD 20</td>
<td>SA 20 A 4 N 16 D 40 SD 20</td>
<td>SA 40 A 6 N 14 D 30 SD 10</td>
<td>SA 10 A 10 N 30 D 20 SD 0</td>
<td>SA 26 A 6 N 12 D 26 SD 6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would like to see school-based training strengthened related to SEN (recently qualified teachers)</td>
<td>SA 20 A 15 N 15 D 20 SD 30</td>
<td>SA 20 A 10 N 10 D 10 SD 20</td>
<td>SA 15 A 10 N 0 D 50 SD 10</td>
<td>SA 30 A 5 N 5 D 40 SD 20</td>
<td>SA 20 A 13 N 8 D 29 SD 10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would have liked to have engaged in more practical application as part of my ITT (recently qualified teachers)</td>
<td>SA 10 A 14 N 30 D 16 SD 30</td>
<td>SA 30 A 14 N 10 D 36 SD 10</td>
<td>SA 20 A 5 N 0 D 15 SD 10</td>
<td>SA 50 A 2 N 18 D 30 SD 10</td>
<td>SA 40 A 7 N 12 D 21 SD 20</td>
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Notes: ITT, initial teacher training; PE, physical education; SA, strongly agree; A, agree; N, neutral; D, disagree; SD, strongly disagree.
percent of trainee PE teachers considered SEN issues to be embedded within their courses, with a further 30% commenting that training came through specific compulsory components of their course. Robertson, Childs, and Marsden (2000) argue that there is a specific need for SEN practice and training to be embedded within teacher training processes, emphasising its requirement in both ITT and CPD. They claim that the failure to embed SEN in ITT will reflect a failure to take full account of the ‘true nature of inclusive education’ (Robertson, Childs, and Marsden 2000, 61). As such, they claim that training should be inclusive from the start of any ITT or CPD training. Alternatively, Smith and Green (2004) claim that SEN training in PE ITT will not necessarily result in more inclusive teaching practice. They argue that several teachers will complete mandatory elements of their training relating to SEN, which will have no influence on their attitudes and practices in schools. As such it is necessary primarily to change the perspectives of teachers about inclusion. However, this is not possible unless training is embedded within the training framework (DePauw and Doll-Tepper 2000), therefore increasing the amount of time available to consider issues relating to SEN.

The total number of hours trainees spent on SEN issues ranged from 2%, indicating between 0 and 5 hours, to 21%, engaging in over 100 hours. However, the majority (70%) of respondents indicated that the total number of hours spent throughout their course on SEN-focused training was somewhere between 5 and 70 hours. Time factors were a particular issue for students on postgraduate courses, with 76% of trainees from provider C and 56% from provider E noting they had only spent 0–5 hours on SEN throughout their training. Similarly, 49% of PE ITT provider D trainees indicated they had spent between 0 and 5 hours on SEN during their 4-year undergraduate course. Furthermore, some trainees from provider D commented in the open-ended responses that they did not feel adequately equipped to address SEN and PE issues and, one trainee commented ‘we need more training on PE and SEN in order to feel confident to deliver’. While for postgraduate courses there are issues relating to time restrictions, for those on 3- and 4-year courses time should be made available for inclusive training. However, the small amount of time spent on SEN training on some PE ITT postgraduate courses reflects the minimal importance given to SEN within the training standards for Qualified Teacher Status (TDA 2007). Vickerman (2007) points out that ITT providers find it difficult to fit SEN issues into the training, as SEN is just one of around 60 standards which must be addressed through ITT. Furthermore, Brent (2005) claims that the lack of opportunities given to student teachers relating to SEN, can place considerable constraints on the ability of teachers to respond to the needs of children with SEN. Moreover, Wilkins and Nietfield (2004) claim that teachers tend to be fearful of inclusion due to a lack of knowledge regarding SEN. This fear and constraint could be reduced if student teachers are given more opportunity to experience inclusion, and if contact with children with SEN is increased.

Trainee teachers’ application of SEN and links with schools
The current research has shown that the majority (55%) of respondents experienced more practical training than theoretical SEN training (80% practical; 20% theoretical). Twenty-one percent suggested there was an equal split between practical and theoretical training, and a further 21% indicated they had taken a specific PE module on SEN. Research by Morley et al. (2005) indicates that practicing teachers would prefer more practical than theoretical training, claiming that it provides more preparation for actually having contact with a child with SEN. It is therefore a positive sign that the majority of respondents in this study are experiencing considerably more practical training than theoretical.
However, DePauw and Doll-Tepper (2000, 140) warn that inclusive teacher education in ITT should ‘still focus specific attention on theoretical perspectives’ in order to ensure teachers of PE are aware of the changing role of PE professionals in SEN. As such it would be necessary to deliver ITT that provides a balance between practical and theoretical training, ensuring that student teachers are having contact with children with SEN to promote confidence and practical ability (Morley et al. 2005), as well as the theoretical knowledge to provide an adapted curriculum.

According to Morley et al. (2005), the assessment of knowledge, understanding, and application of SEN is central to PE training providers making judgements on the extent to which trainees are aware of the underpinning issues related to inclusion. Only a minority of trainee teachers (27%) stated that they experienced assessment with specific reference to SEN and inclusion. Similarly, only 11% of recently qualified teachers had this opportunity during their training. Furthermore, one trainee summarised the views of many recently qualified teachers in stating ‘I was not assessed at all in school on SEN, so how did I or the University know if I was progressing’. This places more constraint on trainee and recently qualified teachers, the large majority of whom were unaware if their SEN practice was suitable enough to meet the needs of the children they teach. The National SEN specialist standards (TTA 1999), however, state that all teachers working in both mainstream and special schools must undergo performance review in order to determine development priorities in relation to their practice with pupils with SEN. For qualified teachers, this will occur through peer review and in CPD. However, if trainee teachers are to meet the standards set by the TTA for SEN, assessment must be undertaken by the ITT providers to ensure their trainees are fully prepared to teach children with SEN.

Furthermore, in the current study, 19% of trainee teachers indicated that they had to undertake some form of compulsory special school experience, while a further 59% said there were optional opportunities to make visits to special schools, if they so wished. However, at three of the PE training providers, levels of optional visits to special schools were significantly higher than the average (PE ITT provider E: 78%; PE ITT provider B: 92%; and 76% at PE ITT provider C). On further examination, this was attributed to lecturers openly encouraging trainees to experience some form of special school experience in order to extend their appreciation of the full continuum of learning needs, which, according to Hodkinson (2006), is essential if teachers of the future are to be adequately prepared for delivering the inclusion agenda. Indeed, Ainscow et al. (1999) supports the view that successful inclusion rests upon teachers demonstrating positive attitudes and commitment to inclusion while embedding these values as an integral aspect of their pedagogical practice.

Trainee values and attitudes

The trainee teachers were asked to respond to a series of questions to gauge their attitudes and values towards inclusive PE for children with SEN. Trainees were presented with a series of statements, to which they were asked to agree or disagree on a five-point Likert scale. The inclusion of children with SEN within mainstream schools has increased in prominence over recent years (Rose 2002; Vickerman 2007) and in support of this view, 62% of trainee teachers agreed or strongly agreed that children with SEN should be included in mainstream schools. However, only 12% of trainees from provider D agreed with this. This links to other factors associated with this provider, such as low total number of hours spent on SEN and several comments from trainees that they ‘felt ill prepared for inclusion’. The differences seen between ITT providers on issues relating to SEN
highlights the need for new standards for all ITT providers to be put in place. Currently, SEN standards provided by the TTA ‘do not constitute a training syllabus’ (TTA 1999, 2), but instead provide guidelines from which ITT providers can develop training programmes. As such it may be beneficial for the TTA to provide set training standards which must be met by all ITT providers to ensure consistency within the teaching profession.

In addition to this, Dyson (2001) claims that training experiences do have a correlation with the views and perceptions trainee teachers formulate and then take on into their teaching in school. Thus, if teachers have negative experiences of SEN and inclusion while in training they are more likely to be reluctant to adopt flexible approaches to learning and teaching, particularly in areas where they are lacking in confidence (Bailey 2005).

The extent to which trainees feel equipped to deliver inclusive PE for children with SEN, has an impact on the confidence teachers have once in schools (Morley et al. 2005). Forty-three percent of the respondents in this study suggested they were not adequately prepared. This reinforces the Audit Commission (2002) view that newly qualified teachers need further support in their transition from ITT to schools. Furthermore, 91% of final-year trainees indicated they would need some form of CPD once in schools; again reflecting the lack of confidence among trainee teachers. Nevertheless, while there may be many questions on the current readiness of PE teachers to deliver inclusion for children with SEN, 93% agreed or strongly agreed that such issues should be comprehensively addressed within ITT.

Recently qualified PE teachers’ reflections on their ITT

Recently qualified teachers are, according to Shelvin and O’Moore (2000), in a critical position to comment on the appropriateness of their ITT relating to how equipped they are to deliver inclusive PE to children with SEN once in schools. The combination of theoretical and practical application of SEN training showed a different pattern to that in the Stage one questionnaires. While respondents noted a considerable amount of time spent on practical application, the Stage two responses included 26% of teachers indicating their ITT was all theory-based, with a further 16% suggesting it was at least 90% theory. This was validated by open-ended responses, in which many of the recently qualified PE teachers noted that they wished more time had been spent on practical application, which now appears to be the case with current trainees. Indeed, examples of open-ended responses included ‘I would like to of had more practical application rather than just theory’; ‘We focused too much on lectures rather than how to practically include the children’; and ‘I felt that I did not have the practical knowledge to support the pupils’. The lack of practical SEN training has been highlighted in a number of research studies (Smith and Green 2004; Morley et al. 2005), and it is evident from these that limited practical training places constraint on the teachers’ ability to modify their teaching to meet the needs of all children. Morley et al. (2005) emphasise this and highlight the challenges faced by training teachers in their ability to interpret and apply the codes of practice in qualifying to teach if their training is based on theory rather than practice. This reinforces the view that a balance should be struck between providing theoretical and practical training in SEN.

In relation to the question ‘Do you feel that your ITT course prepared you for the inclusion of children with SEN in PE?’ only 16% of recently qualified teachers said yes, while 84% of respondents answered no. This therefore raises many questions on the current readiness of PE teachers to deliver inclusive PE for children with SEN, and as a result the need for CPD is paramount if PE teachers are to be satisfactorily equipped to support children with SEN. This high level of uncertainty reinforces the need to strengthen
links between ITT, induction and CPD, which have already been highlighted by Ammah and Hodge (2005) and the Audit Commission (2002).

**PE teachers’ experiences once qualified**

A key factor to examine from the Stage two respondents was the view that PE ITT providers are concentrating too much on the theory, rather than practical application of SEN in both university and school-based contexts. This supports previous research by Smith (2004) and Vickerman (2002) in which it was highlighted that successful inclusive practice rests upon sound theoretical concepts, which are then applied in practical settings to give trainees clear strategies for inclusion. Many current PE teachers commented that PE ITT providers should be encouraged to think carefully about strategies to enhance links between the theory and practice of SEN. For example, open-ended responses included, ‘whilst I did large amounts of theory, I didn’t get a chance to apply it until I was in a teaching post and this was too late’ and ‘we should have done more practical work to help us prepare for the realities of the classroom’. Additionally, 33% indicated a desire to strengthen school-based training experiences in order for trainees to appreciate the challenges that face teachers on a daily basis, which supports Hodkinson’s (2006) view that synergies between training providers and schools are an essential element of successful training.

The reflections offered by the recently qualified PE teachers bring significant currency and insight into the extent to which ITT has satisfactorily equipped them for supporting children with SEN. When teachers were asked to comment on any issues they felt ITT providers should address, 42% suggested there should be a compulsory SEN school experience, while 47% suggested that more ideas on practical activities and delivery should have been given. Furthermore, 21% indicated that they required more experience of teaching the full range of SEN as this had been rather limited in comparison to the extensive continuum of needs experienced in school. This supports the views of Sugden and Talbot (1998) and Wright and Sugden (1999), who advocate the need to prepare trainees for the whole continuum of physical, social, emotional and learning needs that children present with in special and mainstream schools.

**Conclusion**

The examination of trainee and recently qualified teachers’ experiences of ITT and CPD, and the implementation of this training in relation to inclusive PE, is somewhat assorted. This perspective is supported by Norwich (2002), who advocates the view that there are multiple values related to the delivery of inclusion. For example, Brent (2005) and Lambe and Bones (2006) indicate that inclusion is not a prescriptive set of expectations, but moreover it rests upon creativity, flexibility and responsiveness to the meeting of the needs of individual pupils with SEN. Bearing this in mind, it is possible to draw together areas of strength, and areas for further development in ensuring PE teachers are equipped to include children with SEN. As a result, The Audit Commission (2002) argues for a strengthening of links between ITT, induction and CPD to ensure teachers consolidate their knowledge, skills and application of inclusion and SEN. As part of this process the TTA (2003) require newly qualified teachers to evidence how they have built upon their knowledge and understanding and subsequently evidence this during their induction year.

Time factors are a significant issue in PE ITT with the total number of hours spent on SEN ranging from 0 to 5 hours in 1-year postgraduate courses, to between 5 and 70 hours on 4-year undergraduate programmes. While time is one factor to consider, more important
is the manner in which PE ITT providers use this to prepare trainee teachers for inclusive education (Dyson 2001; Bailey 2005; Morley et al. 2005). Some trainees report that SEN, for example, is a compulsory aspect of their curriculum, and comment very positively on this approach. In contrast, where provision was more optional, trainees noted concern that they could potentially avoid parts of this subject area and consequently be left not equipped to deliver effectively once in schools.

The level of dissatisfaction among trainee PE teachers (Stage one) with their ITT, relating to SEN, ranged from an average of 24% across the five PE ITT providers, to one institution reaching the 40% mark. These figures are rather high in some cases, and providers need to work with students, schools and mentors (Vickerman 2002; Hodkinson 2006) to ascertain why this is the case, and draw upon the research evidence within this study.

In relation to curriculum delivery, the most common aspects of content covered were teaching, learning and differentiation. However, further work needs to be undertaken in order to link this much more directly to children with SEN; concepts of continuum of learning needs; and mixed ability teaching. Additionally, as only one third of trainees indicate at present that they are receiving feedback on their mixed ability teaching related to children with SEN, this is an area that needs to be addressed in a much more significant way.

In summary, there is much work to be done to address why 84% of current PE teachers and 43% of final-year trainees indicate that their ITT has not prepared/is not preparing them to work with children with SEN in schools. A key factor in addressing this in the future will be to necessitate schools, training providers and government listening to the voices of trainee and qualified PE teachers, as well as children with SEN, in order to address the high levels of dissatisfaction that are currently present.

Note
1. ‘Recently qualified teacher’ refers to teachers who have up to 2 years’ post-qualifying experience following an ITT course within England. Teachers in England must hold/study towards a Bachelor’s degree in a related subject or have extensive experience in that subject area prior to Qualified Teacher Status being awarded, which is similar to the US policy for Highly Qualified Teachers in the No Child Left Behind guidelines (United States Department of Education (USDoE) 2004).

References


