Pre-service psychology education in Europe: a survey of approaches to teacher education and continuing professional development of school psychology teachers

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1. Abstract
Psychology has been taught in secondary schools for many years in several European countries, yet despite the Eurydice (1999) report, tertiary psychology education (PTPE) has received little attention from researchers.

Considered a non-traditional secondary school subject, access to initial teacher education (TE) and continuing professional development (CPD) for psychology teachers appears to be more limited than for other subjects.

The aim of this exploratory research was therefore to examine approaches to TE and CPD for school psychology teachers in eight European countries which provide PTPE for 15-19 year-olds. Telephone interviews were conducted with seven teachers from six countries, followed by a focus group of eight further teachers.

The qualitative data suggested that TE and CPD were regarded as at least adequate in most countries, but concerns remained over poor availability of TE in England, parts of Germany, and Scotland, and the consequent impact on quality of PTPE and career opportunities for psychology graduates.

3. Methods
Structured interviews and a subsequent focus group were carried out. For both procedures, participants were selected by non-probability, purposive sampling. The interview questions were:

- extensive experience in education with 15-19 year olds
- thorough knowledge of psychology education in their own country
- an overview of current trends in psychology education

Most participants were active members of national psychology teachers’ associations.

• Interviews were conducted with seven participants (see Table 1). Interview items were open-ended and related to aspects of TE and CPD for PTPE. Interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes and were conducted via Skype. They were recorded digitally and were rewatched by the interviewer for two participants who were interviewed in their first language and their responses translated into English.

• Focus group questions were devised on the basis of preliminary analysis of the interview data, requiring expansion on certain key points. Participants were eight Psychology teachers who were also EFPTA conference members, and the interviews lasted approximately one hour.

Table 1: Participant codes, by country

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Participant code</th>
<th>Focus group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>P1, P2, P3</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>P1, P2, P3, P4</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>P1, P2, P3</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>P1, P2, P3, P4</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>P1, P2, P3</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovenia</td>
<td>P1, P2</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>P1, P2</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

14 participant interviews were conducted in total, translated into English.

3. Results and Discussion
Data from interviews and focus group were collated for analysis.

Nature of initial TE – general aspects
Patterns of TE were similar across countries, falling mainly into ‘Nordic’ models. The Council of the European Union (EU) has made recommendations to ensure primary graduates have a sufficient knowledge level in psychology to teach psychology in schools.

In most countries TE had a strong ‘teaching on the job’ emphasis, confirming findings of Banyard (2008), Demant (2009), and Sokolová (2010). In order to access training, in Slovenia and Finland, participants felt a need for a greater emphasis on workplace experience.

• Mentoring of trainees: seen as an important role of senior staff, however resourcing varied: in Ireland, the role was not incorporated into workload but was given additional payment, whereas in England, no payment was available and there were no specific reductions in workload.

Professional skills and subject expertise were seen as equally important, reflecting the view of the EU Council (ET 2007). These were seen as major problems between participants in perceptions of quality of TE in their country, most felt that quality was overall adequate or varied between subjects.

Availability of TE for psychology
There were large differences between countries: extent of provision in Finland or exceeded demand, in Germany, Denmark and Norway, and was enhanced with provision for psychology graduates. In England, there was a distinction between first time and secondary training on the job. In all these countries with limited availability of training, participants reported that psychology was nevertheless widely taught in schools, including at the level of HE-entrance qualifications. In those countries with poor provision, participants were concerned at the reduced career opportunities for psychology graduates.

Availabilty of CPD for psychology
Most aspects of CPD were similar across countries, including availability of teachers, amount of time per year, quality of training, and teacher autonomy in identifying development needs and appropriate development activities. Participants from several countries felt the most useful psychology CPD was provided by teachers’ associations, but that there was not enough.

Limitations of methodology
The samples were targeted for the specific purpose of obtaining their specialist knowledge of PTPE, TE and CPD; there was no intention to generalise findings to a wider population.

Possible threats to validity and reliability include: researcher bias, as all were psychology teachers with an interest in providing professional development in psychology; and teacher autonomy in identifying development needs and appropriate development activities. Participants from several countries felt the most useful psychology CPD was provided by teachers’ associations, but that there was not enough.

4. Conclusions
This small-scale initial explorative study has shown many areas of similarity, as well as some major differences in TE and CPD for PTPE in Europe. There was greater variation, and concern, over initial TE.

• poor access to TE for PTPE in some countries: England – limited student places; QTS for FE sector not valid for schools
• poor access to TE for PTPE in some countries: Germany – not available in all Länder
• transport costs: QTS for FE sector not valid for schools
• deployment of non-specialist staff to teach psychology in the 15-19 age band, suggesting that the relevance of teachers’ subject expertise for their students’ learning is undervalued by school leaders (England, Scotland)

These findings carry clear implications for practice: the major obstacles to TE for psychology in England and Scotland must be addressed, in order to enhance the quality of PTPE, and psychology graduates’ career opportunities, to the levels that obtain in other European and in other countries.

Posibilities for future research: status of psychology v other school subjects; PTPE for younger learners and embedding in school curriculum; students’ perceptions of PTPE; psychology-specific pedagogical skills; PTPE curriculum, and how they are determined.

References

Banyard, P. & Dalgarno, T. (2010) Teaching psychology on the job: implications of FIER (2009). In Denmark and Germany graduates must find a teaching job first in order to gain TE. In England the Wolf Report (2011) had addressed this issue and found that of places. In Scotland, there were no such courses at all.
Banyard, P. & Hesselink, J. (2008) Pedagogical development (CPD) in Europe was conducted (Schrempf et al, 2009, on PTPE in the teaching of psychology at universities). However, it was noted that TE for psychology leading to HE-entrance qualifications (e.g. A-level, Matrur, International Baccalaureate, English A-levels, Scottish Highers) that had given rise to the main concerns regarding TE, and therefore the focus of the current study.

2. Introduction
Pre-service psychology education (PTPE) in Europe
Until relatively recently the research focus of psychology education has been mainly on the undergraduate psychology course (but see Banyard, 2008, and Rowley & Dalgarno, 2010, on PTPE in the UK; Kitter, 2009, on PTPE in Europe). As far as the authors are aware, a cross-European comparison studies of PTPE have been published.

Under the auspices of the European Federation of Psychology Teachers’ Associations (EFPTA, http://www.efpta.org), a survey of PTPE in Europe was conducted (Schrempf, 2009). The survey was based on a quantitative online questionnaire. Responses were received from 20 psychology teachers in seven countries. A database of psychology curricula was constructed and concerns of teachers were identified, including availability and access to TE and CPD. Findings showed that ‘psychology as a subject’ exists in a variety of guises; though not labelled as such, psychology is taught in diverse curricular areas, including citizenship, personal and social development and science studies. However, it was noted that PTPE leading to HE-entrance qualifications (e.g. A-level, Matrur, International Baccalaureate, English A-levels, Scottish Highers) that had given rise to the main concerns regarding TE, and therefore the focus of the current study.

Teacher education (TE) & continuing professional development (CPD) in Europe
Two models of TE for qualified teacher status (QTS) in Europe have been identified: simultaneous and consecutive (Eurydice, 2002); a further distinction is made by Ostinelli (2009), into ‘English’ and ‘Nordic’ models. The Council of the European Union (EU) has engaged in efforts to improve the quality of TE in Member States, in nine areas, including ‘teacher specialist knowledge and pedagogical skills (European Commission [EC], 2007). Two major reports have been published on TE and CPD in the EU: see Eurydice (2009) and FIER (2009). The EC’s ‘Common European Principles for Teacher Competences & Qualifications’ (2010) assert a range of standards or benchmarks for teachers’ development needs that should be met by both initial TE and CPD.

Presentation by Germans high school psychology students (EFPTA Conference, Dortmund, 2006)

[Further text and references provided]