

# The (virtual) teaching of physical education in times of pandemic

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## Abstract

This study analyses the factors that affect the pedagogical practice and the consideration of the subject of physical education (PE) for a group of students in initial training to become teachers, with the intention of (a) discovering what feelings the COVID-19 pandemic arouses in the future teachers when having to teach physical education virtually, (b) investigating the advantages and disadvantages of the virtual teaching of PE during the pandemic, and (c) finding out how the pandemic has changed their perception towards the teaching of PE and their passion for teaching. Twelve future teachers (four women and eight men), who were completing a practicum during their last year at university, participated in the study. A qualitative methodology was employed, in which data were obtained through individual online interviews and online focus groups. The data were analysed using a thematic content analysis and a constant comparison method. The results show, among other aspects, that future teachers understand that the teaching of PE has to be carried out face-to-face in order not to lose its meaning, that there are implicit shortcomings in the virtual teaching model, and that there is a greater probability of suffering from teacher stress and disenchantment with the profession when following an online teaching methodology. The results can be used to foster a critical dialogue regarding the difficulty faced by PE teachers today, at a crucial moment when the political, social and cultural aspects surrounding it are changing.

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**Keywords**

COVID-19, initial training, pandemic, uncertainty, virtual teaching

**Introduction**

The initial training stage is the period in which future educators begin to analyse, examine, observe and reflect on what they do and how they do it; it is the vehicle that allows them to discover their own identity as teachers in a critical and reflective way (Atkinson, 2004; Graham and Phelps, 2003). One of the fundamental features for discovering the pedagogical identity of the future teacher lies in the interpersonal essence of the profession (González-Calvo and Fernández-Balboa, 2018), in the way in which the student in training interacts with other student teachers and the rest of the educational community. However, the profession has changed radically in recent months due to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) health crisis. Spain, like so many other countries, chose to declare a state of alarm and with it, the closure of schools and universities. During this time, it became clear that jobs such as those of teachers had to change from face-to-face to virtual communication in a matter of hours, a situation for which they were not trained. This may have created many problems for future teachers, who were doing their practicum in schools at the time and have thus been deprived of socialisation in the classroom.

Although no one knows what will happen tomorrow, when the ‘new normality’ is recovered and the health crisis is no more than a bad memory, we cannot help but wonder what consequences will come after COVID-19 for the teaching profession and for those who will be entering it in the coming years. Online teaching is an increasingly used resource in education, even in the case of physical education (PE) (Killian et al., 2019), where different studies have reported benefits for students in relation to motivation, achievement involvement or its extracurricular nature (Kooiman and Sheehan, 2015; Kooiman et al., 2016; Osterlie, 2018). However, the teachers’ perceptions are that this format cannot be a substitute for face-to-face meetings with students. Teachers still perceive online teaching as a complementary format for very specific situations (Daum and Woods, 2015), and justify their opinion describing the difficulty of establishing socio-affective relationships with students (Daum and Buschner, 2012). This casts doubt on the possibility that a teacher in training can benefit through online teaching from the pedagogical aspects provided by being physically present with the students.

Today we live with the uncertainty that directly affects social relations and, as a consequence, the educational model. This situation could serve as an excuse to weave a new educational model, one in which the defining elements are bureaucracy, communication technologies, social distancing and the digital panoptic, and where the perceptions and opinions of the teaching staff are not taken into account (Burns, 2020).

**(Virtual) education in times of pandemic**

The teaching profession has been changing at an impressive speed in recent times, something that COVID-19 seems to have accelerated even more (Varea and González-Calvo, 2020; Varea et al., 2020). The new social situation brought about by the pandemic has meant the emergence of a market of vendors willing to fix education on the basis of its *technologisation* (Teräs et al., 2020). What were initially changes forced by the need to provide an urgent educational response,

seem to be turning into a springboard to establish partisan interests in future educational policies and allow the entrance of large companies in the educational field (González-Calvo and Arias-Carballal, 2018). It is true that continuous changes are common in Western societies (Han, 2017, 2018; Standing, 2011); however, major social disruptions, such as the coronavirus crisis, have been used to establish these changes in the form of neoliberal policies, taking advantage of fear and insecurity (Klein, 2020). In this sense, neoliberalism foments an unrestrained belief in market values, radical individualism and unchecked competition, therefore discouraging notions of the public, solidarity and care for others (Giroux, 2014). The necessary condition of ‘agility’, as a precursor to success in the neoliberal world, echoes what Bauman (2000) termed ‘liquidity’, as a way to characterise the relationship that individuals have with society today. Our subjectivities are in continuous change and, like *fluids*, we do not keep to any shape for long and need to be constantly ready (and prone) for change (Bauman, 2000). With all this, no emerging form, such as that of a teacher in the current political and educational situation, is likely to solidify and survive for long (Bauman, 2013). In this sense, COVID-19 may mark a new roadmap in the way education, social and political processes will be addressed in the future (Burns, 2020). The professional journey of teachers is far from straightforward, as many of them teach in complicated contexts of high precariousness (Zafra, 2017). Thus, the increase in the bureaucratisation of the teaching profession, virtual teaching, the lack of personal contact with students and other education professionals, among others, can end up neutralising teachers, nullifying the capacities of professionals who should be dedicating themselves to teaching, researching their own methodology and directing their efforts towards improving their pedagogical practice (González-Calvo et al., 2020; Mehta, 2013). However, on the contrary, it is possible that the coronavirus could serve as a springboard for virtual teaching, reinforcing those who argue that there is no return to traditional teaching or, at most, that we will have to imagine hybrid face-to-face/virtual teaching (González-Calvo et al., 2020; Varea et al., 2020).

According to this new type of teaching, communication between transmitters and receivers is more direct, as digital communication cancels out both the physical and mental distances between teacher and student. On the other hand, what is private becomes public, and the teachers are obliged to come to terms with letting the students into their homes in a virtual manner (González-Calvo et al., 2020).

In this article, we start from the premise that the experiences derived from teaching PE virtually can have an important effect on revising assumptions about education and PE, with a clear impact on the teaching profession and the way in which it is understood and approached by future teachers. Along these lines, the paper presents three objectives, drawn from the opinions of future teachers: (a) to discover what feelings the health crisis arouses in future teachers when they have to teach PE virtually; (b) to investigate the advantages and disadvantages of the virtual teaching of PE and (c) to find out how the pandemic has changed their perception of the teaching of PE and their passion for teaching.

## Methods

### *Participants and context*

Participants for this study were a group of 12 preservice PE teachers from Spain (four women and eight men) who were undertaking their practicum in PE when the COVID-19 lockdown was imposed in Spain. Participants were aged between 22 and 24 years old, and they were all born in Spain. Their parents were also born in Spain, except for two parents who came from Bulgaria

and Romania. Participants were asked about their future aspirations as PE teachers, and some of their intentions included continuing with postgraduate studies and to travel abroad to improve their English skills.

Ethical approval was obtained through the University of Valladolid (Spain). Participants signed consent letters prior to participation and all names used in this paper are pseudonyms to ensure anonymity in the reporting of results. Participants were in the last year of their teaching degree programme (fourth year) and were undertaking their second practicum. This final practicum was supposed to last for 12 weeks, with the preservice teachers required to teach face-to-face PE classes in schools.

On 14 March 2020, the Spanish government declared a state of alarm and the country went into lockdown, initially for 15 days. The lockdown was then further extended on multiple occasions. This decision involved the cessation of all face-to-face educational activities at all educational levels and institutions, and 13 March 2020 was the last day of school and university classes before the summer holidays. Since all face-to-face classes were suspended in Spain from 13 March 2020, all educational actors had to switch their classes to online mode. As a consequence, these preservice teachers also had to undertake their PE practicum online. They had online contact with both the university tutor and the teachers and students at the schools. They were requested to prepare videos, tutorials, physical and other activities, so that the school students could work on them from their homes.

*Data production*

Participant-produced drawings and semi-structured interviews (individual interviews and focus groups) were used to generate data (Tinning and Fitzpatrick, 2012) for the overall project, which aims to investigate students’ and future teachers’ PE experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. This paper presents results produced through the individual interviews and focus groups with future teachers only. First, individual interviews, which lasted between 15 and 30 min, were conducted with all the participants. A script of questions was used for participants to answer and reflect on (see Table 1). The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Subsequently, two focus groups were conducted with all participants based on the data from the individual interviews. In this way, the experiences and opinions of all the participants could be shared, as a way of learning from others, encouraging a reflective debate and checking whether the ideas were recurrent or complementary. Each focus group session lasted between 60 and 90 min. The focus groups were audio-

**Table 1.** Individual interview questions.

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How do you feel about online teaching now (e.g. in terms of stress levels, mood, time spent with family/friends, etc.)?
What are your main concerns as an educator, and have they changed since confinement?
What are the consequences of not being able to meet the expectations involved in the teaching profession due to the current situation?
Explain whether you think it is easier to ‘burn out in the teaching profession’ being a distance PE teacher than face-to-face. Why do you think this is the case?
Are there any other questions you would like to respond to, related to the topic of study, that I have not asked you here?

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recorded and transcribed verbatim. Although questions were used to guide the dialogue, the focus group interactions were largely conversational in style (Hedrick et al., 2009). The initial questions posed led to further questions during the focus group meetings (see Table 2). Both interviews and focus groups were carried out in Spanish and translated into the English language in this paper.

Author 1 conducted the individual interviews and focus groups online, given the situation of lockdown in Spain. He acted as an 'active listener', seeking further details where relevant (Smith, 2010) and guiding the conversation. Participants were asked to comment on their perceptions and experiences about the meaning of PE during the COVID-19 pandemic, the pros and cons of online PE teaching, and their preferences and fears, present and future.

**Table 2.** Focus group questions and questions that arose during the focus groups.

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What feelings do you have about the virtual teaching of PE?

- Now we are at home and video recording our surroundings, is that something that can make you uncomfortable or you feel is difficult?
- Do you think you have to pretend to be happy or content? In what situation do you have to pretend?
- In the case you were really shattered and had to pretend, how would it be easier to pretend those feelings; if you were with the students or if you had to send them a video?

What emotions surface when you think about being in physical contact with the students when it was possible and now that it is not possible?

- Do you prefer face-to-face classes where the student is close to you or do you think that virtual classes have certain advantages? What are those advantages?
- Does anyone feel relief in having more computer-mediated relationships or do you see that as more of a disadvantage than an advantage?

You have been experiencing PE for many years as students, has it already changed definitively and what type of PE teacher are we going to be able to be in the future? Are we going to be able to recover the model that we experienced?

- Does the role of the teacher change, is it the same, should it be supported by technologies?
- Are you afraid of going back to school and having to be with a lot of children? Afraid of infecting them, of being infected? How do you manage these fears?
- Are we going to be so afraid of contagion that we will have to understand that the profession will be different?
- Are we going to spend more time on student surveillance than on anything else?
- Are tracksuit and sneakers still your distinctive trademark? Is this distinctive sign so important or not anymore?

Do you think that the way of teaching PE will change a lot? If so, in what sense do you think it will change?

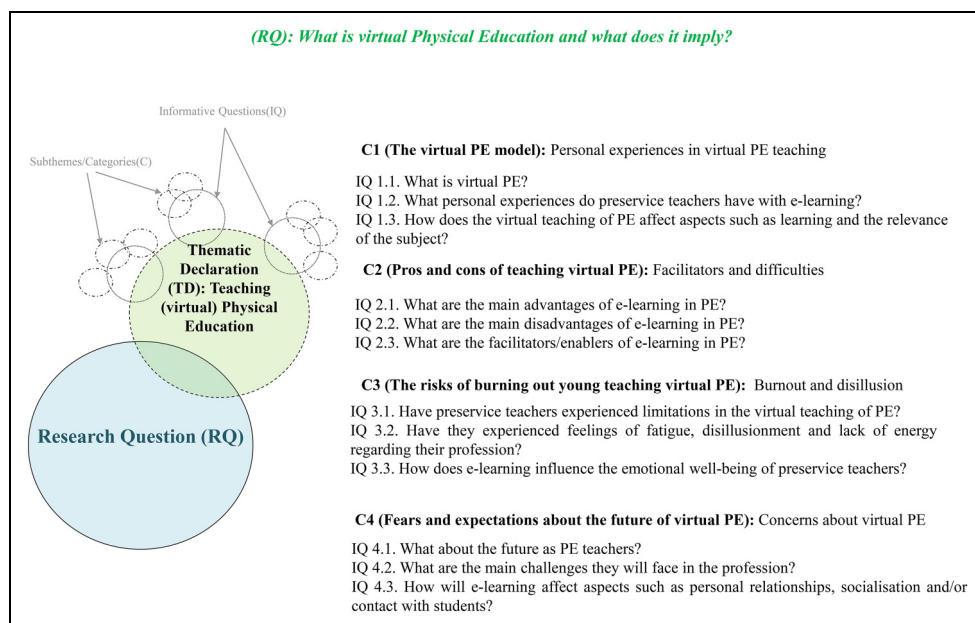
- Will PE lose a lot if in the end the way of teaching it changes so much?
- Do you think that there will be objectives or content that will be favoured over others? What type of content are those on which we teachers will rely more?
- Do you think it is easier to teach PE virtually than other subjects or is it more difficult?
- Now, in the beginning, in the so-called new normal, will it also continue to be more complicated in schools or not anymore?

How do you see your long-term future in education and, in this case, in PE?

- What are your expectations for the future?
  - Have you changed much with respect to COVID?
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## Data analysis

The Atlas 6.0 qualitative software package was initially used to organise and code the data. The data were analysed through thematic content analysis (Libarkin and Kurdziel, 2002) and constant data comparison (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The thematic content analysis focused on finding common patterns across all interviews. First, the transcripts were read several times to get a general sense of the meanings conveyed by all the respondents. Code categories and themes were identified from the data analysis (e.g. personal experiences in virtual PE teaching, burnout feelings, fears and expectations about the future of virtual PE teaching). This part of the data analysis was conducted by the lead author. The categories and themes raised in the first steps of the analysis by the lead author were then critically examined through a reflective dialogue, which included discussed and dialogued interpretations among all four authors; for example, the perceived meanings and certain phrases spoken by the participants (Dale, 2000). Figure 1 shows the process of data reduction and association that followed, seeking to answer the research question posed: ‘What is virtual PE and what does it imply?’ Following Miles and Huberman’s (1994) anticipated data reduction approach, a main theme was proposed (thematic declaration) which helped to illuminate the research question: virtual PE and its implications. In turn, the thematic declaration was explored through a set of informative questions that helped us to understand it. Finally, the gathered data were merged into four subthemes or categories to respond to the informative questions, which were: (a) ‘The model of virtual PE’; (b) ‘Advantages and disadvantages of virtual teaching in PE’; (c) ‘The risks of “burning out young” with online PE’; and (d) ‘Fears and expectations for the future



**Figure 1.** Graphic structure of the process followed for data reduction and association.  
C: category; TD: thematic declaration; IQ: informative question; RQ: research question.

in the face of virtual teaching in PE'. These subthemes were also, in part, informed by previous research on COVID-19 and teaching PE (e.g. Varea and González-Calvo, 2020; Varea et al., 2020).

## Results and discussion

### *The model of virtual PE*

When the state of alarm was declared in the middle of the academic year, the university trainees had to finish this period virtually, which has given them some very clear experiences, feelings and opinions about what it is like, and how it feels, to be a PE teacher without being physically present with their students. Not having been able to experience one of the most inspiring stages of initial training which affords the greatest learning for a future teacher (Wilson, 2006) meant that the PE student teachers experienced many negative feelings. Among these, participants referred to disillusionment and frustration due to the contrast between what they expected from their training period and what they experienced:

There is a continuous feeling of frustration for not being able to practise in the way I would like to or to carry out some of the didactic proposals that could make me more enthusiastic. (R., Female)

These feelings are often reflected in novice teachers, whose initial responsibilities often contrast with their expectations (De Neve and Devos, 2017; Fantilli and McDougall, 2009; Sabar, 2004). However, they are contrary to the usual feelings of university student teachers during their practicum, which often lead to positive evaluations, because it is the first time that they feel close to the teaching profession (Beck and Kosnik, 2002; Marais, 2013; Smith and Lev-Ari, 2005).

Participants also had negative feelings about their lack of training to cope with this new experience. By changing the social circumstances in which their practicum took place, the future teachers were exposed to new challenges and circumstances for which they were not prepared:

Lack of comfortability in not being used to this way of teaching, lack of privacy in having to 'open up my house' to all the students and parents who might be watching. (S., Female)

Different studies have pointed out how training programmes, support, facilities, relationships, mentoring or the right link between theory and practice are determining factors for the correct development of the practicum in initial training (Allen and Wright, 2014; Cohen et al., 2013; Ulvik et al., 2018). However, the new situation led participants to experience a feeling of discomfort that persisted throughout the practicum.

In some student teachers, the feeling of discomfort at being exposed can turn into fear. What was supposed to be a training period to build the basis of their professional development, supported by an expert teacher and a university lecturer (Ulvik and Smith, 2011), became a public process, where teachers and trainees had to open up their homes, their rooms and their private spaces (González-Calvo et al., 2020). This is something that for a future teacher in the process of personal and professional growth meant a continuous feeling of being judged:

The fear of what they might think, since teaching is now more 'public' because it is virtual, is something that affects me especially, it is a part of my personality that I don't like and I want to change, and it is

very complicated for me. Sometimes you think that others think something about you that they are not really thinking, or that if they are thinking it, it should not be something that affects me. (M., Male)

In addition to this, student teachers point out that virtual PE also means more fatigue by focusing most of the teacher's attention on other tasks far from the teaching of their subject and for which they were not trained. Technologies were a central focus for teachers during the confinement stage, as their poor mastery meant that they had to devote great effort and dedication to preparing material or learning how to operate digital platforms (Donitsa-Schmidt and Ramot, 2020; König et al., 2020). This is also reflected by the participants in our study as trainee teachers. But in this case, in particular, the excessive focus on technology distanced the future teachers from acquiring a good learning base as PE teachers, which left them with a feeling of exhaustion at the end of this stage:

I feel exhausted. It is exhausting to have to be so attentive to technologies, to make videos and edit them for students, to learn on the fly how technologies work in order to make learning proposals. (Se., Female)

When they had to work with their students, they recognised their need to be strong and overcome exhaustion. Participants understand that they have a responsibility to their students to make them feel good and learn as much as possible. This led to moments when they had to pretend to feel a motivation that virtual teaching has gradually undermined:

Many personal demands require teachers to be energetic and willing, with optimism [...] taking into account that the situation affects us all a lot, so that not to affect the students even more, there are times when we have to 'pretend' to be well in order not to harm the students. (G., Male)

The results so far show how the future of education must take into account these feelings that future teachers carry over from their training. The relationships between students and teachers are closely linked to the well-being of the latter (Spilt et al., 2011). The present study highlights how in a teacher trained to be in the classroom the absence of these relationships also has consequences for their feelings and leads to episodes of stress. Having had negative feelings does not have to be an insurmountable obstacle for their future profession if they work together to address them. The stressful episodes that future teachers are already beginning to glimpse must be a shared responsibility, where organisations, policies and the teachers themselves must work together to resolve them (Prilleltensky et al., 2016).

Faced with the strong personal demands of online teaching and learning and the associated feelings that we have just discussed, student teachers have made an even greater effort to be active and motivated. Participants continue to show a critical attitude towards teaching and perceive themselves as committed teachers, despite the stress they claim to have suffered, due to the uncertainty, fear or disillusionment caused by virtual teaching:

Stress and tiredness that this way of being a teacher entails. Being available all day long, looking at the work that the students send you, makes you feel psychologically exhausted. (A., Male)



In this regard, if anything positive can emerge from these discourses of the future teachers, it is that they present a strong identity, which guarantees greater hope for their upcoming professional development after COVID-19 (González-Calvo et al., 2020):

I am invaded by feelings such as the obligation to be active and happy in the virtual lessons, trying to make the students see that we are learning the same things we would learn in a normal situation even though I know that this is not true. (S., Female)

In the teaching of PE in Spain, there has been insecurity when it comes to including the use of technology in teacher training at universities (González-Calvo et al., 2020). Significantly, future teachers are now being forced to switch to online PE teaching in schools, because of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and this has significant consequences for future teachers, as further explored in the next section.

### *Advantages and disadvantages of virtual teaching in PE*

When asked about the advantages they found as future teachers in doing PE virtually with the school children, their answers were very brief, even non-existent in most cases, which contrasts with a large number of disadvantages they pointed out. The future teachers stated that the only possible advantage of this situation was that more individualised attention could be given to the students and their derived actions:

The advantage is a more individualised and detailed online contact than in a group. (Se., Female)

Despite the short time they have been in the classroom, future teachers already pointed out one of the main problems that Spanish teachers have been denouncing for years, namely high ratios (Díaz Gandasegui and Caballero Méndez, 2014; Sánchez Lissen, 2018). They considered that the current situation in schools, where the number of students per class is very high, often prevents correct and complete individual supervision of each student. In the case of virtual teaching, social interaction among the students, with its positive and negative factors, is eliminated and individual treatment is the only possible option:

Being a virtual teacher means that you don't have to be concerned about student discipline, keeping control, resolving conflicts [...]. In that sense, it is easier to teach virtually. (M., Male)

With regard to disadvantages, student teachers considered that they increased in PE. In addition to the difficulties and problems of virtual education that they experienced due to confinement and which have already been pointed out by many studies (Diez-Gutierrez and Gajardo-Espinoza, 2020; González-Calvo et al., 2020; Iivari et al., 2020; Owusu-Fordjour et al., 2020), the participants considered that the teaching of PE will suffer other more aggravating ones due to its particular nature. This subject requires the body and movement to learn, which is very limited by the physical and social isolation caused by the closure of schools. In virtual teaching, the participants consider that PE is less PE, as it has a much smaller practical component:

For physical education teachers it can be even more frustrating not to have that freedom of movement, our profession requires body, movement. (G., Male)

In addition to the impossibility of movement, it is also difficult to get to know the students closely, and thus to set tasks and processes in accordance with their motor development. The situation of social isolation makes it difficult for the teacher to know each student separately, to see how they evolve and, therefore, to adapt the methodologies and content for better individual development:

Not having the reference of what students are like makes it very complex to adapt the activities to their characteristics [...] I propose activities for a 6-year-old child and for a 12-year-old child without fully knowing what each one is like, because I do not know them well in person, I do what logic and theory tell me. (M., Male)

In addition, PE requires manipulation, social interaction or movement, which is very limited in the space of a house and different for each student. Thus, a part of PE seems to inevitably go back to the beginning of the 20th century, towards standard measures, based on generalised theories (Kirk, 2010):

When scheduling online activities, it is very difficult to know whether or not the students have the equipment you want them to use, how many people live in the family context to know if you can count on them when asking them to do a small group activity. (R., Female)

The difficulties for being in contact with the students and with the development of their learning are strongly reflected in the evaluation that the future teachers were able to carry out with their students during the practicum. Many studies point to evaluation as a key didactic factor in PE for motor awareness, learning, self-regulation and extrapolation outside school (López-Pastor et al., 2013; Lorente-Catalán and Kirk, 2015; Ní Chróinín and Cosgrave, 2013). However, all these aspects seem to be lost in a virtual PE environment. The impossibility of being in contact with the students makes it difficult for the teacher to evaluate them and for the students themselves to be able to redirect and advance in their learning:

This direct contact has been lost and it is much more difficult to carry out an effective assessment of the students, as well as a self-assessment of the learning units. (C., Male)

Direct work with students has been lost and teaching has been 'dehumanised'. (C., Male)

Another difficulty that has arisen during the pandemic is the impossibility of accompanying students in their personal, emotional and social growth. The participants considered that in this way one of the most important aspects of being a teacher is lost: the desire and pride in seeing your students grow. In this respect, it seems that the ideas of the student teachers take on a critical perspective, in line with Freire (1996) when he claims that education is merely a human manifestation; in this way, education is constantly being redone in practice:

The biggest disadvantage is that you no longer have close contact with the students, you no longer see how they evolve in person, you cannot feel comforted by seeing that after effort and dedication they manage to achieve objectives thanks to your help. (Ser., Female)

Immediate face-to-face feedback and direct contact are thus important for PE teachers. The student teachers now are 'a virtual ghost' for the participants (González-Calvo et al., In press), and now these future teachers struggle to shift that situation to one that includes more digital support and individual activities.

### *The risks of 'burning out young' with online PE*

As we have analysed so far, the experiences and opinions of future teachers seem worrying. The excessive wear and tear caused by the demands of virtual teaching and the loss of the human factor have been very frustrating aspects of their training. These facts seem to have affected their identities as teachers and, as shown below, have made them begin to visualise a future scenario for which they feel no desire and do not believe they are prepared (Giroux, 2014).

The participants perceive that virtual teaching has been a moment of exhaustion for them, as students in training:

It is easier to get tired of the profession at a distance. (A., Male)

Disenchantment with the teaching profession is a widely studied topic, where pressures, school climate and disenchantment are key factors over time (Malinen and Savolainen, 2016; Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2010, 2017). However, the perception of future teachers is that if virtual teaching continues, this process will take place much earlier and the passage of time will no longer be such a determining factor:

I think it would be easier to burn out with distance education. (S., Female)

In this regard, the near future that lies ahead is a real concern for a teacher in training. Studies on the novice teacher show discouraging data on how quickly many young teachers burn out in the profession, leading to precipitous abandonment (De Neve and Devos, 2017; Kauffman et al., 2002; Olson, 2000; Watkins, 2005; Ingersoll, 2002); but the fact that they are already predisposed to disenchantment with the teaching profession, if it continues to be online, could be a strong aggravating factor that worsens this situation. Some of their experiences during this forced stage of teaching PE online have led them to frustration about what the actual practical experience of the subject entails.

Among the main causes that future teachers pointed to as a factor in burning out with virtual teaching was the linearity of the classes. The participants explained that virtual classes make it extremely difficult to modify and transform a task or the way in which the student learns during their development. They considered this to be detrimental not only to the students, but also to them as future teachers:

At home the work is always very monotonous and very repetitive, without putting into practice what you teach in person and therefore without taking guidance from how you are doing it. (A., Male)

Virtual teaching makes it difficult for teachers to use their didactic and pedagogical knowledge to redirect the teaching-learning processes. In this way, teachers are involved in a repetitive process of preparing tasks and making final corrections, without the possibility of contact with their students:

By means of distance education their work is limited to an intellectual task of programming activities.  
(C., Male)

Another important factor, which we have already pointed out, is the excessive centralisation of efforts required by the use of technology. In this case, participants pointed to technology as a limiting factor when preparing tasks or teaching processes. The problem they underlined was the lack of training to be able to handle them fluently, which implied greater dedication simply to prepare the classes:

In addition, at home you depend a lot on online platforms which, no matter how many advantages they have, always have issues that we cannot control and sometimes it makes you very nervous that they don't let you do your job or that you simply find it very difficult to manage them. (A., Male)

Some studies indicate that this problem has been more important because it was unexpected, but once it has been overcome, training processes can move towards new challenges in online learning (Donitsa-Schmidt and Ramot, 2020). However, the participants considered that technologies present insurmountable limitations in the teaching of PE that made them have to continually reorganise the teaching–learning processes according to the tools and resources they possess and manage.

In virtual classes, teachers must invest more time in trying to engage with their students. If a teacher's dedication to their profession is already high on a face-to-face basis (Sánchez-Lissen, 2020), student teachers consider that this increased with the teaching of virtual PE. The difficulties of virtual teaching in accompanying, evaluating and reorienting learning for students during the pandemic are being compensated for by the more dedicated teachers (González-Calvo et al., 2020). Even so, they considered that there are limitations that they cannot overcome even with this greater effort, which means that they are frustrated and this adds to the fatigue that this new form of teaching entails:

It's easy to get burned out as a distance education teacher, since you may spend more time in front of a screen sending individual emails, resolving doubts, making explanatory videos, which may require editing, feeling frustration at not reaching some students because they don't have a computer, among other things. (R., Female)

The words of the participants show how online teaching has not been part of their training, as they are only able to understand the teaching profession from the classroom:

Not being able to be in contact with students and having to keep an eye on the computer and online tasks all day is quite exhausting, especially considering that this is a profession characterised by being in contact with people. If the situation lasts a long time, I do believe that it is easy to become disenchanted with teaching. (M., Male)

In conclusion, in this section, the participants point out that virtual PE requires greater effort, mostly separate from pedagogical reasons, and a social decontextualisation of the subject, which leads them to understand that it is not the education for which they have been trained. In this respect, it is necessary to understand that the student teachers have not experienced true online education, but rather emergency remote teaching (Hodges et al., 2020), which leaves them with a bitter taste of the experience of online education. It is also necessary to understand that they have been trained to be in the classroom with their students and that this was the path they chose when

they decided to begin their studies. Teachers and future teachers are a collective capable of adapting to change, as has been shown in this period of forced online teaching, but taking advantage of this situation to permanently entrench these changes, in the pursuit of neoliberal interests, seems only likely to bring early unease in the future of the teaching profession:

I believe that it will be much more pleasant for any teacher to give classes in person. (A., Male)

Virtual teaching led participants to feel more insecure about their future role as PE teachers and what is expected from them. This created an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty for future teachers, which will be further explored in the next section.

### *Fears and expectations for the future in the face of virtual teaching in PE*

In the results shown so far, the future teachers have shown their experiences, feelings and opinions as a result of having worked as trainee teachers in PE virtually, which have also left them with a perspective for the future. When talking about the challenges posed by virtual PE, the student teachers referred mainly to two circumstances: the role of the teaching staff in returning to the classroom and the worrying situation facing PE.

The participants believed that returning to the classroom without a cure for COVID-19 would change the current role of the teacher. The fact that teachers have been given responsibility for complying with and enforcing the new safety regulations makes students feel that it will result in teachers being less dedicated to their real work, which is teaching. In this sense, teachers who are just beginning to teach will suffer a severe setback in their professional development (González-Calvo et al., 2020; Varea and González-Calvo, 2020). Student teachers consider that, if they return to the classroom next year, these will be moments full of fear, control and discipline, where educational and training developments will be less important:

When we go back to the classroom, at least until there is a cure for the virus, we PE teachers are going to be like policemen all the time, making sure that the students don't get too close, that they keep their distance, that they don't share equipment... More than teaching, we are going to spend the class stressed out by the fear that the children might catch it. (D., Male)

According to the participants, PE teachers will be even more affected by the fears associated with the new return to face-to-face classes. Once again, they considered that the lack of sufficient resources, in this case for students to work with individual equipment or sufficient space, will mean that teachers will have to be much more vigilant in terms of control tasks:

As this is an area in which children themselves tend to move and interact with other people, and to touch and manipulate everything in front of them, I think they are going to have to be very careful not to do this. (Se., Female)

In a subject such as PE, where the manipulation of objects and movement are essential factors, the impossibility of sharing the scarce resources available to most schools will affect the way in which it can be developed and the attention given by teachers (González-Calvo et al., 2020; O'Brien et al., 2020).

With regard to PE as a curriculum subject, participants had the perception that we may be at a key moment in its development and the training of future teachers. In the case of continuing with online PE, the difficulties in developing its full pedagogical potential were seen by the future teachers as a direct attack on the profession. Having to give classes by means of video tutorials can create a social vision far removed from reality. Despite the fact that teachers work and make an effort to be able to carry out truly educational activities for their students, the future teachers considered that these videos can be confusing:

PE is based on the body and movement. If the body is absent, the subject must be approached in a completely different way, running the risk that PE will end up losing its essence. You take the risk of being reduced to a kind of video tutorial of physical exercise from home to keep active and healthy, and you do not need to spend four years studying at university to do that. (Ca., Female)

Virtual PE is increasingly used, giving good results for some aspects, although also with strong limitations (Killian et al., 2019). However, when neither teachers nor society are prepared for this formative model, PE is often reduced to a social vision of promoting physical activity and health, seriously limiting its pedagogical approach.

In short, the future teachers saw that their profession was at risk if they continued to teach PE online. The lack of resources, training and the little importance that the educational administrations are giving to the development of learning in the midst of this health crisis, made the future teachers perceive that PE is being forced to turn towards minimum content (Giroux, 2014). They believed that if this trend continues and there is a lack of resources to be able to provide a solution to the educational crisis we are experiencing, they, as future PE teachers, are at serious risk. Without an educational and political system that supports education and understands its importance in society, PE teachers will lose much of their educational and curricular prestige. As the return to school continues, it is essential to analyse how future PE teachers are assimilating and adapting to the evolving situation of uncertainty. The mere perception of these ideas creates a feeling of concern, with which they will begin their activities in the classroom:

If PE is definitively taught online, teachers run the risk of being left out of the equation. What are we going to teach virtually? Are our classes going to be a fitness session like the ones you can find on YouTube? In order to do this, and with the intention of saving money on teachers in the times of crisis that are coming, we will surely be replaced by a few online classes given by sports monitors. (C., Male)

Future teachers have often felt fear, uncertainty and low expectations during their academic training regarding their chosen professional field of PE, and during lockdown, those sentiments of fear and insecurity were intensified (González-Calvo et al., 2020; Varea and González-Calvo, 2020). In the case of Spain, this is a logical feeling among teachers, who have lived through eight educational laws in the last 40 years and in which their opinion has never been taken into account (Fernández Liria et al., 2017). Now, at a time of social change, the possibility of establishing another new educational policy, based on online teaching, without their input, may become a real option that would make no sense at all.

## Conclusions

The purpose of this paper was to explore how preservice teachers experienced their online PE practicum as a consequence of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic in Spain, where extreme lockdown regimens were imposed. Through dialogue established in the interviews and focus groups, we aimed to help the participants to re-construct and re-examine their professional subjectivities (Ambler, 2012; Pritzker, 2012), making visible their concerns, motivations and uncertainties in these pandemic times. The student teachers recounted their experiences during their practicum and their perspectives for their future as teachers in the midst of a health crisis. These stories point to great concern and disenchantment.

The 'new version of PE and the PE teacher' requires 'external' bodies (material, non-material, etc.) in constant interaction to assemble and re-assemble into new formations. This approach to the body gives importance to the concepts and constructs with which the body engages, including discourses, affects, ideals, norms, practices, institutions, other bodies and objects (Coffey, 2016). Human bodies have always interacted with technologies. However, technology has changed significantly and bodies are now digitised as never before (Lupton, 2015, 2019). In this regard, while we expose the difficulties that preservice PE teachers went through when they were suddenly requested to change their teaching to fully online, we also highlight the agential capacities regarding this shift, and how now even more than before, there is a shift towards increased knowledge of bodies and movement through digital technologies.

Thus, forced virtual teaching, caused by the pandemic, has left future teachers feeling disillusioned, tired and stressed, which affects their learning and their passion for the possibility of continuing with online teaching. Carrying out their training virtually, far from the classrooms and their students has meant disenchantment with the profession during this period and a break in their professional development. Future teachers have found themselves in a situation for which they were not trained. Overnight they were forced to teach PE online, without having received prior training and in a situation where the need to provide an urgent response had taken precedence over the construction of a true digital education. This meant that their practicum was full of obstacles and problems, which left them with a bitter taste of their last year of training and online teaching. Despite all these problems, future teachers have continued to work with their students to try to keep them engaged in their learning, as a result of having invested more hours and effort, and of opening up their private spaces. This reflects their commitment to teaching and their students and shows an encouraging future for the profession. In a situation of social, political and educational uncertainty, future teachers have been able to overcome the difficulties, acquire knowledge and strengthen a teaching identity committed to education and students. It is necessary, therefore, that we understand neoliberal discourses and practices, how they work and their possible effects in these pandemic times, so that their normalising and naturalising features, such as considering it normal to experience an uncertain position in PE for life, can be interrupted (Davies and Petersen, 2005; Davies et al., 2006).

Student teachers reflect wariness with the kind of PE that they believe awaits them after the pandemic. Based on their experience with virtual PE during the pandemic, future teachers envision a subject that moves away from pedagogical and didactic approaches, where technological tools seem more important and where the possibility of reaching all students is difficult. Again, the lack of training in how to teach properly online seems to strongly undermine their expectations of online PE. However, there are important aspects for future teachers that they believe are impossible to develop despite being able to carry out effective online teaching. They consider the pedagogical

aspects inherent in the meetings between teachers and students in the classroom, where they can interact, engage in dialogue, get to know each other in-depth and support each other, but also learning by manipulating, socialising and being present, to be essential for PE. In this respect, future teachers perceive a stage in which the profession may lose some of its value and where new health measures fill the classrooms with fear, individualism and controls. Thus, teachers in training see how their profession can be ostracised in the face of the difficulty of developing a true pedagogical approach to PE.

Given the possibility that socially distant education, whether online or face-to-face, is the near horizon that awaits us, teacher training must be an essential factor to reverse these feelings and perspectives. In the coming years, teacher training should necessarily take into account the new social circumstances and be able to support teachers in providing an effective response to their students in the current situation. However, this cannot, and should not, be an excuse to establish an educational policy based on online teaching, since teachers are not really trained for it, nor was it their choice to engage in online teaching. Such policies should be committed to education in general and to PE in particular, to strengthen the professional identity of educators, which will allow them to face the difficulties already inherent in their profession in a better way.

As a possible future line of research, we consider contrasting the experiences and perceptions of these teachers with teachers from other European countries to learn about the similarities and differences among them. Finally, this article hopes to contribute to a fruitful dialogue about the educational system and to show how this new pandemic scenario has altered the essence of teaching, something that can lead teachers to feelings of worry, exhaustion, and disenchantment with their profession.

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