

1 What Young People Say about Physical Activity: The Children's Sport Participation and Physical
2 Activity study (CSPPA)

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6 Deborah Tannehill¹, Ann MacPhail², Julia Walsh³, & Catherine Woods⁴
7 ^{1&2}University of Limerick, ³University College Cork, & ⁴Dublin City University

8

9 Deborah Tannehill
10 Senior Lecturer
11 P1-021
12 PE PAYS Research Centre
13 Department of Physical Education and Exercise Science
14 University of Limerick
15 353 202-884 telephone
16 353 202-814 fax
17 Deborah.tannehill@ul.ie

18
19

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27 Abstract

28 The Children’s Sport Participation and Physical Activity study (CSPPA) is a unique multi-
29 centre/discipline study undertaken by three Irish institutions, Dublin City University,
30 University of Limerick and University College Cork. The study sought to assess
31 participation in physical activity, physical education and sport (PAPES) among 10-18 year olds
32 in Ireland. This paper shares what Irish children and young people convey, using their own
33 voices, about their sport and physical activity experiences and how such experiences may result
34 in their feeling included or excluded in PAPES.

35 Eighteen focus groups (FG) with 124 boys and girls elicited descriptive data from
36 students and were conducted with homogeneous groups of 6 to 8 boys and girls aged 12-18
37 years (selected for convenience) identified as male/female, primary/post-primary, and generally
38 active/inactive.

39 Five themes (‘being with friends’, ‘variety in activity content’, ‘experiencing fun’, ‘time
40 constraints’, and ‘opportunity to be outside’) ran across the three PAPES opportunities for young
41 people. Overall data revealed these young people have a positive attitude toward physical
42 activity (PA) which does not diminish as they age despite activity levels decreasing. Other
43 choices of activity participation (e.g., debate, music), or more focused activities took the place of
44 previous choices as young people came to realise what they most enjoyed.

45 If we are to encourage and provide opportunities for young people to choose active
46 lifestyles, it is important that we address what these young people report affects their
47 involvement in physical activity across a number of contexts. Two such developments within
48 Irish school and community contexts are discussed: Active School Flag initiative and Senior
49 Cycle Physical Education framework.

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51 What Young People Say about Physical Activity: The Children’s Sport Participation and Physical
52 Activity study (CSPPA)

53

54 Introduction

55 The Children’s Sport Participation and Physical Activity study (CSPPA) was funded by
56 the Irish Sports Council (ISC) who is committed to increasing the number of young people
57 participating in physical activity and to measuring the change in that participation as part of its
58 research programme. Associated with this research programme, the Council sought proposals
59 from an external research organisation to undertake a study of children’s sport participation and
60 physical activity. The intent was for a follow up the 2005 Economic and Social Research
61 Institute (ESRI) study of sports participation and physical activity levels among children and
62 young people in Ireland (Fahey, Delaney, & Gannon, 2005). In response, a unique multi-centre
63 and multi-discipline endeavour brought together expertise from physical education, sport and
64 coaching studies, and physical activity for health through collaboration between three higher
65 education institutions in Ireland, Dublin City University (DCU), University of Limerick (UL) and
66 University College Cork (UCC). The CSPPA study sought to assess participation in physical
67 activity, physical education and sport among 10-18 year olds in Ireland, assess indices of health
68 and fitness in a sub-sample of the target population, and examine the complex interactions of
69 factors influencing participation in physical activity, physical education and sport. CSPPA
70 research methods replicated the ESRI (2005) study, where possible, with the addition of certain
71 elements. The quantitative measures included a redesign of the original ESRI (2005)
72 questionnaire and the use of motion sensors (accelerometers). Basic physical health measures
73 were also collected to examine the relation between physical activity levels and health. These
74 included aerobic fitness (estimated using a 20 metre shuttle run test) and systolic and diastolic
75 blood pressure (BP, mmHg) to measure physical health. Qualitative data provided a more

76 complete picture of the questionnaire data by allowing participants to share their own voice
77 providing a more detailed exploration into why children choose / choose not to participate in
78 physical activity, and are the focus of this paper.

79 Results from the overall study reported elsewhere (Woods, Tannehill, & Walsh, 2012;
80 Woods, Tannehill, Quinlan, Moyna, & Walsh, 2010; Walsh, Woods, & Tannehill, 2011) should
81 be of interest, as well as of concern, to parents, the community, and young people. Numerous
82 international scholars over the past two decades have suggested that as young people
83 participate in and enjoy physical activity experiences, they will develop physical activity habits
84 and skills, and will be more inclined to choose and maintain a physically active lifestyle (British
85 Heart Foundation, 2000; Hallal, et al 2006; McKenzie, 2001; Twisk, 2001). In addition to family,
86 amenities and attitudes of the local environment, informal play, and other social and personal
87 influences, key to providing positive physical activity experiences and helping children and youth
88 develop physical activity patterns are physical education teachers, physical activity coordinators
89 and youth sport providers.

90 In their study documenting the frequency and types of activity in which young people in
91 Ireland participated during physical education, extra-curricular activity and out of school sport
92 Fahey et al. (2005) favoured quantitative measures of access and participation. Other Irish-
93 based studies have utilized qualitative methods to explain young peoples' experiences of sport
94 and provide greater insight into *why* particular young people are included in, or excluded from
95 sport and physical activity (Collier et al, 2007; Connor, 2003; de Roiste et al, 2005; Enright &
96 O'Sullivan, 2010; MacPhail et al, 2009). This paper strives to complement these later studies by
97 exploring further, and on a larger scale, the perspectives of young people, their exposure,
98 experience and outlook of being involved (or not) in physical education, sport and physical
99 activity. It also intends to examine the relationship, interactions and consequences that

100 permeate across the three pillars for young people. Our literature review revealed a dearth of
101 research in this area both in Ireland and internationally.

102

103 Opportunities for young people to be physically active in the Irish context.

104 Physical education is not provided in all Irish primary or post-primary schools and the
105 quality and breadth of provision varies. Primary teachers are responsible for the teaching of
106 physical education within the primary school and while there is no compulsory level of physical
107 education provision, the suggested minimum weekly time established by the Department of
108 Education and Skills (DES) includes one hour per week for the subject. The physical education
109 curriculum at the primary level is divided into six strands. The strands are athletics, games,
110 dance, gymnastics, outdoor and adventure activities, and aquatics. There is an increasing trend
111 of national governing bodies (NGBs) of sport providing coaches for particular sports within the
112 primary school day and also providing resources and training to teachers. The expectation for
113 post-primary physical education is that qualified physical education teachers are responsible for
114 its delivery. The physical education curriculum at junior cycle, 'the first three years of post-
115 primary education', has been developed on the basis of a time allocation of two hours per week
116 (Department of Education and Science (DES) and National Council of Curriculum and
117 Assessment (NCCA), 2003). The junior cycle physical education curriculum is divided into eight
118 strands. The content strands are the same as for the primary syllabus with the addition of
119 health-related activity and the games strand being sub-divided into invasion games (where
120 players invade their opponents space such as basketball, soccer, field hockey, rugby), net
121 games (played on a court divided with goal to prevent opponent from returning the ball such as
122 badminton, volleyball, badminton) and running and fielding games (where opposing teams play
123 offense and defence by running to score such as cricket, rounders, softball). The general trend

124 of participation in physical education declines as students move through the post-primary school
125 years.

126 The promotion of extra-curricular sport / after-school sport in Irish schools is fragmented.
127 Three main groups provide some level of support for after school sport: (1) teachers providing
128 structured opportunities on a voluntary basis, (2) NGBs, and (3) Local Sport Partnerships
129 (where they exist) that have been created to provide a national structure to coordinate and
130 promote the development of sport at the local level (MacPhail et al, 2008). The exposure young
131 people have to particular extra-curricular sport is generally dependent on the interests and
132 expertise of those offering to provide provision. Out of school physical activity opportunities are
133 primarily administered by NGBs. While every NGB is expected to develop and implement a
134 programme for young people in sport, building on the principles of an agreed national
135 programme (MacPhail et al, 2008), the exposure young people have to particular sports is
136 dependent somewhat on what is available and in their locale. NGB strategies/guidelines are
137 interpreted at local club level, in the majority of cases these clubs are serviced by volunteers
138 who have a range of experiences, expertise, and agendas. Also available within many
139 communities are opportunities for young people to be involved in physical activity through
140 adventure centres, private clubs (e.g., swimming, tae kwan do, dance), and facilities that
141 accommodate activities such as horse riding and skate boarding.

142

143 Seeking and listening to young peoples' voices.

144 Voices of young people must be sought if we are to hear their beliefs, values and
145 perceptions on such issues as why they choose to participate in physical activity, barriers that
146 prevent them from taking part, obstacles they encounter as they navigate physical activity
147 environments, types of activities they find most inviting, who is most influential in their choice to
148 participate, and how they might better be supported in their quest, to be active. Without hearing,

149 and most importantly responding to this collective voice, we will not be in a position to offer
150 inviting and realistic experiences that promote and increase young peoples' physical activity
151 patterns.

152 There are diverse theoretical traditions (e.g., constructivism, post-structuralism, queer
153 theory) and methodological approaches (e.g., narratives, ethnography, participatory action
154 research, critical engagement) that support the gathering of young peoples' perspectives and
155 experiences on their involvement in sport and physical activity. Methodological approaches
156 such as drawings (MacPhail & Kinchin, 2004) allow young people to portray their feelings about
157 and experiences in physical activity while participatory action research (Enright & O'Sullivan,
158 2010) strives to provide authentic sport and physical activity opportunities that meet the
159 multiplicity of young peoples' changing needs and interests with the ultimate goal being to
160 encourage young people to be more physically active and to adopt a healthy lifestyle (O'Sullivan
161 & MacPhail, 2010; Wright & Macdonald, 2010). There are examples of how values and beliefs
162 sought from young people have informed the development of effective practice in physical
163 education (Enright & O'Sullivan, 2010) and identified enablers and barriers to involvement in
164 sport (Rees et al., 2006; Sit & Lindner, 2005). By encouraging young people to share the reality
165 of their exposure to, and involvement in, sport and physical activity experiences, we may be in a
166 better position to acknowledge and address how such contexts can most effectively work
167 together to motivate young people to choose active lifestyles. It is important to recognise that
168 participation in physical activity and sport is constrained by a multitude of individual, social and
169 economic factors, however, it is important to recognize that some findings may be more
170 prevalent in some social groups. No findings apply in the same way to all members of such
171 groups and the issues discussed are not an exhaustive list of what young people share about
172 their experiences in sport and physical activity; in other words, the picture that emerges is
173 complex (MacPhail, 2011b). Young peoples' voices are always positioned within a range of

174 physical, social, geographical, and economic factors and, moreover, some of the potential
175 inclusion/exclusion factors may not yet have arisen due to the young person's age and
176 exposure to particular life opportunities. What young people convey about their experiences of
177 sport and physical activity will therefore, to some extent, be positioned by their exposure to, and
178 experience of, different stages of sport participation, the interpretations, agendas and
179 interactions of researchers, and commissioning agencies and policy makers (MacPhail, 2011b).

180 In an attempt to critically examine and clarify the questionnaire data, CSPPA sought
181 young peoples' opinions, attitudes and views on the factors they deemed important in
182 influencing their involvement in, or avoidance of, physical activity, physical education and sport.
183 This paper foregrounds what young people convey, using their own voices, about their sport
184 and physical activity experiences (i.e., what they construct to be sport and physical activity
185 experiences) and how such experiences may result in young people feeling included or
186 excluded in youth sport. We will share the insights gained from this qualitative aspect of the
187 CSPPA study and hopefully cause each of us involved in providing physical activity
188 opportunities for young people to consider how young peoples' voices might influence best
189 practice with the aim of potentially increasing young peoples' motivation to participate in
190 physical activity and sport.

191

192 Method

193 For the larger CSPPA study a one-stage cluster sampling procedure was used to obtain
194 the representative sample of schools. Based on a Department of Education database of schools
195 clusters were based on school-type (vocational/community etc.), school location (urban/rural),
196 school gender (male/female/mixed), school socioeconomics, and school classification
197 (public/private). From these clusters a representative sample of schools were chosen and
198 invited to take part in the overall study. All participants, 4122 students from 70 schools across

199 Ireland, completed the self-report measures and a sub-sample of 3% (N=124) took part in focus
200 groups (FGs). These FG (N=24) were divided among the three research institutions conducting
201 this study with each institution being responsible for three post primary schools (one all boys,
202 one all girls and one mixed), and three primary schools (one all boys, one all girls and one
203 mixed) (table 1). To be as representative as possible a convenience sample of schools was
204 chosen to include boys/girls/mixed, high socioeconomic/low socioeconomic, and geographical
205 location. Primary students were those in 5th-6th class (10-12 years of age) while post primary
206 included students across all grade levels from 1st year to 6th year (12-18 years of age).

207

208 Focus Groups.

209 FG were used to elicit descriptive data from students and were conducted post self-
210 report and objective data. The research team examined the narrowly focused theme/topic of
211 young peoples' involvement or lack of involvement in physical activity as the focus of the FGs.
212 FGs and questions were developed following review of the survey. Groups of between 6 to 8
213 students (selected for convenience) were gathered for a group interview/discussion on students'
214 opinions, attitudes and views on the factors they deem important in influencing their involvement
215 in, or avoidance of, sport, physical education and physical activity was accessed through the
216 FGs. With written consent of all participants FGs were audio taped for transcription and
217 analysis.

218 These FG lasted between 30 and 50 minutes (average length 42 minutes) depending on
219 numbers and age of students in the group as well as how interactive the students were with one
220 another. The research team focused their emphasis on the interaction between and among the
221 participants (Morgan, 1988) in each group. With the exception of posing guiding questions,
222 probing by asking an additional question or refocusing the group in order to sustain the
223 interaction, the researchers were listeners focused on learning from the participants' voice.

224 To prevent our questions from being confusing or young peoples' responses being
225 misunderstood, when starting the interviews we ensured that the students understood the
226 difference between the three opportunities to participate, i.e., physical education, sport and
227 physical activity by discussing, clarifying and answering questions they posed for clarification. It
228 was explained to students that **physical education** is done with a teacher during timetabled
229 physical education class at school, **sport** is done when taking part with a club or after school
230 programme, and **physical activity** is any activity or exercise such as play, games, and informal
231 activity that is done (outside of physical education class and sports clubs) such as at lunch, on
232 the way to school, in the evening or on weekends.

233 Krueger and Casey (2000) advise selecting participants who are similar in some way
234 specific to the research allowing them to have something to say to one another, and who would
235 be comfortable talking to each other. With this in mind, FGs were conducted with homogeneous
236 groups of boys and girls who were identified as either generally 'active' (regular physical activity)
237 or 'inactive' (sporadic physical activity) by their classroom (primary) or physical education (post
238 primary) teachers. While this form of sampling is not the ideal, we believe these teachers knew
239 their students and were familiar with their activity involvement; FG teams followed up with the
240 students at the start of the interviews. As Krueger and Casey (2000) suggest, it was felt that
241 these 'like' groups might provide a safe environment in which students would feel comfortable
242 sharing their views and feelings without being ridiculed. It should be noted that teachers at the
243 primary level, who have close contact with the students had difficulty identifying any 5th or 6th
244 class children as inactive, especially among the boys. Once students were identified as 'active' /
245 'inactive', the class was asked for students to volunteer to take part in the focus groups.

246 FG teams included masters and doctoral students studying sport, physical activity,
247 physical education and/or coaching in the three research institutions responsible for conducting
248 the study. One of the lead researchers designed a full-day workshop to train interview teams

249 from all institutions on strategies for conducting FGs. Training involved a full day workshop that
250 included demonstrations, explanations, trials and mock interviews with each institution being
251 responsible for further development of these facilitator and and moderator skills prior to their
252 being released to collect data. In addition, a handbook of guidelines was developed and made
253 accessible to all members of the research teams.

254 Each FG was conducted by two researchers, one assigned as facilitator and the other as
255 moderator, each with a specific role for which they were trained. The facilitator's role was to
256 stimulate interaction among participants toward the theme/topic through direct or indirect
257 methods by overseeing group discussion and encouraging all participants to respond. A set of
258 FG questions guided discussion although these were not used to limit the facilitator probing or
259 asking follow-up questions. The facilitator used probing techniques both these were posed
260 within a non-threatening and supportive environment. The moderator kept a record of the
261 discussion as it evolved to add details for instances where the recording was not audible and to
262 reflect participant behaviours and expressions that do not come across through the audio tape.
263 While field notes taken by the facilitator are generally used for purposes of the discussion to
264 highlight additional questions or topics to probe, the recorder plays a key role in keeping track of
265 central points in the discussion, meaningful quotes, and observations of body language or
266 discussion climate. While FGs were audio recorded to obtain the detail and nuances of the
267 participants' voices, in accordance with the Research Ethics Guidelines approved by all three
268 institutions for this study, participants were informed that all recordings would remain
269 confidential and pseudonyms used if they were referenced.

270

271 Data Analysis

272 FG data on the individual, pre-labeled interviews were first transcribed. Analysis of the
273 transcription was conducted manually by comparing it with notes taken by the moderator to fill in

274 inaudible phrases or gaps in the recordings. Three researchers were involved in the analysis of
275 FG data.

276 The constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was used to analyze the
277 qualitative data which involved finding, highlighting and comparing themes across FGs for
278 similarities and differences to establish patterns within the data (Berg,2009). This process
279 involved manually breaking the text down into manageable sections, attaching keywords to
280 sections of text and then finding other segments of text to which the same keyword had been
281 given (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009). Following this, a content analysis (Reinharz, 1992) of the
282 keywords was undertaken with thematic codes given to text to allow categorizing of all data. In
283 this way, codes represented the link between interview data and the researchers' theoretical
284 concepts. Two researchers worked independently to code the data, which was then cross
285 checked by the third researcher. Consensus meetings were held regularly to discuss and clarify
286 any disagreements, determine rules for making judgments, and to reach consensus. As is
287 typical, and the most common method for data analysis of FG, the group, rather than the
288 individual, was the unit of analysis (Knodel & Pramualratana, 1987). While some researchers
289 (Goldman, 1962; Hess, 1968) indicate that group interviewing provides more information that is
290 qualitatively better than individual interviews, they also suggest it provides greater synergism,
291 stimulation and spontaneity, as we found in this study. A summary of the interviews was
292 developed through repeated reading of the narratives for their underlying meaning. When the
293 researchers had a clear sense of what the participants were attempting to say, quotations of key
294 points were selected from the transcript and shared with an accompanying narrative
295 explanation. Before the analysis was complete, the entire text was re-read for additional clues to
296 assist in the most complete and detailed interpretation of the data.

297

298 Results and Discussion

299 Throughout the results section we utilize two of the reporting styles outlined by Krueger
300 (1998) to share our findings, providing summary description with illustrative quotes and in some
301 instances summary description with illustrative quotes followed by interpretation. As noted in
302 the methodology, to prevent our questions from being confusing or young peoples' responses
303 being misunderstood, when starting the interviews we ensured that the students understood the
304 difference between the three opportunities to participate, i.e., physical education, sport and
305 physical activity by discussing, clarifying and answering questions they posed for clarification.
306 Table 2 denotes the themes identified by young people as influencing their level of involvement
307 in physical education, sport and physical activity. We have chosen to focus on the five themes
308 ('being with friends', 'variety in activity content', 'experiencing fun', 'time constraints', and
309 'opportunity to be outside') that ran across all three opportunities for young people to be active.
310 If we are to encourage and provide opportunities for young people to choose active lifestyles, it
311 is important that we address the comments that young people report affects their involvement in
312 physical activity across a number of physical activity provision contexts.

313
314 Themes that ran across all three opportunities of physical education, sport and physical activity
315 (1) Being with friends

316 In reviewing previous research, young people have reported liking physical education
317 when the curriculum encourages social interaction (Dismore & Bailey, 2010; Smith & Parr,
318 2007). In addition, there is a tendency for girls to focus more on social competence in physical
319 education lessons, with the desire to be popular, socially accepted and to have high social
320 status, with peer interaction and friendship being extremely important to them (Garrett, 2004). In
321 the current study, whether primary or post primary, boys or girls, active or inactive, students
322 enjoyed being with friends during **physical education**. It was interesting to note that many
323 inactive boys shared the same perceptions as their active peers, including the wish to spend

324 time with friends during physical education. A variety of responses were received when inactive
325 boys were asked about their friends' involvement in **sport** and the encouragement they received
326 from them. Fewer inactive post primary boys had friends who participated in the same activities
327 yet, when they did, feelings of support and enjoyment were reported. Many indicated none of
328 their friends played any sport, suggesting that they had 'quit', or that they were 'too lazy'. Those
329 who did indicate participating with their friends suggested that this '*made it great craic, ya*
330 *know...have fun with them, they defend your back.*' (PP IA B)

331 Many acknowledged the place of friends in their desire to train and compete in **sport**
332 and one male youth noted, '*Like, my friends keep me going. More likely to be with my friends to*
333 *have a laugh and all. I don't care if I win or lose as long as I'm having fun and my friends are*
334 *playing, so.*' (PP A B) Many of the girls indicated beginning their involvement in sport through
335 friends' birthday parties such as one young primary active female who shared, '*A friend had her*
336 *birthday at the kickboxing club. It was great craic, you know, so I joined after.*' (P A G) In
337 discussing winning and how the pressure to win impacts their participation, girls noted that while
338 they participate in sports clubs to win it is also nice to have friends on the team to support them.
339 One inactive young teenager admitted, '*My friends are really inactive, they wouldn't do, like*
340 *sport, they do dancing and stuff, but that would be it and not organised like.*' (PP IA G) Another
341 supported her by stating, '*yeah, all my friends are not into the whole team thing, I think.*' (PP IA
342 G)

343 A few inactive girls noted **physical activity** opportunities outside of physical education
344 and sport as they discussed guides activities such as canoeing, rock climbing, and adventure
345 that were fun and let them meet different people. Several other groups of inactive girls
346 suggested that they would play around the neighbourhood with friends that lived close by, '*you*
347 *know it's not so formal and you can just run and jump around*' (PP IA G). It appeared that for
348 these girls pleasurable **physical activity** was linked to socialising with friends in whatever

349 activity they chose to do, *'like, we just walk around the shops and talk'* (PP IA G), *'I like the*
350 *company'* (P IA G), *'much better than chores'* (PP IA G), or *'after school I probably walk up to*
351 *my horse and that's far'* (PP IA G), *'walk my dogs or something around the fields. Gives us*
352 *something to do'*. (PP IA G) A common thought among many of the girls seemed to be spending
353 time with friends in active, yet informal kinds of settings as conveyed by one active girl, *'Going*
354 *out with friends. I just get bored watching tele or sitting at the computer. I usually play the Wii*
355 *because there's not many people. I have a nine-year-old sister, so I feel ashamed of myself if*
356 *I've been sitting inside all day and I didn't do anything.'* (PP A G)

357 For boys, relaxed play was the most prominent type of **physical activity** whether it
358 involved sports, swimming, the gym or cycling. For some there was more access than others
359 but they seemed to enjoy the same types of activities with friends, *'like we only have a hill n*
360 *street and cul de sac but it can be pure rapid, that's where I go with my mates and em my mate*
361 *was on top of the hill and he just chipped a ball and it bounced on the concrete and he put a*
362 *window in...just no room ya know but we had great craic'* (PP IA B) while another group talked
363 about going to the gym, or the pitch as, *'everything is local...like everything is about fifteen*
364 *minutes away. The classic [facility] is about half an hour away so it is easy to get to'* (PP A B).
365 They indicated that it did not matter where you went as long as you were with your friends, *'The*
366 *gym is the gym like, the lads would just say here are you coming to the gym? like doing it*
367 *together'* (PP IA B).

368 Primary and post primary youth, whether male or female, active or inactive, and
369 regardless of the geographical area in which they had access to activity, all talked about
370 wanting to be physically active with friends as one of their main reasons for participating. They
371 indicated the fun involved in **physical activity**, that it prevented boredom, and let you be with
372 friends, *'Friends...you know, you play with your friends and it gives you a boost up'* or *'yeah,*
373 *motivates ye'* (PP A G)

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(2) Variety in activity content

Young people report liking physical education when the curriculum has variety and choice (Dismore & Bailey, 2010; Smith & Parr, 2007), reporting that they dislike physical education when the curriculum repeats the same activities every year. A number of active boys, at primary and post primary, did talk about other types of activities, other than games, they enjoyed in **physical education** such as fencing and swimming. One boy liked fencing *'because you're trying to look out for yourself'* (PP A B). An inactive primary boy in a mixed school thought swimming was good because, *'everyone can take part'* (P IA B) and the entire group responded, *'yeah, so everyone can play'* (P IA B). Active boys from numerous schools suggested they would like to try boxing, running track, and gymnastics in physical education, although boys in one mixed school and several post primary schools suggested that gymnastics was not enjoyable and was for girls; *'gym? No, girls do gym'* (PP A B), *'only girls do that'* (P IA B). One group of inactive boys indicated a lack of interest in playing football during physical education as they played this regularly outside of physical education, suggesting that, *'hey, we only do football...and who cares?'* (PP IA B). The biggest problem for the inactive boys when it came to participation in physical education was *'boring warm-ups and the bleep test'* (PP IA B). One group of active boys felt that games [activities] needed to have a purpose in physical education or they were boring, *'you know, we can play much better games... like in third class we did gymnastics and we had like monkey bars and big poles and mats and a horse and that was the best PE we've ever done'* (PP A B). The transition year is an optional year of schooling situated after the first three years and before the final two years of post-primary school in Irish education. Boys in this year of school re-enforced the desire for physical education to offer variety and novel activities that were new to them and which some already enjoyed such as tai

398 chi, judo and hip hop dance; 'more variety of activity would be better' (PP A B), 'would like more
399 choice of what to do in class' (PP A B) and 'we do only what the teacher likes' (PP IA B).

400 Young peoples' continued requests for access to a wide range of sports further
401 highlights the importance of ensuring young people can find a sport to which they are attracted,
402 in which they can remain involved, and that caters for their individual abilities and interests
403 (MacPhail, 2011b). Less active youth, whether male or female, made suggestions for having the
404 opportunity to participate in organized alternative activities outside of school such as boxing,
405 Tae-Kwan-Do, dancing, and skateboarding. One male youth noted that, '*I started tag rugby but*
406 *quit when it was too rough then Nanny phoned this thing up that she knew the website and it*
407 *told you where it was and all and then told you how much it was every month and all so I started*
408 *singing...it is good fun*' (P IA B). Both active and inactive girls had a wider range of sport type
409 clubs and activities in which they participated than the boys and included invasion games
410 (camogie, soccer, basketball), swimming, fitness, dancing, horse riding, cross country running
411 and tennis.

412 Differences between boys identified as generally active and inactive were revealed
413 through their comments. When discussing the types of physical activity they would choose to
414 participate in away from school and club sport, active boys suggested similar games and
415 activities that they play in clubs and physical education, i.e., soccer, rugby, and Gaelic games
416 with the difference being that each would be played informally in the park. On the other hand, it
417 was interesting to hear the inactive boys speak of physical activity describing a much wider
418 range of activities in which they choose to participate, including cycling, climbing trees/walls,
419 pitch and putt, go-carting, passing the ball and going outside and hanging with friends. One
420 group of inactive primary boys talked of '*Running around, probably racing each other, probably*
421 *going around hiding, playing hide and seek, or playing tag or something*' (PP IA B).

422

423 (3) Experiencing Fun

424 Young people report liking physical education when the curriculum provides
425 opportunities for fun and enjoyment (Dismore & Bailey, 2010; Smith & Parr, 2007). In this study,
426 active boys at both levels confirmed that any competitive game, and all invasion games, were
427 what they enjoyed most in **physical education**, identifying bumball (invasion game where you
428 move by sitting on your bottom), basketball, soccer, rugby and hurling, with one primary boy
429 excitedly reporting, *'yeah, in sixth class we can do rugby contact sport'* (P A B). A group of
430 active boys from an all boys' school agreed with a peer who commented, *'Well...I quite, I pretty
431 much like the games that you are teamed up with other people cause then like you can all work
432 together and then it wouldn't be as hard as you'd think it would'* (P A B).

433 Previous research notes that enjoyment has to be prevalent in sport experiences for
434 continued participation (Foster et al, 2005). More active boys at both the primary and post
435 primary level tend to report positive sport experiences that are fun, team based, require a
436 certain level of physical competence and entail (Woods, Tannehill, Quinlan et al., 2010) while
437 girls tend to report positive sport experiences where they are fun and encourage friendships
438 (O'Connor, 2009, p. 115).

439 The two main reasons cited by boys and girls for participating in **sport** in the current
440 study were fun and competition, *'The fun. The fun and competitive, both. You have to have a
441 laugh. If it's not competitive then there is no point playing football. To enjoy it. You wouldn't say
442 you play football to have a fight over it. If it wasn't competitive you wouldn't really bother, it's
443 better like winning matches* (PP A B). *It doesn't matter with me. More competitive, yeah. You
444 get something out of it'* (PP A G). Many youth talked about the importance of competition in
445 sport as *'giving you the drive to work hard'* (PP A B), but at the same time emphasised that
446 participating must be fun as noted by one boy, *'serious yeah, but I mean, it has to be fun...have
447 a laugh and good craic when there, and win too'* (PP A B). Winning seemed to be the focus in

448 the clubs in which these young people had been involved, and they felt, *'winning would make*
449 *you happy, but winning's not everything. Just play for fun, that's all I do. I just play for fun, for the*
450 *laugh'* (PP A B).

451 While competition was an important reason why young people enjoyed participating in
452 **sport**, for some, the idea of winning was not as critical and could even spoil the fun. One girl
453 reported, *'well like I don't really care if we lose or win, like it's just the point of enjoying yourself*
454 *and playing the game and like no pressure...you don't need all the pressure on you of everyone*
455 *saying 'oh come on win this game' and there's people shouting all that, cos my mam's never like*
456 *that...'* (PP A G). Many of the inactive boys felt there was too much pressure on them to
457 participate in club sport as one boy reported, *'I don't like parents and teachers telling me what to*
458 *play, like, you are built for rugby so why not give it a go? Is it good to be built for rugby?.....no. I*
459 *want to have fun'* (PP IA B). One group of inactive boys discussed how they would be more
460 interested in playing if it was fun and if someone could/would help them improve their skills, with
461 one boy commenting, *'like if you are no good...like,...I was in soccer, but, well, and they all kept*
462 *picking on me so I just dropped out of it'* (PP IA B).

463 Enjoyment and pleasure were key for all youth in choosing to take part in **physical**
464 **activity**. The boys seemed to enjoy the fun involved in physical activity suggesting that it
465 prevented boredom, and let you be with friends. They also shared what they disliked about
466 physical activity that made it less enjoyable including the fatigue caused by too much activity,
467 getting sweaty, being active in the rain, getting injured, or the expense of some activities, *'I don't*
468 *like the way it costs so much money...'* or *'ye like if I break my arm in a match, like you can't do*
469 *anything, like you can't even go to sleep for a few weeks. Like you couldn't play sports for a few*
470 *months like...'* (PP IA B). Active and inactive girls revealed remarkably similar responses to the
471 questions about physical activity. These girls indicated the desire to be physically active both on
472 a daily basis and also if they were forced to choose between activity and being sedentary

473 suggesting that being active can be more fun 'play is more fun than sitting' ((PP IA G) and 'when
474 you feel good about yourself it makes you realise that activity is fun, or maybe has fun results'
475 (PP A G).

476 Boys talked about various forms of **physical activity** including cycling or walking to
477 school, walking the dog, or doing activity for fitness like sit ups at home or running laps on the
478 track. In all cases, these boys described physical activity as being relaxed and enjoyable. One
479 boy noted that, *'it's like you don't notice who is good and who isn't like just have a laugh'* (P A B)
480 and another noted, *'if you're with a mate you can have a laugh while doing stuff, but I think if*
481 *you're on your own then it can be real boring. You get more done when you're on your own*
482 *but...'* (PP A B).

483 One inactive girl noted that she would not choose organized sport as a form of **physical**
484 **activity** because, *'I just don't think doing sports would be fun'* (PP IA G). Another girl who felt
485 similarly, said, *'Well...like, my sister would kind of, do you want to play some B-ball my homie,*
486 *and I'm like, OK, yeah sure. Because if I play video games too long I get all dizzy'* (PP IA G). A
487 group of inactive primary girls from a mixed school suggested that on weekends, *'At home,*
488 *sometimes, you play like man hunt or tag or something and it's like we're, you run after*
489 *someone and catch them and they run and there's loads of people like running away...it is just*
490 *playing, it's fun'* (P IA G).

491

492 (4) Time constraints

493 Students have previously noted a particular dislike of taking part in physical education
494 being related to insufficient time being allocated to changing and showering (Rees et al, 2006).
495 The current study reported that youth were adamant that they did not get enough time for
496 physical education to make it worthwhile and enjoyable. Most of the girls indicated that the time
497 allowed for each **physical education** class is too short and the frequency of taking part in

498 physical education every two weeks is not enough *'to make you get exercise and feel good'* (PP
499 A G).

500 When discussing what influences their choice to participate in **sport** the inactive girls
501 cited time (*'it takes too much time'* PP IA G), the nature of sport (*'screaming, shouting, and all
502 the sweating, like not worth it'* (PP IA G), less keen on training and playing (*'boring', 'always the
503 same'* P IA G) and getting bruised and hurt as reasons for quitting sport or starting other
504 activities. Other youth, male and female, noted not taking part in sport outside of school
505 because their parents were too busy to transport them to training/matches and the huge time
506 commitment expected to participate.

507 Whether discussing **physical activity** on weekends, the choice between being active or
508 sedentary, or how their physical activity levels had changed since they were younger, both
509 active and inactive girls reported limited time for physical activity due to babysitting or other
510 jobs, studying, chores, being tired or not in the mood, or safety issues in their neighbourhoods.
511 An array of responses from various FGs revealed similar reasons for girls' choices across all
512 settings and age groups.

513

514 (5) Opportunity to be outside

515 Whether primary or post primary, boys or girls, active or inactive, students enjoyed being
516 released from what they perceived as school academic commitments / lessons. One boy shared
517 his thoughts on **physical education** as, *'Well its not fun but I like it because it's something to
518 get off work and school, and you get to burn off the energy that's inside you when you're at
519 school doing (inaudible), and you can get more fit'* (PP IA B).

520 When discussing the types of **sports** in which they liked to participate and why they
521 chose them, one post primary active boy remarked, *'I really like playing the tennis because you*

522 *get lots of fresh air and you have lots and lots of fun and it is never like a chore to go to it, it's*
523 *actually pleasurable when you go and you make lots of new friends'* (PP A B).

524 Similar to the boys, girls suggested that socializing was what they liked about **physical**
525 **activity**, along with being out in the fresh air better than being indoors. One active girl noted, '*it*
526 *clears your head'* (PP A G) and an inactive girl suggested, '*it gives you freedom to experiment'*
527 (PP IA G). Two groups of girls, one active and one inactive, emphasised that physical activity on
528 its own, '*gives you choice'* (PP IA G), '*like options, you know'* (PP IA G) which they felt was
529 something lacking in their other activity opportunities.

530

531 Conclusions to Inform Moving Forward

532 Perhaps most exciting, it appears that these young people have a positive attitude
533 toward physical activity which does not seem to diminish as they age despite their activity levels
534 decreasing. They also appear positively disposed to discussing how best to maintain or
535 encourage an interest in physical activity for themselves and their peers. Similar to the findings
536 of Wright, Macdonald and Groom (2003) while time, or lack of time became an issue, other
537 activities, or more focused activities, took the place of previous choices as young people came
538 to realise what they most enjoyed. As physical education teachers, sport providers and physical
539 activity supervisors we are encouraged to work with young people to design programmes that
540 reflect the attributes and experiences young people have shared as contributing to relevant and
541 exciting programmes. Young people are requesting (1) fun opportunities to interact with friends,
542 (2) activities that are both competitive and non-competitive, focused on sport and other forms of
543 movement, (3) linking activity to options that can be done with parents or other family members,
544 (4) opening facilities that welcome and encourage young people, (5) setting up travel options so
545 young people can access activity, and (6) setting up free options for those who face financial
546 issues. MacPhail (2011a) prompts us that, 'such listening has consequences, however, and

547 may lead teachers and coaches to question cherished aspects of their provision and practice. In
548 other words, if a decision is taken to find out about young peoples' views, it is important to
549 decide what will happen if those views suggest that pedagogical changes are required' (p. 106).

550 Cothran (2010) indicates that recently teachers are increasingly interested in gaining the
551 insights of young people about many aspects of their learning and experiences in school,
552 including what they value about physical education. Numerous studies have examined the link
553 between students' values and the physical education curriculum, unfortunately confirming that
554 physical education is often not valuable to young people (Cothran & Ennis, 2001; MacPhail, Kirk
555 & Kinchin, 2004; Mowling, Brock & Hastie, 2006). One important finding reveals young peoples'
556 desire to be involved in choosing, or at least having input into, choices on the curriculum
557 (Courturier, Chepko & Coughlin, 2005; Stinson, 2003). Carlson and Hastie (1997) introduced
558 the idea of students and teachers working together to identify commonalities between them to
559 create learning experiences and curricula to which they could both find benefit and value. Oliver
560 (2010) encourages teachers and researchers to consider 'what might be' by involving young
561 people as co-researchers seeking their insights and perspectives on their own experiences to
562 reform physical activity practices. Enright and O'Sullivan (2013) suggest that allowing students'
563 choice and the opportunity to negotiate the curriculum allows them to link their physical
564 education experiences to their daily lives in meaningful ways. While the debate about the place
565 of student voice in the curriculum is beyond the scope of this paper, it does link to some of the
566 findings and implications of this work.

567 Physical education teachers, physical activity coordinators and sport providers need to
568 respond to young peoples' physical activity related needs and desires if they are to be best
569 positioned to encourage and maintain young peoples' involvement and investment in physical
570 activity. Acknowledging that the young peoples' experiences and perceptions of physical activity
571 are noted as being similar to international data, we share two particular developments in the

572 Irish context that are best placed to link schools and community working cooperatively to offer
573 challenging, appropriate and meaningful activity experiences for children and youth.

574 One such initiative is the Active School Flag (ASF), launched by the DES in 2009
575 (<http://www.activeschoolflag.ie>). ASF is a non-competitive initiative that seeks to recognise
576 schools (both primary and post primary) that provide quality physical education, co-curricular
577 physical activity and sports programmes for their students. Key to this initiative is the
578 partnership approach which the ASF encourages, empowering schools to become proactive in
579 approaching such groups as National Governing Bodies (NGBs), Local Sports Partnerships,
580 Health Service Executive (HSE) and Education Centres about working together to promote
581 physical activity (individual and team) for all young people, regardless of ability. An important
582 aspect of the ASF is the school setting up an ASF committee that involves all stakeholders,
583 especially students in the decision making process related to type of provision and promotion of
584 physical activity. i.e., using student voice to design appropriate programmes for their
585 participation and enjoyment. This is consistent with those who encourage us to involve young
586 people in the design of innovative and challenging curricula that will stimulate their interest and
587 involvement (Collier, 2006; Glasby & Macdonald, 2004). To achieve the ASF there are a
588 number of required criteria that schools must achieve that fit quite closely with the issues that
589 young people in this study identified; minimum of a double period of physical education per
590 week to all students, a range of co-curricular activities for all students, individual and team
591 activities, encouraging students to walk/cycle to school, informing students about physical
592 activity events, facilities and opportunities in local community, accessing local facilities that
593 promote physical activity opportunities, and demonstrating involvement of staff, parents and
594 members of the community in provision of physical activity.

595 Another development worthy of discussion is senior cycle physical education (SCPE),
596 proposed by the NCCA (2011) and composed of two distinct courses, a non-examination

597 curriculum framework and an examination syllabus. The non-examination framework is to be
598 accessible to all students and open to student choice through an innovative set of instructional
599 models. The aim of SCPE is *'to encourage learners' confident, enjoyable and informed*
600 *participation in physical activity while in senior cycle and in their future lives'* (NCCA 2011a, p.
601 13). The focus on the learner and lifelong learning is key to the SCPE framework as it strives to
602 develop skills in young people that will aid them in leading long and healthy lives. Through
603 SCPE teachers invite young people to be involved in designing the physical education
604 curriculum making choices on the activities that will serve as the medium through which they
605 learn about physical activity and how it might impact their lives. This notion of partnership in the
606 SCPE framework is consistent with recommendations made by Kirk and Macdonald (2001) in
607 planning physical activity opportunities for young people. The SCPE framework recommends
608 that objectives and key skills be achieved through use of multiple instructional models in
609 conjunction with physical activities chosen by both the students and the teacher together.
610 Inclusion is highlighted in the framework as every student irrespective of their ability and/or
611 commitment to physical activity should be encouraged toward active participation in SCPE.
612 Further, the document highlights the potential for creating community links through allowing
613 students to reflect on the community and societal factors that can ease their lifelong
614 participation in physical activity or make it more difficult (NCCA, 2011a). The use of an activity
615 portfolio as a form of assessment in SCPE allows students to investigate and learn what
616 activities are available to them in their local area, increasing the chance of students choosing to
617 be active outside of school. The framework could have a positive impact on the relationship
618 between schools and the community, as young people discover links between various physical
619 education content areas and sports clubs or activity venues in the community.

620 The acknowledgement that young people are complex learners with a multiplicity of needs
621 heightens the expectation that programmes and interventions to encourage higher levels of

622 participation in physical activity, physical education and sport should ideally be multi-leveled and
623 differentiated (Mulvihill & Quigley, 2003). To be effective, all those tasked with providing
624 opportunities for young people to be physically active need to recognise and diagnose individual
625 learners' needs and interests, consult young people about them, and reflect on their personal
626 and professional capacities (as teachers, physical activity coordinators, families, coaches, sport
627 development officers, national governing bodies and / or youth workers) to meet those learning
628 needs (Armour, 2011; MacPhail, 2011a).

629

630

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