‘Carving a new order of experience’

with young people in physical education:

Participatory Action Research as a pedagogy of possibility

by

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Limerick

Supervised by Professor Mary O’Sullivan

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to work with a group of disengaged teenage girls to understand and help them transform their self-identified barriers to their physical education engagement and physical activity participation. This study was premised on a conviction that young people have unique perspectives on learning and life, that their voices warrant not only to be heard but to be acted on, and that these young people (disengaged teenage girls in this case) should be partners in any efforts at reimagining physical education.

The study took place over three years in a designated disadvantaged, city-centre, girls’ school. It was framed methodologically, theoretically and philosophically by a feminist Participatory Action Research (PAR) orientation, and engaged forty-one teenage girls as co-researchers and curriculum decision makers. Participatory methods (photovoice, timelines, poster making) were used to generate data with the participants throughout this study and were supported by more traditional ethnographic techniques (participant observation and interviews/guided conversations). Five research questions guided the study: 1) What methodologies are most successful in facilitating the students in explicating their ideas about physical education and physical activity, and in engaging them in curriculum design? 2) What were the students’ perceptions of their involvement in physical education and physical activity at the beginning of the PAR process? 3) What does the process of negotiating a formal physical education curriculum look like? 4) What happens when we engage with students to challenge formal physical education curricular boundaries and connect with students’ physical culture outside of school? 5) How does increased involvement in decision-making impact on students’ engagement with physical education and physical activity?

Findings suggest that participatory approaches to research and curriculum making can serve to promote students’ meaningful engagement in the critique and the reimagining of their physical education and physical activity experiences. The girls in this study, when provided with guidance and encouragement, rose to the challenge and took ownership of their learning, and doing so was a positive, energizing and exciting experience for them and one in which deep learning occurred and deep insights were produced. This transition to ‘carving a new order of experience’ was not without challenge however, and both students and adult allies needed support in persevering beyond the transition and the novelty of initial excitement.
Declaration

I hereby declare that:

My submission as a whole is not substantially the same as any that I have previously made or am currently making, whether in published or unpublished form, for a degree, diploma, or similar qualification at any university or similar institution. I am the author of this thesis and the principal author of the four articles which form its core.

Signature: ___________________

Eimear Enright
Acknowledgements

_Ní neart go cur le chéile._

Many people have supported me in this study and in other experiences that led to this. So, lest I forget someone in this piece, I extend a warm thank you to everyone who has in any way contributed to my completion of this thesis.

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Finally, I dedicate this thesis to my family for putting up with me and my too few visits and conversations over the last year in particular. The prodigal daughter returns…at least for a while….

_Gura fada buan sibh!_
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Girls’ disengagement from physical education has been well documented (Bain, 1995; Hastie, 1998; Nilges, 1998; Satina et al, 1998; Scraton, 1992). Historically girls have been constructed as ‘the problem’ for not engaging positively with the subject (Flintoff & Scraton, 2001; Rich, 2003, 2004; Wright, 1996). This discourse of blame is increasingly being challenged and deconstructed by physical education researchers and there has been a shift towards an appreciation that ‘the problem’ is more often located in the curriculum and pedagogical contexts within which girls are expected to participate and relates to the social construction of gender through physical education and physical activity (Ennis et al, 1997; Flintoff & Scraton, 2005; Sandford & Rich, 2006, Wright, 1996). This conceptual shift has provided the impetus for an increasing number of alternative curricula to facilitate girls’ engagement with physical education by confronting and disrupting staid and often alienating curricular practices (Ennis, 1999; Hastie, 1998; Kinchin & O’ Sullivan, 1999; Kirk et al, 2001; Oliver & Lalik, 2000). These curricula have allowed students greater roles and responsibilities within the learning context (Ennis, 1999; Hastie, 1998), provided opportunities for their critical interpretation, challenged and resisted dominant and often harmful discourses of the body (Oliver & Lalik, 2001), and facilitated students in interrogating and making meaningful connections between school based physical education and contemporary physical culture (Kinchin & O’Sullivan, 1999).

By sharing an emphasis on girls’ engagement, a sensitivity to gendered identities and an awareness of the pedagogical implications of engaging girls in physical education, many of these curricula have come to be referred to as ‘girl friendly’ and have been differentially successful in confronting and interrupting curricular practices which alienate many girls and indeed some boys. These ‘girl friendly’ curricular initiatives have been conceived and tightly defined largely by adult perspectives and constructed as teacher-led intervention strategies. Therefore while these curricula are informed by research on girls’ perspectives of physical education and some elicit responses directly from their participants regarding their attitudes, beliefs and values in relation to physical education and physical activity, this is often the extent of girls’
involvement in curriculum construction. Brooker and MacDonald (1999) confirm this assertion, acknowledging that ‘While curriculum supposedly exists to serve the interests of learners, their preferences, if sought at all, are marginalised and their voices are mostly silent in curriculum making’ (p.84). Students’ voices have been largely absent from decision making processes regarding the conceptualisation, implementation and evaluation of their physical education curricular experiences. This has significant implications for physical education, a subject which is greatly mediated by the interests and culture of its students (Brooker & MacDonald, 1999). It is suggested that curricula for the agentic student, that is curricula which harness student interest and potential, be created through negotiation (Boomer, 1992; Shor, 1996; Brooker & MacDonald, 1999; Glasby & MacDonald, 2004). Penney (2006) adds further to support to this suggestion. She concludes her review of curriculum construction and change in physical education with a recommendation for a reconceptualisation of curriculum and research in curriculum that ‘rightly refocuses attention on students but also prompts more involvement of them in both curriculum development and research in physical education’ (p. 576).

Participatory Action Research (PAR) has been proposed as an appropriate theoretical and pragmatic platform from which to consider supporting students as both researchers and curriculum designers (Udas, 1998). It represents ‘an epistemology that assumes knowledge is rooted in social relations and most powerful when produced collaboratively through action’ (Fine et al., 2001, p. 173). PAR sees people ‘co-creating their reality through participation; through their experience; their imagination and intuition, their thinking and their action’ (Reason, 1998, p. 262). It has a double objective, first, ‘to produce knowledge and action directly useful to a group of people’ and, second, ‘to empower people at a deeper level through the process of constructing and using their knowledge’ (Nieuwenhuys, 2004, p. 210). PAR therefore ‘provides young people with opportunities to study problems affecting their lives and then determine actions to rectify these problems’ (Cammarota & Fine, 2008, p.2).

Fine et al (2007) argue ‘young people who witness injustice in schools, are willing to research the capillaries of inequity, and work hard to redesign school structures, policies, and practices’ (p. 806). For years scholars have documented blatant, insidious and persistent injustices inherent in physical education practices. These injustices relate to gender (Flintoff and Scraton, 2006; Gard, 2006), sexuality (Clarke, 2006), social class (Evans, 2006), ability (Fitzgerald, 2006), and race and ethnicity (Harrison and Belcher, 2006). More recently, the intersection of these social structures
has received attention (Azzarito & Solmon, 2005; Flintoff et al, 2008; Hamzeh, 2007; Hills, 2006). Students have been perpetrators, subjects and witnesses of these intersecting inequities, and are therefore uniquely positioned to name and change dysfunctional, inequitable physical education practices, and they are as Fine et al. (2007) suggest, often ‘willing’ change agents. Participatory Action Research with students privileges student voice and recognises students as experts in terms of improving their own educational experiences (Morrell, 2008).

There is a wealth of research in the general education literature that documents the potential benefits of student voice efforts, such as student PAR, for the students involved. At a classroom level student participation in educational decision making has been documented as resulting in increased student engagement and academic achievement (Oldfather, 1995; Rudduck and Flutter, 2000); greater student attachment to schooling (Newman, 1981); increased sense of agency, autonomy, competency, belonging, empowerment and concern for others (Oldfather, 1995; Mitra, 2004, 2007; Rudduck, 2007); increased self-confidence and commitment to learning (Soo Hoo, 1993; Rudduck, 2007); and the development of students’ problem-solving, public-speaking, negotiation and listening skills (Mitra, 2007). There is a small but growing literature base in terms of student voice initiatives in physical education. Oliver et al (2009) found when she engaged girls in co-creating a curriculum; the games they created facilitated them in overcoming many of their self-identified barriers to physical activity participation. Similarly in studies by Fisette (2008) and McMahon (2006) which also foregrounded student voice in physical education curriculum making, ownership over physical activity practices and increased opportunities to be physically active were noted as benefits for the students involved.

The literature provides a strong rationale therefore for promoting students’ active involvement in curriculum making, offers PAR as one possible way of supporting this, suggests that students may be excited about this approach, and is recently also beginning to show evidence to support the notion that a participatory orientation to research and to curriculum making in physical education may be worthwhile.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to work with a group of disengaged teenage girls to understand and help them transform their self-identified barriers to their physical education engagement and physical activity participation. The study took place over three years in a designated disadvantaged, city-centre, girls’ school. It was framed
methodologically, theoretically and philosophically by a feminist PAR orientation and engaged forty one teenage girls as co-researchers and curriculum designers. This study was premised on a conviction that young people have unique perspectives on learning and life, that their voices warrant not only to be heard but to be acted on, that these young people should be partners in any efforts at reimagining physical education, and that such an approach would better engage girls in physical education.

Research Questions

Five research questions have guided the study:

1) What methodologies are most successful in facilitating the students in explicating their ideas about physical education and physical activity, and in engaging them in curriculum design?
2) What were the students’ perceptions of their involvement in physical education and physical activity at the beginning of the PAR process?
3) What does the process of negotiating a formal physical education curriculum look like?
4) What happens when we engage with students to challenge formal physical education curricular boundaries and connect with students’ physical culture outside of school?
5) How does increased involvement in decision-making impact on students’ engagement with physical education and physical activity?

Significance of Study

This study has curricular and methodological significance for teachers and educational researchers working with students of physical education and in education generally. It also constitutes quite a liberal interpretation of some recent policy recommendations in relation to physical activity and sport participation in the Irish context.

Curriculum

Physical education researchers have persistently highlighted the marginality of student voices in curriculum-making practices in physical education (Brooker and Macdonald, 1999; Dyson, 1995; Macdonald, 2003; Penney, 2006). Furthermore, critiques of curriculum reform efforts suggest that selecting and constructing a curriculum that connects and speaks to the heterogeneity of young people is contentious if not impossible, if the voices of the young people the curriculum seeks to connect with, are absent from the construction process (Glasby & Macdonald, 2004; Macdonald, 2003;
Penney & Evans, 1999; Penney, 2006). From a curricular perspective the negotiation process, specifically the extent of student involvement in curricular making, provided through this study, will mark a new departure in curriculum innovation in physical education.

In the general education literature in the Irish context a limited conceptualisation of ‘participation’ and ‘student voice’ has been embraced. Students have been asked to critique the current schooling system (Boldt, 1994, Lynch, 1999, Devine, 2000, Lynch and Lodge, 2002, Smyth et al, 2006) though are rarely invited to offer suggestions for change, and are even less likely to be engaged in transforming their educational experiences. Educational research practice in other countries has begun to challenge tokenistic concepts of participation and voice (vís a vís the typical student council) through innovative methods, such as the Students as Researchers project (Fielding, 2001); Participatory Action Research projects (Niewenhuyys, 2004); and social action research (e.g. Jones, Jeyasingham & Rajasooriya, 2002). This perspective is not yet evident in Irish educational publications.

The proposed co-constructed physical education curriculum approach is also particularly timely considering the policy context in Ireland. The National Taskforce on Obesity (2005) recommended that ‘schools should develop increasing opportunities for physical activity that are inclusive and appropriate to age, gender and ability, such as those that concentrate on increasing physical activity among teenage girls’ (p. 89). The ‘School Children and Sport in Ireland’ report (Fahey et al, 2005), calls for the identification of specific types and categories of non-participation, and for a better understanding of the experiences, orientations and preferences of the young people found in these categories, and the design of responses accordingly’ (p.90). These recommendations although quite clearly inspired by prevalent public health as opposed to educational discourses, do provide a strong rationale for the development of a context specific co-constructed physical education curriculum.

**Methodology**

Historically, educational researchers have positioned students as objects, using for example, limited response questionnaires, and statistical analysis to conduct research on students (Erickson & Shultz, 1992). This perspective and these methods have been criticised for fracturing student experience; failing to recognise students as experts on their own lives and failing to acknowledge student subjectivities or agency (Christenson & Prout, 1999). The publication of a monograph on student voice in 1995 by the Journal
of Teaching in Physical Education provided one impetus for a methodological shift in physical education research towards an understanding of students as research subjects (Graham, 1995). In line with this shift, in the last decade there have been a multitude of studies which focus on students’ perspectives of their physical education experiences (Dyson, 2006). Few studies have, however, moved beyond the ‘student as subject’ perspective and positioned students as active participants in the research process. From a methodological perspective the participatory approach to research adopted in this study constitutes an effort to rectify this imbalance in physical education research.

Also, significantly, we have a very small research base on young people, physical education and physical activity in the Irish context. The research we do have is mostly descriptive quantitative participation data (Connor, 2003; Fahey et al, 2005; Dineen & De Róiste, 2005; Woods, Nelson, O’Gorman, Kearney & Moyna, 2005) and there is a noticeable dearth of qualitative work relating to students’ understandings of their physical education and physical activity experiences. This study is one effort to extend our understanding of young people, physical education, and physical activity.

**Thesis Outline**

This thesis is organised in an article-based format. Three of the chapters, have been peer-reviewed and accepted for publication. Chapter four will appear in a forthcoming edition of *Sport, Education and Society* (Appendix A: Editor acceptance notification). Chapter six has been accepted for publication, subject to minor revisions, by the *European Physical Education Review* (Appendix B: Editor acceptance notification). Chapter eight will be published as a book chapter in a forthcoming edited text on *Young People’s Voices in Physical Education and Sport* (Appendix C: Flyer). Chapter 7 has been accepted for resubmission by *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*. I have made some formatting decisions in the name of consistency. References will appear at the end of each chapter. Figures and table titles which appear in the articles will be renumbered in line with those in the rest of the thesis, meaning the title will acknowledge the chapter number.

Chapter two constitutes a theoretical mapping of the knowledge and ideas which have inspired, engaged and informed the decision-making process relating to the focus of inquiry of this study. Reviewing relevant literature related to ‘girls and physical education’ and ‘student voice’ enabled me to identify existing gaps, and to build on a platform of existing knowledge and ideas in the area. Chapter three outlines the ways in which I came to align methodological decisions with the theoretical framework of my
research, introduces the reader to the context of this study, and provides a step by step account of how the co-researchers and I collected, analysed and interpreted our data. In chapter four I critique the value of participatory methods in terms of facilitating students in explicating their ideas about physical education and physical activity. The specific research question I seek to answer through this chapter is research question one, what methodologies are most successful in facilitating the students in explicating their ideas about physical education and physical activity, and in engaging them in curriculum design? Chapter five focuses on the multiple and often competing discourses within which five of the working class, white, Irish, girls in this study constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed their subjectivities and acted as both the sites and subjects of discursive struggles for identity. It is in chapter five that the focus of research question two, that is, students’ perceptions of their involvement in physical education and physical activity at the beginning of the PAR process, is addressed.

Chapter six seeks to address research questions three and five: What does the process of negotiating the formal physical education curriculum look like, and how does students’ increased involvement in curricular decision making impact on their engagement with physical education? In chapter seven I ask what happens when we engage with students to challenge formal physical education curricular boundaries and connect with students’ physical culture outside of school; and what are the benefits and the challenges associated with engaging with this sort of practical activism? The ability of PAR to promote the creation of more educationally meaningful and socially relevant learning experiences for all students in physical education is evidenced with reference to four recent PAR-orientated projects in physical education in chapter eight. Finally, in chapter nine I seek to draw out and discuss the knowledge claims made and the conclusions arrived at through this study and thereby highlight the significant contribution I believe this study makes to an emergent knowledge base on young peoples’ voices in physical education and youth sport. I also present an agenda for research that builds on the platform of ideas created by this study.

Glossary of terms

Curriculum

For the purpose of this thesis, curriculum is understood simply ‘as the learning experiences that contribute to student learning. This inclusive definition includes both
the planned and the unplanned experiences that contribute to student learning’ (Ennis, 1999, p. 109) and is broad enough to function across learning situations outside schools (Paechter, 1999).

**Negotiating/Co-constructing the Curriculum**

‘Negotiating the curriculum means deliberately planning to invite students to contribute to, and to modify, the educational program, so that they will have a real investment both in the learning journey and in the outcomes’ (Boomer, 1992, p 14).

**Physical Education**

Physical education centres on ‘the education of children in and through physical activities and contexts: and the provision of opportunities for all children to experience enjoyment and achievement in physical contexts, and to gain skills, knowledge and understanding that will be a basis for them to lead active and healthy lives’ (Penney and Chandler, 2000, p. 76).

**Participatory Action Research**

PAR represents ‘an epistemology that assumes knowledge is rooted in social relations and most powerful when produced collaboratively through action’ (Fine et al, 2001, p.173). It is a qualitative research perspective that sees people ‘co-creating their reality through participation; through their experience; their imagination and intuition, their thinking and their action’ (Reason, 1998, p. 262). It has a double objective, firstly ‘…to produce knowledge and action directly useful to a group of people’ and secondly, ‘…to empower people at a deeper level through the process of constructing and using their knowledge’ (Nieuwenhuys, 2004, p. 210).

**Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA)**

The Leaving Certificate Applied is a distinct, self-contained Leaving Certificate programme. It is designed for those students who do not wish to proceed directly to third level education or for those whose needs, aspirations and aptitudes are not adequately catered for by the other two Leaving Certificate programmes. The Leaving Certificate Applied is structured around three main elements -Vocational Preparation, Vocational Education and General Education - which are inter-related and
interdependent. This programme is characterised by educational experiences of an active, practical and student-centred nature (DES & NCCA, 2000).

**Feminist Poststructuralism**

Feminist poststructuralism is ‘a mode of knowledge production which uses poststructuralist theories of language, subjectivity, social processes and institutions to understand existing power relations and identify areas and strategies for change’ (Weedon, 1987, p. 40). It offers a tool to destabilise or subvert dominant gender discourses by presenting women not as passive victims of oppression, or as problems, but as active participants who make choices and participate in structuring their identities (Azzarito et al, 2006, p.223).

**Discourse**

‘A discourse is defined as a constellation of hidden historical rules that govern what can be and what cannot be said and who can speak and who must listen. Discursive practices are present in technical processes, institutions, modes of behaviour, and, of course, disciplines of knowledge. Discourses shape how we operate in the world as human agents, how we construct our consciousness, and what we consider true’ (Kincheloe, 2007, p.759).

**References**


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CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter is constructed as a theoretical mapping of the knowledge and ideas which have inspired and informed the decision-making process relating to the focus of this study. Two concepts central to the development of the research questions and the chosen curricular negotiation approach are ‘girls and physical education’ and ‘student voice’. Reviewing relevant literature related to both of these concepts enabled me to identify existing gaps, and to build on a platform of existing knowledge and ideas in the area. The lacunae in the literature together with identified strategies for change will be signposted through this literature synthesis.

Girls and Physical Education

It is becoming increasingly apparent that curricula and pedagogical strategies are not supporting meaningful or relevant physical education experiences for students, girls in particular. While research from the UK (Flintoff & Scraton, 2006, Scraton 1992) the USA (Ennis, 1999) and Australia (Wright, 1996) has provided increasingly sophisticated theoretical understandings of how and why girls are disengaging from physical education, in the Irish context support for the opening premise rests mainly on strong anecdotal evidence and inferences from largely quantitative, physical activity and leisure research on Irish youth (Dineen & De Róiste, 2005; Fahey et al, 2005; Office of the Minister for Children, 2006). It is predominantly therefore the international data, to which I turn in order to explain how and why the research purpose and questions were devised in their current form, and why the specific research design was selected. Where possible however, as is evidenced by the following opening context, I do draw from Irish data in order to contextualise what it can mean to be an adolescent girl in Ireland today.

Girls and Education: A Context

Educational scholars in Ireland and the UK have documented and problematised the relatively stronger performance of girls in the majority of subjects examined during second level education (Lynch, 1999, Raphael Reed, 1999). The media has also reported on girls’ relative academic successes. ‘Girls still outshining boys in junior cert exam’,
‘Girls get more A-grades than boys in major subjects’, and ‘Girls outperform boys again in nearly all subjects’, ‘Time to take a look at gender and balance’: these are just a sample of the headlines that have appeared in one national broadsheet relatively recently (Irish Times, 2007/2008). These headlines have given rise to public and political uneasiness regarding boys’ poor performance in relation to girls’ in academic state exams, ‘thus swinging the tide of concern towards what has been called a crisis of masculinity’ (Arnot & Mac an Ghaill, 2006, p.1). What these headlines and the discourses arising from them have conspired to do is generalise the experience of girls (and indeed of boys) and imply that all girls are faring well in school. Of course, we know all girls are not ‘faring well’ in school because we know girls are not a homogenous group; their identities are ‘multi-layered and shifting, shaped by, among other factors, their social class, their ethnicity and their sexuality’ (Kane, 2006, p.562). These complex ‘shifting’ identities ensure different forms of engagement with schooling and impact powerfully on the outcomes of schooling’ (Kane, 2006). There is therefore a more useful question we might ask, that is ‘which girls and which boys succeed and fail’ (Arnot & Mac an Ghaill, 2006, p.5), at what and in what ways?

The index which currently ascribes whether one is ‘faring well in school’ is contentious. It seems to be grounded in a limited philosophy of education, one which is concerned only with intellectual development, one which divorces the mind from the body and neglects the importance of the corporeal in schooling (Shilling, 1993). Participation and success patterns in state exams are in this context taken as indicative of student engagement, student learning and ultimately school effectiveness. If girls’ relationships with schooling were to be analysed through a more holistic lens, a lens which, factored in stress levels, academic self-image, body image and self-esteem then there is much evidence to support the assertion that schools are confusing and often limiting environments for many girls (Lynch, 1999). This is particularly true of physical education, a site within school which is imbued with complex and negative connotations for many girls and young women (Cockburn, 2001), who voice and embody their dissatisfaction with their physical education experiences by refusing to dress or participate (Ennis, 2000). Also some girls who are seen to be participating may not be expending effort or engaging fully with the experience and ‘by toe-ing the line [these] girls avoid many of the costs of resisting physical education but still forego any real or valuable participation’ (Cockburn & Clarke, 2002, p. 659). Negative attitudes towards and limited engagement with physical education, play a part in promoting adolescent
girls’ attrition from physical activity at an early age and at a rate far higher than boys (Armstrong & Welsman, 1997).

**Girls and Physical Activity Participation**

While debates relating to the nature and purposes of physical education have been persistent and often controversial, there is general agreement with respect to one purpose for the subject, which is the promotion of lifelong participation in sport and physical activity (Flintoff, 2005; Green, Smith & Roberts, 2005). Girls’ and women’s participation levels in sport and physical activity may therefore be taken as one indicator of the success of the subject in communicating its purposes.

Research has consistently shown there is a wide range of inequalities when it comes to girls’ and women’s participation in sport and active leisure pursuits in the Irish context (Connor, 2003; Fahey, Delaney, and Gannon, 2005). Girls’ participation in physical activity is lower than that of boys and is characterised by a sharp decline during adolescence (National Taskforce on Obesity, 2005). The Health Behaviour in School Aged Children Survey reported the physical activity levels of 12-14 year old girls decreased from 49% of the population in 1998 to 44% in 2002 and this drop, which represents a global trend, is occurring at a younger age (Kelleher et al, 2003). The Take Part (Physical Activity Research for Adolescents) Study of east of Ireland 15-17 year olds reported that females were ‘significantly less likely to be physically active than their regularly active counterparts in Northern Ireland’ (Woods et al, 2005, p. 6). The Irish Sport Council estimated that ‘national participation in sport stands at 32.7% for females and 62.3% for males’ (Liston & Menzies, 2005, p.5). More recently, the Irish Sports Council CEO noted that less than one in five Irish women came close to achieving the accumulated 30 minutes of physical activity per day, for at least five days per week, as recommended by the World Health Organisation for good health (Treacy, 2006), and The State of the Nation’s Children Report highlighted that girls (45.9%) between the ages of 9 and 17 were less likely than boys (63.5%) of the same age to report that they were physically active on a daily basis (OMCYA & DES, 2008).

The above participation data describe the participation levels of girls and young women and are useful in that they provide a context in which we can begin to problematise girls’ participation in physical activity. They also of course infer that physical education in Ireland, as it is currently conceptualised and constructed, is failing to communicate one of its key purposes (that is, lifelong participation in...
physical activity) effectively to female students. In general however, these data do not attend to the social and cultural contexts in which girls choose to participate in physical activity and fail to acknowledge individual circumstances which may inhibit or promote engagement in physical activity (Wright, Macdonald & Groom, 2003). By so doing they cast non-participants as ‘deficient and delinquent’ (Wright, Macdonald & Groom, 2003) and support a discourse of blame, which constructs the female non-participants as the problem. This discourse of blame is also evident in the field of physical education although it is increasingly being challenged and deconstructed by qualitative physical education researchers.

**Girls as the Problem**

Girls’ alienation and disengagement from physical education internationally has been documented extensively (Bain, 1995; Ennis, 1999; Griffin, 1984, 1985; Hastie, 1998; Nilges, 1998; Satina, Solmon, Cothran, Loftus, & Stockin-Davidson, 1998; Scraton, 1992; Vertinsky, 1992; Williams & Bedward, 2002). Girls have often been constructed as ‘the problem’ for not engaging positively with the subject (Flintoff & Scraton, 2001; Rich, 2003, 2004; Wright, 1996). The majority of teachers, both male and female, in Wright’s (1996) study for example, perceived girls to be ‘far less enthusiastic than the boys, much harder to motivate, slower to change, far less skilled and more resistant to being positioned by the discourses and practices of physical education’ (p.66). Wright critiqued this perspective noting ‘this characterisation of girls as resistant [and boys as compliant] only works when physical education is conflated with games and sports related areas - if dance and gymnastics were to be taken into consideration the picture is rather different’ (p.67). Wright’s (1996) commentary again reminds us of persistent and often controversial debates relating to the nature and purposes of physical education (Kirk, 2003; Green, 2000, Green et al, 2005), and significantly it challenges the construction of disengaged girls as ‘the problem’.

Socio-critical analyses of girls’ disengagement locate ‘the problem’ in the curriculum and pedagogical contexts within which girls are expected to participate (Ennis, Cothran, Davidson, Loftus, Owens, Swanson & Hopsicker, 1997; Flintoff & Scraton, 2005; Sandford & Rich, 2006; Wright, 1996). While schools are increasingly seen to espouse principles of equality, the methods and curricula through which they purport to provide equality in physical education often mean girls merely have equal access to male physical education, a model which immediately positions girls as less skilled, able and interested than boys (Scraton, 1992). It is argued that constraining
ideologies (most notably hegemonic competitive masculinity) inherent in physical education and in physical activity cultures generally have contributed to girls’ alienation from physical education and physical activity (Flintoff, 2005; Leaman, 1986). Ironically therefore, while schools have been charged with becoming ‘too feminised, favouring girls by remodelling the curriculum in line with their learning needs’ (Arnot and Mac an Ghaill, 2006, p.5) physical education seemingly remains a bastion of hegemonic competitive masculinity and girls continue to resist and reject the experiences offered in its name.

Physical Education Curricular Context

Historically, separate and different physical education curricula have been written for girls and boys. Curricula for girls were underpinned by certain assumptions about femininity, for example:

- Girls are physically less capable than boys and possess specific female characteristics such as grace, poise, finesse, control and sensitivity.
- Physical education has a role to play in preparing physically fit young women for motherhood and domestic duties.
- ‘Acceptable female behaviour involves restraint, quietness and orderliness’.

(Adapted from Scraton, 1992, p. 53).

This ideology persists within the implicit and explicit curricula of many physical education programmes. Scraton’s (1992) study of girls’ physical education, for example, highlighted how teachers’ expectations of their female students in physical education were still greatly mediated by their perceptions of girls as weaker and more passive than boys, with grace, poise and flexibility seen by teachers as the most desirable female physical capabilities. Gender-based ideologies such as this pervade the thoughts and the actions of many physical education teachers and are used to justify the different content and pedagogical approaches used to teach girls’ physical education (Scraton, 1992). Girls’ physical education has therefore been evidenced as continuing to contribute to the promotion of andocentric bias and the reproduction of established gender relations. This has largely been attributed to the resilience traditional forms of practice in physical education have demonstrated to change.
The Multi-activity Games Curricular Model

The traditional model of physical education is a form of physical education ‘which emerged during the 1940s and was initially sponsored by the men who had newly arrived to physical education in significant numbers’ (Kirk, Fitzgerald, Wang & Biddle, 2001, p. 5). It is also often referred to as the multi-activity games model (Ennis, 1999) and has been the most prominent physical education curricular model for over half a century (Bain, 1988, Ennis, 1999). Notable characteristics of this model include:

- The dominance of competitive sports, particularly team sports;
- A concern for the detail of technique development; and
- Biological and mechanical functionalism that objectifies the body and in so doing often loses sight of the whole person

(Kirk et al, 2001)

- ‘Short units of activity with minimal instructional periods
- Weak or non-existent educational sequences across lesson, units and grades that limit learning
- Little or no accountability for using skills strategically in game play
- Few if any policies to equalise opportunities for low-skilled players
- Required public displays of playing ability
- Class control exercised by central authority figure(s), minimising student ownership and leadership opportunities in large classes and constraining learning’

(Ennis, 1999, p. 32)

Ennis’s (1999) critique of this model is worth quoting at length:

The multi-activity approach is characterised by curricular structures that produce multiple, short-duration units consisting of limited instruction and numerous opportunities for highly skilled participants to be involved and participating in a variety of sport and exercise opportunities. A closer look however, reveals several curricular structures that promote inequality and (re)produce gender segregation and low skill levels in both girls and boys. Because girls often have not experienced adequate skill instruction or have been socialised to reject the subjective value of physical participation (i.e. Nilges, 1998; Vertinsky, 1992), they often demonstrate low skill levels and high levels of reluctance and rejection of sport……No curriculum in physical education has been as effective in constraining opportunities and alienating girls as that found in co-educational multi-activity sport classes (p. 32).

Considering the characteristics of this model, it is clear that both the content of the curriculum as well as the pedagogical strategies employed in enacting it need to be
problematised and challenged if we are to interrupt a form of practice that continues to alienate many girls. Three of the characteristics of the model are critiqued in the following section in order to facilitate a greater appreciation of how and why this model is not providing meaningful and socially relevant experiences for many young women and also in order to begin to identify directions for change.

**Public Display**

Physical education, like dance, music and drama to an extent, is distinctive in that it a subject where the body is constituted as both an object and subject of study. In physical education lessons ‘the body is explicitly used, displayed and talked about’ (Paechter, 2003). The multi-activity games curriculum places an emphasis on public display of playing ability and hence public display of the body in action. This has proven to be particularly problematic for girls and young women whose bodies are continuously objectified and degraded in society and who consequently often come to possess complex, often destructive relationships with their bodies (Oliver, 2001). Oliver (2001) suggests ‘when the stories about girls’ bodies are narrow in scope, often portraying girls as objects of male desire (Berger, 1972; Bordo, 1997; Wolf; 1991), we limit girls’ life possibilities, and jeopardise girls’ health’ (p.145). Popular cultural images of flawless, slim, tall, predominantly white young women become the norms against which girls learn to evaluate themselves and others (Oliver, 1999). The messages girls receive about their bodies through popular culture, and how girls interpret these messages and experience their bodies influence how they interact with physical education (Armour, 1999; Kirk, 1999; Kirk & Tinning, 1994; Oliver, 2001; Oliver & Lalik, 2001). McRobbie’s (1978) study, for example illustrates how working class girls’ instrumental relationship with their bodies, specifically their conceptualisation of their bodies as a means of attracting boyfriends through the exhibition of adult forms of femininity is at odds with the roles offered to them in physical education and sport, and this dissonance promotes these girls’ disconnection from physical education and sport (Shilling, 1993). Physical educators have been criticised for perpetuating this discourse by constructing the body ‘as an object to be controlled and manipulated’ (Oliver & Lalik, 2001, p.321). Another frequent criticism is the presentation of health as synonymous with thinness and the implication that being fat is wrong (Kirk and Coquohoun, 1989; Tinning, 1985). Oliver and Lalik (2001) suggest that physical educators have ultimately failed to engage students in critical analysis regarding how they learn to think and feel about their bodies and often end up reinforcing girls’ existing insecurities. They also contend that ‘when
including the body as a focus of school study, curriculum developers have largely ignored girls’ views and experiences of their bodies’ (p.305).

**Curricular content**

Physical education is the only curricular subject where not only are girls and boys often taught separately, but they are also often offered very different curricula (Talbot, 1986). This legacy of the socialisation of girls into, what would be regarded by some as, more female appropriate activities, for example dance and gymnastics and males into more masculine activity forms, for example rugby and soccer has contributed to the reproduction of an ideology which promotes traditional constructs of femininity and masculinity, often resulting in girls’ divorcement from physical education. A respondent in Liston’s (2006) study on girls’ socialisation into soccer in Ireland articulates how she became aware of the gender-appropriateness of certain sports through her early physical education experiences in an Irish primary school.

The school was divided into the girls’ section and the boys’ section and from what I can remember the big playing pitch was down in the boys’ end and we never went down there. And there was a hall area in the middle of the school-indoor and the only exercise we [the girls] got was to be taken there to do Irish dancing. And that was sport for the girls. There was a bit of PE, running around a small bit but I don’t remember any ball games like soccer or Gaelic football. The girls didn’t go down to the boys’ end of the school. You’d see the boys down there doing sports because they had male teachers (p.376).

While sex segregated classes are no longer the norm in the USA owing to legislation (Title IX), and there is a general move towards co-education in schools in Europe and Australasia, the nature and content of the curriculum, especially the type of activity offered to girls through their physical education curriculum, remains contentious. This is in no small part attributed to the fact that the move to coeducational physical education resulted in the male model of physical education becoming dominant, thus greatly influencing the type of activities offered to girls (Vertinsky, 1992). Cockburn (2001) identified the nature of the curriculum activity/ies offered as the primary factor influencing her adolescent female respondents’ enjoyment or dislike of physical education. It is widely accepted that boys and girls ‘behave differently and feel differently when it comes to sport’ (Fahey, Delaney & Gannon, 2005) and sport-based physical education suits boys more than girls (Armstrong & Welsman, 1997). In Ireland, as in many other countries, physical education is dominated by team sports.
‘…there is a large gap between the diverse, multi-strand approach set out as the ideal in the physical education syllabus and the narrower range of activities that the majority of students actually do’ (Fahey, Delaney & Gannon, 2005, p.20). The centrality of mainstream competitive team sports in physical education curricula persists ‘despite evidence to suggest that young people [particularly girls] are demonstrating a preference towards alternative individual recreational activities and physical cultures’ (Sandford & Rich, 2005, p. 280). Williams and Bedward (1999) found that ‘girls’ involvement in outside activities was often in spite of, rather than because of, their experience of physical education’ (p.8). Many of the activities girls choose to participate in outside of school are simply not represented within their physical education curriculum (Flintoff & Scraton, 2001). It is suggested therefore that ‘young women are not simply disinterested in physical activity per se, but rather are disengaged from the current structure and format of physical education’ (Sandford & Rich, 2005, p. 280).

While acknowledging that the nature of the activity is significant, Williams and Bedward (1999) caution against the representation of girls’ responses to curricular activities in over-generalised ways. They found that ultimately it was those activities in which girls felt competent that they most enjoyed, be that, for example, competitive team games or dance, and that the context and pedagogical strategies employed were as significant as the activity in fostering positive attitudes towards participation in physical education. This perspective is supported by Armstrong & Welsman (2000) who contend that the nature of the delivery of the curriculum is as critical as the content for the promotion of ongoing participation.

**Student Ownership**

We know that one of the principle characteristics of the multi-activity games model is a reliance on a central authority figure and command style teaching which minimises student ownership and leadership opportunities (Ennis, 1999; Kirk et al, 2001). Scraton (1992) questions whether it is possible to inspire student interest and enjoyment through the use of hierarchical and disciplinarian methodologies. Green (2004) argues

> If physical education is to appeal to young people it must allow them degrees of choice, regarding what they do and where they do it. We can be sure that young people will want the opportunity to exert some control over what, how and with whom they do activities - we do well to remember ‘the growing autonomy which tends to accompany the physical and social maturation of the young (p.82).
Giving girls choices regarding what activities they do, with whom and how in their physical education classes has been found to have positive implications for engagement (Ennis, 1999). Many of the girls in Flintoff & Scraton’s (2001) study highlighted how choice had significantly improved their physical education experiences.

I like school PE because of the choice. It is good to do PE to keep fit and it’s part of a healthy lifestyle...it keeps your body in shape. School PE is really relaxed, you can choose what you do and you can choose what you wear as well. The lessons are good…

(Catherine, School 2)

One of the choices Catherine speaks to is that of clothing. Research has continuously shown the negative impact prescribed compulsory physical education uniforms have on girls’ attitudes towards participation in physical education (Flintoff & Scraton, 2001; Williams & Bedward, 2001). A student in Williams and Bedward’s (2002) study shares her concerns with the PE uniform:

The PE skirts are really short, but you have to deal with it because that’s the school uniform for PE. And you’re not allowed to wear cycling shorts either. I don’t think it’s fair...We have to wear PE pants. Even though it’s not showing your other pants, it’s still a bit revealing I think.

(p. 98).

In order to maintain their feminine appearance adolescent girls and young women often refuse to bring or wear their physical education kit, or to remove jewellery (Cockburn & Clarke, 2002). Giving girls and young women choices regarding their physical education kit, even if these choices are restricted to some extent, has been evidenced as contributing to more comfortable and less resistant participants (Flintoff & Scraton, 2001).

The second choice Catherine mentioned was activity choice. Research has also documented how giving students choices regarding the content of their physical education lessons has had positive effects on participation. Green (2004) proposes that ‘in order to improve the likelihood of adherence to sport and physical activity among the majority of young people, physical education needs to move with the prevailing tide of young people’s leisure lifestyles, and particularly their preferences for spreading their interests across a wider range of activities’ (p.81). The activity choice approach is however problematic for many physical educators who are often seen as out of touch with the interests of their adolescent students. Claire, one of the students in Flintoff & Scraton’s (2001) study remarks:
They do try and give us a good choice, it’s just they are picking from their generation and they just don’t know what want to do and they don’t ask us. They don’t know what we do out of school, it’s just what we get to do in the gym (p.97)

Green (2000) found that older teachers ‘viewed the emergence and development of ‘activity choice’ as a practical response to the pragmatics of coping with older pupils rather than a ‘philosophical’, or ideological, response to a change in young people’s lifestyles (p.118). Physical education in this context risks becoming synonymous with recreation, as participation as opposed to education becomes the guiding philosophy of programmes, which seek merely to ‘cope’ rather than connect with older disengaged pupils. Interestingly the conceptualisation of ‘student ownership’ which emerges from physical education literature is synonymous with restricted choices regarding activities, kit, and in Sport Education and related curricular models, previously defined roles and responsibilities, for example, team captains, and referees. This is arguably a limited conceptualisation of student ownership and will be spoken to in greater detail shortly.

Towards solutions

The literature used to speak to the three characteristics of the multi-activity model gives an indication of new directions in physical education practices with girls. It highlights the importance of choice, of relevance, and of critical approaches to the study of physical education. Clearly, there has been a concerted effort to understand the complex relationships girls have with their physical education experiences and the nature of research on (and increasingly with) girls in physical education has evolved (Flintoff & Scraton, 2006). It is questionable however whether developments in physical education curricular practice have developed with similar pace and diversity.

Evans and Penney (2002) contend ‘physical educationalists have seemed slow to respond to debate and research that has highlighted sexism and sex differentiation in physical education and to confront inequitable gender relations in schools and the subject’ (p. 3.). While evidencing the increasingly sophisticated theoretical understanding of girls and physical education Flintoff and Scraton (2006) acknowledge that despite this, it is difficult to see positive changes to practice in girls’ physical education. Drawing on work by Macdonald (2002) they assert that the gulf between theory and practice needs to be addressed and suggest a turn towards praxis, where theory and practice become synonymous.
Curricular Alternatives

There are some noteworthy examples of praxis where alternative curricula have been designed in order to facilitate girls’ engagement with physical education (Ennis, 1999; Hastie, 1998; Kinchin & O’Sullivan, 1999; Kirk et al, 2001; Oliver & Lalik, 2001). These initiatives work by confronting and disrupting staid and often alienating curriculum practices and have ranged in scale and design, from large multi-site intervention programs, for example, the Trial of Activity for Adolescent Girls (Webber et al, 2008) and the Nike/Youth Sport Trust ‘Girls in Sport’ partnership (Kirk et al, 2000), to localised curriculum projects, for example Oliver & Lalik’s (2001) Body as Curriculum project and Ennis’ (1999) Sport for Peace approach. Some have taken an action research approach (Kirk et al, 2001); others align to a curriculum model (Ennis, 1999; Hastie, 1998; Kinchin & O’Sullivan, 1999). While the scale and nature of these initiatives vary, there are some unifying features of these initiatives, that is, emphasis on engagement, sensitivity to gendered identities, and a desire for change. It is worth taking a closer look at some of the features of three of these initiatives in order to develop a context for the approach which focused this study.

Sport for Peace

Ennis (1999) reports on the successes of an innovative approach to team-sport curricula called ‘Sport for Peace’ in enhancing girls’ levels of engagement and satisfaction in urban high school physical education. Based on peace education theory (Carson, 1992) and the Sport Education model (Siedentop, 1994), Sport for Peace facilitates student engagement in physical education through the creation of an equitable participation environment. The curriculum while underpinned by the features of Sport Education also included ‘an additional focus on conflict negotiation, self and social responsibility, and care and concern for others’ (Ennis, 1999, p. 36). Ennis (1999) found that the Sport for Peace curriculum was successful in challenging and interrupting practices which supported male dominance of sport in co-educational physical education. It facilitated the development of ownership, and collaboration and provided opportunities for success, which promoted and enhanced girls’ engagement (Ennis, 1999). The importance of skill instruction, student ownership, authentic cooperative team environments, and second chances contributed to girls’ experiences of success in the Sport for Peace curriculum. One of Ennis’s (1999) female respondents articulates why Sport for Peace worked for her:

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I really like playing on our team. I got to learn how to keep statistics and after each game everybody on the team would come to the table and look at their results. It was very important to pay attention because you know that the players were proud of what you did (p.37).

Another girl charts her experience of Sport for Peace:

We played basketball before in middle school, but the boys were rough and they didn’t give us much time to play. When we did get in the game, they stole the ball away from us and told us we be ‘sorry’. In Sport for Peace basketball, Derek, my coach spent time with me every day to teach me how to shoot and how to dribble around people. He was really patient and nice. I still lose the ball sometimes but my team tells me, ‘that’s ok, try again’. I’m working really hard, because I know they’re counting on me and want me to be successful. I want to show Derek that his hard work with me is really paying off (Cited in Ennis, 1999, p.38)

Ennis (1999) noted that ‘student ownership of the curriculum appeared particularly important to students who have limited control over many aspects of their economic and family situations’ (p.39).

**Girls in Sport**

The Nike/Youth Sport Trust (YST) ‘Girls in Sport’ Partnership adopted an action research approach to engaging girls in physical education and physical activity. The aim of the ‘Girls in Sport’ project was ‘to develop forms of physical education that can, when applied in appropriate circumstances, increase girls’ physical activity levels and produce more positive attitudes towards participation’ (Kirk et al, 2001, p.1). The project was constructed on the premise that teachers must be recognised as central change agents in any efforts at improving curricular practice. In the first exploratory phase of the project physical education teachers in 50 schools designed action plans containing intervention strategies in consultation with other colleagues and then worked to realise these strategies. The second phase of the project saw fourteen schools involved in piloting some of the strategies generated in phase one which were seen as having the potential to promote ‘girl-friendly’ physical education. Examples of strategies identified and worked on included the development of school sports councils, reversion to single sex physical education classes, the provision of alternative extra-curricular recreation programmes, and the use of more student centred, ‘girl friendly’ pedagogical strategies.
The schools identified as being most successful in engaging girls in physical education and physical activity shared the following characteristics: change was directed at disrupting traditional forms of teacher-learner interaction, the nature of the subject matter/activity choice was challenged and modified, and programmes were supported by colleagues and management and focused by thoughtful and detailed planning by committed teachers. In advocating the perspective that teachers need to ‘own change’, this project recognised that individual schools needed some degree of freedom to shape particular interventions to fit their context and support the perceived needs and agenda of their schools and students.

**The Body as Curriculum**

Oliver and Lalik’s (2001) curriculum project focused on the body as a legitimate subject of study for adolescent girls. Their intention was ‘to develop a curriculum of the body that would begin with girls’ experiences, interests and concerns about their bodies, rather than featuring adults’ concerns exclusively’ (p, 307). The curriculum project provided opportunities for the girls involved to write and talk about their experiences of their bodies, and worked to begin to position the students as critical consumers of popular culture using storytelling, reflection and critical analysis as learning processes. Oliver and Lalik (2001) located the success of this curriculum in this ‘interplay of opportunities used to examine how the body has been represented through various media, with opportunities to write and talk about their experiences of their bodies’ (p.138). These opportunities provided spaces within which ‘the girls were able to express some resistance to culturally dominant perspectives’ (Oliver & Lalik, 2001).

Detailed above are three examples of initiatives which have met with some degree of success upon implementation and clearly there is much we can learn from the processes through which they worked to engage girls in physical education and physical activity. I have identified some commonalities which are present across the initiatives, for example sensitivity to gendered identities. A commonality of absence can also be identified. While each of these initiatives seeks to connect with students and engage them in more positive and meaningful physical education and physical activity experiences, none of the initiatives open up opportunities for student led change or acknowledge the possibility that students can become actively involved in decision making processes regarding the design and implementation of their physical education curricula. Ennis’s curriculum allows students greater roles and responsibilities; however
this is within a curricular framework which has already been tightly defined by adult perspectives and constructed as a teacher focused intervention strategy (Ennis & Chepyator-Thomson, 1999). A principle aim of the ‘Girls in Sport’ partnership was that teachers would own change. Therefore while students were surveyed and interviewed in groups during the course of the project to identify their attitudes, beliefs and values in relation to physical activity and physical education, students were not directly involved in planning and decision making processes regarding the selection of strategies for change. The curriculum of the body project was unique in respect to the support and opportunities it provided for the girls’ critical interpretation, challenge and resistance of dominant and often harmful discourses of the body (Oliver & Lalik, 2001) and has been described as ‘a pedagogy of transformation’. Again in this case however, while the curriculum was sensitive to who the girls were, the girls were absent from the research/curriculum design processes and consequently did not have opportunities to shape the content or nature of their curriculum or the research agenda.

Recently we are beginning to see a shift within physical education research, towards a recognition of students as active agents, researchers and curriculum decision makers. In Oliver and colleagues’ latest research (Oliver et al., 2009; Oliver and Hamzeh, 2010), the purpose of which was to (a) understand 5th grade (aged 9–10 years) girls’ self-identified barriers to physical activity, and (b) work with the girls to design and practise strategies for publicizing and changing the barriers they identified (Oliver et al., 2009; Oliver and Hamzeh, 2010), the girls were facilitated in becoming curriculum decision-makers. Similarly, McMahon (2007) study sought to engage one co-ed class of 5th class primary school students (aged 10–11 years) as physical education curriculum designers, while Fisette’s (2008) study engaged a group of seven teenage (aged 13–16 years) girls in undertaking their own exploratory physical education projects. These four studies (Fisette, 2008; McMahon, 2007; Oliver & Hamzeh, 2010; Oliver et al, 2009) are profiled in greater depth in chapter eight. Suffice to highlight here therefore the benefits noted by students who participated in these studies included: increased opportunities to be physically active (Oliver et al., 2009; Oliver and Hamzeh, 2010), opportunities to name and challenge inequities students identified around physical activity provision and participation (Fisette, 2008; Oliver et al., 2009; Oliver & Hamzeh, 2010), opportunities to effect real change (Fisette, 2008; Oliver et al., 2009; Oliver & Hamzeh, 2010) and ownership over physical education experiences and physical activity practices (McMahon, 2007). Facilitating more
substantive involvement of young people in curriculum development in physical education is therefore a nascent approach to curriculum conceptualisation (Penney, 2006), but one in need of more and sustained inquiry.

**Section Summary**

In summary, we know an increasing number of girls are opting out of physical education and physical activity. We know that these girls are not the problem. The problem is located in the curriculum and instructional models used to teach physical education and relates to the social construction of gender through physical education and physical activity. We know that traditional forms of physical education perpetuate girls’ alienation from physical education and therefore a reappraisal and reconceptualisation of physical education is necessary. We know that a number of initiatives have been somewhat successful in connecting with this population and these efforts have been characterised by sensitivity to gendered identities and an awareness of pedagogical implications of engaging girls in physical education. We also know that girls’ voices have been largely absent from the decision making processes regarding the conceptualisation, implementation and evaluation of these curricular interventions. While there is a small and emerging literature base on student engagement in physical education curriculum negotiation, we still do not know very much about the benefits and the challenges associated with this kind of work and how physical educators might be supported in facilitating students’ active and authentic participation in curriculum construction, and ultimately if and how a negotiated curriculum might work to create more personally meaningful and socially relevant physical education experiences for students. The student voice literature provided answers to some of these questions.

**Student Voice**

**Introduction**

While the physical education literature is replete with theoretical treatments of the ‘problem’ that is girls and physical education, there is no such preoccupation with issues related to student voice. The following section therefore draws primarily from literature in the areas of general education and feminist research and is an effort to understand what it might mean to operationalise the student voice rhetoric in physical education curriculum design with adolescent girls.
Voice

The concept of voice is a powerful metaphor currently drawn upon to problematise human agency in life and in education specifically. The metaphor creates possibilities for multiple and useful interrogations of complex educational realities. It has been argued that this metaphor, now quite implicit in scholarly thinking, may actually constitute ‘a repressive myth[s] that perpetuates relations of domination’ (Ellsworth, 1992, p.91). Some scholars have therefore suggested that we abandon the metaphor of voice in favour of story/texts (Ellsworth, 1992; Gilbert, 1991). Others make convincing arguments for the retention of both of these metaphors as complementary lenses through which to view discourse:

The textuality metaphor highlights how discourse issues from other discourse (seeing all texts as ‘intertextual’), while the voice metaphor highlights how discourse issues from individual persons and from physical bodies. The text metaphor highlights the visual and spatial features of language and emphasises language as an abstract, universal system; the voice metaphor highlights sound and hearing rather than vision, and it emphasises the way all linguistic meaning moves historically through time rather than existing simultaneously in space….We benefit from both metaphors or lenses and lose out if either is outlawed (Elbow, 1994, p. xiv)

Snaza and Lensmire (2006) extend Elbow’s position and assert that we need both metaphors ‘because they theorise, are worried about, different moments in the production of texts in schools’ (p.14). Despite these arguments to abandon, or to partner and extend the concept, many scholars remain captivated with the metaphor of voice.

Voice and feminist uses

Within feminist discourse ‘voice’ and ‘speech’ have become popular metaphors used to describe the construction of ‘women’s self-definitions’ (Ellsworth, 1992). Maguire (2001) acknowledges multiple feminist uses of ‘voice’, and maps the course of the appropriation of the metaphor, by feminists, through a selection of literature: silence, secrets and lies (Rich, 1979), talking back (hooks, 1989), a different voice (Gilligan, 1982), disruptive voices (Fine, 1992) and contesting the voice of authority (Morawski, 1997). Voice and story, interestingly appear to adopt a composite identity for Maguire (2001), as is evidenced by how easily and seemingly erratically she moves between her uses of both metaphors, when commenting on how women express their experiences. Adding even greater complexity is the methodological focus of her writing, which is feminist action research. In this context, ‘voice’ is also constructed as being
synonymous with participation and empowerment. This one text therefore is a useful starting point for this review in that it reveals at least three popular conceptions of ‘voice’, that is, self-expression, participation and empowerment. To deconstruct and extend these conceptions it is sensible to draw from literature in the arena within which the concept of ‘voice’ has undergone the significant interrogation, reconceptualisation, and application, that is, education.

Student Voice

‘Student voice’ is an example of a neologism used to describe ‘the individual and collective perspective and actions of young people within the context of learning and education’ (Soundout, 2010). Typically neologisms undergo much scrutiny after initial coinage, with one of the major criticisms of new coinages being that they may obscure the issue being discussed. ‘Student voice’ has not escaped this scrutiny and has been criticised for obfuscation, but ultimately the coinage has survived and become quite stable through public usage. The meaning the public and many educational scholars have attributed to ‘student voice’ has not stabilised however and is contentious.

Mitra (2004), (drawing on the work of Fielding, 2001; Goodwillie,1993; Levin , 2000) proposed student voice ‘has gained increased credence as a construct that describes the many ways in which youth might have the opportunity to actively participate in school decisions that will shape their lives and the lives of their peers’ (p.651). Rudduck (2002) advocates a more limited meaning for the construct. She describes ‘Student voice [as] the consultative wing of student participation’ (p.86). Giroux and McLaren (1986) proposed yet another definition and view of student voice as ‘the measures by which students and teachers participate in dialogue’ (p.237). These definitions reveal semantic and substantive tensions inherent in the concept of student voice. Before problematising the nature of student participation it makes sense to gain an appreciation of the context which has nurtured the current occupation with and multiple framings of ‘student voice’.

Factors influencing the growing interest in ‘student voice’

A myriad of reasons, some interrelated, have provided the impetus for what has become known as the ‘student voice movement’ (Fielding, 2001). Lodge (2005) identifies six inter-connected factors which she believes have contributed to increased attention on student voice: changing views of childhood; human rights; a concern for school improvement; democratic schools; citizenship education through participation and
consumerism. These factors are discussed with specific reference to the Irish context where appropriate.

**New Sociology of Childhood**

‘Children should be seen and not heard’: This aphorism, which has persisted in common usage, reveals the tension inherent in the construct of childhood. Developmentalism is the model of childhood, which has, historically, dominated our understanding of childhood (Lynch, 1999). This model supposes ‘rationality is the mark of adulthood and that childhood is basically an apprenticeship of its development’ (Lynch, 1999, p.162). Rudduck and Flutter (2004) cite this ‘outdated view of childhood which fails to acknowledge young people’s capacity to take initiatives and to reflect on issues affecting their lives’ as one of the primary reasons student voice has been ‘bracketed out’ for so long (p. 1). Currently this ‘bracketing out of student voice’ is being challenged and there is an inclination towards an acceptance that childhood is related to adulthood but not hierarchically as the aforementioned model contends. Within this alternative discourse as highlighted by the work of Moss and Petrie (2002)

> Children are understood as citizens, members of a social group, agents of their own lives, and as co-constructors of knowledge, identity and culture, constantly making meaning of their lives and the worlds in which they live (p.119).

Viewing children as valid social actors in their own right rather than simply as ‘developing adults’ (James & Prout, 1990) and as expert commentators on their own lives (Alderson, 1993; Clark and Moss, 2001) has had significant implications from a legislative perspective.

**Human Rights**

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989) is informed to some extent by the new sociology of childhood. Article 12 of the Convention, for example, calls upon governments and all agencies working with children and young people to take into account the views and ideas expressed by children with regard to all decisions that affect them:
1. State parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the rights to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

While article 13 states:

1. The child shall have the right of freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child’s choice.

The convention is still primarily concerned with issues of child protection, however these two articles (12 & 13) do signal a new departure in that they recognise children’s capacities as active agents.

In Ireland the ratification by the Government in 1992 of the UNCRC set the Irish agenda for the promotion of the meaningful involvement of youth in matters that directly affect them. The publication of the National Children’s Strategy (2000), which is informed by the UNCRC, and the subsequent establishment of Dáil na NÓg, (2002), Comhairle na NÓg, (2003), and the appointment of the Ombudsman for Children, (2004), gave further credence to the Irish government’s commitment to youth voice and participation. More recently debates regarding the Children’s Rights Referendum have strengthened the profile of children’s rights in Ireland, although this referendum is ostensibly more concerned with child protection issues than specifically with children’s rights, as the title of the referendum suggests (The Irish Times, 30/5/2009).

Children’s rights are also beginning to be foregrounded in education. The Education Act (1998) accords post primary pupils the opportunity to form student councils, to be informed about school activities, to greater involvement in the operation of the school, and to be consulted on the setting and monitoring of school objectives (Section 23 (no.1 &2) and section 27 (no.3)). Although ironically students were not included in the consultation process leading to this act, evidenced through these articles is an appreciation of students’ right to be involved in decision making relating to matters which affect them. It is suggested the student rights provided through this act are constrained due to the adults’ role within the system, specifically their prerogative to deem whether or not the children are of appropriate age and experience for such consultation (Devine, 2004). Only post primary school students are accorded the right to establish a council, reflecting a conviction that younger students would be unable to participate in such structures.
While rights may be enshrined in the constitution it is often much more difficult to realise these rights in practice, and engage schools, principals, teachers and parents in honouring these rights.

**School Improvement**

Schools are beginning to commit to the student participation agenda and some would suggest that this has less to do with legal or moral obligation and more to do with a realisation that improved student outcomes and more effective school reform are positively linked to greater student participation in reform efforts (Mitra, 2004). Flutter and Rudduck (2004) highlight some of the potential benefits for the school of involving [students] in discussion about teaching and learning:

- may suggest new directions for school improvement planning
- can contribute to monitoring and evaluating processes for school self-review
- helps to establish a more positive learning culture within the school
- provides a practical expression of ideas taught in citizenship education
- encourages [students] and teachers to feel that they are valued and respected members of an inclusive, collaborative learning community

(p.21)

While an acknowledgement of this perspective is very evident in UK school reform efforts (Fielding, 2001, Fielding & Bragg, 2003, Flutter & Rudduck, 2004), evidence of student voice rhetoric in school improvement efforts in the Irish education system, is not yet compelling. The democratic school movement has also seemingly bypassed the Irish educational landscape.

**Democratic Schools**

‘Democratic Schools’ ‘result from explicit attempts by educators to put in place arrangements and opportunities that will bring democracy to life’, this involves the creation of ‘democratic structures and processes by which life in the school is carried out’ and ‘creating curriculum that give young people democratic experiences’ (Apple & Bean, 1999, p.10). The Alternative Education Resource Organisation (AERO) list four characteristics typical of a democratic school:

- shared decision-making among the students and staff
- a learner-centered approach in which students choose their daily activities
- equality among staff and students
As of March, 2010, there are 479 democratic schools worldwide, 380 of which are in US states (AERO, 2010). While there are of yet no ‘Democratic Schools’ in Ireland there are some partial yet laudable efforts at bringing democracy to life evidenced through the citizenship curricula currently offered to students in mainstream education.

**Citizenship Education**

The Irish Junior Cycle course includes Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) for all students. One of the primary aims of this curriculum is the development of active citizens who have an ability to fully participate in democratic society. A caveat attached to the teacher guidelines for this curriculum reads, ‘If students are to become active participatory citizens then they must be active participants in their own learning’ (NCCA, 2005, p. 7). This alerts teachers to the tendency to communicate to students, what Holdsworth (2005) calls, ‘deferred citizenship’, meaning teaching students their ‘value is in what they will become, not what they are or can do today’, and challenges them to interrupt traditional curricular practices. The curriculum calls on the primary decision makers in schools to recognise the importance of active, participatory citizenship to the lives of young people in school and society, and to create spaces in school within which students can actively participate in democracy. Devine et al (2004) challenge this perspective noting that ‘while citizenship education represents a welcome development in the Irish school system (e.g. through Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and CSPE programmes), [they] would strongly argue that education about citizenship is insufficient - children are not citizens-in-the-making but are actual citizens who have the right both to exercise their voices and to be heard in schools’ (p. 245).

**Consumerism**

‘Consumerism’ is popularly defined as a movement advocating the greater protection of the interests of consumers (www.wordreference.com). Rudduck and Flutter (2004) propose that while politicians, service providers and companies very quickly realised the value of consulting consumers in relation to what they think about a service or a product, educational providers are only relatively recently beginning to conceptualise students as educational consumers. Evidence of this reconceptualisation in the Irish system was apparent in the national consultation process, Your Education System
(YES) which was conducted in 2004. This was a unique development on two counts: firstly surveys of public opinion regarding education have not been common practice in Ireland and secondly the primary consumers, the students, were asked to express their views on the system. The Your Education System process was underpinned by the belief that education was the property of the people of Ireland, and was designed to provide the opportunity for parents, teachers, students and employers to express their view on the current system and how they might see it developing. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) have also begun to engage student voice in their consultation processes, most notably, the Junior Cycle (2002) and Senior Cycle (2004) Review processes. This is heartening considering their failure over a decade ago, to involve pupils in the primary curriculum review.

**Student Voice: the challenges**

Read critically, the factors establishing student voice in educational discourse reveal two distinct framings, a standards, and a rights framing. These framings have implications for the nature of student involvement in ‘student voice’ initiatives. It has been argued for example, that a rights framing may promote potentially more ‘transformative, disruptive practices’ as the rights framing predicates that ‘students are always involved in important discussions rather than it being at the discretion of those in power’ as is often the case when the standards and improvement discourse is drawn upon (Thomson & Gunter, 2006, p. 845). Some scholars have highlighted the potentially oppressive capacity of the construct of student voice. Orner (1992) for example, sees student voice as ‘perpetuating relations of domination in the name of liberation’ (p.75). Others have taken exception with certain participatory structures, suggesting for example that student councils may constitute ‘an extension of the surveillance structures of schools’ (Rudduck & Flutter, 2004, p.17), only allow a certain profile of student to be involved (Holdsworth & Thomson, 2002), and are ultimately perceived by students as tokenistic efforts which offer them no real involvement in decision making, most notably in relation to teaching and learning (MacBeath & Mortimore, 2001). It is necessary therefore to problematise the nature of student participation in supposed ‘student voice’ orientated work in schools and to find ways of distinguishing between genuine student participation and more tokenistic approaches.
Typologies of student engagement

Quite a number of frameworks of participation, each with their own philosophies, aims and methods, have been proposed in literature on citizenship, community and youth work (Hart, 1992; Shier, 2001; Treseder, 1997) and education (Fielding, 2004; Thomson & Holdsworth, 2003). All of these models distinguish between the different levels of participation and empowerment afforded to individuals and all illustrate the degrees/levels of engagement in participation differently, for example, hierarchically as in Hart’s ladder or non-hierarchically, as in Treseder’s model. Hart’s ladder has for over a decade been the most often cited participation model in educational literature.

The first three rungs on Hart’s ladder represent non-participation, that is, manipulation, decoration and tokenism. The top five rungs represent situations which constitute authentic participation. The main criticism of Hart’s model is its hierarchical nature. Treseder’s (1997) Non-Hierarchical Model of Child Participation is based on Hart’s (1992) participation ladder and informed by this criticism. Although maintaining Hart’s categories of participation (rungs 4-8), Treseder (1997) arranges them non-hierarchically. In so doing he highlights that it is not always more valuable for young people to do things by themselves rather than in partnership with adults, and that different categories of participation are appropriate in different contexts.

Fielding’s Framework (2001)

The most recent participation model to be proposed in the educational literature is Fielding’s (2001) framework, a two part framework, which aligns with much of the aforementioned work. It distinguishes between different modes of participation, however it is also invested with a unique sensibility; its attentiveness to students in the schooling context. It is this framework therefore that is closest and most resonant with the current student voice agenda. Although reductionist, it is necessary and useful at this point to highlight that ‘student voice’ work generally manifests in two distinct forms: firstly, students’ formal involvement in curriculum decision making within school, most often within the classroom context and secondly, students’ engagement in educational research. The former is the context for Fielding’s framework. The latter will be discussed in greater detail in chapters three and four, as it has impacted significantly on the methodological decisions made in this study.

The first part of Fielding’s framework ‘From Data to Dialogue: a four-fold typology of student engagement’, illustrates a participation continuum constituted by
four distinctive yet related student roles: student as data source; student as active respondent; student as co-researcher and students as researchers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher role</th>
<th>Student role</th>
<th>Teacher engagement example</th>
<th>Classroom example</th>
<th>Team / Dept. example</th>
<th>School example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Students as data source</strong></td>
<td>Acknowledge and use information about student performance</td>
<td>Receive a better informed pedagogy</td>
<td>Dissemination</td>
<td>Looking at samples of student work</td>
<td>Student attitude surveys, cohort exam and test scores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Students as active respondents</strong></td>
<td>Hear what students say</td>
<td>Discuss their learning and approaches to teaching</td>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>Shared lesson objectives / explicit assessment criteria</td>
<td>Students evaluate a unit of work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Students as co-researchers</strong></td>
<td>Listen in order to learn with teacher on agreed issues</td>
<td>Co-researcher (teacher-led)</td>
<td>Focus groups conducted by student co-researchers</td>
<td>Students assist in team / dept. action research</td>
<td>Transition between primary / secondary school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Students as researchers</strong></td>
<td>Listen in order to contribute with teacher support</td>
<td>Initiator and director of research</td>
<td>Dialogue (student-led)</td>
<td>What makes a good lesson?</td>
<td>Gender issues in technology subjects</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1 From Data to Dialogue (Fielding, 2004).

**Student as data source**

Students as data source reflects ‘a real teacher commitment to pay attention to student voice speaking through the practical realities of work done and targets agreed’ (Fielding, 2004, p.201). Inherent in this mode is the realisation that to improve teaching and learning efforts must be made to understand student and class performance and attitude data. Students benefit in the form of a more student driven pedagogy. An example of this mode, which is in essence data driven practice is evidence through the ‘Girls in Sport’ project spoken about earlier (Kirk et al, 2001). The teachers involved in
the Girls in Sport project used data generated through student surveys to design and deliver what they perceived as more ‘girl friendly’ physical education and physical education experiences (Kirk et al, 2001).

**Student as active respondent**

‘Student as active respondent’ reflects an increased teacher readiness to ‘move beyond the accumulation of passive data and a desire to hear what students have to say about their own experience in lessons and in school’ (Fielding, 2004, p.201) As active respondents, students step outside the realm of banking education, and position themselves as discussants of knowledge. This is facilitated by the teacher who is actively committed to creating spaces within which the students can actively engage with and make meaning out of existing data. Traditional school councils and student feedback on units of learning are examples of this approach.

**Student as co-researcher**

‘Students as co-researchers’ is underpinned by a model of partnership and marks an increased involvement by both teachers and students in construction of knowledge. Students’ and teachers’ roles, while not equal, are moving in a more democratic direction. Fielding (2004) asserts that in this mode ‘whilst the boundaries of action and exploration are fixed by the teacher, and whilst she identifies (again typically through negotiation) what it is that is to be investigated, explored and better understood, the commitment and agreement of students is essential’ (p.202). This mode sees hearing replaced by active listening, and teacher-led dialogue, and an increasing potential for student creativity and production. Recent work by Fisette (2008) and Oliver et al (2009) exemplify this approach as in both of these studies students were engaged in researching their physical education curricular experiences in collaboration with adult allies (teachers, researchers, teachers as researchers) and in co-creating curriculum.

**Student as researcher**

This mode extends the partnership model of ‘student as co-researcher’ mode. Now it is the student’s voice that is foregrounded as the student adopts an initiating role, identifying the areas to be researched, taking on the responsibility for collecting and analysing data, and writing up and presenting their findings. Teachers and staff assume a facilitatory role, supporting the student led research through active listening and engaging in dialogue, which is integral to this mode. In the Irish context, the general education tasks offered through the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme are
useful examples of existing spaces within a curriculum which promote the engagement of students as researchers in the teaching and learning process. The general education task can be undertaken in one of five areas: an investigation of an issue/topic; the staging of an event; a performance; provision of a service; and development of a product/artefact and it is each individual student’s prerogative to decide the subject of these tasks (Leaving Certificate Applied Support Service, n.d.).

Fielding’s typology has evolved from his critical interpretation of an educational context where ‘student voice is sought primarily through insistent imperatives of accountability rather than enduring commitments to democratic agency’ (Fielding, 2001, p.123). His typology is therefore sensitive to the dangers of developing increasingly sophisticated ways of involving students that, often unwittingly, end up betraying their interests, accommodating them to the status quo, and in a whole variety of ways reinforcing assumptions and approaches that are destructive of anything that could be considered remotely empowering (2001, p.124).

Fundamentally the agenda articulated through Fielding’s two part typology pivots on the tenets of a democratic classroom, and is inextricably linked to educational reform efforts which have been variously referred to as power-sharing, co-governance, authentic assessment, integrated curricula, negotiated governance and negotiated curricula (Boomer et al, 1992; Shor, 1996; Glasby and Macdonald, 2004; McMahon, 2007). It is this final term, that is, negotiated curricula, which is the most vexed in the literature. It is useful to conceptualise ‘negotiating the curriculum’ as a model which seeks to increase student involvement in curricular planning. This is a model which, as has been previously discussed, is largely absent from curriculum construction in physical education.

**Negotiating Curriculum**

Negotiating the curriculum means deliberately planning to invite students to contribute to, and to modify, the educational program, so that they will have a real investment both in the learning journey and in the outcomes (Boomer, 1992, p 14).
Why negotiate?

Brooker and Macdonald (1999) assert that ‘While curriculum supposedly exists to serve the interests of learners, their preferences, if sought at all, are marginalised and their voices are mostly silent in curriculum making’ (p.84). It is further argued that faithfully adhering to prescribed curricula without engaging the interests of the students, has a negative impact on the quality of student learning (Boomer, 1992; Shor, 1996; Glasby & Macdonald, 2004). Student interest is positively associated with student investment and personal commitment (Boomer, 1992). This has significant implications for physical education, a subject which is greatly mediated by the interests and culture of its students (Brooker & Macdonald, 1999). It is suggested that curricula for the agentic student, curricula which harness student interest and potential, be composed through negotiation (Boomer, 1992; Shor, 1996; Brooker & Macdonald, 1999; Glasby & Macdonald, 2004; McMahon, 2007). The curriculum negotiation process is seen to be necessary and beneficial for all students, adolescents in particular.

For developing adolescents who need both autonomy and affiliation, the opportunity to be heard and to be taken seriously is a major incentive to commit to the school environment…Incentives and structures that take account of students’ needs to be cared for and to participate in shaping their own work are as important as those that take accounts of teachers’ needs for knowledge, information, and authority in managing their work. Through genuine negotiation across processes, content and assessment, students gain a sense of power and control that is positive and engaging


Gordon (2006) extends Darling-Hammond’s commentary suggesting that one of the greatest contradictions evident in the lives of adolescent girls manifests ‘in everyday life at school through tensions between control and agency’ (p.1). There is a lack of alignment between the needs of developing adolescents for autonomy and control and the limited opportunities provided for them through social environments such as school (Eccles et al, 1993). Gordon (2006) highlights the contradictory and potentially oppressive capacity of schools where ‘rights of students to exercise agency and to act citizenship are curtailed, whilst the need for their individual responsibility and planning is stressed’ (p. 12). For many adolescent girls, tensions between control and agency are particularly fraught. It is worth quoting Gordon (2006) at some length in this regard. She states:
Bodies in space are constructed as female or male and different expectations are inscribed on them. Girls are expected to be more still in space, their bodies supposed to be more contained and their voices quieter (Gordon et al, 2000). The embodied activities of girls and boys in space are also differentially interpreted. In order to exercise agency and to become individual citizens girls have to balance between ‘suitable speech of womanhood’ and the desire to ‘talk back’, as bell hooks (1989) argues. Talking back is a necessity if girls are to grow up to be empowered women. Michelle Fine (1992) suggests that silence has its price. Walkerdine (1997) demonstrates that this price is often paid through anxiety and pain, and Deborah Cameron (1995) argues that ‘verbal hygiene’ is expected of women, and taught to them through interruptions of their talk (Gordon, 2006, p.6).

What do we negotiate?

The above commentaries provided by Darling-Hammond (1997) and Gordon (2006) together with an understanding of the context of Fieldings’ (2004) typology reminds us of the importance of problematising the nature of student involvement and the need to create spaces where girls can ‘talk back’ and engage in genuine negotiation which encompasses questions of process, content and assessment. Glasby and MacDonald (2003) share this conviction and assert that in physical education curriculum planning ‘negotiation should not be limited to what is to be learnt: a tokenistic gesture that merely offers students choice in the games that are played or in the activities in which they participate’ (p.134). Boomer (1992) considers it useful for teachers to consider the following tenets of curriculum in curriculum planning: content; justification of content; products, skills and media; learning activities; aids and resources and; methods of evaluation. It is ipso facto, also useful and necessary for teachers to engage students in considering these elements when engaging them in curriculum negotiation. To reconnect students to learning in physical education, spaces need to be created within which students are involved in contributing to decision making in all of the aforementioned elements of curriculum planning, ‘students need to be provided with opportunities not only to make decisions about what they learn, but also how to demonstrate that learning has occurred and how it will be judged’ (Glasby & MacDonald, 2003, p.134).

Influences on negotiation

It is necessary to recognise that because ‘negotiating the curriculum is set within a social constructivist view of the world’ it will always be mediated by who we and our collaborators are: our beliefs, values, experiences, and life contexts (Boomer et al, 1992,
There will also always be non-negotiables, and making these explicit for all stakeholders is an important aspect of curriculum negotiation. The imposed syllabus and its requirements, daily timetables, facilities, resources, teacher allocation and school regulations are examples of constraints which may define and limit curriculum planning (Cook, 1992). Because physical education in Ireland is a non-examinable subject and also because ‘textbooks are rarely used in physical education’, physical educators are in a unique position in that they have a considerable degree of autonomy regarding curricular decision-making, ‘thus in theory they can make content adjustments and changes to respond to student characteristics and the social context more easily than teachers in other subjects’ (Ennis, 1999, p. 446). There are therefore theoretically fewer non-negotiables with respect to curriculum negotiation in physical education than there are in most other school subjects.

**Students responses to curriculum negotiation**

Student reaction to the offer of curriculum negotiation has manifested in a number of forms. Hyde (1992) cites four markedly different and interesting reactions exhibited by the student negotiators in her classes: firstly the ‘thankful and amazed students’ who are happy to finally be able to enact decisions related to their learning; secondly, the suspicious students, who have learned not to trust adults and therefore are sceptical of the offer of a negotiated curriculum; thirdly, those students who are dismayed at the prospect of curriculum negotiation - they would rather the status quo remained as this constitutes their comfort zone and finally, some students react with contempt, they resent the role change and see the teacher ‘shirking [her] responsibilities by not giving the class a prescription for learning’ (Hyde, 1992, p.54).

Students have also been noted to initially perceive those teachers who engage in curriculum negotiation with them as ‘soft and slightly crazy’ (Siegal & Skelly, 1992, p.84). This has been attributed to the fact that curriculum negotiation practices have usually not been experienced by students in school and therefore students have difficulty seeing those teachers who engage and promote these practices as representative of school (Siegal & Skelly, 1992).

A powerful message which emerges from these students responses is:

...the notion of incorporating students as collaborators, in the labour process of curriculum construction is not necessarily one which will gain immediate acceptance by the students. The traditions of the division of responsibility and the distribution of power in the work of teaching and
learning are strongly embedded in the histories of both teachers and learners.

(Grundy, 1986, p. 124).

Eccles (1993) further suggests that ‘although adolescents desire more freedom from adult control than children do, they do not want total freedom….instead they desire a gradual increase in the opportunity for self-determination and participation in decision making and rule making’ (p.99).

**Teachers as curriculum negotiators**

Curriculum negotiation with students clearly has political implications, ‘for it confronts and challenges the very basis of power relationships upon which education traditionally depends (Cosgrove, 1982, p.146, cited in Grundy, 1987, p. 137). Hargreaves (1995) suggests that ‘though silenced in research and in policy, teachers’ voices often prevail inordinately within their own institutions, to the exclusion of students’ and parents’ ones (p.14). This perspective is of particular relevance in the context of physical education curriculum decision making when one considers the degree of control which physical educators have in relation to curriculum construction and implementation.

Of course curriculum is always negotiated or mediated by the contexts within which it is enacted. Negotiation is a taken for granted aspect of every physical educator’s remit: they negotiate questions of content, student roles and responsibilities, organisational issues and so on daily, and physical education students are also acting as curriculum negotiators sometimes overtly and sometimes as ‘hidden curriculum decision makers’ (Mac an Ghaill, 1992). Neither is the concept of deliberate curriculum negotiation new to the physical education literature, although it has been presented primarily under the banner of critical pedagogy (Kirk, 1986; Macdonald, 2002; Tinning, 1997). Deliberate negotiation however occurs when the teacher adopts the role of ‘co-learner and facilitator as well as a source of knowledge’ (Kordalewski, 1999). Boomer et al (1992) contend the best opportunities for maximising learning emerge when students and teachers work together to negotiate the curriculum. It is further suggested that when educators acknowledge the different ways in which students learn, the process of curriculum negotiation is enhanced. Glasby and Macdonald (2004) contend that as a curriculum negotiator working towards higher quality learning the teacher is required ‘to value difference, scope, variety, diversity, inclusivity and change through: understanding the heterogeneity of the class; approaching learning as an active process; and; valuing students knowledge and interests’(p.134).
Chapter Summary

The first section of this chapter presented evidence of how and why traditional models of physical education are failing to connect with many adolescent girls and made reference to some of the alternative curricula which are being used in an attempt to challenge and disrupt these traditional, often alienating, practices. These alternative curricula are undoubtedly well intentioned and have been successful in creating spaces for students to take on some roles and responsibilities, work together, lead activities, and critique issues relating to their bodies. A critical review of these curricular interventions reveals that girls’ voices have been largely absent from decision making processes regarding curricular conceptualisation and implementation. Reviewing the student voice literature provided some challenging and engaging considerations and questions regarding the potential of involving students in the process of curriculum construction. The concept of ‘student voice’, specifically in relation to curriculum negotiation is one attempt to consider and deal with power inequities in physical education teaching and learning. What is clear from this reading of the literature is that listening to student voice in physical education requires a lot more than giving students choices regarding the content of their lessons (although this measure in itself may be a useful step towards negotiation) and that ‘issues of power, communication and participation are central’ tenets in any efforts at operationalising the student voice rhetoric (Cook-Sather, 2006, p. 369).

The study purpose and the research questions which guide this study were based on the findings of this literature synthesis. It is important to note however that my literature review continues throughout this thesis, becoming more focused, and offering greater depth on relevant issues when required. This is particularly the case when it comes to chapters four, six, seven and eight, all of which have been written with a view to publication. There is also a strong literature base to the next chapter, the first methodology chapter, where I work to outline the ways in which I have come to align methodological decisions with the theoretical framework of my research and provide a step by step account of how the co-researchers and I have collected, analysed and interpreted our data.
References


CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

It is impossible to distinguish between the methodology and the message

(John Goodlad, 1984, p.12)

It is impossible in a truly liberating praxis for the educator to follow a domesticating model

(Paulo Freire, 1985, p.105)

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is twofold: to outline the ways in which I have come to align methodological decisions with the theoretical framework of my research, and to provide a step by step account of how the co-researchers and I have collected, analysed and interpreted our data. This chapter is therefore a narrative of the decisions and contexts which have shaped, and were in turn shaped by, our research questions. As this study was praxis-orientated, the intertwining of curriculum, pedagogy and research methodology was inevitable. Untangling this praxis was necessary in order to bring clarity to the process for the reader. A somewhat artificial distinction is made therefore between the curriculum process and the data collection and analysis practices. The chapter begins with an introduction to the theoretical perspectives that have informed the methodology. The school context, together with some biographical information on the identities central to the generation of the knowledge which forms the basis of analysis, is then presented, followed by an overview of the curriculum process, and the data collection and analysis methods.

Tracking Theory

I cannot easily track the development of my theoretical positioning. Long before I knew the terminology associated with different paradigms I had come to know things through living, and intuition. As a teacher I knew what I believed in and what I cared for and about. I believed in the agency of all students, in each individual student’s ability and entitlement to shape their own learning, to make decisions about their education, and in their ability to teach educators how to best teach them. My thoughts
however lacked the sophistication that theory can bring. I did not know, for example, how I might problematise the beliefs I held. I did not know to question the extent to which there was congruence and consistency between that which I claimed to believe in so strongly and how I actually lived my life. I came to theory curious but still struggling with learning what questions to ask.

My first venture into research (a pilot study I undertook in my final undergraduate year, relating to students’ educational ideals) sparked my current research interests generating questions, the answers to which I felt compelled to pursue. A realisation of the methodological shortcomings of that piece of research, specifically the limited nature of the students’ involvement in the research process, served to catalyse my search for alternative methods, methods with the potential to encourage and facilitate the production of knowledge and action, which would be authentic, compelling and engaging for the students themselves. I sought methods that would help students ‘learn to derive meaning from themselves and the world around them’, methods that would facilitate student empowerment (Kincheloe, 2007, p.745) and engage students fully in the investigative process (Shevlin & Rose, 2003). Christenson and Prout (2002) proposed that four perspectives on children in research can be identified in the literature: the child as object, the child as subject, the child as social actor and a nascent approach which views children as participants and co-researchers. The student as participant and co-researcher perspective positions students as active participants in the research process (Christenson & James, 2000) and it was this perspective that I hoped would guide the process of knowledge production in this study.

Participatory Action Research (PAR) acknowledged this perspective, and consequently initially constituted the philosophical, theoretical and methodological framework within which my research would be positioned. Gradually as my work with the students and my reading progressed, poststructural feminism came to inform and develop my conceptualisation of PAR. My reading in this field extended and sometimes challenged previous perceptions I had of PAR, and ultimately spoke to the increasing complexity of my understandings of the context of my research.

**Participatory Action Research (PAR)**

PAR represents ‘an epistemology that assumes knowledge is rooted in social relations and most powerful when produced collaboratively through action’ (Fine et al, 2001, p.173). It is a qualitative research perspective that sees people ‘co-creating their reality through participation; through their experience; their imagination and intuition, their
thinking and their action’ (Reason, 1998, p. 262). It has a double objective, firstly ‘…to produce knowledge and action directly useful to a group of people’ and secondly, ‘…to empower people at a deeper level through the process of constructing and using their knowledge’ (Nieuwenhuys, 2004, p. 210). PAR acknowledges that the researched possess critical social knowledge and repositions them as participants in and architects of research (Fals-Borda, 1979; Fine and Torre, 2005; Torre, 2005). PAR is therefore explicitly political.

History and development of PAR

PAR has a ‘long and global history’ (Fine et al, 2001, p.173). It has its roots in social psychology and builds on the action research and group dynamics models developed by psychologist Kurt Lewin (1948) in the early-to-mid 1900s. Lewin (1948) described action research as ‘a comparative research on the conditions and effects of various forms of social action and research leading to social action’ that uses ‘a spiral of steps, each of which is composed of a circle of planning, action, and fact-finding about the result of the action’ (p.12). PAR is a form of action research which calls for a higher degree of participation, in requiring participants to be both subjects and co-researchers (Argyris & Schon, 1991; Udas, 1998).

Although PAR is not the product of a single theory, it is the work of critical theorists that has had the greatest influence on its development (Haubert, 1986; Udas, 1998). Udas (1998) highlights the significance of the connection between thought and action in PAR as evidence of the impact of critical theory on PAR. This connection between thought and action is synonymous with Freire’s concept of praxis, that is, the combination of action and reflection (Udas, 1998, p. 607). It was through Freire’s (1970, 1973, 1994) work that I first accessed PAR. Freire was one of the first to break with conventional research on the oppressed and advocate for PAR as a genuinely emancipatory approach to research. PAR scholars now draw from neo-marxist, feminist, queer and critical race theorists (Anzaldua, 1987; Apple, 2001; Crenshaw, 1995; Weis & Fine, 2004, Lykes, 2001; Matsuda, 1995) to articulate methods and ethics that have local integrity (Katz, 2004).

PAR: an emergent process

Significantly Greenwood et al (1993) emphasise the emergent character of PAR. They contend ‘that [PAR] is always an emergent process largely controlled by local
conditions’ and ‘that it can often be enhanced (even under seemingly hostile conditions)...’ (p.176). They assert therefore that ‘one cannot easily predict whether a particular process will lead to a fully developed participatory action research process’ (p. 188). While I understood that my intention to increase the degree and complexity of participation might not be enough to lead to a fully developed participatory action research process, I believed from the outset that my efforts could take the process in the direction of better research. I saw the potential of a curriculum built on PAR to address a multitude of issues, among them, my research questions. I read the main features of the model, as outlined below, as a guide and often used them as criteria to interrogate the degree to which our research aligned with PAR.

1. PAR involves a spiral of self-reflective cycles of planning, acting and reflecting.
2. PAR is a social process
3. PAR is participatory
4. PAR is practical and collaborative
5. PAR is emancipatory
6. PAR is critical
7. PAR is recursive (reflexive, dialectical)
8. PAR aims to transform both theory and practice

(Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000, p.595-600)

**PAR and Gender**

Much of the early literature on participatory approaches to knowledge creation and the practice of participatory research, position the subject as gender neutral (Fals-Borda and Rahman, 1991, Freire, 1995, Lewin, 1948). Maguire (1987) in her critique of this literature notes the absence of women’s perspectives and realities:

The work of Paulo Freire (1970, 1981), often quoted and central to participatory research, presents an example of the field’s male bias...Consider the drawings used by Freire for cultural circle discussions (1981: 62-81). The drawings, used as the basis for group dialogue about ‘man in the world,’ without doubt, suggest that men, not women create culture. These drawings encourage men and women to focus on man’s contribution to culture. Freire (1970) maintained that the domination was the major theme of our epoch, yet his conscientizacion tools ignore men’s domination of women (p.46).

Maguire (1987) argues that although ‘participatory research has highlighted the centrality of power in the social construction of knowledge, only feminist research has highlighted the centrality of male power as a factor in the construction of knowledge’
(p.99). She sees the potential of ‘PAR, with its paradigmatic base in post-positivist understandings about the nature of truth claims, to trouble the boundaries of gender’ (Gatenby and Humphries, 2000, p. 90). Initially I did not see ‘troubling the boundaries of gender’ as something I needed to be bothered about.

**Feminist Research**

I did not set out as a feminist to conduct participatory research or at least I did not recognise myself as a feminist when I began my research and had not intended to conduct explicitly feminist research. The circumstances under which I came to identify as a feminist were shaped by feminists I met and worked with, the direction of my reading, and a class I took on philosophical approaches to gender. What firmly marked out feminism and gender issues as subjects which I would continue to read and think about was my understanding of my work with the co-researchers and the explanatory potential that feminist poststructural theory, in particular, offered. As I came to adopt feminist perspectives and agendas, so too did the PAR process. These two perspectives infused slowly but quietly as I found there to be substantive similarities between PAR and feminist research. Both had, for example, ‘been developed by researchers aiming for involvement, activism and social critique for the purpose of liberatory change’ (Gatenby & Humphries, 2000, p.89). What sets PAR and feminist research apart is the centrality of gender on the feminist research agenda. I now recognise that the concerns and knowledge I bring to the research process are uniquely feminist and have consequently come to view my research as an explicitly feminist form of praxis.

My beginning efforts at reading feminist theory taught me much. Initially what I read as a lack of agreement in the literature over what constitutes feminism as theory and practice frustrated me, but ultimately it prompted me to identify parallels between, what are often viewed as, competing feminist perspectives. I concurred with Lugones and Spelman (1990), in that, ‘Feminist theory - of all kinds - is to be based on, or anyway touch base with, the variety of real life stories women provide about themselves’ (Lugones and Spelman, 1990, p. 21). I was encouraged and saw possibilities in the notion of partial rather than competing perspectives which united in the hearing and telling of the stories of women’s lives. Poststructural feminist theory in particular spoke to my appreciation of partiality and to my belief in individual agency. Feminist poststructuralism is ‘a mode of knowledge production which uses poststructuralist theories of language, subjectivity, social processes and institutions to understand existing power relations and identify areas and strategies for change’
It offers a tool to destabilise or subvert dominant gender discourses by presenting women not as passive victims of oppression, or as problems, but as active participants who make choices and participate in structuring their identities (Azzarito et al, 2006, p.223).

**The PAR process**

Social scientists are usually advised to first identify a research problem and then select an appropriate method. Initially, I believed that I, like Maguire (1987), began this research with an approach in search of a question. In retrospect, I now see that I did come to PAR with a research problem, albeit a vague and shifting one. I believed that students should be involved in co-constructing their educational experiences and was curious as to how this could be achieved, what involving students in curriculum design might look like. I saw PAR’s potential to serve as a model of interaction for the ideas, beliefs, and values, which would underpin the aims and the questions of the research as they evolved, and also to constitute the foundation for a critical pedagogy.

**The research questions**

Ideally, participatory research is initiated at the request of a community group which is involved in the entire process. Although the research problem should originate in the community, the literature is vague about how the research problem makes itself known (Maguire, 1987). While a community may have feelings about problems or issues requiring attention, it rarely articulates those feelings as subjects for research or investigation. My research problem did originate from the community I would work with but was not articulated to me initially by my student co-researchers but rather by one of their teachers. At a Physical Education, Physical Activity and Youth Sport (PE-PAYS) community of practice meeting teachers from the region were identifying key challenges associated with their particular contexts and one challenge that transcended the experiences of all those present was engaging adolescent girls in physical education and in physical activity generally. The dialogue between these teachers, their concern about what they viewed as the challenge of engaging adolescent girls in physical education and their reported inability to work with this population effectively, fascinated me, partly because I heard their concern to be genuine and their efforts to be real, and partly because physical activity had been such an important organising principle of my teenage life that I found it difficult to grasp why so many girls were opting out of physical education and physical activity generally. From reading, action
and reflection that began at that time and continued throughout the PAR process, five research questions emerged as worth pursuing:

1) What methodologies are most successful in facilitating the students in explicating their ideas about physical education and physical activity, and in engaging them in curriculum design?
2) What were the students’ perceptions of their involvement in physical education and physical activity at the beginning of the PAR process?
3) What is the nature of the formal physical education curriculum the students design?
4) What happens when we engage with students to challenge formal physical education curricular boundaries and connect with students’ physical culture outside of school?
5) How does increased involvement in decision-making impact on students’ engagement with physical education and physical activity?

The school
St. Mary’s is a large, girls’ free-scheme secondary school located in the centre of a large Irish city. It is a Catholic school established in 1837 by a female religious order, to serve the second level educational needs of the growing population on the south side of the city. The mission of the school reads as follows:

‘Our school is a Christian community…. A primary aim of our school is the pursuit of academic excellence. We seek to develop the full potential of each person; intellectual, spiritual, emotional, social, physical and creative. To achieve this, the school strives to provide an education environment suited to the needs of each individual, within the demands of a changing world’

(School Prospectus).

The school currently caters for over 640 pupils from first year to Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) level, and offers the Junior Certificate Schools Programme and the Leaving Certificate Applied, as well as the established Junior and Leaving Certificates. Flexibility and curricular innovation have been the hallmarks of the school (School Prospectus). In practical terms, this has meant that the school has piloted many programmes for those students who excelled in ways other than academic. Examples of these curricular innovations are Mini-Company, Social & Environment Programme, Community Based Learning, Senior Certificate, Leaving Certificate Applied, learning through the use of computers (Laptop Initiative).

As has happened in the great majority of Irish religiously-managed schools, the principal and almost all the staff are lay people. Almost all of the teachers are female, as
is the newly appointed principal, reflective of the increasing feminisation of the teaching profession (Griffiths, 2006). The school has been granted disadvantaged status and is eligible for additional resources and supports in terms of pupil teacher ratios, special grants and extra support for pupils. It also has a home-school liaison programme in operation. This programme aims to improve cooperation between home, schools and communities to advance the educational interests of disadvantaged pupils.

**The Research Team**

In year 2, at the height of this study, we had a research team of forty four: Mary, my PhD supervisor; Róisín Kennedy (Pseudonym), the PE teacher in our setting, forty one student researchers and I. I have made beginning efforts, earlier in this chapter, to share my identity with the reader, in keeping with Fine et al’s (2000) assertion that, ‘We have a responsibility to talk about our identities, why we interrogate what we do, what we chose not to report, how we frame our data, on whom we shed our scholarly gaze, who is protected and not protected as we do our work’ (p.108). I will endeavour to extend this effort throughout this thesis. I will also introduce the reader to the other identities central to this work, Róisín and the students.

**The Teacher**

Róisín is a qualified physical education teacher. The first year of this project was also her first year teaching in St. Mary’s, although she had two years teaching experience in a demographically similar school, in a different county. She had never taught on the LCA Health and Leisure module previously. Prior to our first meeting with the girls, we had two meetings in which she outlined her hopes and expectations for our time with the girls. She was enthusiastic about the idea of having ‘outsiders’ in to support and extend her work with the girls but was concerned that we might be a little naive as regards the extent to which we thought the students might successfully engage in curriculum decision-making. Initially she voiced her desire to take a backseat role while we were there but ultimately agreed that working together we could achieve more. She identified herself as a ‘fairly strict’ teacher, whose ‘main concerns are the dress, participation and behaviour of the girls while they’re in [her] class.’ She also highlighted her belief that routine would prove incredibly important when working with this particular group of girls. She shared that she believed the most important purpose of physical education was promoting ‘life-long physical activity participation’ while
acknowledging that the ‘status of PE in Ireland’ and ‘the lack of time given to PE in a lot of schools’ made supporting this purpose difficult.

The Students

The student researchers, all on the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme, ranged in age from fifteen to nineteen years old. Students’ self-selected pseudonyms are used throughout this thesis. These students were selected by school administration for the LCA programme based on their achievements and discipline records, and having had a successful interview with the LCA programme coordinator. The primary exclusion criterion was behaviour related. Active teaching and learning methodologies are a core tenant of the LCA curriculum, and it was perceived by the LCA coordinator, that including students with very poor discipline and behaviour records makes it far more difficult to support these methodologies, and may ultimately have a negative impact on the experiences of the other students in the class. In the beginning there were 16 potential student co-researchers. This number fell quite early on in the first year. Amanda left school to pursue a career in hairdressing and Britney chose to leave and attend Youthreach. Youthreach is a programme directed at unemployed young early school leavers aged 15—20. It offers participants the opportunity to identify and pursue viable options within adult life, and provides them with opportunities to acquire certification, including the opportunity to continue with the LCA programme.

Shauna was required to leave the LCA programme due to misbehaviour but remained in the school and began taking the Leaving Certificate Established programme. All of the remaining 13 students were involved to varying degrees and in different ways in the PAR process over the first year. Five of these students played a more significant role as they chose to do their research projects in Leisure and Recreation, which meant they were present for the full two hour period every Tuesday and so were available to engage in a more substantive way with the PAR process (more detail regarding student research project choice is provided shortly). Short personal biographies of these five student researchers (Kelly, Jade, Debra, Grace and Shelly) together with an insight into their attitudes and perceptions of their involvement in physical education and physical activity at the beginning of the PAR process are presented in chapter five.

In the second year of the study, a further two fifth year LCA classes joined the PAR process. In year two of the study therefore, as well as the initial 13 girls, who were now in sixth year LCA, there were an additional 28 students engaged with the project.
Again a smaller subset of these two classes played a more substantive role in the PAR process as they chose to do their individual research projects in Leisure and Recreation, and this meant that we had more curricular time in which to facilitate these students’ engagement with the PAR process: two hours a week as opposed to one. In year two our weekly curricular contact with the 13 sixth year students decreased to one forty minute period every Friday evening. This was the timetabled allocation for the Leisure and Recreation course for sixth year students in the school. Year two of the study also saw the development of an after-school physical activity club for both fifth and sixth year groups and so for two terms as well as curricular contact time, there was also two hours plus of out-of-school contact time with the 17 students who chose to attend the club.

The Curriculum

Róisín and I met the fifth year class groups every Tuesday afternoon of school term from 1:30pm to 3:30pm in both year one and year two of this study. This constituted a triple class on the students’ timetable. The course timetabled for this period was LCA Leisure and Recreation. The Leisure and Recreation Course is designed to enable students to acquire and develop skills which will encourage them to participate in active leisure pursuits. The girls called this class PE. One of the non-negotiables for my time in the school with this class from the school administration’s perspective was that I work, together with Róisín and the students, to ensure the Leisure and Recreation curriculum requirements were met.

My first reading of the syllabus for this course left me unimpressed. I did not think it was challenging enough for the students or that the key assignments demanded enough investment by them. I thought there was too much disconnection, too many spaces, too little prescription. Ironically it was the spaces, the disconnection and the lack of prescription that I came to most appreciate about the Leisure and Recreation curriculum. These spaces afforded the co-researchers, Róisín, and I the opportunity to choose questions and methods which best spoke to our needs and interests, both within and beyond the curriculum requirements.

Assessment of the LCA takes place over two years under three headings: satisfactory completion of modules; performance of student tasks and performance in terminal examination (DES & NCCA, 2000). To complete a course satisfactorily, students must have at least 90% attendance and complete all key assignments. The Leisure and Recreation course required the students to complete two of the following
modules: Physical Activity for Leisure and Recreation, Physical Activity for Health and Fitness and Physical Activity for Performance.

The two modules on the Leisure and Recreation course selected by the students for negotiation in this study were ‘Physical Activity for Health and Fitness’, and ‘Physical Activity for Leisure and Recreation’. Physical Activity for Leisure and Recreation was the module which focused the fifth year curriculum over the initial sixteen weeks in both year one and year two of the study. The key assignments we completed in the first sixteen weeks were therefore those of the ‘Physical Activity for Leisure and Recreation’ module. The following graphic represents these key assignments together with how we chose to complete them (Table 3.1). In year one of this study, all thirteen fifth year LCA students worked towards the completion of the key assignments. In year two the process was repeated by a further 28 fifth year LCA students. The major difference in focus between the approach we took to completing these tasks in year one and year two was in relation to key assignment four. In year one the focus of the group planning was the formal physical education curriculum. In year two while the students did negotiate their formal school curriculum the class was also involved in the design of an out-of-school physical activity club, and the focus of my research shifted to this. Also significant is that in year 2, the 13 students who had begun the project with us and successfully passed the LCA Leisure and Recreation course, continued to have one single (40 minutes) physical education class a week. This space served three purposes. Firstly, Róisín continued to work with and negotiate physical education decisions with her students during this class time. Secondly, I initiated a critical studies unit in which the students and I began to critically engage with issues of gender and ‘reflect upon and deconstruct existing dominant forms of masculinity and femininity’ (Connolly, 2007, p.345). Thirdly, it was a space in which we could ensure that these sixth year girls could contribute to the design and development of the out-of-school physical activity club.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>‘Physical Activity for Leisure and Recreation’ Key Assignments</th>
<th>Task</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The identification of a range of physical recreational activities in my community</td>
<td>Year 1 and Year 2 of study Photovoice: students asked to take photographs of sport and physical activity in their community. Sharing and discussion of photographs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Maintenance of a diary of participation in physical activities</td>
<td>Year 1 and Year 2 of study 8 week Diary, supported by photographs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Identification of the social and physical benefits of participation in recreational activities</td>
<td>Internet search followed by discussion session.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Participation in a programme of physical leisure and recreational activities planned by the group</td>
<td>Year 1: Taster session debriefing, curriculum decision making and curriculum design sessions to inform development of negotiated formal physical education curriculum unit. Year 2: Taster session debriefing, curriculum decision making and curriculum design sessions to inform co-constructed formal physical education curriculum unit. Student tasks and physical activity club committee used to inform design of out-of-school physical activity club</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1 ‘Physical Activity for Leisure and Recreation’ key assignments

We were continuously engaged in a spiral of cycles of planning, acting and reflecting throughout the PAR process. Broadly speaking however, each year there were three phases of engagement with the PAR curriculum: naming inequities; broadening horizons; and change-agency.
As well as completing the key assignments for the first module, we also asked the girls to complete some tasks which sometimes answered or extended the key assignments of the module and sometimes were completely outside the prescribed curriculum. The purpose of this ‘Naming Inequities’ phase, which spanned six weeks was threefold: to get to know the girls, who they were and what they valued and cared about; to encourage the girls to critically appraise their relationship with physical education and physical activity and identify barriers to their engagement; and to provide some initial training for the students in research methods. A task book was created as a space within which the students could create narratives around their engagement with physical education and physical activity. The intention of this space was not merely to gather information but also to prompt self-reflection about the students’ engagement in physical activity and physical education. The task book consisted of five tasks; personal biography; physical activity timeline; physical activity profiles; perceptions of purposes of physical activity and physical education, and the last task focused on students’ perceptions of the possibilities for physical education. These tasks, together with students’ responses to these tasks are discussed in greater depth in chapters four (physical activity profiles supported by photovoice and timelines), five and six (perceptions of the purposes of physical education and physical activity) and eight (possibilities).
Broadening Horizons

The purpose of this phase was to extend the students’ frame of reference as to what physical education could be. Ten weeks of taster sessions followed by a curriculum decision making session constituted this phase. Again this phase is discussed in greater detail in chapters six and eight. It is suffice to highlight here therefore the mechanics of this phase.

The taster sessions provided the students with opportunities to experience a diverse array of content and teaching strategies. At the end of each taster session, the students participated in debriefing sessions where they were asked to ‘talk back’ about their experience of that lesson. Questions used to guide this debrief included: What was the purpose of this class? What did you learn? What helped you to learn? What made it difficult to learn? How did you (or could you) show that you learned something? How could we improve the class to maximise learning? Sometimes we facilitated debriefing through discussion and questioning and sometimes by asking the students to respond to the above questions on posters. Together Róisín, the students and I then talked about strategies to incorporate this student feedback into future lessons.

The curriculum decision-making session involved a discussion about the students’ involvement in decision-making in school and in physical education specifically. The students listed which decisions were made in school, which decisions they perceived they made in school, which decisions were made in physical education, and which decisions they made in physical education. The students then discussed what physical education curricular decisions they felt should be negotiated, drawing from their experience of the taster sessions.

Change-Agency

The students who participated in this study were facilitated in ‘taking responsibility for rethinking and changing’ their physical education and physical activity experiences. In year one, the primary way they did this was through negotiating their Leisure and Recreation curriculum. Building on the students’ experiences of participating in the naming inequities and broadening horizons phases of the curriculum, we facilitated two curriculum design sessions in which we worked with the students to negotiate an 8 week curriculum unit. The eight week unit was negotiated within the framework of the ‘Physical Activity for Health and Fitness’ module. The decision making therefore was focused by the key assignments that we had not engaged with to that point.

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Table 3.2 ‘Physical Activity for Health and Fitness’ key assignments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>‘Physical Activity for Health and Fitness’ Key Assignments</th>
<th>Task</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I have monitored my heart-rate for a week</td>
<td>Students decided they would make a poster for their classroom and Debra would record results before class. Róisín would facilitate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I have recorded and participated in activities that develop aerobic fitness.</td>
<td>Students chose boxercise and ‘gym workout’ as the aerobic activities that would focus their negotiated unit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I have kept a diary of my fitness programme.</td>
<td>Students decided to gather a photographic record of participation in physical education and physical activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I have led a group in warm-up and cool-down exercises related to a chosen activity</td>
<td>Students decided this would be a pair-based assignment. They requested a ‘training session’ to upfront this task and asked that the most confident students would do this task first.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The out-of-school physical activity club

In year two the change-agency phase manifested in a number of different ways. The students continued to work with Róisín negotiating their formal physical education curriculum, and both the fifth year and the sixth year students were also involved in designing their own out-of-school physical activity club. The key assignments for the Leisure and Recreation curriculum had been the framework within which we decided to negotiate the formal physical education curriculum. We primary used the LCA General Education Task framework to facilitate the development of the out-of-school club.
General Education Task

As well as individual course requirements, LCA students must also complete seven student tasks over the two year period. Student tasks are used as a means of integrating courses across LCA. One of these, the general education task must, for those in St. Mary’s, be grounded in their work in either Leisure or Recreation or in Art Education and must be completed in fifth year. In year one seven fifth year students opted to do their LCA general education tasks in Leisure and Recreation. In year two, fifteen students chose the Leisure and Recreation pathway. Those who chose to do their general education task in Leisure and Recreation made this decision for many different reasons, amongst them: interest in physical education, physical activity and related topics; dislike of art/the art teacher; a desire to continue to engage in the co-constructed curriculum process; and a perception that the Leisure and Recreation task may be more fun. Those who chose not to do their general task in Leisure and Recreation completed their tasks in Art Education.

It is significant that after week seven, those students who chose to do their general education task in art were expected to spend half of our 2 hour period working independently on their art projects. There were therefore seven girls in year one, and fifteen in year two who could potentially be involved in a more substantive way with the main Leisure and Recreation curriculum and club design aspect of the PAR process. These girls were representative of the class in terms of willingness to participate and attitudes towards physical education and physical activity and also as regards personality, with some of the most and least vocal included in the group.

I did not want to dictate what topics students would chose for their projects and so in week seven we discussed the task requirements and I gave the students what I called a ‘Think Task’ for homework. I told them to think about the outstanding questions they had, what topics they were interested in, that they saw as any way related to physical education, physical activity or youth sport. I wanted them to have ownership of their ideas and therefore their projects, to choose questions and topics that would sustain their interest and be relevant and meaningful for them. In week eight, some of the students came back with ideas, but some needed a little more help so we took some class time to brainstorm and some of the other students and I also offered some suggestions. It is noticeable that in year two a number of students chose projects which would feed into the design of the out-of-school physical activity club. Ultimately all the students chose both their research questions/tasks and methods. In week nine of year one and year two, I facilitated a research workshop for the girls that explored in a little
more detail the two primary methods which the girls had chosen to gather their data for their individual projects, that is, questionnaires and interviews. Table 3.3 outlines the research questions the girls chose to pursue and the methods they selected to help answer their research questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Research Question/task</th>
<th>Methods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Year 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debra</td>
<td>How did Andy Lee become so good at boxing?</td>
<td>Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelly</td>
<td>Who goes to the local gym and can we?</td>
<td>Case-study: interviews and observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelly</td>
<td>Why do we do physical education and physical activity anyway?</td>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jade</td>
<td>How active are my family and why?</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominika</td>
<td>Swimming Pools in Limerick: where are they?</td>
<td>Community mapping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aga</td>
<td>Bilingual activity posters for our gym</td>
<td>Product</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>What types of physical activity do first year and fifth year girls like?</td>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Year 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caoimhe</td>
<td>How active are we?</td>
<td>Task book analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saoirse</td>
<td>The barriers to physical activity for girls in our class</td>
<td>Task book analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clodagh</td>
<td>What are the real benefits of physical activity?</td>
<td>Literature search</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ciara</td>
<td>What our school thinks about sport?</td>
<td>Teacher and student interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shona</td>
<td>Our school, a health promoting school…nobody told us!</td>
<td>Principal interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leonie</td>
<td>Our perfect PE</td>
<td>Task book analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deirdre</td>
<td>Designing a physical activity club in our community.</td>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Marketing a physical activity club to girls like me</td>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniella</td>
<td>Our physical activity club image</td>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zara</td>
<td>Sport and the media</td>
<td>Literature search and student interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chloe</td>
<td>My physical activity family tree</td>
<td>Family interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dione</td>
<td>How to get a job in health and fitness</td>
<td>Interviews with two health and fitness professionals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lyla</td>
<td>Our teachers and physical activity: do they practice what they preach?</td>
<td>Teacher Questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kayleigh</td>
<td>Do we really need to do warm-ups and cool-downs?</td>
<td>Literature search</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Levi</td>
<td>Girls and physical activity in my community</td>
<td>Taskbook analysis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.3 Student research projects
For eight weeks Róisín and I facilitated the girls’ completion of their research projects. We answered any questions and queries the students had; helped them to think about how they might best prepare their questionnaires and interview guides; offered them suggestions as to where they might find relevant information; talked to them about analysing their data and how they might best report it; and organised for them to have the computer room to carry out internet searches and type up their research. There was a definite tension for us between the degree and nature of assistance we provided to the students as they worked to complete their research projects and our desire to keep the negotiation process genuinely democratic. We were aware of this tension and invested in creating and sustaining a supportive and inclusive environment for democratic participation. We were mindful however that our role was to help students maximise their potential and we worked to do this through constant questioning and discussion. In terms of the club design, while individual students chose their research questions, the nature of the questionnaire they wished to develop and which data they would prefer to work with relating to the club, the findings they generated were all presented back to the club committee (interested students from fifth and sixth year classes, Róisín and I). The design of these particular questionnaires was also informed by an overarching research question relating to the club, that the two year groups of students had agreed on, that is, ‘what kind of after school physical activity club would the girls in our school actually want to go to?’ A more substantive discussion relating to the design and development of the girls’ physical activity club is presented in chapter seven.

The curriculum section above provides a framework for understanding the practicalities involved in our adoption of a student-centered negotiated approach to teaching and learning. The following section contextualises the data collection and analysis methods used.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

PAR is not a methodology but rather an orientation that can guide and shape methodological practices. The actual methods of PAR are diverse and often experimental. Dialogue with people is central (Fals Borda, 1991). Methods which emphasise collaboration and dialogue as appropriate to the community are favoured. In PAR as in feminist qualitative research, ‘participants are always ‘doing’ research, for they, along with the researchers, construct the meanings that become ‘data’’ (Olesen, 1994, p.166). I was mindful of Greenwood et al’s (1993) notion of the emergent
character of PAR and did not want to run the risk of constraining or overly manipulating the experiences of the participant researchers. I used participatory methods throughout the PAR process in order to support conversation with the participants and facilitate them in producing knowledge about themselves. Two of these participatory methods (photovoice and timelines), together with some of students’ responses to using these methods are explored in greater detail in chapter four. For the most part the participatory artefacts used to focus conversation with the students were generated as part of the curriculum process. These artefacts proved invaluable in opening up dialogue, however it was discussion and questioning relating to these artefacts rather than the artefacts (photos, timelines, debrief posters, research posters etc.) themselves, which constituted the data source. This discussion and questioning occurred in rather informal open ended individual and group interview/guided conversation contexts.

Interviews/Guided Conversations

Bogdan & Biklen (1995) define the purpose of a qualitative interview succinctly: ‘to gather descriptive data in the subjects’ own words so that the researcher can develop insights on how subjects interpret some piece of the world’ (p.94). Participant observation was a key feature of my study, therefore I knew the students through interacting with them and often ‘gathered descriptive data in the subjects’ own words’ in the spare few moments before and after class. These situations could be classified as informal interviews. The focus of this section is, however, on the more formal interviews I undertook. These interviews were scheduled and conducted in a quiet space away from the gym, recorded using a digital dictaphone and in these interviews I was seeking specific information.

Holstein and Gubrium (1995) remind researchers to be cognisant about what the interview produces but also how the interview is produced and how texts are created. Participatory research artefacts (e.g. photos, timelines, posters) often focused the relatively open ended interviews. The students therefore had ‘considerable latitude to pursue a range of topics’ and shape the interview content and agenda (Bogdan & Biklen, 1995, p. 94). Because the students played such a strong role in defining the content and the direction of the interview, the interviews became more like ‘guided conversations’ (Rubin & Rubin, 1995) and indeed I began to refer to them as such as the project proceeded. This approach to interviewing allowed me to gain insight into how the students themselves had come to understand their relationship with physical
education and physical activity and also facilitated a greater understanding of the range of perspectives on the topic. All guided conversations were digitally audio recorded.

**Participant Observation**

Participant observation will be defined as a field strategy that simultaneously combines document analysis, interviewing of respondents and informants, direct participation and observation and introspection (Denzin, 1989, pp.157-158).

The goal of my field notes was to ‘discover recurring patterns of behaviours and relationships’ (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p.79). At different phases in the research my field notes were focused to a greater and lesser degree by particular research questions. In the first weeks of the study each year, for example, it was research question two (what were the students’ perceptions of their involvement in physical education and physical activity at the beginning of the PAR process?) that received most attention. I recorded what I saw, heard, felt and thought about each lesson, the interactions and conversations that occurred and teaching and learning processes and practices (Bogdan & Biklen, 1995). Some of the data gathered also came from informal ‘interviewing’ in the field (Fontana & Frey, 2005). As I spent more time in the setting, observations became more focused to determine if emerging themes were consistent over time (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Each day, after returning from the school I wrote reflections on these observations. I often spoke about these observations with my peer debriefers and with the student researchers.

Table 3.4 aligns the data collection strategies used throughout this study with the questions underpinning this research.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Data Collection Strategy</th>
<th>Year 1 When and with whom</th>
<th>Year 2 When and with whom</th>
<th>Year 3 When and with whom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) What are the students’ perceptions of their involvement in physical education and physical activity at the beginning of the PAR process?</td>
<td>Field notes</td>
<td>Completed for each visit to school/club</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Group guided conversation: focused by narratives, timelines and photos.</td>
<td>September/October with 16 students</td>
<td>September/October with 28 students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Individual guided conversations: focused by narratives, timelines and photos.</td>
<td>September/October with five students</td>
<td>September/October with two groups of five students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Group member checking sessions: focused by my read of the emerging themes.</td>
<td>-November with five students -December with 13 students -January with 13 students</td>
<td>-October with two groups of five students -January with fifteen students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) What is the nature of the formal physical education curriculum the students design?</td>
<td>Field notes</td>
<td>Completed for each visit to school/club</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Curriculum debriefing session posters</td>
<td>September to January with 13 students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Curriculum decision making and design session conversation recording, poster generation</td>
<td>January with 13 students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Individual guided conversations</td>
<td>March/April with five students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) What happens when we engage with students to challenge formal physical education curricular boundaries and connect with students’ physical culture?</td>
<td>Field notes</td>
<td>Completed for each visit to school/club, club launch and The Pres Girls conference (Appendix D)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student-led poster design session</td>
<td>Two sessions in April with 17 students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Group guided conversation</td>
<td>3 students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Semi-structured interview</td>
<td>May with Róisín</td>
<td>January with Róisín</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) How does increased involvement in decision-making impact on students’ engagement with physical education and physical activity?</td>
<td>Fieldnotes</td>
<td>Completed for each visit to school/club, club launch and The Pres Girls research presentation at PE-PAYS Research Forum (Appendix D).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Individual guided conversations with students</td>
<td>February/March with five student researchers.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Guided group conversation</td>
<td>End of February with five student researchers</td>
<td>January with ten students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Semi-structured interview</td>
<td>May with Róisín</td>
<td>May with Róisín</td>
<td>January with Róisín</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) What methodologies are most successful in facilitating the students in explicating their ideas about physical education and physical activity, and in engaging them in curriculum design?</td>
<td>Field notes</td>
<td>Throughout process</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Individual guided conversations</td>
<td>February/March with five student researchers.</td>
<td>February/March with two groups of five student researchers.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Group guided conversation</td>
<td>End of February with five student researchers</td>
<td>End of March with two groups of five student researchers.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.4 Questions and methods
Consent

Ethical approval was received for this study from the University of Limerick Research Ethics Committee (ULREC No. 06/48, Appendix E). Consent was definitely not a ‘one-off event’ with the student co-researchers and for many and diverse reasons neither they nor I, never would have allowed it to be. Issues arose firstly with the LCA coordinator as to how readable the consent forms (Appendix E) was for these students and their guardians whose literacy she described as questionable. The complexity of the content of my consent forms demanded by the ethics committee made it difficult for me to provide reader friendly information, but it was important to me that all stakeholders did provide informed consent and so I redrafted what I had, trying to be more concise and reader friendly, increasing the font size and highlighting my phone number, and offering conversation to gain their consent. I also asked the students to encourage their guardians to ring me should they have questions. Ultimately however it was the student researchers whose consent I was most interested in. With PAR you cannot fully inform the participants at the outset what they are ‘signing up for’ because you simply cannot be sure. Defining how the programme might evolve would run counter to the emergent character of PAR. I was therefore mindful of the necessity to renegotiate consent on several occasions throughout the PAR process (Alderson, 1995; Morrow and Richards, 1996; Morrow, 1999). My fear was that the context would work to make students feel compelled to give consent. As the process and my relationship with the students evolved, it became clear to me that this was not something I needed to worry about as the students showed on numerous occasions that they were more than capable and comfortable to express dissent. Kelly, for example, initially chose not to participate in the photovoice aspect of the project as she said she didn’t want to share her pictures with anyone but asked instead to talk about her experience based only on her timeline.

Data Analysis

Glesne (1999) contends ‘Data analysis involves organising what you have seen, heard, and read so that you can make sense of what you have learned’ (p.130). While for some data analysis is viewed as the ‘final stage of listening to hear what meaning is said’ (Rubin and Rubin, 1995) data analysis during this study was concurrent with data collection (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998) and actively pursued throughout the process.
Data analysis was threefold. Firstly, I collected and transcribed the interview data. I saved each data source (transcript, photograph, timeline, poster etc) as a primary document in the Atlas.ti programme. ATLAS.ti, a computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) package is both a conceptual network builder and a code-based theory builder (Flick, 2005). The software ‘is based on the approach of grounded theory and theoretical coding’ (p.258) and provides a formal structure for writing and storing data to develop the analysis and facilitate more conceptual and theoretical thinking about the data. A major criticism of CAQDAS generally is that it distances the researcher from their data and that it may potentially lead to qualitative data being analysed quantitatively (Seidel, 1991). I did not find this to hold true for my analysis, rather, ATLAS.ti served to facilitate instant access to the data once coded and therefore assisted me in asking more complex questions of the data (Barry, 1998). The data (i.e. timelines) that did not lend themselves to electronic transfer were digitally photographed and saved as JPEGs. I then coded all data in relation to how they informed each of my research questions (see Appendix F for interview transcripts and coding examples). I reviewed the data and my emergent codes repeatedly continuously looking for patterns, themes, and regularities and identifying irregularities, paradoxes, variations, nuances in meaning and constraints (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

Secondly, I shared samples of these coded data with the students in order to verify I had reflected their perspectives accurately, ascertain if how I was presenting the data was problematic for them in terms of confidentiality, and open the data up to new ideas and interpretations (Glesne, 1999). Appendix F also includes one example of how I shared some of my initial coding with the students. This opening up of my coding to the students ensured that my constructs were valid and my theoretical notions were meaningful and reflective of the students’ experiences and perspectives (Fine, 2008). It was an opportunity for us to work together to unpack, reconstruct and rename constructs which I/we may have taken for granted. Significantly, these sharing sessions went beyond serving only member checking purposes, in that during these sessions there were also opportunities for the students to expand and/or add new concepts related to the question we were working towards answering. The students therefore played central roles in the interpretive process.

Thirdly, I then brought a more focused theoretical lens to bear on the data, as I worked to make sense of the data in relation to my reading of the literature. My reading of the feminist post structuralist literature for example, pushed me to work to
understand how the girls were both ‘made subject by/within the social order and how they were agents/subjects within/against it’ (Jones, 1993).

**Trustworthiness**

Creswell (1998) describes eight verification procedures, often used in qualitative inquiry, to augment one’s argument for the trustworthiness of their research: prolonged engagement and persistent observation; triangulation; peer review and debriefing; negative case analysis; clarification of researcher bias; member checking; rich; thick description; and external audit. Careful attention to establishing trustworthiness has enabled me to speak to each of these procedures.

**Prolonged engagement and persistent observation**

Prolonged engagement and persistent observation is according to Lincoln and Guba (1985) ‘critical in attending to credibility. If prolonged engagement provides scope, persistent observation provides depth’ (p.304). ‘When a large amount of time is spent with your research participants, they less readily feign behaviour or feel the need to do so, moreover, they are more likely to be frank and comprehensive about what they tell you’ (Glesne, 1999, p.151). I spent an extended period of time in the setting. Over two years consistently working with these girls afforded me time to build sound relationships, develop trust, learn the culture and identify and pursue specific lines of inquiry.

**Triangulation**

Triangulation is a ‘word used to name the combination of different methods, study groups, local and temporal settings, and different theoretical perspectives in dealing with a phenomenon’ (Flick, 2005, p.226) and can serve to ‘increase the scope, depth and consistency in methodological proceedings’ (p. 227). I used multiple methods (photovoice, narratives, interviews/guided conversations, observation, student research projects etc.), with multiple sources (41 co-researchers, 1 teacher), supported by multiple investigators (41 co-researchers, 1 teacher, 1 research supervisor), and by multiple theoretical perspectives (PAR, poststructural feminism) and therefore strived to ‘systematically extend and complete the possibilities of knowledge production’ (Flick, 2005, p.227).
Peer Review

My research supervisor served as my primary peer debriefer. She reflected with me on the process, on specific incidents that arose and data that emerged. Her questioning forced me to reflect on aspects of my work which I might not have considered, prompting me to ask new questions of myself, the participants and the data. A second important peer debriefer was Róisín, the teacher. We met every week for a half an hour before class and also debriefed on the phone after class most weeks. The focus on these debrief was usually reflection around what we perceived to be working or not working, our perception of student response to the process and our own positionality within the setting.

Negative Case Analysis

In feminist research, ‘The purpose of exploring multiple perspectives is not to eliminate so-called rival hypotheses, but rather to add depth to our research enterprise’ (Kirsch, 1999, p.14). ‘Outlying data’ therefore were noted and investigated, as were silences and absences that were identified in the data. The students were actively engaged in helping us to understand such cases and in this way we worked to respect the complexity inherent in any qualitative research enterprise.

Researcher Bias

I strongly believe that in order to maximise the potential of schools as learning environments, students’ voices must be central to curricular decision-making. My investment in this hypothesis might lead me to seek out or even shape data to support it. I was aware of this bias and also committed to constantly monitoring and reflecting on the role my own subjectivities and my identity played in this research process. Hesse-Biber and Piatelli (2007) suggest:

Reflexivity, at one level, is a self-critical action [that] can help researchers explore how their theoretical positions and biographies [and] how the structural, political, and cultural environments of the researcher, the participants, and the nature of the study affect the research process and product (p. 496).

I worked with Mary to maintain critical reflexivity (Hesse-Biber and Piatelli, 2007; Lather, 1986) and interrogate and negotiate my positionality throughout the study. As a
white, Irish, female from the same county as the girls I could be considered an insider/in-between (Anzaldua 1987; Hamzeh & Oliver, 2009; Mohanty, 2003) in relation to the discourses the girls drew on in constructing their relationships with physical education and physical activity. However, as a middle class, 23 year old (at the time of starting this study), postgraduate student with a passion for physical education and physical activity, my social class, age, academic status and relationship with physical education and physical activity positioned me as an outsider (Hamzeh & Oliver, 2009; Hill-Collins, 1990). Using a feminist post structural lens required that I interrogate the girls’ subjectivities, meaning, ‘the ways in which [they gave] meaning to themselves, others and the world’ (Davies & Banks, 1992, p. 2). It also significantly required me to focus on how I positioned myself and was positioned and perhaps contributed to the transformation of discourses and the increased availability of different subjectivities for the girls. A series of questions posed by Glesne (1999) helped me to ‘consider [my] subjectivity within the context of the trustworthiness of [my] findings’:

Whom do I not see? Whom have I seen less often? Where do I not go? Where have I gone less often? With whom do I have special relationships, and in what light would they interpret phenomena? What data collecting means have I not used that could provide additional insight?

(p. 152).

**Member Checking**

Each student in this study was also a co-researcher. They interacted with the data on several levels over the duration of the study. The action research framework meant that the knowledge they produced collaboratively, was most often applied, for example their reflections on the taster physical education experiences, formed the basis of the curriculum design sessions. Our class discussions were often grounded in their taskbooks, photos, diaries or research projects. As well as the more formal member checking/sharing sessions spoken about above, I also ensured that I shared my interview transcripts, coding and drafts on numerous occasions with the students and at times they named the themes within which we analysed the findings (chapter six). In this way I worked to ensure I was representing them and their ideas as accurately as words would allow, and tried to avoid retelling their story in a way that was not authentic to them.
Rich Thick Description

I hope that my writing facilitates the reader in entering as fully into the research context as possible. I firmly believe ‘rich descriptions of the social world are valuable’ (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 12) and aim to achieve verisimilitude through the provision of rich detailed descriptions of the context, the participants, and the data (Geertz, 1973). The voices of the student researchers should also serve to facilitate the reader in entering into the ‘rich’ context within which this study is positioned.

External Audit

Eileen, a graduate student in the department was an outsider in respect of my study, but she did have an interest in the area of research. I enlisted her at times to help ‘audit’ my data analysis and subsequent interpretations. It was Eileen, for example, who in the earlier stages of the study, made me aware of my tendency to give far more attention to certain students in my field notes and observations. I also shared my findings orally on a number of occasions at formal presentations (Appendix G) and therefore subjected my methodologies, findings and analysis to external comment and critique.

Conclusion

The intention of this chapter was to outline the ways in which I have come to align methodological decisions with the theoretical undercurrent of my research, and to provide a step by step account of how the co-researchers and I have collected, analysed and interpreted our data. Participatory Action Research is an approach that unapologetically refuses neutrality (Fine, 2008). It is serious and engaged research and it is messy. It was difficult in this chapter for me to artificially tear the curricular aspect of this study from data collection methods because they were so intertwined. It was also difficult to plan very far ahead in any stage of the research process, owing to the emergent nature of PAR. My flexibility became paramount, as the site (from in-school to out-of-school), and scope (from 13 student to 41 students, and from a formal physical education curriculum focus to a focus on students’ out-of-school physical activity experiences) of the research responded to the students’ own research and transformation agendas. This messy, highly flexible process was also however, both rigorous and systematic (Fine, 2008) and intended to support the student participants in developing skills to ‘talk back’. In the next chapter, I extend the methodological discussion
presented here by critiquing the value of participatory methods in terms of facilitating students in explicating their ideas about physical education and physical activity.

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CHAPTER 4

‘Producing different knowledge and producing knowledge differently’: Rethinking physical education research and practice through participatory methods

EIMEAR ENRIGHT and MARY O’SULLIVAN

Abstract

Drawing on data from a three year Participatory Action Research (PAR) project, undertaken with 41 teenage girls within and beyond the boundaries of a designated disadvantaged urban school, this paper is an effort to critique the use of participatory methods as a means of ‘producing different knowledge, and producing knowledge differently’ with students (St. Pierre and Pillow, 2000, p.1). In pursuit of this aim we work to: introduce participatory methods and the theoretical grounding of these methods; share our participants’ perspectives on their engagement with two participatory methods, namely photovoice and timelines; and we also critique the value of these methods. We conclude this paper with a discussion of the benefits and the challenges associated with the use of the participatory methods and present some implications for physical education research and practice.

Keywords: Participatory methods; Student researchers; Photovoice; Timelines; Student activists

Introduction

Christensen and Prout (2002) identify four perspectives on children in research: ‘the child as object, the child as subject, the child as social actor and a nascent approach seeing children as participants and co-researchers’ (p.480). Historically most educational researchers have positioned students as objects, using for example, limited response questionnaires, and statistical analysis to conduct research on students (Erickson & Shultz, 1992). This perspective and these methods have been criticised for subordinating children’s voices to adults’ voices, failing to recognise students as experts on their own lives and disregarding student subjectivities and agency (Christensen & Prout, 2002; Clark & Moss, 2001, Punch, 2002). The publication of a monograph on student voice in 1995 by the Journal of Teaching in Physical Education marked a methodological shift in physical education research, towards an understanding of
students as research subjects (Graham, 1995). In line with this shift, in the last decade there have been many studies, which focus on students’ perspectives of their physical education experiences (Azzarito, Solmon & Harrison, 2006; Burrows, Wright & Jungerson-Smith, 2002; Carlson, 1995; Cothran & Ennis, 1999; Dyson, 1995, 2001; Hastie, 2000; Hopple & Graham, 1995; Hunter, 2002; Kinchin & O’Sullivan, 2003; Pope & Grant, 1996). We are now beginning to see physical education researchers moving beyond the student as subject perspective and positioning students as active participants in the research process (Enright & O’Sullivan, 2007, 2008; Fisette, 2008; Hamzeh, 2007; Fitzgerald & Jobling, 2001; Oliver, Hamzeh & McCaughtry, 2009).

This evolution, in terms of students’ roles in research, is inspired by, and aligns quite clearly with, what is considered a paradigm shift in the study of childhood. This new paradigm, which is often called ‘the new social studies of childhood’, has foregrounded discourses of participation in research with young people (James, Jenks & Prout, 1998). It is no longer considered enough to position students as subjects in educational research. The ‘new social studies of childhood’ requires that students be engaged as participants or better still as researchers in the research process (Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008). Aligned with this paradigm shift participatory methods have enjoyed growing popularity as adult allies (researchers, teachers, teachers as researchers) seek new and more effective ways of engaging with student voice.

**Participatory Methods**

Participatory methods are those that facilitate participants in finding their own language to articulate what they know and help them put words to their ideas and share understandings of their worlds, thereby giving participants more control over the research process. Most often participatory methods are practical activities, which are considered engaging, enjoyable and relevant ways for participants to engage in research and generate data. Examples of participatory methods include: student led photography; mapping exercises; student-led tours; role-play exercises; drama; music; dance; diary keeping; collage; model-making; story telling; print journalism and; radio production (Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008). Some examples of participatory methods used in physical education research have included: photography; development of personal biographies; free writing; body drawing; journal writing; drama; student drawings; poster design and; timelines (Enright & O’Sullivan, 2008; Fisette, 2008; Fitzgerald & Jobling, 2001; MacPhail & Kinchin, 2004; McMahon, 2007; Mowling, Brock & Hastie, 2006; Oliver et al, 2009; O’Sullivan, MacPhail, & Tannehill, 2009; Pope, in press ).
Participatory methodologies have been widely lauded as facilitating the active participation of students in research (Clark & Moss, 2001; O’Kane, 2000; Punch, 2002); ‘accessing and valorising previously neglected knowledges and providing more nuanced understandings of complex social phenomena’ (Kesby, 2000, p. 423); facilitating students in ‘learning to derive meaning from themselves and the world around them’ (Kinchenloe, 2007, p.745), promoting enjoyment and relevance for students (Barker & Weller, 2003; O’Kane, 2000; Punch, 2002), and encouraging student empowerment (Allard, 1996). There has been little research, which provides substantive evidence of these noted benefits. With notable exception (Gallacher & Gallagher, 2007; Piper & Frankham, 2007) neither has there been much critique of the use of participatory methods. While researchers have highlighted the dangers of ‘succumbing to political ideology and methodological fashion’ (Prosser & Lowley, 2007, p.55) there has been an absence of sustained critical debate around the possibilities and perils of engaging with students using participatory methods. This paper is an effort to address both these gaps through a presentation of our participants’ perspectives on their engagement with two participatory methods and a critique of the value of, and the challenges associated with using, participatory methodologies with young people.

**Producing Different Knowledge: The Process**

Participatory Action Research constituted the theoretical, methodological and pedagogical framework for our larger study. PAR represents ‘an epistemology that assumes knowledge is rooted in social relations and most powerful when produced collaboratively through action’ (Fine, Roberts, Torre, & Upegui, 2001, p.173). Participatory Action Research sees people ‘co-creating their reality through participation; through their experience; their imagination and intuition, their thinking and their action’ (Reason, 1998, p. 262). It has a double objective, firstly ‘….to produce knowledge and action directly useful to a group of people’ and secondly, ‘…to empower people at a deeper level through the process of constructing and using their knowledge’ (Nieuwenhuys, 2004, p. 210). The purpose of our larger project was to work with disengaged students to understand and transform their self-identified barriers to their physical education engagement and physical activity participation. The student participants therefore became co-researchers and curriculum designers through the PAR process.

This study commenced in September 2006 following a successful application for ethical approval to the University Research Ethics Committee. We started out with 13
participants’ engaged in the PAR process. These girls were all between 15 and 18 years old and represented one fifth-year class in a designated disadvantaged, single-sex, urban post-primary school. In the second year, our project extended to a further two classes and therefore by year two, there were 41 teenage girls involved to varying degrees with the PAR process. Participants’ self-selected pseudonyms are used throughout this paper to identify their contributions. Eimear and the students’ physical education teacher, Róisín (also a pseudonym), were also participants in this process, occupying the role of adult allies, fostering the students’ capacities to critique and transform that which was dysfunctional in their physical education.

The participatory methods used in this study included photovoice, timelines, scrapbooking, poster-making, student research projects and student-led discussions. For the purpose of this paper we will focus on the role of two participatory visual methods used to begin the PAR process and to facilitate participants in naming the inequities around and barriers to their physical education engagement and physical activity participation. These methods were photovoice and timelines.

**Photovoice**

Visual anthropology and sociology are now established academic research sub-disciplines (Pink, 2003). The visual is also beginning to gain a more established foothold in physical education research. Visual research in physical education has primarily been constituted by two activities, either ‘examining pre-existing visual representations’ or ‘collaborating with social actors in the production of visual representations’ (Banks, 2001). So for example, in relation to the former, Oliver (2001) used images from mass media to engage girls in critical dialogue about body issues. Gard and Meyenn (2000) used video-taped footage to facilitate conversations with boys regarding their reasons for choosing and rejecting certain movement forms. More recently Azzarito (2009) explored young people’s social construction of the ideal body using a portfolio of body images drawn from popular health and fitness magazines. These are all examples of researchers working with ‘found’ images that already exist independent of their research projects (Rose, 2007).

Increasingly we are also seeing examples of research in which participants are recognised as social actors and engaged in producing their own visual representations (Banks, 2001). These visual representations are made as part of the research project. For example, student drawings have been used to access students’ experiences and perceptions of physical education (Goodwin & Watkinson, 2000; Solmon & Carter,
1995), sport education (MacPhail & Kinchin, 2004; Mowling, Brock & Hastie, 2006), and physical activity in their communities (Sharpe, Greaney, Rice & Fields, 2004). Oliver (2009) employed student photography as a tool to facilitate her students identifying what prevented them from being active. Pope (in press) used 'photography as voice' to explore young people’s sports experience.

There have been many claims made about the value of visual methods and their potential to: ‘generate multi-layered data’ (Piper & Frankham, 2007, p373); support reflection (Rose, 2007); contribute to the development of participant self-esteem and self-confidence (Young & Barrett, 2001); transform participants and their community (Wang, Cash, & Powers, 2000); allow participants to ‘speak for themselves’ (Schratz & Walker, 1995, p. 76) and; empower young people (Pope, in press). We had read these claims, were excited about the potential of visual methods to better inform our understandings of young people’s experiences of physical education and physical activity, and yet we were also cautious about the degree to which these claims might be actualised in our work.

Consistent with the overarching frame (PAR) of our larger study and our appreciation of the value of visual methodologies we selected photovoice as one method which would facilitate dialogue with and between our participants. Photovoice has been described as ‘a powerful participatory action research method where individuals are given the opportunity to take photographs, discuss them collectively, and use them to create opportunities for personal and/or community change’ (Linnan et al, 2001). ‘Voice’ in the context of photovoice clearly therefore has political connotations and refers to both ‘the expression of feeling or opinion’ and ‘having the right or opportunity to express an opinion’ (Collins Concise Dictionary, 2002). The participants in our study participated in a workshop, which focused on the ethics of photographing other people, and basic photography skills, and were provided with disposable cameras. They were then asked to make photographs of their lives and given prompts to focus some of their image making. These prompts included: where I spend my leisure time; my physically active life; physical activity facilities nearby; physical activity in the lives of my family and friends; and the things that are important to me. The participants kept one copy of their photographs and we retained the second copy. The participants’ photographs were discussed in individual and group contexts where the students and adult allies together engaged in dialogue regarding what these participatory research artefacts represented. These conversations were audio recorded and later transcribed. Some of the participants spoke to their photographs through written narrative. The photographs were therefore
used as an aid to narrative (Moss et al, 2007) and participants were always involved in helping us to understand the meanings associated with their chosen images (Pink, 2003). In all 389 photographs were selected and discussed and/or addressed through written narrative by the participants during the first two years of the study. Figures 1 through 5 represent examples of the photographs and accompanying audio and written narratives. The figure titles denote the prompt the photographs were taken in response to.

Figure 4.1 ‘My Physically Active Life (Photo S20)’

‘This is us out at [fast food restaurant] havin a dance off. Don’t go there that often but the odd time we’d go for chips and a bit of air-hockey and dance machine. I’m alright at it, dancing like. Just thinking now that the tracksuit bottoms aren’t looking all that great under the skirt…. That’s Dione next to me. She’s alright too. It’s good when there’s a few of you, but not too many cos then there’s a line then and you’re bored waiting for it’.

(Audio: S20)
‘Well these are the photographs I took of physical activity in my life. I do the washing, the hovering, the babysitting, they’re my sister’s children [pointing at photo M18], the cooking, that’s physical activity isn’t it, cooking?’

(Audio: M15)

‘This is about physical activity facilities near me. That’s my little sister running to the horses. Some of them are a bit wild, off their game like, and they’re chasing each other around the field and some of them are lazy out like. You could knock em over. I don’t really know why I took this one now, we could go walking there and do sport I suppose, but its all rubbish and horseshit, pure lightnin like, and then the crazy horses. So you could but would you want to?’

(Audio: S16)
Figure 4.4 Physical activity in my community: Sport is for Boys (Photo J2)

‘Another photo of physical activity in my community. It’s way easier to get photographs of the boys doing sport around the place cos they just do more sport and soccer specially. They’re syco bout soccer. There’s just more stuff for them. Sport is more for boys’.

(Nar:J2)

Figure 4.5 The things that are important to me (Photo A45)

‘These are the things that are important to me, my music, make-up, my ghd, couldn’t leave the house without it, my mobile. Wanted to put in my mock tan too but the bottle was leakin’

(Audio:A45)
Timelines

The second participatory method used was timelines. Timelines are popular tools of communication for social workers undertaking life-story work with children (Thomas & O’Kane, 1998). Life-story work is said to help children and youth make sense of their past experiences. Qualitative researchers are also often interested in changes over time and hearing how participants make sense of experiences, and have recently come to see the value of timelines as a participatory technique of communication. Deacon (2006) for example, proposes timelines as ‘simple and easy ways to organise [changes over time] and analyse the impact of context on current life’ (p.103). Educational timelines and accompanying narratives supported O’Sullivan, MacPhail and Tannehill’s (2009) effort to understand student teachers’ physical education, physical activity and youth sport histories and the impact of their experience on their decision to become physical education teachers.

It was important for us, considering the aim of our larger study, to understand the context within which our participants’ disengagement from physical education and physical activity had occurred and within which they had seemingly come to devalue physical education and physical activity. We believed also that it was incredibly important for the participants to engage critically with their own physical education and physical activity histories and the story of the groups’ collective disengagement. We therefore asked them to identify on a timeline (either on the template we gave them or a blank page) the critical incidents that had impacted on their engagement with physical education and physical activity, either positively or negatively. We defined critical incidents as incidents that students saw as having important consequences for their relationship with physical education and physical activity. The participants identified these incidents on their timelines using drawings and written text.

We wanted to establish when and why the participants had stepped on and off physical activity pathways and engaged and disengaged with physical education. We believed that answers to these questions would provide insight as to how we might challenge dysfunctional physical education and physical activity practices and support good practice. Again the timelines were discussed in individual and group contexts where the students and adult allies together engaged in dialogue regarding what these participatory research artefacts represented. These conversations were audio recorded and later transcribed. Some of the students also spoke to their timelines through written narrative. In all 35 timelines were discussed and/or addressed through written narrative.
by the participants. Figures 4.6 and 4.7 represent examples of the timelines and accompanying audio and written narratives.

‘Yeah, I used to do basketball and Shelly and Jade used to do it as well but then we all left cos of the coach [John], cos he was always roaring at us for no reason and then we all just quit. And yeah I did dance too with Jade and Debra, don’t’ know why we stopped that, when I think about it, I can only remember it being good fun….and then I got me things, so couldn’t do PE for a while then and you know I wouldn’t’ be feeling great, you know yourself…’

(Audio K:2)

‘I don’t play any sports now but it use’n’t always be like that. I used to play hurling and basketball and I tried disco dancing when I was young but I stopped doing everything over my junior cert [state exam]. My mother said I had to study. So I do nothing now’.

(Nar: N5)
It is important to note that while the photographs and timelines were produced and initially discussed by the participants early on in their engagement with the research process (during the first two months), participants and adult allies together continued to revisit these participatory research artefacts in subsequent conversations and discussions.

**Producing Knowledge Differently**

Considering the purpose of this paper we are less interested in the data constituted by the above timelines, photographs and narratives and more interested in the data that relate to the participants’ perspectives on their engagement with both participatory methods. While there is a tension for us concerning our privileging of verbal data in what we present below, this knowledge was produced differently in that it was participatory methods that allowed us entrée to this layer of participant experience. The recorded participatory discussions were all either focused by participatory artefacts or by participant discussion and questioning related to their engagement with the participatory process.

These data were all generated over the first two years of the study. Most of these data came from audio-recorded discussions of the photographs and timelines during the ‘naming the inequities’ phase of our research (Enright & O’Sullivan, *in press*). Some of the data were however generated in a later phase of the project, when participants were involved in participant-led discussions around the benefits and challenges they associated with being involved in our larger project. Again, in this case, data were collected through digital audio recordings of participant discussions. For the purpose of this paper we only discuss data which relate directly to the use of two participatory visual methods, photovoice and timelines.

The participants interacted with these data on numerous occasions and levels. The data were fed back to the participants repeatedly through the action research cycle and at two different stages Eimear also facilitated interpretation and analysis sessions, where she shared the transcript data that related to the participants’ perspectives on participatory methods. These sessions constituted a space where participants could share in the inductive analysis of the data they had produced about themselves.

**Participants’ Perspectives**

We present the participants’ perspectives on their engagement with participatory methodologies below, organised under six participant generated themes: ‘Cos that’s
what I thought you wanted to hear like’; ‘You can’t shut us up when we get started’; ‘We’re more in charge’; ‘It makes you think’; ‘We can change things, make a difference’ and; ‘It was just good fun’.

‘Cos that’s what I thought you wanted to hear like’

Students have years of learning what constitutes a teacher-pleasing response and in the beginning of our study many of our participants gave us the type of responses that they thought would please us. Most of the participants for example, had over-reported their physical activity participation in participation diaries they kept in the first eight weeks of our project. This misrepresentation only became evident during the photovoice discussions as is illustrated by this exchange between Jade and Eimear:

  Eimear: You didn’t get any pictures for the third prompt, your physically active life?
  Jade: Yeah [laughing]…that’s because I don’t do anything.
  Eimear: You said in your diary that you go swimming and running and…
  Jade: Yeah cos that’s what I thought ye wanted to hear like, for the diary... but in the photographs is what I do, who I am.

Jade had been reporting what she ‘thought [we] wanted to hear’ as opposed to what she was actually doing; quite a patent example of the ‘researcher/teacher/observer effect’. Examples such as this highlight the epistemological benefits of engaging with students using participatory methods. Participatory methods allowed us to access knowledge which students are often unwilling to share through other methods. Written text is privileged in school culture. Taking photographs and creating timelines was perceived as a temporary escape from conventionalised routines of everyday schooling. The students acknowledged that it would be more difficult to ‘tell lies’ (Kelly) through photographs and because the photovoice task was not ‘real homework like essays or writing stuff’ (Debra), they did not feel like they had to tell lies. Photographs therefore became ‘a more transparent representation of the life experiences of participants’ (Dodman, 2003, p. 294), conveying their ‘real flesh and blood life’ (Becker, 2002, p.11). Jade’s example also reminds us of the absolute necessity of triangulation and of spending significant time with our research participants. It took time for us to gain Jade’s trust and for her to feel safe enough to tell us her truth.

‘You can’t shut us up when we get started’

Our second theme is quite closely connected to the first in that it seems to have been inspired by the girls’ increasing trust in our research process. The confidence and
fluency with which the girls shared the photographs they took was a surprise for us initially. It soon became clear however that the girls chatted with ease because they believed they knew all the right answers and there were no wrong answers when it came to the image making tasks.

Eimear: You don’t mind me asking you questions about the photographs you take?
Shelly: Nah. It’s not like you’re examining us on our maths homework or we’re going for an interview for work experience, like we know all the right answers because it’s about us isn’t it, and we took the photographs and nobody knows us better than us.

Shelly positions herself as an expert on her own life. She believes she knows all the right answers because she knows herself better than anyone. This allowed for a more confident engagement in discussion. The girls worked hard to help Eimear contextualize the photographs and enjoyed being in a position where could share their knowledge with her.

‘Well you can’t shut us up when we get started talking about the photographs and who’s in em and what’s in em and you don’t recognize half the places so we’ve to explain everything to you! Remember the sally port [pub] photographs and it’s only a stone’s throw away from your house’.

(Debra)

‘We’re more in charge’

Using participatory methods in the context of our PAR process facilitated the creation of spaces where the girls felt more in charge of the research process, ‘more able to say what they wanted to say’. They felt in charge because they were in charge to a large extent. Their self-made images gave participants something to talk about that they felt belonged to them in a tangible sense because they had made them themselves (Warren, 2005). This ownership and increased control over the research agenda did not go unnoticed.

‘With those [photographs, timelines, students’ own research projects] we’re more in charge. We make the decisions about what we take and make’

(Debra)

‘It’s more our project, we do most of the work, it’s about us, and it’s for us kind of…so we’ll do dance and we’ll take photographs and we’ll do our own projects and we’ll even do writing sometimes and we won’t be moaning cos its ours’

(Jade)
Jade went on to suggest that through image-making ‘We were more able to say what we wanted to say’ (Jade). Jade’s perspective supports Walker’s (1993) contention that the ‘use of photographs in educational research touches on the limitations of language, especially language used for descriptive purposes. In using photographs the potential exists, however elusive the achievement, to find ways of thinking about social life that escapes the traps set by language’ (p.72). Reading the above student comments it would be quite easy to jump to the conclusion that participatory methods are in and of themselves liberating. We will argue later, however, that context is as important as method, and while participatory methods can be used in liberatory ways, they are not inherently liberating (Gallagher, 2008).

‘It makes you think’

The fourth theme highlights the potential of participatory methods to support physical education’s pedagogical purposes. Kincheloe (2007) has asked ‘Why are pedagogical strategies based on the active engagement of students as researchers so blatantly missing in contemporary education reforms?’ (p.747). Our participants’ perspectives add further weight to Kincheloe’s question. There were numerous acknowledgements by the girls that working with images prompted self-reflection and collaborative learning. Image-making gave participants a space to reflect on aspects of their lives that they might not have previously considered.

‘Not the writing about things anyway. No the photographs or the timelines they were good now and we were thinking about them things and we like to talk, you know that by now but writing, that’s a big no, no’

(Shelly)

Deirdre talks here about her engagement with the timeline task:

‘You know when we broke it into primary school and secondary and then we're remembering or trying to remember what we did first on the line. Yeah it was good. Sometimes if you’re just talking and thinking you forget but when you have, you know, to you know, think about primary and secondary on their own, then you remember more of it…. I was keeled over, in total knots like laughing like when Sarah was remembering rugby in primary school and I’d totally forgotten all about [Mike] the monkey, had like disappeared from my brain. Spuds between the ears disappeared’

(Deirdre)

‘Well it was work like because we had to think about it, for each of the lines[prompts], we had to take something and then whatever we wanted. Do you know what I found out, I found out that it’s very hard to get pictures of my family doing any physical activity and do you know why that is? Well it’s because they’re too lazy and the nearest they get to doing anything is watching it on the tele. For instance my father and did you see him, total couch potato himself, in the photo….I rest my case’

(Jade)

The participatory tasks also facilitated the girls in collaborative learning, talking together, sharing meanings and understandings.

‘Like I think I learn better when we’re together talking about things and making stuff. I don’t learn from reading and I definitely don’t learn from Miss [McGrath] for instance keeping on talking the whole time’

(Jade).

‘Sure we talk about everything with you, well most things [laughing]. And we talk about it with each other, chat about our photographs and about what we’re doing in PE next week and about starting our physical activity club and what we need to think about and plan to do for it’

(Kelly)

Thinking in our project was often linked to potential action. Grace’s comment below might be read as a definition of praxis, the synthesis of thought and action, theory and practice (Friere, 1996).

‘It’s what we do with the photographs. We think about them, talk about them and then we do stuff with them. Like for example, the photographs got us thinking that boys do way more sport outside school than girls, Jade’s photographs and some of Kylie’s mostly, and then we started to think about why and how we could change that’

(Grace)

Grace speaks of thought and dialogue orientated to action, to making a difference, which is another of our participant generated themes.

‘We can change things, make a difference’

Our fifth theme relates to the transformative potential of participatory methods, when used within a PAR context. One significant aspect of participatory action research is action/change. The girls and adult allies shared responsibility for change.

‘We learned that we can change things, make a difference. That’s what we learned from them [participatory methods] and then from making
our club. Ye listened to us because of them and that got the ball rolling’

(Dione)

‘They listened to us and we made a club because of it and its rapid’

(Jade)

Our use of participatory methods was orientated to change. They allowed the girls to articulate and make sense of their experience and engage in dialogue around how they could change those things they identified as barriers to their participation. Participatory methods helped participants articulate what they wanted to change. The PAR process facilitated them in considering strategies to change their situation and make the changes they wished to see in their physical education and physical activity worlds.

‘It was just good fun’

The final theme we will speak to and one which we believe is often underrated is that of fun or enjoyment. The success of the method can hinge on the ability to engage students with the process. Photovoice in particular made this easy.

‘Taking the photographs [was good] cos it was free, we didn’t have to pay for the cameras or for getting the photographs and we got to keep them…and it was for homework I think wasn’t it, homework that we actually wanted to do, that does not happen’

(Jade)

‘It [the research] was good. We got to make things and keep things like the photographs’

(Grace)

‘It [the photovoice task] was just good fun. That’s enough to say isn’t it’

(Shelly)

Discussion

St. Pierre and Pillow (2000) remind us that the task of feminist educators is ‘to ask questions that produce different knowledge and produce knowledge differently, thereby producing different ways of living in the world’ (p.1). We argue that this task should not be the preserve of feminist educators but rather a possibility for all educational researchers. We also believe that our questions can never be considered independent of our method, and methods therefore influence how and what knowledge is produced and which ‘ways of living in the world’ we access. Participatory methods do produce different knowledge and are a method of producing knowledge differently.
Our participants and our research clearly benefited from our engagement with participatory methods. Participatory methods allowed us insight into participant lived experience in a way that we know we would struggle with using more conventional methodologies. They brought us closer to the concrete realities of our participants’ lives, to understanding the incredible complexity and diversity of contexts within which our students define their relationships with physical education and physical activity. They supported sense-making, in that the dialogue they promoted required participants to engage critically with what they had photographed, made, drawn, said or written. In these conversations participants examined their beliefs, assumptions and their patterns of behaviour. In telling and hearing each other’s stories of disengagement they came to reassess their lives and their individual and collective relationship with physical education and physical activity. They also came to be critical of the social and curricular contexts in which they were expected to participate in physical education, physical activity and sport. Participatory methods were arguably most effective however to the degree that they actually empowered participants to take responsibility to be ‘the change’ they wished to see in their physical education and physical activity worlds. Our sustained engagement made this possible.

Sustained engagement with participatory methods helped students to develop knowledge, skills, confidence, and understandings that adult allies often struggle to teach students through conventional methodologies. There can be no doubting our participants’ overwhelmingly positive response to the participatory research process. Participatory methods had a positive impact in terms of student honesty, learning, enjoyment, confidence, ownership and empowerment. What we do need to look at however is context. A careful reading of our participants’ feedback reveals the power of context. We used participatory methods within a PAR framework. Our participants’ responses, participation and engagement were orientated to change-agency (Shor, 1992). Our students were facilitated in taking responsibility for rethinking and changing their physical education and physical activity experiences. They knew they had a real opportunity ‘to produce different ways of living in their worlds’ and invested accordingly. They knew we were going to work with them to ‘make a difference’. We were not going to take their data and run. This did have an impact on the participants’ feedback. It is not solely therefore about what methods we use but also in what context we use these methods.

It is also necessary to emphasise that we did not rely solely on the participatory research artefacts (photographs or timelines) as data. We used participatory methods in
conjunction with other ethnographic techniques that is, interviews/discussions and observation. Participatory methods therefore supported and enhanced rather than replaced more traditional data collection methods in our research. Photovoice and timelines worked for us, in our context with our participants but it was a quest for authentic dialogue, rather than a preoccupation with innovative, creative, student-friendly, participatory methods, that led us. Neither the photographs nor the timelines were ever allowed speak for themselves. The images, both photographs and timelines, only became meaningful through the interpretative work of the participants. We worked with the students both individually and collectively to understand ‘what might be outside those photograph frames’ (Piper & Frankham, 2007, p.384), what might lie behind and beyond their timelines that would affect our reading and interpretation of the visual artefacts. The student participants led this interpretation, and through peer-led discussion, participants talked and re-talked themselves and their interpretation of their photographs and timelines, often moving between interpretative positions. It was the students’ reading of their own visual artefacts that gave us the best insight into their lived experiences. There were ethical benefits associated with working in this way with the participants. The ‘reliability, validity and ethical acceptability’ of our work was improved by using methods which facilitated students in shaping the research agenda and were deemed by the students as relevant and interesting methods to engage with their realities (Thomas & O’Kane, 1998, pp.336). Our participants were involved in all stages of our research process, including interpretation/analysis. Our research process and methods ‘reorientated, focused and energised participants towards knowing reality in order to better transform it’ and therefore supported catalytic validity (Lather, 1986).

Despite the above benefits of our process there were still significant ethical concerns for us around the use of photovoice particularly. The nature of the photovoice process requires the consideration of several ethical questions relating to invasion of privacy, subject recruitment, representation, participant and facilitator participation and theme generation (Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001). Adequate induction into the photovoice method as well as stressing the importance of the use of photo release consent forms for the subjects of all photographs is imperative when undertaking this type of research with young people (Strack, McGill & McDonagh, 2004). We had tough choices to make at certain points regarding what questions we could and should ask about certain photographs, particularly as they related to family situations, and which photographs we should and could consider for group discussion. There was sometimes tension between the photographs the participants deemed appropriate for sharing, and
those we thought appropriate for the group to discuss. There was one incident in which one participant unproblematically presented a photograph of what was clearly a very drunk relative dancing. This photograph was taken in response to the prompt ‘physical activity in the lives of my family and friends’. Eimear suggested to the participant photographer that perhaps the subject of the photograph might not appreciate it being made available to the class for discussion. The participant responded that this was a very accurate portrayal of physical activity in the life of her relative in that ‘The only time she does any physical activity is when she’s drunk dancing’ and if she was happy to share it, then why should it matter? We made the decision not to share this photograph with the group. While we were eager to promote and facilitate the active engagement of student participants in shaping the research agenda, we were equally committed to upholding our own professional and ethical values.

A final ethical concern related to the dangers of voyeurism. There were photographs in which the subjects were clearly unaware of being observed and photographed, and as such they may be seen as voyeuristic. In many of these cases the participants did not know the subjects and did not ask them to sign photo release forms. A related issue was Eimear’s uneasiness viewing the photographs without the participant photographers there to interpret and make meaning of the images. Without the participants Eimear could not relate directly with the subject/s of the photographs and therefore perceived this also as a voyeuristic activity.

**Conclusion**

It seems reasonable to assume that physical education researchers will continue to draw on participatory methods to engage young people in the process of producing new knowledge. They will also, considering the trends in other disciplines, increasingly draw on visual methods: drawing; photo-elicitation; student photography; photovoice and video and hypermedia in their efforts to understand young people’s experiences of sport, physical activity and physical education. Participatory methods are creative tools, which when used ethically can facilitate participants in producing rich, multi-layered data and bring participants and researchers closer to critical engagement with participants’ lived experiences. This reciprocal relationship can simultaneously support high quality physical education research and physical education’s pedagogical purposes. Rethinking how knowledge is produced and what role our participants play in the production, interpretation and dissemination of this knowledge could be methodologically beneficial for physical education researchers. What might physical
education research and practice come to look like if more researchers viewed their responsibility not just as the generation of knowledge, but also as helping participants produce knowledge about themselves?

Recently we presented a photography workshop (Enright, Barnes & O’Sullivan, 2009) at a research conference. In attendance were practicing physical education teachers (some with nearly thirty years teaching experience, some had just graduated), physical activity and health promotional professionals and physical education teacher educators and researchers from several countries. Inspired by a previous experience (Oliver, Bustle, Azzaritto & Enright, 2009), we facilitated participants in engaging with the potential of photography as both a pedagogical tool and a research methodology. In small groups the participants went out around the university campus and took photographs that best represented their understandings, ideas and beliefs around physical activity and health. In some ways this experience was quite similar to what we have found with the students we worked with. Wherever we have used participatory methods and particularly image based work to understand lived experiences we have found some commonalities: we can never truly predict the layers, depth, breath and nature of knowledges that will be shared; participatory methods are powerful tools for encouraging participation and self-evaluation; and of course using participatory methods has always been fun!

References


CHAPTER 5

Understanding the girls’ disengagement from physical education and physical activity

'The engaged voice must never be fixed and absolute but always changing, always evolving in dialogue with a world beyond itself.'
(bell hooks, 1994, p. 11)

Introduction

What something means to individuals is dependent on the discourses available to them (Richardson, 2004). Kincheloe (2007) provides a concise, yet embracing definition of discourse, one which is a useful starting point for a chapter which holds as its focus to understand the multiple, fragmented, and often contradictory subjectivities of Grace, Jade, Kelly, Shelly and Debra.

A discourse is defined as a constellation of hidden historical rules that govern what can be and what cannot be said and who can speak and who must listen. Discursive practices are present in technical processes, institutions, modes of behaviour, and, of course, disciplines of knowledge. Discourses shape how we operate in the world as human agents, how we construct our consciousness, and what we consider true (Kincheloe, 2007 p.759)

This chapter will identify the multiple and often competing discourses within which these five working class, white, Irish, adolescent girls constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed their subjectivities and acted as both the sites and subjects of discursive struggles for identity. These five students, while not selected as representative, did demonstrate quite different social positions within the class and also included the most (Deborah and Kelly) and the least (Grace) vocal students in the class. Their stories also reflect the many and varied stories of the girls that I found at the school in the first weeks and months of this study. The specific question addressed through this chapter is research question two, what were the girls’ attitudes towards and perceptions of their involvement in physical education and physical activity at the beginning of the PAR process?

Discourses are always historically located (Parker, 1992) and as the larger study involved the girls in the design, implementation and evaluation of co-constructed curricula, in what it was hoped would constitute a ‘pedagogy of transformation’, it was possible to track how and why some of the discourses, which some of these girls drew
on, changed over time and how new discourses emerged. In order to track changes and identify emergent discourses it is necessary to provide insight into the girls’ patterns of engagement with and attitudes towards physical activity and physical education when I began my work with them. Profiles of five of these girls are therefore presented below followed by a commentary on the discourses which evidently had the greatest impact on these girls’ engagement.

The Students

Kelly
Kelly is 16 and the youngest of 12 children. She has eight sisters and three brothers, all of whom she sees often. Kelly’s mother is a settled Traveller although Kelly says her Mam and Dad ‘still do a good bit of travelling like, they’d go away a lot visiting people, you know’. Kelly lives in a flat with her Mam, her Dad, her 18 year old sister Shelly and Shelly’s baby Lily. When Kelly was younger ‘[she] went away in the caravan with [her] cousins in the summer but not anymore since some of [her] cousins were locked up for stuff’. As most of her brothers and sisters have babies of their own she says she’s ‘well sick of babysitting at this stage’, and sometimes she feels like babysitting is all she does, other than hanging around the flats or the estate. Kelly writes of herself ‘I am the least patient person I know. I get angry when other people are slow or annoying me and I’ve a very bad temper and roar a lot’. Kelly says her ‘friends think [she’s] good fun, happy, hyper and a good friend who would stick up for them’.

Jade
Jade is 16 years old and the oldest in her family. She has three brothers and a sister which she writes ‘means there’s a lot of babysitting’. She lives with her Mam, Dad, brothers and sister in a flat across the road from Kelly. Jades’ Mam and Dad have been together for nearly twenty years but ‘didn’t get a chance to get married until this year, and they’ve planned the wedding for September and [she’s] more excited about the wedding than anything ever in [her] life’. Jade loves watching TV especially ‘The OC and Home and Away…and [she loves] every kind of music, jazz, hip hop, R&B…and Bebo as well, love that’. She describes herself as ‘easy going, funny, always happy, a good listener and caring’.
Debra

Debra is 16 and lives with her Dad and two brothers, one of whom is her twin and the other who is 30 years old and severely disabled. She also has three sisters and two brothers who have their own ‘places’. She says she is ‘the real baby’ of the house because her twin is five minutes older than her and she is the only girl left at home. Debra’s Mam left when she was seven and Debra does not talk to her now. Debra’s free time is spent either babysitting for one of her sisters or with her boyfriend Trevor. She says herself and Trevor are ‘like chewing gum, stuck together’. She ‘absolutely love[s] going on Bebo and talking to [her] friends’ and dislikes being ‘stuck at home doing nothing’. She likes ‘listening to sad songs like by Celine Dion, Garth Brooks and Kenny Rogers’ but also likes dance music. She describes herself as ‘kind, caring, energetic, fun and loving’.

Grace

Grace is 16 years old and an only child. She lives with her mother who works as a cleaner. She does not see her Dad very often. Grace spends most of her time after school with her boyfriend, who’s ‘20 and has his own job and his own place’. Grace loves playboy bunny merchandise and spends ‘[her] money on playboy jewellery and tops and all’. When Grace was asked to describe herself she wrote ‘I don’t hang with mad people who call me names. I don’t watch television and I don’t read. I like music like dance music and I love babies and cleaning. Cleaning is like a hobby for me. I think that I’m quiet, sound, nice, caring and kind’.

Shelly

Shelly is 16 and the oldest in her family. She describes her family as her mother, and her three sisters. Shelly’s favourite thing in the world is music. She loves ‘all chart music, like Shakira, Rihanna, Celine Dion and Faith Evans’. She also likes to ‘read true stories in the magazines like Take a Break, Chat and Hello’. Shelly has just began ‘seeing [her] first boyfriend’. Now she says she ‘sees him the whole time, don’t do anything else really just hang around with him’. Shelly thinks her friends would describe her as ‘a mad laugh, funny, a good personality and kind’. Shelly describes herself as ‘mad, kind, loving, careable and have a heart of gold’. Shelly and Grace are first cousins.
Methods

The data for this chapter was primarily generated through the participatory methods spoken to in chapter four, that is, photovoice and timelines. The five girls’ photographs and timelines were discussed in individual and group contexts where together Róisín, the girls and I engaged in dialogue regarding what these participatory research artefacts represented. These conversations were audio recorded and later transcribed. Some of the participants also spoke to their photographs and timelines through written narrative. The participatory artefacts were therefore used as an aid to narrative (Moss et al, 2007) and participants were always involved in helping us to understand the meanings associated with them. A second source of data for this chapter was the students’ response to and discussion around a task I gave them relating to their perceptions of the purpose of physical education and physical activity. Students first responded in their task book to two questions; what is the purpose of physical education; and what is the purpose of physical activity? They then broke into small groups to discuss their perceptions. The small groups reported these perceptions back through posters which were created using visual and written text. The third and final data sources for this chapter were my field notes. In the first weeks and months of this study, the notes I kept were more oriented towards research question two, that is, what were the students’ perceptions of their involvement in physical education and physical activity at the beginning of the PAR process?

Findings

Understanding the girls’ perceptions of their involvement in physical education and physical activity at the beginning of the PAR process was not a clean or easy enterprise. Perceptions just like their identities are ‘precarious, contradictory and in process’ (Weedon, in Weiler, 1991, p. 467). What I seek to do here is work to come a little closer to understanding the girls’ relationships with physical education and physical activity, and appreciating how their disengagement came about. In order to contextualise the findings for this chapter, it is important to note that contrary to recent research in the Irish context which suggests that extra-curricular sport in schools and sport outside school involves students in physical activity more frequently than physical education (Fahey et al, 2005), at the beginning of this study the only significant source of physical activity for these five girls was provided through their physical education classes. Also noteworthy is the fact that from the outset, these girls’ physical education teacher had
identified their collective disengagement from physical education as problematic. The attitudes and perceptions presented below are therefore within a context of non-participation and disengagement.

Discussion of the girls’ physical activity timeline tasks and photographs was particularly revealing in relation to how each of the girls had come to lead these physically inactive lives. The stories the girls told revealed six sometimes connecting, sometimes competing discourses on which the girls drew to make meaning of their relationships with physical education and physical activity: bodily discourses; gendered discourses; classed discourses; discourses of disconnection; discourses of purpose; and discourses of power.

**Bodily discourses**

As the girls ‘grew up’ it seemed that an ever increasing number of factors were conspiring against their active involvement in physical activity participation. One of the most fraught of these was the tension that arose between the girls’ desire to attain ‘hot bodies’ because ‘boys like skinny girls’ (Shelly) and awareness that in order to do so, they may need to engage in certain forms of physical activity which required them to display their bodies. This tension was more troubled for Shelly, Kelly, and Grace who evidently possessed more complex negative relationships with their bodies.

Shelly, when talking about why she attended a gym session explained, ‘I thought my thighs were very fat, I thought it would help me’. In a later conversation Shelly shared that what she thought going to the gym would ‘help’ her to do was to lose weight and therefore get a boyfriend. This rationale, juxtaposed with that provided for why she stopped swimming, clearly reveals the tensions she experienced in negotiating a physically active life. She cites an awareness of ‘the male gaze’ as one of the primary factors influencing her decision to stop swimming, ‘Well I used to like it but then…who’d be there and see you, what feens [boy] you know…’ (Shelly) The ‘male gaze’ is therefore at once motivating and prohibiting her from engaging in physical activity.

Piecing together snippets from conversations with Kelly gives some indication of the investment in, the contradictions with, and meaning she attaches to her body.

‘I’m one of the tallest girls in my class and I have long blond hair, well it’s dyed like but its blonde anyway. I have to spend about 15 or 20 minutes putting on my make up in the morning, every morning. I got gel nails done the other day, cost €12 but I think they’re worth it. I wear mock tan most of the time. You can get the tan wipes for €2 in
Penney’s…. I love my jewellery: hoops, chains, rings and all and they’re all gold. I’d feel naked without them… I absolutely hate getting my photo taken because I never like myself in photos. That’s why I hate the new gym room in school cos there’s mirrors all around the place and all you’re doing is looking at yourself like, that’s pure stupid’.

Apart from the mirrors in the gym, one of the ‘most annoying things about PE’ for Kelly was that it undid much of the effort she had invested in doing her make-up that morning ‘It wrecks my face, like the make-up goes and I’m big red spot head’. Kelly admitted that her beauty regime is ‘mostly for the fellas, they like girls lookin good’. When Eimear suggested to Shelly that there were no boys in her PE class or in the school and perhaps she didn’t need to worry about her make-up on PE days, she was corrected ‘listen miss, there might be no boys here but there’s boys on the way here and boys on the way home, especially like well have you seen the gang of fellas outside the gate after school, and you tellin me it don’t matter, right’. Interestingly however in the conversation where Shelly shared her belief that she needed to lose weight to get a boyfriend, Kelly visibly became angry and agitated and repeated to Shelly twice ‘never put yourself down for a fella, never put yourself down for a fella’. Again tensions arise between Kelly’s engagement in a rather time-consuming beauty regime, which she acknowledges is ‘mostly for the fellas’ and her advice to Shelly, which implies that girls should never allow boys to make them feel bad about themselves.

A series of Kelly’s photographs which were taken in response to the prompt ‘the things that are important to me’ included her new belly button bar.

Got it done a while ago but this is a new jewel like. Boys think it’s hot but it was real sore gettin it done… I said I’d take this photo cos my body is important to me, keeping a flat tummy like and making it look good is important to me (Kelly).
Discussions about the body always seemed to be brought back by the girls to the ability of their bodies to attract boyfriends.

Kelly - Boys go to the gym to tone muscle, girls go to the gym to lose weight or tone muscle
Eimear – Why don’t boys go to the gym to lose weight?
Shelly – Because they don’t need to lose weight
Jade – Excuse me, some boys do and for instance Jack Osborne did you ever see him like, exactly that is my point, I rest my case (laughing).
Jade – Girls think they have to be skinny because in the magazines of the press, they…what’s the word I’m looking for I forget the word now…
Shelly – Boys like skinny girls
Debra – and girls don’t like being fat
Jade – no they do like being fat but it’s because magazines are criticising them and are making them think bad about themselves
Debra – Boys like skinny girls
Jade – So we need to lose weight, tone muscle and look good for the aul feens
Eimear – feen?
Kelly – a feen is a fine thing, a good looking fella like and a boor is a good looking girl

This conversation reveals two popular reasons cited by these girls for the preoccupation of girls generally with thinness: the power of the media in shaping their behaviour and the boys’ perceived preferences for ‘skinny’ girls. Tracking Jade’s commentary reveals a significant irony: her insistence that Jack Osborne needs to lose weight, which is based on her knowledge of him through the media, sits uneasily next to her strong criticism of the media for making girls who ‘like being fat’ ‘think bad about themselves’. Also interesting is the repetition of the same phrase by both Shelly and Debra ‘boys like skinny girls’ and ultimately Jade’s adoption of this rationale when providing a summary statement for why girls think they need to be skinny.

Interestingly Shelly, Kelly and Grace were also three of the many girls who took photographs of their bathrooms in response to the prompt ‘where I spend my leisure time’.
My bathroom… Spend a lot of time doing my make up in the morning in here and me Mam and me sisters specially would be fit to kill me.

(Shelly)

Debra was by far the most confident of the girls in relation to her body, ‘I like my body. Trevor thinks I’m hot, but I think it looks good as well if you do exercise and keep fit’. While the affirmation of Trevor, her boyfriend, did seem important to her, Debra highlighted that she also felt that it was important to look good. An incident, which further illustrates Debra’s bodily confidence and also her appreciation of the ability of her body to please others, occurred during a hip-hop lesson on my third day with the girls.

There was a window cleaner cleaning the windows of the gym today. The girls were in groups composing and practicing their own hip hop routines and I was moving around between groups when I saw Debra pretending to strip and dance for him. I asked her to stop and concentrate on the routine she was making with her group and she did, after explaining that all she was doing was ‘making a sad man happy’.

(Field notes)

While for the most part, the class group got on well and were respectful and supportive of each other, one isolated incidence of bullying was revealing. The following incident as described in my field notes did not involve any of the five co-researchers directly however they were complicit through their laughter.
Sandra came to me at the beginning of class today and told me she couldn’t find one of her runners. Justine then told Kylie to ‘cop on’ and give it back and Kylie did saying she was only messing. Two lines exchanged between Sandra and Kylie at this point have remained in my head:

Sandra: You’re just a bloody lesbian Kylie and we all know it…
Kylie: We all know I’m not, but we all know you’re fat.

(Fieldnotes)

These labels, being fat or being a lesbian, were seemingly two of the worst labels that these girls could be called, revealing how not only are the girls pressured by the media as to what is acceptable female behaviour, and their perceptions of what boys like and want but they also perpetuate their own oppression by pressurising each other to conform to an ‘acceptable’ body image and sexuality.

Gendered Discourses

All of the girls perceived that there were more opportunities in the locality for boys to be active, than for girls. The photovoice task seemed to confirm this perception, as many of the girls commented on how much easier it was to get photographs of boys being physically active.

Figure 5.3 Physical activity in my community: Sport is for Boys (Photo J8)

‘That’s [Mary’s] brother kicking ball in the alley on the island. I’m the same as Jade, all boys doing the sport in the photos. There just weren’t no girls doing anything outside’
Jade was particularly aware of differential access to physical activity. The following two excerpts from Jade’s discussion of her photographs highlight two physical activity facilities she identified in her local community, which she felt she could not access. This first excerpt clearly highlights the power of visual media in promoting and reinforcing dominant gender stereotyped discourses of gyms as male spaces.

Eimear– Is that the gym that [Kelly] is doing research on?
Jade – No, that’s by [Mike’s shop].
Eimear – Did you ever go to this gym?
Jade – No, course not, it’s only for men
Eimear – So no girls are allowed.
Jade – Yeah
Eimear – How did you know it was only for men?
Jade – It was on the window, on the other side, not in the photo like but there are only pictures of men on it.

Jade also shared her disappointment at not being able to attend a local boxing club because it was ‘only for boys’.

Eimear – What else did you take?
Jade – I took [Joe’s boxing club]. I’ll actually give that to [Debra] for her project if she wants it.
Eimear – That’s a really good idea. Did you ever go to [Joe’s boxing club]?
Jade – No, I wanted to but it’s only for boys.
Eimear– Are there physical activity facilities that are only for girls?
Jade – No.

Jade did not actively try to join the boxing club because she perceived it to be ‘only for boys’, also possibly because on the one occasion when she had been assertive and tried to get involved in another stereotypically male activity, that is soccer, she was rebuffed.

‘For instance girls can’t play soccer because I went down to the boys’ club to join and they wouldn’t leave me and they told me the only girls’ team is out the country somewhere so I wasn’t joining, so boys do way more sport outside of school because they’re boys and boys get to do everything’.

Jade had learned ‘girls can’t play soccer’, that boxing ‘is only for boys’ and that ‘boys get to do everything’. While she clearly was not happy about it, she seemed to have learned to accept that boys have more opportunities to be active, simply ‘because they’re boys’.

When Grace came to share her photographs it became obvious that they had been jointly produced by her and her boyfriend and that many were not accurate reflections of Grace’s ‘physically active life’. Grace acknowledged that this was the
case revealing, ‘the truth is that I do nothing’. Some of Grace’s photographs were of her in various gymnastics positions and some were of Grace’s boyfriend Dan playing soccer. Grace said she had wanted to take some of herself kicking the ball around but Dan said she should ‘leave soccer to the fellas because they know what we’re doing’ and ‘gymnastics was more for girls anyway’. Grace agreed saying: ‘Dan was right, so we took some of me doing bridges and all and some of Dan with the ball’. Dan not only reminded Grace of the gendered appropriateness of certain sports but also implied that soccer was too difficult a game for girls who wouldn’t really know what they were doing.

All of the girls believed the boys they knew liked physical education more than girls. They cited a number of reasons why this was the case:

- Debra - Boys are very immature, boys like children’s games like soccer like with Trevor he’s never out on a Friday because that’s PE day.
- Eimear – So why do boys like PE?
- Debra – They’re boys
- Jade – They like doing stupid stuff and because there’s more jobs for boys doing physical education in fitness and stuff
- Debra – It’s way easier for boys like Trevor, me and Trevor went to the gym and did the same stuff and I was pure dying like and he was grand.
- Shelly – he’s more fitter than you. It’s way easier for boys.

Debra makes a number of suggestions for why boys like physical education, firstly physical education is basically ‘children’s games’ and as ‘boys are very immature’ they like them, secondly because they are boys, and thirdly ‘it’s way easier for boys’. Shelly also supports this last rationale. Jade agrees that boys ‘like doing stupid stuff’ but also contends ‘there are more jobs for boys doing physical education in fitness and stuff’. It is interesting that yet again Jade brings the conversation back to equality of opportunity.

**Classed Discourses**

Class was integral to the girls’ subjectivities. While rarely explicitly spoken of, the girls’ experience of class existed in connotations and was recognisable in the range of ways the girls made judgements on themselves. A clear example of this emerged quite early on in the study during a conversation with Kelly.

   Kelly - So that’s recording everything we say?
   Eimear - Yeah it is.
   Kelly - Can I hear myself talking on it?
   I turn off Dictaphone and play back for Kelly to hear us
   Then turn back on.
   Eimear - Ok, so if at any time you want me to turn it...
   Kelly - Do you hear the way you talk and do you hear how I talk
Kelly was measuring her accent against mine and making judgements on herself based on my accent and how I spoke. Another example of measuring themselves against others, where class was implicated, related to the nicknames given to the girls’ school. St. Mary’s was according to the girls often referred to as ‘The Pregnant Nation’, owing to the perceived high pregnancy rate amongst its predominantly working class student population. The local middle class girls’ school, which was located on a hill, was called ‘Pill Hill’, the implication being, the girls informed me, that students there could afford to be on contraceptives, and that was the reason there were not as many incidences of teenage pregnancy.

There were many other observable incidents that appeared to be class related. The girls knew the cost of everything, often gave out about having to pay for things ‘If we have to pay for any of this stuff, then I’m not doing it’ (Kelly), and on occasion cited money as the reason they did not have their tracksuits, or appropriate footwear for physical education: ‘I don’t have my tracksuit because my mother didn’t have the money for it this week and all the navy ones are gone from Penney’s anyway’ (Shelly). Money was also cited as a barrier to participation to certain types of physical activity provision, most notably access to gyms. ‘The gyms now, they can be very expensive, like €5 for one go on the machines’ (Shelly).

There was also an appreciation that it was not only economic barriers that prevented the girls accessing these facilities, ‘Like that new gym over by the hill, they wouldn’t want our money anyway, they want older people and professionals’ (Grace). On one trip to the university, Grace also acknowledged ‘this is probably the first and last time I’ll be in a university, people like me don’t go here, we do PLCs’ . Grace’s comments highlight her awareness of her youth and educational status as barriers to private gyms and universities. These were spaces where the girls felt they did not belong. Here, class was experienced by the girls as exclusion.

Also revealing was the girls’ perspectives on their futures. They talked quite often about marriage and having children. During a conversation, in which the girls were commenting on the wedding dress a celebrity had recently been photographed in, Kelly offered ‘I’m never getting married; you lose your book when you get married’. The ‘book’ Kelly later clarified for me was unemployment benefit, highlighting how unemployment was a real possibility in her imagined future.
Discourses of disconnection

For these girls traditional physical education bore little relevance to their lifestyle contexts. It emerged clearly that the girls felt they were offered activities in physical education which they had no interest in, as articulated by Kelly:

‘…as if we’d ever do Irish dancing or rugby again outside of school and that was all our PE since I was five or six, like in babies until sixth class’

or physical education experiences from which they could not see participation pathways:

‘We did swimming lessons and I liked them but then once they stopped, that was it. And we did Irish dancing lessons and then they stopped so that was the end of that too.’

(Grace)

On further questioning Grace revealed there was never explicit links made for the girls with outside physical activity providers and ‘sure how would we know where to go and times and the money and all to do it and there’s no way we’d do it on our own, are you mad like, we’d need like a gang of us to be going’. The idea of needing to be in a group, and the security provided by collective action is something which emerges quite frequently through the data in relation to both stepping on and off physical activity pathways. Also very evident in Grace’s response is a dependence on school structures and personnel in creating connections between school physical education experiences and activities in the community.

All of the girls were critical to some extent regarding the choice of activities offered to them through their physical education curriculum. While some just wanted a little more variety, others rejected all of the activities they had experienced in physical education, ‘for three years all we’ve ever done is basketball, rugby-rounders or soccer and that’s it, stupid and boring madness’ (Kelly).

This is not surprising considering that the nature of the activities they were offered through their post primary physical education experiences were incredibly consistent. Their physical education curriculum had mirrored the traditional multi-activity sport model, privileging competitive team sport over all other forms of physical activity. Significantly, when the girls had led physically active lives in the past, the activities the girls chose to participate in themselves tended to be non-competitive, individual activities, for example, gymnastics, dance (‘hip hop’, ‘disco’ and ‘freestyle’), walking and going to the gym. All of the girls had, however, also stopped participating
in these activities, for many and varied reasons. For Jade for example, it was the individual performance and increasingly competitive nature of dance that began to turn her off activity:

‘She made us dance on our own in front of people… and if you didn’t want to do the competitions then you had to just dance the same routine for six months’

Jade’s dance teacher did not recognize or provide for those who were interested in dancing recreationally as opposed to competitively. The coach/teacher is again identified as the problem in Kelly’s account:

‘Yeah, I used to do basketball and Shelly and Jade used to do it as well but then we all left cos of the coach [John], cos he was always roaring at us for no reason and then we all just quit’.

It is quite ironic to note that Kelly identifies the coach ‘always roaring’ as one of the reasons she quit basketball. Yet, in an earlier conversation with Kelly, she identified having a very bad temper and roaring a lot as two of her own vices. Ironies such as this pervade these data.

One of the most revealing conversations relating to the girls’ descriptions of their involvement in physical activity when they were younger focussed on their participation in gymnastics. Jade’s mother had taught gymnastics in the past and Kelly, Jade and Debra had been regular attendees at her classes. The girls really struggled to pinpoint any critical incident that had prompted them to stop attending these classes and did not remember consciously deciding to stop doing gymnastics. In fact Kelly said ‘when I think about it, I can only remember it being good fun’. Debra however seemed to capture a sentiment shared by the three ‘we just kind of grew up and out of it…’

Inherent in this statement is an appreciation of shifting identities, and of the girls’ individual agency. Gymnastics as it had been constructed had fit with the girls’ identity constructions for a while but failed to move with the girls as they reconstructed their identities in line with new priorities, new ways of being and so the girls exercised their agency collectively and ‘all stopped at the same time’ (Debra).

**Discourses of Purpose**

In my first few weeks of working with the girls it became clear that physical education was not regarded as a legitimate learning space within school. The general agreement of the class was that it was a ‘break from learning’ (Debra) and ‘we don’t do work in
physical education’. ‘Work’ was a word which the girls often used interchangeably with ‘learning’. The girls struggled to articulate purposes for physical education, describing it as ‘just something that gets us out of the classroom’ (Shelly) and ‘the purpose of physical education is to do exercise instead of sitting all day’. The only clear purpose to emerge was a social purpose. For Grace physical education was about ‘getting to chat and have a laugh with friends’, Jade described it as ‘fun, fun, fun’ and ‘to spend time with our friends’. Kelly noted ‘we communicate more in PE than in any other subject’. Clearly the girls valued this aspect of their physical education time, however much of this chatting, communication and ‘havin a laugh with the girls’ occurred outside of a structured learning context, as is illustrated by Debra, ‘some days we get to just sit out and chat and that’s all we do for PE’ (Debra). The girls made no reference to cognitive or psychomotor objectives for physical education although one reference to physical education teaching them to be ‘fit and healthy’ was made: ‘I think we do PE to be fit and healthy and spend time with our friends’ (Grace). Tagged onto this comment was the purpose that seemed the most important for all the girls, that is to ‘spend time with friends’.

Standing in stark contrast to the girls’ views on the purposes of physical education are their perceptions of the purposes of physical activity. Debra noted the purpose of physical activity was ‘…work for your body’ (Debra). Shelly thought it was ‘to put in a lot of effort to get your body in shape’. The girls’ preoccupation with body image dominated this conversation: Grace contended ‘It’d give you a 6 pak if you did a lot of it’; Kelly highlighted that she thought the purposes of physical activity were different for boys and girls ‘for girls it’s to lose weight, for boys it’s to tone muscel’; and Shelly noted it was ‘to make your body a different shape like if you’re a pear and you don’t want to be’ (Shelly). The importance the girls placed on how boys perceived their bodies as in ‘to look good for the fellas’ (Jade) also emerged strongly. In general the girls felt that physical activity was a means to an end and saw it as a weight control mechanism as is illustrated by one of Kelly’s other listed purposes: ‘To lose weight after Christmas’ (Kelly) and that of Jade ‘so that you don’t get fat or if you are fat to make you skinnier and that’s important because you might get sicker and not be as healthy if you’re fatter and you might get bullied’. Inherent in Jade’s comment is an appreciation that physical activity is good for your physical health and also an awareness of the ‘bullying'/alienation of ‘fat’ girls.

Interesting also is that the word ‘learning’ appeared twice in the discussion of the purposes of physical activity. The girls talked about ‘learning how to use the
machines in the gym’ (Shelly), and ‘learning what kind of exercise makes you lose weight and what makes you big’. This ‘learning’ was on both occasions linked to the ultimate purpose which was ‘to make their bodies good looking’ (Grace). Jade and Debra did deviate somewhat from the general trend in two of the purposes they noted ‘It can make lots of your body better like your weight and your skin and your heart’ (Jade) and ‘It’d make you feel better about yourself doing it and then having a nicer body as well’ (Debra). Again body image is alluded to in both of these quotations; however Jade also demonstrates her awareness that physical activity has health benefits and Debra acknowledges that participation in physical activity might ‘make you feel better about yourself doing it’. Noticeably absent in the listed purposes of physical activity was the word ‘fun’ or any indication that physical activity might be engaged in for enjoyment, or for it’s own sake. The emphasis rather was clearly on weight loss and most of the purposes cited revolved around the girls’ desire to ‘be skinnier’ (Shelly), ‘fit into size 6’ (Grace) ultimately, ‘to lose weight’ (Kelly). However there were other purposes mentioned, for example ‘If you want a really good strong shower you might do physical activity to use the ones in the swimming pool or the gym’ (Jade) and ‘To make the gyms lots of money’ (Kelly).

**Discourses of Power**

The girls evidently did not construct physical education as a legitimate learning environment. Neither was it an arena within which they felt they possessed much power. The girls were acutely aware of the difference in power and status between themselves and teachers in school. One of the purposes of physical education cited by Jade illustrates this point: ‘It teaches you to listen and take instructions and then run around in circles’ (Jade). There was no evidence from the data that in physical education or indeed in school generally the girls felt their autonomy was respected. In fact all of the girls were very critical of hierarchical and institutional power embodied by teachers and principals, ‘the teachers make all the decisions and the principal and they never listen to us’ (Kelly).

The girls constructed school as an unnecessary imposition of power and control, highlighting the schools commitment to the enforcement of ‘stupid rules’ over a commitment to student learning. As a group they listed with ease all the decisions they felt were made for them by others in school.

- Time we have to get up in the morning
- How long we spend in school
How long the shop is opened for
And what the shops sells and what we get for our lunch
What subjects we do
What we have to wear
What books we have to read
Where we get to go…trips and things
What homework we have
What tests we have
What we have to learn and how
That we have to sit down and just write and read all day
Holidays
No boys allowed
When we get detention and for what
That we can’t wear tackies and we have to have navy coats
That we can’t go into the staff room but that teachers can come into our own class room
When we’re allowed outside and not
When we’re allowed to talk to each other and not
That we’re not allowed to smoke or drink
When we can go to the toilet
When we can drink water
What tattoos and piercings are allowed
How we talk

And specifically in physical education:
  What games we do
  Where we do them
  What we can wear
  How long we do things for
  But mostly what, when, where and why we **can’t** do things.

While the physical education list was a significantly shorter list than that of decisions made for them in school generally, the discussion of these decisions quickly became dominated by the girls’ assertion that more decisions are made in physical education about what they cannot do than about what they can. The only decisions the girls
perceived they made in physical education were about when: ‘to participate’ (Debra), ‘put in effort and try or to mooch’ (Kelly) and ‘to bring in gear or not’ (Shelly). Basically the girls felt that the only way their autonomy was recognised in physical education was when they exercised their choice to participate or the degree of effort they chose to invest in the class if they did participate in physical education.

The girls were particularly critical of their teachers with regard to their lack of support for student autonomy, and the rationale they perceived underpinned much of what occurred in the name of physical education:

Eimear - What about PE, do you feel you’re listened to in PE
Kelly - No way, we just do whatever is easiest, like whatever whatever teacher thinks is easier to do with us and all they want to do is try to stop us annoying them, like keep us quiet, or no really in PE it’s more to keep us doing something, looking like we’re doing something, in other subjects it’s more keeping us quiet, do you know.

Not only did they feel they weren’t listened to, they also thought their teachers only delivered what was ‘easiest’ and their main purpose was to keep the girls busy and ‘doing something’ so that the girls would ‘stop annoying them’. A differentiation was made between other subjects, where keeping the students quiet was prioritised, and physical education where keeping the students ‘doing something’, presumably being active, was prioritised. Again the girls alluded to a disconnect between the preferences of the students and those of the teachers:

‘Yeah like cos they only want us to do what they want us to do, and not what we want to do and they don’t really care what we want to do but if they did we might do something for them and not be dossing the whole time’

(Shelly).

Shelly highlights how she believed learning was organised in terms of adult priorities, adults who ‘don’t really care about what [the students] want to do’, adults who have no empathy with the girls. Jade provides further support for Shelly’s assertion:

‘They don’t respect us and they’re always wanting us to give them some, like for instance queuing in the shop and all, or them roaring at us for things we don’t even do and when we roar that’s the end of it, no they don’t listen to us, they just listen to themselves and they don’t care so long as we’re not causing them hassle’

(Jade).

The data were replete with contradictions regarding the students’ relationships with their teachers. Jade’s comments reveal two of many contradictions which the girls articulated, the expectation that respect be given to teachers versus an acknowledgement
that the students themselves do not feel respected, and the notion that students need to listen and be quiet in class versus the perception that teachers ‘just listen to themselves’.

The dichotomy of us and them was infused throughout the entire data set and is evidenced quite clearly in the following exchange:

Debra - How much money does a teacher get for a year teaching?
Eimear - I’m actually not sure at all, I think at the start when you just start teaching you get about 20,000 or more probably and then as you get more experience and get different roles of responsibility within the school you get paid more, so if you work your way up and became a principal I think It’s about 70,000 maybe, but I’m only guessing.
Jade - So we do all the work and they get all that money.
Debra - Yeah and then the money goes to their heads and they think they’re the bosses of us then when we should be their bosses because they’re supposed to be here for us (everyone laughing)
Kelly - yeah and we should get the money and all. Like in Youthreach to go to school they get money

The idea of the teachers as the ‘bosses’ and students as ‘workers’ was problematised by Debra who thought that roles should be reversed and teachers should acknowledge students as the bosses. Kelly was quite aware that some students are provided with financial incentives to remain on educational pathways as in the Department of Education’s Youthreach programme which provides an education and training allowance for participants.

Kelly summarised a discussion of power and listening in physical education quite succinctly suggesting: ‘Yeah, they never listen to us so we have to roar’. In other subjects these girls’ resistance took the form of chatting or passively disengaging from their work ‘in other classes we just sit down and be quiet and listen and it’s better and easier’ (Jade). Resisting teacher authority in physical education was perceived as much more difficult than resisting teacher authority in other classes as resistance was manifested in more obvious and more immediately problematic ways for both the students and teachers due to the practical and performance orientated nature of the subject. The equivalent of ‘Roaring’ in a classroom lesson often ultimately came to mean refusing to participate outright in physical education lessons.

Discussion

The girls’ attitudes towards and perceptions of their involvement in physical education and physical activity are best understood through reference to how their subjectivities and identities were shaped (Garrett, 2004). The girls drew from a myriad of discourses available within their culture in both constructing and also in making sense of their
emerging identities. Discourses of disconnection; power; purpose; bodily discourses; classed discourses and gendered discourses dominated the stories the girls told about their lives and specifically their relationships with and disengagement from physical education and physical activity. These constitutive discourses were often overlapping, sometimes competing and always ‘constituted by ‘traces’, pieces of other texts that help constitute meaning’ (Porter, 1986). The complexity of these girls’ relationships with physical education and physical activity cannot be overestimated. The stories the girls told were never simple stories of conformity or resistance. They were fragmented and often contradictory tales, which captured the tensions, the difficulties and the joys of being an adolescent girl.

Social and cultural contexts undoubtedly framed the girls’ perceptions of physical education and physical activity but also significantly framed their capacities to resist, reject, contest or comply with impositions of power and of constraint. When physical activity providers failed to acknowledge their emerging identities, in particular their increasing need for autonomy and control (Gordon, 2006), the girls enacted collective agency, rejecting this provision and they all stopped participating in structured physical activity. Similarly, when physical education failed to connect with these girls’ lives and their learning interests and preferences, the girls either disengaged, half-heartedly participated, provided excuses for non-participation, forgot their physical education gear or refused to participate. This collective agency was made possible as a result of a very strong collective identity. This collective identity was predicated on a very narrow definition of what it meant to be an attractive and popular girl and often trumped aspects of individual girls’ identities.

Two of the most powerful discourses on which all of the girls drew in making sense of their relationship with physical activity and physical education were those related to the body and heterosexual femininity. The positions/ways of being a girl made available by these competing, overlapping and often contradictory discourses were narrow. The girls are growing up in a culture which objectifies the female body, and all the girls in this study had consequently learned to objectify themselves (Parsons & Betz, 2001). The gender norms prescribed through dominant bodily discourses most definitely shaped the girls’ decisions and choices regarding the ‘performance’ of their gender identity (Goffman, 1959) and these identities were inextricably linked to physical appearance (Pecora & Mazzarella, 2002). Despite a somewhat critical awareness of the role of the media in ‘making girls feel bad about themselves’ the girls’ construction of what constituted an ideal feminine body was still very much generated by the media and
grounded in the mainstream ideology of the ideal female body. Negotiating the difficulties and tensions in conforming to the feminine ideal and becoming physically attractive was a very individual experience for each of the girls. While they were all acutely aware of the instrumentality of their bodies, they enacted this in different ways, for example Debra dancing provocatively for the window cleaner, and Grace decorating her body with playboy bunny jewellery (necklaces, belly rings, earrings, rings) and clothing in order to attract male attention.

The girls drew on a vast discursive repertoire when talking about their bodies, which they did quite frequently (Wright, O’Flynn, & MacDonald, 2006) and they all equated a slim body with physical attractiveness, and invested with greater social capital than other kinds of bodies (Bourdieu, 1984). Physical activity was seen as one means of attaining this body ideal and accessing this capital. The cost incurred in engaging in physical activity did not go unnoticed by the girls. One fraught tension for Shelly, for example, was that in order to attain the body ideal, she would have to reveal her current body in the process. Going swimming required her to expose her body to the gaze of others. Another tension existed in relation to the nature of what constituted appropriate physical activity engagement for girls. When they tried to construct meanings about their bodies which demonstrated a rejection of mainstream ideologies, they were reminded by their boyfriends in some instances (Grace) or by club membership requirements and advertising in others (Jade), of what constituted appropriate feminine behaviour. Structural and socially constructed barriers evidently continue to make it difficult for these girls to lead active lives.

The discourses of power, which the girls drew on, were social and historical. The girls had all spent years ‘learning that their place in school and society was marginal and subordinate’ (Shor, 1996, p.15) and had learned that ‘[principals and teachers] never listen to students’. Physical education was seen as a microcosm of school and society in this regard with physical education teachers possessing formal and unilateral authority. Though subordinate the students were never fully passive recipients of this authority. In fact they actively constructed their disengagement from physical education and physical activity. The girls exercised their agency as resistance and withdrawal, using their informal power to undermine their physical education experiences (Giroux, 1983). They forgot their gear, feigned illness, forged notes, or just outright refused to participate. Resistance in physical education was constructed as a fight that required effort and investment. In other subjects their resistance manifested in
more passive and tacit ways and was viewed as easier to enact by the girls, because when they disengaged (‘switched off’) they were not noticed.

All of the girls had come to see many of the activities in physical education as trivial and irrelevant. Contrary to the findings of Chen (1998) who considered a pluralistic interpretation by pupils of the physical education curriculum to be somewhat inevitable, there was little evidence to suggest that physical education addressed a variety of purposes in the girls’ lives. The time the students spent in physical education was meaningful for the girls almost exclusively in a social sense. This social meaning did not necessarily relate to the experiences provided by curriculum but instead was often attributed to the opportunity to be social while they avoided and resisted participation.

Conclusion
Grace, Shelley, Debra, Jade and Kelly spoke with voices that were both united and unique. They spoke from their own histories, backgrounds and life experiences and they each spoke with a voice that was, returning to hook’s (1994) opening quotation, ‘always evolving in dialogue with a world beyond itself’ (p.11). The girls’ voices and perceptions were created in dialogue with each other, consciously and subconsciously, and always seemed inflected by the named, dominant discourses. The process of naming the discourses and the inequities which defined their relationship with physical education and physical activity became a generative and inspiring one for the girls as they came to gain a deeper and more critical knowledge of the workings of their social context. When presented with the key themes outlined in this chapter and some of the supporting data they had generated, the girls were united in identifying the two most dominant influences on their disengagement from physical education and physical activity as ‘lack of voice and choice’ and ‘stupid physical education’. The rationale for selecting these themes was that ‘it all comes back to that really, like everything would fit in them two, about being girls and not having choices, about school not caring, everything really’ (Debra). These themes then became a starting point for transformational resistance and the reimagining of the girls’ physical education and physical activity experiences. The next two chapters describe two of the transformational agendas that the girls engaged with.
Notes

1. Post Leaving Certificate Courses (PLCs) offer a mixture of "hands-on" practical work, academic work and work experience. They are designed as a step towards skilled employment and, as such, they are closely linked to industry and its needs. Post Leaving Certificate courses adopt an integrated approach, focusing on technical knowledge, core skills and work experience. Almost 50% of the time spent on these courses is devoted to knowledge and skill training related to employment, with a further 25% on relevant work-based experience.

References

CHAPTER 6

‘Can I do it in my pyjamas? : Negotiating a physical education curriculum with teenage girls

EIMEAR ENRIGHT and MARY O’SULLIVAN

Abstract

The data for this paper was generated during a three year, Participatory Action Research project, with forty one 15-19 year old female co-researchers and activists, within and beyond the walls of a secondary school. The purpose of the larger study was to work with these students to understand and transform their self-identified barriers to physical education engagement and physical activity participation. The focus of this paper is on one of the transformation sites, the students’ formal physical education curriculum. The specific questions we seek to address in this paper are what does a negotiated physical education curriculum process look like, and how does students’ increased involvement in curricular decision making impact on their engagement with physical education? Findings suggest that while sharing curriculum decision making with students can be challenging for teachers, the benefits are worth the investment.

Keywords: curriculum negotiation, student activists, participatory action research, student, physical education, students as researchers

Introduction

Girls’ disengagement from physical education has been well documented (Bain, 1995; Hastie, 1998; Nilges, 1998; Satina et al, 1998; Scraton, 1992). Historically girls have been constructed as ‘the problem’ for not engaging positively with the subject (Flintoff & Scraton, 2001; Rich, 2003, 2004; Wright, 1996). This discourse of blame is increasingly being challenged and deconstructed by physical education researchers and there has been a shift towards an appreciation that ‘the problem’ is more often located in the curriculum and pedagogical contexts within which girls are expected to participate and relates to the social construction of gender through physical education and physical activity (Ennis et al, 1997; Flintoff & Scraton, 2005; Sandford & Rich, 2006, Wright, 1996). This conceptual shift has provided the impetus for an increasing number of alternative curricula to facilitate girls’ engagement with physical education by confronting and disrupting staid and often alienating curricular practices (Ennis, 1999;
Hastie, 1998; Kinchin & O’Sullivan, 1999; Kirk et al, 2000; Oliver & Lalik, 2000). These curricula have allowed students greater roles and responsibilities within the learning context (Ennis, 1999; Hastie, 1998), provided opportunities for their critical interpretation, challenged and resisted dominant and often harmful discourses of the body (Oliver & Lalik, 2001), and facilitated students in interrogating and making meaningful connections between school based physical education and contemporary physical culture (Kinchin & O’Sullivan, 1999).

By sharing an emphasis on girls’ engagement, a sensitivity to gendered identities and an awareness of the pedagogical implications of engaging girls in physical education, these curricula have come to be referred to as ‘girl friendly’ and have been differentially successful in confronting and interrupting curricular practices which alienate many girls and indeed some boys. These ‘girl friendly’ curricular initiatives have been conceived and tightly defined largely by adult perspectives and constructed as teacher-led intervention strategies. Therefore while these curricula are informed by research on girls’ perspectives of physical education and some elicit responses directly from their participants regarding their attitudes beliefs and values in relation to physical education and physical activity, this is often the extent of girls’ involvement in curriculum construction. Brooker and MacDonald (1999) confirm this assertion, acknowledging that ‘While curriculum supposedly exists to serve the interests of learners, their preferences, if sought at all, are marginalised and their voices are mostly silent in curriculum making’ (p.84). Students’ voices have been largely absent from decision making processes regarding the conceptualisation, implementation and evaluation of their physical education curricular experiences. This has significant implications for physical education, a subject which is greatly mediated by the interests and culture of its students (Brooker & MacDonald, 1999). It is suggested that curricula for the agentic student, that is curricula which harness student interest and potential, be created through negotiation (Boomer, 1992; Shor, 1996; Brooker & MacDonald, 1999; Glasby & MacDonald, 2004).

**Negotiating the Curriculum**

Boomer (1992) conceptualized curriculum negotiation as a model which seeks to increase student involvement in curricular decision making processes:

‘Negotiating the curriculum means deliberately planning to invite students to contribute to, and to modify, the educational program, so
that they will have a real investment both in the learning journey and in the outcomes’

(p. 14)

The curriculum negotiation process is seen to be necessary and beneficial for all students, adolescents in particular (Darling-Hammond, 1997). This is largely attributed to the lack of alignment between the needs of developing adolescents for autonomy and control and the limited opportunities provided for them through social environments such as school (Eccles et al., 1993). Gordon (2006) highlights the contradictory and potentially oppressive capacity of schools where ‘rights of students to exercise agency and to act out citizenship are curtailed, whilst the need for their individual responsibility and planning is stressed’ (p. 12). For adolescent girls tensions between control and agency are particularly fraught. It is worth quoting Gordon (2006) at some length in this regard:

‘Bodies in space are constructed as female or male and different expectations are inscribed on them. Girls are expected to be more still in space, their bodies supposed to be more contained and their voices quieter (Gordon et al., 2000). The embodied activities of girls and boys in space are also differentially interpreted. In order to exercise agency and to become individual citizens girls have to balance between ‘suitable speech of womanhood’ and the desire to ‘talk back’, as bell hooks (1989) argues. Talking back is a necessity if girls are to grow up to be empowered women.’

(Gordon, 2006, p.6).

Many girls and young women possess complex, often destructive relationships with their bodies (Oliver, 2001). Physical education is the one space within school where ‘the body is explicitly used, displayed and talked about’ (Paechter, 2003), therefore, providing opportunities and supports within physical education which facilitate girls in ‘talking back’, exercising agency and constructing empowering and relevant learning experiences becomes all the more imperative.

This study was based on the premise that students are the primary stakeholders in their physical education experiences and should be recognised as co-constructers of knowledge, and of action. While the larger study addresses questions relating to the girls’ prior experiences of physical education and physical activity and their multiple, fragmented, and often contradictory subjectivities, the focus of this paper is on the nature of the curriculum the girls collectively construct and their responses to the curriculum negotiation process, specifically, how does increased involvement in curricular decision making impacts on the girls’ engagement with their physical education curriculum?
The Irish Physical Education Curriculum Context

A brief overview of the Irish physical education curriculum context is presented in order to contextualise the study. Special attention is given to the case of the Leaving Certificate Applied Leisure and Recreation Course as this is the curricular framework within which the curriculum negotiation at the heart of this study occurred.

Post-primary or secondary education in Ireland consists of a three-year Junior Cycle, followed by a two-year or three-year Senior Cycle. Most students begin secondary education at the age of 12 or 13. The Junior Certificate Programme examination is taken at the end of the three year Junior Cycle. The revised junior cycle physical education (JCPE) syllabus was introduced in 2003 and includes a number of areas of study representative of a range of practical activities: adventure activities: aquatics, athletics, dance, games, gymnastics and health related activity (Departement of Education and Science (DES) & National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), 2003). JCPE is one of only three junior cycle subjects which is not assessed as part of the Junior Certificate Examination.

In the three year Senior Cycle, there is an optional one-year ‘Transition Year’ programme followed by a choice of three Leaving Certificate programmes. Each of these three Leaving Certificate programmes - the Established Leaving Certificate (LC), the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme - is a two-year programme. There are two senior cycle Physical Education courses currently in development; a non-examination curriculum framework for Physical Education and a syllabus for examination. There are also two LCA courses, which include two subjects that address physical education related content and objectives: ‘Leisure and Recreation’ and a follow on course ‘Active Leisure Studies’. The Leaving Certificate Applied is designed for those learners whose aptitudes, learning interests and ways of learning are not fully catered for by the other two Leaving Certificate programmes and for those learners who are at risk of leaving school early. Participants in the LCA engage in work and study of an active, practical and task-centred nature in preparation for transition from the world of the school/centre to that of adult and working life (NCCA, 2009). The rationale for the LCA Leisure and Recreation course is as follows:

The Leisure and Recreation Course is designed to enable Leaving Certificate Applied students to acquire and develop skills which will encourage them to participate in active leisure pursuits. The modules will broaden students’ perspectives of leisure and recreation activities.
and offer them opportunities to participate in a range of physical activities. The modules also encourage co-operation between students and allows for the development of personal and social skills. The Leisure and Recreation course promotes long-term learning and motivates the students to choose a life-style that is active, healthy and meaningful (DES & NCCA, 2000).

The Leisure and Recreation course requires students to complete two of the following three modules: Physical Activity for Recreation, Physical Activity for Health and Fitness, and Physical Activity for Performance. As well as individual course requirements, LCA students must also complete seven student tasks over the two year period. Student tasks are used as a means of integrating courses across LCA.

**Methodology**

Christensen and Prout (2002) propose that four perspectives on children in research can be identified in the literature: ‘the child as object, the child as subject, the child as social actor and a nascent approach seeing children as participants and co-researchers’ (p.480). Historically, research in physical education and in education generally has positioned students as objects, and used deductive research techniques, limited response questionnaires, and statistical analysis to conduct research on students (Erickson & Shultz, 1992). This perspective and these methods have been criticised for fracturing experience and failing to recognise the students as the experts on their educational experiences and embodiers of individual subjectivities and agency. The publication of a monograph on student voice in 1995 by the *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education* marked the emergence of student voice as a legitimate area of inquiry within research in physical education and provided one impetus for a methodological shift towards an understanding of ‘students as subjects’ in physical education research. Consequently, in the last decade there have been a multitude of student centred studies, which have listened to what students have to say about their physical education experiences (Dyson, 2006). Few studies have however moved beyond the ‘student as subject’ perspective, appreciating students’ ‘central and autonomous conceptual status’ and fewer still position students as active participants in the research process (Christensen and Prout, 2002, p. 481).

Noting this absence, Participatory Action Research (PAR) was selected as the methodological framework within which this research would be positioned. PAR represents ‘an epistemology that assumes knowledge is rooted in social relations and most powerful when produced collaboratively through action’ (Fine et al, 2001, p.173).
It is a qualitative research perspective that sees people ‘co-creating their reality through participation; through their experience; their imagination and intuition, their thinking and their action’ (Reason, 1998, p. 262). It has a double objective, firstly ‘…to produce knowledge and action directly useful to a group of people’ and secondly, ‘…to empower people at a deeper level through the process of constructing and using their knowledge’ (Nieuwenhuys, 2004, p. 210). PAR acknowledges that those researched possess critical social knowledge and repositions them as participants in and architects of research (Fine and Torre, 2005; Martin-Baro, 1994; Torre, 2005). Significantly Greenwood et al (1993) emphasise the emergent character of PAR. They contend ‘that [PAR] is always an emergent process largely controlled by local conditions’ and ‘that it can often be enhanced (even under seemingly hostile conditions)...’ (p.176). They assert therefore that ‘one cannot easily predict whether a particular process will lead to a fully developed participatory action research process’ (p. 188).

This study was conducted in a city centre secondary school and engaged forty one 15-19 year old female co-researchers in the design, implementation and evaluation of their own physical education curriculum and a physical activity club in their community. Ethical approval for this study was received from the University Research Ethics Committee. Pseudonyms are used throughout to refer to the students, the teachers and the community. Data for this paper were generated by five student researchers and curriculum designers during the first year of the study and relate to the formal physical education curriculum negotiation process. These five students while not selected as representative, did demonstrate quite different social positions within the class and included the most (Deborah and Kelly) and the least (Grace) vocal in the class.

As well as engaging fully with the PAR process, each of these five student co-researchers also participated in two individual and two group conversations with Eimear regarding the curriculum negotiation process. These conversations were at times guided by participatory research artefacts (e.g. example, photographs, taster session debrief posters). Field notes were maintained by Eimear throughout the research process. These field notes related to the joys and the challenges associated with the curriculum negotiation process.

Eimear, the school physical education teacher Róisín Kennedy, and the students met every week for two hours during the students’ timetabled Leisure and Recreation class. The two modules on the Leisure and Recreation course selected by the students for negotiation were ‘Physical Activity for Health and Fitness’, and ‘Physical Activity
for Leisure and Recreation’. It is useful to view the curriculum negotiation process as consisting of three phases: naming inequities; broadening horizons and change-agency. It is also useful to note that the students, Róisín and Eimear regularly referred to both the Leisure and Recreation course and class as physical education.

**What does negotiating the physical education curriculum look like?**

Broadly speaking there were three phases of engagement with the curriculum negotiation process in this study: naming inequities; broadening horizons; and change-agency.

**Naming Inequities**

The purpose of this introductory phase, which spanned six weeks was threefold: to get to know the girls, who they were and what they valued and cared about; to encourage the girls to critically appraise their relationship with physical education and physical activity and identify barriers to their engagement; and to provide some initial training for the students in research methods. Harrison (2002) has suggested that ‘[Narrative] is the form our stories take when we use our language and our own voice to record or tell the experience of our lives’ (p. 84). The place for narrative in educational research has been well justified by Connelly and Clandinin (1990) who contend, ‘humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives. The study of narrative therefore is the study of the ways humans experience the world. This general notion translates into the view that education is the construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories; teachers and learners are storytellers, characters in their own and other’s stories.’ (p. 2). A task book was created as a space within which the students could create their narratives. The intention of this space was not merely to gather information but also to prompt self-reflection about the students’ engagement in physical activity and physical education. The task book consisted of five tasks; personal biography; physical activity timeline; physical activity profiles; perceptions of purposes of physical activity and physical education, and the last task focused on students’ perceptions of the possibilities for physical education.

The purpose of the personal biography task was to inspire conversation about who the girls were and what they valued and cared about. This task required the students to respond in writing to questions such as: who are you, what do you like and dislike, what do you enjoy watching on TV, what type of music you like? A participatory method used to support completion of this task and allow students to begin
to actively shape and engage in the research process was photovoice. Photovoice has been described as ‘a powerful participatory action research method where individuals are given the opportunity to take photographs, discuss them collectively, and use them to create opportunities for personal and/or community change’ (Linnan et al, 2001). The method uses photographic documentation of people’s everyday lives as an educational tool and facilitates voice in the learning and action process (Lykes, 2001; Wang and Burris, 1997). The participants in our study participated in a workshop, which focused on the ethics of photographing other people; and also basic photography skills and were provided with disposable cameras. They were then asked to make photographs of their lives and given prompts to focus their image making. These prompts included: where I spend my leisure time; my physically active life; physical activity facilities nearby; physical activity in the lives of my family and friends; and the things that are important to me. The participants kept one copy of their photographs and we retained the second copy. The photographs, rather than predefined questions, formed the foundation for conversations which involved the student co-researchers in interpreting and discussing the photographs with the lead researcher and each other. The photovoice task also addressed one of the key assignments of the Physical Activity for Leisure and Recreation module which required the students to identify a range of physical recreational activities in their local community.

Physical activity timelines constituted the second of the narrative based tasks. It was intended that this task would encourage the girls to take a critical look at their physical education and physical activity histories. The girls were therefore asked to identify important people or critical incidents that have influenced their participation in physical activity from birth until the present, and to speak to these critical incidents. An in-depth discussion on the use of photovoice and timelines in this study, including students’ responses to these methods is presented elsewhere (Enright & O’Sullivan, in press a).

The purpose of the third task, the physical activity profile was to encourage student to reflect on their current participation levels. Physical activity diaries were used to support the girls’ completion of this task. The completion of a diary of physical activity participation was one of the key assignments for the Physical Activity for Health and Fitness module. The students were encouraged to make daily entries in their diary which described the nature and the amount of physical activity they undertook that day. Students’ perceptions of the purposes of physical activity and physical education were the focus of the fourth task. Students first responded in their task books to two
questions; what is the purpose of physical education; and what is the purpose of physical activity?; They then broke into small groups to discuss their perceptions. The small groups reported these perceptions back through posters which were created using visual and written text. The fifth task aimed to move beyond existing perspectives towards future possibilities, that is, the girls were asked to complete the sentence ‘The PE I’d like…’ It was envisaged that the student narrative phase would inspire conversations about the girls’ experience of their lives (Oliver & Lalik, 2000) and engage them in a consideration of the possibilities of physical education.

The two generative themes to emerge from the naming inequities phase of the research were ‘lack of voice and choice’ and ‘stupid physical education’. While is beyond the scope of this paper to detail the conversations which led to the selection of these themes, it is important to understand that the students cited these themes as the primary reasons they had disengaged from physical education.

Broadening Horizons

The data generated by the students during the Naming Inequities phase provided the foundation for the Broadening Horizons phase, which included a period of taster sessions and a curriculum decision making session. The purpose of this phase of the study was to facilitate students in seeing the ‘givens’ in physical education as ‘contingencies’ and better positioning them to imagine alternatives (Greene, 1995).

Taster Sessions

The students engaged in ten weeks of taster sessions. The purpose of these taster sessions was to extend students’ knowledge base, give them a greater frame of reference to make decisions relating to their physical education experiences and shake up their perceptions of what physical education was and could be. The students chose the activities they would like to try and either the lead researcher or the school physical education teacher taught them when they had the expertise or outsourced if they did not. The activities the girls chose to form the basis of their taster curricula were for the most part individual and non-competitive activities, for example, gym, dance, boxercise, rock climbing, Pilates, and aerobics. When asked about this selection of activities, Shelly noted ‘that’s cos these will get us fit, healthy and skinny’. Jade felt ‘we never tried some of the things before and we wanted to see what they were like’. Kelly contended ‘it’s mostly about the music, most of these you do to music’. Another pertinent rationale for
this particular selection was that ‘it’s like what we can think we might be bothered to do if we did anything like for exercise outside school’ (Shelly), and ‘things I could actually see myself joining up to and all, like going to the gym or classes in [local gym]’ (Kelly).

Pedagogical strategies were also varied during the taster sessions. The students were provided with opportunities to take on different roles and responsibilities within the class (peer teachers, attendance keepers, warm-up officers, disc jockey etc), and record and demonstrate their learning using a number of different assessment strategies for example, self-scoring, teacher graded work, poster presentations, written assignments, and group discussion. An action research cycle was reflected in the debriefing sessions that occurred after each of the taster lessons. At the end of each lesson time was protected for the girls to ‘talk back’ about their experiences in physical education that day. During these debriefs the physical education teacher Róisín and Eimear facilitated the students in evaluating their experience of physical education lessons. The questions used to guide the debrief included: What was the purpose of this class? What did you learn? What helped you to learn? What made it difficult to learn? How did you (or could you) show that you learned something? How could we improve the class to maximise learning? Sometimes we facilitated debriefing through discussion and questioning and sometimes by asking the students to respond to the above questions on posters.

Together Róisín, Eimear and the students then decided on strategies to incorporate this student feedback into future lessons. By varying both content and pedagogical perspectives, students acquired a broader understanding of the decisions that shape their experiences of physical education. The taster sessions were therefore a method of extending the students’ curriculum decision-making literacy. The students were then able to draw on this new found literacy to engage in a more meaningful way with the curriculum decision making session.

Curriculum Decision Making Session

The curriculum decision making session initially took the format of a focus group. ‘Focus groups minimise the control the researcher has during the data gathering process by decreasing the power of the researcher over research participants. The collective nature of the group interview empowers the [co-researchers] and validates their voices and experiences’ (Madriz, 2000, p. 838). The session began as a discussion about the students’ involvement in decision making in school and in physical education specifically. The students listed which decisions were made in school, which decisions
they perceived they made in school, which decisions were made in physical education, and which decisions they made in physical education before their engagement in this project. The students then discussed what physical education curricular decisions they felt should be negotiated, drawing from their experience of the taster sessions. The decisions the girls felt they wanted to make in physical education were:

Some people want to keep being role takers and warm-up leaders
How we do the key assignments
What activities we do
In what order we do activity and tasks
We get to go outside school again
What music we listen to
How we get examined
What the rules should be
Some people want to lead some activities

The decisions noted above relate to curriculum content, sequencing, learning environment, rules, assessment, roles and responsibilities and teaching strategies, highlighting how the girls believed they should be involved in decision-making relating to all aspects of their physical education. However they did acknowledge and identify that some decisions were non-negotiable such as:

The Leisure and Recreation key assignments
What people come in to teach us
We have to wear our PE gear
We have to turn up with gear
No hoopy earrings in PE

We have to listen to the teachers because they are listening to us

It is noteworthy that the list of non-negotiable decisions is shorter than that of the decisions, which the students felt they could and would like to be involved in. Also significant is the last addition to this list: ‘we have to listen to the teachers because they are listening to us’. The students positioned this remark as a non-negotiable but the wording implies that a choice actually has been made by the students, that is, the girls appreciate that the teachers are listening to them in the negotiation process and now feel obligated to some extent to return this ‘compliment’. This is arguably evidence of the girls taking increased responsibility for their learning.
Change-Agency

The third phase of this particular study was the Change-agency phase. Change-agency ‘means learning and acting for the democratic transformation of self and society…people tak[ing] responsibility for rethinking and changing the conditions they are in’ (Shor, 1992, p.190). The students who participated in this study were facilitated in ‘taking responsibility for rethinking and changing’ their physical education and physical activity experiences. One way they did this was through direct involvement in curriculum re-conceptualisation. This was facilitated in the curriculum design sessions.

Curriculum Design Sessions

The purpose of these sessions was to work together to co-construct a 8 week curriculum unit based on recommendations grounded in the students’ learning from the biography tasks, their responses to the taster physical education sessions and the list of decisions the students generated relating to what decisions they felt they should make in physical education. The eight week unit was negotiated within the framework of the Leisure and Recreation curriculum. The decision making therefore was focused by the key assignments that we had not engaged with at that point. Designing a physical education curriculum answered one of these key assignments, that is, students were required to participate in a programme of physical leisure and recreational activities planned by the group (DES & NCCA, 2000).

When prompted to consider what they thought the purpose of the co-constructed curriculum should be the whole class decided on and worded a shared purpose: ‘To think about and try new things in PE that will help us to like being active and help us to be active more and it will all be good fun’. This purpose reflects an evolving understanding regarding the potential contribution of physical education to the girls’ lives. Students had previously struggled to articulate anything other than a social purpose for the subject. While still retaining an emphasis on fun, the girls also acknowledged that physical education should be about thinking about and trying new things that enable them to find joy in physical activity and ensure their continued participation.

Each of the five girls also offered their own individual purposes:

Jade - I want to try and learn new things that I like.
Kelly - I want to learn how to be patient.
Grace - I want to get skinny.
Shelly - I want to learn about how to be fit and healthy.
Debra - I want to achieve a two pack.
When it came to choosing content a strong conviction of Eimear was that students should now try to focus on a particular curricular area/question for an extended period of time and therefore engage in a more substantive way with the content. This was a conviction which was not initially shared by the students however some did consider and take on board this opinion in reaching their decision regarding the number of activities which would focus the unit.

Jade - Well we said two activities and we could have said three but remember you or was it Ms. Kennedy were like we should be trying to stick at something so that’s why we picked the two instead of like fifty seven games but now I don’t know if it’s the best, if we’re changing all the time or we’re trying to stick at it.

Eimear - Why do you think I thought you should be trying to stick at things?

Jade - I don’t know. It was something about getting better at them or learning about sticking at things wasn’t it.

Jade evidently hasn’t made her mind up at this stage as to whether a constantly changing activity focus was better or if ‘sticking at things’ might have benefits. What was encouraging however was the increasing willingness to listen to suggestions and compromise. In the end the girls did actually chose to ‘stick’ with two activities for their negotiated unit. The girls chose boxercise and a gym workout from the activities they had tried in the taster physical education. The rationale for this selection was consistent with that provided for the activities chosen for the taster physical education experiences. An interesting additional reason for choosing these two activities was provided by Shelly: ‘They’ll get us the skinniest the fastest’. Shelly’s preoccupation with her body weight/image was presented clearly and consistently throughout the data. The selection of these activities and discussion and research around developing aerobic fitness through these activities answered another of the key assignments of the curriculum, namely, that students must record and participate in activities that develop aerobic fitness (DES & NCCA, 2000).

Another remaining key assignment required the students to monitor their heart rate for a week. Debra decided she would oversee this assignment. The students discussed the assignment and decided the best time for this to be done was in their base classroom in the morning five minutes before their first class began. The rationale was that ‘we’d probably just lie about doing it and put down anything if we had to do it as homework but this way we’ll do it properly’. While Debra would lead this assignment they also wanted Róisín to be present to ensure they were taking the heart rate correctly.
They suggested a poster be made for their classroom to record their measurements over the week and that their assessment be based on a discussion of this poster and possibly a quiz. Self-grading was discussed as an assessment option but was eventually outvoted in favour of a teacher generated grade ‘cos it might be fairer’ (Jade).

A final example of a key assignment the girls negotiated required them to lead a group in warm-up and cool-down exercises related to a chosen activity (DES & NCCA, 2000). The first decision the girls made relating to this assignment was that they would like to do this assignment in pairs. The second was that they wanted a ‘training session’ where the Rósín and Eimear demonstrated and talked them through appropriate stretches and warm-up/cool-down activities. The girls also wanted to choose which week they would lead the class because they noted that some of them were more confident than others and it would be best for these students to go first. It was in this democratic fashion that all decisions relating to the focus, structure, delivery and assessment of learning in their negotiated physical education curriculum occurred.

**How does increased involvement in curriculum decision making impact on students’ engagement with physical education?**

The key themes to emerge from the data relating to the students’ response to curriculum negotiation included: participation, investment, learning, accountability, and pathways. An effort is made below to illustrate each of these themes but firstly a little more substantive reflection on students’ initial reactions to the prospect of curriculum negotiation.

‘I was surprised today by some of the students’ reactions to the notion of working with me to design their curriculum. I had, now naively I realise, expected them to be almost grateful that finally they got to be involved in choosing what and how they wanted to learn. While some of them were happy about the opportunity (e.g. Grace, Chloe, Shelly), it really didn’t seem to register with a couple of the girls or at least they didn’t seem to care, (Sandra and Ciara) and one student (Debra) thought I was trying to dodge my teaching responsibility and load the students with all the work: ‘That should be your job shouldn’t it. So what are you going to be doing, if we’re doing your job?’

(Fieldnotes, wk 2)

Hyde (1992), reflecting on her experiences of negotiating a maths curriculum with a group of students’ characterises the responses of the students she worked with under four headings: thankful and amazed, suspicious, dismayed and contempt. Three of these four categorisations are useful in explaining the responses of the girls in this study.
Contempt, is illustrated by Debra (above) who thought Eimear would be shirking her responsibility as a teacher by not completely directing the class. Suspicion and an element of distrust are evidenced through the following field note excerpt:

‘At the end of class today the girls asked what the activity for next week was. I told them we would be going to the climbing wall in [the university] as planned and they seemed shocked and delighted, even though that’s what they’d chosen two weeks before and I’d told them at that time that I’d organise it. They clearly didn’t trust me or think I’d follow through’.

The third category thankful and ‘happy’ if not quite amazed was Grace’s observation as she noted:

‘Well we were happy that we could choose what we wanted to do in PE because we didn’t do that before and you said we could choose anything and then talk about it and see could we do it so it was good’

While the girls’ responses to the prospect of curriculum negotiation were quite diverse, there was a certain homogeneity regarding the impact of increased involvement in curricular decision-making on their engagement with physical education.

**Participation: ‘Can I do it in my pyjamas’?**

The girls were far more eager and prepared to participate fully in class. The first clearly observable indicator was the fact that they were all more likely to arrive at class fully kitted out for participation. When asked about this, Jade shared her thoughts as to why this was the case:

Eimear– And what about what you do during your PE class now?
Jade – Well now we do more talking like about things and then we have to do activities as well or do the dj or whatever and even if we forget our gear we have to do something like.
Eimear– Do you think that’s why people don’t forget their gear as much?
Jade – dunno
Eimear– Why do you think you don’t forget your gear as much now?
Jade – well I usen’t to forget it that much but I bring it now cos we might as well bring it cos we’re going to be doing something anyway even if we forget it, and we picked mostly what we do so we might as well do it. But we still forget it sometimes, not on purpose like but really forget it.

Jade’s response suggests that the roles and responsibilities taken up by the girls as well as the girls’ involvement in curricular decision making both had positive impacts on the girls’ preparedness for participation. Another phenomenon that marked the girls’ new willingness to participate occurred when the girls actually legitimately did forget their
gear, and involved the girls participating in their pyjamas. The girls are required to wear ankle length skirts as part of their school uniform and most of them like to wear their pyjama bottoms under their skirts ‘cos it gets cold’ (Kelly). Debra was the first to ask ‘can I do it in my pyjamas’ and Kelly and Sandra also participated in their pyjamas on separate occasions. When asked about it Kelly acknowledged that ‘yeah it’s embarrassing but it’s only us that sees us and it’s better than not being able to do it’. A final incident which illustrates the girls’ commitment to participation occurred on one occasion when Debra had been excused from school for the day and given permission to go home at lunchtime because she had spilled something all over her uniform. She went home, got changed and returned for the final two classes, her PE classes, despite the fact that she had been excused for the whole day. This was, according to one of the supervising teachers, ‘shocking’ as in completely and positively surprising to teachers that she would choose to return.

**Investment: ‘You wouldn’t like it if I took your job!’**

Not only did participation improve but the girls’ investment in their physical education curriculum also increased remarkably. The girls committed to their roles and responsibilities, which clearly came to mean something to them as illustrated clearly by the following exchange which occurred between Debra, the assigned attendance keeper and Ms. Kennedy:

Debra: it was my turn to take the roll but no, she took it.
Debra: You wouldn’t like it if I took your job would you, no you wouldn’t and then you go off stealing my job and it’s fine is it!
Ms. Kennedy: I’m sorry Debra, you can take it next week…that’s the end of it.

There was an acknowledgement by the girls that participation and investment had increased. Content choice, music and roles and responsibilities were the reasons they cited most often for why this had happened:

‘The gym now was very good and the music was loud and makes you get more up and do stuff. They love music. And me and Kylie doing dj sometimes and picking out the songs and it’s good. It makes the girls more to do more stuff. I don’t know what it is exactly but its good’

(Shelly)

The fact that the girls themselves were positioned as central to curriculum, as both the decision makers and the primary benefactors did not go unnoticed:

‘It’s more our project, we do most of the work, it’s about us, and it’s for us kind of…so we’ll do dance and we’ll take photographs and we’ll do
our own projects and we'll even do writing sometimes and we won’t be moaning cos it’s ours’

(Jade)

**Learning: ‘We learned about learning’**

One significant turnaround made by the girls was an acknowledgment that learning could and did occur in physical education. In conversations at the beginning of the study the girls had struggled to articulate the purpose of physical education and had often referred to it as a ‘break from learning’ (Debra). The girls showed no such difficulty or hesitancy in describing the learning they associated with their engagement in the negotiated curriculum experience.

Eimear - Do you think you’ve learned things in PE this year?
Grace - Yeah. But well we don’t all learn the same things like in our general education tasks cos we did different projects but we all learned different things that we wanted to. And I don’t know if it’s learning but we do, like we have different jobs like taking the role and doing the warm-ups. I only did that once though. And we learned about lots of different activities, dance, the aerobics thing, the gym, badminton, the climbing and you know all that stuff like, and did things we didn’t do before.

Not only does Grace acknowledge that learning occurs in physical education, she also highlights how the learning was individualised to the point where the girls ‘all learned different things that [they] wanted to’. Jade extends this suggesting that the co-constructed curriculum process taught them ‘everyday life’:

‘Doing the different things makes us get used to everything else and learn everyday life, like talking to lots of people, being a leader and all’.

Debra clearly articulates her perception of the benefits of having a transparent curriculum construction process ‘We learned about learning…and about teaching PE and about the things you have to think about when you’re teaching, it’s harder than I thought being a teacher but I was good like teaching the Polish girls you said…and as well how you know that you’ve learned something that’s important too’. Debra evidently gained invaluable insights into the teaching and learning process by engaging in the curriculum construction process and by taking on teaching roles within the class.

**Accountability: ‘We chose it, so we do it’**

Accountability is a theme that emerged very frequently in the data. Prior to the negotiation process the girls had been very critical of the hierarchical and institutional power embodied by teachers and principals, whereby ‘the teachers make all the
decisions and the principal and they never listen to us’ (Kelly). The curriculum negotiation process respected their autonomy and allowed them to engage meaningfully in decision making and the girls respected this new role and worked hard to ensure that the decisions they made worked. This assertion is supported by the participation and investment themes spoken to above and manifested quite clearly in the ways the girls encouraged and supported each other’s participation.

‘At the beginning of the lesson today Megan told me her leg was ‘really sore’ and she didn’t think she could participate. Kylie interrupted our conversation telling Megan that the group had decided on ‘boxercise’ as the activity for this week, and even if she didn’t like it she should participate because they’d chosen it and it would be ‘crap’ if everyone just decided to sit out whenever they wanted. Megan participated fully for the lesson’ (Fieldnotes).

It is important to note that Megan and Kylie left this conversation laughing with one another. Kylie had called Megan’s bluff and both girls found this amusing. In general the girls were much more likely to listen and respond to the encouragement and prompting of their peers than that of their teachers. ‘We chose it so we do it’ seemed to be the general sentiment expressed and on the few occasion when there was dissent, the girls reminded each other that ‘everyone doesn’t like everything so sometimes you just have to wait ‘til your turn comes’ (Shelly).

**Pathways: ‘It gave me confidence’**

In contrast to the disconnection many of the girls alluded to in relation to their previous physical education experiences, where “for three years all we’ve ever done is basketball, rugby-rounders or soccer and that’s it, stupid and boring madness” (Kelly) the girls felt that the co-constructed curriculum provided for and facilitated them in building pathways to participation. Two nice examples of pathway building were evidenced through this study quite early in the study. One of the taster sessions offered to the girls was a session in a local private fitness facility. It was a basic introductory session, which held as its purpose to enable the girls to become familiar with safe and informed practice in using gym equipment. Shelly illustrates how this session gave her the confidence to go use a local gym:

Eimear - Do you think you would have joined the gym if you hadn’t used it here?
Shelly – I don’t know, actually that gave me more confidence now. I’d be in the gym and I’d be here, oh god how do you use that?
Eimear– So using the gym here gave you more confidence?
Shelly – Yeah and I thought it would help me, I thought my thighs were very fat
Eimear– What?!
Shelly - and I said I have to go to the gym now and my friend says no you’re a stick but then she goes yeah I need to tone up my muscles too so we went and...Oh miss, the, what do you call them, the weights are very good for your muscles. They tone them all up, they were very good now...and the fella, I goes to him can we join up, and he goes what age are ye and I goes 16 and he goes you see I don’t know if I’ll be able to join you because you’ve never been in a gym and I goes I was, up inside school and she showed us all how to do the stuff and he goes yeah so and he joined me up then over that.

Kelly had also begun attending a private gym in her neighbourhood. For her research project she chose to do a case study of a local gym because she had access to it though her sister’s boyfriend John. She interviewed John and through this interview became familiar with the processes involved in getting gym membership and ultimately became a member herself, evidence of which was the gym membership card which she brought to class and proudly showed us.

Neither Kelly nor Shelly continued their gym participation for very long. While all of the girls acknowledged that there was definitely more connection between the nature of their negotiated curriculum and the physical activities the girls would choose to engage in outside of school, it soon became clear that initiating and sustaining physical activity participation beyond the negotiated physical education curriculum was going to be difficult.

‘I think I would have kept going if there were more of the girls coming with me and if I didn’t have to pay for it, it was either pay for the gym or buy a new going out dress on one of the weeks and the dress won’

(Shelly)

The idea of needing to be in a group, and the security provided by collective action is something which emerged very frequently throughout the data in relation to both stepping on and off physical activity pathways.

Above are examples of the practical implications of negotiating a curriculum. Also significant was how the girls felt when they made these decisions. The girls’ responses to this question were, for the most part, positive. They felt ‘more like adults’, ‘like ye’re respecting us’, ‘like we’re listened to’ and ‘like you care’. They also thought it was ‘good practice’ and made them feel ‘kind of in charge’. Ultimately they felt ‘it makes us happier and we like it more’ although again an acknowledgement that ‘sometimes its like you don’t care though cos you’re making us do all the work’ was
voiced and Jade shared that ‘I like it but all this decision making and new work in PE makes me tired’.

Discussion/Conclusion

‘Always aware of the complexity permeating knowledge production, our critical pedagogy understands that in order to survive, disciplines had to embrace particular features and structures at specific historical points in their development. Often such dimensions live on in new epochs of disciplinary history, serving no pragmatic purpose other than to fulfil the demands of unconscious tradition. When the teachers’ and students’ historical discursive research uncovers such anachronistic dynamics, they can be challenged as part of an effort to facilitate more rigorous and pragmatic scholarship, pedagogy and learning’ (Kincheloe, 2007, p. 760).

Negotiating the curriculum facilitated the girls in challenging the anachronistic dynamics which Kincheloe (2007) alludes to. These dynamics included excessively rigid student and teacher roles and subject boundaries. The negotiation process transformed traditional authoritarian relations and allowed the girls, Róisín and Eimear to connect to each other and to students’ lives resulting in the development of a ‘community of learners’ (Azzaritto & Ennis, 2003). The girls made decisions relating to the content, progression and assessment of their learning in collaboration with Róisín and Eimear (Glasby & Macdonald, 2004; Hastie & Sinelnikov, 2006). Principles of fairness, respect and inclusion underpinned many of the decisions the girls made about their curriculum, for example, the girls’ decision to allow the teachers grade their work was premised on a belief that this would be fairer; the decision that those most confident in leadership roles would lead the warm-ups and cool-downs first showed a respect and a sensitivity to those girls who would find this role more challenging; and the agreement that everybody should have the option of taking up a role of responsibility within the class was predicated on the notion that no one would feel left out. The girls showed on numerous occasions how capable they could be when given the opportunity. Their decisions were well reasoned and sensitive to others, highlighting the girls’ respect for this increased responsibility with which they had been entrusted (Carlson & Hastie, 1997; Dyson, 2002).

The negotiated curricula facilitated the girls in connecting physical education to the sociocultural contexts of their lives (Azzaritto & Ennis, 2003; Cothran & Ennis, 1999; Ennis, 1999, 2000) and opened up opportunities for students to critically appraise their previous experiences of physical education in relation to their lives, backgrounds and values while engaging them in considering the possibilities for physical education.
The girls then actively participated in constructing knowledge and action that connected their physical education curriculum to their everyday lives. Conceptually and content wise, the negotiated curriculum, was more meaningful and socially relevant than any physical education curriculum they had previously experienced. It allowed the girls to ‘bring their learning from wider physical culture settings into the field of PE’ (Sandford & Rich, 2006, p. 284) and validated their interests and experience. While we were aware of the possibility of merely pandering to their preferences, it soon became clear that the choices the girls were making were well rationalised. The nature of the activities the girls selected were for the most part individual, non-competitive activities, which they could engage to with music and they were all activities which the girls could imagine themselves choosing to participate in outside of school.

In her inaugural lecture Flintoff (2009) asked a number of searching questions of physical education professionals:

If girls have different experiences of PE, what strategies should we use to address these and the continuing inequities that girls as a group continue to face? How can we, for example, acknowledge girls’ differing identities, and yet at the same time, challenge the continuing inequalities resulting from the structures of gender, class, disability and ‘race’?

This paper presents curriculum negotiation as one possible answer to Flintoff’s (2009) questions. The curriculum the girls engaged in went beyond being merely ‘girl-friendly’. It was meaningful for Jade, Shelly, Kelly, Grace, Debra and their peers because their positioning as curriculum negotiators allowed them space to tailor the curriculum to acknowledge their differing identities and collective agency. A negotiated curriculum by its very nature is inherently concerned with students’ lived experiences and ‘envisions the participation of the student in a social community of learners as the primary vehicle for the creation of knowledge and understanding’ (Azzarito & Ennis, 2003, p. 195). Explicit, participatory involvement in curriculum making by the girls in this study, served to increase their sense of ownership of what became ‘their’ curriculum. Because the curriculum respected the girls’ agency and ‘differing identities’ by allowing them opportunities to actively engage in curriculum making, they respected it and were invested in making it work.

Cook (1992) contends ‘The key to negotiation, both in theory and practice, lies in the ownership principle: people tend to strive hardest for things they wish to own, or to keep and enhance things they already own. The inverse is just as true and observable all around us: people find it difficult to give commitment to the property and ideas of other’ (p.15). The girls in this study were active constructors of their curriculum and
became committed to its success. They shared leadership and responsibility and consequently they came to share ownership of the curriculum change. The girls participated fully in their physical education lessons because they wanted to. They were empowered by a learning environment that recognised their capacities as competent social agents.

**Implications**

The findings of this study have implications for physical education curricula, for practice and for teacher education. Local innovation and tailoring of physical education curricular experiences with students can allow for the creation of learning opportunities which reflect student learning needs and community contexts, while satisfying formal curricular requirements. There needs to be space, however, in formal national physical education curricula which allow for multiple and local interpretations and there also needs to be a willingness at the local level to do things a little differently. To support the development of physical education teachers who have the confidence and capacity to engage willingly in this necessary work, there needs to be opportunities on Physical Education Teacher Education programmes for student teachers to practice working creatively with students on local ideas in order to bring the students and their learning to the fore in curriculum-decision making. Professional development opportunities for teachers in the field also need to begin to move beyond a content focus and towards the notion of supporting pedagogies of possibility if the physical education community is serious about engaging students in personally meaningful ways with physical education.

**References**


CHAPTER 7

Physical Education ‘in all sorts of corners’: Student activists transgressing formal physical education curricular boundaries.

EIMEAR ENRIGHT and MARY O’SULLIVAN

Abstract

The data for this paper was generated during a three year, Participatory Action Research project, with forty one 15-19 year old female co-researchers and activists, within and beyond the walls of a secondary school. The two questions we seek to answer through this paper are: what happens when we engage with students to challenge formal physical education curricular boundaries and connect with students’ physical culture; and what are the benefits and the challenges associated with engaging with this sort of practical activism? Findings suggest that a boundary crossing approach to physical education can facilitate students in finding their own meanings in physical education and physical activity. Supporting boundary crossing practices is however a time and thought intensive pedagogical design, which will be challenging for many physical education teachers.

Keywords: Student Voice, Students as Researchers, Participatory Action Research, Physical Education Pedagogy

Introduction

…teaching as possibility in dark and constraining times. It is a matter of awakening and empowering today’s young people to name, to reflect, to imagine, and to act with more and more concrete responsibility in an increasingly multifarious world….The light may be uncertain and flickering; but teachers in their lives and works have the remarkable capacity to make it shine in all sorts of corners and, perhaps, to move newcomers to join with others and transform

(Maxine Greene, 1997, p. 10).

Greene (1997) speaks here about the transformative potential of teaching and about teachers’ and students’ capacities to realise change ‘in all sorts of corners’. This study is an effort to move others to recognise and create new corners for physical education learning, in-between spaces and places that are engaging and empowering, and lie outside formal school and curricular structures. By working with a group of student activists and their school physical education teacher to chart how we struggled and to
some extent succeeded in the creation of a series of in-between physical education learning spaces we hope to give others insight into the benefits and the challenges associated with the process.

As a school subject physical education has been criticised by students for being disconnected from their lifestyle contexts and for lacking relevance and meaning (Enright & O’Sullivan, in press a; Ennis, 1999, 2000; Gibbons & Humbert, 2008; Macdonald, 2003; Tinning & Fitzclarence, 1992). For many young people their engagement with physical culture outside of school is antithetical to the experiences provided to them through their formal physical education curriculum (Macdonald, 2003). Students struggle to engage with detached pedagogies which fail to recognise their lived experiences of physical culture and often provide less challenge, responsibility and autonomy than they are familiar with in their lives outside school.

While physical education scholars differ in terms of value orientations and the pedagogical models they support, most of these scholars share one common pedagogical belief - learning is facilitated when students find activities relevant and personally meaningful (Kretchmar, 2000). There has been strong advocacy for the design of more meaningful physical education and physical activity experiences for young people (Ennis, 2000; Kretchmar, 2000).

There have been some efforts to act on this advocacy and challenge the discontinuity between students’ in-school physical education experiences and their out of school engagement with physical culture and thereby make physical education more personally meaningful for students. O’Sullivan & Kinchin’s (2005) cultural studies curriculum model was ‘an attempt to offer physical educators an opportunity to help students appreciate and critique the role of physical activity and sport in their own lives, the life of their schools, their community and the wider society’ (p. 104). Similarly, Oliver’s (1999, 2001, 2004, 2009, 2010) sustained line of inquiry on how girls learn to experience their bodies has allowed us deep insight into how she has facilitated girls in critically engaging with their experiences of physical culture. At a formal curricular level, the socio-cultural and social justice perspective of the Queensland Year 1-10 Health and Physical Education syllabus encourages students to consider social and cultural developments that may affect them and others in their lives now and into the future (Australian Education Council, 1994; Rossi et al, 2009). There have also been efforts to provide opportunities for students to take more responsibility for their learning in physical education. Hellison’s (1985) teaching personal and social responsibility model (TPSR) focuses on teaching self and social responsibility by recognising
students’ autonomy and their capacity to be responsible for their own bodies and lives in the face of a variety of barriers and limitations, and by teaching students that they have a social responsibility to be sensitive to the rights, feelings and needs of others. These curricular initiatives are all examples of internal integration (Placek & O’Sullivan, 1997), of bringing the outside in, and reimagining physical education as a ‘connective specialism’ (Penney & Chandler, 2000).

It is more difficult to find work which relates to the development of new contexts for physical education, that lie beyond formal physical education curricular boundaries. The work of the TPSR Alliance, of which Hellison is a co-director, is unique in that it recognises alternative spaces such as physical activity extended day programs as legitimate physical education learning spaces, and promotes physical education in the community through service learning (Cutforth, 2000; Hellison, 2000; Martinek et al, 1999). Hellison has argued that it is often easier to engage students in physical education outside of the formal school and curricular context, free from chaotic school timetabling (personal communication, October 1st, 2009). Another physical education boundary crossing effort is the English ‘School Sport Co-ordinator Programme’ which, ‘aims to develop opportunities for youth sport through coordinated links between PE and sport in schools, both within and outside of the formal curriculum, with those in local community sports settings’ (Flintoff, 2003, p. 231). Flintoff (2003) has cautioned however that these coordinated links may not reflect strong educational values due to localised interpretation of policy.

Out-of-school physical activity programs also receive attention in the literature, in terms of their perceived role in combating youth disaffection and anti-social behaviour and their potential to lead to educational gains (Sandford, Armour & Warmington, 2006; Sandford, Duncombe & Armour, 2008). These programs are usually offered by community based youth agencies, youth services, and educational support services. These are all agencies that have recognised the potential of sport and physical activities as vehicles to help promote youth safety, positive youth social and emotional development and re-engage youth in education and in society generally. The programs run by these agencies are usually adult designed, adult-led programs and are typically constructed as distinct and separate from participants’ school physical education experiences. Physical education teachers are rarely formally involved in such initiatives, and the degree to which these programs have an educational underpinning may be questionable (Flintoff, 2003; Macdonald, 2002). Significant also is that there is
a dearth of evidence to suggest that these programs do deliver in terms of their perceived aims (Sandford, Armour & Duncomb, in press).

Largely absent in the physical education literature are practical examples of, and sustained discussion around, transgressive, student-led pedagogies which seek to empower students and connect with students’ physical culture by taking physical education into the community and reaching beyond formal school and curricular boundaries. The two questions we seek to answer through this paper are: what happens when we engage with students to challenge formal physical education curricular boundaries and connect with students’ physical culture; and what are the benefits and the challenges associated with engaging with this sort of practical activism for students and for adult allies? We acknowledge the irony of writing a paper which supports the troubling and challenging of formal learning boundaries while in some ways remaining quite true to the rather discrete subject/disciplinary boundary that is, physical education. We are physical education professionals, writing in a physical education journal and are passionate about the unique contribution of our subject matter. We do not however view the physical education disciplinary boundary as fixed. Indeed in our work we often manipulate, stretch and reach beyond the edge of perceived physical education disciplinary limitations.

Methodology
This paper is based on a Participatory Action Research (PAR) project, undertaken over a three year period, with forty one 15-19 year old female student researchers and activists, within and beyond the walls of an Irish, city-centre, secondary school. Ethical approval was received for this project from the University Research Ethics Committee. The purpose of the larger project was to work with a group of students to understand and transform their self-identified barriers to their physical education engagement and physical activity participation. The first phase was focused on the students’ formal, in-school physical education curriculum and engaged the students as curriculum designers and evaluators (Enright & O’Sullivan, in press a). The idea for phase two of the project emerged during informal conversations with the girls around the successes and the challenges they associated with phase one, specifically how they thought we might work together to help each other to create positive patterns of engagement with physical activity outside of school. Phase two saw the students’ decision making capacities and responsibility extend to the design, coordination and evaluation of an out-of-school physical activity club. This paper draws heavily on the students’ perceptions of the
process of designing, participating in and advocating for their out-of-school student-led physical activity club.

Participatory Action Research (PAR) constitutes the theoretical, pedagogical and methodological framework for this study. PAR sees people ‘co-creating their reality through participation; through their experience; their imagination and intuition, their thinking and their action’ (Reason, 1998, p. 262). It has a double objective, firstly ‘…to produce knowledge and action directly useful to a group of people’ and secondly, ‘…to empower people at a deeper level through the process of constructing and using their knowledge’ (Nieuwenhuys, 2004, p. 210). With PAR you cannot fully inform the participants at the outset what they are ‘signing up for’ because you simply cannot be sure. Defining how the programme might evolve would run counter to the emergent character of PAR. Eimear was therefore mindful of the necessity to renegotiate consent on several occasions throughout the PAR process (Alderson, 1995; Morrow, 1999; Morrow and Richards, 1996).

The students in this project had previous practice as researchers and curriculum designers (Enright & O’Sullivan, in press a, in press b). They had been and continued to be encouraged to read the world in such a way that they understood it and were empowered to change it (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998). They produced knowledge and action directly useful for themselves and were facilitated in creating the changes they wished to see in their physical education worlds. The following section describes the practicalities of this process.

Students as Researchers

Towards the end of phase one of the project it became clear that while curriculum negotiation was having a positive impact in terms of the girls’ engagement with physical education, for the most part it was not having any impact on the girls’ out of school physical activity participation. Eimear engaged the girls in conversations about why this might be the case. What emerged from these conversations was that the girls’ felt that the kinds of non-competitive, individual physical activities they would like to engage with out of school were privatised and costly and this proved a significant barrier to their out of school participation in physical activity. It was from these conversations that the idea for a student-led physical activity club began. Following a successful application for funding through the Local Sports Partnership (LSP) the process of designing ‘The Pres Girls Club’ began in October 2007. As ‘Frierian co-investigators’ (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998) Róisín, the physical education teacher at
the school, and Eimear first facilitated the students in identifying their research purpose/question.

After discussions with two year groups of students the student research question which emerged was ‘What kind of an afterschool physical activity club would girls in our school actually want to go to?’ One year group of students decided on a list of questions they would need to find the answers to in order to design their club and worked together to design questionnaires based on these questions. Individual and small groups of students then expressed preference regarding what sets of data they wished to work with. They refined the questions and worked individually and in groups analysing particular data sets and realising particular visions for their club. For example, one student selected club image as her particular interest and she analysed the data which related to proposed club names, club logo and club colours. Another student took organisational issues and worked to access students’ perspectives on where and when the club should operate, and how and by whom it should be facilitated? Other questions on the questionnaire related to club activities, marketing, incentives and the purpose of the club. All data were analysed by the students. They were prompted to firstly identify patterns and themes in the data they had chosen to analyse, then name these themes and show the regularity with which they were occurring and finally to document any outlying data that did not fit into these themes. These findings were then presented back to the club committee (the class, Eimear and physical education teacher). At this stage discussions occurred among the committee as to how we as a group would interpret and work with the data. For example, one clear club purpose did not emerge from the data but rather multiple purposes were articulated. The students then decided to conflate the most popular cited purpose statements and the final articulation of the club purpose became ‘To help us enjoy and want to do exercise more, lose weight, get fit and be with our mates’.

The club committee did not always agree. During one particular class discussion at which the student who had worked on the club image data was feeding back, it emerged that the playboy bunny logo was the most frequently suggested club logo. This was one of the few times in the development of the club that Róisín and Eimear fundamentally disagreed with the suggestions of the student researchers. We spent some time trying to help the students understand why we could and would not support the use of that particular logo but our stance was not appreciated or seemingly understood to the degree that we would have hoped. On one of the students’ draft posters which was completed three months after the discussions around the logo the following statement
appears in red: ‘Our club logo would not be the playboy bunny logo even though this was the most popular choice from the survey!’ In the following excerpt from one of the students’ posters they describe how the club began and the nature of the decision-making they were involved in:

**HOW THE CLUB STARTED**

It was our ideas that started the club. Most of us didn’t do any physical activity except in PE and we wanted to keep fit and do activities after school and we wanted more time to be with our friends after school and be more sociable. Some of us made questionnaires as part of one of our Leaving Cert Applied (LCA) tasks’. In the questionnaires we asked all of the girls in fifth year and sixth year LCA about what they would like a physical activity club to be like. Then we used the answers to make the club.

**THE DECISIONS WE MADE**

We decided:

- The club would be called The PRES GIRLS Club
- Black and Pink would be our club colours
- The club would meet every Wednesday after school
- The club base would be somewhere in the city, not in our school
- We would choose the activities
- We would be able to change activities when we wanted
- We wanted leaders who would listen to us and not roar at us or be in our face the whole time
- We would choose the music.

**HOW THE CLUB WORKS**

There are 17 girls in the club and there are about 12 girls at every session. So far we have picked and done aerobics, boxercise, walking, swimming, Khai Bo and going to the gym and we’ve had lots of different instructors. The club moves around the city. Sometimes we go to the University, sometimes we go to the Youth Service hall or to the gym at the [hotel]. We get stars for participating every week. That was our idea, and then you need four stars to get your t-shirt and more stars for your tracksuit. We definitely started going to the club for the free stuff but now we’ve no more free stuff left to get but we just like it now and it’s our Wednesday routine.

Data for this particular paper were gathered from four main sources. Firstly, field notes around club benefits and the challenges associated with the club design and participation process were kept by Eimear. Secondly, seventeen students engaged in two student-led, poster design sessions which focused on their experience of participating in ‘The Pres Girls Physical Activity Club’. The research poster drafts produced during the design sessions were kept and both sessions were audio-recorded. The final poster, which was presented by the students at a national conference, is also part of this data.
source. Thirdly, three girls who helped design but chose not to attend the club were asked for their feedback. They chose a focus group format as means through which they would articulate their views on the club. Finally, two semi-structured interviews were conducted with Róisín, the physical education teacher who had, together with Eimear, facilitated the PAR project, both in-school and out. Interviews and recordings were transcribed and all data were inductively analysed and reviewed repeatedly looking for patterns, themes, and regularities and identifying irregularities, paradoxes, nuances in meaning and constraints (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Pseudonyms are used throughout to refer to the students, their teachers and their community.

**Students’ perspectives on the benefits and challenges**

The girls cited with ease the benefits of participating in ‘The Pres Girls Club’. Many highlighted the amount and diversity of learning that occurred over the term and the joy that they had found in physical activity. ‘We have learned loads of things from the club: that it can be good fun being active and staying fit; how to use all the machines in the gyms; how to box; how to do aerobics and loads more’. Learning was not limited to content however; the girls also recognised their involvement in the project had made them aware of themselves as change agents.

‘We learned that we can make a difference awwwh (laughing). Like we wanted some stuff to happen and then it happened…..we said what we wanted. You helped us get it and now we have a club and hoodies. Simple as. The hoodies are very important (laughing)’

(Levi)

We see something good happen with what we do in PE, like our PE class actually made a club and then we actually wanted to go to it. It’s mad when you think about it.

One of the strongest themes to emerge from the girls’ discussions on the club related to their perceptions of connection and increasing relevance of physical education to their lives in and outside of school.

‘We bring our lives into class like with the scrappin the media stuff we do and talking about how magazines tell us we have to be skinny and eat low fat and diet everything and making us feel bad about ourselves and scrappin the photographs of our lives and communities that we took as well…. and now with the club its like in a way we’re giving PE a shake, making it mean something’

(Leonie)

‘Well you know what I mean like, now it’s flowing both ways. We’re talking in PE about making the club better and in the club about making
PE better and you know sometimes you forget where you are like cos we’re finally getting some respect and that does not happen in school usually’

(Sarah)

‘It’s the first time I’ve seen any purpose to PE. Sad but true…it’s not nothing like before… It’s more about trying to help us be smart active and confident to use stuff like gyms around where we live. Basically it’s helping us be active more than the once a week in class, we’re helping ourselves be active actually, and PE use’n’t do that and it’s also more about us and our lives and that’s a first but that’s just not the case for PE that’s in most school stuff’

(Debra)

Learning how to keep a routine was another perceived benefit of participation in the club: ‘It teaches us to keep a routine, going to the club every Wednesday’.

Communication and negotiation skills were also thought to have improved:

‘We’re learning life skills, like what [Ms Kennedy] is always on about, so we’ll be good in the interview, and for getting a job with customers, we’ll be able to communicate with them, express ourselves good an all’. (Daniella)

‘Listening to each other like, before saying yes or no to something, that’s what the choices make you have to do, whether you like it or not, cos you’re supposed to try to see where they’re coming from, sometimes it’s from Mars!’ (Shelly).

The girls were also aware of the benefits others attached to the club:

‘Our PE teachers are happy because we’re actually doing some activity outside of PE now’.

‘Our parents think the club is great because it keeps us off the crazy streets and the [gardaí] think it’s good too because it stops them from having to say ‘move along now, move along now’ on Wednesdays’.

Many of the girls shared their parents’ perceptions regarding the ‘crazy streets’ and did not feel safe hanging around in their community. For them the club constituted a safe, enjoyable social space.

‘Do you know where I live do you? You need a bullet proof vest to leave the house’

(Grace)

‘[At the club] we get the chance to spend time with our mates and it keeps us out of trouble and harm’s way’

(Jade)
The social aspect of the club was the most often cited reason for the girls’ continued participation in the club, and was tagged onto most responses the girls gave in relation to why the club worked.

‘We keep going because the club gives us a chance to express ourselves and do something that we want to do and have time with our mates. We’d love if the club was on two times a week’.

‘I go to do exercise but mostly to have a laugh with the girls. That’s mostly why I go’.

During the design phase of the club weight management had been listed by many of the students as one of the primary benefits of engaging in physical activity. They had also voted to include ‘lose weight’ in the overall club purpose. Interestingly however, weight management was not mentioned in any of the girls’ conversations about the benefits they derived from participated in the club.

Also interesting are the comments of students who were involved in designing the club but chose not to participate.

Eimhear - Did you ever even consider going to the club?
Jane - No way. I’m out those gates the minute last class is over. I don’t care where it’s on, or what we get to do….I’m just not into that stuff and my real friends don’t go here…We’ve got other things to do after school.

‘It was alright filling in the questionnaire and designing it. It was a laugh like but I was never going to go. Just not my thing. Just not into sporty things, go fast walking with my mates a few times a week and happy with that’

(Deirdre)

In terms of the organisational structure of the club, the girls highlighted the use of incentives as a very important motivator at the outset.

‘We get stars for participating every week. That was our idea, and then you need four stars to get your t-shirt and more stars for your tracksuit. We definitely started going to the club for the free stuff but now we’ve no more free stuff left to get but we just like it now and it’s our Wednesday routine. We only do it now because we like it’.

The routine aspect of the club, cited as a benefit above was also noted by one girl as the primary reason the club was successful.
‘You see we always know it’s on. Every Wednesday it’s on. Posters go up and we get a text on Monday or Tuesday. [The Leaders] are waitin for us after school Wednesday. That’s why the club is still going. Routine. We like routine’

(Levi)

The facilitator role adopted by the adult allies did not go unnoticed. ‘Leader’ was the title the girls initially gave to all adult allies involved in facilitating the club, and was inclusive of activity leaders and Eimear. The girls were evidently used to being told what to do and appreciated the fact that the leaders listened to them, encouraged them and helped them to coordinate the activities of the club. They also appreciated the consistency of interaction with the club leaders.

‘They aren’t in our faces the whole time. They just help us to make the club work and get us to the club sessions and encourage us mostly’.

‘They don’t really tell us what to do or give out to us. They just listen to us about what we want to do and help us arrange it and get to the activities. They’re at the club every week and join in the activities and just encourage us and look out for us’.

Interestingly as time passed, the girls also came to see themselves as leaders.

‘We all have jobs in the club to make it work so I suppose we’re leaders too… I’m getting my leaving cert in June but I’d say I’ll hang around the place and come back and help out with the new girls next year, if the hairdressing college will let me take the time off, that’s if I get in’

(Jade)

The students recognised that the club was a space in which their autonomy and decision making capacities were respected.

‘The club is good because…we get to do something that we enjoy, not things that we’re just told to do’.

‘We wear stuff we’re happy wearing, listen to music we’re happy listening to, do exercise we’re happy doing and we’ve worked for it all. We worked in PE for it with the research and all and we’re still working to keep it going….some weeks I’m lazy or Amy’s lazy but we make everyone go otherwise it would collapse and it’d all have been for nothing’.

The location of the club was something the girls flagged very early, as a decision they wanted to be involved in making. They did not want the club to be based in the school gymnasium. They wanted to leave the school premises for club activities.
‘If it was in school we wouldn’t do it we hate school and get out those gates as quick as possible’.

The mobility of the club became a very positive characteristic of the club for the participants.

‘The club moves around the city. It’s good that way’.

‘We get to use the gym at the [hotel] now. It’s just behind my house, on the doorstep like’.

‘Liked going out to the University and seeing all the rugby players!’

When asked what changes they would make to the club to improve it for next year the girls had a number of suggestions.

‘We’d have it twice a week and for three hours instead of two’.

‘More girls. Let more people be allowed join’.

‘Go away more as a club, like to [Irish holiday resort] or somewhere’.

Many of the student generated organisational recommendations outlined above align very closely with what we have found in a larger scale project which focused on best practices and key challenges in the provision of physical activity opportunities for girls (O’Sullivan, Enright & Harrison, 2006).

Asked to comment on how they felt PE teachers and other people working to engage young people in sport and physical activity could improve current practice, the girls had lots of advice, suggesting that physical activity providers needed to:

‘Ask girls more about their opinion on what they want to do’.

‘Start listening to girls and hearing what they want to do and give them a chance at different things and encourage them more’.

One girl provided a strong rationale for why this was important.

‘It’s not that we don’t like physical activity and sport, it’s just that sometimes we don’t like the kind of activities that people try to make us do, like basketball mostly, and sometimes we don’t know what we like because we only get to try the same things all the time’.
The girls ultimately felt that to get more girls active, girls themselves need to be more involved in making decisions about how their clubs, activities, and sport is organised and delivered. Their involvement was influenced by several things including the selection of the activities provided by the club.

‘Sometimes it’s not even the sport that puts us off, it’s like people roaring at you or they want you to do it at some stupid time or to some crap music’.

On being prompted to consider a take home message for their final poster the girls chose the following statement:

‘If you want to get more girls active you need to just listen to us and help us to make our own clubs. We know what we like and we’ll work hard to make decent clubs that we’ll want to go to. The Pres Girls club works like that and we think it’s rapid!’

In terms of the challenges for students of engaging in boundary crossing efforts the girls rarely articulated, and struggled when prompted to identify, challenges.

‘There’s never enough time really, is there, to be planning everything like. And forgetting, that’s a problem, like really forgetting. I was supposed to be the texter last week and let everyone know the story for this week, where we were meeting and all and sure you might as well have told the wall to do it and you had to remind me’.

(Grace)

Debra picks up on this notion of collective responsibility for the club and thinking about other people as a challenge but also notes this as something that the girls need to start doing.

Debra: We’re kind of letting each other down and you down cos we did all this work and sure it’s for nothing if we don’t stick to it. Sometimes I do not want to go…..Don’t’ want to stick around after school on the Wednesday just cos I’m lazy or lads are going shopping or whatever but I have this thing pecking at me, telling me to cop on…. Ah it’s mostly rapid but it’s hard too like when it’s not just yourself you have to care about….well you have to think about other people. That’s new to me [laughing]…aren’t we growing up and I suppose we need to.

Adult ally perspectives on the benefits and the challenges

Many of the benefits students noted above are also benefits for teachers, but there are also many additional benefits for teachers who engage in student voice work. Flutter (2007) highlights what she calls a simple and profound rationale for teachers to engage with student voice:
‘It affords teachers an opportunity to refocus their attention on what really matters - learners and how they learn best. The cornerstone of teacher development lies in extending teachers’ knowledge and understanding to enable them to practise their art more effectively: pupil voice strategies are one way in which teachers can go about extending their knowledge and understanding, through investigation’

(P.345)

Engaging with student voice raised significant and challenging professional questions for the physical education teacher involved in this study. The students’ positive response to curriculum negotiation and to the club prompted Róisín to reflect on why and how the club was working to re-engage students who had previously disengaged.

‘They really feel like they own the club. ‘It’s our club’. They created it, they chose it, and they designed it. There was definitely a more positive attitude towards physical education especially with the likes of Amy, I had her for PE last year and she’d always turn up in her gear but she’d be feigning injury, and saying, oh I’ve had enough now, I’ve had enough now I can’t do it anymore, where as she definitely had a much more positive attitude towards it this year and it was definitely connected to the club... and the club has been very successful in getting students together after school. That’s something we struggle with; the students just seem to want to get out of here as soon as they can... And their interests are being recognised now too in a way that they never were before. And it makes you wonder have we been getting it very wrong? I’ve been fighting with them for so long to get them to do anything and I hate fighting with them and this club and negotiating the curriculum takes serious effort but I’d take it over the gear forgetting, injury faking, and period stuff any day’

(Róisín)

The benefits Róisín associated with The Pres Girls’ Club included the students’ more positive attitude towards physical education, which she suggests was a result of their engagement in the club, and an increasing recognition of students’ interests. Róisín also acknowledges however that one significant challenge of negotiating the curriculum and co-constructing the out-of-school club was the effort, time and investment required on behalf of all involved, particularly the physical education teacher. Establishing and investing in long-term relationships with student participants is necessary for all adult allies who wish to support student voice orientated initiatives. Bland & Atweh (2007) remind us that ‘it takes time for students to adjust to the novelty of having their voices respected in meaningful collaboration with adults’ (p. 344). Teachers need to be willing to invest this time, because developing meaningful collaborative relationships with students will take longer than telling students exactly what to do.

It was arguably much easier for Eimear to construct this meaningful collaborative relationship with the students than it was for Róisín. Eimear’s relationship
with the teenage student researchers was definitely not akin to the relationships they were used to having with their teachers. Eimear was not thought of as a ‘real teacher’ even after having spent two years attending their physical education classes, facilitating the negotiation of their curriculum, teaching and assessing their learning and helping coordinate their out-of-school physical activity club. At times she was even viewed as somewhat of an ‘incompetent adult’ (Corsaro & Molinari, 2000).

Amy - When are you going to become a real teacher?
Eimear: How do you mean?
Amy - Like when would you be able to come back and teach here all the time and teach all the PE classes like to everyone not just us?
Eimear - I am a real PE teacher kind of…
Amy - But not here like. Here like you’re not a real teacher like with annoying rules and all, and you need us to help you, like [FA first name] if we’ve told you once, you don’t leave your bag lying around here unless you want it swiped. We’re sick of picking up after you [laughing]
Eimear - How else am I not real teacher?
Amy - Well, you’re more like one of us than one of them sometimes cos you hang with us after school at the club and we kind of tell you what we’re doing and you’re not on our backs you’re just there helping us and sometimes I’m like she better be being paid for this cos we’re not easy but then I suppose we don’t give you a hard time like the real teachers then either….

Her atypical, less authoritative adult/teacher status afforded Eimear privileges with the girls in terms of how they responded to her. The facilitator role therefore came a little easier to Eimear. Róisín, who supported the entire PAR process and team-taught with Eimear on many occasions, supported Amy’s observation. She confessed that she experienced challenges negotiating her new facilitator identity, citing a conflict between ‘doing what teachers are expected to, are supposed to do’ and ‘trying to work with and respect students’ voices and choices’. This might be interpreted as a struggle over her teacher identity. Róisín was a permanent staff member at the school, a face the students saw daily in the school corridors. She was perceived by the students as an enforcer of ‘annoying rules’ and so the students had a very different relationship with Róisín and challenged her in very different ways. Róisín was operating in a school culture where there were very definite and arguably narrow expectations in terms of what it meant to be a teacher and she felt constrained by the culture. She felt her title and her disciplinary responsibilities impacted on her ability to facilitate an out-of-school learning experience.
This year they call you Eimear, which for them was really positive. They have huge respect for you. They definitely viewed you as an authority figure but one who was looking out for them and was there primarily to help them and work with them to improve their PE experience. They didn’t have the same expectations of you. You are a teacher but you’re not a teacher to them because they only see you for their classes. Just the word teacher is just such a negative. Even the fact that they’re able to call you Eimear is a huge thing. Being able to call you Eimear makes you a normal person. As soon as they start calling me Miss [Kennedy] there’s a barrier there straight away. That’s one thing I really worry about. Me being me and them having to see me there and me having to go where’s your navy jacket and all the usual stuff that go with being a teacher here and that, me, might deter some of them. That would be my fear for the club this year when you’re not around as much. I do fear that me being there would prevent people from being involved. Because it’s been such a positive experience to date and I wouldn’t take it personally or anything but just because I’m an extra link to the school. They love it at the moment and I would hate it to be gone for next year’

(Róisín)

Rudduck (2007) suggests that moving ‘from a familiar and safe position of power to a relationship that is more collaborative, open, responsive, and consultative’ results in a ‘temporary destabilising period of change’ for teachers (p.607). There are traditional ways of being a teacher. Deviating from tradition and negotiating this ‘temporary destabilising period of change’, requires courage on the part of the teacher and is a difficult and complex departure without institutional and collegial support. It was arguably much easier for Eimear to transgress the in-school, out-of-school boundaries in her interactions with the students, as she was perceived by them as an atypical adult, who was ‘more like one of [them]’ and there were therefore no such expectations of her role.

In the second year of the club, which was the third year of the study, Róisín took a greater role in the negotiation and coordination of the out-of-school club as Eimear began to withdraw from the setting. Róisín reflects here on the difficulties associated with this transition:

‘I am so sorry. I’ll tell you straight. I just did not put enough time and energy into it. And it was difficult because there’s so much else going on and the week would fly and it would be Wednesday again before you knew it. I didn’t do some of the things that we knew mattered. It was easier to use the school gym rather than go outside, just logistically and so we kept it in the school. And you know some of them would be playing up in school on Friday when I had them, very uncooperative and it was very hard then to see them on the Wednesdays be all nice and listen to them. And they definitely tried to test boundaries with me this
year when you weren’t around. And some of the girls were worried you know like Levi would be coming up to me saying ‘What’s the story with this club it’s falling apart. What are we going to do about it?’ So she is one of the one’s fighting to keep it going. And I know it’s a good thing for me to support as a PE teacher, I need to support it, we want to see them active outside of school and learning, and so I will keep working on it and give it another go, fresh start after the break’

(Róisín)

Róisín’s resolve to keep the club going despite the difficulties she noted and her hectic workload reflect her commitment to what she sees as an important part of the responsibility of the school physical education teacher. Facilitating the club was a challenging role for her and one for which she received no extra remuneration and yet she persisted because she believed in the value of the club and it’s potential to promote her students’ learning and engagement in physical activity.

Conclusion

Recognising connective spaces, such as student-led, out-of-school clubs, as extensions of formal physical education provision is one way of keeping physical education and physical education teachers in touch with the changing nature of students’ physical activity practices. For our students, one of the main factors in making their club work was the degree of ownership they felt over it. The girls participated in the ‘The Pres Girls Physical Activity Club’ because they got ‘to do something that [they] enjoyed, not things that [they’re] just told to do’. Their positioning as researchers and curriculum designers resulted in the creation of an in-between physical education learning space which they saw as relevant, meaningful and connected to their physical culture and their formal physical education curriculum. Having adult allies who ‘weren’t in [their] faces the whole time’ but were encouraging and respected the girls’ agency and their ability to make good decisions was deemed vital to the continued success of the club. What was arguably one of the most powerful learning experiences for the students was the opportunity they had ‘to make a difference’ and ‘see something good happen with what [they] did in PE’.

While debates relating to the nature and purposes of physical education have been persistent and often controversial, there is general agreement with respect to one purpose for the subject, which is the promotion of lifelong participation in sport and physical activity (Flintoff, 2005; Green, Smith & Roberts, 2005). Physical education classes in primary and post primary school can be a key foundation in developing positive adolescent attitudes and confidence to engage in regular physical activity
outside of school time (O’Sullivan, Enright & Harrison, 2006). Recent research in Ireland however suggests that very few adolescents report physical education as a motivator to participation in recreation of any kind (Roe, 2006). We know therefore that a large number of students can ‘successfully negotiate years of physical education where they learn about health, acquire motor skills, and encounter a variety of sport and dance activities - but never change the sedentary patterns of living that presumably matter more to them’ (Kretchmar, 2000, p.20). It is difficult to challenge these patterns when physical education as it is often conceived is out of touch with much of what young people find relevant and into which they are socialised.

Physical education cannot continue to retain the features that distinguish it so sharply from students’ physical culture if it is to promote its own purpose. Re-imagining physical education to challenge in-school/out-of-school learning boundaries may simultaneously renew physical education’s educational value as students begin to see continuities between their school based and community based physical education and find meaning in physical activity. ‘The Pres Girls Club’ worked to make students value their in-school physical education experiences and motivate students to participate in out-of-school physical activity. The educational underpinning of the club would not have been possible however without the investment and support of Róisín, a boundary crossing school physical education teacher.

Boundary crossing teachers are those who help young people make connections between school physical education programmes, in-school sport and physical activity programmes, and local community activities and infrastructure for sport and physical activity. Boundary crossing will require a different mindset for many physical education teachers and teacher educators. It may also mean reconstructing a different kind of job description for physical education teachers in schools. Teachers would now spend part of their time teaching physical education and part of their time coordinating physical recreation activities with young people and with outside providers. Part of the physical education teachers responsibility would therefore be that of ‘activity broker’, meaning they would ‘broker a variety of experiences - many emphasising student choice and responsibility, some involving outside-of school resources, others requiring collaboration with parents’, adult allies in the community and so on (Kretchmar, 2000, p. 24). This would allow students to consolidate and extend what they are learning in the physical education programme with their outside physical recreation and sporting experiences. This approach together with an appreciation of student voice and agency.
would also help teachers to facilitate students in finding their own meanings and creating positive and sustainable patterns of engagement with physical activity.

In terms of supportive national policy contexts for these sorts of boundary crossing initiatives England constitutes quite a good example. The PE and Sport Strategy for Young People (PESSYP) launched in England in January 2008 and grounded in the perceived success of the previous Physical Education and School Sport Club Links (PESSCL) Strategy, aims to improve the quantity and quality of PE and sport undertaken by young people aged 5 - 19 in England. The School Sport Partnership Programme (SSPP) which is one pillar of this national strategy holds as its purpose ‘to make links between school physical education (PE) and out of school sports participation, and has a particular remit to raise the participation levels of several identified under-represented groups, of which girls and young women are one’ (Flintoff, 2008, p. 393). Despite some previously cited critiques of this programme in this paper, evaluations of the SSPP have evidenced an increase in the amount, diversity and quality of extra curricular physical activity provision for young people and a related increase in young people’s participation in physical activity and sport, with primary pupils being the main beneficiaries (Office for Standards in Education, 2003, 2004, 2005; Loughborough Partnership, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008).

Implications
This work has taught us much. It has taught us that maybe sometimes we need to muddy the waters and blur boundaries if we are to bring into sharp relief that which we seek to understand. ‘The Pres Girls club’ has illustrated that physical education is possible in ‘all sorts of corners’ and its success suggests that we need to start seeking out and recognising these corners as legitimate learning spaces, if we are serious about helping young people find meaning in our passion. It has also taught us that we cannot make significant change on our own. We need, returning to the opening quotation by Greene (1997), to ‘move newcomers’ to join with us and transform (p10). In the context of this project, the students were ‘newcomers’ in terms of their substantive curriculum development roles, as were the various community agencies who helped to resource the out-of-school club. Physical education teachers cannot and should not be expected to carry these boundary crossing efforts on their own. Teachers, adult allies, schools, physical education teacher education programs, community agencies, parents and students need to work together to ensure the success and sustainability of physical education change efforts.
The findings of this work also have implications for teacher education. Physical education teacher education needs to do more than prepare teachers to teach in schools as they are. Student teachers must be engaged in imagining possibilities and facilitated in developing the confidence to work with young people in collaborative ways both in school and out. We need to begin to think creatively around what pedagogical practices within physical education teacher education will support the notion of student-led, boundary crossing physical education.

Notes
1. The PE-PAYS (Physical Education, Physical Activity and Youth Sport) Forum is a research conference hosted annually by the PE-PAYS Research Centre at the University of Limerick. Further information on the PE-PAYS Research Centre is available at www.ul.ie/pepays.
2. The Leaving Certificate Applied is a distinct, self-contained Leaving Certificate programme, designed for those students who do not wish to proceed directly to third level education or for those whose needs, aspirations and aptitudes are not adequately catered for by the other two Leaving Certificate programmes. More information on the programme is available at www.lca.slss.ie.

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CHAPTER 8

‘Carving a new order of experience’ with young people in physical education: Participatory Action Research as a pedagogy of possibility

EIMEAR ENRIGHT and MARY O’SULLIVAN

Introduction

It is June 13th 2008, a bright, warm, much appreciated, summer’s day in Ireland. The school holidays have begun and three teenage girls have chosen to attend the Physical Education, Physical Activity and Youth Sport (PE-PAYS) Annual Forum. Dressed in their black and luminous pink, self-designed, club hoodies, they are standing in front of a crowd of 20 or so people, sharing their experiences as activist researchers, designers and participants in The Pres Girls’ Physical Activity Club (The Pres Girls, Enright and O’Sullivan, 2008). They are nervous but they speak honestly and passionately. They have not learned off by heart what they are saying; rather they speak from their hearts and their recent memories. The crowd are engaged, hanging on the girls’ words, and at times laughing appropriately at the incredible honesty of what they are hearing. One of the girls has earlier led a two-hour hip-hop dance workshop for interested physical education teachers and health promotion professionals. Afterwards the girls talk quickly and excitedly about their experience: ‘the buzz’ they got from being listened to by so many people; the photographer who had told them their poster was visually the best at the conference; how they felt everyone understood their presentation because ‘[they] didn’t use big, confusing words like “motivational climate” like the other presenters’ (all adult researchers) and ‘[they] were just [them] selves’. One of the girls, Daniella, did not speak during the presentation as she had planned to. ‘I was just too nervous. My heart was hopping,’ she explains. Levi and Zara tell her that they were glad she was there with them to support them, whether she said anything or not. Later she comes into her own, fielding questions from interested teachers and researchers. ‘I’m speaking up there the next time,’ she resolves. After their initial excitement dissipates, a brief silence follows. Levi then asks: ‘Do you think now that they’ve heard us talking about it they’ll try to make their PE classes better and get their students to help them make PE better and make clubs with them and all?’ Levi cares about other students’ experiences. She wants to know her work, her investment, will make a positive difference in the lives of other students. ‘I hope so Levi,’ Eimear replies.

(Adapted from field notes, p. 112)
Student voice ‘describes the many ways in which youth actively participate in the school decisions that shape their lives and the lives of their peers’ (Mitra, 2007, p. 727). The student voice movement supports a shift in the status of students in school from passive objects to active participants (Hodgkin, 1998). Daniella, Levi and Zara, the students introduced in the narrative above, embody this shift. They have become advocates for a student voice initiative, which engaged them as designers and evaluators of their physical education curriculum and an after-school physical activity club in their community (Enright and O’Sullivan, 2007; The Pres Girls, Enright and O’Sullivan, 2008). For them student voice means:

Listening to us and helping us express ourselves, and letting us make real decisions, and the teachers hearing us and working with us to make PE and sports and stuff better for everyone. . . . And that’s what it’s all about, us making PE classes that we want to be in, and that are good fun and that we learn interesting, and useful things in.

(Daniella, student researcher)

Student voice is, as Daniella suggests, about more than just listening to students; it is about listening to students with the intent of responding to what we hear (Fielding, 2004; Cook-Sather, 2007). Responding appropriately to what we hear requires that students’ voices ‘need to not only be heard, but also engaged, reconciled and argued with’ (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 251). We need therefore to create safe, democratic spaces where teachers and students can come together, ‘discover what they recognize together and appreciate in common’ (Greene, 1995, p. 39), and work towards increased student engagement and subsequently deeper and more relevant student learning.

This chapter is an attempt to stimulate a rethinking of how student voice is conceptualized and enacted in physical education research and teaching. It is an effort to promote an appreciation of young people as curious, thoughtful, social agents who have the desire and capacity to imagine more engaging and meaningful physical education and physical activity experiences, and to create the changes they wish to see in their worlds. The primary aim in writing this chapter is to challenge physical education teachers and researchers to work with students to trouble the boundaries of what’s possible in physical education, imagine what is possible, and work towards what could be (Lather, 1991; Fine, 1992; Greene, 1995; Oliver et al., 2009).

One approach to such a re-imagining is to focus on Participatory Action Research (PAR) as a theoretical construct, a research methodology and a pedagogical framework. Participatory Action Research in this context constitutes a ‘pedagogy of
possibility’ (Giroux and Simon, 1989; Freire, 1994; McLaren, 1999). The ability of PAR to promote the creation of more educationally meaningful and socially relevant learning experiences for all students in physical education is evidenced with reference to four recent PAR-orientated projects in physical education (Enright and O’Sullivan, 2008; Fisette, 2008; McMahon, 2007; Oliver, Hamzeh and McCaughtry, 2009; Oliver and Hamzeh, 2010). It is our hope that learning from these efforts will ‘light the slow fuse of possibility’ (Dickinson, 1960, quoted in Greene, 1997), encouraging more teachers and researchers to challenge existing boundaries of experience in educating students in and through physical education.

The chapter begins with some theoretical foregrounding on the emergence of student voice. We then position PAR as a framework to support student voice-orientated work in physical education, and chart three phases of student engagement: naming inequities; broadening horizons; and change-agency. Some of the challenges and benefits associated with supporting a PAR pedagogy are then discussed, and implications for all who seek to engage with student voice in physical education are presented.

**Silenced voices**

The traditional positioning of students as passive recipients of teaching renders them as ‘blank slates’, ‘beneficiaries’, ‘consumers’, ‘conformists’ and ‘subordinate subjects’ (Thiessen, 2007), supporting the popular aphorism ‘children should be seen and not heard’. The student voice agenda challenges these traditional images of youth, daring all those who work with young people in schools to support students in taking an active, meaningful role in decision making related to their learning. ‘Meaningful student involvement’ has been defined as ‘the process of engaging the knowledge, experience and perspectives of students in every facet of the educational process, for the purpose of strengthening their commitment to education, community and democracy’ (Fletcher, 2004, p. 4). Definitions of student voice and involvement, such as that proposed by Fletcher (2004) support schools where students are engaged as ‘teachers, education researchers, school planners, classroom evaluators, system-wide school decision makers, and education advocates’ (p. 4).

This type of educational imperative has been knocking on the door of physical education for quite some time. Physical education researchers have persistently highlighted the marginality of student voices in curriculum-making practices in physical education (Dyson, 1995; Brooker and MacDonald, 1999; MacDonald, 2003; Penney,
Nearly a decade ago, Brooker and Macdonald (1999) asserted that ‘[w]hile curriculum supposedly exists to serve the interests of learners, their preferences, if sought at all, are marginalized and their voices are mostly silent in curriculum making’ (p. 84). More recently Macdonald (2003) observed:

> While the literature in the curriculum field recognizes the difficulty in creating meaningful curriculum change within current school structures, the majority of innovations and analyses are blind to the bigger and more significant questions surrounding change: Who are the young people in schools, and what, where and how do they learn? (p. 147)

This blindness has particular significance for physical education – a subject that is greatly mediated by the media, and the interests and culture of its students (Tinning and Fitz Clarence, 1992; Brooker and Macdonald, 1999). Critiques of curriculum reform efforts suggest that selecting and constructing a physical education curriculum that connects and speaks to the heterogeneity of young people is near impossible, if the voices of the young people the curriculum seeks to connect with are absent from the construction process (Penney and Evans, 1999; Macdonald, 2003; Glasby and Macdonald, 2004; Penney, 2006). Penney (2006) contends that ‘the starting point for more and innovative research has to be new conceptualizations of curriculum . . . Such conceptualizations will rightly refocus attention on students but also prompt more involvement of them in both curriculum development and research in physical education’ (p. 576). It has also been suggested that curricula for the agentic student, curricula that harness student interest and potential, be created through negotiation (Boomer, 1992; Shor, 1992, 1996; Brooker and Macdonald, 1999; Greene, 2000, Glasby and Macdonald, 2004). While there exist numerous possibilities for curriculum negotiation and shared curriculum decision making with students in physical education, it is difficult to find reported examples of such practices.

Students’ roles in research and the corresponding critique of these roles by the research community have followed a similar trajectory to that of the literature relating to students’ marginal positioning within curriculum development. Christensen and Prout (2002) identify four perspectives on children in research: the child as object; the child as subject; the child as social actor; and an emerging approach that positions children as participants and co-researchers. Historically, educational researchers have positioned students as objects, using, for example, limited-response questionnaires and statistical analysis to conduct research on students (Erickson and Shultz, 1992). This perspective
and these methods fail to recognize students as experts on their own lives, fracture student experience, and do not acknowledge student subjectivities or agency. The publication of a monograph on student voice in 1995 by the *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education* marked a methodological shift in physical education research, towards an understanding of students as research subjects (Graham, 1995). In line with this shift, in the last decade there has been a multitude of studies that focus on students’ perspectives of their physical education experiences (for example, Carlson, 1995; Dyson, 1995, 2001, 2002; Hopple and Graham, 1995; Pope and Grant, 1996; Cothran and Ennis, 1999; Hastie, 2000; Burrows, Wright and Jungersen-Smith, 2002; Hunter, 2002; Kinchin and O’Sullivan, 1999; Azzarito, Solomon and Harrison, 2006). Much has been learned from listening to student perspectives. For example, we now know that students often perceive only a vague rationale for their physical education curriculum, and often do not find physical education relevant (Cothran and Ennis, 1999). We also know that affording students greater roles and responsibilities within the learning context (Hastie, 1998; Ennis, 1999), providing opportunities for their critical interpretation, challenge and resistance of dominant and often harmful discourses of the body (Oliver and Lalik, 2001), and facilitating students in interrogating and making meaningful connections between school-based physical education and contemporary physical culture (Kinchin and O’Sullivan, 1999), can work to facilitate student engagement and deepen student learning. We can surmise, therefore, that it is not disengaged students that are always the problem but often the pedagogical contexts within which they are expected to participate, and the curricula with which they are instructed to engage (Wright, 1996; Ennis et al., 1997; Flintoff and Scraton, 2005; Sandford and Rich, 2006).

We have clearly learned a lot from listening to student perspectives and, while it is very necessary, listening alone is not sufficient if we hope to challenge current curriculum-making practices or promote a change in the status of students within schools or within educational research (Brooker and Macdonald, 1999; Rudduck, 2007). In the general education literature the methodologies that frame and support students’ roles within research are becoming increasingly sophisticated and diverse (Thiessen, 2007). There is an evolving appreciation of students’ potential roles in research as ‘co-researchers’, ‘co-constructors of knowledge’, ‘collaborators’, ‘researchers’, ‘advisors’, ‘co-interpreters’, ‘inquirers’, ‘architects’, ‘activists’, ‘advocates’ and ‘evaluators’ (Thiessen and Cook-Sather, 2007). Within physical education research we are also now beginning to see this shift, particularly among feminist critical scholars (Enright and
Recognizing students as active agents, researchers and curriculum makers necessitates the construction of an entirely different set of relationships to the ones that currently characterize how many teachers and students do physical education, and indeed education generally. The potential of PAR as a critical pedagogical tool, which can support negotiated curricular practices and forge more democratic relationships between teachers and students, has received support (Udas, 1998). So, too, has the potential PAR ‘offers as a means by which marginalized students, teachers and university researchers can work collaboratively towards positive outcomes for participants and their schools’ (Bland and Atweh, 2007, p. 337).

**Participatory Action Research**

We have framed the research reviewed in this chapter as PAR. We might have borrowed from various perspectives presented by physical education and non-physical education scholars, and framed our pedagogical efforts as critical democratic pedagogy for self and social change (Shor, 1992), feminist critical pedagogy (Oliver and Lalik, 2001), empowering education (Shor, 1992), poststructural pedagogy (Wright, 2003), postmodern physical education (Macdonald, 2003), democratic education (Beane, 1997), coherent curricula (Ennis, 2003), curriculum co-construction, power sharing, co-governance, authentic assessment, integrated curricula (Glasby and Macdonald, 2004), or negotiated curricula (Boomer *et al*., 1992; Shor, 1996; Glasby and Macdonald, 2004). Similarly the research efforts described within this chapter might have been articulated as feminist activist research (Fine, 1992), socially critical research (Devis-Devis, 2006), praxis-orientated research (Lather, 1991), emancipatory social research (Lather, 1992) or poststructural feminist research (Nilges, 2006). The work cited in this chapter does reflect principles inherent in all of these research and pedagogical frames. We chose PAR, however, as it foregrounds collective action, a principle that, considering our understanding of student voice and our belief that students who have become ‘collaboratively disengaged’ (Chaplain, 1996) need to be collaboratively re-engaged, we viewed as particularly important. Like Shor (1992), we believe that ‘knowledge is power only for those who can use it to change their social conditions’ (p. 6). PAR supports this belief representing ‘an epistemology that assumes knowledge is rooted in social relations and most powerful when produced collaboratively through action’ (Fine *et al*., 2001, p. 173). PAR sees people ‘cocreating their reality through participation;
through their experience; their imagination and intuition, their thinking and their action’ (Reason, 1998, p. 262). It has a double objective, first, ‘to produce knowledge and action directly useful to a group of people’ and, second, ‘to empower people at a deeper level through the process of constructing and using their knowledge’ (Nieuwenhuys, 2004, p. 210).

Participatory Action Research acknowledges that the researched possess critical social knowledge, and repositions them as participants in and architects of research (Torre and Fine, 2006), thereby promoting a higher level of participation than action research. PAR is explicitly political premised on the notion that marginalized people can transform their realities through education, research, action and reflection. Udas (1998) contends ‘Participatory Action Research must be aimed toward social justice, involve critical reflection on practice, question assumptions on which practice is predicated, and promote collaborative collective action’ (p. 606). We draw on four physical education PAR studies as exemplars of this approach to student voice. A brief introduction to each of these studies is presented here. We do not have the scope in this chapter to go into detail on the students’ contribution to the PAR process, nor do we have the space to introduce you to each of the student researchers. We do however make an effort, in the sections that follow, to allow you enter as fully into the spirit and practicalities of the research journeys as we can.

Enright and O’Sullivan (2007, 2008) carried out a three-year PAR project with disengaged students in an all-girl, urban, post-primary school in Ireland. The aim of the project was to work with the students to understand and transform their self-identified barriers to in-school physical education engagement and their out-of-school physical activity participation. The PAR project was initially focused on the engagement of one class of teenage (aged 15–19 years) girls as physical education curriculum designers and evaluators (Enright and O’Sullivan, 2007). The project extended to a further two classes and to the design and evaluation of an after-school physical education club in the second year (The Pres Girls, Enright and O’Sullivan, 2008), thereby challenging formal physical education learning boundaries.

Adopting curriculum negotiation as a theoretical framework, McMahon’s (2007) study sought to engage one co-ed class of 5th class primary school students (aged 10–11 years) in the process of physical education curriculum negotiation. The purpose of the study was to understand students’ views of their involvement in curriculum negotiation, and how it affected their ownership of and investment in their physical education curriculum. Her ten-week study involved students in a process of curriculum
negotiation with the researcher/teacher in which together they determined the purpose, content, aims, teaching methods and assessment of a curriculum. Unlike the other three PAR studies (Enright and O’Sullivan, 2007, 2008; Fisette, 2008; Oliver et al., 2009; Oliver and Hamzeh, 2010) profiled in this chapter, all of McMahon’s (2007) students self-identified as enjoying physical education prior to her study.

A strong Participatory Action Research theme underpins much of Oliver and Lalik’s work (Oliver and Lalik, 2000, 2001, 2004a, 2004b). For the purpose of this chapter we will focus on Oliver and colleagues’ most recent research (Oliver et al., 2009; Oliver and Hamzeh, 2010), the purpose of which was to (a) understand 5th grade (aged 9–10 years) girls’ self-identified barriers to physical activity, and (b) work with the girls to design and practise strategies for publicizing and changing the barriers they identified (2009). Oliver et al’s participants were all identified by their teachers as unenthusiastic physical education participants prior to her study.

Fisette’s (2008) study engaged a group of seven teenage (aged 13–16 years) girls in undertaking their own exploratory physical education projects. This group was selected with the help of their physical education teacher as a representative sample of their physical education class, and included students with low and high levels of engagement in physical education. The girls formulated their own projects to further their knowledge on a topic or issue in physical education that was significant for them. For example, one group chose embarrassment in physical education as their focus of inquiry. Through her work with the girls Fisette (2008) sought to understand (a) how adolescent girls perceive and feel about their bodies while they engage in physical education, and (b) how they navigate ways to feel comfortable within their own bodies and the physical education environment.

**Naming inequities**

Shor (1992) proposes that ‘[f]inding a generative theme, that is a theme generated from student conditions that is problematic enough to inspire students to do intellectual work, can produce a wealth of student expression’ (p. 5). Physical education is a subject that is particularly problematic for many students (more girls than boys) and as such is ripe for intellectual work. Fine et al. (2007) contend that ‘young people, who witness injustice in schools, are willing to research the capillaries of inequity, and work hard to redesign school structures, policies and practices’ (p. 806). For years scholars have documented blatant, insidious and persistent injustices inherent in physical education practices. These injustices relate to gender (Flintoff and Scraton, 2006; Gard, 2006), sexuality
(Clarke, 2006), social class (Evans, 2006), ability (Fitzgerald, 2006), and race and ethnicity (Harrison and Belcher, 2006). More recently, the intersection of these social structures has received attention (Azzarito and Solmon, 2005; Oliver, Chapter 3 in this volume). Students have been perpetrators, subjects and witnesses of these intersecting inequities, and are therefore uniquely positioned to name and change dysfunctional, inequitable physical education practices, and they are as Fine et al. (2007) suggest, and as our four profiled PAR studies (Enright and O’Sullivan, 2007, 2008; McMahon, 2007; Fisette, 2008; Oliver et al., 2009; Oliver and Hamzeh, 2010) reveal, ‘willing’ change agents.

Each of the PAR studies reported on in this chapter began with the selection of one or more generative themes. Participatory methods were used to open up dialogue and begin to engage students in critical inquiry in all cases. Participatory methods are those that facilitate participants in finding their own language to articulate what they know; methods that help participants put words to their ideas and share their understandings of their worlds. These methods work to facilitate students thinking ‘in light of local knowledge’ first, and generating what Clifford Geertz (1983) calls a ‘feeling for immediacies’ (cited in Greene, 1995, p. 68). The participatory methods used in the four profiled PAR studies included photography (Enright and O’Sullivan, 2008; Oliver et al., 2009; Oliver and Hamzeh, 2010), development of personal biographies (Enright and O’Sullivan, 2008; Fisette, 2008; Oliver et al., 2009; Oliver and Hamzeh, 2010), free writing, body drawing, journal writing (Fisette, 2008), student drawings (McMahon, 2007), posters sessions (Enright and O’Sullivan, 2007; Fisette, 2008), and physical activity timelines (Enright and O’Sullivan, 2008).

The participants in Enright and O’Sullivan’s (2007) study identified their first generative theme as ‘lack of voice and choice’, with students being particularly critical of the hierarchical and institutional power embodied by teachers and principals: ‘the teachers make all the decisions and the principal and they never listen to us’ (Kelly). The only decisions the girls perceived they made in physical education were: ‘to participate’ (Debra), ‘put in effort and try or to mooch’ (Kelly) and ‘to bring in gear or not’ (Shelly). By making these decisions, the girls refused to be passive recipients of the physical education teachers’ formal and unilateral authority. In fact through these decisions they actively constructed their disengagement from physical education and physical activity. The girls felt that boys were far better catered for, in terms of sports and physical activity provision in their communities, highlighting how lack of voice and choice in relation to physical activity options extended beyond school boundaries. The
second generative theme to emerge for the participants was ‘stupid physical education’. All of the girls were critical to some extent regarding the choice of activities offered to them through their physical education curriculum. While some just wanted a little more variety, others rejected all of the activities they had experienced in physical education, ‘for three years all we’ve ever done is basketball, rugby-rounders or soccer and that’s it, stupid and boring madness’ (Kelly). This perspective is not surprising considering that the nature of the activities offered through their post-primary physical education experiences were incredibly consistent. Their physical education curriculum had mirrored the traditional multi-activity sport model, privileging competitive team sport over other forms of physical activity (Ennis, 1999).

For Fisette’s (2008) participants, ‘gender issues’ and ‘class/curriculum design’ in physical education were selected initially by one of her student groups as the two themes they wanted to investigate. They dropped the theme of class/curriculum design once they realized how complex and time consuming it was going to be to focus on gender issues alone. The girls in this group struggled particularly with what they perceived as male dominance in physical education. Her second group of students decided on ‘how you feel in physical education’ as their generative theme, believing that this theme encompassed both their key questions/concerns: what influences girls’ participation and what makes them embarrassed in physical education. These girls were particularly critical of the public, performance aspect of physical education, and feared their bodies and their performance being watched and judged by other classmates.

Oliver and colleagues (Oliver et al., 2009; Oliver and Hamzeh, 2010) worked with two groups of 9–10-year-old girls. For the first group the generative theme was ‘girly girl’ and how being a ‘girly girl’ hindered the girls’ physical activity and physical education engagement. For the second group the primary physical activity barrier and the theme selected by the participants for further study and potential transformation was ‘the boys won’t let us play’.

McMahon’s (2007) co-ed group of students expressed a unanimous rejection of their limited involvement in decision making in physical education. ‘Making decisions in physical education’ therefore constituted the generative theme, which inspired her students’ intellectual work.
**Broadening horizons**

Greene (1995) wrote:

> Only when the given or the taken-for-granted is subject to questioning, only when we take various, sometimes unfamiliar perspectives on it, does it show itself as what it is - contingent on many interpretations, many vantage points, unified (if at all) by conformity or by unexamined common sense. Once we can see our givens as contingencies, then we may have the opportunity to posit alternative ways of living and valuing and to make choices.

(p. 23)

In order to facilitate students in seeing the ‘givens’ in physical education as ‘contingencies’ and better positioning them to imagine alternatives, efforts need to be made in a physical education PAR pedagogy to introduce ‘unfamiliar perspectives’ and thereby broaden student horizons. Horizon activities help students develop two types of language, that of critique and that of possibility (Giroux, 1997; Lalik and Oliver, 2005).

For the participants in Enright and O’Sullivan’s (2008) study, taster classes of alternative physical activities, based on participant suggestions, were used to broaden the participants’ frame of reference on potential content in physical education. During these taster classes both content and pedagogical strategies were varied and, after each class, participants were encouraged to reflect critically on the activities, and on how the lesson was delivered and assessed. This was facilitated by Eimear and Róisín, who engaged participants in discussion around some key questions every week. These key questions included: What was the purpose of this class? What did you learn? What helped you to learn? What made it difficult to learn? How did you (or could you) show that you learned something? How could we improve the class to maximize learning?

Similarly, students in McMahon’s (2007) study were first engaged in a Sport Education unit where they had the opportunity to experience increased roles and responsibilities. The Sport Education experience challenged their conceptions of what could constitute a physical education curriculum, therefore increasing their appreciation of curricular possibilities. Oliver and colleagues (Oliver et al., 2009; Oliver and Hamzeh, 2010) used sporting goods magazines to broaden students’ horizons regarding their engagement in physical activity. Oliver asked the girls to identify equipment in the magazines that they might like to use in the pursuit of physical activity.
Change-agency

In each of the four profiled PAR studies these horizon activities expanded the dialogue between students, teachers and researchers, and opened up new vistas within which a critique of existing physical education and physical activity practices and the imagining of physical education alternatives could take shape. That the students had begun to understand and critically engage with their realities, and to imagine alternatives, was not enough however. A PAR pedagogy is orientated to ‘change-agency’ (Shor, 1992). Change-agency ‘means learning and acting for the democratic transformation of self and society . . . people tak[ing] responsibility for rethinking and changing the conditions they are in’ (p. 190). Students who participate in a physical education PAR pedagogy are facilitated in ‘taking responsibility for rethinking and changing’ their physical education and physical activity experiences. This may be through direct involvement in curriculum re-conceptualization (McMahon, 2007; Enright and O’Sullivan, 2008; Oliver et al., 2009), or advocacy for the benefits of physical activity in the form of creating newsletters and writing for local newspapers (Fisette, 2008), school presentations (Oliver et al., 2009; Oliver and Hamzeh, 2010), public performances (McMahon, 2007), research conference presentations (The Pres Girls, Enright and O’Sullivan, 2008) or media interviews (The Pres Girls, Enright and O’Sullivan, 2008). In all of these examples, students’ voices were ‘authorized’ (Cook-Sather, 2002). Drawing from Heilbrum (1988), Cook-Sather (2002) defines authorizing as ‘the ability to take one’s place in whatever discourse is essential to action and the right to have one’s part matter’ (p. 3). By appreciating students’ knowledge and capacity to imagine more engaging and meaningful physical education and physical activity experiences, and to create the changes they wish to see in their worlds, the above studies serve as examples of authorizing student voice in physical education.

Supporting a PAR pedagogy

Roles

To authorize student perspective ‘those invested with authority must confront the power dynamics inside and outside our classrooms [that make] democratic dialogue impossible’ (Ellsworth, 1989, p. 107). Gore (1992) suggests ‘we must use our power in an attempt (that might not be successful) to help others exercise power’ (p. 59). Teachers and researchers who work within a PAR pedagogy are what Aronowitz and Giroux (1985) called ‘transformative intellectuals’. They facilitate students in their
development as change agents. As adult allies they foster students’ capacities to critique and transform that which is dysfunctional in their education, in this case their physical education experiences.

Rudduck reminds us ‘we should not underestimate the degree of challenge student voice can present to both experienced and new teachers’ (2007, p. 607). Teachers and schools need to be supported in ‘giving up some control and handing it over to students’ (Smyth, 2007, p. 655). Working in democratic ways with students, recognizing their authority and agency as curriculum designers and co-researchers requires an identity shift and role redefinition, not just in relation to students’ roles but also for all those who seek to facilitate students’ engagement with the process. Oldfather (1995) supports this assertion, suggesting that ‘learning from student voices . . . requires major shifts on the part of teachers, students, and researchers in ways of thinking and feeling about the issues of knowledge, language, power and self’ (p. 87).

Positioning physical education as the focus of the PAR curriculum constituted a significant conceptual shift, for all involved in the profiled PAR studies, with regards to what constituted teaching and learning in physical education, and what constituted teacher and student roles and responsibilities. Both the subject reconceptualization and the role redefinitions sometimes met with resistance.

In the beginning, a minority of Enright and O’Sullivan’s (2008) students proposed that student involvement in decision making would constitute a ‘waste of time’, time that, they argued, could be spent on activity as, after all, ‘this is PE isn’t it?’ Student and teacher role re-definition was also met with some opposition, with one student articulating her dissatisfaction quite clearly: ‘That should be your job shouldn’t it? So what are you going to be doing, if we’re doing your job [designing the curriculum]?’ (Debra). Debra understandably voiced resistance when initially introduced to PAR. Students like Debra have had years of practice of being told exactly what to do. They are used to being managed and directed. Sharing responsibility for their learning is often something completely new to them and something that they understandably may find quite frustrating initially.

Róisín, the teacher in Enright and O’Sullivan’s (2007) study, experienced similar challenges negotiating her new facilitator identity, citing a conflict between ‘doing what teachers are expected to, are supposed to do’ and ‘trying to work with and respect students’ voices and choices’. Rudduck (2006) suggests that moving ‘from a familiar and safe position of power to a relationship that is more collaborative, open, responsive, and consultative’ results in a ‘temporary destabilising period of change’ for teachers (p.
There are traditional ways of being a teacher. Deviating from tradition and negotiating this ‘temporary destabilising period of change’, requires courage on the part of the teacher, and is a difficult and complex departure without institutional and collegial support. A colleague observing one of Enright and O’Sullivan’s (2007) lessons commented disapprovingly that at times it looked as if ‘the students were running the show’. The irony that ‘students running the show’, in terms of student-led curriculum reform, was exactly what we were striving for, escaped her.

Inclusion

The research reviewed in this chapter sought to open up the distinct and contradictory voices of each of the student participants. The researchers were mindful of ‘ventriloquating’ others’ voices (Bakhtin, 1981). We were mindful, however, not just because of our potentially problematic positioning as ventriloquists, speaking through the voices of the students, but also because of the likelihood of the student participants speaking themselves through the voices of others. Efforts were made to avoid losing individual voices to group mimicry, as is sometimes the case when one works with peer groups.

It is a difficult task to credit all voices, and to capture and work with the contradictions of competing voices. McMahon (2007), for example, reported gender-based inequalities regarding who participated in decision making, with one of her female students initially citing the physical education decision makers as ‘all boys and the teacher’ (Beky). Interestingly when dance was selected by her students as the focus of their negotiated curricular unit, roles were reversed to the point where one of her male students commented that, in the negotiated unit, ‘[The girls] kind of ruled over us’ (Mitch).

Fisette (2008) highlights the distinct personalities of her participants with, for example, Lilly being described as gregarious and outspoken, versus Dot who was very quiet and kept to herself. This is a reality in any group of students and is one of the greatest challenges associated with facilitating a physical education PAR pedagogy. Enright and O’Sullivan (2007, 2008) found that while the majority of participants were more than confident and willing to speak their minds in the group context some were very reluctant to speak out and contribute to group discussions about research and curriculum decision making processes. It took one of the girls, Grace, five months to feel confident participating in group conversations. During this period she was more than happy to engage in the PAR tasks and showed a clear desire to be part of the PAR
process, on one occasion even requesting that Eimear interview her individually about the PAR process and the changes she would like to effect. Grace, more than any other student, highlighted for us the necessity to be pedagogically sensitive to the silenced voices in the classes we work with. She shared that she did not feel comfortable contributing in the group because sometimes it took her a little longer to think about what she wanted to say than the other girls and the conversation moved too quickly for her, and she was afraid that she ‘didn’t have the right things to say then at the right time’. There is also clearly a lesson to be learned here with regard to research design. If our research had been of a shorter duration, we might never have come to hear the voices of the reluctant/resistant/shy/marginalized participants such as Grace. Inspired by an appreciation of the absolute necessity of hearing students like Grace and Dot, Macbeath et al. (2003) remind us of the dangers of further disenfranchising those students who arguably have the most to gain from student voice-orientated work:

There is evidence that those pupils who are most articulate in the language of the school are both more likely to shape the decisions of their peers and to be ‘heard’ by teachers-leaving others, ironically, feeling disenfranchised in an initiative specifically designed to empower them. What we have to remember is that consultation processes can sometimes reflect rather than challenge existing divisive practices in schools.

(Macbeath et al., 2003, p. 42)

All students’ voices deserve attention: contesting voices, coherent voices, loud and articulate voices, and particularly those that are muted. It is the responsibility of those who work to support any PAR process to engage all students in dialogue. This can take considerable time and patience, and has implications also for research design (i.e. time spent working with students to allow for and assess impact on all students).

Another important voice, which should not be allowed to be usurped in our effort to attend to student voice is that of the teacher. Bragg (2007) asserts, ‘There are clear contradictions in insisting on listening to pupil voice when teacher voice has been undermined’ (p. 670). It is arguably impossible for teachers to listen to student voice if their voices have been muted. If teachers are to take on new patterns of interaction and new pedagogies, they will need others (principals, students, staff) to support and listen to them. To undertake student voice-orientated work confidently and wholeheartedly in the first place ‘teachers need to feel that they have a voice, that they are listened to, and that their views matter’ (Rudduck, 2007, p. 600).
School structures/cultures and sustainability

Mitra (2007) reminds us that ‘often the institutional and normative features of schooling prevent substantial student power’, suggesting that a supportive school context is key to enabling and sustaining student voice-orientated change efforts (p. 742). It is important that teachers and students feel supported in pursuing awakening curricular experiences. It is equally important that efforts are made at creating structures that support the sustainability and extension of student voice-orientated initiatives. Armour has raised a significant and challenging question for those who engage in participatory ways with students: ‘Who nurtures the shoots?’ (personal communication, 17 June 2008). Outside and beyond our student-led reform efforts, how, if at all, are students’ increasing curiosity, self-confidence, self-efficacy, motivation and love of learning nurtured? Equally important is that the teachers’ foray into and sustainability of their new role is nurtured. Strategic efforts need to be made to ‘break the crusts of conventionalized and routine consciousness within schools’ (Dewey, 1954, cited in Greene, 1993, p. 211) and kindle the flames that a PAR pedagogy has ignited. Establishing and investing in long-term relationships with student participants is necessary for all adult allies who wish to support a PAR pedagogy. Bland and Atweh (2007) remind us that ‘it takes time for students to adjust to the novelty of having their voices respected in meaningful collaboration with adults’ (p. 344). Teachers need to be willing to invest this time, because developing meaningful collaborative relationships with students will take longer than telling students exactly what to do. Researchers, too, need to commit their time, as PAR is arguably more demanding than conventional educational research designs. It takes time ‘to touch teachers and reach students’, but that is what educational research is or at least should be about (Armour, 2006, p. 470). Experience tells us that physical education teachers and researchers have heart, and care deeply about student experience and learning. PAR is one avenue through which teachers and researchers can channel their ‘ethic of caring’ (Noddings, 1984) in a way that ‘challenges young people to imagine a better world and to try out ways of making it so’ (Beane, 1998, p. 11).

Benefits for students, teachers and researchers

Students

The benefits of engaging with students through a PAR pedagogy far outweigh the challenges for teachers and students alike. Student voice initiatives in schools have had a positive impact on curriculum, teaching and learning, assessment practices and
student–teacher relationships (Soo Hoo, 1993; Fielding, 2004), leading to enhanced student outcomes and school climate (Mitra, 2004). There is a wealth of research in the general education literature that documents the potential benefits of student voice efforts for the students involved. At a classroom level student participation in educational decision making has been documented as resulting in increased student engagement and academic achievement (Oldfather, 1995; Rudduck and Flutter, 2000); greater student attachment to schooling (Newman, 1981); increased sense of agency, autonomy, competency, belonging, empowerment and concern for others (Oldfather, 1995; Mitra, 2004, 2007; Rudduck, 2007); increased self-confidence and commitment to learning (Soo Hoo, 1993; Rudduck, 2007); and the development of students’ problem-solving, public-speaking, negotiation and listening skills (Mitra, 2007).

The benefits noted by students in our profiled studies included: increased opportunities to be physically active (Enright and O’Sullivan, 2007; The Pres Girls, Enright and O’Sullivan, 2008; Oliver et al., 2009; Oliver and Hamzeh, 2010), opportunities to name and challenge inequities students identify around physical activity provision and participation (Enright and O’Sullivan, 2007; Fisette, 2008; The Pres Girls, Enright and O’Sullivan, 2008; Oliver et al., 2009; Oliver and Hamzeh, 2010), opportunities to effect real change (Enright and O’Sullivan, 2007; Fisette, 2008; The Pres Girls, Enright and O’Sullivan, 2008; Oliver et al., 2009; Oliver and Hamzeh, 2010) and ownership over physical activity practices (Enright and O’Sullivan, 2007; McMahon, 2007; The Pres Girls, Enright and O’Sullivan, 2008).

All of the students in the profiled PAR studies were encouraged to be critical analysts of the communities and societies in which they live. Students therefore began to expose the structures that constructed their relationship with education, physical education, physical activity and, importantly, between themselves and others, collectively developing an understanding of issues that were real to them. The opportunity to name and challenge the inequities around and barriers to their physical education and physical activity participation, as well as the opportunity to effect real change was ultimately received excitedly and respectfully by the student researchers. This took time. They felt ownership over their physical activity practices. Through this process they also became researchers of teaching and learning. Debra, one of Enright and O’Sullivan’s (2007) participants, clearly highlights an important benefit she attached to the PAR curriculum:

We learned about learning . . . and about teaching PE and about the things you have to think about when you’re teaching . . . and as well how
you know that you’ve learned something that’s important too.

Part of what Debra alludes to here is meta-learning, ‘a process of always monitoring the assumptions, hidden rules, and expectations of formal and informal educational processes’ (Kincheloe, 2007, p. 758). In this sense a PAR pedagogy represents an awakening curriculum (Greene, 1993, p. 220).

**Teachers**

Many of the benefits students accrue from their engagement in student voice activities are also benefits for teachers, but there are also many additional benefits for teachers who engage in student voice work. Flutter (2007) highlights what she calls a simple and profound rationale for teachers to engage with student voice:

> It affords teachers an opportunity to refocus their attention on what really matters - learners and how they learn best. The cornerstone of teacher development lies in extending teachers’ knowledge and understanding to enable them to practise their art more effectively: pupil voice strategies are one way in which teachers can go about extending their knowledge and understanding, through investigation.

(p. 345)

Engaging with student voice has the capacity to raise significant and challenging professional questions for physical educators. Oliver and colleagues (Oliver *et al.*, 2009) contend, ‘When girls are given the opportunity to critically study barriers to their physical activity, researchers and teachers can begin to see beyond the dominant discourse’ (p. 108). Once the girls in their study had made their physical education teacher aware of the problems they were having being active at recess, the physical education teacher began to pay more attention to the dynamics between boys and girls during recess. Seeing the dominant discourse is not enough however. Teachers do need to be willing to ‘review familiar beliefs and practices that have provided or that provide the promise of security and stability’ (Rudduck, 2007, p. 607), but they also need to work together with their students to understand and challenge dominant, often harmful, physical activity and physical education discourses. The physical education teacher in Oliver and colleagues’ (Oliver *et al.*, 2009) study went this extra step, by playing an active role in supporting girls’ physical activity during recess and encouraging others to do so. Róisín, the teacher in Enright and O’Sullivan’s (2007, 2008) research, highlighted the impact her attempt to respond to the students had on her teaching and her extra-curricular scheduling:
‘I’m definitely going to incorporate more choice, less competitive team games and for extra-curricular I want to help coordinate the club they have designed because otherwise all they’d really have is basketball. You get sick of fighting with them all the time. I want them to be active and what I’ve learned from this experience is that they will be when we listen to them and give them more ownership over their experiences. I think it’s a lot about ownership. This is something I have started to do already with my other classes as well’.

Researchers

Educational researchers, too, have much to gain from recognizing student voice and agency within a PAR framework. Morrow and Richards (1996) contend that ‘the biggest ethical challenge for researchers working with children is the disparities in power and status between adults and children’ (p. 98). They suggest ‘Using methods which are non-invasive, non-confrontational and participatory, and which encourage children to interpret their own data, might be one step forward in diminishing the ethical problems of imbalanced power relationships between researchers and researched at the point of data collection and interpretation’ (Morrow and Richards, 1996, p. 100). Participatory research is without doubt a time- and thought-intensive design for researchers. Educational researchers who espouse empowerment of students in their own learning, however, have a responsibility to support students in achieving their goals and in helping them to change the system in ways highlighted by their engagement in a critique of their worlds. PAR facilitates researchers in developing an understanding of the meaning of students’ lives and social worlds as understood by the students themselves.

Conclusion

While there is much hope in this chapter, there is also an acknowledgement of the complexities involved in pursuing critical, collaborative, activist research with youth. A PAR pedagogy is an informed, methodologically rigorous, productive process that requires extensive facilitation. There are many questions that emerge from this chapter that should be seriously considered by all adult allies who hope to facilitate students’ participation in a PAR pedagogy: Who frames the research? Who names the problem? Who is considered expert? How are participants selected? Which students are heard? Whose voices are privileged? Whose voices are ignored, marginalized or silenced? Do we make a conscious effort to seek out the silences, the outliers, the dissidents, and the
privileged? Is the teacher’s voice heard? What is the role of the teacher’s voice in a PAR pedagogy? How do we listen to student voice? What kind of strategies do we use to help students articulate their feelings, understandings, ideas and hopes? Whose language is privileged and whose is marginalized? Whose knowledge is privileged and whose is marginalized? How do we create a safe space where students can debate with each other and with adult allies, and feel confident taking multiple, sometimes opposing, sometimes contradictory positions? How do we work to help students contextualize their understanding and experiences? Do we hold high expectations for all students? How do we respond to what students say? How, where and by whom is change conceptualized and enacted? How does the school, community, social, cultural context challenge, distort or support our student voice-orientated initiatives? How are teachers who facilitate a PAR pedagogy supported in terms of time, space, resources, emotional and intellectual support? Is consent a one-off event or is it renegotiated as the research proceeds? Is student voice actively promoted in how other subjects, the school, the community etc. are organized? Who is given the opportunity to listen to what students have to say?

Although many of these questions have been considered in this chapter, they remain significant questions that should be considered by anyone who wishes to support a physical education PAR pedagogy. The answers to these questions will determine the degree and nature of student participation, student voice, student choice and student engagement in any PAR pedagogy, and impact the relevance and depth of student learning.

Physical education teachers and researchers need to have the courage and conviction to explore with their students the nature of curriculum content and the strategies for delivering content that would engage students more meaningfully in physical education and physical activity outside of school, as well as developing awareness and advocacy for their voice in their educational experiences. Young people, when provided with guidance, encouragement and support, can and will rise to the challenge and take ownership of their learning, and doing so can be a positive, energizing and exciting experience for both teacher and student. However, the transition to ‘carving a new order of experience’ in physical education will challenge students and teachers, and both need support in persevering beyond the transition and the novelty of initial excitement.

Implications

A PAR pedagogy is a profoundly practical response to student disengagement, one of
the greatest professional challenges that many contemporary physical educators face (Enright and O’Sullivan, 2007). One implication of this work is the need for professional development of teachers with opportunities to see and hear how others have negotiated curriculum and the challenges and benefits for them and their students. Another implication is the need for the process of student voice-orientated work to be studied more carefully. We need to work harder to understand how adult allies and schools can facilitate sharing decision making with students. We also need to work to understand the key impacts of such negotiations on student learning, and what is perhaps gained and lost in learning in and through a PAR pedagogy. Perhaps this chapter might be a catalyst to others to engage in this exciting and important research agenda.

Notes

1. Quotation originally crafted by Maxine Greene and drawn upon more recently by Rudduck and Flutter (2000).

2. The PE-PAYS (Physical Education, Physical Activity and Youth Sport) Forum is a research conference hosted annually by the PE-PAYS Research Centre at the University of Limerick. Further information on the PE-PAYS Research Centre is available at www.ul.ie/pepays.

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CHAPTER 9
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Introduction
The purpose of this study was to work with a group of disengaged teenage girls to understand and help them transform their self-identified barriers to their physical education engagement and physical activity participation. The study took place over three years in a designated disadvantaged, city-centre, girls’ school and was framed methodologically, theoretically and philosophically by a feminist PAR orientation. This study was premised on a conviction that young people have unique perspectives on learning and life, that their voices warrant not only to be heard but to be acted on, and that these young people should be partners in any efforts at reimagining physical education. Mindful of poststructuralist feminist critiques of critical pedagogies, which were quite popular in the early 1990s (Ellsworth, 1992; Orner, 1992; Weiler, 1991) and more recent concerns relating to student voice orientated research and practice (Cook-Sather, 2006; Fielding, 2004; Gunter, 2005; Lodge, 2005), I was conscious of the ‘impositional potential’ (Cook-Sather, 2007) of my convictions and my efforts at working with students towards more empowering physical education experiences. Attempts were made therefore throughout the study to acknowledge and attend to the diverse experiences of diverse students, to avoid responding to student voices and/or working with students in totalising and undifferentiated ways, and to engage all voices, including those that were sometimes difficult to engage and hear, with a view towards supporting liberatory educational practices.

Through this final chapter I seek to draw out and discuss the knowledge claims made and the conclusions arrived at in the previous five empirical chapters and thereby highlight the significant contribution I believe this study makes to an emergent knowledge base on young people’s voices in physical education and youth sport. I also present an agenda for research that builds on the platform of ideas created by this study.

Discussions/Conclusions
I had initially thought I would construct this final chapter around the five research questions I set out to answer through this study. I have decided against that approach for two reasons. Firstly, I think and hope the previous chapters address these questions to
some extent. Secondly, I worry that to organise this final chapter around five questions might be to reinforce a fragmentation of the key learning from this study. There was resonance and overlap between the answers we found to the five central research questions. This was most evident in relation to the following three themes: student identity, student voice and curricular possibilities. I have decided therefore to construct this discussion around these concepts, in the hope that this may be a more generative and provocative approach to this chapter.

**Student Identity**

I came to this project firmly believing that the disengaged girls I would be working with were not the problem. Informed by conversation with their physical education teacher, I understood the girls had collectively disengaged from physical education and physical activity and I wanted to understand this. I was quite surprised that physical activity was ‘not on their radar’ as an aspect of their lived experience. It is easy now to claim that as a group, these girls had been oppressed by a curricular and community physical activity context that failed to acknowledge their collective experience and identity, because this is supported by much of the data produced by the girls and spoken to in earlier chapters. They did identify and articulate shared inequalities (Scraton, 2001) when it came to telling their stories of disengagement from physical education, and physical activity and they did support their teacher’s perspective regarding their collective disengagement. At the beginning of the study I was also concerned, however, with the girls’ own assertions of their individual identities, and the specificity of each of these girls’ lives. Indeed the students’ engagement with the research process began with their own articulation (supported through participatory methods) of their individual lived experiences. Individual students and individual stories highlighted for me the complexity of identity, and the importance of persistently confronting unitary notions of girls’ experiences of physical education and of student identity (Flintoff & Scraton, 2006). This study was not only about understanding one group of white, Irish, working class, disengaged, teenage girls. It was also supposed to be about understanding Grace, Debra, Kelly, Levi, Daniella, Shelly, Deirdre and the other 33 student participants’, who I will not name here in the interests of brevity, relationships with physical education and physical activity. I struggled then in the early stages to reconcile my appreciation of individual difference with my desire to foster the girls’ appreciation of their collective identity and their ability to channel their collective agency. I soon realised however that the students
were never going to allow this study to become preoccupied with individual, idiosyncratic lives.

De-individualising the girls’ sense of their lives became a source of empowerment for them, as they came to realise that their experiences could not be disconnected from their peers, community, or history. Over time each student’s individual story became placed in the sea of stories generated by the other participants and with every sharp intersection and overlap, the girls’ collective identity and increasingly their collective responsibility for improving their physical education and physical activity practices was affirmed (Collins, 1998; Fine et al, 2007). It was on this strong collective base, that the seeds of action were sown and from here too, that deep participation in the PAR process began as the students began to realise that resistance did not need to be ‘self-defeating’ (Cammarota & Fine, 2008). It was also around this time that I realised that understanding individual difference and capturing the fluidity of individual identity was not as important to me or the students as was facilitating the students in coming to ‘discover what they recognise together and appreciate in common’ (Greene, 1995, p. 39) and helping them to move themselves and each other from engaging in self-defeating forms of resistance to transformational resistance (Solózano & Delgado-Bernal, 2001). As students began to identify and name the inequities that confronted them, they became more frustrated and charged and the embers of a smouldering desire for increased autonomy, challenge, cultural respect, and inclusion were ignited. This manifested in an increased attention by the students to questions relating to how we might work together to do things differently. They had begun to live the politics of student voice.

Fine et al (2007) have cautioned that we must guard against ‘voice being co-opted as a personal individualised story, as if about choice, autonomy freedom from structures or a self that can be disconnected from history and politics’ (p.825). There are dangers too, however, in moving beyond the individual stories. In the same vein as feminist scholars have argued against ‘claims to universal truths and ….assumptions of a collective experience of oppression’ (Weiler, 1991) there is a risk too of reducing student voice to a uniform, united entity (Cook-Sather, 2006).

The voices of those students who self-identify with, or are branded with, a particular identity must be at the centre of any interpretation or re-interpretation of their identity, if we are to avoid ‘claims to universal truths’. This work has taught us therefore that we need to walk, talk and challenge this individual-collective contour if we are serious about avoiding ideas of ‘singular, essential, authentic and stable notions of identity’
(Orner, 1992, p.86) and about nurturing collective youth agency. It is through working this contour that we will be able to continue to acknowledge and value difference, and invite more nuanced interpretations of identity, while not losing sight of shared experience (Flintoff & Scraton, 2006) or undermining the possibility of joint action. Understanding students’ identities should be a starting point of any effort that holds as its purpose to transform physical education or physical activity experiences, and help students see a role for, and find meaning in physical activity, in their lives.

**Student Voice**

Student voice in the context of this project came to capture a range of activities as students became repositioned as key players in curriculum decision making, and in data generation, interpretation and representation. The work presented in this thesis acknowledged the students ‘as the best informants’ (Feuerverger & Richards, 2007) and transformers of their own lives, and in so doing it redefined ‘the processes, products and the practitioners’ (Cook-Sather, 2007, p. 852) of curriculum decision making and of qualitative research.

This redefinition was most evident when it came to roles and responsibilities. It seems that students and teachers too become stuck in roles; roles they have been taught to assume by the culture of schooling and roles which they construct for themselves in an effort to either support or reject this culture. PAR required a redefinition of the student and teacher role and a redefinition of traditional boundaries between teachers and students (Bragg, 2007). One of the students in this study, Levi, astutely referred to this redefinition as ‘a bit of a flip-flop’. Fielding (2001), an eminent student voice scholar has referred to this ‘flip-flop’ as ‘radical collegiality’, and spoken at length about the possibility and desirability of improved ‘dialogic encounters’ between students and teachers, ‘in which the interdependent nature of teaching and learning and the shared responsibility for its success is made explicit’ (p.130). This change in pedagogic relations (Penney, 2007) meant issues of relevance to students’ everyday lives, issues that had once been silenced by the ‘tight hierarchical pattern that reproduces teachers’ authority in the classroom’ (Mirón & Lauria, 1998, p.192) were allowed to surface and breathe, as the students came to find, articulate and make space for their own meanings of physical education and physical activity. Students’ roles in research were also redefined. PAR is ‘intimately concerned with extending the notion of the so called “expert” to encompass a wider range of stakeholders (Demetriadis, 2008, p. viii). Students were considered experts on their own lives in this study and were
allowed considerable latitude in terms of informing the research agenda. The interpretive frame and focus of analysis of this study were shaped by the students’ ideas and perspectives. Their ‘ways of seeing’ were foregrounded (Cook-Sather, 2007).

Adult allies (teachers and researchers, and teachers as researchers) who support student voice work need to be open to the shifts in roles, responsibilities and identities propelled by a real commitment to hearing students. These were some of the shifts that occurred in this study; shifts from:

- Teacher as director to teacher as facilitator/guide
- Researcher as expert to student as expert and co-constructor of the research agenda
- Student as passive recipient of learning to student as active constructor of knowledge and of curriculum

Negotiating these shifts was not without struggle, as has been evidenced in previous chapters. Students were sometimes limited in terms of what they imagined as possibilities. Efforts were made to extend students’ frame of reference to enable them to make more informed choices regarding the content and structuring of curricular experiences. Students’ curriculum decision making literacy was improved through a set of experiences that caused them to critically engage with curriculum decision making. The taster sessions and the curriculum decision and design sessions invited students to think about learning in ways that they may not have done previously, and in ways some of them were not thrilled about in the beginning. It was difficult sometimes to facilitate these experiences, because the students had no practice of negotiation, and it took time for us to learn to listen to each other. For reasons that have been outlined previously, this was an easier journey for me, than it was for either Róisín or the students. Appreciating students as the experts on their own lives and as co-constructors of the research agenda also had challenging consequences in terms of research design. The emergent and participant-led nature of PAR means you can never plan very far ahead, simply because you cannot be sure what is going to happen. This uncertainty requires some degree of flexibility by all involved. Despite these challenges and uncertainties, once we learned how to listen to and were ready to hear and respond to and with the students, the intense possibility of PAR took hold, and both Róisín and I began to relax into the process.

Bragg (2001) has asserted it is very difficult to listen to and learn from voices we do not want to hear. The experience of this project has taught us that knowing how to hear these voices and teaching others to be able to do this is incredibly important.
One of the abstracts the Pres Girls submitted to a conference for consideration received the following review: ‘I can tell you are very excited about your after school physical activity club and I applaud your efforts!...However, AERA is a Research organization, and you are not reporting research’. Initially my reaction to this review was anger. I was immediately reminded of a quote I had read by bell hooks (1990):

> No need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself. No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own. Rewriting you I write myself anew. I am still author, authority. I am still colonizer the speaking subject and you are now at the center of my talk

(p.343)

I wondered if the abstract would have been rejected if I had rewritten it for the girls, if I had become the ‘speaking subject’ and the girls the ‘center of my talk’. I thought not. On further reflection, however, I began to question what I had done to help the conference reviewers to understand and receive this work as quality physical education research and realised I too may have been at fault. I failed to help them hear the girls’ voices. This incident highlighted for me more than any other in the course of this project, the importance of not only practicing pedagogy, research and theory building that repositions students as architects of research and curriculum, but also of advocating for this approach.

Those of us passionate about the potential of physical education need to help others to open themselves and their work, be it research and/or teaching, to being transformed by young people, their interests, discourse, and priorities. We need to educate the physical education community to respect and engage with the politics and the possibilities of student voice. We have a responsibility to ‘communicate in a way that compels others to act’ (O’Sullivan, 2007, p.256).

**Curricular Possibilities**

PAR blurs the lines between pedagogy, research and politics (Dimitriadis, 2008) creating an in-between space, of possibility and uncertainty. It is in this uncertainty that much of both the promise and the problems associated with supporting a physical education PAR pedagogy lie. In the same way that Rudduck (2007) reminds us that we must review ‘the deep structures of schooling that hold habitual ways of seeing in place’ (p.588) I believe the students in this study offered a compelling case for why we need to review the foundations on which physical education curricula are built and they also
illustrated ways in which physical education could be re-imagined to better fit their interests and needs. The physical education PAR pedagogy with which the students in this study were engaged inspired new meanings of student voice, which have been highlighted above but also created new meanings of physical education curriculum. The physical education curricular experiences the students designed placed themselves at the centre and challenged formal physical education curricular boundaries. Their re-imagining and subsequently increased investment in their physical education prompted their teacher, Róisín, to ask ‘have we been getting it very wrong?’ Fielding (2001) speaking about the success of one student voice orientated initiative suggests:

New structures that have the power to invite and retain commitment seem more likely to arise from transformative practices (in this case led by students) that gradually generate a cumulative authenticity and robustness over time. Because the assumptions and values which shape the form and texture of their daily reality are differently configured to prevailing school norms, they have difficulty finding a place within existing organizational arrangements and new forms arise to accommodate and further their development

(p.129)

Róisín’s questioning of prevailing school and physical education curricular norms was prompted by observing her students’ increased commitment to their negotiated curricular experiences. Responding to student voice, she later revealed, did result in her changing her practice in other classes with other students, and therefore did lead to the emergence of ‘new organizational structures which incorporated students as partners in the process of curriculum renewal’ (Fielding, 2001, p. 129), if only for a while.

Supporting a physical education PAR pedagogy is potentially as engaging and important as it is unpredictable and demanding. Through a physical education PAR pedagogy we listened and worked to understand who the students were, and what, where and how we might facilitate their active engagement with physical education and deepen their learning (MacDonald, 2003). The curriculum re-conceptualisation started with them (Penney, 2007) and became a lesson in postmodern curriculum planning as their decisions led to the negotiation of a more open curriculum, structured around complexity, accepting of students’ ability to engage in curriculum decision making, and orientated towards transformatory change (Doll, 1989; MacDonald, 2003).

It would have been nice in some ways to end this discussion of curricular possibilities with the last paragraph because it was clean and positive and did reflect what happened. An epilogue to this study would however be revealing. Inevitably, a student-led initiative, such as the one that forms the core of this thesis, raises a number
of issues around novelty and the ‘nurturing of a sympathetic professional culture’ in order to sustain it (Fielding, 2001. p.133). While the Pres Girls club and much of the student engagement in curricular decision making continued in year three of this study without my direct involvement, in year four (this year) both the Pres Girls’ club and the students’ engagement in physical education curriculum decision making in St. Mary’s has faltered (Róisín, personal communication, January, 2010). Róisín’s journey has highlighted for her and for us that the types of relationships promoted by a PAR pedagogy are not easily sustained over time, especially not within a school culture which is constructed around a very different ethos and set of priorities.

**Limitations**

Returning now to my introduction to this chapter, where I caution about the impositional potential of student voice and the risk associated with offering a single story of how we might facilitate more meaningful physical education. I believe this type of work is local and it is and will be in each new space and place, with each new group of participants that the complex questions, nature and methodology of PAR will need to be decided. This research happened in a segregated setting which gathered one collective of teenage girls. Within this project we heard ‘distinct and amazing insights’ particular to this local context (Fine, 2008, p.227). Curriculum construction and change is culturally specific (Penney, 2007). The findings of this study relate to a specific time and place, but they do offer a site for further learning and change (Bragg, 2007). Drawing inspiration from Greene, Fine (2008) offers a novel conception of generalisability: provocative generalisability, referring to ‘a measure of the extent to which a piece of research provokes readers, or audiences, across contexts, to generalise to “worlds not yet,” in the language of Greene; to rethink and reimagine current arrangements’ (p. 227). At the very least, there is a possibility that this work might provoke a rethinking of Irish physical education.

This thesis is also but one translation of a story that has been multiply translated. The Pres girls have told their stories of this PAR process at conferences (Appendix D: Conference Poster), at their club launch and in media interviews. Their voices are central to this thesis. I have included and foregrounded their words as much as possible and they have interacted with the data presented here on multiple occasions and at multiple levels. I remain however the editor of this work and this remains in many ways my telling.
Implications

My engagement with this PAR process, and specifically observing the impact of engaging in a PAR pedagogy on the students’ trajectories as physical education and physical activity researchers and activists, has only served to strengthen my belief in student voice. For the students involved, becoming participatory action researchers ‘meant becoming different and more empowered, kinds of persons’ (Morrell, 2008, p.182). In the process of transforming their physical education experiences, the students themselves were also transformed in a way that served as inspiration to the adult allies, peers and community members with whom they engaged. What then are the implications of this work for the kinds of curriculum we offer to students and research we undertake with students? What are the implications for the role of physical education teachers and what challenges does this create for contemporary schools, teacher education and professional development? The following four paragraphs represent the key implications from this thesis.

Participatory methods are creative tools, which when used ethically can facilitate participants in producing rich, multi-layered data and bring participants and researchers closer to critical engagement with participants’ lived experiences. This reciprocal relationship can simultaneously support high quality physical education research and physical education’s pedagogical purposes. Rethinking how knowledge is produced and what role our participants play in the production, interpretation and dissemination of this knowledge could be methodologically beneficial for physical education researchers.

Local innovation and tailoring of physical education curricular experiences with students can allow for the creation of learning opportunities which reflect student learning needs and community contexts, while satisfying formal curricular requirements. There needs to be space, however, in formal national physical education curricula which allow for multiple and local interpretations and there also needs to be a willingness at the local level to do things a little differently. To support the development of physical education teachers who have the confidence and capacity to engage willingly in this necessary work, there needs to be opportunities on Physical Education Teacher Education programmes for student teachers to practice working creatively with students on local ideas in order to bring the students and their learning to the fore in curriculum-decision making. Professional development opportunities for teachers in the field also need to begin to move beyond a content focus and towards the notion of supporting pedagogies of possibility if the physical education community is serious about engaging students in personally meaningful ways with physical education.
Physical education is possible in ‘all sorts of corners’ and we need to start seeking out and recognising these corners as legitimate learning spaces, if we are serious about helping young people find meaning in our passion. This study has taught us that we cannot make significant change on our own. We need to ‘move newcomers’ to join with us and transform (Greene, 1997, p10). In the context of this project, the students were ‘newcomers’ in terms of their substantive curriculum development roles, as were the various community agencies who helped to resource the out-of-school club. Physical education teachers cannot and should not be expected to carry these boundary crossing efforts on their own. Teachers, adult allies, schools, physical education teacher education programs, community agencies, parents and students need to work together to ensure the success and sustainability of physical education change efforts.

Physical education teachers and researchers need to have the courage and conviction to explore with their students the nature of curriculum content and the strategies for delivering content that would engage students more meaningfully in physical education and physical activity outside of school, as well as developing awareness and advocacy for their voice in their educational experiences. Young people, when provided with guidance, encouragement and support, can and will rise to the challenge and take ownership of their learning, and doing so can be a positive, energizing and exciting experience for both teacher and student.

Future Research
I am hopeful that the findings of this study will actively inform future research and curriculum development in physical education. Most research of student experience is still conducted ‘on’ as opposed to ‘with’ students. Most curricula are still constructed ‘for’ as opposed to ‘by’ or ‘with’ students. I firmly believe that the findings presented within this thesis present a strong case for local, participatory approaches to research and curriculum making. The physical education community would benefit greatly from increasing opportunities for young people to engage with physical education PAR pedagogies. Like Morrell (2008) I believe we ‘desperately require their passion, their purpose and their unique positioning if we are to create a knowledge base from which to advocate more powerfully’ (p.183) for and work to create more relevant and personally meaningful physical education experiences for all students, girls and boys.

We need then to work hard to understand:

- How do others negotiate curriculum with students and what are the challenges and benefits for them and their students?
• How can we better prepare teachers and create cultures in schools to support teachers’ and students’ involvement in curriculum negotiation?
• What is gained and lost in teaching and learning through a PAR pedagogy?
• What pedagogical practices within physical education teacher education will support the notion of student-led, boundary crossing physical education?
• What would a postmodern physical education teacher education look like?
• How can we work to make curricula built around PAR take root and become sustainable within local contexts?

Final Word

This study was an example of praxis, of theory informing action and action informing theory. It became about the positive changes that can happen when we listen to and work with the primary stakeholders in any educational experience, the students. The voices and actions of the students involved in this study permeate, frame and are central to any conclusion I can arrive at, and theirs is the final word.

‘You listened and we made it better together’

(Zara)

References

November 4th, 2009

Dear Eimear,

Re: SES Paper 304/09

Thank you for resubmitting your paper to Sport, Education and Society.

I am delighted to inform you that your paper has been accepted for publication.


We will be in touch with you again with further details closer to the date of publication.

Again, thank you for considering SES as an outlet for your work.

Best wishes,

John

Professor John Evans
Editor

ps a thoroughly enjoyable (and innovative) paper - well done

John

-----Original Message-----
From: Eimear.Enright (mailto:eimear.enright@ul.ie)
Sent: 03 November 2009 08:25
To: John Evans
Subject: FW: SES paper 304/09

Dear John,

Please find my revised paper attached.

I was delighted with both reviewers’ feedback not only in terms of strengthening this paper but also as food for thought as I continue my PhD write-up.

I have addressed the following revisions as suggested by my reviewers - included reference to the work of Fitzgerald and Jobling
- Included a sentence highlighting that ‘producing different knowledge and producing knowledge differently’ should not only be the preserve of feminist educators but rather a possibility for all educational researchers.
- Removal of reference to digital photos as this seemed to lead to confusion. (Most photographs were taken with disposable cameras but when photographs were being developed I requested to have one hard copy and one electronic copy).
- I have not added Gill Valentine as a reference as suggested as I did not find relevant participatory work by her but I am drawing on the work of two other social geographers who I came across (Kesby and Gallagher).
- Thought about providing some definitional work around physical education and physical activity as suggested but am working elsewhere on this and particularly the students’ perceptions of the meaning/purpose of PE and PA and so would like to keep this discussion for another paper.
- Figures included as separate attachments.
- All grammatical errors and typos were attended to.

Hope this is acceptable. Please let me know if there is anything further I need to do.

Le gach dea-ghuí

Eimear

-----Original Message-----
From: John Evans (mailto:John.Evans@lboro.ac.uk)
Sent: 12 October 2009 10:48
To: Eimear.Enright
Subject: RE: SES paper 304/09

Excellent, and well done. Very good paper.

John

-----Original Message-----
From: Eimear.Enright (mailto:eimear.enright@ul.ie)
Sent: 12 October 2009 10:18
To: John Evans
Subject: RE: SES paper 304/09

Thanks a million John and thanks to the reviewers, I am happy to revise and resubmit.

Eimear

-----Original Message-----
From: John Evans (mailto:John.Evans@lboro.ac.uk)
Sent: 12 October 2009 09:13
To: Eimear.Enright
Subject: SES paper 304/09

12th October 2009

Dear Dr Enright

Re Paper JE/304/09 '....'

Thank you for submitting your paper to Sport, Education and Society.
We have now received the views of our referees (see attached) and I am delighted to inform you that your paper has been accepted for publication in the journal subject to some minor revision.

As you will see, the reviewers found the paper of real value and believe it should be published, however, they offer a few thoughts as to how the paper could be strengthened and better attuned to a SES readership. I hope you find their comments of some assistance to you.

I would very much like to see this paper published in SES and hope that you will be able and willing to address the issues they raise.

Again, congratulations. I look forward to receiving a revised paper.

Please resubmit electronically according to SES guidelines. The final manuscript with a Title page containing authors affiliation and e mail address (page 1), followed by Abstract and Key Words (page 2), and then the full text, all in one document. Any tables are to be included as a separate document.

Best wishes

John

Professor John Evans

(Editor)
Appendix B: Editor Acceptance Notification

-----Original Message-----
From: Ken Green [mailto:kengreen@chester.ac.uk]
Sent: 16 May 2010 17:26
To: Eimear.Enright
Cc: k.powell@chester.ac.uk
Subject: Re: Submission for EPER

Dear Eimear,

Re: "Can I do it in my pyjamas? Negotiating a physical education curriculum with teenage girls"

I am pleased to inform you that your above-titled paper has been ACCEPTED SUBJECT TO MINOR REVISIONS for publication in the European Physical Education Review.

Please find attached the comments of the reviewers. It is a condition of acceptance that authors respond satisfactorily to reviewers' comments.

If you are able to do so it would be my intention to fit the paper into the next available issue in 2010. Indeed, if you are able to respond within the next four weeks I may be able to publish it in the summer issue.

I look forward to receiving the amended paper.

Yours sincerely,

Ken Green
Editor
EPER
Appendix C: Book Chapter Flyer

New from Routledge!

**Young People's Voices in Physical Education and Youth Sport**

Edited by Mary O’Sullivan, Ann MacPhail

How do children and young people experience and understand sport and physical activity? What value do they attach to physical education and physical education, sport and physical activity? This important new book attempts to engage more deeply than ever before with the experiences of young people by placing the voices of the young people themselves at the centre of the discussion. As the need to listen to young people becomes increasingly enshrined in public policy and political debate, this book illuminates our understanding of an important aspect of the everyday lives of many young people.

With contributions from leading researchers and educationalists from around the world, the book draws on a diverse range of methodological and theoretical perspectives to demonstrate how we can better understand the unique perspectives of young people, how teachers and coaches can respond to and engage with the voices of young people, and how young people can be afforded opportunities to shape their education and leisure experiences. The book presents a fascinating range of case studies from around the world, including the experiences of African American girls and masculine sporting identities in Australia, and addresses both theoretical and policy debates. *Young People’s Voices in Physical Education and Youth Sport* is essential reading for any serious student or professional with an interest in physical education, youth sport, sports development, sports coaching, physical activity and health, education or youth work.

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- Introduction to young people’s voices in Physical Education and sport.
- Part 1: Exploring voice in different settings.
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  - 2. The body, physical activity and inequality: Learning to listen with girls through action.
  - 3. Students’ curricular values and experiences.
- Part 2: Multiple identities of adolescent populations.
  - 4. Finding their voice: Disaffected youth insights on sport/physical activity interventions
  - 5. Using ethnography to explore the experiences of a student with special educational needs in mainstream physical education.
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- Part 3: Theoretical frames and methodological approaches
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  - 9. ‘Carving a new order of experience’ with young people in physical education: Participatory Action Research as a pedagogy of possibility.
- EPILOGUE: Hearing, listening and acting.

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Appendix D: The Pres Girls Poster

“IT’S OUR CLUB AND IT’S RAPID”:
Our experience of designing an after school physical activity club

HOW THE CLUB STARTED
It was our idea that started the club. Most of us didn’t do any physical activity except in PE and we wanted to keep fit and do activities after school and we wanted more time to be with our friends after school and be more sociable.

Some of us made questionnaires as part of our Leaving Cert Applied (LCA) tasks. In the questionnaires, we asked all of the girls in fifth year and sixth year LCA about what they would like a physical activity club to be like. Then we used the answers to make the club.

THE DECISIONS WE MADE
We decided:
1. The club would be called The PRES GIRLS Club
2. Black and Pink would be our club colours
3. The club would meet every Wednesday after school
4. The club base would be somewhere in the city, not in our school
5. We would choose the activities
6. We would be able to change activities when we wanted
7. We wanted leaders who would listen to us and not roar at us or be in our face the whole time
8. We would choose the music

HOW THE CLUB WORKS
There are 17 girls in the club and there are about 12 girls at every session. So far we have picked some aerobics, boxercise, walking, swimming, Khat Bo and going to the gym and we’ve had lots of different instructors. The club moves around the city. Sometimes we go to the University, sometimes we go to the Limerick Youth Service hall or to the gym at the Quality hotel.

We get stars for participating every week. That was our idea, and then you need four stars to get your t-shirt and more stars for your tracksuit. We definitely started going to the club for the free stuff but now we no more free stuff left to get but we just like it now and it’s our Wednesday routine. We only do it now because we like it.

The leaders of the club don’t really tell us what to do or give out to us. They just listen to us about what we want to do and help us arrange it and get to the activities. They’re at the club every week and they join in the activities and they just encourage us and look out for us.

WHY THE CLUB IS GOOD
1. We have learned loads of things from the club; that it can be good fun being active and staying fit, how to use all the machines in the gym, how to box, how to do aerobics and loads more.
2. The club is good because we get something nice to eat and get to do something that we enjoy, not things that we’re just told to do.
3. We get the chance to spend time with our mates and it keeps us out of trouble and harms way.
4. It teaches us to keep routine, going to the club every Wednesday.
5. We keep going because the club gives us a chance to express ourselves and do something that we want to do and have time with our mates. We’d love if the club was on twice a week.
6. The leaders aren’t in our faces the whole time. They just help us to make the club work and get us to the club sessions and encourage us more.
7. Our parents think the club is a good because it keeps us off the crazy streets and the guards think it’s good too because it stops them from having to say “move along now, move along now” on Wednesdays.
8. Our PE teachers are happy because we’re actually doing some activity outside of PE now.

HOW TO GET MORE GIRLS ACTIVE
PE teachers and other people trying to get girls active should:
1. Ask girls more about their opinion on what they want to do.
2. Start listening to girls and hearing what they want to do and give them a chance at different things and encourage them more:
   “It’s not that we don’t like physical activity and sport, it’s just that sometimes we don’t like the kind of activities that people try to make us do, like basketball mostly, and sometimes we don’t know what we like because we only get to try the same things all the time.”
3. Involve girls more in making decisions about how their clubs, activities, sport is organised and delivered:
   “Sometimes it’s not even the sport that puts us off, it’s like people roaring at you or they want you to do it at some stupid time or to some crap music.”

OUR CONCLUSION
If you want to get more girls active you just need to listen to us and help us to make our own clubs. We know what we like and we’ll work hard to make decent clubs that we want to go to and that will get our mates to go to, if we’re listened to. The PRES Girls Club works like that and we think it’s rapid
30 June 2006

Professor Mary O’Sullivan
Department of Physical Education and
Sport Sciences
University of Limerick
Limerick

Re: ULREC No. 06/48 – Active Students Participating In Restructuring Education (ASPIRE)

Dear Professor O’Sullivan

I hereby confirm receipt of revised documentation addressing the conditions outlined by
the University of Limerick Research Ethics Committee at its meeting on 8th June 2006.

Full approval is herewith granted for this application.

Yours sincerely

Dr Martin Mullins
Acting Chairman
University of Limerick Research Ethics Committee
The title of this project is Active Student Participation in Restructuring Education (ASPiRE). The project aims to develop a greater understanding of what can be done to enhance adolescent girls’ participation in and enjoyment of physical education. The participating girls will be involved in the design, implementation and evaluation of their own physical education curriculum.

The girls who consent to participate will be interviewed, observed, asked to write their thoughts and opinions, and to photographically record relevant information in relation to the study. They will then be actively involved in designing a physical activity programme suited to their groups’ interests. After this they will participate in the activities, help evaluate them and be encouraged to take leadership roles within the activities. The girls’ involvement in this project will be primarily through their scheduled PE classes. There will however be one take home task, where the girls are given camera and asked to tell a story of their life through photographs. A small group of girls will also be asked to meet for one hour every two weeks outside of scheduled class time.

The study aims to directly benefit the girls in terms of their participation and enjoyment in physical activity as well as aiding a wider understanding of the interests of adolescent girls in relation to physical education and physical activity.

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts in the procedure; it is non-invasive and entirely voluntary, working within the school framework. You and your daughter may withdraw consent and discontinue the participation at any time. If you have any concerns about the project, the following people will be able to assist you:

Eimear Enright (PESS Dept. University of Limerick) Tel: 061 233245
Prof. Mary O’Sullivan (PESS Dept. University of Limerick) Tel: 061 202949

Alternatively you may contact The Chair of UL Research Ethics Committee for an independent discussion, they can be contacted c/o Vice President, Academic and Registrar Office, University of Limerick. Tel: 061 202022
Dear Principal

I (Eimear Enright) am a postgraduate student at the University of Limerick. My Masters research project is entitled “Active Students’ Participation in Restructuring Education”. The primary aim of this project is to develop a greater understanding of what can be done to enhance adolescent girls’ participation in and enjoyment of physical education. I plan to involve the students in the design, implementation and evaluation of a context specific PE curriculum, which it is hoped will be sustainable.

I would appreciate 10 minutes of your time to discuss this further.

Please feel free to contact me or to arrange an appointment at your convenience. If you would rather contact my supervisor Prof. Mary O’Sullivan please do so at 061-202949. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Eimear Enright
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University of Limerick
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061-213245

Prof. Mary O’ Sullivan
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The title of the research is Active Student Participation in Restructuring Education (ASpIRE). The study aims to develop a greater understanding of what can be done to enhance adolescent girls’ participation in and enjoyment of physical education. The participating girls will be involved in the design, implementation and evaluation of their own physical education curriculum. I understand that my daughter has been asked to participate in this study.

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to my daughter if she agrees to participate in the study. I understand that the result of my daughter’s participation in the study is that she will be participating in a procedure that will be non-invasive to her. The study aims to directly benefit your daughter in terms of her participation and enjoyment in physical activity as well as aiding a wider understanding of the interests of adolescent girls in relation to physical education and physical activity. It also offers the opportunity to contribute to research on secondary education and any information gathered will be used to provide much needed data regarding the attitudes of students towards curriculum decision making in Physical Education. I understand that the results of the research may be published but that the name of my daughter or the school that my daughter attends will not be revealed. In order to maintain confidentiality of my daughter’s records, Eimear Enright will code all participants in the study using a coding system. The information will be stored on file and computer, and Eimear Enright and Prof. Mary O’Sullivan (postgraduate’s Supervisor) are the only personnel who will have access to the information.

I have been advised that the research my daughter will participate in does not involve more than minimal risk. While photographs of the participants and taken by the participants may be used for presentation purposes, steps will be taken to remove identifiable features from these photographs. I understand that any questions I have concerning the research study or my daughter’s participation in it, before or after my consent, will be answered by Eimear Enright PESS Department, University of Limerick, Tel 061 213245, or Prof. Mary O’Sullivan, PESS Department, University of Limerick, Tel 061-2202949. (If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent you may contact: The Chair of UL Research Ethics Committee, c/o Vice President, Academic and Registrar Office, University of Limerick Tel: 061-202022).

I have read the above information. The nature, demands, risks and benefits of the project to my daughter have been explained to me. I knowingly assume the minimal risks involved, and understand that I may withdraw my consent and discontinue the participation of my daughter at any time. In signing this form, I am not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies.

Signature of Parent/Guardian ___________________________ Date ____________
Signature of Parent/ Guardian (Print) _____________________ Date ____________
Student Consent Form

I ________________________________, understand that my parent(s)/guardian(s) have given permission for me to participate in a study entitled ‘Active Student Participation in Restructuring Education’ (ASPiRE) in collaboration with Eimear Enright and Prof. Mary O’Sullivan. My involvement in this project is voluntary, and I have been told that I may withdraw from participation in this study at any time.

Signature of Participant _______________________________ Date ____________

Witnessed by ________________________________

Signature of Investigator _______________________________ Date ____________
Appendix F: Data Analysis

The data collection and analysis process consisted of six steps:

1. Generation of data
2. Preparation for Atlas.ti (where necessary)
3. Coding within Atlas.ti
4. Sharing broad themes with students for expansion, confirmation, clarification and addition.
5. Reviewing of initial codes
6. Positioning of constructed themes within relevant literature

Worked Example 1

1. Generation of data
In the following example the data were generated through an individual interview with one student focused by her photographs and timelines. This was the first interview I had with Jade and one of my first interviews for this study.

2. Preparation for Atlas.ti (where necessary)
Below is a section of the transcript from my interview with Jade which was uploaded as a primary document to Atlas.ti.

First individual interview/guided conversation with Jade

(Focused by Photographs and Timelines, October 2008)

E – Are these not yours?
J – Oh yeah, that’s [Kelly’s] cousin
E – Thank god, I thought I was showing you some random photographs. Ok what we’re going to do today is look at your photos and some questions I have about you and PE and physical activity, kind of like you know when you asked your Dad the questions about him and physical activity.
J – Yeah
E – Ok, so there’s no right or wrong answers because all of the answers are just what you do, what you think. Let’s remember the prompts the things you were asked to take pictures of were….
J – That’s the gym, it’s closed down.
E – When did it close down?
J – about a few months ago.
E – Is that the gym that [Kelly] is doing research on?
J – No, that’s by [Mike’s] shop.
E – Did you ever go to this gym?
J – No course not, it’s only for men
E – So no girls are allowed.
J – Yeah
E – How did you know it was only for men?
J – It was on the window, on the other side, not in the photo like but there are only pictures of men on it.
E – What else did you take?
J – I took [Joe’s Boxing Club]. I’ll actually give that to [Debra] for her project if she wants it.
E – That’s a really good idea. Did you ever go to [Joe’s Boxing Club]?
J – No, I wanted to but it’s only for boys.
E – Are there are physical activity facilities that are only for girls?
J – No.
E – Is that somewhere ye hang out?
J – Yeah, that’s across the road from my house?
E – That’s near the milk market isn’t it; I like that market on Saturday mornings.
J – That’s right outside my house.
E – Does it wake you up on Saturday mornings?
J – Noh, sleep through anything.
E – That’s school. You know how there’s no pictures of you being physically active in these…
J – That’s because I don’t do anything.
E – Do you do anything outside of school?
J – No.
E – How come?
J – Don’t know, it’s stupid.
E – Used you ever do anything?
J – Yeah, I used to do gymnastics and dance and things...[pointing at timeline]
E – Gymnastics and Dance. Why did you stop?
J – I got bored of it
E – You got bored of it. What happened that you got bored of it?
J – I don’t really know how to describe it.
E - Do you remember what age you were when you gave gymnastics up?
J – Nine or ten.
3. Coding within Atlas.ti
This is an example of my open-coding within Atlas.ti (Screen Print). The specific research question these data were coded in relation to was research question 2) What were the students’ perceptions of their involvement in physical education and physical activity at the beginning of the PAR process? The codes assigned were not always mutually exclusive and often a piece of information was assigned several codes.

4. Example of sharing of broad themes with students
This is a copy of the PowerPoint presentation used to share some of the data that related to the students’ perceptions of physical education and physical activity at the beginning of the study. Permission for the inclusion of these data in this PowerPoint was sought and received from those students who had generated the data. During this sharing session, the students worked to help me unpack, reconstruct and rename constructs that were meaningful to them and impacted on their relationship with physical education and physical activity. Towards the end of this session when I asked the students to put into groups the things that seemed to have the greatest impact, they were untied in identifying the two most dominant influences on their disengagement from physical education and physical activity as ‘lack of voice and choice’ and ‘stupid physical education’. The rationale for selecting these themes was that ‘it all comes back to that really, like everything would fit in them two, about being girls and not having choices, about school not caring, everything really’ (Debra).
This is what I heard.....
Is this what you said/mean?

The question we were trying to answer.....
What do you think about physical education and physical activity?
...why do we want to understand this?

Some of the things you said....

- 'As if we'd ever do Irish dancing or rugby again outside of school and that was all our PE since I was five or six, like in babies until sixth class'
- 'We did swimming lessons and I liked them but then once they stopped, that was it. And we did Irish dancing lessons and then they stopped so that was the end of that too.'

- 'She made us dance on our own in front of people... and if you didn't want to do the competitions then you had to just dance the same routine for six months'
- 'Yeah, I used to do basketball and Shelly and Jade used to do it as well but then we all left cos of the coach [John], cos he was always roaring at us for no reason and then we all just quit.'

Debra - Boys are very immature, boys like children's games like soccer like with Trevor he's never up on a Friday because that's PE day.
Emer- So why do boys like PE?
Debra - They're boys
Jade - They like doing stupid stuff and because there's more jobs for boys doing physical education in fitness and stuff
Debra - It's very easier for boys like Trevor, me and Trevor went to the gym and did the same stuff and I was just dying like and he was grand.
Shelly - he's more fit than you, it's way easier for boys.
Decisions in PE

- What games we do
- Where we do them
- What we can wear
- How long we do things for
- But mostly what, when, where and why we can't do things.

Eimear - What about PE, do you feel you’re listened to in PE
Kelly - No way. We just do whatever is easiest, like whatever whoever teacher thinks is easiest to do with us and all. They want to do is try to stop us annoying them, like keep us quiet, or no really in PE. It’s more to keep us doing something, looking like we’re doing something. In other subjects it’s more keeping us quiet, do you know.

They don’t respect us and they’re always wanting us to give them some. Like for instance queuing in the shop and all, and they roasting at us for things we don’t even do and when we roar that’s the end of it, so they don’t listen to us, they just listen to themselves and they don’t care so long as we’re not causing them hassle.

(Jade)
5. Reviewing of Initial Codes
Subsequent to getting students’ feedback and input relating to how I had begun to analyse the data, I went back to the codes and was able to eliminate less useful ones, combine some, rename some, or if a very large number of responses have been assigned the same code, subdivide that category. It was at this point that I began organizing codes into larger themes that connected the different codes. In this case for example, the code entitled ‘access’, became subsumed within what I decided was a more useful concept and one articulated by the girls, that is, ‘lack of voice and choice’. The depth of data relating to gender, body, class, purpose, power and disconnection, and the frequency with which these concepts were drawn on ensured their retention.

6. Positioning of constructed themes within relevant literature
Chapter five evidences the positioning and recontextualising of the final constructed themes within relevant literature. Feminist post structural literature was particularly useful in helping me understand the complexity of these girls’ relationships with physical education and physical activity. The girls’ attitudes towards and perceptions of their involvement in physical education and physical activity were best understood through reference to how they shaped their subjectivities and identities (Garrett, 2004). Discourses of disconnection; power; purpose; bodily discourses; classed and gendered discourses dominated the stories the girls told about their lives and specifically their relationships with and disengagement from physical education and physical activity and it was therefore through reference to these multiple, competing and overlapping discourses that I sought to understand how the girls constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed their subjectivities and acted as both the sites and subjects of discursive struggles for identity.

Worked Example 2.

1. Generation of data

In this particular example data were gathered from four main sources. Firstly, field notes around club benefits and the challenges associated with the club design and participation process were kept by Eimear. Secondly, seventeen students engaged in two student-led, poster design sessions which focused on their experience of participating in ‘The Pres Girls Physical Activity Club’. The research poster drafts produced during the design sessions were kept and both sessions were audio-recorded. The final poster (Appendix E) was also part of this data source. Thirdly, three girls who helped design but chose not to attend the club were asked for their feedback. They chose a focus group
format as means through which they would articulate their views on the club. Finally, I conducted two semi-structured interviews with Róisín.

2. Preparation for Atlas.ti (where necessary)
In this instance I typed out what the girls had written on their posters and saved each as an individual word document. I also transcribed their conversations around the creation of these posters, and the interviews with Róisín and the three girls who chose not to attend the club. The girls had decided to prepare their draft posters around a series of questions: 1) How does the club work? 2) Why it’s good and 3) Advice for other people? I also prompted them to consider challenges associated with being participants in ‘The Pres Girls Club’ and what might not be so good about it? This is an example of one of the ‘Why it’s good’ posters and the retyped text uploaded as a primary document to Atlas.ti

![Poster image]

**Why it’s good (group 2)**
The club is good because we get something healthy to eat and we get to do activities that we want to do and activities we like. I learned to swim (woo hoo).
Betty Boop xxx
Learned how to use machines in the gym
Learned that it’s good to stay fit
Get along with others
The club is good because we get something nice to eat and get to do something that we enjoy not something that we were told to do. We get the chance to spend time with our mates and keeps us out of trouble and harms way. I learned how to keep to a routine e.g. going to (Pres Girls) every Wednesday.

3. Coding within Atlas.ti
The specific research question I coded these data in relation to was research question 4) What happens when we engage with students to challenge formal physical education curricular boundaries and connect with students’ physical culture outside of school? In this example the students had at a surface level organised some of their data already. They had decided on some questions they would answer through which they thought they could best share their experiences of The Pres Girls Club. The audio-recordings therefore also became structured around these questions and to a lesser extent my prompts. The data initially therefore was coded into three broad categories: organisational structure, benefits and challenges. The second stage of initial coding saw me code within and between these categories. ‘Learning’, ‘connection’, ‘social’, and ‘responsibility’ were examples of codes that networked around the broader ‘benefit’ code.
4. Sharing broad themes with students for expansion, confirmation, clarification and addition.

In this particular example when the final poster (Appendix E) was being created I shared some sections of the transcripts from the first poster session with the students and reminded them of previous data they had generated relating to their experiences of the club. They were also of course working from the draft posters they had created. This allowed them another opportunity to expand/reject/share new concepts and/or rename their data.

5. Reviewing of initial codes

Triangulation of the data generated through the poster sessions together with my field notes and the transcripts from the interviews with Róisín and the three non-participants facilitated me in asking different questions of the data and my initial coding. I went back to the codes at this point and again was able to eliminate less useful ones, combine some, rename some, or if a very large number of responses have been assigned the same code, subdivide that category.

6. Positioning of constructed themes within relevant literature

Chapter seven evidences the positioning and recontextualising of the final constructed themes within relevant literature. What emerged very clearly in relation to this specific example was the high frequency with which Róisín cited the challenges she associated with facilitating the club, where as the student data was saturated with conversation around benefits with minimal attention given to challenges. The student voice literature was particularly useful in helping me to understand this disparity and appreciating Róisín’s positioning. The PAR process had required Róisín to move ‘from a familiar and safe position of power to a relationship that is more collaborative, open, responsive, and consultative’ and did result in a ‘temporary destabilising period of change’ (Rudduck, 2007, p.607).
Appendix G: Research Communications

Presentations

Invited Presentations/Workshops


International Presentations


National Presentations

