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Posters put on quite a display at the National Annual Conference

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Introduction

Those of you who attended the afPE National Physical Education and School Sport Conference in July will no doubt have seen the impressive array of posters on display which featured a range of research projects and studies which are, or have recently been conducted across and beyond the United Kingdom. The poster presentations were included as part of the research strand to the conference and proved to be a great success, generating not only an attractive visual display but a good deal of interest and professional dialogue between the presenters and conference delegates.

The aim of the poster presentations was to provide a forum for both experienced and/or new researchers alike to share and discuss their research with colleagues in a relatively informal and relaxed setting. Individuals interested in presenting a poster at the conference were invited to submit a short abstract for consideration, focusing on the other key conference strands which included pedagogy, leadership and health, and providing a brief overview of the aims, methodology, findings and conclusion(s) of their research. All abstracts were reviewed and a total of 16 were accepted for inclusion within the conference. At this time, presenters were then provided with further information and guidance about the poster presentations. A total of 11 of the accepted posters focused on pedagogy, four focused on health, and one on leadership. Furthermore, and between them, it was pleasing to see that the authors represented a number of different institutions, mainly within the United Kingdom but also from Ireland and as far afield as Australia. The institutions represented included: Brunel University; Dublin City University; Leeds Metropolitan University; Loughborough University; St Patrick's College, Dublin; University of Glamorgan; University of Queensland, Australia; University of Wolverhampton; University of Worcester; Institute of Technology, Tralee, Ireland; and Waterford Institute of Technology, Ireland.

During the conference itself presenters were encouraged to be available to discuss their posters with conference delegates at set times. This gave rise to some fruitful professional dialogue and I think it is fair to say was an opportunity that was valued by the presenters and other delegates alike. Evidently, by the standard of the posters on display and the range of topic areas covered, some very interesting research is currently being conducted within physical education, some of which more importantly, has real potential to influence physical education policy and practice.

We were also pleased to be able to offer a prize to the 'best' poster, the winners of which were Tony Sweeney and Maura Coulter from St Patrick's College, Dublin for their poster entitled 'Teachers' perspectives on the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs in the mainstream physical education class' (see the abstract below). Tony is a primary school teacher (currently on secondment to Froebel College of Education, Dublin) who has just completed a masters degree at St. Patrick's College under Maura's supervision.

It was a pleasure to be able to assist with the organization of the posters at the National conference and we are keen to retain these as a feature of the programme each year. Indeed, it would be great to receive and accept even more submissions next year! My thanks go to the conference organizing team for their support in facilitating the process, to the University of Gloucestershire for sponsoring the display, as well as to the volunteer judges of the poster competition, Steve Kibble, Jan Hickman and Jeanne Keay, who gave generously of their time and carried out the task so diligently.

Below are just a selection of the poster abstracts which provide a flavour of the range on display at the conference across the areas of pedagogy, health and leadership. Topics span inclusion (including special educational needs/disability, gender/girls), high quality physical education and school sport, physical education teachers' philosophies, teachers' knowledge and continuing professional development, and children's physical activity levels, across the primary and secondary sectors. Anyone with a particular interest in any the abstracts and the studies outlined are welcome to contact the authors about their research.

Pedagogy Abstracts

Teachers' perspectives on the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs in the mainstream physical education class

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This study aimed to investigate inclusive physical education for pupils with special educational needs in mainstream Irish primary schools. The focus of the inquiry was on the readiness, confidence levels and perspectives of the class teachers delivering the physical education curriculum. It also sought to identify the needs of teachers in providing an appropriately adapted physical education experience.

The research design employed mixed methods including both questionnaire and interview. A questionnaire comprising four sections of 15 closed and 9 open-ended questions and three Likert-type rating scales was administered to a sample of mainstream primary school teachers in the South Dublin/Wicklow region (n=130). The questionnaire sought background information on: teacher and school, profile of pupils with SEN, reflections on the physical education experience, and teacher attitude to inclusive physical education. The data were analysed using Excel and the findings provided the focus of inquiry for a subsequent focus group interview (n=4).

Findings indicated that 91% of the primary teachers had received no specific training in adapted physical education and that levels of teacher confidence and readiness for inclusive physical education were frequently linked to the nature of pupil special educational need experienced in their classes. All teachers of wheelchair users (n=10) felt they lacked training, in comparison with approximately half (53%) of teachers of pupils with Aspergers Syndrome (n=13). There was a 93% level of commitment to inclusive physical education but, while 91% of teachers with less than 5 years teaching experience (n= 31) felt teaching pupils with special educational needs had been a positive experience for them, only 61% with greater than 20 years experience (n=30) were as positive.

Teachers strongly identified needs in the areas of in-service training, provision of support

personnel, and suitable resources and equipment with respect to inclusive physical education. Thus, it is concluded that initial teacher training and in-service training provision for special needs assistants in adapted physical activity and adapted physical education requires attention and that there is a need for the establishment of cohesive multi-disciplinary support structures for pupils and schools. It is proposed that the above must be addressed in terms of government funding and collaborative planning between the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Health and Children as a matter of urgency, if the policy of inclusive physical education is to become practice.

Effective pedagogy: exploring difference – the intersection of gender and disability in an after school football intervention

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This research was a small scale project that explored difference and how this was expressed through an after school football intervention. A case study approach was undertaken, focusing upon the collaboration between a special and a mainstream school. The intervention aimed to enhance football opportunities for girls with learning disabilities via school to school links.

In recent decades the concept of difference has emerged within education but remains relatively unexplored within physical education. Despite the call to recognise difference, and to decentre white, middle class, heterosexual, non disabled women's experiences, feminist research within physical education has been guilty of focusing upon gender. Whilst ethnicity and disability have been explored, albeit on the periphery, this has been done in parallel with gender. Limited attempts have been made, within physical education, to explore the interconnections between social categories and their systems of oppression (Flintoff et al, 2008).

Through quantitative research, both girls and disabled people are shown to exhibit below average participation in sport. However, this kind of research does not provide an explanation as to why these differences occur, nor explores the differences *within* groups. More useful research has been that which focuses on social relations between different groups and explores the hierarchies created by practices across different social spaces (Flintoff et al, 2008). West and Fenstermaker (1995) call for new models to move beyond these types of analyses. Their focus is how identities are accomplished through interactions with others, and the impact of powerful hegemonic cultures on how different identity markers are afforded more importance across multiple contexts. Thus, identity is viewed as being in a constant state of flux (Archer, 2004, Valentine, 2007).

This research aimed to address the experiences of disabled girls using a theoretical approach that centralised intersectionality in a football context. It also aimed to address a gap in much current research in physical education which fails to consult with children as the main users of services provided. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, including the head teacher, School Sports Co-ordinator (SSCo), coach and the girls with learning disabilities. The intervention was successful in a number of ways including overcoming challenges, improving skill and physical abilities, and enhancing confidence. Regarding difference, the findings revealed and demonstrated the girls' agency; their ability to influence, and be influenced by, interactions and the patriarchal

power structures; the recognition by the girls of the difference the experience offered; and the power of hegemonic cultures and spaces in identity alignment.

However, the long term benefits of the intervention could be questioned due to a lack of awareness, by the key stakeholders, of the opportunities available for girls with learning disabilities once the intervention had ceased. Furthermore, organisations supporting football opportunities for girls with learning disabilities must recognise the multifaceted nature of identity when formulating policy and ensure networks of support are communicated widely to both coaches and schools to ensure effective pedagogy takes place.

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High Quality extra-curricular physical education and school sport in the secondary school – a Welsh perspective through the 5 x 60 School Sport programme.

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Schools have been identified as key institutions for the promotion of physical activity among youth. Whilst the physical education curriculum is commonly regarded as the major vehicle for the promotion of physical activity in schools (Biddle & Mutrie, 2001), physical activity recommendations for children and adolescents cannot be met through physical education alone. In response to this, the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) has moved the health of the population of Wales to the top of the political agenda and the health of children and young people is a key priority. In its 20 year strategy for sport and physical activity ‘Climbing Higher’, WAG has established some very challenging targets. Target 3, for example, focuses on young people of secondary school age (11-16 years), with the intent that ‘at least 90% of boys and girls of secondary school age will participate in sport and physical activity for at least 60 minutes, five times a week’ and that secondly, ‘all secondary schools will provide a minimum of two hours of curricular based and one hour of extra-curricular sport and physical activity per week’. According to the latest Sports Council for Wales survey (2004/05), only 24% of secondary school pupils are physically active for 60 minutes on at least five days of the week and more alarmingly, a quarter fail to achieve an hour of physical activity on any day of the week.

One school context which has great potential in the promotion of physical activity is extra-curricular sport (Cleland et al., 2005). After school programmes have the potential to promote physical activity, however, they have also been criticised for offering ‘more of the same thing for the more able’ (Penney & Harris, 1997). Reports by the Sports Council for

Wales (2004/05) have identified that, whilst 71% of young children (11-16 years) in Rhondda Cynon Taff have participated in extra-curricular physical activity, only 46% have participated in extra-curricular activity five times a week. In an attempt to address these figures, the Welsh Assembly Government has focused on promoting opportunities to deliver after school physical activity through the Sports Council for Wales 5 x 60 School Sport programme. However, there are concerns that increasing the range of opportunities offered through extra-curricular sport does not always ensure the quality. In an attempt to address these issues and to ensure high quality physical education, the University of Glamorgan are working in partnership with Rhondda Cynon Taff Education authority and utilising final year students as a coaching workforce.

In the first year of the partnership, 45 final year Sports Studies students delivered a 20 week programme between 1-2 days a week in 10 secondary schools in the Rhondda Cynon Taff region that offer the 5 x 60 School Sport programme. Initially, and prior to entering the final year module, students had completed between 4-6 National Governing Body awards, Sports Coach UK workshops, 1st aid, Dragon Sport, and a university based training programme and induction period by the 5 x 60 school sport officers. Following an initial consultation with all children, activities were drawn up to be delivered ranging from the traditional team games to the less traditional. The students were responsible for the marketing of the programme, delivery, weekly evaluation of attendance and were mentored on a weekly basis by their 5 x 60 officer. At the end of each semester the students also held a multi sport festival with Year 6 children from feeder primary schools. The uptake of the programme by the children was very good with a total of 500, 11-16 year olds being involved on a weekly basis. Whilst this is in only one of the 22 local authorities in Wales, the results clearly illustrate the impact that students can have as a potential coaching resource. Furthermore, this community partnership demonstrates how this approach can contribute to Climbing Higher targets and to ensuring high quality physical education and school sport are delivered. Plans for the future are that the programme will be extended to include 70-80 students, 12-15 schools, and to offer extra-curricular activity on 2-3 days per week.

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Give me an 'A': An evaluation of alternative activities within a girls' physical education programme

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Considerable literature exists which outlines girls' disengagement from physical education (see Hastie, 1998). Although girls themselves have often been identified as the problem

(Flintoff & Scraton, 2001), within physical education research there has been a tangible shift which indicates that the key problem lies within the curriculum and the pedagogic content (Sandford & Rich, 2005).

During the spring term in a secondary school in Warwickshire, a group of year 9 girls (n=25) were taught an alternative range of activities including cheerleading, aerobics, skipping, tag rugby and ultimate frisbee in place of their usual and more traditional physical education curriculum. The aim of this study was to evaluate how the introduction of this 'pilot' programme was received. Qualitative data were collected in the form of anonymously returned self completion questionnaires in which pupils were asked a range of closed and open questions in order to compare their contrasting curricula. Findings were collated and were reported as both descriptive statistics and as a series of themed statements.

Overall, 84% of the pupils reported that they enjoyed their physical education lessons more during the alternative activities unit of work. A representative comment suggested this was because *'The activities were different and more exciting and made me actually want to do games'* (JA 19/03/08). Interestingly though, some pupils indicated that they preferred the traditional curriculum, explaining that they felt less challenged by the alternative activities, *'to be honest, I think some of these activities are just an excuse to cop out – you don't have to work at it'* (EE 19/03/08).

This study indicates that offering a diverse range of activities within the physical education curriculum, some but not all of which, are less traditional, should appeal to the widest possible number of pupils. Whilst there are obvious challenges to the implementation of alternative curricula such as financial cost, staffing, and lack of facilities, ultimately it must fall to the teachers' own desires to consider curriculum innovation that will affect change to re-engage disaffected, as well as meet the needs of all pupils.

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Leadership Abstract

We change whether we like it or not: the influence of a head of department on a physical education student's philosophy

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The difficulty of defining physical education (Capel, 1997) together with numerous interpretations of official documentation such as the National Curriculum for Physical Education (DfEE & QCA, 1999) makes it difficult for student teachers to clarify their aims and goals within the subject (Curtner-Smith & Meek, 2000). A wide range of influences affect physical education student teachers' 'philosophies' or what they perceive to be the essential characteristics of physical education (Green, 1998), including contact with

qualified staff (Hardy, 1999). The aims of this study were to compare and contrast a final year university physical education student's philosophy with that of a head of department's philosophy and ascertain the influence this might have on the student's philosophy of the subject.

With institutional ethical approval, the final year student, using an auto ethnographic approach, was asked to communicate their philosophy of physical education in writing, to unearth their beliefs and the life influences that had shaped their thinking and values (Genzok, 1999). The head of department was interviewed by the student using a semi structured interview in order to ascertain his beliefs of physical education and the origin of such beliefs. Regularly occurring statements were inductively organised into themes (Sapsford & Jupp, 2006).

Common themes from both subjects were enjoyment, health benefits and gaining practical competency. Previous research has indicated that these are popular ideals for most physical education teachers (Green, 2000). Two unique themes from the head of department were the importance of pupils learning '*in a social and cognitive way*' and improving '*the academic reputation of the department*' (Simon, 22/02/05). Both subjects' philosophies had come from past experiences as pupils. However, a significant influence on the student had been the university physical education course while the head of department remarked that the '*experience of working with children in schools*' (Simon, 22/02/05) had been a major influence on his philosophy of physical education.

This study demonstrated that the student's beliefs were similar in many ways to those of an experienced professional. It also indicated that experienced teachers are likely to influence student teachers' philosophies. Student teachers need to be made aware that their philosophy will almost certainly develop as they learn alongside experienced staff and, perhaps more importantly, qualified teachers need to consider their role in shaping the beliefs of student teachers.

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Health Abstracts

Physical education teachers' professional knowledge and continuing professional development in health and health related exercise: a healthy profile?"

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Physical education is consistently presented by the government and media as a key vehicle through which to promote health and physical activity amongst young people. Long-standing concerns, however, have been expressed over the status, organisation and delivery of health related exercise within the physical education curriculum. More recently, there have also been rising concerns over the extent to which physical education teachers have engaged with continuing professional development within this area (Armour and Yelling, 2004) and, in turn, the extent to which that engagement has been effective. On this basis, the research questions driving this study were :

- i) What is the nature and extent of physical education teachers' engagement with health related exercise, and what social processes have influenced their engagement?
- ii) What is the nature and extent of physical education teachers' engagement with continuing professional development in health related exercise, and what social processes have influenced their engagement?

A mixed-method, two stage approach was undertaken. Using a proportionate, stratified sampling procedure, stage one involved distributing 463 questionnaires to schools in every Local Authority in England. The questionnaire explored physical education teachers' views and experiences of health related exercise in order to gain a more adequate understanding of their practices within this area of the curriculum. In total, 112 teachers responded to the survey. Once questionnaires were returned, the data were entered into SPSS 16.0 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) for analysis. Stage two involved twelve teachers being chosen to be part of a purposive sample of interview participants. Semi-structured interviews were used to address some of the limitations of the questionnaire and to provide an opportunity to clarify and add further meaning and depth to some of the responses provided in the questionnaire.

Preliminary findings indicated that, whilst physical education teachers claimed to value health related exercise, in a number of schools, they had not committed themselves to producing a written scheme of work for the area. Furthermore, health related exercise appeared to be absent from most of the teachers' continuing professional development profiles. Indeed, the findings revealed that teachers gained much of their health related exercise knowledge from personal experiences and the media. Although health related exercise was incorporated into the physical education curriculum, most teachers tended to focus much of this work upon fitness and performance. Given that the aim of health related exercise is to encourage life-long participation in physical activity, it is argued that a continued emphasis upon fitness is neither relevant nor conducive to the promotion of 'healthy, active lives' for all (Capel, 2007; Cale, Harris & Chen, 2007; Green & Thurston, 2002). Physical educators are viewed as instrumental in promoting physical activity and health amongst young people and, therefore, it is crucial that they have the necessary knowledge, skills and understanding to be able to do so. On the basis of the findings, it is suggested that physical education teachers would benefit from more guidance and support

with regards to their delivery of health related exercise. Furthermore, it is argued that the process of continuing professional development can, potentially, have an important role to play in enabling teachers to effectively deliver HRE.

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An analysis of break time active play in Irish primary schools

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School break time is one of the few times of the day for children to engage in self-directed play with peers. The Irish primary school curriculum recommends a break of 10 minutes duration per day and a daily recreation period of 30 minutes. Yet, little is known about the break time environment and the physical activity habits of children in Irish primary schools and its contribution to daily physical activity guidelines. Via a survey questionnaire, this study examined the policies and practices that influence the physical activity break time habits of 5-12 year old children in 391 Irish primary schools. The questionnaire response rate was 54.5%. Children's physical activity levels were also observed in three primary schools in the south east of Ireland at break time using the SOPLAY system of observation (McKenzie, 2002).

The study found that boys were more active than girls at break time. Small schools (<101 pupils) were more likely to have adequate playground space ($p=0.045$). Analysis also indicated that schools with more than 201 pupils were significantly less likely to allow children to play on grass areas than smaller schools ($p=0.044$), and that schools with an enrolment size of greater than 100 pupils were less likely to provide school equipment to children to play with at break times ($p<0.05$). Free running at break time however, was reported to be permitted by 84.5% of the respondents.

Given the 40% physical activity break time threshold proposed by Ridgers and Stratton (2005), Irish primary schools should recognise the value of break times in providing valuable minutes of physical activity during a school day. This study suggests that safety is a barrier to physical activity promotion in relation to restrictive playground size and equipment. Furthermore, schools evidently promote certain practices at break time that influence children's physical activity behaviour from implicit and or explicit policies. Thus, while the school is not solely responsible for children's activity levels, simple strategic changes in policies and practices may be able to encourage and stimulate more children to be more active.

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