Disaffected Youth in Physical Education (PE): What every PE teacher needs to know?

Foteini Papadopoulou (f.papadopoulou@lboro.ac.uk)

Prof. K.M. Armour & Dr. R.A. Sandford

Governments worldwide have invested heavily in interventions to improve their education systems. As a part of this, Continuing Professional Development (CPD) has been viewed as essential, since ‘CPD is no longer an option, but an expectation of all professionals’ (Day & Sachs, 2004, p.4). In parallel, disaffection among young people raises great concerns for the future (Klein, 2000). There is evidence in current government strategies (PESSYP, 2008) to suggest that PE and School Sport can lead to the re-engagement of such individuals. Moreover, there is evidence from youth disaffection research to support this perception (Sandford et al., 2006). The purpose of this PhD research is to consider these two developments together. For, there are growing expectations on PE teachers to deliver positive outcomes for disengaged and disaffected youth in education (Bechtel and O’Sullivan, 2007), yet there is little evidence to suggest that PE teachers are trained effectively throughout their careers to maximize the potential of the physical education/school sport environment. In particular, there is very little research available on the professional needs of PE teachers with regard to disaffected behaviour in a PE class, or the effective implementation of particular programmes intended to re-engage disaffected youth in PE.

This study used qualitative research methods to generate data in two phases. During the first phase, an open-ended survey was distributed to Partnership Development Managers (PDMs) and Head teachers of PE in the Midlands of England. In the second phase, a two-tier case study approach was employed in order to explore more closely some of the issues relating to youth disaffection, physical education and PE teacher’s CPD needs (Yin, 2003). Firstly, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 2 PDMs and 8 Heads of PE who had responded to the original survey. Secondly, more extensive fieldwork was undertaken within 3 schools, with data being collected through semi-structured interviews with teachers; observations of selected PE lessons; focus group discussions with pupils; and document analyses of school behaviour management policies. Data analysis is being undertaken using a grounded theory approach, as this ‘aims to generate theory out of research data by achieving a close fit between the two (Bryman, 2008, p.694) and is at an early stage. However, preliminary results suggest that: almost all the teachers report they have experienced behaviour problems from disaffected young people in PE; PE is often perceived to play a positive role in managing these pupils’ behaviour although it can also play a negative role; and most of the teachers have received no specific training on youth disaffection in PE; instead, they rely on their day-to-day experience to inform their practice. In this presentation, triangulated data from the case studies will be used to illustrate some of the findings from the teacher survey, and recommendations will be made for PE-CPD provision in relation to addressing/managing youth disaffection.

1. Introduction

This research study attempted to embark upon an area of study, which has not been explored previously: Physical Education (PE) teachers’ views on and experiences of Professional Development within the context of disaffected/disruptive youth in Physical Education (PE). Moreover and within the same context, the study attempted to identify and address the PE teachers’ professional development needs in this area. This paper will first provide the
rationale for the implementation of this study; it will then continue to an overview of the objectives of the study and address the research questions that informed the research design. Methodological issues will be presented and finally some brief preliminary findings (since the data analysis is still in progress) along with limitations of the study.

2. Rationale

2.1 Physical Education and School Sport (PESS)
In the UK, government concern about youth disaffection and disengagement from education is expressed through official government policies (i.e. Every Child Matters, 2005) and documents (i.e. White Paper, 2009) that among other aims, target disaffected young people seeking their re-engagement in the contexts of education and society. In parallel, the use of Physical Education and School Sport as a powerful ‘tool’ to re-engage young people and positively influence their physical, psychological and social development (Sandford et al., 2006) has led to the establishment of the Physical Education and School Sport for Young People (PESSYP, 2008) strategy. PE teachers are significant in this as they deliver PESS and relevant programmes and they hold the potential to positively affect the young people’s lives (Ntoumanis & Standage, 2009). However, are they appropriately trained to effectively deliver these programmes?

2.2 Physical education teachers
There is little evidence of any CPD available to PE teachers that addresses their particular needs in using PESS as an effective strategy to re-engage disaffected young people in education. MacFayden & Bailey (2002) have argued that PE teachers must be able to cope with ‘pupils of different personalities, experiences, developmental stages and learning abilities...’ (p.25). Moreover, the TDA (2009) defined CPD as the key to school improvement and in raising standards of pupil achievement, by helping to improve teaching and learning. In particular, research also suggests that PE–CPD can play a key role in equipping teachers with the knowledge and skills necessary to meet the needs of pupils (Chen, 2005).

In regard to what exists in practice in England, it is important to highlight the establishment of the National PE–CPD programme through the PESSYP strategy (2003) and the existence of the Professional Development Board (afPE, 2000). Yet, there is no CPD available that focuses specifically on dealing with disaffected behaviours in PE within the National CPD programme; indeed, the provision of CPD in relation to disaffected behaviours is mainly through generic Behaviour Management Courses, which are available to all teachers. Is this adequate to maximise the potential of the PESS environment in this context?

2.3 Pupils
It is important to establish the definitions of disaffected/disengaged/disruptive pupils in schools and in this research. In the Report ‘Child Poverty in Perspective: An overview of child well-being in rich countries’ published by UNICEF (2007), the UK ranked 21st out of the 21 economically advance countries that participated in the section related to behaviours and risks among adolescence. Youth disaffection and disruptive behaviours, especially within the school context have been and still continue to be a major concern for the UK government (Elton Report, 1989; Green Paper, 2002; White Paper, 2009). Tackling disaffection and re-engaging these young people into education and more broadly in society have been at the core of numerous government funded school based projects, i.e. Sky Sports: Living for Sports, which is now accessible to all secondary schools in the UK (2009). As Sandford et al
(2006) argued ‘disaffection is ‘a complex and multidimensional phenomenon, which is influenced by numerous, interrelating factors’ (p.251). In particular, disaffection in relation to the school context and according to research is used to mean: disengagement from education (Huskins, 1998), lack of affection for school and lack of participation in school (Hayden & Blaya, 2002; 2005), disobedience and physical aggression (Charlton et al, 2004), non attendance (Shumer, 2005) and engagement in disruptive behaviours (Brown & Fletcher, 2002). In addition, the distinction between being actively and passively disaffected is highlighted by Sandford et al. (2008), where active disaffection is defined as ‘disruptive behaviour, truancy and exclusion’ and passive as the one that involves ‘low academic achievement, non-participation and alienation (p.97). In the context of Physical Education and School Sport (PESS), disaffected/disruptive behaviours can be defined from a similar point of view, i.e. active and passive. Therefore, there could be disruptive behaviours in the form of ‘misusing’ school equipment, obstructing their own learning and that of their own classmates, disrupting the PE teacher from appropriately delivering the lesson, and exhibiting aggressive behaviours towards their teacher and classmates (Education and Inspections Act, 2006; Ntoumanis et al., 2004, Evans et al. 2002). It is important to note that the main focus of the particular research study was disengaged/disaffected youth who engage in disruptive behaviours.

2.4 Supporting physical education teachers to maximise the potential of the PESS environment for reengaging disaffected and disengaged young people in education.

To conclude, the purpose of this research was to consider these two issues together. There are growing expectations placed on PE teachers to deliver positive outcomes for disengaged and disaffected youth in education (Bechtel and O’Sullivan, 2007), yet there is little evidence to suggest that PE teachers are trained effectively throughout their careers to maximize the potential of the physical education and school sport. Existing research has identified ways in which PE teachers’ professional learning could be organized to maximize its effect, but, to date, there has been less research that has focused on teachers’ learning needs in specific areas (Duncombe & Armour, 2004; Armour & Yelling, 2007). In particular, there is very little research available on the professional needs of PE teachers with regard to disaffected behaviour in a PE class, or the effective implementation of particular programmes intended to re-engage disaffected youth in PE. Bearing in mind the concept of ‘using research to improve practice’ (Elliott, 2004 p.265), this research study adopted a qualitative research design to explore issues surrounding the three dimensional focus of this research study: policy expectations; teachers CPD backgrounds and needs; the specific needs of the target pupils in PESS.

3. Research Questions

The main research question is as follows:

- What is the role of Physical Education and School Sport (PESS) in re-engaging disaffected youth in education and what forms of the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) can support physical education teachers to do this work effectively?

Sub-questions included the following:
(i) How disaffected/disruptive youth are defined in the existing literature in the fields of education, sociology, psychology and physical education and school sport (PESS)?

(ii) What assumptions have been made, both in research and national/international policy documents, about the role of PESS in engaging disaffected/disruptive youth in education?

(iii) What is the role of physical education teachers in engaging disaffected/disruptive youth in education through PESS and what training have they received to prepare them for this role?

(iv) What kinds of professional development are required to support physical education teachers to maximize the potential of the PESS environment in re-engaging disaffected/disruptive youth in education?

4. Research Design
In order to address the research questions, this research study was designed following a qualitative research design and utilized a number of research methods as tools for data collection. To begin with, an extensive literature review was undertaken, first, to address issues of disaffected youth, with a during the adolescence period from a 'youth in transition' perspective; second, on Physical Education and School Sport (PESS) policies on tackling youth disaffection and re-engaging these young people into the physical education and the education context; finally, on general issues of the continuing professional development for PE teachers and specifically, in relation to issues of disaffected youth. Further, fieldwork was conducted in order for rich data to be collected and it was divided in two (2) phases. Brief details in brief will be provided in the research methodology section of this paper. Data analysis is still in progress and is being undertaken using a Constructivist approach to Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2006; 2009). Concluding, the theoretical framework which informed the research design was informed by the learning theory of social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978) and elements of situated learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991).

5. Theoretical Framework
The learning theories of social constructivism and elements of situated learning informed the choice of the research methodology and provided an appropriate framework for this study. In brief, ‘constructivism’ emerges as ‘a guiding light for the implementation of successful changes in teaching practice’ (Light, 2008, p.22 & 26). Social Constructivist theory (Vygotsky, 1978) and the theory of Situated learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991) put the learner at the heart of the educational process as an individual actively engaged in the environment constructing knowledge while at the same time acknowledge the learners’ previous experiences. As Lave and Wenger (1991) argued, learning is an activity related to the social world and it is inseparable from the socio-cultural environment and social practice. To sum up, learning is active, teacher is the facilitator and the learning occurs through participating in the community of practice. In relation to PE, Kirk and Kinchin, (2003) supported the role of situated learning by arguing that ‘it is useful to think in relation to school PE, because it allows us to explore the complex between forms and cultures, on the one hand and forms of consciousness on the other (p.224).
6. Data collection

Data collection was divided into two phases. The first phase involved the administration of open-ended questionnaires to both Partnership Development Managers and Heads of the PE departments of all types of secondary schools in the area of Midlands in England. The second phase involved the implementation of a two-tier case study approach. The first part included eleven (11) single cases and the second part, three (3) schools as multiple cases. In regard to the first phase of the data collection, the survey was administered via email and post to both PDMs and Heads of PE of all kinds of secondary schools in the area of Midlands in England. In total, 275 questionnaires were sent out and 80 were returned. The first part of the second phase of the data collection involved in-depth, semi-structural interviews with two (2) Partnership Development Managers (PDMs) (a thirty (30) and a sixty (60) years old woman, with over ten (10) years of experience and currently holding a leadership role) in two (2) mainstream secondary schools and nine (9) Head teachers of PE (four (4) in mainstream [1 woman and 3 men] and five (5) Emotional Behavioural Difficulties (EBD) schools [1 woman and 4 men, all in leadership roles]. The second part of the second phase of the data collection involved three (3) schools, which were examined as multiple Case Studies. The three (3) secondary schools were a mainstream secondary school, a school sport specialist college and an emotional behavioural difficulties school. Research tools that were used to acquire data were: policy documents from each school, single, semi-structured interviews with members of the PE department, observations of PE lessons and focus group interviews with four (4) disaffected pupils after each lesson. Qualitative research methods were used for the collection and analysis of data, as they can provide an opportunity to understand and explain social phenomena in context (Merriam, 1998).

7. Data Analysis

The data analysis is currently taking place using a Constructivist approach to Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2006, 2009). In general, Grounded Theory allows the generation of theory from data and concepts are systematically constructed from data (Glaser and Strauss, 1969). In particular and in relation to the Constructivist approach, Charmaz advocated (2005, 2006, and 2009) that knowledge is perceived to be socially constructed, acknowledging multiple standpoints.

Although data analysis is at an early stage, preliminary data from the questionnaires, the individual and school case studies indicated:

- Almost all the PE teachers reported that they had experienced behaviour problems from disaffected young people in their PE classes;
- Teachers felt that PE can have a positive role in managing these pupils’ behaviours; however, for some pupils PE is a context in which they are most likely to exhibit poor behaviour;
- Most PE teachers in this study reported that they had received little or no specific training on youth disaffection in PE and on maximising the potential impact of the PESS environment; instead they relied on learning from their day to day experience to inform their practice;
- When highlighting their CPD needs, main issues for the teachers appeared to be the content of CPD programmes (e.g. new and a variety of activities, in order to attract the interest of the children) and the expertise of the people, who deliver them (e.g. theory from academics – practice from PE teachers).
8. Conclusion
Data indicate strongly that more could be done to support physical education teachers to maximise the potential of the PESS environment in re-engaging disaffected/disengaged/disruptive youth in education. Expectations on the profession in this regard appear to be increasing, but neither theoretical nor practical frameworks appear to be developed sufficiently to inform PE teachers in CPD through their careers. Generic behaviour management CPD is available – and can be useful – but this does not seem to match the unique expectations placed on the PE profession. As the data analysis unfolds, further evidence will become available on the nature of the CPD needs of PE teachers in this field.

Bibliography


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